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Qatar opens pavilion at Venice Biennale

●Sheikha Al Mayassa: It's the beginning of a new cultural journey

QNA
Venice

HE the Chairperson of Qatar Museums Board of Trustees Sheikha Al Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani inaugurated Qatar's pavilion at the 19th International Architecture Exhibition (La Biennale di Venezia) in the historic Giardini della Biennale in Venice, Italy.

In her speech at the event, HE Sheikha Al Mayassa emphasised that this participation marks the beginning of a new cultural journey, reflecting Qatar's presence in spirit and stone, noting that the pavilion demonstrates Qatar's commitment to fostering intercultural dialogue and promoting cultural exchange.

She added that the pavilion, which features an art installation by Pakistani architect Yasmeen Lari, embodies values of inclusivity and belonging and aligns with this year's theme "My home is your home". HE Sheikha Al Mayassa said that Qatar's participation goes beyond architectural construction, presenting a powerful cultural message that amplifies the voice of the region and show-



cases its heritage with confidence.

She highlighted that Venice, historically a bridge between East and West, serves as an ideal platform for conveying this message, adding that Qatar will soon join other nations in Giardini, where architecture becomes diplomacy and beauty speaks for peace.

She pointed out that Qatar's pavilion, designed by talented architect Lina Qattouf, symbolises

hospitality and resilience, reflecting shared aspirations.

HE Sheikha Al Mayassa affirmed that culture is the foundation of the pavilion's design, with kindness as its language, making it not just an architectural structure, but a space for dialogue, wonder, and global engagement in conversations that inspire peace and cultural exchange.

Qatar's new pavilion is cen-

trally located within the Biennale gardens, near the renowned Book Pavilion, adding a distinctive presence to the prestigious historical gardens that have showcased leading cultural and artistic creations for over 50 years.

Chief Executive Officer of Qatar Museums (QM) Mohamed Saad al-Rumaihi, said that international exhibitions are a cornerstone of the institution's strategy to raise



Qatar's cultural profile worldwide, noting that such shows help build cultural understanding and reinforce a creative economy.

Qatar's ambassador to Italy Khalid bin Youssef al-Sada affirmed that the state's participation in this year's Biennale Venice is part of a strategic cultural vision aimed at promoting cultural dialogue with the world and strengthening bilateral relations

with Italy, based on a firm belief that culture serves as an effective bridge for communication and understanding among peoples.

Meanwhile, the Qatar pavilion organised the Beyti Beytak exhibition at La Biennale di Venezia. The exhibition explores how modern and contemporary architecture meets the needs of communities and reimagines a sense of belonging. **Page 12**

IMF approves \$1bn Pakistan payout

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) yesterday approved a loan programme review for Pakistan, unlocking around \$1bn in much-needed funds and greenlighting a new \$1.4bn bailout. Pakistan came to the brink of default in 2023, as a political crisis compounded an economic downturn and drove the nation's debt burden to terminal levels. It was saved by a \$7bn bailout from the IMF — its 24th since 1958. "The authorities have demonstrated strong programme implementation, which has contributed to improving financing and external conditions, and a continuing economic recovery," the IMF said in a statement. **(AFP)**

80% tariff on Chinese imports 'seems right'

US President Donald Trump said yesterday an 80% tariff on Chinese goods "seems right", for the first time suggesting a specific alternative to the 145% levies he has imposed on Chinese imports ahead of closely watched weekend talks. US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent and chief trade negotiator Jamieson Greer will meet Chinese economic tsar He Lifeng in Switzerland for talks aimed at containing a trade war between the world's two biggest economies. It could be the first step toward resolving a damaging trade conflict that has already entangled global supply chains. **(Reuters)**

Gold prices rise as dollar falls

Gold prices rose more than 1% yesterday, benefiting from the weaker US dollar and positive signs of a resolution to trade disputes between the US and China. Spot gold rose 1.1% to \$3,340.29 per ounce, gaining 3.1% this week and more than 27% since the beginning of the year. US gold futures rose 1.1% to settle at \$3,344, while the dollar fell 0.3%, making gold less expensive for holders of other currencies. **(QNA)**

'Aid distribution in Gaza nearly impossible without UNRWA'

AFP
Geneva

It is "very difficult" to imagine any operation to deliver humanitarian aid to the besieged Gaza Strip without the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, a UNRWA spokeswoman said yesterday.

The US on Thursday announced a new foundation to provide aid to Gaza, sidelining the UN as Israel's two-month blockade brings severe shortages to the war-battered Palestinian territory.

"It is impossible to replace UNRWA in a place like Gaza. We are the largest humanitarian organisation," the agency's spokeswoman Juliette Touma told a press conference in Geneva, when asked about that proposal.

Little is known for sure about the body proposed by the US, but a listing in Switzerland showed the establishment in February of the "Gaza Humanitarian Foundation".

"We have the largest reach, whether it is through our teams that work across the Gaza Strip, where we have more than 10,000 people who work to deliver whatever is left of the supplies," said Touma, speaking from Amman, Jordan.

"We also manage shelters for the displaced families."

"It is very, very difficult to imagine any humanitarian op-



Palestinians sift through destroyed shelters at a UNRWA school housing displaced people, following an Israeli strike in the Bureij refugee camp in the centre of the Gaza Strip.

eration without UNRWA."

Israel has blockaded Gaza for two months, leading UN agencies and other humanitarian groups to warn of dwindling supplies of everything from fuel to medicine to the territory of 2.4mn Palestinians.

Such a proposal is widely criticised by the UN and humanitarian organisations.

"We'll only participate in any aid operation that respects our humanitarian principles of independence, humanity and impartiality," UN spokesman Rolando Gomez told the press conference.

James Elder, spokesman for the UN children's agency Unicef, said Israel's plan would only in-

crease the suffering of youngsters in the Gaza Strip.

"It's dangerous to ask civilians to go into militarised zones to collect rations; it further entrenches forced displacement for political and military purposes; and humanitarian aid should never be used as a bargaining chip," he said.

Those most at risk, who are unable to travel to such zones, would "face horrendous challenges" in accessing aid as a result, Elder added.

"And the use of humanitarian aid as a bait to force displacement, especially from the north to the south, will create this impossible choice between displacement and death." **Page 4**

Qatar's global efforts to save environment pay off

●Qatar nominated to represent Asia-Pacific region in Bureau of Conference of Parties to Stockholm Convention

The Asia-Pacific Group, within the Conference of the Parties on Chemicals and Hazardous Waste Management, has nominated Qatar as its representative in the Bureau of the Conference of the Parties to the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants. The nomination came during the Conference of the Parties to the Basel, Rotterdam, and Stockholm Conventions, held in Geneva. The nomination reflects the active role played by Qatar on the international stage in protecting the environment and promoting the sustainable management of chemicals

and waste. It also embodies its firm commitment to implementing the provisions of international environmental agreements and its active participation in their implementation mechanisms.

This achievement is a qualitative addition to Qatar's journey in international environmental work, enhances its position in global environmental forums, and confirms the international community's confidence in its competence and ability to effectively contribute to achieving the objectives of the Stockholm Convention and supporting global efforts to achieve sustainable development. **(QNA)**

Iran, US to resume nuclear talks tomorrow

Iran has agreed to hold a fourth round of nuclear talks with the US tomorrow in Oman, Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi said yesterday, adding that the negotiations were advancing.

US President Donald Trump's special envoy, Steve Witkoff, plans to attend the talks in Oman, a source familiar with the matter said yesterday.

"The negotiations are moving forward, and naturally, the further we go, the more consultations and reviews are needed," Araqchi said in remarks carried by Iranian state media.

"The delegations require more time to examine the issues that are raised. But what is important is that we are on a forward-moving path and gradually entering into the details," Witkoff, in an interview with Breitbart News, said the Iranians had stated that they do

not want a nuclear weapon and the US will "take them at their word" on this point.

"If that's how they feel, then their enrichment facilities have to be dismantled. They cannot have centrifuges. They have to down-blend all of their fuel that they have there and send it to a faraway place — and they have to convert to a civil programme if they want to run a civil programme," he said.

The fourth round of indirect negotiations, initially scheduled for May 3 in Rome, was postponed, with mediator Oman citing "logistical reasons".

In a separate statement yesterday, Omani Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr Albusaidi said that after "co-ordination with both Iran and the US", the fourth round of negotiations was set to take place tomorrow in Muscat. **(Reuters)**

EU rejects attempts to alter Gaza's demographic composition

The High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Kaja Kallas, firmly rejected any attempts to alter the demographic composition or geographical borders of Gaza Strip, including the forced displacement of Palestinians. Speaking at a press conference in the Polish capital Warsaw

following an informal meeting of EU foreign ministers, Kallas expressed EU's deep concern over the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Gaza. She noted that the foreign ministers unanimously agreed that the humanitarian conditions in the Strip are unbearable and worsening rapidly. Kallas called on Israeli

occupation authorities to immediately lift the blockade and allow humanitarian aid to reach those in need inside Gaza. On the situation in Syria, Kallas welcomed French President Emmanuel Macron's stance advocating for easing sanctions on Syria, noting that the matter is currently under discussion within EU institutions. **(QNA)**



Al-Hammadi meets Malaysian FM



HE the Secretary-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Ahmed bin Hassan al-Hammadi met in Putrajaya yesterday with Malaysian Foreign Minister Mohamed Hasan. During the meeting, the two sides discussed bilateral relations and explored ways to enhance and develop relations, alongside discussions on topics of mutual interest. The meeting was attended by Qatar's ambassador to Malaysia Salah bin Mohammed al-Sorour, Acting Director of Asian Affairs Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Al-Johara Yousef Fakhro, and the accompanying delegation.

Al-Hammadi meets Malaysian counterpart

HE the Secretary-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Ahmed bin Hassan al-Hammadi met in Putrajaya yesterday with Secretary-General of Malaysia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Amran Mohamed Zin. During the meeting, both sides discussed bilateral relations and ways to enhance and develop them, alongside topics of mutual interest. The meeting was attended by Qatar's ambassador to Malaysia Salah bin Mohammed al-Sorour, Acting Director of Asian Affairs Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Al-Johara Yousef Fakhro, and the accompanying delegation. **(QNA)**



Nigerian president meets al-Khulaifi



Qatar poised to become leading medical tourism hub: Aamal CEO

By Joey Aguilar
Staff Reporter

Qatar's cutting-edge healthcare infrastructure, further enhanced by innovative treatments and strong international collaborations, positions the country as a rising destination for medical tourism in the region, according to Aamal Company CEO Rashid bin Ali al-Mansoori.

Speaking to *Gulf Times*, al-Mansoori expressed confidence in Qatar's capabilities, highlighting its status as having one of the world's best healthcare systems and the presence of "very advanced hospitals." He also stressed that Hamad Hospital stands out in the region.

"Healthcare is an important pillar in Qatar National Vision 2030, so we need to be supporting this vision by bringing the best to the Qatar market," he said, citing the recent introduction of innovative treatments, such as the recently launched obesity drug Wegovy. This, he pointed out, forms part of Aamal's aim of providing the best in healthcare for the people of Qatar. "We look at healthcare not only as a trading or for making profit but it is the service and social responsibility of Aamal for its community," al-Mansoori said. He added that partnerships with international pharmaceutical leaders such as Novo Nordisk, the manufacturer of Wegovy, are crucial not just for accessing new medicines but also for knowledge transfer.

Al-Mansoori said that Aamal's commitment ex-



Rashid bin Ali al-Mansoori

tends beyond providing medication, but to include public health awareness and prevention. He said the company actively works to educate its staff and the wider community about these diseases, viewing such efforts as fundamental, pre-medical steps that underline the importance of lifestyle and dietary choices.

He said the noticeable increase in general tourism, demonstrated by reports of a crowded airport, also shows that Qatar's tourism authorities are successfully working on all fronts to attract more visitors and diversify the nation's economy.

Ministry launches pest control in different areas

As part of its keenness on maintaining public health and curb the spread of insects, the different municipalities across the country exerted considerable efforts to fight insects last month. The Ministry of Municipality carried out 829 applications for fighting insects in Doha Municipality, 995 Al Rayyan, 560 Al Daayan, 453 Umm Slala, 370 Al Wakra, 166 Al Khor and Al Thakkira, and 64 application in Al Sheehaniya Municipality, totalling 3,493 applications handled in April. Most of these applications were submitted through the Ministry of Municipality app Oun, the Unified Call Centre and the ministry website. Besides, the related efforts are set to go on to maintain a clean and healthy environment for the residents.

Seasonal mango celebration at Jamavar Doha



Jamavar Doha, the Michelin-starred jewel of Indian fine dining in Qatar, invites guests to embark on a culinary journey across India with its limited-time Alphonso Mango Feasting Menu during May. Created as an ode to the beloved king of fruits, this seasonal feast at Jamavar Doha in Sheraton Grand Doha, brings together the bold flavours, heritage, and artistry of regional Indian cuisines, a statement said. Curated by culinary director Chef Surender Mohan, renowned for his refined interpretation of regional Indian cuisine, this menu celebrates the Alphonso Mango's deep cultural significance in the subcontinent and its remarkable culinary versatility. Each dish draws inspiration from the regional flavours of India, unified by the golden hue and aromatic sweetness of the mango. The menu offers a flavourful journey across the country, from the foothills of the north to the spice-laden shores of the south.

Start with a reimagined street-style classic — Chandni Chowk Ki Aloo Tikki, a crisp potato patty layered with flavours and a seasonal mango twist, a nostalgic nod to Delhi's Street fare. Travel south with a seafood special - the Meen Manga Curry, where



tender sea bass is gently simmered in a spiced coconut broth, enriched with the tang of raw mango — a soulful tribute to Kerala's coastal kitchens. Next, dive into the heat and vibrancy of Ajwaini Kairree Jheenga, where succulent prawns are elevated with bold southern spices and a tangy mango chutney. This is followed by Scallop Mangai, a seared scallops paired with a mango-infused sauce, blending tang, spice, and subtle sweetness in a modern, soulful dish. To complete the journey, the menu culminates in Mango Delice — a refined dessert featuring an Alphonso tart, complemented by tangy mango salsa and refreshing sorbet. A curated enhanced beverage pairing is available to complement the menu's rich flavours and aromas. The Alphonso Mango Feasting Menu will be available until May 31, served for lunch from 12:30pm-3pm and dinner from 6pm-10pm. The menu is priced at QR350 per person for the non-vegetarian option, QR295 for the vegetarian option, and QR250 for the optional beverage pairing. For more information and reservations: <https://jamavarrestaurants.com/indian-restaurant-doha/>

New art exhibition forges cultural dialogues between Europe and the Gulf

By Joey Aguilar
Staff Reporter

As Qatar's cultural landscape undergoes rapid expansion, a new exhibition by renowned Italian artist Quayola at M7 offers a timely exploration of how generative art and artificial intelligence (AI) can shape evolving dialogues between Europe and the Gulf region.

'Nuovo Paesaggio (New Landscape)', presented by the Italian embassy in Doha in collaboration with Fondazione AGO - Modena Fabbriche Culturali and supported by the Directorate-General for Contemporary Creativity of the Italian Ministry of Culture, is on view at M7 (first floor) until July 19. "Certainly in the region, there is really a cultural explosion. There are a lot of very interesting things happening, and I find my work also starting to circulate more here—that's something that makes me very happy," Quayola told *Gulf Times*.

The artist, renowned for his innovative use of technology to reinterpret classical art and natural forms, sees the flourishing cultural landscape in the Gulf as fertile ground for such exchanges. "Having this cultural exchange, and this sort of point of view that meets through art, is



Quayola is renowned for his innovative use of technology to reinterpret classical art and natural forms. **PICTURE:** Thajudheen

always a nice thing to witness and to be part of," he said.

However, Quayola underlined the essential human element in his creations, noting that while technology is fascinating and full of potential, it also carries risks that require occasional restraint. For him, the human component is fundamental, and the crucial question is not what technology is used, but how it is applied. "As technology becomes more



Renowned Italian artist Quayola's 'Nuovo Paesaggio (New Landscape)' is on view at M7 until July 19. **PICTURE:** Joey Aguilar

advanced and standardised, the artist's role is to innovate how it is used... What you see here in this room is the result of observations made with a very specific technology — one that is widely used in a very different context.

"But it is not the technology itself that produces what you see here;

it is the human using that technology, sometimes subverting it in unusual ways. What makes this artwork unique is the person, not the technology. And I think how we use technology is a crucial question for the future," Quayola noted.

Having exhibited globally, Quayola finds the diverse interpretations

of his work enriching. He shared that the opportunity to display his art around the world, including in the Gulf, is deeply rewarding. He explained that his work explores universal themes, such as humanity's relationship with nature and the ways people observe the world, and he considers art to be a form of

universal language. While interpretations may vary, he noted, the fundamental core of what his artworks offer remains consistent.

Quayola views his art as "a celebration of nature, and also a celebration of human creativity — in a form where machines are there to enhance our own creativity."

Malayalam literature hit the shelves at Doha International Book Fair



Some of the visitors at the IPH Book Stall.

IPH Books is once again showcasing Malayalam literature at the Doha International Book Fair (DIBF) 2025 for the 12th consecutive year, a statement said. This year, IPH has brought over 600 Malayalam titles to the fair. In addition to books published by IPH, the pavilion features works from a wide array of prominent Malayalam publishers including DC Books, Mathrubhumi, Pradeeksha, Book Plus, Olive, Other Books, Madhyamam Books, and Yuvatha Books.

A curated collection of acclaimed Malayalam novels such as *Athreyakam*, *Maranavamsam*, *Mariya Verum Mariya*, *Oru Kaalam*, and *Agartha* are also available. Reflecting this year's guest country, Palestine, the pavilion hosts a special display of Malayalam books that delve into the Palestinian cause and related themes.

Over a hundred titles in children's literature are on offer, catering to younger readers. A major highlight is the availability of the most comprehensive Islamic encyclopedia ever published in Malayalam. The stall also features curated book packages, including the Tafheem-ul-Quran Package, Hadith Package, Children's Literature Package, History Package, and Family Package.

Books authored by expatriate Malayali writers in Qatar are also prominently displayed, offering a platform for local literary voices. The IPH pavilion, number 58 in hall number three at the fair, will also host daily surprises, competitions, and book giveaways. The release of 10 new titles is also scheduled to take place adjacent to the pavilion.



IPH Books stall at Doha International Book Fair.



DIBF is attracting readers from all age groups. A scene from yesterday. **PICTURES:** Shaji Kayamkulam



Palestinian publishing house brings many facets of Jerusalem to book fair

By Tawfik Lamari
Staff Reporter

On the second day of the Doha International Book Fair (DIBF) at the Doha Exhibition and Convention Centre, in the midst of a very busy and eventful evening, and a great turnout from eager readers of all ages and categories, Samir al-Jundi spoke to *Gulf Times* in an exclusive interview.

The author and publisher said: "I am honoured to be at the DIBF, especially this year, which has designated Palestine as the guest of honour for its 34th edition. We are part of this Palestinian pavilion, where 11 publishing houses from Palestine participate in this edition of the DIBF.

We, at Al-Jundi Publishing House, are based in Jerusalem. To celebrate this occasion, we have decided to bring to this pavilion only new books published in 2025. So that there is something new to be seen at this beautiful exhibition. Therefore, it is worth noting that we have more than 105 new titles in this stand, all of which are being displayed at a book fair for the first time. Al-Jundi Publishing House is located in Hall 2, 2H52. This stand welcomes all distinguished guests.

He added: "In addition to these books, I also have my own publications, including *Bab al-Amud*, a collection of 29 short stories, each

one tackling an aspect of life in Jerusalem. I also have *Son of Heaven*, which is a very important book and one of the best books I have written, and I'm proud of this publication more than any other. The other book is the novel *City Boy*, which tells the story of a young man living in Jerusalem who managed to excel in science, education, and social standing without any help. However, what distinguishes *City Boy* most is that this novel takes place entirely in Jerusalem.

Samir al-Jundi continued: "Another of my new books, the 2025 edition *Jerusalem Rituals*, is about seven days I spend in the streets and alleys of Old Jerusalem. When I'm walking through these alleys, if I recall a specific incident that happened somewhere — and there are many incidents in Jerusalem — I recount that incident in detail and document what I've said with photographs. Therefore, this book contains 118 colour photographs. I cherish this book and consider it important, especially for young people. I document Palestinian identity through words and photographs, and this is most important because our presence in Jerusalem is our only weapon to protect this city. The author added: "In addition to these books, we have a collection of works by Palestinian and Arab poets, including the late poet Samih al-Qasim, may God have mercy on him, author of the poem *I Walk Upright, I Walk with My Head*

High, an Olive Branch in My Hand and My Coffin on My Shoulder. This beautiful poet is from the Palestinian village of al-Rama, where he lived and was laid to rest. I was present at the burial. May God have mercy on him.

He commented the other books: "The remaining publications are by authors from all over the Arab world, because one of the goals of Dar al-Jundi Publishing House is to attract writers, authors, and scholars to publish their books in Jerusalem to strengthen our presence, and the most important element of this presence is culture.

He stressed: "Jerusalem has always been the capital of culture, and therefore, we at Dar al-Jundi seek to prove this principle in practice through the diversity of our publications and the depth of these publications.

"We have very important publications, for example, the book *The Mother in the Morals of the Messenger*, in four volumes. This is the first time such a title has been published, and it's by the brilliant Egyptian scholar Muhammad al-Sayyid al-Shinnawi. This man, who vowed to print and publish all of his works in Jerusalem without asking us a single penny. He has published more than 20 publications, all of which are in-depth studies. Among the titles he has published in Jerusalem are *Market Ethics*, the relationship with the customer and how to deal with him

and the merchant, and the Factory, basing this on the Prophet's (PBUH) Sunnah and the Holy Qur'an.

Al-Shinnawi also has a new reading of *The Inevitability of Israel's Demise*, based on the Sunnah, the Qur'an, and history. We printed it in Jerusalem. He also has *Jerusalem and the Supposed Promise*.

Regarding the reception of the Palestinian pavilion by the organisers of the DIBF, Samir al-Jundi said: "It is enough for you to visit the Book Fair and visit the Palestine pavilion to find this more than wonderful reception from the organisers of the fair and the officials from the Ministry of Culture, headed by HE the Minister of Culture Sheikh Abdulrahman bin Hamad al-Thani. This hospitality has warmed our hearts. The sight of the State of Palestine pavilion at the DIBF is truly beautiful, and I am very happy with this participation."

Regarding the turnout, Samir al-Jundi added: "The audience at the DIBF is a qualitative one. As many as 18 out of 20 people who attend the stand buy books. If this indicates anything, it reflects the value of the person who comes; a serious and committed reader who buys books that will benefit them, and this is very important."

The exhibition will extend over 10 days, providing a unique cultural experience for readers of all ages and from different venues.



Author and publisher Samir al-Jundi.

Qiyadat initiative reflects national direction

QNA
Doha

The Civil Services and Government Development Bureau, represented by the Institute of Public Administration, launched the second edition of the Qiyadat (Leadership) programme, in collaboration with the Qatar Leadership Center and Duke Corporate Education.

The programme aims to develop the leadership skills of assistant undersecretaries in government entities, enhancing their leadership capabilities and supporting institutional transformation efforts in the public sector.

In his remarks, HE Dr Abdulaziz bin Nasser bin Mubarak al-Khalifa, who serves as President of the Civil Service and Government Development Bureau and Secretary-General of the National Planning Council, said that Qiyadat programme reflects the national direction toward preparing empowered government



leaders equipped to keep pace with change and contribute effectively to achieving sustainable development goals.

He highlighted the success of the program's first edition and the tangible impact it had on the performance of participating entities. Dr Fadi Hisham, a representative of Duke Corporate Education, delivered an introductory

presentation outlining the main features of the program and the institution's role in designing academic content and training tracks in accordance with global best practices in public sector leadership. Following the presentation, the first training session was held as part of a programme running through December.

It includes nine specialised

modules covering areas such as strategic project management, digital transformation, agile and transformational leadership, media engagement, financial and commercial acumen, crisis management, customer service, and innovation in the public sector.

The programme also includes a learning trip to Estonia from Aug 25-29, aimed at exploring global experiences in digital transformation, governance, and entrepreneurship, as well as learning about mechanisms for co-operation between government entities and civil society in developing public services.

Qiyadat is considered one of the most prominent national initiatives reflecting the Civil Service and Government Development Bureau's commitment to preparing second-tier leadership in the government sector. It contributes to building a resilient leadership system that supports institutional excellence and aligns with the goals of Qatar National Vision 2030.

Coffee with a Little Fascism launched at Cultural Salon

The recently published book 'Coffee with a Little Fascism' by Rosa Publishing House, by HE Sheikh Nawaf bin Mubarak bin Saif al-Thani, was launched yesterday at the Cultural Salon of the 34th Doha International Book Fair (DIBF). The author, HE Sheikh Nawaf bin Mubarak bin Saif al-Thani, reviewed some of the book's content and his experience in writing it.

The book includes a collection of intellectual articles that shed light on contemporary political, social, and cultural issues in a style that combines in-depth analysis with balanced critical discourse.

Through his texts, the author offers an in-depth reading of regional and international phenomena, drawing on field experience and an independent vision that enriches intellectual debate. Speaking to Qatar News Agency (QNA), HE Sheikh Nawaf bin Mubarak bin Saif al-Thani explained that the book monitors and analyses contemporary transformations in the Arab world and their impact on the nation and Arab citizens in a changing world. He noted that it takes the reader on a journey from the past to the present to an imagined future.

HE Sheikh Nawaf noted that the most important milestones in this journey include the Qatari Renaissance experience, its development, and its national, regional, and global impact, as well as the Arab Spring, its consequences, and repercussions through monitoring and analysing events and developments.

The 469-page book, *Coffee with a Little Fascism*, is written in a sophisticated Arabic language that alternates between seriousness and purposeful sarcasm, providing the reader with a balanced intellectual experience that raises questions and invites contemplation. It also discusses the intertwined relationships between issues of society, culture, politics, the environment, law, and the media. It is worth noting that HE Sheikh Nawaf bin Mubarak bin Saif al-Thani is an author who juggles his diplomatic and military experience, offering distinctive insights into issues of strategic politics and society. (QNA)



French pro-Palestinian group contests govt move to shut it down

Reuters
Paris

A French pro-Palestinian protest group is contesting a government decision to shut it down, saying the move was politically motivated and based on “false” arguments as part of a wider crackdown on the movement for Palestinian rights.

Urgence Palestine (Emergency Palestine), created in 2023 to protest against Israel’s military offensive in Gaza, filed its counterarguments to the shutdown procedure on Thursday, their lawyer Elsa Marcel said.

French Interior Minister Bruno Retailleau, explaining the decision, said in a letter dated April 28 to one of the group’s founders, Omar Alsoumi, that Urgence Palestine had provoked violent acts, including towards Jewish people, and had called for armed struggle.



The French pro-Palestinian group “Urgence Palestine” takes part in an International Workers’ Day protests, after the government announces its intention to shut the organisation down, in Paris.

Asked about the decision, Alsoumi told Reuters yesterday: “This shows the partiality of the French government on the genocidal war that the Palestinian people is experiencing.” He said the group, which has been organising protests across France over the past 19 months, rejects any conflation of Jews and the Israeli government and that Palestinians have the right to resist occupation under international law.

The French Interior Ministry did not respond to a request for comment.

The group’s lawyer Marcel said the closure was part of a wider wave of repression in Western countries against pro-Palestinian, anti-war activists.

“There is an extremely elastic use of the question of terrorism apology, which we contest, and criticism of Israel is represented as antisemitism, which we also contest,” she said.

New Gaza aid plans would increase children’s suffering, Unicef says

Reuters
Geneva

The UN Children’s Fund (Unicef) yesterday criticised emerging plans to take over distribution of humanitarian aid in Gaza on Thursday floated by both Israel and the US, saying that they would increase suffering for children and families.

The US State Department earlier floated a solution that would allow delivery of food aid to Gaza was “steps away” and an announcement was coming shortly.

A proposal is circulating among the aid community for a Gaza Humanitarian Foundation that would distribute food from four “Secure Distribution Sites”, resembling plans announced by Israel earlier this week, which drew criticism that it would effectively worsen displacement among the Gaza population.

“It appears the design of a plan presented by Israel to the humanitarian community will increase ongoing suffering of children and families in the Gaza Strip,” said Unicef spokesperson James Elder.

Elder said his remarks also applied to the new foundation which he understood to be part of the same broad plan.

The aid community has already rejected any plans that would give occupying power Israel a role in



Palestinians wait to receive food cooked by a charity kitchen, in Beit Lahia, northern Gaza Strip.

distributing aid in Gaza.

However, the Foundation document said the sites would be “neutral” and US ambassador to Israel Mike Huckabee said on Friday that Israel would not be involved in handing out aid.

Still, Elder said that the use of such hubs, which the foundation says will initially serve 300,000 people each, would create risks for children and families as they

go to retrieve aid and would drive further displacement.

“The use of humanitarian aid as a bait to force displacement, especially from the north to the south will create this impossible choice: a choice between displacement and death,” said Elder, who has been on several missions to Gaza since the Israel-Hamas war began 19 months ago.

“It appears designed to rein-

force control over life-sustaining items as a pressure tactic.”

He called instead for Israel to lift a more than two-month-long blockade on aid entries into the enclave, which is stoking widespread hunger and raising concerns about a spike in malnutrition-related deaths.

“There is a simple alternative, lift the blockade, let humanitarian aid in to save lives,” he said.

Five Palestinians martyred in Israeli shelling of Gaza

Five Palestinians were martyred and others injured yesterday as a result of Israeli shelling of the Gaza Strip.

Medical sources reported that four citizens, including a child, were killed when the Israeli occupation forces shelled a store in the Al Rimal neighbourhood, central Gaza City.

Another Palestinian succumbed to his wounds yesterday when Israeli shelling targeted a group of civilians near the Al Amal Hotel, west of Gaza.

A number of Palestinians were also injured in an Israeli airstrike on a Bank of Palestine branch in the town of Beit Ha-

noun, north of the Gaza Strip.

Four Palestinians were martyred and dozens wounded in an Israeli air strike on Jabalia camp, northern Gaza Strip.

Local sources said that the air strike targeted the UNRWA food supply building in the camp, killing four civilians and wounding dozens, including women and children.

The Israeli occupation resumed its aggression on Gaza on March 18, following a two-month pause under a ceasefire agreement that went into effect on January 19, deepening the unprecedented humanitarian tragedy facing the Strip’s residents. (QNA)

Drone strikes hit Port Sudan for sixth straight day

Drone strikes hit Port Sudan for a sixth straight day yesterday, an army source said, blaming the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, at war with the regular army since April 2023.

“Our air defences intercepted some of the enemy drones which were targeting sites in the city,” the source said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Witnesses reported strikes across Port Sudan, seat of the army-backed government and the country’s main aid hub.

The port city, which had been seen as a safe haven from the devastating conflict between the army and the RSF, has been hit by daily drone strikes since Sunday.

The long-range attacks have damaged several key facilities, including the country’s sole international airport, its largest working fuel depot and the city’s main power station.

Later yesterday, the national electricity company said a drone strike hit the power station in Atbara, the River Nile state capital west of Port Sudan.

The strike with three drones, blamed on the RSF, started a fire and caused power outages across the state and the neighbouring Red Sea state, where Port Sudan is located.

Port Sudan is the main entry point for humanitarian aid into Sudan, and UN chief Antonio Guterres warned the attacks “threaten to increase humanitarian needs and further complicate aid operations in the country”, his spokesman said.

More than two years of fighting have killed tens of thousands of people and uprooted 13mn in what the UN describes as the world’s worst humanitarian crisis. (AFP)

UN committee warns of new mass expulsion in Palestinian territories

AFP
Geneva

The world could be witnessing “another Nakba” expulsion of Palestinians, a UN committee warned yesterday, accusing Israel of “ethnic cleansing” and saying it was inflicting “unimaginable suffering” on Palestinians.

For Palestinians, any forced displacement evokes memories of the “Nakba”, or catastrophe – the mass displacement in the war that accompanied to Israel’s creation in 1948.

“Israel continues to inflict unimaginable suffering on the people living under its occupation, whilst rapidly expanding confiscation of land as part of its wider colonial aspirations,” warned a UN committee tasked with probing Israeli practices affecting Palestinian rights.

“What we are witnessing could very well be another Nakba,” it said, after concluding an annual mission to Amman.

During the 1948 war, around 760,000 Palestinians fled or were driven from their homes in what became known as “the Nakba”.

Gaza death toll rises to 52,787, says health ministry

The death toll from the Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip since Oct 7, 2023, has risen to 52,787 martyrs, with 119,349 injured, according to the Palestinian Ministry of Health. In a statement yesterday, the Ministry of Health in Gaza reported that hospitals received 27 martyrs in the past 24 hours,



Palestinians, displaced by the Israeli military offensive, shelter in a tent camp, in Gaza City.

The descendants of some 160,000 Palestinians who managed to remain in what became Israel presently make about 20% of its population.

The UN Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories was established by the UN General Assembly in December 1968.

The committee is currently composed of the Sri Lankan, Malaysian and Senegalese ambassa-

dors to the UN in New York.

“What the world is witnessing could very well be a second Nakba. The goal of wider colonial expansion is clearly the priority of the government of Israel,” they said in their report.

“Security operations are used as a smokescreen for rapid land grabbing, mass displacement, dispossession, demolitions, forced evictions and ethnic cleansing, in order to replace the Palestinian communities with Jewish settlers.”

including one whose body was recovered, along with 85 wounded individuals. The statement further noted that since the renewed Israeli assault on Gaza on March 18, the number of martyrs has reached 2,678, with 7,308 wounded. The ministry also confirmed that several victims remain trapped

under rubble or in the streets, with rescue teams and civil defence forces unable to reach them.

Israel broke a two-month ceasefire that had gone into effect on Jan 19, further deepening the unprecedented humanitarian crisis facing Gaza’s population. (QNA)

Palestinians demonstrate parkour skills



Palestinians demonstrate their parkour skills amidst the rubble of houses, in Gaza City yesterday.

MES champions of CBSE Qatar Cluster Athletic Meet 2025

MES Indian School emerged overall champions of the CBSE Qatar Cluster Athletic Meet 2025, jointly hosted with Mesis Abu Hamour Branch at the MES ground from April 29-May 1.

The event brought together the finest young athletes from the CBSE schools across Qatar. Competitions were held in three categories, U-14, U-17 and U-19.

MES has thus established a sporting legacy of retaining a winning spree for more than two decades in the CBSE Qatar Cluster Athletic Meet.

The closing ceremony was graced by MES governing board president B M Siddique, sports and games director Badarudeen Ghulam Mohyuddin, treasurer Usman A T, principal Dr Hameeda Kadar, Mesis principal Prameela Kannan, coaches, and participants of all Indian schools.

Amidst jubilation and thunderous applause, the team MES lifted the Champions Trophy.

The MES athletes were trained by the department of physical education head Salim J Nadaf along with Steeson Mathew, Gigy Abraham and Nazanin S Nadaf.



DPS-MIS wins medals at CBSE Qatar Cluster Athletics Meet



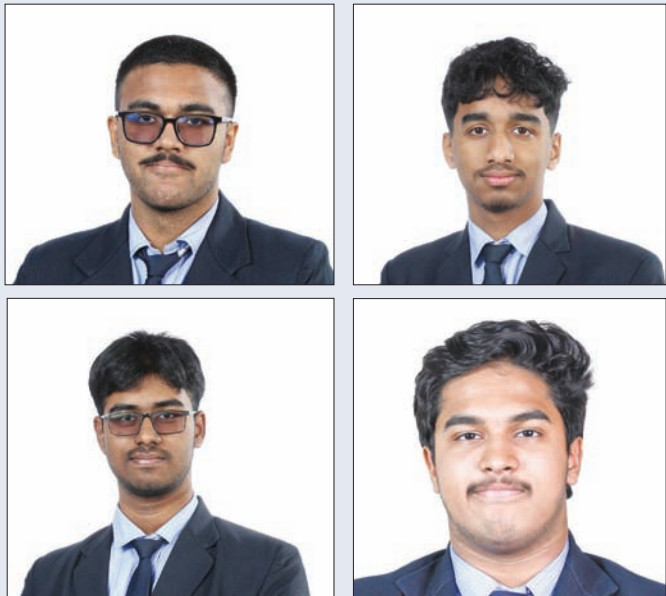
Athletes of DPS-Modern Indian School (DPS-MIS) delivered an outstanding performances at the CBSE Qatar Cluster Athletic Meet, held from April 29-May 1 at MES Indian School. In the Under-14 category, Sanjanaa Nakulan and

Rishyanth Senthil bagged gold medals in the 800m race. In the Under-17 category, Suhana Senthil earned a silver in the 1,500m race, while Jeevika Velusamy won a bronze in long jump. In the Under-19 category,

Sterlyn Alfred Fonseca won a silver in the 1,500m race, and Madheeha Mudassir a silver in discus throw. Principal Asna Nafees congratulated the participants and wished them continued success in future competitions.

NIS shines in global space competition

Noble International School (NIS), Qatar, bagged a major achievement by winning second place among 170 teams from around the world in a competition organised by the Arts and Business College of London (ABC London) in collaboration with Space Store. The event, themed around designing a futuristic and sustainable habitat for Mars 2040, selected only 10 teams for the final round after a rigorous evaluation process. The first prize was awarded to a team from the US, while the third and fourth prizes went to teams from New Zealand and the UK, respectively. The NIS team, comprising Grade 12 students — Ashwanth Kumar, Amal Shibu, Shivansh Sharma and Hazim Ahmed — impressed an international panel of judges with their innovative and scientifically sound Mars habitat design. Their project stood out for its creativity, sustainability, and outstanding presentation.



The school management, principal Dr Shibu Abdul Rasheed, vice principals, heads of sections, and the teaching

faculty congratulated the team for bringing pride to NIS and the broader Qatari educational community, a statement said.

DPS-MIS hosts inter-school art competition

DPS Modern Indian School (DPS-MIS) Silver Jubilee Inter-School Art Competition brought together 142 participants from 17 schools across Qatar.

The event was graced by Shinu George, corporate relationship officer, DPS Group, who fondly reflected on the school's remarkable 25-year journey and applauded its unwavering commitment to holistic education and creative growth.

In her address, principal Asna Nafees highlighted the importance of art integration in the curriculum and the value of providing platforms that nurture budding artists.

The competition was conducted across four categories: Category 1 (Grades I and II), Category 2 (Grades III-V), Category 3 (Grades VI-VIII), and Category 4 (Grades IX-XII).

In Category 1, Thanmay Lijo (Rajagiri Public School) secured the first position, followed by Dhaara Shankari and Hanna Sara (Bhavan's Public School) in the second and third positions, respectively.



In Category 2, Izaan Mohamad Rikkaz (DPS Monarch International School) clinched the top spot, while Ancil Dsouza (DPS-MIS) and Pranav Nidhin (Podar Pearl School), were second and third.

In Category 3, Aambal Synesh and Sohan Sandeep from MES Indian School were first and second, respectively, while Kannika V from Ideal Indian School (IIS) was third. Consolation prizes were awarded to Maryam Abdul-lah (IIS) and Nemsith Nimpura

Peiris (Shantiniketan Indian School).

In Category 4, Kalyani Sunil (Rajagiri Public School) earned the first position, followed by Jannatul Maowa (Bhavan's Public School) in second and Tanshi Sivaraja (Birla Public School) in third.

A consolation prize was awarded to Malavika Unnikrishnan (Bhavan's Public School).

The panel of judges included Richa Bahl, Ramachandran Arsha, and Vaishnavi Srinivasan.

NIS student creates reading record

Riona Saha, a KG-2 student of Noble International School, Doha, has entered the International Book of Records by becoming the youngest child to read the maximum number of Level E books in a single sitting. At four years, three months and 17 days, Riona read seven Level E books. The school management, principal Dr Shibu Abdul Rasheed, vice-principals, heads of sections, and the teaching faculty congratulated the achiever.



RPS honours new student leaders



Rajagiri Public School organised the investiture ceremony for academic year 2025-2026, officially inducting the newly appointed student leaders.

Juvenile Police Department's awareness officer First Lt Mohammad Abdulla al-Naama was the chief guest while Faisal al-Hudawi from the Ministry of Interior's Public Relations Department was the guest of honour.

The event celebrated the appointment of student leaders across various levels, beginning with the class prefects from Grades 1-12. Leadership roles were formally

conferred upon the captains and vice-captains of the school's four houses – Apollo, Atlas, Hercules, and Pegasus – along with the newly appointed junior captains from each house.

The key leadership positions for the academic year were announced, with Aadil Ali Shaikh appointed head boy, Michelle Donald Vattakuzhi as head girl, Shreya Sara Aju as cultural secretary, and Junaid Jaseer as sports captain. Dakshin Dilu and Yara Hamdi were selected as junior head boy and head girl, respectively. The board of directors were

present. In his address, Dr Aju Abraham urged the newly appointed leaders to embrace their roles as role models and lead with both passion and purpose. Following this, the principal administered the oath of office, formally entrusting the responsibilities to the student leaders.

In his presidential address, First Lt al-Naama, emphasised the importance of diligently fulfilling their leadership duties. He encouraged the young leaders to inspire their peers to step forward and embrace leadership opportunities in the future.

MES wins prizes in elocution competition

Three students of MES Indian School won prizes in the B K Mohamed Kunhi Interschool Elocution Competition 2025, organised by the MES Alumni Association and Mesaa Toastmasters Club under the theme 'Voices of Tomorrow'. In Table Topic, Afrah Fathima (Class IX) and Mohammed Aiman Jamil (Class XII) won second

prizes in the junior and senior categories, respectively and in the inspirational speech senior category Aaisha Fathima Basheer (Class IX) won third prize.

Co-ordinators and members of the department of English, including Atheen B, Pushyami, D Rex, and Ishrat Fathima trained the students for the event.



Landmark 500th meeting

The Indian Club of Toastmasters (ICTM) recently marked a significant milestone, hosting its 500th meeting with the theme, 'Honouring the past, Empowering the future'. Sabeena, Alar Mel Mangai, Ravishankar, H P S Bhullar, other officials, members and their families attended. The club's third newsletter for 2024-2025 was launched. The meeting was conducted by Kumaran C S, Mohammed Aslam Chanda, Duggupati Bhasker Rao and Surya Narayanan.





African charity admits abuses against locals at Congo park

AFP
Johannesburg

A major African conservation charity has acknowledged its rangers were involved in rights violations reportedly including sexual offences and torture against indigenous people at a national park in the Republic of Congo.

African Parks, which has Prince Harry on its governing board and receives EU and US funding, said an independent investigation had confirmed allegations of abuses at its Odzala-Kokoua National Park in northern Congo. "African Parks acknowledges that, in some inci-

dents, human rights abuses have occurred, and we deeply regret the pain and suffering that these have caused to the victims," the Johannesburg-headquartered organisation said on Thursday.

The group, which works in 12 countries in Africa, did not give details of the allegations of violations against the Baka community of hunter gatherers who live near the park. Reports in Britain's Mail on Sunday and the German outlet Tagesschau cited locals as alleging rape, beatings, torture and other abuses carried out by guards employed by African Parks.

A report by Tagesschau said, for example, that rangers had water-

boarded a local because he had ventured too deep into a protected area of the park, where locals are only allowed to access the periphery for foraging. African Parks said it had engaged London-based human rights law firm Omnia Strategy to investigate the claims, of which it became aware in mid-2023 and some of which may have occurred over the past 15 years.

The British firm said its 16-month investigation looked into 21 of the allegations, which included physical and sexual violence, including rape, torture and "unlawful killing". Its statement did not detail its findings or recommendations. African Parks admit-

ted the investigation "highlighted several failures of our systems". It said it would appoint an independent panel to oversee investigations into "all serious grievances" and take action against staff members implicated in incidents not yet known about or that had not been adequately dealt with. Leading Republic of Congo rights group Centre d'Actions pour le Developpement (CAD) lauded the investigation as "a responsible reaction" and called for sanctions against the perpetrators.

"Hiding the abuses committed by the eco guards in the name of the fight against wildlife crime has only allowed other abuses to be

committed," CAD executive director Tresor Nzila told AFP. Founded by the late Dutch billionaire Paul Fentener van Vlissingen in 2000, African Parks manages 22 protected areas in 12 countries.

Prince Harry served as president of the organisation for six years until 2023 after which he joined the governing board of directors. The non-profit organisation, which has also received funding from celebrities like pop star Taylor Swift, has faced criticism for practising "fortress conservation", effectively barricading local communities from nature reserves and the tourists who visit them. African Parks has denied the accusations, saying

in a 2024 statement that "none of our work would even be possible without the active support and engagement of local communities". In one of its flagship projects in Chad, African Parks helped rebuild Zakouma National Park's elephant population after numbers had dropped by about 95 percent.

Located in the south of the landlocked country, Zakouma is guarded by militarised rangers and armed with assault rifles. The Odzala-Kokoua National Park is set in the Congo Basin, the world's second-largest tropical rainforest after the Amazon, and is home to critically endangered gorillas as well as forest elephants.

Ugandan opposition leader to seek presidency, chides West over rights

Reuters
Nairobi

Ugandan opposition leader and pop singer Bobi Wine said yesterday he plans to run for president for a second time and criticised the West for not speaking out more against "gross human rights violations" in the country.

Wine, 43, whose real name is Robert Kyagulanyi, will be challenging long-serving President Yoweri Museveni, 80, who is widely expected to seek re-election. "Yeah, I've expressed my availability on behalf of my team," Wine said in an interview with Reuters when asked whether he would stand again in the east African country's next presidential election, due in January.

Wine, 43, whose real name is Robert Kyagulanyi, will be challenging long-serving President Yoweri Museveni, 80, who is widely expected to seek re-election

Participation in the election, he said, will also be "a fighting opportunity to further expose the regime and to further galvanise the people of Uganda to rise up and free themselves."

Wine came second in the last election in 2021 but rejected the



Ugandan opposition leader and singer Robert Kyagulanyi Ssentamu, known as Bobi Wine in a file photo.

outcome, alleging ballot staffing, falsification of results, beatings and intimidation by soldiers and other irregularities. Government and electoral officials denied the accusations. Wine criticised

Western governments for not denouncing what he said were escalating human rights violations, including abductions, illegal detention and torture of his supporters and officials. Wine did not single out any country for criticism. "Some leaders in the West are complicit in our suffering. They are here to crack their (business) deals and they don't care about human rights," he said. "If they were standing for the values that they profess, then they would be castigating all these gross human rights violations."

Uganda is considered by the West as an ally in the fight against terror and has deployed troops in Somalia. Uganda's justice minister said this week that Eddie Mutwe, an activist in Wine's National Unity Platform (NUP) party, who also doubles as his personal body

guard, appeared to have been tortured while in captivity.

Museveni's son and head of the military, Muhoozi Kainerugaba, said he had kept him in his basement and that he was using him as a punching bag. After missing for a week Mutwe was on Monday produced in court, charged with robbery and remanded. Wine said Mutwe told him he had been electrocuted, waterboarded and beaten.

Police spokesman Rusoke Kituma did not respond to a Reuters call for comment on the allegations. Reuters contacted a spokesperson for Uganda's defence forces seeking comment from Kainerugaba. He did not respond. Wine said that if was elected, his priorities would include restoration of political and civil rights and a crackdown on corruption.

S Africa protests to US over first resettlement of white Afrikaners

AFP
Johannesburg

South Africa had "expressed concern" to the United States after reports it will accept from next week the first white Afrikaners it had offered to resettle, the foreign ministry said yesterday. US media reported on Thursday that Donald Trump's administration plans to welcome the first group of white South Africans as early as Monday, after the US president accused Pretoria of "racial discrimination" against them.

The South African government had "expressed concerns with the information conveyed that the United States has commenced with processing alleged refugees from South Africa", the foreign ministry said. "We reiterate that allegations of discrimination are unfounded," it said in a statement.

"Moreover, even if there are allegations of discrimination, it is our view that these do not meet the threshold of persecution required under domestic and international refugee law."

South African deputy foreign minister Alvin Botes had raised the concerns directly with his US counterpart Christopher Landau, it said.

Relations between South Africa and the United States have nosedived this year over a range of domestic and foreign policy issues, culminating in Washington's expulsion of Pretoria's ambassador in March. "It is most regrettable

that it appears that the resettlement of South Africans to the United States under the guise of being 'refugees' is entirely politically motivated and designed to question South Africa's constitutional democracy," the foreign ministry said.

One of the sticking points is a land expropriation law signed in January that Trump has claimed would allow the South African government "to seize ethnic minority Afrikaners' agricultural property without compensation". The government has stressed the new law only allows authorities to expropriate property without compensation in the public interest and after efforts had been made to reach a fair agreement with the owner.

Trump, whose tycoon ally Elon Musk was born in South Africa, said in February he would prioritise access to a refugee programme "for Afrikaners in South Africa who are victims of unjust racial discrimination."

This is despite his decision to halt refugee arrivals to the United States immediately after taking office in January. Trump said in March that any South African farmer and their families seeking to "flee" would have a "rapid pathway" to US citizenship. Reports said afterwards that thousands of Afrikaners had approached the US embassy in Pretoria about the offer. US investigative outlet The Lever quoted an April 30 memo saying that the first South Africans were scheduled to arrive "within a few days".

Washington was preparing to resettle up to 1,000 Afrikaners this year, it said, quoting a government source. National Public Radio (NPR) and the New York Times said the group was scheduled to arrive Monday, although the Times quoted officials saying the date could change depending on logistics. The South African government wanted to know if those being accepted into the United States had the status of asylum seekers, refugees or ordinary citizens, the foreign ministry said.

It also wanted assurances that those who were leaving had been appropriately vetted including to ensure they do not have any criminal cases pending against them. "Whilst South Africa challenges the United States' assessments of alleged refugee status, it will not block citizens who seek to depart the country from doing so," the statement added.

White Afrikaners are predominantly descendants of Dutch settlers who arrived at the tip of Africa more than three centuries ago. Today they make up most of South Africa's 7.3% white population.

Mainly Afrikaner-led governments imposed the brutal race-based apartheid system that denied the black majority political and economic rights until it was voted out in 1994.

Their claims that white farmers are targeted for murder - despite official data that most victims of killings are young black men in urban areas - have morphed into a myth of a "white genocide", also repeated by Trump.

Rare bone-eroding disease ruining lives in Kenya's poorest county

AFP
Lodwar

Joyce Lokonyi sits on an upturned bucket, fingers weaving palm fronds as the wind pulls her dress to expose the stump of her amputated foot, lost to a little-known disease ravaging Kenya's poorest county. Mycetoma is a fungal or bacterial infection that enters the body through any open wound, often as tiny as a thorn prick.

Starting as tiny bumps under the skin, it gradually leads to the erosion of tissue, muscles and bone. The fungal variety is endemic across the so-called "mycetoma belt" - including Somalia, Sudan, Yemen and northern Kenya - with funding and research desperately lacking. Once the disease has reached the bone the only option is amputation.

"I was able to slightly walk, although the disease had eaten all my toes," Lokonyi, 28, told AFP. She was shunned by the local community, she said. "They used to say that when you go to someone's home, you will leave traces of the disease where you stand."

She was unable to afford medication despite her husband selling off his goats, and amputation became the only option. "I accepted because I saw that it was going to kill me," she said, a pair of battered crutches lying on the sand

beside her two-year-old daughter. But she has struggled with the aftermath. "I have become a good-for-nothing, I can't work, I can't burn charcoal, I can't do anything," she said.

In Kenya's poorest county, Turkana, around 70% of the population lives beneath the poverty line, with healthcare limited and hard to reach. Mycetoma disproportionately affects rural communities of farmers and herders, according to the Drugs for Neglected Diseases initiative (DNDi), a global NGO. It was only recognised as a neglected disease by the World Health Organisation in 2016. Ignorance and misdiagnosis remain widespread. "Doctors are not aware of the disease," Borna Nyaoke-Anoke, DNDi's head of mycetoma research, told AFP. "If you're used to donkeys, you don't start seeing zebras everywhere."

The scale of the problem is difficult to estimate, but Ekiru Kidallo, director of Lodwar Hospital in Turkana, said they "rarely go a week without finding a case". He added that the local population, 80% of which is illiterate, often turns to traditional medicine. By the time they come to hospital "the condition is already advanced such that it's not easy to reverse."

Medication is also expensive - treatment takes up to a year and costs as much as \$2,000 - and comes with dizzying side effects. Diagnosis and treatment are not

free under Kenya's overwhelmed health system, leaving patients at the mercy of foreign donors or seeking sums that are unimaginable for subsistence farmers. In Lodwar Hospital, lab technician John Ekai bends over his microscope and examines a suspected mycetoma sample.

"Mycetoma is a very neglected disease, no-one is giving it attention," he told AFP.

He has become the go-to man for suspected patients, handling his charges with a mischievous sense of humour that puts them at ease. Ekai has treated more than 100 mycetoma patients in the past year, but has seen only five recoveries, with many simply vanishing back into Turkana's arid plains. He worries for those who have disappeared: "The mycetoma will grow and grow and maybe... lead to amputation."

During AFP's visit, he examined young mother Jennifer Ekai, 19, who had lived with the disease since she was 11. "I was in school but I decided to leave because of my foot," she said, showing her swollen and painful extremity, hidden beneath a red-and-white dishcloth. Four doses of medication a day appeared to be helping, she said.

But as she gathered up her daughter, three-year-old Bianca, she admitted she was worried about the future. "I do not want to think about the worst."

US to cut health aid to Zambia over 'systemic theft'

Reuters
Lusaka

The United States said it would cut \$50mn in annual aid to Zambia's health sector because the government had failed to stop "systemic theft" of donated medicines and medical supplies. US President Donald Trump's administration is finalising a broader review of its foreign aid, but the cut for Zambia is "wholly separate from that process", US ambassador to Zambia Michael Gonzales said in a statement.

"I am disappointed to share publicly today that since 2021 we have uncovered systemic theft of life-saving medicines and other

products that were intended for free for the Zambian public," Gonzales said, adding medicines stolen included antiretroviral drugs used to treat HIV.

Zambia's health ministry responded in a statement acknowledging the US ambassador's concerns and said recurrent theft of medicines was a "persistent challenge" dating back to before 2021.

After he was alerted to the issue Zambian President Hakainde Hichilema commissioned an independent forensic audit of the entire medicines supply chain, the ministry said.

A number of officials found to have been involved had been removed from office or suspended, while others were arrested and are set to appear in court.

"We want to assure the public that Zambia currently maintains sufficient stocks of essential medicines, including antiretroviral, antimalarial, and other critical drugs, with no immediate risk of shortages," Zambia's health ministry said.

Gonzales said he had recommended to Washington that the US continue to procure and deliver lifesaving medicines and medical supplies to Zambia until January 2026 to provide time for the government to develop a transition plan.

After January, the US will still offer technical and logistics assistance to support humanitarian activities and prevent drug resistance and disease transmission, he said.

New Pope makes headlines in Nairobi



A conveyor belt transports printed newspapers with a picture of the newly elected Pope Leo XIV, Cardinal Robert Prevost of the United States, at the Nation Media Group printing press on the outskirts of Nairobi, Kenya.

Trump names Fox News host as top Washington prosecutor

Donald Trump has appointed TV personality and former judge Jeanine Pirro to a key post in the US judiciary, the president's latest nomination of a Fox News on-air host to a position of government power.

The brash 73-year-old has been selected to work as interim US Attorney for the District of Columbia, plucked from one of Trump's favourite hiring pools: right-leaning television networks.

Other hires from cable news include Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth, who co-hosted *Fox & Friends Weekend*, and Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy, a former reality TV show competitor and Fox Business co-host.

The pick came soon after Trump pulled his first choice for the post, a defence lawyer who represented defendants charged in the January

6, 2021 storming of the US Capitol.

"I am pleased to announce that Judge Jeanine Pirro will be appointed interim United States Attorney for the District of Columbia," Trump posted on his Truth Social platform, describing the former district attorney of New York's Westchester County as being "in a class by herself".

"During her time in office, Jeanine was a powerful crusader for victims of crime. Her establishment of the Domestic Violence Bureau in her Prosecutor's Office was the first in the Nation. She excelled in all ways," he wrote.

Pirro briefly entered politics in ill-fated attempts to run for the US Senate and for New York Attorney-General, losing the latter race to Democrat Andrew Cuomo.

She began earning wider public exposure by

hosting a weekday television show, *Judge Jeanine Pirro*, from 2008-2011.

That year she joined Fox News Channel to host *Justice with Judge Jeanine*, which ran for 11 years, and today she is a co-host of the network's show, *The Five*.

Pirro has also authored several books, including *Liars, Leakers, and Liberals: The Case Against the Anti-Trump Conspiracy*, from 2018.

The *Washington Post* described the book as "sycophantic" in its support for Trump.

After promoting unfounded conspiracy theories alleging election fraud in 2020, Pirro was named a defendant in a defamation lawsuit filed by Dominion Voting Systems, which said Fox broadcast false statements about the company.

Fox News settled the case for nearly \$800mn. – **AFP/Reuters**

Dozens of minors killed in Mexico cartel clashes

Dozens of minors have been killed during months of fighting between two factions of the Sinaloa drug cartel in northwestern Mexico, a local ombudsman said yesterday.

Nearly 100 minors have gone missing in violence that followed the capture last July of a cartel co-founder, Oscar Loza, president of the Sinaloa State Human Rights Commission, said.

"Thirty nine minors have lost their lives in this armed conflict," he told AFP, citing data from the public prosecutor's office.

The victims include two girls, aged seven and 12, who died on Monday after being caught in the crossfire between gunmen and security forces.

A 12-year-old boy was also wounded along with his parents and two other relatives, authorities said.

"When will the people recover from such a deep and painful wound? Never. It will always be there, not because of numbers but the smiles that were extinguished," Loza said.

Monday's shooting occurred in the municipality of Badiraguato, the birthplace of imprisoned drug trafficker Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman and other senior cartel figures, authorities said.

Cartel co-founder Ismael "El Mayo" Zambada claimed last year that he was kidnapped in Mexico by Joaquin Guzman Lopez, one of El Chapo's sons, and flown to the United States in a private plane against his will.

The infighting is believed to pit gang members loyal to El Chapo and his sons against others aligned with Zambada.

The conflict has left more than 1,200 people dead and 1,400 missing, terrorised residents and dealt a heavy blow to businesses in the state capital Culiacan and other towns in Sinaloa.

Criminal violence, much of it linked to drug trafficking and gangs, has seen around 480,000 people murdered in Mexico since 2006. – **AFP**

Mexico suing Google over 'Gulf of America' name

Mexico has sued Google for changing the Gulf of Mexico's name to "Gulf of America" for Google Maps users in the United States, President Claudia Sheinbaum said yesterday.

"The lawsuit has already been filed," Sheinbaum said at her morning news conference, without saying where and when it was submitted.

On Thursday, US lawmakers voted in favour of the name change, turning into federal law an executive order signed by President Donald Trump in his first week in office in January. – **AFP**

US Justice Department opens probe into Trump legal foe

The US Justice Department has opened a criminal probe of New York state Attorney-General Letitia James, one of President Donald Trump's main adversaries, for alleged mortgage fraud, newspapers reported on Thursday.

The investigation comes after the head of the Federal Housing Finance Agency (FHFA), a Trump appointee, alleged that James "appeared to have falsified records" related to properties in Virginia and New York to obtain better loan terms.

James has denied wrongdoing.

The *Albany Times-Union* and *Guardian* newspapers, which first reported the probe, said the criminal investigation into James's real estate dealings involved the Justice Department and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).

The *Washington Post* said it is believed to be the first criminal investigation by the administration involving a law enforcement official who took action against Trump.

James, a Democrat, drew the wrath of Trump after leading a civil fraud case against him that saw the Republican ordered to pay a huge penalty last year.

Trump was found liable of fraud by conspiring to alter his net worth to get better loan and insurance terms.

Trump and his older sons were ordered to pay \$454mn.

Trump and his allies regularly attacked James during the trial in New York, and he has put revenge against his foes high on the agenda since returning to the White House in January. – **AFP**

War between India and Pakistan will be 'none of our business', says Vance

Reuters

Washington

US Vice-President J D Vance has said that India and Pakistan should de-escalate tensions, but he added that the US cannot control the nuclear-armed Asian neighbours and a war between them would be "none of our business".

"We want this thing to de-escalate as quickly as possible. We can't control these countries, though," Vance said in an interview on Fox News show *The Story* with Martha MacCallum.

"What we can do is try to encourage these folks to de-escalate a little bit, but we're not going to get involved in the middle of war that's fundamentally none of our business and has nothing to do with America's ability to control it," he added.

India is an important partner for Washington, which aims to counter China's rising influence, while Pakistan remains a US ally despite its diminished importance after Washington's withdrawal from neighbouring Afghanistan in 2021.

Analysts and some former officials have said US involvement to achieve diplomatic goals in Russia's war in Ukraine and Israel's war in Gaza may make Washington leave India and Pakistan on their own in the early days of their tensions, without much direct

pressure from the US government.

Pakistan and India accused each other of launching drone attacks, and Islamabad's defence minister said further retaliation was "increasingly certain" on the second day of major clashes on Thursday.

Two days of fighting killed nearly four dozen people.

The latest escalation in the decades-old India-Pakistan rivalry began on April 22 when religious militants killed 26 people in India-administered Kashmir in an attack that New Delhi blamed on Islamabad, which denied the accusations and called for a neutral probe.

"Our hope and our expectation is that this is not going to spiral into a broader regional war or, God forbid, a nuclear conflict," Vance said on Thursday.

Washington has held regular talks with both in recent days, including on Thursday when Secretary of State Marco Rubio held calls with Pakistan's prime minister and India's foreign minister while urging them to de-escalate and have direct dialogue.

US President Donald Trump called rising tensions a shame.

On Wednesday, he said he hoped the two countries will stop now after going "tit-for-tat".

The State Department urged both countries to work towards what Washington terms as a "responsible solution".

Trump fires librarian of US Congress

Reuters/AFP

Washington

US President Donald Trump has fired the Librarian of Congress, Carla Hayden, in part over her commitment to diversity, the White House said yesterday.

White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt said that the Trump administration believed Hayden was not serving the interests of American taxpayers, citing her advancement of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) policies.

"There were quite concerning things that she had done at the Library of Congress in the pursuit of DEI and putting inappropriate books in the library for children," Leavitt told reporters at a press briefing yesterday. "She has been removed from her position, and the president is well within his rights to do that."

Hayden, who was the first woman and first black American in the role, headed an office that has overall management responsibility for the library and sets out policy on its programmes and activities.

Democratic president Barack Obama appointed her in 2016 to a 10-year term in the role that needed Senate confirmation.

The Library of Congress did not immediately respond to a request for comment from Reuters.

The *New York Times* first reported the firing.

Top Democrats in Congress criticised the move as Trump's latest politically-motivated purge.

"Donald Trump's decision to



White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt speaks to members of the media in the briefing room at the White House in Washington, DC.

– **Reuters**

fire Dr Carla Hayden is the latest foray in his relentless campaign to dismantle the guardrails of our democracy and punish public servants who don't bend to his every will," top Senate Democrat Chuck Schumer wrote.

The House of Representatives minority leader, Democrat Hakeem Jeffries, called the firing unjust.

"There will be accountability for this unprecedented assault on the American way of life sooner rather than later," he said in a statement.

New Mexico Senator Martin Heinrich praised Hayden for running a library that was "accessible to all Americans, in person and online".

"While President Trump wants to ban books and tell Americans what to read – or not to read at all – Dr Hayden has devoted her career to making reading and the pursuit of knowledge available to everyone," he said.

Hayden was nominated to

manage the world's largest library in 2016 but has been criticised by conservatives, including members of the American Accountability Foundation lobby group, which has accused her of seeking to "indoctrinate America's children with radical sexual ideologies".

"Carla Hayden is woke, anti-Trump, and promotes trans-ing kids," the group posted on social media hours ahead of the librarian's firing. "It's time to get her OUT and hire a new guy for the job!"

The Library of Congress provides research and information for the legislative process as well as managing a vast collection of books, films, audio recordings and other materials.

The librarian of Congress is responsible for setting policy and managing staff, while also overseeing the US Copyright Office and appointing the poet laureate.

The library did not respond to a request for comment.

Measles roars back in the US, topping 1,000 cases

AFP

Washington

The United States' measles outbreak has surpassed 1,000 confirmed cases with three deaths so far, state and local data showed yesterday, marking a stark resurgence of a vaccine-preventable disease that the nation once declared eliminated.

The surge comes as Health Secretary Robert F Kennedy Jr continues to undermine confidence in the measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR) vaccine – a highly effective shot he has falsely claimed is dangerous and contains fetal debris.

An AFP tally showed there have been at least 1,012 cases since the start of the year, with Texas accounting for more than 70%.

A vaccine-sceptical Mennonite Christian community straddling the Texas-New Mexico border has been hit particularly hard.

A federal database maintained by the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has lagged behind state and county reporting, as the globally renowned health agency faces deep workforce and budget cuts under President Donald Trump's administration.

North Dakota is the latest state to report an outbreak, with nine cases so far.

Around 180 school students have been forced to quarantine at home, according to the North Dakota Monitor.

"This is a virus that's the most contagious infectious disease of mankind and it's now spreading like wildfire," Paul Offit a paediatrician and vaccine expert at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia told AFP.

He warned the true case count could be far higher, as people shy away from seeking medical attention. "Those three deaths equal the total number of deaths from measles in the last 25 years in this country."

The fatalities so far include two young girls in Texas and an adult in New Mexico, all unvaccinated – making it the deadliest US measles outbreak in decades.

It is also the highest number

of cases since 2019, when outbreaks in Orthodox Jewish communities in New York and New Jersey resulted in 1,274 infections but no deaths.

Nationwide immunisation rates have been dropping in the United States, fuelled by misinformation about vaccines, particularly in the wake of the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic.

The CDC recommends a 95% vaccination rate to maintain herd immunity.

However, measles vaccine coverage among kindergartners has dropped from 95.2% in the 2019-2020 school year to 92.7% in 2023-24.

Measles is a highly contagious respiratory virus spread through droplets when an infected person coughs, sneezes or simply breathes.

Known for its characteristic rash, it poses a serious risk to unvaccinated individuals, including infants under 12 months who are not ordinarily eligible for vaccination, and those with weakened immune systems.

Before the measles vaccine's introduction in 1963, it is thought that millions of Americans contracted the disease annually, and several hundred died.

While measles was declared eliminated in the US in 2000, outbreaks persist each year.

Susan McLellan, an infectious disease professor at the University of Texas Medical Branch, pushed back against messaging that promotes remedies like Vitamin A – which has valid but limited uses – over vaccines.

Kennedy has led that messaging in frequent appearances on Fox News.

"Saying we're going to devote resources to studying therapies instead of enhancing uptake of the vaccine is a profoundly inefficient way of addressing a vaccine-preventable disease," she told AFP.

McLellan added that the crisis reflects broader erosion in public trust in health authorities.

She said it is hard for an individual untrained in statistics to understand measles is a problem if they don't personally see deaths around them. "Believing population-based statistics takes a leap, and that's public health."

San Francisco trains hit by system-wide outage

San Francisco's main public transport system abruptly shut down yesterday morning, stopping all trains in the Bay Area and throwing the morning commute into chaos.

"Due to a computer networking problem BART service is suspended system wide until further notice," said a message on the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) website. "Seek alternate means of transport."

The shutdown left tens of thousands of commuters scrambling to find other ways to work.

Pictures showed crowds of people pressing aboard buses, while reports said both the Golden Gate Bridge and the Oakland Bay Bridge – key routes into and out of the city – were clogged.

Unlike many major US cities, San Francisco has a well-developed public transport network that includes an underground train network, buses, trams and ferries that traverse the bay between San Francisco and other cities in the region.

The closure of the BART train system, whose 131 miles (210km) of track carry more than 174,000 passengers every day, appeared to be related to how the system had powered up after overnight maintenance, communications officer Alicia Trost told ABC7. – **AFP**

Newark air traffic suffers new outage, says FAA

Reuters

Newark/Washington

A facility that guides air traffic in and out of Newark airport suffered a new 90-second communications outage early yesterday, the second in two weeks that prompted an air traffic controller to complain "Scopes just went black again" to a nearby FedEx flight.

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) said the telecommunications outage impacted communications and radar displays at Philadelphia Terminal Radar Approach Control that guides aircraft in and out of Newark Liberty around 3.55am ET yesterday and lasted approximately 90 seconds.

A recording of an exchange obtained by Reuters discussed the outage with a pilot.

"FedEx 1989, I'm going to hand you off here, our scopes just went black

again," the controller told the pilot. "If you care about this, contact your airline and try to get some pressure for them to fix this stuff."

The pilot responded he was sorry to hear of the outage.

FedEx did not immediately comment.

The latest incident highlights the air traffic control network's ageing infrastructure and comes a day after Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy proposed spending billions of dollars to fix it over the next three to four years.

White House spokeswoman Karoline Leavitt said "there was a glitch in the system" caused by the same telecom issue that caused the prior incident.

She said that the goal is to address the technical issue later on Friday "to prevent further issues".

The FAA said on Wednesday that it was taking immediate steps to address ongoing problems that have

disrupted hundreds of flights at Newark since April 28 especially from United Airlines, the largest carrier at the airport located just outside New York City.

United said yesterday that the FAA outage impacted its Newark operation but did not elaborate.

It has sharply cut flights and wants the FAA to impose new limitations on Newark flights to address ongoing delays.

"Decades of failing to properly invest in the system has prevented good-faith efforts to make technology upgrades and bolster the staffing of our nation's hard-working air traffic controllers," United chief executive Scott Kirby said in a Fox News op-ed yesterday.

The FAA said it is increasing air traffic controller staffing, adding three new, high-bandwidth telecommunications connections and deploying a temporary backup system to the Philadelphia TRACON during the

switch to a more reliable fiber-optic network.

Duffy said on Thursday that the FAA had two redundant lines and "both are up and working now" at Philadelphia.

The FAA did not immediately answer why the backup did not prevent yesterday's incident.

Newark has been hit by runway construction, FAA equipment outages and air traffic control staffing shortages that prompted urgent calls from lawmakers for investigations and new funding.

FlightAware said there were nearly 300 flights delayed and 135 cancelled.

Duffy said on Thursday that controllers overseeing planes at the busy airport lost contact with aircraft on April 28 for 30-90 seconds, an incident that raised serious alarm.

The FAA last year relocated control of the Newark airspace to Philadelphia to address staffing and congested New York City area traffic.



LAW AND ORDER

China cracks down on strategic minerals' smuggling

China yesterday said it would crack down on the smuggling of strategic minerals as it enforces an export ban on precious metals vital to the manufacturing of semiconductors and weapons. Last month, Beijing restricted exports of tungsten and seven categories of rare earths as part of its response to US President Donald Trump's sweeping tariffs on Chinese goods. In 2024, China banned exports to the US of gallium, antimony and germanium - key components in semiconductors - as well as certain types of graphite used in electric vehicle batteries. China dominates the global supply chains for rare earths.

TRAGEDY

Sri Lanka helicopter crash kills six military personnel

A Sri Lankan Air Force helicopter crashed during a graduation ceremony yesterday, plunging into a reservoir and killing six of the 12 people on board, a military official said. The personnel were preparing for a grappling demonstration when their Bell 212 careened into the reservoir at the Maduru Oya national park, the official said. "There were 12 people on board, and six of them survived with minor injuries," said the official. Those killed included four special forces commandos and two Air Force gunners. The survivors were admitted to hospital. The crash took place halfway through the ceremony in Maduru Oya, nearly 300km east of Colombo.

COMMENT

Expansion of military bootcamp scheme for unruly teens 'likely'

Indonesian teenage students who skip class or play too many video games could land themselves in military bootcamp if a disciplinary pilot project rolled out in one province this month proves successful, a government minister said yesterday. More than 270 teenage students in West Java deemed troublesome have been shipped to military barracks under a scheme launched this month by the governor, local media reported. Human Rights Minister Natalius Pigai praised the project, and has thrown his support behind rolling out the programme nationwide. He reiterated his support for expanding the programme across the country yesterday.

MALPRACTICE

Tokyo hotels warned over information-sharing

Japan's fair trade watchdog has warned 15 luxury hotels in Tokyo that their sharing of information on occupancy rates and prices could violate anti-monopoly laws. Hotel prices around the country have soared in recent months as record numbers of foreign tourists have flocked to Japan amid labour shortages and stubborn inflation. Major hotel operators in the capital, including the Imperial Hotel and the New Otani, have held monthly meetings, the Japan Fair Trade Commission said. "They exchanged information on room occupancy rates, average room prices, revenue per room, future bookings and policies for setting future room prices," the statement said.

Taiwan slams Russia, China for distorting World War II history

Reuters
Taipei

Taiwan yesterday criticised Russia and China for distorting World War II history, saying Chinese communist forces made "no substantial contribution" to fighting Japan and instead took the opportunity to expand their own forces.

Taiwan has this year sought to cast the war as a lesson to China in why aggression will end in failure, reminding the world it was not the government in Beijing that won the war.

The Chinese government at the time was the Republic of China, part of the US, British and Russian-led alliance, and its forces did much of the fighting against Japan, putting on pause a bitter civil war with Mao Zedong's Communists whose military also fought the Japanese.

The republican government then fled to Taiwan in 1949 after finally being defeated by Mao, and Republic of China remains the democratic island's official name.

Responding to comments by Russian President Vladimir Putin to Chinese President Xi Jinping that the war was won under the leadership of China's communist party, Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council said it was the Republic of China government and people who fought and ultimately won.

"The Chinese communists only took the opportunity to expand and consolidate communist

forces, and made no substantial contribution to the war of resistance, let alone 'leading' the war of resistance," it said.

China's Taiwan Affairs Office did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Xi was in Moscow yesterday to attend the military parade marking the 80th anniversary of the end of the war in Europe.

In a joint statement with China, Russia reaffirmed that Taiwan was an "inseparable part of the People's Republic of China" - a position the government in Taipei strongly disputes.

The government in Beijing says that as it is the successor state to the Republic of China it has a legal right to claim Taiwan under the text of the 1943 Cairo Declaration and 1945 Potsdam Declaration, the island at the time being a Japanese colony.

Taiwan's foreign ministry said those documents confirmed that it was the Republic of China which had sovereignty over Taiwan.

"At the time, the People's Republic of China did not exist at all," it said.

"Any false statements intended to distort Taiwan's sovereign status cannot change history, nor can they shake the objective facts recognised by the international community"

China labels Taiwan President Lai Ching-te a "separatist". He rejects Beijing's sovereignty claims, saying only Taiwan's people can decide their future.



North Korean leader Kim Jong-un (centre right) visits the Russian embassy in North Korea with his daughter Ju Ae (centre left) and leading officials of the Workers' Party in Pyongyang yesterday.

North Korea leader visits Russia embassy as generals meet Putin

Reuters
Seoul

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un made a rare visit to Russia's embassy in Pyongyang with his daughter yesterday and reaffirmed "the invincible alliance" between the two countries, while Russia's leader greeted North Korean generals in Moscow.

Congratulating Russia on the 80th anniversary of the Soviet Union's victory over Nazi Germany in World War Two, Kim said North Korea would "consolidate and develop the long tradition of the DPRK-Russia relations, the noble ideological foundation and the invincible alliance", state-run KCNA reported. Kim has taken his young daughter to a variety of events recently, part of what South Korean intelligence views as plans for her to succeed her father.

North Korea's unprecedented deployment of thousands of troops, as well as huge amounts of artillery ammunition and missiles, has helped Russia push back a Ukrainian incursion into its western Kursk region. It has also brought North Korea and Russia - both economically and politically isolated - closer.

More than three years after its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Russia is marking the World War II anniversary with a military parade attended by China's Xi Jinping.

In Moscow, Russian President Vladimir Putin greeted North Korean army generals with handshakes after hosting the parade. Putin embraced Kim Yong Bok, a three-star general who is considered to be a key figure

overseeing North Korea's troop deployment to Russia. Kim is subject to sanctions by the US, South Korea and the European Union.

"All of the best wishes to all of your warriors," Putin said in video footage of their encounter.

Kim responded to Putin by thanking him for his "high evaluation."

With Kim was Sin Kum Chol, another general blacklisted by the South Korean government over involvement in the war in Ukraine.

About 600 North Korean troops have been killed fighting for Russia against Ukraine out of a total deployment of 15,000, according to the South Korean intelligence.

In return, Pyongyang appears to have received technical assistance on satellites, as well as drones and anti-aircraft missiles, South Korea has said.

Tokyo knife attacker blames toxic parenting

A knife-wielding man arrested in Tokyo this week wanted to warn parents nationwide that tough love can ruin their children, citing his own miserable childhood, Japanese media reported yesterday. The 43-year-old has been charged with attempted murder after allegedly assaulting a man in his 20s on Wednesday at Tokyo's Todai-mae Station, near the University of Tokyo, Japan's most prestigious higher education institution. The suspect "with the intent to kill slashed the victim's head and other body parts with a knife-like object that he was carrying, causing injuries", a police spokesman previously said. When questioned, the suspect spoke of his demanding parents, who he said were obsessed with his academic achievement, local media said. Because of them, "I stopped going to school and had a hard time" as a teenager, public broadcaster NHK quoted him as telling investigators.



Protesters gather in front of the State Guest House Jamuna, the official residence of Bangladesh's Chief Adviser Office of Interim Government Muhammad Yunus, demanding a ban on ousted Sheikh Hasina's party, the Awami League, in Dhaka yesterday.

Thousands rally seeking ban on Hasina's party

AFP
Dhaka

Thousands of people yesterday rallied outside the residence of Bangladesh's interim leader Muhammad Yunus, demanding he ban the political party of former prime minister Sheikh Hasina.

Nobel Peace Prize winner Yunus, 84, has led an interim government since Hasina was overthrown by student-led mass protests in August 2024 and fled into exile as crowds stormed her palace.

Yesterday's rally came after the sudden departure of Abdul Hamid, a former leader of Hasina's Awami League party, from Bangladesh early Thursday.

A crowd, mainly made up of young people, had started gathering outside Yunus' residence on Thursday night.

Hasnat Abdullah, the chief or-

ganiser of the newly formed National Citizen's Party, said the demonstration would continue until their demands were met.

"Sheikh Hasina robbed the people of Bangladesh of their democratic rights. She manipulated the system to prevent any real opposition from participating in the election," Kamrul said.

"We saw Abdul Hamid leave the country safely. The actions of certain advisers are highly suspicious. The delay in justice appears to be part of a broader plan to bring back the fallen dictator and her party," he added. Hasina remains in self-imposed exile in India and has defied an arrest warrant from Dhaka over charges of crimes against humanity.

According to the United Nations, up to 1,400 protesters died in July when Hasina's government launched a brutal crackdown on the opposition, casualties for which she and Hamid are being investigated.

Election holds key to future for foes Marcos, Duterte

AFP
Manila

The Philippines votes on Monday in a ballot that will decide half the senate's seats, thousands of local posts, and quite possibly the political future of impeached Vice President Sara Duterte.

More than 160,000 national police have been deployed to secure polling stations, escort election officials and guard checkpoints in a country where hotly contested provincial postings are known to erupt in violence.

But it is the vice-president's feud with President Ferdinand

Marcos that has dominated national politics heading into the mid-term election.

The rift between the two former allies came to a head in the wake of the vice president's February impeachment and her father Rodrigo Duterte's subsequent arrest and transfer to the International Criminal Court (ICC) to face charges over his deadly drug war while he was president.

The 12 senators elected on Monday, and 12 others already in office, will serve as jurors in an impeachment trial - tentatively set for July - that could see her permanently barred from public office.

Seven currently polling in the top

12 have been endorsed by Marcos while four - including the president's independent-minded sister Imee Marcos - are publicly aligned with Duterte.

Among the front-runners are a TV host, a comedian and a former Duterte lieutenant who has publicly said he could be next on the ICC's warrant list.

Former boxing champion Manny Pacquiao sits just outside the so-called Magic 12.

The threat the Dutertes face is an existential one, Cleve Arguelles, president and CEO of WR Numero Research, said.

"If (Rodrigo) is cut off from power, if Sara is cut off from public office,

then it's not far from imagining that it might also threaten their control of Davao," he said, referencing the capital of the family's southern stronghold Mindanao.

Seeing the vice president removed from the 2028 presidential equation is in the interest of more than just Marcos, who is constitutionally limited to one term, Arguelles added.

"If she is out of the game, then it's anybody's ballgame," he said.

The Dutertes' woes, however, have done little to boost Marcos's popularity.

A survey released last month showed a dramatic dip in his approval rating from nearly 50% to 25% in barely three months.

"There's a view that the mid-term elections serve as a referendum for the incumbent president," said Dennis Coronacion of the University of Santo Tomas' political science department.

Marcos, however, has no signature achievement he can point to, said Jean Franco, assistant chair of the University of the Philippines' political science department.

"Since late 2023, his entire administration's narrative seems to be about Sara Duterte," she said. "I think Filipinos are souring on him."

A bid to make the country's clashes with Beijing in the disputed South China Sea central to the campaign has also largely fizzled with voters.

While surveys show Filipinos are broadly anti-China on the issue, it rates far behind bread-and-butter topics like inflation and jobs, said pollster Arguelles.

In Manila on Monday, many will queue to cast their ballots inside air-conditioned malls.

The spectre of violence, however, looms large the further you get from the capital.

In 2022, shortly after polls opened in the presidential election, a trio of security guards were shot dead at a polling station in the far south's autonomous Muslim region in Mindanao.

Hours before that, nine were wounded in a grenade attack.

India offers to slash tariff gap by two-thirds in dash to seal US trade pact

Reuters
New Delhi

India has offered to slash its tariff gap with the US to less than 4% from nearly 13% now, in exchange for an exemption from President Donald Trump's "current and potential" tariff hikes, two sources said, as both nations move fast to clinch a deal.

This would mean that the average

tariff differential between India and the US, calculated across all products without weighting for trade volume, would be reduced by 9 percentage points, in one of the most sweeping changes to bring down trade barriers in the world's fifth largest economy.

The US is India's largest trading partner, with bilateral trade totalling some \$129bn in 2024. The trade balance is currently in favour of India, which runs a \$45.7bn surplus with the US.

Trump announced on Thursday his administration's first "break-through deal" with Britain. It lowers average British tariffs on US goods but keeps in place the 10% base tariff imposed by Washington on British goods, likely setting a template for Washington's approach with other trading partners.

Last month, Trump announced a 90-day pause on his long-planned reciprocal tariffs on global trading partners, including a 26% tariff

on India, while his administration negotiates trade deals. A 10% base tariff continues to apply to India and many other nations during the pause.

After the UK, India and Japan are the next two nations in line to finalise a deal, a third Indian government official said. "We will see which one crosses the line first."

To achieve this, New Delhi has offered to reduce duties to zero on 60% of the tariff lines in the first

phase of the deal which is under negotiation, said the first two sources, both Indian government officials familiar with the matter.

India has offered preferential access to nearly 90% of goods imported from the US, including the reduced tariffs, one of the two officials said. Details of India's offer to slash the tariff gap and what it has asked the US in return have not been previously reported.

A delegation of Indian officials is

likely to visit the US later this month to take the negotiations forward, a fourth official said, adding that India's Trade Minister, Piyush Goyal, might visit too but his plans were not finalised.

All four government officials did not wish to be identified as details of the negotiations are private and sensitive.

India's trade ministry, which is leading talks, did not respond to a request for comment.

India tells X to block over 8,000 accounts

AFP
Washington

India has ordered X to block more than 8,000 accounts, the platform said, adding that it was reluctantly complying with what it described as government-imposed "censorship".

The move appears to be part of India's sweeping crackdown targeting social media accounts of Pakistani politicians, celebrities and media organisations amid heightened tensions and deadly confrontations between the nuclear-armed neighbours.

The order, which X said includes demands to block international news organisations and other prominent users, comes a day after Meta banned a prominent Muslim news page on Instagram in India at New Delhi's request.

"X has received executive orders from the Indian government requiring X to block over 8,000 accounts in India, subject to potential penalties including significant fines and imprisonment of the company's local employees," the site's global government affairs team said in a statement. It added that in most cases, the government had not specified which posts from the accounts violated Indian laws, and in many others, it provided no evidence or justification for the blocks.

The Elon Musk-owned platform said it disagreed with the demands but it had begun the process to withhold the specified accounts in India. "Blocking entire accounts is not only unnecessary, it amounts to censorship of existing and future

content, and is contrary to the fundamental right of free speech," the statement said.

"This is not an easy decision, however keeping the platform accessible in India is vital to Indians' ability to access information."

The move comes amid fierce fighting between India and Pakistan, two weeks after New Delhi blamed Islamabad for backing a deadly attack on tourists in Kashmir.

Pakistan rejects the charge.

At least 48 people have been killed on both sides of the border in escalating violence since India launched air strikes on Wednesday that it said targeted "terrorist camps".

Both countries accused each other on Thursday of carrying out waves of drone attacks.

X said it could not make the Indian executive orders public due to legal restrictions, but it encouraged the impacted users to seek "appropriate relief from the courts."

It did not name the affected users, but in recent days the Indian media has reported that the country has blocked the X accounts of Pakistani politician Bilawal Bhutto Zardari and Pakistan's former prime minister and cricket captain Imran Khan.

India has also banned more than a dozen Pakistani YouTube channels for allegedly spreading "provocative" content, including Pakistani news outlets.

Pakistani Bollywood movie regulars Fawad Khan and Atif Aslam were also off limits in India, as well as a wide range of cricketers - including star batters Babar Azam and Mohammad Rizwan and retired players Shahid Afridi and Wasim Akram.



Indian villagers wait for transportation as they evacuate following overnight Pakistani artillery shelling in Uri, about 100km from Srinagar, yesterday.

New wave of drone attacks target Kashmir

AFP
Srinagar, India

A new wave of drone attacks targeted Kashmir for a second straight evening yesterday, including the city of Jammu, an Indian defence source said, after Pakistan earlier denied carrying out such attacks.

The source said "drones have been sighted in Jammu, Samba" in Kashmir and in Pathankot in the neighbouring state of Punjab, adding: "They are being engaged".

Kashmir's Chief Minister Omar Abdullah said on X: "Intermittent sounds of blasts, probably heavy artillery, can now be heard from where I

am" in Jammu, adding that there was a blackout in the city. Journalists on the ground reported heavy artillery shelling in the village of Poonch near the border. On a third day of tit-for-tat exchanges, the Indian army said it had "repulsed" waves of Pakistani attacks using drones and other munitions overnight, and gave a "befitting reply".

Pakistan's military spokesman yesterday denied Islamabad carried out such attacks.

An Indian army spokeswoman yesterday spoke of "300-400" Pakistani drones being fired but it was impossible to verify that claim independently.

Meanwhile, residents across Pakistan and India rushed to stockpile foods and other essential supplies, while families living near the border

fled to safer areas. In Punjab, Amanpreet Dhillon, 26, said many families in his village - just 13km from the border with Pakistan - have already sent women and children to safer areas.

"I am also contemplating it... I'm afraid my village could be next," he said.

In Kashmir's Uri district, residents said many fled overnight after several houses were struck by shelling, some taking shelter behind rocks or in bunkers. "We have never seen such intense shelling in our life. The majority of the people fled the town and other villages as soon as shelling started last night with some taking shelter in underground bunkers," said Bashir Ahmad, 45, in the town of Baramulla in Uri. "It was a nightmare for us."

UK's national statistician quits due to ill health

Britain's Statistics Authority yesterday said that Ian Diamond, the country's head statistician, had resigned from his position due to ongoing health issues.

It said Emma Rourke, deputy national statistician for health, population and methods, will act in his place, pending longer term arrangements being put in place.

"Unfortunately, I have made the decision that, due to ongoing health issues, I am unable to give the commitment to the role of national statistician that I would like to and feel that it is the right time for somebody else to pick up the baton," Diamond said in a statement.

Diamond's resignation comes at a difficult time for the Office for National Statistics, which has been criticised for the quality of its labour market statistics that provide critical information for government and Bank of England policymakers.

Royals attend VE Day anniversary concert



Britain's Prince William, Prince of Wales and Catherine, Princess of Wales, attend the celebratory concert to mark the 80th anniversary of VE Day, or Victory in Europe Day, marking the end of World War II in Europe, at Horse Guards Parade in London.

Two men found guilty of felling iconic UK tree

AFP
London

Two men were yesterday found guilty of the "deliberate and mindless" felling of one of the UK's most iconic trees in a case that sparked national outrage.

The jury at Newcastle Crown Court found former friends Daniel Graham, 39, and Adam Carruthers, 32, guilty of criminal damage after the 2023 felling of the tree at Sycamore Gap, which had stood for nearly 200 years next to Hadrian's Wall, a Unesco World Heritage site in northern England.

Groundworker Graham and mechanic Carruthers were each found guilty after around five hours of deliberation of two counts of criminal damage - one to the sycamore and one to the

Roman wall, which was damaged when the tree fell on it.

Prosecutors told court the two men cut down the tree with a chainsaw "in an act of deliberate and mindless criminal damage," which they filmed on Graham's phone and then shared with others.

Prosecutor Richard Wright said the pair drove to the site near Hexham in Graham's Range Rover and felled the tree on the night of September 27, 2023, slicing through the trunk in "a matter of minutes".

"Having completed their moronic mission, the pair got back into the Range Rover and travelled back towards Carlisle" where they lived, he said.

He said a video of the act recovered from Graham's phone was shared by the two men with "the unmistakable sound of a chainsaw, and a tree falling".

Death threats, bullets sent to Star Health's India executives

Reuters
New Delhi

The hacker who leaked sensitive personal data held by Indian health insurer Star Health last year has taken responsibility for sending death threats and bullets to the company's chief executive and finance head.

The hacker, who goes by the alias "xenZen", described their reprisals against Star Health and Allied Insurance Company in a March 31 e-mail to Reuters.

The news agency is reporting them for the first time.

Star Health, India's biggest

health insurer, has faced criticism from customers and data security experts since it was reported last September that xenZen had leaked sensitive client data, including medical reports. At the time, xenZen said in an e-mail to Reuters they possessed 7.24 terabytes of data related to over 31mn Star Health customers and was speaking to potential buyers for the data.

The news agency hasn't independently confirmed the identity or location of xenZen, the accuracy of the facts laid out in the March 31 e-mail or the hacker's motive for targeting Star Health and its executives, which the e-mail ascribed to the company's denial of medical

claims to certain customers.

In response to questions from Reuters, Star Health's chief legal officer said in a statement the company could not comment "due to an ongoing, highly sensitive criminal investigation" related to its data leak.

XenZen said they had concealed bullet cartridges in two packages sent to Star Health's head office in the southern Indian city of Chennai, in Tamil Nadu state, in February.

The e-mail included photographs that showed the packages addressed to chief executive Anand Roy and chief financial officer Nilesh Kambli and a note inside

which read: "next one will go in ur and ur peoples head. tik tik tik."

Roy did not respond to a phone call requesting comment, while Kambli said Star Health's public relations team would respond on his behalf. The company did not respond to further requests for comment.

The New Indian Express on Saturday reported that police in Tamil Nadu were investigating the threats and had linked them to xenZen.

Tamil Nadu police did not respond to queries.

Three police sources confirmed an investigation was underway. They declined to be named as the matter is confidential.

One police source said a man from the neighbouring state of Telangana, who the source did not name, has been arrested in recent days for allegedly helping courier the packages to Star Health on behalf of xenZen.

Reuters was unable to identify the individual or the status of his detention.

Globally, health care companies have been reassessing the risks for their top executives after UnitedHealthcare chief executive Brian Thompson was murdered in a targeted attack in December. The killing also called fresh attention to deepening patient anger over health insurance.

In the March 31 e-mail to Reuters, xenZen referred to the killing of Thompson and said the death threats to the Star Health executives were sent after the hacker was contacted for help by customers of Star Health who had been denied claims on medical bills despite coverage plans with the company.

Star Health did not comment on what xenZen described as their motive, the claims of dissatisfied customers being denied or the police investigation into the threats.

Star Health launched internal investigations into last year's data leak, which the company said followed a ransom demand of \$68,000 from the hacker.

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GULF TIMES

Countering Trump’s trade trickery

US President Donald Trump signalled yesterday that he could lower sky-high tariffs on Chinese imports, as the rival superpowers prepare for trade talks in Switzerland over the weekend.

“80% Tariff on China seems right!” Trump wrote on his Truth Social platform, which would bring them down from 145%, with cumulative duties on some goods reaching a staggering 245%.

Much has been written about Trump’s disastrous “reciprocal” tariffs, which, despite having remained in effect for less than 24 hours, roiled the stock market, drove up Treasury yields, and caused the dollar to depreciate. In fact, the tariffs that have so badly undermined markets’ faith in the US were never reciprocal at all: they were entirely unilateral actions betraying a fundamental misunderstanding of economics.

US businesses and consumers will face higher prices. Trump himself was forced to concede this in a recent cabinet meeting, though he was dismissive of the impact.

Trump’s attacks on the independence of the US Federal Reserve – which he has long held should maintain lower interest rates – make it less likely that this policy-induced inflationary pressure will be reined in. Compounding the risks are Trump’s threats to reinstate “reciprocal” tariffs for any country that does not strike a new trade deal with his administration during the 90-day “pause” he announced on April 9. And some tariffs – including a 10% “baseline” tariff on US imports and a 25% sector-specific rate – have remained in place all along.

As tariffs rise, losses to the importing country grow not proportionally, but exponentially, to the square of the tariff rate

The costs of Trump’s tariffs will not be confined to the US. Some of the countries Trump has targeted with high tariffs have very small economies, which are highly dependent on exports to the US. Lesotho, on which Trump imposed a 50% levy, is perhaps the most extreme example.

The costs are compounded when countries respond with tariffs of their own, whether retaliatory tariffs on US imports, like those embraced by China, or tariffs on other markets to offset the export losses to the US. While this response is understandable – why should the US be able to inflict losses on its trading partners unilaterally? – it ends up making matters worse for everyone.

As tariffs rise, losses to the importing country – as measured by the rise in consumer prices and reduction of consumption – grow not proportionally, but exponentially, to the square of the tariff rate. Double the tariff rate; quadruple the losses.

This does not mean countries should simply tolerate Trump’s tariffs. Rather, they should preserve or increase free trade among themselves, lower non-tariff barriers, and reduce their dependence on the US in other realms (such as defence), thereby bolstering their own resilience. Such a response could ensure that, as reckless and irredeemable as Trump’s tariff campaign is, some good does come of it.

At the same time, countries should work together to persuade the US to abandon its tariff campaign. After all, tariffs prevent the price mechanism from performing its proper function of balancing supply and demand, and this mechanism is integral to the free-market ideology to which Trump and his Republican Party purportedly subscribe. Even the mission of the Department of Government Efficiency, as problematic as it is in theory and practice, aligns with the party’s traditional defence of the principle that markets should be allowed to function with minimal government intervention.

Republicans might counter that the tariffs align with another of their stated priorities: reducing America’s current-account deficit. But a deficit arises when a country spends more than it produces. The only way to reduce it is through fiscal, monetary, and exchange-rate policies that boost savings, not through disruptive, distortionary, and antagonistic tariffs that merely boost costs. – Project Syndicate

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Syrian minister praises Qatar’s social work model

QNA
Damascus

Syrian Minister of Social Affairs and Labour Hind Kabawat has praised Qatar’s pioneering experience in the humanitarian and social fields, describing it as a “rich experience.”

In an interview with Qatar News Agency (QNA), the Syrian minister affirmed that co-operation with Qatar strongly enhances the effectiveness of social and humanitarian programs in Syria and enlarges the scope of beneficiaries.

Minister Kabawat expressed the ministry’s aspiration to establish strategic and regional partnerships with countries that have successful development experiences, pointing out that co-operation with Qatari partners will play a central role in supporting efforts to expand its service coverage, achieve social justice, and strengthen community cohesion in the post-war phase.

Regarding the ministry’s current priorities, Kabawat stressed that the main focus is on the most vulnerable and affected groups, giving top priority to rebuilding the social and economic fabric that has been severely damaged by years of conflict. She explained that the ministry is currently working to accelerate the return of camp residents and displaced people to their original areas, and to create conditions for a dignified and sustainable return.

She emphasised that achieving this return requires a comprehensive plan that takes into account the difficult living conditions and the extensive infrastructure collapse. She noted that the ministry is co-ordinating with other ministries and international actors to ensure the provision of basic services in housing, health, education, and legal infrastructure.

On the issue of the most affected groups – such as widows, orphans, and the injured – Kabawat explained that the ministry is working on developing an accurate and updated database covering these groups to ensure fair and organised access to support programs. She stressed that the goal is to end dependency and build a new model of support based on sustainable rehabilitation and empowerment.

On the legal framework for regulating the labour market, she noted that the ministry is organising a series of workshops in co-operation with representatives from industrial, commercial, and professional sectors to discuss current challenges and propose necessary legislative amendments. She highlighted co-ordination with relevant ministries to draft a balanced labour law that respects workers’ rights and serves employers’ interests, aiming to create a flexible and fair work environment that boosts economic activity and reduces unemployment.

HE also pointed to the deep psychological impacts left by the war on Syrian society, affirming the need for many groups to undergo



Syrian Minister of Social Affairs and Labour Hind Kabawat.

psychological and social rehabilitation, including those who experienced detention, lived in camps, or endured exile and hardship. She announced that the ministry is preparing a special psychosocial support manual, in co-operation with local and international organisations with experience in this field, to serve as a reference for care providers.

She also revealed a set of programmes aimed at promoting social cohesion through community dialogues, awareness campaigns on citizenship and pluralism, training of local mediators in conflict resolution, and empowerment of marginalised groups economically and educationally to reduce feelings of exclusion and division.

In terms of co-operation with civil society and non-governmental organisations, the minister said that the ministry has granted licences to nearly 2,000 organisations to operate inside Syria, including some that were previously active abroad and have recently reopened offices in the country. She added that the ministry has launched a series of dialogue workshops with these organisations to develop the Law on Associations and create a modern and sustainable legal environment based on the principle of partnership between the state and civil society. She also stressed the need to move beyond the traditional competitive relationship in favour of a complementary one that involves shared roles and responsibilities.

On the mechanisms to ensure that

international aid reaches those who need it, Kabawat underlined that the ministry has launched a comprehensive automation project in co-operation with the Ministry of Communications and Technology. This includes three key digital platforms, including one for organising NGO work and preventing duplication of services, a labour market platform for linking job seekers with employers and providing career consultations, and a platform for persons with disabilities to enable them to update their data and submit formal applications for service cards. She emphasised the importance of building a central and accurate database across all ministry directorates and facilities as a key tool for ensuring transparency and impact measurement, and directing resources to those who truly deserve them.

The Syrian minister affirmed that the ministry is guided by a national vision rooted in social cohesion, justice, and effective partnerships between the government sector and civil society. She pointed out that the upcoming phase will require comprehensive national efforts and broad regional and international support, stressing that co-operation with Qatar – given its successful experience in social and humanitarian management – will be one of the key pillars of humanitarian work in Syria in the coming phase, and that the ministry aims to translate this into tangible programmes and initiatives that serve the Syrian citizen wherever they may be.

America is erasing the data the world needs

By Shaida Badiee, Joel Gurin, and Claire Melamed
Washington, DC

In recent months, thousands of web pages and datasets have been removed from US government websites. An informal army of “data rescuers” has emerged to download, save, and republish vital information, including some 300,000 datasets on data.gov, before it is lost. But preserving existing data is only a temporary measure. The bigger question is how future data – particularly the health and climate data that are essential to guide policy – will be produced and published.

This is not just an American problem. The US government has long supported the production of official statistics in low- and middle-income countries. For example, the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) programme has been helping to produce survey data on key indicators such as child health and nutrition in 90+ countries for more than 40 years. These data have guided the development of countless valuable initiatives, from a support programme for pregnant women to an app that broadens access to support for victims of domestic violence. Ten of the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals rely on DHS data to track progress.

But US President Donald Trump’s administration has now suspended the DHS programme indefinitely and is dissolving the US Agency for International Development (USAID), which runs it. Alternative means of producing important health, demographic, and other social data are urgently needed.

One useful change would be to make better use of administrative data – the data that flow through government systems every time a new patient enters a hospital, a classroom register is taken in a school, or a new baby is born – rather than relying primarily on surveys. With efforts to consolidate and streamline major household-survey programmes already

underway, greater reliance on administrative data would simply require a shift in focus – and investment – by governments and development partners.

Climate data are also under growing pressure. The US administration has removed or made less accessible datasets the world relies on to track and predict changes to the climate. Meanwhile, proposed funding cuts are casting doubt on the future collection and analysis of such data. Even the data that are collected might not be shared internationally, given America’s withdrawal from multilateral initiatives like the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

While the European Union, Japan, and others also have huge climate-data programs, filling the gap left by the US will take considerable time and money, both of which are in short supply. Given this, innovators are needed to devise new tools and models, and to realise the full potential of new technologies, such as AI.

The US government is not just erasing or obscuring data; it is also floating proposals to alter how data are reported. For example, Secretary of Commerce Howard Lutnick has suggested dropping government-spending measures from GDP calculations. This change would make it more difficult to assess the impact of the US administration’s massive federal spending cuts on the US economy.

But established norms exist for

a reason: they ensure the reliability and comparability of data over time and across countries. Lutnick’s proposed change would undermine the reliability and usefulness of cross-country GDP comparisons. The international statistical community must therefore hold firm in defending long-established methods and principles, with the support of partners who recognise the critical importance of this often-overlooked but essential government function.

Statisticians, data scientists, and open-data advocates around the world are developing strategies and taking action to recover, protect, and future-proof data. Data producers and users, in the US and elsewhere, can support these efforts – which will be neither easy nor straightforward – in five ways.

First, they should monitor developments carefully. What changes in data policy are governments announcing, and on what time scale? When datasets are removed and then reposted, have they been altered? Tracking such changes is essential to support advocacy to restore essential data.

Second, they should develop compelling use cases and advocacy alliances. Government data not only support social progress; businesses and AI systems also depend on comprehensive, high-quality data for innovation and decision-making. Major corporations, including tech companies at the forefront of AI development, are potential allies

in advocating for the continued production and sharing of robust data in every country.

Third, new data-collection strategies must be implemented. Faced with reduced funding, countries should streamline household surveys, expand the use of sources like administrative and citizen data, share satellite data, and contribute to a robust global data ecosystem.

Fourth, to discourage arbitrary changes that undermine analysis and complicate comparisons, standards for collecting and publishing statistical and other data, such as GDP, should be strengthened and publicised.

Finally, given that prevailing methods for collecting and publishing national data were never perfect, the current upheaval can be viewed as an opportunity to collaborate to improve methodology and data governance. Any such effort to rethink how data is collected and used should emphasise global and regional collaboration, information sharing, and alignment of methods and standards.

We cannot yet predict how extensive and lasting the impact of changes to the data landscape will be, and how different organisations and institutions will respond. But if we develop comprehensive counter-strategies now, the global data community can ensure that systems essential to sound policymaking not only survive whatever comes next, but emerge stronger. – Project Syndicate

• Shaida Badiee, a former director of the World Bank’s Development Data Group, is a co-founder and Managing Director of Open Data Watch.
• Joel Gurin, President of the Center for Open Data Enterprise, is the author of Open Data Now: The Secret to Hot Startups, Smart Investing, Savvy Marketing, and Fast Innovation (McGraw-Hill Education, 2014).
• Claire Melamed, a former managing director of the Overseas Development Institute, is CEO of the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data.

France, Poland sign treaty with mutual defence pledge

AFP
Paris

France and Poland signed yesterday a treaty committing both sides to mutual assistance in case of an attack by an aggressor, strengthening ties between the EU heavyweights in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The deal was signed in France's eastern city of Nancy by French President Emmanuel Macron and Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk, both among the strongest European backers of Ukraine following Russia's 2022 invasion.

Condemning Vladimir Putin's comments at a Moscow military parade marking 80 years since the defeat of Nazi Germany in World War II, Macron said that the Russian leader was "on the side of war, not peace".

Macron said one of the key aspects of the treaty was a clause on "mutual defence", in addition to the protections already offered by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato) and the European Union.

"It does not substitute for Nato or EU," Macron said alongside Tusk, adding that it

"reinforces what already exists today".

He also suggested that troops could mobilise quickly: "I have no doubt that yes, such a deployment would be possible in the face of aggression and if the worst were to happen."

Tusk described the treaty as "a historic event".

"I am profoundly convinced... that France and Poland will be able to count on each other in all circumstances, good and bad," he said.

The text of the friendship and co-operation treaty states that "In the event of armed aggression on their territories, the parties shall provide mutual assistance, including by military means".

Macron, who leads the EU's only nuclear weapons power, also implied that France's atomic arsenal could be part of such assistance.

"The interests of our main partners are integrated in deciding what our vital interests are," he said.

Such protection is of immense interest to Poland, which shares a border with Russia's exclave of Kaliningrad and has repeatedly warned that the country too could be the

target of Russian aggression.

With the United States, backed by its European allies, proposing an unconditional 30-day ceasefire between Russia and Ukraine, Macron painted a bleak picture of Putin's interest in peace.

"President Putin is on the side of war, not the side of peace. The belligerent comments that he made, the reality of every day, only underline that," he said.

Ties between France and Poland have tightened since Tusk, a former European Council president, became prime minister in late 2023, ending years of rule by the conservative Law and Justice (PiS) party.

Such partnerships have grown all the more important after US President Donald Trump made clear Europe should do more to ensure its own security.

Analysts say Nato member Poland could have the EU's biggest army in the next decade.

The Polish army had an estimated 216,000 troops in 2024, according to Nato data, already more than the French (205,000) and German (186,000) armies. It aims to reach 300,000 troops by 2035.

The location and timing of the treaty's

signing in Nancy were also loaded with symbolism.

Nancy is part of the Lorraine region, ruled in the 18th century by the deposed Polish king Stanislaw I, who was also the father-in-law of French King Louis XV. Nancy's main square is named Place Stanislas in his honour.

Tusk and Macron also showed off their alliance on the day Putin hosted the Red Square parade with guests including Chinese President Xi Jinping and Robert Fico, the prime minister of EU member Slovakia.

Without naming Fico directly, Tusk said that attending the parade "brings shame".

Meanwhile, European leaders from the "coalition of the willing", a grouping of countries that have pledged strengthened support for Kyiv, will meet in Ukraine on Saturday, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said, without specifying who would be coming.

Poland is also gearing up for presidential elections on May 18 amid warnings of the risk of a Russian disinformation campaign.

A nationalist candidate backed by the PiS will challenge the pro-European mayor of Warsaw, who has the support of Tusk.

Church must fight 'lack of faith': Pope

Leo XIV urged the Catholic Church to work urgently to restore the faith of millions in his first homily as Pope yesterday, a day after the little-known cardinal become the first head of the 2,000-year institution from the United States.

Chicago-born Robert Francis Prevost became the 267th pope, spiritual leader of the world's 1.4bn Catholics and successor to Argentina's Pope Francis on Thursday, after a secret vote by fellow cardinals in the Vatican's Sistine Chapel.

In today's world, Leo warned in his homily to assembled cardinals, there are places or situations where "it is not easy to preach the Gospel and bear witness to its truth, where believers are mocked, opposed, despised or at best tolerated and pitied".

"Yet, precisely for this reason, they are the places where our missionary outreach is desperately needed," said the new Pope, 69, standing at the Sistine Chapel altar with Michelangelo's fresco of *The Last Judgment* behind him.

The former missionary deplored "settings in which the Christian faith is considered absurd, meant for the weak and unintelligent". And in an echo of his predecessor Francis, he said people were turning to "technology, money, success, power, or pleasure".

"A lack of faith is often tragically accompanied by the loss of meaning in life, the neglect of mercy, appalling violations of human dignity, the crisis of the family and so many other wounds that afflict our society," said Leo in Italian, wearing a white papal robe trimmed in gold as he addressed the seated white-robed cardinals.

In an apparent message to evangelical Christians, Pope Leo also warned that Jesus cannot be "reduced to a kind of charismatic leader or superman".

"This is true not only among non-believers but also among many baptised Christians, who thus end up living, at this level, in a state of practical atheism," he said.

In an unscripted introduction to his homily in English, he also evoked a need to overcome divisions within the church, telling his fellow cardinals: "I know I can rely on each and every one of you to walk with me."

Many around the world were still digesting the choice of the man sometimes referred to in Rome as the "Latin Yankee" for his decades-long missions in Peru.

"A pope from the United States is almost more surprising than an Argentine and Jesuit pope" such as Francis, wrote the *Corriere della Sera* daily. Francis was the first pope ever named from the Americas.

The Vatican released video images of the moments after Leo's secret election on Thursday, showing him praying at a chapel altar and shaking hands and receiving congratulations in a sea of scarlet-robed cardinals.

The American, a member of the Augustinian order who spent two decades in Peru and was only made a cardinal in 2023.

However, he had been on many Vatican watchers' lists of potential popes, although he is far from being a globally recognised figure.

Over the coming days, including during tomorrow's midday Regina Coeli prayer and a meeting with journalists at the Vatican on Monday, his actions and words will be closely scrutinised.

He will meet with diplomats on May 16 and on Sunday May 18 will hold an inauguration mass at St Peter's Square, which is expected to draw world leaders and thousands of pilgrims. - **AFP**

Putin hails soldiers in Ukraine as allies attend WWII parade

AFP/Reuters
Moscow

President Vladimir Putin vowed yesterday that Russia would win in Ukraine as the Soviet Union had in World War II, as he sought to rally support at a Moscow military parade put on before key allies.

Putin sat with China's President Xi Jinping watching a procession of thousands of troops - some of whom fought in Ukraine - and an array of weapons including new tanks and drones to mark the defeat of the Nazis 80 years ago.

More than two dozen world leaders were in Moscow for the occasion.

Since launching the Ukraine offensive in 2022, Putin has drawn parallels between the Soviet war effort and his own military campaign that has killed many thousands and seen Moscow occupy a fifth of its neighbour.

"The whole country, society and people support the participants of the special military operation," Putin said, addressing the parade. "We are proud of their bravery and determination, of the fortitude that has always brought us only victory."

Putin said Russia would never accept attempts to belittle the Soviet Union's decisive role in defeating Nazi Germany, but that Moscow also recognised the part played by the Western allies in defeating Adolf Hitler.

"The Soviet Union took upon itself the most ferocious, merciless blows of the enemy," Putin said. "We highly appreciate the contribution of the soldiers of the Allied armies, the members of the

resistance, the courageous people of China, and all those who fought for a peaceful future to our common struggle."

Putin made no criticism of the West and referred only in passing to the Ukraine war, Europe's deadliest since World War II, but it haunted the celebration.

The ex-KGB spy, who has led the country for 25 years, said: "Russia has been and will remain an indestructible barrier against Nazism, Russophobia and anti-Semitism."

Moscow says it launched its offensive to "de-Nazify" Ukraine - narratives rejected by Kyiv, the West and independent experts.

At home, Russia has banned criticism of its offensive and hundreds of thousands of Russians have fled their country.

Security was tight ahead of the parade, with Moscow fearing it could be targeted by Ukraine.

Snipers were positioned on a luxury shopping mall that runs alongside Red Square and mobile internet was jammed.

"Russia! Russia!" crowds chanted as Putin walked in front of the stands, escorted by bodyguards.

Around 1,500 troops that had fought in Ukraine were among 11,000 marching on Red Square, state media reported.

The parade also featured military hardware, including attack drones for the first time and more tanks than in previous years.

After the procession, Putin greeted heavily decorated North Korean commanders who led Pyongyang's forces that helped Russia recapture its western Kursk region from Ukraine.

"All the best to you and all your troops," Putin said.



Russia's main battle tanks T-90M Proryv are seen in the Red Square during a military parade on Victory Day, marking the 80th anniversary of the victory over Nazi Germany in World War II, in central Moscow. - **Reuters**

Right: This photograph distributed by Russian state agency Sputnik shows President Vladimir Putin greeting North Korean servicemen on Red Square after the Victory Day military parade in Moscow. - **AFP**



Massacre, during which an estimated 100,000 to 300,000 victims were killed.

Nazi Germany's unconditional surrender came into force at 11.01pm on May 8, 1945, marked as "Victory in Europe Day" by Britain, the United States and France.

In Moscow it was already May 9, which became the Soviet Union's "Victory Day" in what Russians call the Great Patriotic War of 1941-45.

Under 25 years of Putin's rule, the Kremlin has promoted a patriotic vision of WWII - praising military feats, while glossing over the Soviet-Nazi Pact and the 1939 invasion of Poland.

Some spectators in Moscow expressed pride at this year's parade.

"I was delighted," 65-year-old university lecturer Elena Gogoleva told AFP. "Watching the parade is a sacred duty for me. It's good that we are not alone."

Putin ordered his army to halt attacks against Ukraine for three

days to mark the holiday, but Kyiv has accused Russia of violating the truce hundreds of times.

Ukrainian soldiers operating in the direction of the embattled city of Pokrovsk told AFP that fighting continued despite the truce.

However, a lull in some attacks allowed them to evacuate wounded and dead soldiers, they said.

In the days before the parade, Ukraine fired dozens of drones at Moscow, forcing airports to shut and disrupting hundreds of flights.

There were no reports of attempted attacks on the capital yesterday.

In Russia's western Belgorod region, authorities said a Ukrainian drone hit the regional government building, wounding two people.

Kyiv argues Russia's May 9 celebrations have "nothing to do with the victory over Nazism" and that those marching on Red Square were "quite likely" implicated in crimes against Ukrainians.

US, Europeans 'finalising 30-day Ukraine-Russia ceasefire proposal'

Reuters
Paris

The United States and its European allies are finalising a proposal for a 30-day ceasefire in Ukraine that if refused would see them jointly impose new sanctions on Russia, a French diplomatic source said yesterday.

US President Donald Trump called on Thursday for a 30-day unconditional ceasefire between Russia and Ukraine, warning that Washington and its partners would impose further sanctions if the ceasefire was not respected.

Ukraine has expressed readiness to accept the US proposal.

"We're not completely with a finalised project, but we hope that we're at a moment of convergence," said the diplomatic source, speaking on condition of anonymity.



Norway's Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Store (back centre) along with (clockwise, left to right) Denmark's Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen, Estonia's Prime Minister Kristen Michal, Finland's President Alexander Stubb, Iceland's Prime Minister Kristrun Frostadottir, Latvia's Prime Minister Evika Sila, Lithuania's President Gitanas Nauseda, Netherland's Minister of Defence Ruben Brekelmans, Finland's President Alexander Stubb, and Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer, with Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky via video screen, attend the start of a meeting of the annual Joint Expeditionary Force Leaders' Summit in Oslo. - **AFP**

nymity. "What could happen in the coming hours and days, there could be an announcement of a

ceasefire either of 30 days or compartmentalised, which is still being discussed."

Pakistan accuses India of bringing neighbours 'closer to major conflict'

Pakistan has accused India of bringing the nuclear-armed neighbours "closer to a major conflict" as the death toll from three days of missile, artillery and drone attacks passed 50.

The escalation comes after an attack on tourists last month in the Indian-run part of disputed Kashmir that killed 26 people, and which New Delhi accused Islamabad of backing - an allegation Pakistan denied.

India responded with air strikes on Wednesday on what it called "terrorist camps" in Pakistan, killing more than 20 civilians and fuelling the worst clashes between the two in decades.

Pakistan's foreign ministry spokesman Shafqat Ali Khan said that India's "reckless conduct has brought the two nuclear-armed states closer to a major conflict".

Military spokesman Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry told media: "We will not de-escalate - with the damages they did on our side, they should take a hit."

"So far, we have been protecting ourselves but they will get an answer in our own timing," he added.

On a third day of tit-for-tat exchanges, the Indian army said it had "repulsed" waves of Pakistani attacks using drones and other munitions overnight, and gave a "befitting reply".

Late yesterday, an Indian defence source told AFP that drones had been sighted in the Indian-admin-

istered Kashmir areas of Jammu and Samba, and in neighbouring Punjab state.

Earlier, Pakistan's military spokesman denied that Islamabad was carrying out such attacks.

The two countries have fought wars over Muslim-majority Kashmir, which is divided between the two.

Pakistani military sources said that its forces had shot down 77 Indian drones in the last two days, with debris of many incursions seen by AFP in cities across the country.

Pakistan's military said on Wednesday that five Indian jets had been downed across the border, but New Delhi has not responded to the claims, while a military source said three jets had crashed on home territory.

Both sides have made repeated claims and counter-claims that are difficult to verify.

Pakistan has rejected claims by New Delhi that it was behind last month's attack in Pahalgam, Indian-administered Kashmir, when gunmen killed 26 people, mainly male Hindu tourists.

The conflict has caused major disruption to international aviation, with airlines having to cancel flights or use longer routes that do not overfly the India-Pakistan frontier.

World powers have called for both sides to exercise "restraint", with several offering to mediate the dispute. - **AFP**

Exhibitions abroad ‘an embodiment of Qatar’s cultural diplomacy’: CEO

Qatar Museums (QM) chief executive officer (CEO) Mohamed Saad al-Rumaihi has said that international exhibitions are a cornerstone of the institution’s strategy to raise Qatar’s cultural profile worldwide, noting that such shows help build cultural understanding and reinforce a creative economy.

In an interview with the Qatar News Agency (QNA), he said that overseas exhibitions spotlight Qatar’s rich national identity and cultural heritage while showcasing the country’s growing creative community.

Al-Rumaihi stressed that culture today functions as a vital platform for global dialogue, strengthening ties with distinguished institutions abroad and, in turn, nurturing talent and innovation.

He described these exhibitions as a

form of cultural diplomacy that enhances Qatar’s status as an open nation that values dialogue and exchange and sees culture as a bridge between peoples.

Speaking about cultural and museum relations between Qatar and Italy, and in particular the recent opening of the “Beyti Baytak” exhibition in Venice and “A Design Journey with Marcello Gandini”, al-Rumaihi said that those initiatives come within a co-operation agreement designed to deepen cultural partnership between the two countries.

He added that working with the city of Venice marks an advanced step in forging strategic relations, given Italy’s global cultural legacy.

Al-Rumaihi added that it was an ideal partner for the QM given that Venice, a Unesco World Heritage site, offers an ex-

ceptional venue for cultural engagement.

Looking ahead, he said that there are ambitious, ongoing plans for new joint exhibitions and projects.

He pointed to the future Qatar Pavilion site in Venice’s Giardini della Biennale, which will display architect Yasmeen Lari’s community majlis installation during the 2025 Architecture Biennale, an event intended to reflect Qatari traditions of welcome and hospitality.

Al-Rumaihi also said that the “Design Journey with Marcello Gandini” exhibition will move to the National Automobile Museum in Turin in summer 2025, underscoring the continuity of fruitful cultural collaboration.

He emphasised that the QM’s international participation fosters mutual understanding among nations.



Such partnerships, al-Rumaihi added, keep Qatar at the forefront of cultural and creative exchange and encourage human interaction based on mutual respect.

He said that the QM hopes to sustain this approach by inviting Venetians and visitors to explore Qatar’s cultural heritage and, in return, encouraging audiences in Qatar to discover Venice’s inspiring cultural offerings. – QNA

Qatar Pavilion organising ‘Beyti Baytak’ exhibition at Venice Biennale

The Qatar Pavilion is organising the “Beyti Baytak” exhibition at the 19th International Architecture Exhibition (La Biennale di Venezia, Venice Biennale).

The exhibition explores how modern and contemporary architecture meets the needs of communities and reimagines a sense of belonging.

The exhibition consists of two sections, examining how hospitality and traditions of welcoming guests are embodied in architecture and urban landscapes across the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia (Menasa) region.

The exhibition includes the Community Centre installation at the Qatar Pavilion site in the Giardini della Biennale, alongside a main exhibition held at ACP-Palazzo Franchetti, supported by ACP Art Capital Partners.

The exhibition opens to the public on November 23, 2025.

The Community Centre, designed by Pakistani architect Yasmeen Lari, is installed at the Qatar Pavilion site in the Giardini della Biennale, highlighting her humanitarian, social, and architectural development model.

The Community Centre, a bamboo structure, was commissioned by the Heritage Foundation of Pakistan, co-founded by Yasmeen Lari in 1980.

The foundation continues to build shelters and villages for communities affected by natural disasters in Pakistan.

The main exhibition at ACP-Palazzo Franchetti, supported by ACP Art Capital Partners, showcases the works of more than 30 architects, representing three



generations of architects from the Menasa region, through drawings, photographs, models, and key archival documents.

The exhibition at ACP-Palazzo Franchetti features works by pioneering architects, including Raj Rewal (of India), Nayyar Ali Dada

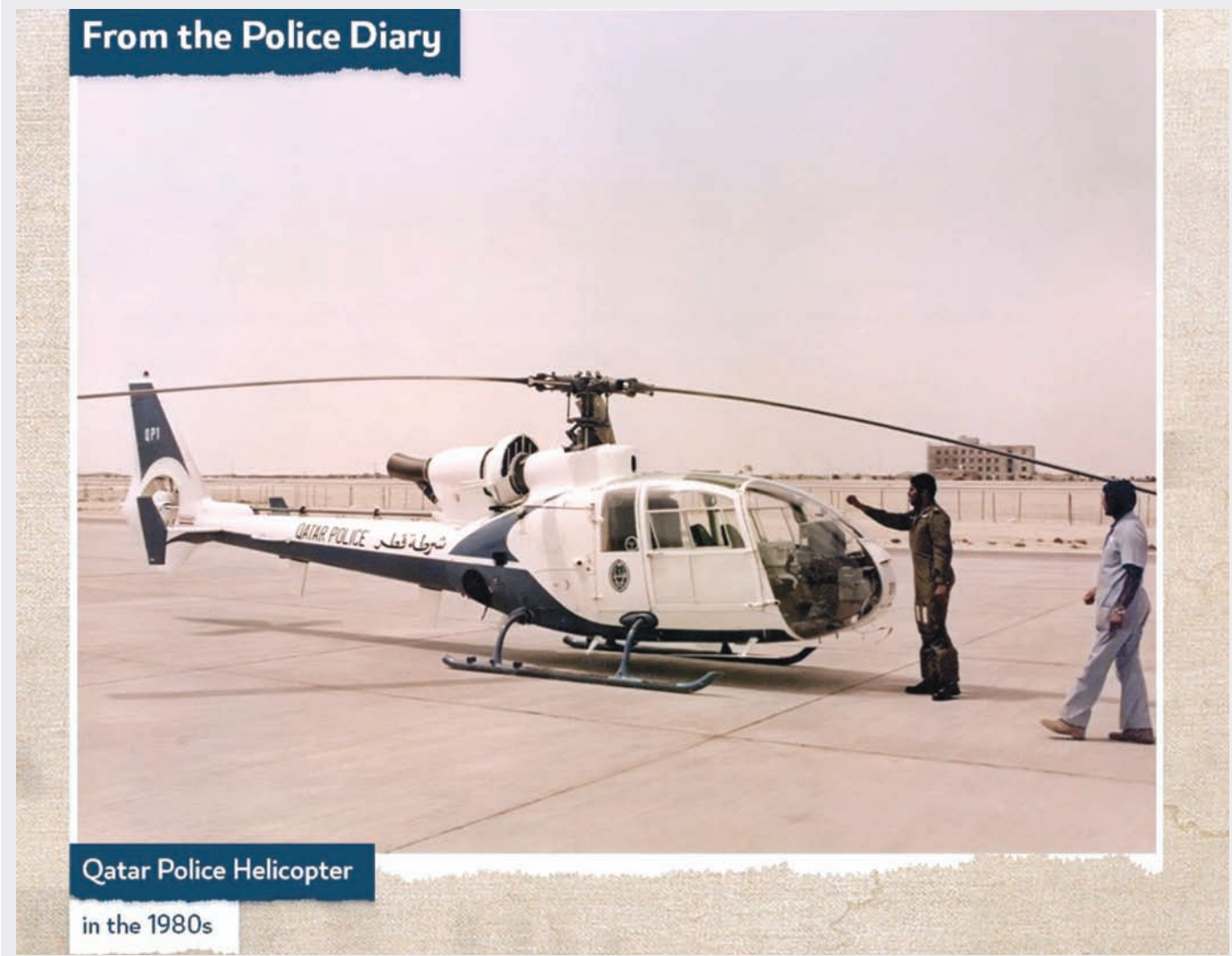


The ‘Beyti Baytak’ exhibition explores how modern and contemporary architecture meets the needs of communities and reimagines a sense of belonging.



and Nabil Haque (Bangladesh), Sameep Padora and Balkrishna Doshi (India), DAAZ Studio (Iran), Abeer Seikaly (Jordan), Sumaya Dabbagh (Saudi Arabia), Diller Scofidio + Renfro (USA), and Meriem Chabani with New South (France).

Past time



A Qatar police helicopter in the 1980s, as seen in a photo from the Ministry of Interior (MoI) Public Relations Department archive, released on the official X account yesterday.

Qatar’s participation in Venice Biennale ‘enhances cultural co-operation’

Qatar’s ambassador to Italy Khalid bin Youssef al-Sada has said that Qatar’s participation in this year’s Venice Biennale is part of a strategic cultural vision aimed at promoting cultural dialogue with the world and strengthening bilateral relations with Italy.

In a statement to the Qatar News Agency (QNA), the envoy said that the approach reflects Qatar’s deep belief in the role of culture in building sustainable partnerships and demonstrates the country’s commitment to supporting cultural initiatives both regionally and internationally.

Al-Sada added that relations between Qatar and Italy continue to develop across various fields, and highlighted that cultural co-operation is one of the key pillars of this relationship.

He stressed Qatar’s commitment to deepening this co-operation in a way that serves the mutual interests of both friendly nations.

The envoy noted the signing of a co-operation protocol between Qatar Museums (QM) and the Venice municipality in 2024, describing it as a milestone in bilateral co-operation.

The agreement aims to strengthen joint efforts in cultural, social, and economic areas, and reflects the depth of the Qatari-Italian partnership and both sides’ eagerness to expand future collaboration.

Al-Sada also said that the presence of the Qatar Pavilion this year in the Giardini Biennale, one of the city’s iconic locations, underscores the growing stature of Qatar’s cultural diplomacy and the increasingly prominent role that Qatar plays on the global stage in supporting the arts, promoting culture, and advancing the values of openness and dialogue among nations. – QNA



Al-Sada: the presence of the Qatar Pavilion in the Giardini Biennale underscores the growing stature of Qatar’s cultural diplomacy.