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TIMES



SATURDAY Vol. XXXXVI No. 13476

August 23, 2025
Safar 29, 1447 AH

www.gulf-times.com 2 Riyals

Published in QATAR since 1978





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Qatar mediation reunites children in Ukraine, Russia with families



Qatar yesterday announced the success of a new stage of its mediation efforts to reunite children from Ukraine and Russia with their families this August, as part of its ongoing efforts to reunite families separated by the conflict between the two countries. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement that, as part of the new phase of the humanitarian mission, four children were reunited with their relatives in Ukraine, and three children were returned to their relatives in Russia, bringing the total number of children reunited with their families since the beginning of mediation efforts to 107. **Page 3**

Daam, Ministry of Social Development sign agreement

The Social and Sport Contribution Fund (Daam) has signed a funding agreement with the Ministry of Social Development and Family to support Mada - Assistive Technology Center Qatar. Under the agreement, Daam will provide three years of funding to back the Mada Innovation Program and the Center's Digital Accessibility Service for persons with disabilities. **Page 3**

2026 World Cup draw to be held on Dec 5: Trump

The draw for the 2026 World Cup will be held at the Kennedy Centre in Washington on December 5, US President Donald Trump announced yesterday. "It's the biggest, probably the biggest event in sports," the president, who was wearing a hat saying "Trump Was Right About Everything", told reporters in the Oval Office accompanied by FIFA President Gianni Infantino. **Sport Page 1**

COMMUNITY
See Page: 5

29 killed in Israeli strikes on Gaza

No fewer than 29 Palestinians, including women and children, were martyred yesterday in a series of Israeli air strikes and artillery attacks across various areas of the Gaza Strip. Medical sources reported that 12 of the victims, among them children and women, died when Israeli artillery targeted the Amr Ibn Al Aas School and surrounding tents sheltering displaced families in the Sheikh Radwan neighbourhood, northwest of Gaza City. Additional casualties were reported following another strike on displaced civilians northeast of Sheikh Radwan, though the exact number of fatalities remains unclear. In Al Shati refugee camp west of

Gaza City, eight members of a single family were killed when Israeli warplanes bombed a residential apartment near Abu Assi School. In the southern Sabra neighbourhood of Gaza City, an Israeli strike near Al Istijaba Mosque claimed the lives of a mother and her son, while medical teams recovered two more bodies from a previous attack. Another woman was killed and several others injured when a drone dropped a bomb on civilians in Al Shujaiya area. Further north, one Palestinian was killed and others wounded in a strike on Jabalia town. In central Gaza's Nuseirat camp, two people, including a child, were killed in a drone attack near Al Shuhada School. **(QNA)**



A Palestinian woman carries a child as she flees with others the Abu Iskandar neighbourhood of northern Gaza City yesterday.

GCC demands immediate global action as UN declares famine in Gaza Strip

QNA
Riyadh

The Secretary-General of the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) Jassem Mohamed Albudaïwi stressed the need for immediate action by the international community to pressure the Israeli occupation forces to open the crossings and allow the entry of humanitarian and relief aid into the Gaza Strip without any restrictions or conditions.

In a statement, the GCC secretary-general pointed out that the official declaration of famine in the Gaza Strip by the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), which has reached catastrophic levels, clearly reflects the dangerous, inhumane, and illegal starvation policies pursued by the Israeli occupation forces against the brotherly Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip. He reiterated the firm position of the GCC countries in supporting the brotherly Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip, the necessity of ending the siege imposed on the Strip, opening all crossings for the entry of humanitarian and relief aid and basic needs, as well as ensuring their continuous access to the Strip's population.

Albudaïwi stressed the importance of providing international protection for the Palestinian people, refraining from targeting them, and fully adhering to international law, international humanitarian law, and relevant Security Council resolutions without exception.

The United Nations, through the World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef), and the World Health Organisation (WHO), officially declared Gaza to be in a state of famine, amid the continued blockade and depletion of essential food and medical supplies.

In a joint statement, the UN agencies confirmed that levels of acute malnutrition among chil-



A child reacts surrounded by pots as Palestinians wait to receive food from a charity kitchen in Khan Younis, southern Gaza Strip, yesterday.

dren, pregnant women, and the elderly have reached catastrophic levels, warning that the humanitarian situation in the Strip threatens the lives of hundreds of thousands and could lead to a total collapse of the health and relief systems.

The United Nations called on the international community to take immediate action to open safe humanitarian corridors and ensure the sustainable and urgent flow of aid to save lives and prevent the worsening of the disaster.

The IPC, an international mechanism supported by the UN, reported that more than 514,000 people, about a quarter of Gaza's population, are already living in famine conditions.

It warned that the number could rise to 641,000 by the end of September, making it the first officially declared famine in the Middle East.

The report indicated that northern Gaza, including Gaza City, is the most affected, with the disaster likely to extend to the governorates of Deir Al-Balah and Khan Younis, where hunger and acute malnutrition indicators continue to reach critical levels.

According to IPC standards, famine declaration depends on three key indicators: near-total food insecurity, high rates of acute malnutrition, and elevated mortality rates due to starvation. The UN confirmed that two of these indicators have already been surpassed, while evidence of the third is increasingly alarming.

Field reports indicate that around 70,000 children under the age of five are in urgent need of specialised therapeutic food, while available aid reaches less than 5% of their needs. Cases of acute malnutrition among children in Gaza City have doubled in two months, reaching 16.5%.

Commenting on the developments, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres stated that what is happening in Gaza represents a man-made disaster and a failure of human conscience, calling for an immediate ceasefire and the establishment of safe and sustained humanitarian access to civilians.

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk affirmed that deliberately starving civilians for military purposes constitutes a war crime, demanding accountability for those responsible for these grave violations. **Page 4**

'FIFA Arab Cup plays key role in showcasing our culture'

With 100 days to go, Algerian player Baghdad Bounedjah looks forward to the FIFA Arab Cup Qatar 2025

The FIFA Arab Cup Qatar 2025 will kick off in 100 days from today. The Arab world's biggest football competition will take place in Qatar from December 1-18, bringing together the best teams from across the region to compete for the coveted trophy.

This is the second time that Qatar will be hosting the prestigious tournament. In 2021, the country hosted the inaugural edition of the FIFA Arab Cup, which was the first time the competition was played under the auspices of FIFA. It proved to be a resounding success, with more than 600,000 tickets allocated and a global TV audience reach of 272mn.

A total of 23 teams will have a chance to lift the coveted FIFA Arab Cup Qatar 2025 trophy. Nine of the highest FIFA ranked teams have qualified automatically, while 14 teams will vie for the remaining seven spots in a series of qualifiers.

For Algeria's talismanic striker Baghdad Bounedjah, the significance of the FIFA Arab Cup goes beyond football.

Speaking to the Local Organising Committee (LOC), the 33-year-old, who was part of the winning squad in 2021 that made history with their first FIFA Arab Cup win, said: "The tournament plays an important role in showcasing Arab and Islamic culture to the world. It's a celebration of our identity

Arab Cup holds a special place for the people of this region, says Sheikh Hamad

With 100 days to go for FIFA Arab Cup Qatar 2025, HE Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa bin Ahmed al-Thani **(pictured)**, Minister of Sports and Youth and Chairman of the tournament's Local Organising Committee (LOC) in an official statement issued yesterday said the tournament's significance goes beyond football.

"The FIFA Arab Cup holds a special place for the people of this region. This tournament's significance goes beyond

football; it's a celebration of our passion and identity - one that unites players and fans alike. We are proud to host the tournament for the second time, which will celebrate the best of Arab football and once again showcase the power of sports in bringing people together," HE Sheikh Hamad said.

To Page 4



and an opportunity to showcase our shared passion for the beautiful game on such a global scale."

"Qatar successfully hosted the Arab Cup in 2021, followed by the World Cup, which is the biggest tournament in international football. We take pride in this achievement, as it showcases the capabilities of the Arab world in hosting major sports events. Now the world will once again witness what the Arab world has to offer," added Bounedjah, who plays as a striker for Al Shamal in the Qatar Stars League.

Defending champions Algeria have been placed in Group D, alongside Iraq, and will be joined by the winners of Bahrain vs Dji-

bouti and Sudan vs Lebanon, with the qualifying matches taking place in Qatar on November 25 and 26.

Four years ago, The Greens clinched the FIFA Arab Cup Qatar 2021 trophy with a 2-0 victory over Tunisia, in front of 60,456 spectators at the world-renowned Al Bayt Stadium.

"Winning the Arab Cup was a big achievement for the team, especially because we won in Qatar while playing in World Cup stadiums. I am grateful that I was part of the squad that lifted the coveted cup. It was surreal - celebrating with the team and fans after our win," said Bounedjah.

To Page 4

GPPC unveils advanced creative studios

New facilities set to empower creators with cutting-edge tools, expertise, and inspiration

The Gulf Publishing and Printing Company (GPPC), publisher of Gulf Times and Al-Raya newspapers, has opened a new chapter in its media journey with the launch of advanced new studios. These studios offer creators of media and artistic works a professional, fully integrated environment that combines technical expertise with design flexibility, enabling them to transform ideas into tangible and impactful products.

This endeavour reflects Gulf Times and Al-Raya's belief that today's media is a dynamic world where sound, image, visual experience, and expressive photography seamlessly integrate with written text. The launch of these studios embodies the vision of both newspapers to serve as true partners in the creative process—showcasing talent and ideas, while not merely providing a space but fostering an atmosphere that inspires innovation and experimentation.

The studios support young people and institutions alike in producing quality content that matches the spirit of the age. They also provide appropriate media consultations that can contribute to developing content, granting creators an integrated environment designed to the highest standards—whether for personal media projects or professional productions aimed at the general public.

Versatile setups tailored to meet the needs of content creators and media professionals.



A Qualitative Leap and Destination for Creativity

The *studios* open their doors to anyone with a media or artistic project. They can be rented along with their facilities, as well as the latest cameras, sound systems, and all necessary equipment. Media consultancy is also available.

This step reflects *Gulf Times* and *Al-Raya's* commitment to being an open platform that does not monopolize or reserve these tools for itself, but instead makes them available to anyone wishing to create—whether institutions, teams, or individuals, even small groups looking for a fully equipped place to move from idea to execution.

The inauguration of these studios represents a qualitative leap in Qatar's media scene, reflecting a new trend of newspapers being more open to different media formats.

Gulf Times and *Al-Raya* aspire for the studios to become a creative hub where media professionals, content creators, and artists meet, offering a professional environment for both amateurs and professionals.

With their flexibility and variety of spaces, the studios



provide practical and professional alternatives for anyone seeking a suitable environment to film programs, produce digital clips, or even record interviews and meetings.

By making these studios available to everyone, *Gulf Times* and *Al-Raya* invites those interested to explore and benefit from these modern facilities, stressing that their doors are open to all serious ideas.

The Arabic tent and green screen set the stage for limitless creativity.

An Opportunity for Students and Youth

The importance of the Gulf Times and Al-Raya Studios is not limited to their professional side but extends to represent a real opportunity for ambitious Qatari youth interested in media.

They are especially suited for university students working on projects, many of whom have ideas and talents but face obstacles such as the lack of proper spaces or necessary equipment.

These new studios bridge that gap by offering a professional environment that helps them develop skills and refine their productions under conditions close to international standards.

While continuing their pioneering journalistic role, the Gulf Times and Al-Raya open the studios' doors to all, reaffirming that today's media is more inclusive and participatory.

Anyone with an idea, message, or content can find in the Gulf Times and Al-Raya the technical and visual support they need.



Supporting Qatar's National Vision

The launch of these studios aligns with Qatar's national vision, which encourages support for cultural and media industries. Creative industries today are considered one of the main drivers of the global economy.

Through this direction, Gulf Times and Al-Raya contribute to providing an environment that supports practical initiatives and helps launch small and medium-sized projects in media and arts.

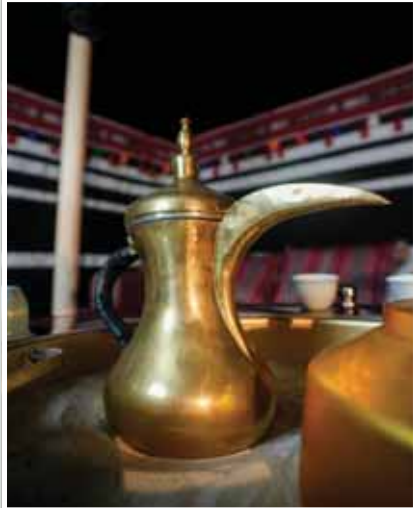
Meeting rooms designed to empower and support media entrepreneurs.



To watch a video showcasing the studio facilities, please scan the QR code.



A Technological Environment Blending Tradition and Modernity



The *studios* were designed in a spirit that combines authenticity and modernity, with corners that grant the space wide and varied possibilities. One corner, the **"Arab Tent"**, evokes traditional heritage with its warmth and sense of intimacy, visually reflecting cultural identity and local nature in all its details.

Another corner, the **"Green Screen"**, enables modern Chroma Key visual effects, making it an ideal choice for producing news bulletins, programs, or digital content, as different backgrounds can be projected as needed.

Beyond the ready-made decor, the studios are equipped with artistic props and accessories that make it easy to change the studio's character depending on the project at hand.

In addition, meeting rooms have been prepared to provide a suitable environment for project owners to exchange ideas, hold brainstorming

sessions, and set production plans.

These facilities make the studios not only a place for filming but also a complete center that offers supportive services, enhancing the quality of work through the latest photography, lighting, and sound technologies. Flexible solutions are also available to meet different production needs, whether technical or stylistic.

This opens the door for producing interviews, short programs, talk videos, or even interactive content for a variety of media platforms, including social media.

Although the studios rely on the latest production technologies, they remain tied to Qatari identity. Some corners preserve a heritage-inspired touch, not just as an aesthetic aspect, but as a message that modern content can still remain deeply rooted in the culture and values of the community.

A Bridge Between Traditional and Digital Media

The studios form a real bridge between traditional media—credible and established—and digital media, flexible and fast.

For decades, print journalism has been the primary source of news and analysis, but with the rise of digital platforms and visual media, the time has come to expand this presence through a fully integrated production environment inside the Gulf Times and Al-Raya. This allows content to be transformed quickly from a written idea on paper to video, digital platforms, or even podcasts reaching audiences anywhere.

Thus, the studios serve as a tool for media transformation itself, reshaping the relationship with the audience in more effective and open ways. A reader who once only browsed the paper in the morning can now watch the same story in a visually engaging format.

This transformation is not limited to the newspaper's own journalists and editors but also extends to young content creators and enthusiasts from outside the institution, allowing them to use these advanced spaces to bring their ideas to life. The studios are designed to be flexible and adaptable, accommodating rapid transformations—from recording podcasts, educational videos for schools and universities, youth programs, short commercial ads, social media content, to even small-scale drama productions.

For more information and studio booking, please contact: 55718622

Qatar's diplomatic efforts reunite children in Ukraine, Russia with kin



Qatar announced the success of a new stage of its mediation efforts to reunite children from Ukraine and Russia with their families this August, as part of its ongoing efforts to reunite families separated by the conflict between the two countries. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement that, as part of the new phase of the humanitarian mission, four children were reunited with their relatives in Ukraine, and three children were returned to their relatives in Russia, bringing the total number of children reunited with their families since the beginning of mediation efforts to 107. The ministry expressed Qatar's appreciation to Maria Lvova-Belova, Commissioner for Children's Rights under the President of the Russian Federation, and Dmytro Lubinets, Commissioner for Human Rights of the Ukrainian Parliament, for their tireless efforts that led to the success of the family reunification process. **(QNA)**

Official

Qatar slams targeting of World Food Programme trucks in Sudan

Qatar strongly condemned the targeting of World Food Programme trucks in North Darfur State, in the Republic of Sudan. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs stressed, in a statement, the urgent need to protect humanitarian workers and ensure the sustainable delivery of aid to address the humanitarian situation in North Darfur. The ministry called for concerted regional and international efforts to end the war through peaceful means. It also reiterated Qatar's full support for the unity, sovereignty, and stability of Sudan, and its support for the brotherly Sudanese people in achieving their aspirations for peace, development, and prosperity. **(QNA)**

Syria's security and stability part of Arab, regional security: Qatar envoy

QNA
New York

Qatar, in a statement delivered on behalf of the Arab Group at the United Nations, affirmed that Syria's security and stability are an integral part of Arab and regional security. It stressed that preserving Syria's unity and national institutions is the real guarantee to prevent regional destabilisation, combat terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, and block the return of terrorist groups.

HE the State of Qatar's Permanent Representative to the United Nations Sheikhha Alya Ahmed bin Saif al-Thani delivered the statement during the UN Security Council's monthly briefing on the Situation in the Middle East and the political and humanitarian tracks for the Syrian Arab Republic.

HE Sheikhha Alya noted that Syria was going through a critical phase in which its people are facing difficult challenges in security, humanitarian issues as well as economic, and developmental issues that affect citizens' living conditions and burden state institutions.

She added that, while national efforts are underway to confront these challenges, the current difficulties require international support to complete the stage of recovery and reconstruction, which would positively impact Syria's stability and that of its surroundings.

HE Sheikhha Alya said that the Arab Group emphasises the im-

portance of consolidating national unity under the umbrella of the state and its institutions, building trust, extending security and stability, promoting development, and moving forward in a comprehensive Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process, with broad participation of all components of the Syrian people. This, she said, would safeguard citizens' rights and strengthen national reconciliation, social peace, and transitional justice.

She further noted that the Arab Group welcomes steps taken by the Syrian government toward achieving these goals, as well as its co-operation with the international community and the UN system, and stressed the importance of the UN's role in providing support to national efforts in these fields.

HE Sheikhha Alya added that the Arab Group affirms its commitment to Syria's national and regional unity, sovereignty, and independence, and rejects any violations of its territorial integrity or sovereignty.

It also rejects any external interference in Syrian affairs or attempts to sow discord, impose illegal realities on the ground, or push toward any form of partition or fragmentation. The group expressed deep concern over acts of violence aimed at undermining security and stability within Syria.

HE the Permanent Representative to the United Nations emphasised in her statement before the UN Security Council's monthly briefing on political and humanitarian developments in Syria, under its agenda item on the situation in the Middle East, that the



HE Sheikhha Alya Ahmed bin Saif al-Thani

Arab Group strongly condemns the violations committed by the Israeli occupation forces in Syrian territory, noting that they constitute a blatant violation of Syrian sovereignty, international law, and the UN Charter, and represent a direct threat to regional peace and security and that the group rejects any pretexts to justify such aggressive policies and irresponsible actions, which pose a grave threat to both regional and international security.

The statement called on the Security Council to assume its responsibilities by obliging the occupying power to immediately cease its violations, respect Syria's sovereignty, fully withdraw from all occupied Syrian lands, comply with the 1974 Disengagement Agreement, and uphold the mandate of the UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF). The statement also reiterated that the entirety of the occupied Syrian Golan remains occupied territory un-

der international law, international legitimacy, and relevant Security Council resolutions, particularly Resolutions 242, 338, and 497. She added that the humanitarian situation in Syria requires an urgent and coordinated international response, including the provision of assistance, institutional and technical support, to strengthen the state's ability to meet basic needs, undertake early recovery projects, rebuild, particularly infrastructure rehabilitation, and revive the economy and investment.

She added that such steps are essential to improving the living conditions of Syrian citizens and creating the conditions for the voluntary, safe, and dignified return of refugees and internally displaced persons to their original areas.

The Arab Group, in its statement, reiterated its appreciation to countries hosting refugees for bearing exceptional burdens over the past years, noting that such burdens cannot be shouldered by

HE Sheikhha Alya said that the Arab Group emphasises the importance of consolidating national unity under the umbrella of the state and its institutions, building trust, extending security and stability, promoting development, and moving forward in a comprehensive Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process, with broad participation of all components of the Syrian people

those countries alone, and therefore sufficient and sustainable financial and technical support must be provided by the international community.

The group highlighted the need to increase funding for the Humanitarian Response Plan to meet urgent humanitarian goals.

The Qatari envoy also noted that the Arab Group views the lifting of economic restrictions and unilateral measures imposed on Syria as a fundamental step to alleviate civilian suffering, facilitate recovery, reconstruction, and development efforts. She pointed out that the group welcomed announcements by international partners, particularly the United States and the European Union, regarding the easing or lifting of such restrictions, considering these important positive steps, but stressed that they must be completed with the full and immediate lifting of all sanctions that hinder the Syrian government's efforts to achieve its objectives at this stage.

She added that the Group values the contributions of member

states that provide Syria with humanitarian, economic, financial, and diplomatic support to help improve living conditions and development and clarified that the Arab Group fully supports Syria's efforts in combating terrorism, securing borders, and countering arms and drug smuggling, and stressed the importance of supporting these efforts and enhancing cooperation within the framework of strengthening regional security and addressing cross-border threats.

She added that the group calls on the Syrian government to continue cooperating with the international community in order to confront terrorist risks, eradicate terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, and uproot its sources.

Finally, HE Sheikhha Alya Ahmed bin Saif al-Thani said that the Arab Group affirms its commitment to supporting Syria's path in overcoming this critical stage, overcoming obstacles and destructive external interventions, in order to pave the way for the Syrian people to live in peace, dignity, and prosperity.

PHCC opens urgent care for adults, children at Al Wajba Health Center

The Primary Health Care Corporation (PHCC) has announced the opening of an urgent care clinic for adults and children at Al Wajba Health Center, starting from Sept 28, as part of its ongoing efforts to expand urgent care services to meet the needs of the community.

In a statement, PHCC said that with the opening of the new centre, the total number of urgent care centres will rise to 13, providing services around the clock.

These centres include urgent care clinics for adults located at: Al Ruwais, Umm Salal, Muaither, Al Mashaf, Al Sadd, Gharrafat Al Rayyan, Al Sheehaniya, Abu Bakr Al Siddiq, Rawdat Al Khail, Al Kaaban, Al Karaana, Laabeeb, and

Al Wajba. Urgent care services for children are available at seven centres: Al Ruwais, Umm Salal, Muaither, Al Mashaf, Al Sadd, Laabeeb, and Al Wajba, where they provide assessment, diagnosis, and treatment for non-emergency and non-life-threatening cases.

The corporation affirmed that all urgent care clinics for adults and children are available to patients in need of urgent care, regardless of the health centre where they are registered.

It also noted that it will continue its efforts throughout the year to expand and further develop urgent care services in line with the community's needs, while enhancing the quality of care provided. **(QNA)**

Ministry to hold Back-to-School activities

The Ministry of Municipality has invited the public to participate in Back-to-School activities from August 27-30 at Place Vendome Mall and West Walk. The aim is to prepare students for going back to classes after the summer holidays.

The itinerary from 4pm-10pm will include awareness events on the importance of healthy food, how to prepare a balanced and healthy diet, and a lecture on the benefits of healthy food. Besides, there will be a number of workshops on agriculture, planting and colouring and drawing. Also scheduled are a number of inter-



active workshops on recycling and another instructive workshop on the national sustainable development targets.

Daam signs funding agreement with Ministry of Social Development to support Mada Center

QNA
Doha

The Social and Sport Contribution Fund (Daam) has signed a funding agreement with the Ministry of Social Development and Family to support Mada - Assistive Technology Center Qatar.

Under the agreement, Daam will provide three years of funding to back the Mada Innovation Program and the Center's Digital Accessibility Service for persons with disabilities.

This partnership reflects the pioneering role played by Daam and the companies listed on the

Qatar Stock Exchange in supporting social initiatives, in line with Qatar National Vision 2030. It also strengthens co-operation with the Ministry of Social Development and Family to promote innovation in assistive technology, integrate people with disabilities, and enable them to participate more fully in society and achieve greater independence.

The Mada Innovation Program supports innovators in developing technological solutions tailored to persons with disabilities and the elderly, offering both funding and consulting opportunities. The program targets entrepreneurs with ready-made solutions that require financial backing to reach

the market, as well as those with viable concepts. It also sponsors international competitions that encourage creativity in the field of assistive technology.

A central component of the program is the Mada Innovation Award, the first of its kind to focus on technological solutions in Arabic and to promote digital accessibility for people with disabilities.

The annual award empowers innovators to transform their ideas into products that meet market needs, whether in the form of hardware, software, or smartphone applications.

As part of the agreement, Daam will also support Mada's Digital Accessibility Service, which pro-

vides assistive technology and devices free of charge to persons with disabilities and the elderly in Qatar. The service includes assessing individual needs, identifying appropriate devices and solutions, providing training sessions to ensure effective use, and offering ongoing technical support.

Since its establishment in 2010, Daam has launched numerous projects and initiatives in cultural, social, sports, and charitable fields. Contributions from listed companies on the Qatar Stock Exchange remain among the Fund's most important financial resources, making it a key partner in driving community development.

Civic ministry launches awareness workshops for staff

The General Cleanliness Department at the Ministry of Municipality has launched a series of awareness workshops to enhance the skills of all employees, including supervisors, inspectors, technicians, drivers and workers since March. These workshops, scheduled to continue until the end of December, focus on several key areas related to the nature of field work in addition to aspects of occupational safety and security, report writing and an introduction to the laws and regulations governing public hygiene services while enhancing employee efficiency and the quality of services. Mohammed Faraj al-Kubaisi, assistant director of the General Cleanliness Department, conducted a field visit to the workshops and urged the department employees to benefit from the outcomes of these awareness programmes. "The department places great importance on employee awareness and training and believes that workers represent the cornerstone of the achievements. Raising their awareness of their professional duties is a priority for the department and a fundamental step towards achieving a sustainable and safe work environment," al-Kubaisi added.





Undernutrition a major concern for children with cerebral palsy

By Joseph Varghese
Staff Reporter

A first-of-its-kind study on 150 children with cerebral palsy in Qatar has identified undernutrition as a major concern, particularly among those with short stature and low weight. “Tailored nutritional interventions and regular monitoring are essential to improve growth outcomes and prevent malnutrition-related complications in this vulnerable population,” notes an article published on *Qatar Medical Journal* and featured in Qscience.com

The research ‘Nutritional status and growth pattern in children with cerebral palsy: A retrospective study from Qatar’ conducted by a group of researchers from Hamad Medical Corporation observed that children with cerebral palsy are at a high risk of malnutrition due to feeding difficulties

and motor impairments, which can further exacerbate their condition.

The study assessed the nutritional status and growth patterns in children with cerebral palsy attending a paediatric rehabilitation clinic in Qatar.

The researchers highlight that nutritional status plays a critical role in the growth and health outcomes of these children, yet limited data is available on this issue in Qatar.

A retrospective observational study was conducted on 150 children with cerebral palsy aged 3-14, who were followed regularly at the Paediatric Rehabilitation Department, Qatar Rehabilitation Institute. Their nutritional status was evaluated using anthropometric measurements - height, weight, and body mass index (BMI) - based on World Health Organisation growth charts. Tests were performed to assess associations between BMI and demographic



variables, including gender, nationality, motor type, weight, and height.

The study found out that the prevalence of underweight children was 48.7% and 35.3% of them had an underweight BMI. Significant associations were found between BMI and nationality, weight status, and height status. However, no significant associations were observed between BMI and gender or motor type. Short stature and low weight were identified as strong indicators of undernutrition.

The researchers point out that

children affected with cerebral palsy often face malnutrition due to their limited motor or physical abilities, which may contribute to further deterioration of their condition. Therefore, understanding the nutritional status of children with cerebral palsy is crucial for developing effective interventions and improving health outcomes.

The study comprehensively assesses the nutritional status of children with cerebral palsy and provides valuable insights into the factors contributing to malnutrition within this population, including the unique interplay of

motor impairments, feeding difficulties, and diverse socioeconomic and cultural influences.

Qatar's demographic diversity, encompassing various nationalities and socioeconomic backgrounds, offers a rich context for examining undernutrition in children with this disease.

By focusing on this multifaceted population, this research aims to fill critical gaps in knowledge and contribute to a broader understanding of cerebral palsy-related malnutrition in the region. The study primarily aims to describe the nutritional status of children with cerebral palsy and explore the relationship between the degree of nutritional status and the type of cerebral palsy classified according to topographical categories.

These findings offer a foundation for future research and the development of targeted interventions for improving the health outcomes of children with cerebral

palsy in Qatar. Cerebral palsy is a group of conditions that affect movement and posture. It's caused by damage that occurs to the developing brain, most often before birth, according to mayoclinic.org

Symptoms appear during infancy or preschool years and vary from very mild to serious. Children with cerebral palsy may have exaggerated reflexes.

The arms, legs and trunk may appear floppy. Or they may have stiff muscles, known as spasticity. Symptoms also can include irregular posture, movements that can't be controlled, a walk that's not steady or some combination of these.

Cerebral palsy may make it hard to swallow. It also can cause eye muscle imbalance, in which the eyes don't focus on the same object. People with the condition might have reduced range of motion in their joints due to muscle stiffness.



‘Summer camp instils values of sustainability among youth’

QNA
Doha

Friends of the Environment Center, affiliated with the Ministry of Sports and Youth, concluded activities of ‘Sustainability Summer 2025’ camp for both boys and girls with a closing ceremony that honoured participating organisations, official sponsors, and the camp's staff and volunteers.

The camp was organised as part of the centre's efforts to instil environmental values and promote the concept of sustainability among young people, in alignment with Qatar National Vision 2030 - particularly its environmental pillar.

Participants engaged in a series of interactive workshops and educational trips that combined learning with hands-on experience.

In this context, Director of Public Relations and Communication at the Friends of the Environment Center, Fahad Abdullah Malik, emphasised that the ‘Sustainability Summer 2025’ programme represented a significant milestone for the centre. He not-



ed that it contributed tangibly to raising environmental awareness among participants and helped them understand sustainability as a way of life rather than a mere theoretical concept.

The camp carefully blended learning with practical experience through diverse workshops, interactive activities, and field trips, giving young participants the opportunity to apply what they learned and explore environmental challenges and solutions firsthand.

He also pointed out that youth participation in innovation and recycling workshops, educational trips, and heritage-related sustainability activities fostered

a sense of responsibility and equipped them with new skills to become ambassadors for environmental awareness within their local communities.

Meanwhile, Head of Events and Programs at Friends of the Environment Center, Zainab al-Shammari, affirmed the centre's commitment to continuing such high-quality programs in collaboration with various partners, aiming to nurture a new generation that is conscious of environmental issues and capable of supporting Qatar's efforts to achieve the objectives of Qatar National Vision 2030, particularly regarding environmental sustainability.

Regarding the types of activities included in the camp programme, al-Shammari explained that it featured a variety of initiatives, including creative workshops such as ‘Icebreaker’ session to enhance positive communication among participants, ‘Our Summer of Learning’ workshop focused on recycling and environmental creativity, and ‘Innovation Lab,’ which allowed participants to explore tools for creative thinking and develop practical solutions to real-world challenges.

Iran, Europeans to meet as snapback sanctions loom

AFP
Tehran

Iran will meet next week with Britain, France and Germany for talks on its nuclear programme, the parties said yesterday, as the European powers warned Tehran to engage swiftly to avoid snapback sanctions.

The Islamic republic suspended cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in July in the wake of its 12-day war with Israel, citing the UN nuclear watchdog's failure to condemn Israeli and US strikes on its nuclear facilities.

The European trio - parties to the landmark 2015 Iran nuclear deal - have threatened to trigger a “snapback mechanism” by the end of August. The move would reimpose sweeping UN sanctions lifted under the 2015 agreement unless Iran agrees to curb its uranium enrichment and restore co-operation with IAEA inspectors.

“It was agreed that Iran's talks with the three European countries and the European Union would continue next Tuesday at the level of deputy foreign ministers,” Iran's foreign ministry said after a phone call between Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi and senior European diplomats. France confirmed the talks and cautioned that Iran faced a narrowing window of time.

“We have just made an impor-

tant call to our Iranian counterpart regarding the nuclear programme and the sanctions against Iran that we are preparing to reimpose,” said French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot on X, noting he was joined on the call by his British and German counterparts and the EU's top diplomat. “Time is running out. A new meeting will take place next week on this issue,” he added.

German Foreign Minister Johann Wadephul said on X that his country remained “committed to diplomacy but time is very short”. “Iran needs to engage substantively in order to avoid the activation of snapback,” he said. “We have been clear that we will not let the snapback of sanctions expire unless there is a verifiable and durable deal.” The EU's foreign policy chief, Kaja Kallas, similarly said: “With the deadline for the snapback mechanism fast approaching, Iran's readiness to engage with the US is crucial. Iran must also fully cooperate” with the IAEA. It was not immediately clear where the talks, the second since the Iran-Israel war, would take place.

Israel in June launched an unprecedented bombing campaign on Iranian nuclear, military and civilian sites, prompting Tehran to respond with missile strikes on Israel. The United States also joined its ally Israel, targeting key Iranian nuclear sites deep within the country. Iran and the European trio - known as the E3 - held talks in late July at the

Iranian consulate in Istanbul, which Tehran described as “frank”. Iran's war with Israel derailed its nuclear negotiations with the United States. The 2015 nuclear deal was aimed preventing Iran from developing an atomic bomb - an ambition it has consistently denied.

The deal was torpedoed in 2018 when Donald Trump, during his first term as president, unilaterally withdrew the United States from the agreement and slapped crippling sanctions on its economy.

Iran has ever since criticised the European parties, accusing them of failing to meet their commitments under the deal.

Araghchi reiterated Friday the “lack of legal and moral competence of these countries to resort to the said mechanism” while warning about “the consequences of such an action”. The secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, Ali Larjani, said in an interview published on Friday that the Europeans are “carrying out part of America's operations” by pursuing the snapback mechanism. Iran has previously said it would leave the nuclear non-proliferation treaty (NPT) if the E3 activate the snapback mechanism. Larjani said in the interview on the supreme leader's website that “the possibility has always existed” for Iran to leave the NPT, but it has remained committed to the treaty even though it bears “no benefit” for Tehran.



45,000 perform prayers at Al-Aqsa Mosque

QNA
Occupied Al Quds

Tens of thousands of Palestinians performed prayers in the courtyards of Al-Aqsa Mosque yesterday.

The Islamic Waqf Department in Jerusalem estimated that about 45,000 worshippers attended the prayers at Al-Aqsa, despite heavy Israeli military

restrictions. Local sources reported that Israeli forces obstructed the arrival of worshippers through the Damascus Gate and Lions' Gate, checking their IDs, detaining several young men, and preventing them from entering the mosque.

Since the beginning of the Israeli assault on the Palestinian people in Gaza and the West Bank, including Jerusalem, in October 2023, Israeli forces have

intensified restrictions at the gates of Al-Aqsa Mosque and the entrances to Jerusalem's Old City.

The occupation authorities deliberately prevent thousands of citizens from the West Bank governorates from reaching Jerusalem to pray at Al-Aqsa, requiring them to obtain special permits to pass through the military checkpoints surrounding the holy city.

Infant dies of malnutrition in Gaza, total rises to 113 children

QNA
Gaza

A Palestinian infant died yesterday from hunger and malnutrition at Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis, southern Gaza Strip, raising the total number of victims of famine and malnutrition to 272, including 113 children.

A medical source reported that the baby passed away due to complications from starvation, with

hospitals unable to provide the necessary care because of severe shortages of food and medicine. The child's mother is also suffering from malnutrition. Meanwhile, the humanitarian crisis continues to spread and worsen as Israel maintains its blockade on all Gaza crossings, preventing the flow of food and medical supplies.

The extreme famine is unfolding alongside the ongoing war of extermination waged against the people of Gaza since Oct 7, 2023.

The UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) had previously warned of the consequences of widespread malnutrition among children under five, noting that the number of cases doubled between March and June due to the ongoing blockade.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has also confirmed that malnutrition levels in Gaza have reached catastrophic levels as a result of Israeli practices and delays in the entry of humanitarian aid.

‘FIFA Arab Cup has key role in showcasing our culture’

From Page 1

After witnessing the strong fan support for the team in 2021, Bounedjah expects Algerian fans to once again turn out in large numbers to cheer for their team from the stands.

“Algerian fans are immensely passionate about football and are always eager to support their national team. I want to deliver another great performance at the Arab Cup, and hope to make our fans proud once again,” he said.

The FIFA Arab Cup Qatar 2025 will be played across six stadiums



Baghdad Bounedjah

that previously hosted matches during the historic FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022.

‘Arab Cup holds a special place in this region’

From Page 1

“Qatar has demonstrated its capabilities in hosting mega-sporting events, year after year, and the FIFA Arab Cup is another chapter in this rich sporting legacy. This will be an opportunity to reaffirm the importance of Arab unity, while showcasing the rich culture of the Arab world and highlight the limitless ability of its people in sports and other fields. We are delighted to welcome the world once again, particularly fans from the region to revel in the excitement of the beautiful game.”



Al Bayt Stadium will play host to the tournament opener.

Outreach Qatar marks India's Independence Day

Outreach Qatar (OQ), a community initiative to provide completely free support to children with special needs and their parents, celebrated 79th Independence Day of India, with the theme 'Mera Bharat, Mera Gourav - My India, My Pride'.

Indian ambassador Vipul was the chief guest. Children performed the national anthems of Qatar and India. They tied braided tri-colour bands they prepared along with the volunteers, onto the wrists of all guests and attendees.

A memento was presented to Navaneetha Chinnakannan, who is bidding farewell to Qatar, to appreciate her voluntary support



to OQ students. K Linges, an OQ student who is entering the Book of Kalam as the first and youngest autistic veena player to perform a

one-hour non-stop recital across multiple music genres, was also honoured. A special gift of a map of India

covered with pictures of OQ students, was gifted to all students after the first copy was presented to the envoy.

OQ students who presented various performances included Mehreen Ayisha, Misha Fathima, Nathania Lela Vipin, Aswin

Ganesh, Liana Mariam, Mohnish Charan, Linges, Naythan Vipin Roy, Lokanath Jayaprakash, Brendon, Eshan Milan Pramod, Mohammad Izhan Hasan, Savannah Maria, Joanna Elisha, Manasvi, Sayyid Yousuf, Rishik Shivashankar Pillai, Steve Anish Regi, Jiya Anish Regi, Arth Khator, Jennah Maria, Prathika Prakash, Aisha Rayyan, Mahanth Vidhun, and Joshua Vijwal Sequeira.

OQ president Sameer Moosa and young volunteer Kriesha Sharma spoke. Management committee member Lakshmi Chockalingam welcomed the gathering and co-ordinated the event. OQ committee member Rama Selvam proposed a vote of thanks.



Amuaaq hosts blood donation camp to celebrate India's I-Day



In a tribute to the 79th Independence Day of India, the AMU Alumni Association Qatar (Amuaaq), hosted a blood donation camp in collaboration with the Qatar National Blood Donation Center of the Hamad Medical Corporation.

The event under the theme 'Give Blood, Give Hope: Together We Save Lives' brought together multiple organisations, including four clubs from Toastmasters Area 19. Indian ambassador Vipul, the chief guest, commended Amuaaq for marking the Independence Day with such a noble event.

AMU Polytechnic former principal Prof Shamim Ahmad, the

guest of honour, expressed pride in the community service being undertaken by AMU alumni abroad. Amuaaq chairman Jawed Ahmad emphasised the need for voluntary and regular donors to ensure a safe and sustainable blood supply.

Amuaaq ladies wing vice president and Toastmasters Area 19 director Dr Ashna Nusrat led a session on advantages of donating blood for the donor, recipient and community. She explained that approximately 350-450ml is typically donated, and the human body replenishes this volume within 24-48 hours, while red blood cells regenerate within four to six weeks. The programme

was co-ordinated by Farrukh Ali Farooqi and Mamnoon Ahmed Bangash, with support from volunteers including Mohammed Farman Khan, Saima Rafat, Dr Mohammed Nayeem, Imamuddin Ahmad, Sanjeev Kumar Sharma, Dr Sikandar, Pramod Kumar, and Jarrar Alam. Registration was handled by medical students Alhena and Fatima.

Rajesh V C, Nijas Noor, Deepak Talreja, Jithil Jayan, Mohammed Shueb, Gulam Rasool, Kulvinder Singh, Pradeep Singh, Rashid Siddiqui, Farrukh Ahmad, Osama Shamsi, Mohamed Alvi, Mohd Irfan, Benjamin Siddiqui, Mohammed Alam, Badreya al-Mahmoud, Maria and Poonam were present.

ICBF organises I-Day event for workers



Indian Community Benevolent Forum (ICBF), organised Indian Independence Day celebration, in association with embassy of India in Qatar, for the low-income blue-collar workers in the community.

The event at the Indian Cultural Centre on the evening of August 15, featured songs, dances and an honouring ceremony for social workers. Ambassador Vipul was the chief guest. embassy first secretary and ICBF co-ordinating officer Eish Singhal, labour officer Ravi Rath and community leaders were present. The envoy presented mementos to the awardees and appreciated their commitment in humanitarian activities.

He also distributed free food kits to nearly 100 fishermen before the commencement of the programme.

Ambassador Vipul emphasised the importance of the India-Qatar bilateral relationship and pointed out the recent improvements in the strategic partnership between the two countries.

ICBF president Shanavas Bava delivered the presidential address. Jail visits head Neelambari S and Pradeep Pillai co-ordinated



ed the cultural events. Managing committee members Amarvir Singh, Mini Siby, Manibharathi, and Irfan Ansari co-ordinated the function. Programme committee Varkey Boban presented

a spot quiz competition for the workers. ICBF general secretary Deepak Shetty welcomed the gathering, and labour and fishermen welfare head Shankar Goud proposed a vote of thanks.

Nepali forum in Qatar observes Teej festival

Overseas Nepali Unity Forum (Onuf), Qatar celebrated the Nepali women's festival Haritalika Teej with a special event titled 'Teej Greetings Programme 2025'.

The function chaired by Onuf president Mohammad Muklada Musalman had the Non-Resident Nepali - National Co-ordination Council (NRNA - NCC) Qatar president Padam Giri as the chief guest.

The newly elected executive committee of NRNA NCC Qatar for the 2025-27 term was feted on the occasion which saw a strong turnout from presidents and representatives of various Nepali organisations in Doha, along with a cross-section of the community.

Nepali women attended the event adorned in colourful traditional attire and red saris, dancing to Teej songs. In keeping with tradition, attendees were served Teej 'dar' - a festive meal featuring sel roti, kheer, and achar, symbolising unity and cultural pride.



The programme began with the Nepali national anthem. A minute of silence was observed in honour of known and unknown martyrs who made sacrifices for the nation. The event was inaugurated with lamp lighting and banner unveiling, followed by a welcome speech from Onuf Qatar secretariat member Shushila Rai. Sec-

retary Ruk Bahadur Rana Bhatt was the anchor.

In his remarks, Giri thanked the organising committee and emphasised that NRNA-NCC Qatar is committed to collaborate with all Nepali organisations in Doha to strengthen community ties and for cultural preservation. Onuf president proposed a vote of thanks.

Expat forum marks silver jubilee with India event

After a year of socio-cultural and sport events in Qatar to mark its silver jubilee, Karnataka Sangha Qatar (KSQ) hosted a tribute event in Bengaluru, India, on August 10, to fete social workers and the forum's founding leaders and pioneers.

The event at the Karnataka Engineer's Academy, Basaveshwara Nagar, Bengaluru, was opened by KSQ general secretary Kumar Swamy. Former president H K Madhu was the master of ceremony.

The function was inaugurated with a lamp lighting by chief guest Paralympian Padma Shri Dr K S Rajanna, KSQ president Ravi Shetty, advisory chairman Mahesh Gowda, former presidents, and managing committee members.

The felicitation of social workers was conducted by treasurer Pradeep Dileep. They were Dr

Rajanna (Mandya), Nagarathna (Belgaum), Geetha R Shetty (Mangalore), Prakash Shettigar (Beluvai), Harish Pergade (Meremajal), Ashwin Angadi (Ballari), Ranjith (Bengaluru), Tarula Tarun (Theerthahalli), Herald Moras (Vamanajoor), Vasanth Master (Mangaluru), Annappa (Kodagu), and Jayaram (Kundapura).

The first part concluded with Sangeetha Ragasudhe, featuring State Award-winning singer Rameshchandra, Dr Susheela, and Prakash Pavanje.

The second part featured tribute to KSQ founders and pioneers. Founder vice president Dr V C Moorthy, former presidents Prakash Babu, Prabhakar, Aravind Patil, Venkat Rao and Anuradha Nagesh Rao, founder president Sathish Deshpande and Bhuvana Nagaraj were honoured at their residences.

The former managing com-



mittee members honoured were: Sooryanarayana, R Ravi, Shyam N Swami, Veena Santhosh Kulkarni, Rajendra Jyothi, Shalini Sharan Alur, Roopa Pramod, Arun Kumar M K, Subramanya E, Manjula Manjunath Rao, Ashok Unakal, C R Manjunath, Lakkappa Gowda, Savitha Arun, Niyaz Ahmed, Hema Lakkappa, Asha Nanjappa, and Sanjana Jeevan.

Special recognition was also given to International Aryab-

hata Awardees Suma Mahesh and Ashwin P Kumar, and silver jubilee supporters Arun Kumar and Sanjay Chapolkar. Senior members Chandrashekar Manakwad, Jaya Shetty, Prakash Rao, Putanna, and poet Shantaram Shetty were honoured with silver jubilee shawls. The celebration concluded on a high note with more Sangeetha Ragasudhe. Former president Prabhakar and Venkat Rao, supported the event.



Five bodies found on Kenyan coast, linked to starvation cult

AFP
Nairobi

At least five bodies, including two children, exhumed on Kenya's coast are linked to an infamous starvation cult that came to light in 2023, police said yesterday.

More than 400 people died in one of the world's worst cult-related tragedies, which became known as the "Shakahola Forest Massacre", discovered inland from the Indian Ocean town of Malindi.

The case rocked the country and made headlines globally, with self-proclaimed pastor Paul Mackenzie facing trial in the coastal city of Mombasa. He has pleaded not guilty to multiple counts of manslaughter.

Officers had excavated at least 27 sites further along the coast

from Shakahola at a five-acre site near Binzaro village in Kilifi county's Chakama area, Directorate of Criminal Investigations (DCI) officer Robert Kiinge said.

"We retrieved five bodies," he said.

Kiinge said that the majority of the remains were in a state of advanced decomposition, indicating they had been in the ground for over a year, although he said one may have been buried as recently as seven to eight months ago.

"We had two remains of children," he said, estimating their ages as between five and seven years old.

"Looking at what we are working on now there is no doubt there is connection with the old Shakahola," he said.

Eleven people have been taken into custody, Kiinge said, although three of them are being treated as

victims. "The people we have in custody today are followers of Mackenzie," he said.

The investigation was ongoing, Kiinge added, noting that until scheduled post-mortems they would not speculate on the cause of death.

The fresh discoveries came after a Mombasa court earlier this month adjourned the ongoing case of the Shakahola preacher, Mackenzie, citing the discovery of new evidence.

Shakahola led the government to move towards tighter control of fringe religious groups, after accusations that it could have prevented the deaths.

Efforts to regulate religion in the majority-Christian country have been fiercely opposed in the past as undermining constitutional guarantees of the division between Church and state.

Boko Haram denies Nigerien army claim to have killed leader

AFP
Abidjan

A close aide to the head of militant group Boko Haram yesterday denied Nigerien army claims that he had been killed in a targeted air strike in the Lake Chad basin.

The militant group has been waging a bloody insurgency to establish a caliphate in north-east Nigeria since 2009, leaving around 40,000 people dead and forcing more than 2mn people to flee their homes.

Niger said late Thursday that Boko Haram leader Bakura, whose real name was given as Ibrahim Mahamadu, was killed during a "surgical operation" on an island in the Diffa region of southeast Niger last week.

But in an audio message sent to AFP by a security source in the Lake Chad area, one of Bakura's lieutenants called news of the leader's death "completely false".

"I am with him now, we are together," he said in the Hausa language spoken in the region, calling the Niger army announcement "propaganda".

Several experts contacted by AFP also cast doubt on the unveri-

fied claim. Since 2023 Niger has been governed by a military junta that took power in a coup but has struggled to stem the militant violence shaking the country.

As well as in the east, where Boko Haram is at large, the Sahel nation also faces insurgencies by fighters linked to Al Qaeda or the Islamic State group in the west, along the borders with Mali and Burkina Faso.

Bakura emerged as the leader of a splinter group loyal to former Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau that refused to join rival faction the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) over ideological differences.

He then moved to the islands on the Niger side of the lake with his fighters.

The Niger army said in its statement that Bakura was targeted by a fighter jet in an early morning strike on August 15, but provided no proof. AFP was unable to independently verify his death.

"I believe that we have to be very, very prudent," said Vincent Foucher, a researcher at France's CNRS institute specialising in studying Boko Haram.

"They've already announced the deaths of several militant leaders many times and very often

those announcements have been contradicted.

"At the moment, we only have an announcement from the authorities."

Along with another expert in west African militant groups, who wished to remain anonymous, Foucher said his sources indicated that Bakura was still at large.

The Boko Haram conflict has spilled over Nigeria's porous northeastern border with Niger, Chad and Cameroon, with Niger suffering its first attacks by the group in Bosso, on the shores of Lake Chad in 2015.

At its height in the 2010s, Shekau was claimed dead several times only to reappear again in video footage, taunting the Nigerian authorities.

He finally died in 2021, with Bakura taking the reins afterwards.

Bakura, said to be aged around 40, originally came from Nigeria, the Niger army said.

It claimed he was involved in the kidnapping of more than 300 students in Kuriga, Nigeria in March 2024, and helped organise suicide bombings against mosques, markets and public gatherings as well as attacks on the Nigerien, Nigerian and Cameroonian armies.

Over 1,200 held in Africa cybercrime crackdown

AFP
Lyon

More than 1,200 people were arrested and some \$100mn recovered in a major crackdown against rising cybercrime in Africa, global police organisation Interpol said yesterday.

The UK and 18 African countries carried out the operation dubbed "Serengeti 2.0" between June and August, identifying some 88,000 victims of fraud and illegal cryptocurrency networks, a statement read. Re-

ports of online fraud have spiked 3,000% in some African countries during the last year, Interpol said in a recent report. Cybercrime now makes up more than 30% of all reported crime in west and east Africa, the report said. In one bust, the Angolan authorities shut down 25 cryptocurrency mining centres, where Chinese operators were illegally validating digital currency transactions, seizing equipment worth an estimated \$37mn.

Proceeds from the seizure will go towards improving electricity distribution in the central African country, Interpol said.

Prosecutor seeks death penalty for Kabila in treason trial

AFP
Kinshasa

A military prosecutor yesterday demanded the death penalty for DR Congo's former president Joseph Kabila who is on trial in absentia on treason charges.

General Lucien Rene Likulia called on the judges to condemn Kabila to death for war crimes, treason and organising an insurrection, the court heard.

The former president went on trial in his absence in July for

his alleged support for Rwanda-backed militants M23.

Kabila, who has been outside the DRC for two years, is also accused of having plotted to overthrow President Felix Tshisekedi and charges including homicide, torture and physical violations linked to the M23 group.

The charge sheet against him also listed the "forcible occupation of the city of Goma", captured by M23 fighters in January before they agreed a permanent ceasefire with the government in July.

Kabila arrived in the eastern city in May, meeting local reli-

gious leaders in the presence of the M23's spokesman Lawrence Kan-yuka. Tshisekedi, his successor as president, has branded him the brains behind the armed group, which has seized swathes of the resource-rich Congolese east with Rwanda's help.

Kabila has denounced the trial, calling the courts "an instrument of oppression".

The DRC lifted a moratorium on the death penalty last year but no judicial executions have been carried out since.

The charge sheet seen by AFP described him as "one of the initi-

ators of the Congo River Alliance" (AFC), the M23's political arm and accuses him of having colluded with Rwanda to try to "overthrow by force the power established by law".

It also accused Kabila of being responsible for atrocities committed by the movement in the North and South Kivu provinces in the mineral-rich east.

Rwanda denies providing military backing to the M23 but UN experts say its army played a "critical" role in the group's offensive in the region.

The AFC and M23's executive

File photo shows former president of the Democratic Republic of Congo Joseph Kabila.

secretary Benjamin Mbonimpa distanced the movement from Kabila in comments to journalists in Goma in July, dismissing his trial as part of a "malevolent strategy" against him.

Kabila ruled the country between 2001 and 2009, taking power following his father Laurent Kabila's assassination.

Although he left the DRC in

2023, the former leader still has influence over Congolese political life. He has criticised Tshisekedi's government as a "dictatorship".

For more than three decades, the eastern DRC has been ravaged by conflict between various armed groups. The unrest has intensified since the M23's resurgence in 2021.



Protesters hold placards as lead applicant and lawyer Mzwandile Masuku addresses them outside the court, after the hearing was postponed, in Mbabane, Eswatini, yesterday.

Eswatini govt faces court challenge for accepting US deportees

Reuters
Mbabane

Human rights lawyers and activists have sued the government of Eswatini for making a secretive deal with President Donald Trump's administration to accept third-country deportees from the US, which they claim was unconstitutional.

The case was due to be heard at the High Court of Eswatini yesterday, but was postponed until September 25 because the government did not file response papers, the lead applicant told Reuters outside the court yesterday.

Eswatini's Attorney General Sifiso Khumalo said in a text message that the case had no legal basis. "It's a frivolous legal application," he wrote. In July

the US deported five individuals from Vietnam, Jamaica, Laos, Cuba and Yemen to the Southern African country. All were convicted felons, and Eswatini says it is holding them in solitary confinement until they can be repatriated.

The applicants in the case, led by the Eswatini Litigation Centre, say that the agreement made with the US was illegal because it was not submitted to parliament for approval and the terms were not disclosed.

They also say they do not know the condition of the deportees because no one has been allowed access to them.

"We want the executive to be held accountable, we want transparency dealing with matters of state importance, (and) respect for the rights of all individuals who are in Eswatini regardless of who they may be,"

said lead applicant and lawyer Mzwandile Masuku.

Eswatini, an absolute monarchy ruled by King Mswati III, has previously said the deportees pose no threat and that the agreement was based purely on its good relations with Washington.

The International Organisation for Migration told Reuters it had received a request from Eswatini to provide "post-arrival assistance" for the deportees, but did not say whether it would accept or what that might entail.

"We are discussing with Government of Eswatini, their request," a spokesperson for the UN agency said on Thursday.

Trump aims to deport millions of immigrants who entered the US illegally and his administration has sought to increase removals to third countries.

Militant insurgency leaves Burkina cotton farmers hanging by a thread

AFP
Abidjan

Laurent Koadima yearns for the days when his cotton farm in Burkina Faso allowed him to provide for his family, before advancing militants forced them to make sacrifices.

"Before, we were envied because cotton was a good business and the harvests were good," the 48-year-old said. "Today, we struggle to live."

Koadima is but one of many in Burkina Faso, among Africa's top producers of cotton, whose output has been decimated due to militant fighters stalking the Sahel nation for more than a decade.

Many farmers have fled the violence or been forced to leave their crops untended as the threat of ambush made them too dangerous to pick.

As a result, cotton production fell by more than a quarter in one year, from 386,794 tonnes in 2023 to 286,623 in 2024, according to official figures.

"These past two or three years, it's been very tough... the security situation means that we've lost much good farmland," Koadima said.

"I've trouble tending to my family's needs as last year I was unable to harvest, so currently I'm doing odd jobs and a bit of trading," he added.

"Two of my children have had to drop out of school." Around 4mn people out of Burkina Faso's population of 23mn owe their livelihoods to cotton, either directly or indirectly. Issa Lompo's fields are his sole source of income, which the 38-year-old farmer needs to take care of his seven children.

But his eastern region has been in the firing line since 2018, falling prey to attacks by militants affiliated with Al Qaeda or the Islamic State group.

Though the ruling junta has pledged to crack down on the unrest since seizing power in a coup in September 2022, its military rulers have so far proven unable to stem the militant tide.

"In four years, we've lost more than 32,000 cot-

ton farms in the region due to insecurity," Lompo said, adding that those who lost their fields have turned to "other professions, like herding or business".

One such series of attacks at the end of June killed seven police officers and a soldier near Fada N'Gourma, the regional capital to which many cotton farmers have sent their families for safety.

The town is home to Socoma, one of Burkina Faso's three big cotton-farming companies.

At one point, its farmers produced an average of 80,000 tonnes of cotton a year.

But after three years of minimal harvests, Socoma announced in July that it would fire every one of its hundreds of employees "for economic reasons".

Its 2024 production had plummeted to 3,000 tonnes. At its general assembly in late June, the National Union of Cotton Producers of Burkina Faso sounded the alarm over the obstacles the violence was creating to the transport and harvest of cotton.

Before that, Burkina Faso's Interprofessional Cotton Association had warned in 2023 about the difficulty of delivering agricultural supplies.

But it also bemoaned a rise in sea transport costs, a key issue for a landlocked country which exports nearly all of its cotton abroad, mostly to Asian countries.

"The industry is taking a beating year after year," lamented Moussa Barro, another producer.

According to Burkina Faso's commerce ministry, cotton accounts for 4% of the country's national output and around 14% of its export revenues.

To help shore up its ailing cotton farmers, Burkina Faso's junta has provided subsidies worth five billion CFA francs (\$9mn) for agricultural supplies such as seeds, fertilisers and equipment.

The militant insurgency has killed more than 26,000 people, both civilians and soldiers, in Burkina Faso since it began more than 10 years ago.

Over half of those deaths have taken place in the past three years.

US Supreme Court allows cuts in NIH diversity research grants

AFP/Reuters
Washington

A divided US Supreme Court gave the Trump administration the green light on Thursday to cut hundreds of millions of dollars in research grants linked to diversity initiatives.

A federal judge in Massachusetts had blocked the planned cuts to the National Institutes of Health (NIH) grants in June, saying they amounted to racial discrimination and gender prejudice.

The Trump administration has targeted nearly \$800mn in NIH research funding for elimination as part of its campaign against diversity, equity and inclusion policies.

In a 5-4 vote, the conservative-majority Supreme Court allowed the cuts to go ahead while legal challenges continue in lower courts.

Chief Justice John Roberts, a conservative, sided with the three liberal justices on the top court in the minority.

The targeted diversity grants represent only a fraction of the more than \$10bn in NIH research and contracts that have

been put on the chopping block since President Donald Trump took office in January.

Other affected projects include studies on the health effects of global warming, Alzheimer's disease and cancer.

The NIH is the world's largest funder of biomedical research.

Trump has launched a sweeping overhaul of the US scientific establishment in his second term – slashing funding, attacking universities, and overseeing mass layoffs of scientists across federal agencies.

The cuts are part of Trump's wide-ranging actions to reshape the US government, slash federal spending and end government support for programmes aimed at promoting diversity or "gender ideology" that the administration opposes.

After Trump signed executive orders in January targeting DEI (diversity, equity and inclusion) and gender ideology, the NIH instructed staff to terminate grant funding for "low-value and off-mission" studies deemed related to these concepts, as well as coronavirus (Covid-19) and ways to curb vaccine hesitancy.

SpaceX launches US military craft

A SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket blasted into space on Thursday carrying the US military's secretive X-37B drone.

The rocket successfully launched at 11.50pm (0350 GMT on Friday), according to SpaceX's livestream of the event.

The Falcon 9 lit up the night sky over Nasa's Kennedy Space Centre, where it was launched from.

The US Space Force has said the drone's mission will include "a wide range of test and experimentation objectives" – **AFP**

Residence of former Trump aide raided

AFP/Reuters
Bethesda/Washington

FBI agents have raided the home of one of US President Donald Trump's most outspoken critics, his former national security adviser John Bolton.

Trump, asked about the early morning FBI search of Bolton's home, said that he was "not a fan" of his former aide but did not know about the raid ahead of time.

"I saw it on television this morning," the president told reporters.

"He's sort of a lowlife," Trump said. "He's a very quiet person, except on television if he can say something bad about Trump."

An AFP reporter saw Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agents entering Bolton's home in the Washington suburb of Bethesda early in the morning.

A police car with flashing lights was stationed outside the house, while journalists and onlookers gathered in the leafy street.

An FBI spokesperson has also confirmed law enforcement activity at Bolton's Washington, DC office.

The director of the FBI, Kash Patel, posted on X: "NO ONE is above the law... @FBI agents on mission."

According to the *New York Times* and other US media outlets, the search was ordered to determine whether Bolton had illegally shared or possessed classified information.

The *Washington Post* said Bolton was not at home at the time of the raid and has not been charged with a crime.

The now 76-year-old Bolton served as Trump's adviser in his first term and later angered the administration with the publication of a highly critical book, *The Room Where it Happened*.

Legal efforts to block its release for allegedly containing classified information were dropped when Joe Biden replaced Trump in the White House in 2021.

Bolton has since become a highly visible and pugnacious critic of Trump, frequently appearing on television news shows and in print to condemn the man he has called "unfit to be president".

A longtime critic of Iran's ruling powers, Bolton was a national security hawk and has received death threats from Iranians.

The raid by the FBI came seven months after Trump stripped Bolton – and multiple other critics – of federal security details.

Asked recently in an interview with ABC whether he was worried about Trump "coming after" him, Bolton said: "He's already



FBI agents load a car with items after a search of the office of former White House national security adviser John Bolton (pictured right), in Washington, DC. – **Reuters**

come after me and several others in withdrawing the protection that we had."

"I think it is a retribution presidency," Bolton said.

Democratic lawmaker Jamie Raskin, whose Maryland congressional district includes Bolton's neighbourhood, called the raid "disturbing".

"This looks like it's very much in line with the other acts of political retribution and vengeance exacted against Bolton," Raskin told CNN.

Since taking office in January, Trump has taken a number of punitive measures against his perceived enemies and political opponents.

He has stripped former officials of their security clearances and protective details, targeted law firms involved in past cases against him and pulled federal funding from elite universities.

The FBI opened criminal investigations in July into two other prominent Trump critics, former FBI director James Comey and ex-CIA chief John Brennan.

Comey and Brennan were named to their positions at the FBI and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) by Democratic president Barack Obama, and they have a contentious history with Trump dating back to his first term in the White House.

Trump was the target of several investigations after leaving the White House and the FBI raided



his Mar-a-Lago home in a probe into mishandling of classified documents.

Trump was also charged with plotting to overturn the results of the 2020 election.

Neither case came to trial, and the special counsel – in line with a Justice Department policy of not prosecuting a sitting president – dropped them both after Trump won the November 2024 presidential election.

A federal magistrate judge would have to approve a search warrant, indicating that there is "at least some objective and legitimate" evidence of a potential crime, according to Bradley Moss, an attorney who specialises in national security.

"This is going to be political no matter what. This is a frequent, very public critic of the president," Moss said. "The question is, did he actually do something that warrants and justifies this or is this pure political retribution?"

National Guard troops will soon carry weapons in US capital

National Guard troops will soon carry weapons in Washington, DC, where President Donald Trump ordered their deployment as part of a crackdown on crime, a US defence official said yesterday.

Trump has said Washington was a "crime-infested rat hole" before he sent troops onto its streets last week.

"At the direction of the secretary of defence, JTF-DC members supporting the mission to lower the crime rate in our nation's capital will soon be on mis-

sion with their service-issued weapons," the defence official said on condition of anonymity, referring to the Joint Task Force-DC.

The US Army previously said as troops began to arrive that "weapons are available if needed but will remain in the armoury".

There are now more than 1,900 National Guard troops in Washington, both from the city as well as the Republican-led states of West Virginia, South Carolina, Ohio, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Tennessee, which have also sent forces. – **AFP**

Trump visits police officers, troops

AFP/Reuters
Washington

President Donald Trump visited police and troops that he has deployed in the US capital in what he calls a crackdown on crime, saying that they were going to "stay here for a while".

Trump ordered hundreds of members of the Guard, a reserve force, to deploy in Washington last week vowing to "take our capital back", despite protests by some residents and statistics showing violent offences falling.

"We're going to make it safe, and we're going to then go on to other places, but we're going to stay here for a while. We want to make this absolutely perfect," he said outside a US Park Police facility in Washington.

The 79-year-old Republican was surrounded by law enforcement from various local and federal agencies as well as National Guard troops.

Earlier on Thursday he suggested that he would go on patrol with police and the military, but instead he made a short speech and gave out pizzas and hamburgers.

"Everybody feels safe," Trump said, adding that he plans to get the capital "fixed up physically".

"One of the things we're going to be redoing is your parks. I'm very good at grass, because I have a lot of golf courses all over the place. I know more about grass than any human being," he added.

Trump wrote on social media early yesterday that "there were no murders this week for the first time in memory" in Washington.

He said Mayor Muriel Bowser "must immediately stop giving false and highly inaccurate crime figures, or bad things will happen, including a complete and total Federal takeover of the City!"

Bowser has said that violent



Trump speaks while visiting federal troops at the US Park Police Anacostia operations facility in Washington, DC. – **AFP**

crime in the capital has been its lowest level in three decades.

Asked by reporters earlier on Thursday if the city was safer now, Bowser said the capital has seen a decrease in crime for the last two years.

"We expect that having 500 additional officers will yield more arrests, and we want guns off the streets. Our police officers continue to do the work, and we expect some incremental difference with more officers," she said, referring to the extra personnel ordered by Trump.

Trump's visit came a day after his vice-president, J D Vance, was greeted by boos and shouts of "Free DC" – referring to Washington's formal name, the District of Columbia – on his own meet-and-greet with troops.

Vance dismissed the hecklers as "a bunch of crazy protesters".

The DC National Guard has mobilised 800 troops, while Republican states Ohio, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, Tennessee and West Virginia are sending a total of around 1,200.

They have been spotted in tourist areas such as the National Mall and its monuments, the Nationals Park baseball stadium and others.

The overwhelmingly Democratic US capital faces allegations from Republican politicians that it is overrun by crime, plagued by homelessness and financially mismanaged.

However, data from Washington police showed significant drops in violent crime between 2023 and 2024, though that was coming off the back of a post-pandemic surge.

Some residents have welcomed the crackdown, pointing to crime in their areas – but others have complained the show of force is unnecessary, or has not been seen in parts of Washington where violence is concentrated.

Several incidents involving the surge of law enforcement have gone viral as residents voice their discontent, including the arrest of one man who was caught on camera throwing a sandwich at an agent.

Banksy-style posters honouring the so-called "sandwich guy" have popped up around the city.

The National Guard troops have provided "critical support such as crowd management, presence patrols and perimeter control in support of law enforcement", according to social media statements.

In addition to sending troops into the streets, Trump has also sought to take full control of the Washington police department, attempting at one point to sideline its leadership.

The deployment of troops in Washington comes after Trump dispatched the National Guard and Marines to quell unrest in Los Angeles, California, that was sparked by immigration enforcement raids.

'Chicago and New York are next'

President Donald Trump said yesterday that he plans to extend his crackdown on crime to Chicago next.

"Chicago is a mess," Trump told reporters in Oval Office remarks. He added that New York could be next.

"We're going to make our cities very, very safe," Trump told reporters. "I think Chicago will be our next and then we'll help with New York." – **AFP/Reuters**

Americans worry democracy in danger amid gerrymandering fights: poll

Reuters
Washington

Most Americans believe that efforts to redraw US House of Representatives districts to maximise partisan gains, like those under way in Texas and California, are bad for democracy, a new Reuters/Ipsos poll found.

More than half of respondents – 57% – said that they feared that American democracy itself was in danger, a view held by eight in 10 Democrats and four in 10 in President Donald Trump's Republican Party.

The six-day survey of 4,446 US adults, which closed on Monday, showed deep unease with the growing political divisions in Washington – where Republicans control both chambers of Congress – and state capitals.

The poll found that 55% of respondents, including 71% of Democrats and 46% of Republicans, agreed that ongoing redistricting plans – such as those hatched by governors in Texas and California in a process known as gerrymandering – were "bad for democracy".

At Trump's urging, Republican Texas Governor Greg Abbott has called a special

session of the state legislature to redraw the state's congressional maps ahead of the 2026 midterm elections, aiming to help Republicans defend their 219-212 US House majority.

Incumbent presidents' parties typically lose House seats in midterms, which can block their legislative agendas and in Trump's first term led to two impeachment probes.

California Democratic Governor Gavin Newsom, a White House hopeful in 2028, has threatened to try to redraw his state's district map in response, adding five Democratic seats to offset Republicans' expected Texas gains.

The practice is not new but has gained attention because it is happening mid-decade rather than following a census.

It has meant that the vast majority of House races are not competitive in general elections; in recent decades about two-thirds of them were won by more than 20 percentage points.

As president, Trump has flouted democratic norms with steps including directing the US Justice Department to pursue his political adversaries, pressuring the independent Federal Reserve to lower rates and seizing control of Washington, DC's police force.

In interviews, Texas Republicans who participated in the poll largely supported the state's potential redistricting, while Democrats described it as "cheating" but supported the idea of Democratic states trying to respond in kind.

The poll had a margin of error of about two percentage points when describing the views of all Americans and about three points for the views of Republicans and Democrats.

Amanda Kelley, 51, an insurance fraud investigator in Dallas, was the rare Republican to criticise the Texas effort.

"I don't like it when either side tries to do that. I think that's shady business," she said. "The optics of it happening in the middle of the term when you would draw district lines, that leaves kind of a bad taste in my mouth."

Paul Wehrmann, 57, an attorney in Dallas who described himself as an independent voter, also opposed it.

"It's unfair, and it sets a bad precedent," said Wehrmann, who worries it could spiral into states redrawing maps every election cycle instead of every decade.

Partisan gerrymandering "is bad all around, but I think that it is fair for Democrats to try to counterbalance what Republicans are doing"

"They need to stop bringing a knife to a gunfight."

Americans of both parties have long disliked elected leaders of the rival party, but the Reuters/Ipsos poll found that they also distrust regular people who align with the opposing party.

Some 55% of Democrats agreed with a statement that "people who are Republican are NOT to be trusted" while 32% disagreed. Republicans were split, with 43% agreeing that Democrats were untrustworthy and 44% saying they disagreed.

The poll also showed politics weighing more on people's everyday lives than in past years, particularly among Democrats.

Some 27% of Democrats said last year's presidential election has negatively affected their friendships.

A Reuters/Ipsos poll in April 2017, early in Trump's first term, showed a smaller share of Democrats – 18% – reported fraying friendships because of the election.

Only 10% of Republicans said this month that politics weighed on their friendships, largely unchanged from 2017.

Jeffrey Larson, a 64-year-old toxicologist and Republican voter in Seabrook, Texas, said he and his wife, a Democrat, agreed not to discuss politics.

"I might not agree with what the Dem-

ocrats are doing, but I don't think that they're trying to specifically destroy my life or destroy America," Larson said.

Close to half of Democrats – or 46% – said that their party had lost its way, compared to 19% of Republicans who said the same of their party.

Sandy Ogden, 71, a tech executive from Sunnyvale, California and self-described Democrat, said she faulted her party's leaders.

"I think the Democratic Party members are united in what we believe, but the leaders are ineffective in mounting an opposition that works," Ogden said.

Analysts said that ordinary Democrats' greater mistrust of Republicans and friction with friends suggests a reluctance among Democrats to engage with Republicans that could harm the party's chances at regaining political standing.

"Democracy involves a willingness to allow people with differing views to express those views," said Whit Ayres, a veteran Republican pollster.

Michael Ceraso, a longtime Democratic operative, found the poll results frustrating.

"The majority of Democrats believe our democracy is failing and nearly half of them don't want to talk to the opposition party," Ceraso said. "We have to be better."



DECISION

China tightens grip over rare earth supply quotas

China, the world's dominant rare earth supplier, issued measures to regulate the mining, smelting and separation of the critical minerals key to energy transition, further tightening its grip over supply. Beijing already regulates and manages rare earth mining, smelting and separation via a quota system. The new rules will include imported raw materials in that quota system, the ministry of industry and information technology said following a public consultation process. The inclusion of imported ore signals a further tightening of supply, analysts said. The proposal sparked opposition from companies concerned they could lose access to feedstock.

OFFBEAT

Japan city proposes two-hour daily smartphone limit

A Japanese city will urge all smartphone users to limit screen time to two hours a day outside work or school under a proposed ordinance that includes no penalties. The limit - which will be recommended for all residents in central Japan's Toyoake City - will not be binding and there will be no penalties incurred for higher usage, according to the draft ordinance. The draft urges elementary school students to avoid smartphones after 9pm, and junior high students and older are advised not to use them after 10pm. The move prompted an online backlash, with many calling the plan unrealistic.

APPEAL

New investigation sought into Indonesia journalist's murder

Indonesian police must reopen an investigation into the murder of a journalist this month, a media watchdog said yesterday, adding new evidence suggested his reporting on tin mining had led to his killing. Tin mining, both legal and illegal, has caused extensive environmental damage to the small island of Bangka in western Indonesia, where the metal has been widely extracted for use in global electronics. The body of Aditya Warman, the 47-year-old executive director of local media website Okeyboz, was found in a well on his farm bearing signs of violence on August 8 after his family reported him missing.

CRIME

Indonesian deputy minister charged in corruption case

Indonesia's deputy manpower minister was charged with extortion, anti-graft investigators said yesterday, after alleging the politician had benefited from illegal fees for the processing of safety permits. The graft investigation was the first to implicate a member of President Prabowo Subianto's cabinet. Prabowo has campaigned against corruption. Deputy minister Immanuel Ebenezer, a member of Prabowo's political party, was arrested along with 10 other people investigated for the case, who include officials with the manpower ministry and two employees of a training provider company, the anti-graft agency chief Setyo Budiyo said at a press conference.

Wickremesinghe arrested over alleged misuse of Lanka state funds

Reuters
Colombo

Former Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe, who led the country during a devastating 2019-2024 economic crisis, was arrested and appeared in court yesterday over allegations he misused state funds while in office, police said.

Wickremesinghe, 76, who lost power in a 2024 election, had been investigated over a visit he made to London to attend his wife's graduation ceremony, local media reported.

Police confirmed his arrest for alleged misuse of public funds.

"Former president Ranil Wickremesinghe has been arrested and produced in court. We are awaiting the court directive to decide what further steps need to be taken," a police spokesperson said.

Wickremesinghe's office did not respond to a request for comment.

An ally from his United National Party (UNP) proclaimed his innocence and suggested the case was politically motivated.

"Ranil Wickremesinghe has never misused public funds or state funds," UNP member Nishantha Sri Warnasinghe told reporters gathered outside the court complex where the former president appeared in Colombo.

"He was the person who stepped up and accepted the challenge to save this country

when the economy collapsed," Warnasinghe said. "That is the person who is being treated like this today by this government."

Sri Lanka's cabinet spokesperson did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Wickremesinghe, a lawyer who also served as Sri Lanka's prime minister a record six times, became president in 2022 at the height of the Indian Ocean island nation's debilitating financial crisis.

Wickremesinghe, who leads the UNP, took over after widespread protests caused by an economic meltdown forced his predecessor Gotabaya Rajapaksa to flee the country and later resign.

He finished third in last year's presidential election - the first since the economic crisis - behind Marxist-leaning Anura Kumara Dissanayake, who won the vote, and opposition leader Sajith Premadasa.

The election was largely seen as a referendum on Wickremesinghe, who led a successful but fragile economic recovery that included painful austerity measures.

Born into a prominent family of politicians and businessmen with large media interests, in 1978 Wickremesinghe was, at 29, made the country's youngest cabinet minister by his uncle, president Junius Jayewardene.

In 1994, following the assassinations of several of his senior colleagues, Wickremesinghe became leader of the UNP.



Former Thai prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra leaves after a Thai criminal court cleared him of charges in a lese majeste case in Bangkok, Thailand, yesterday.

Court clears Thailand ex-PM Thaksin in royal insult case

AFP
Bangkok

Former Thai prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra was yesterday cleared of royal defamation charges, relieving one of the threats to his embattled dynasty, which has dominated Thai politics for two decades.

Thaksin's family has long jostled with the nation's pro-military, pro-monarchy elite, who view their populist movement as a threat to Thailand's traditional social order.

Their tenure as a defining force in Thai politics has unfolded in a saga of coups, street protests and court cases as they have grappled for the kingdom's levers of power.

The 76-year-old Thaksin had faced up to 15 years in prison under laws criminalising criticism of King Maha Vajiralongkorn and his family, but was cleared after a trial that unfolded over two months.

"The court dismissed the charges against Thaksin, ruling that the evidence presented was insufficient," his lawyer Winyat Chatmontree told reporters at Thailand's Criminal Court in Bangkok. But his dynasty remains on the ropes, with his daughter Paetongtarn Shinawatra currently suspended as prime minister and facing her own reckoning next week with a court decision due that could see her thrown out of office.

Thaksin left court ahead of his lawyer, smiling and telling the press his case had been "dismissed" without providing any further comment.

"The court has done its job properly, but I don't think we can relax yet," said 66-year-old food vendor Kamol Orahanta, among around 150 Thaksin supporters gathered outside the court.

"I believe there are still some haters who will try to topple him by other means," he said.

The case stemmed from decade-old remarks Thaksin made in South Korean media relating to

the 2014 military coup that overthrew his sister Yingluck. Thaksin's acquittal gives him room to manoeuvre as Shinawatra heiress Paetongtarn's position hangs in the balance, with a result in her case due next Friday.

"I still believe that Thaksin Shinawatra will remain active in Thai politics, even if his daughter is removed," political analyst Yuttaporn Is-sarachai said.

"Whoever becomes prime minister, the real player behind the scenes is always going to be Thaksin."

Twice elected prime minister in the early 2000s, Thaksin fled Thailand and lived in self-imposed exile for 15 years after he was ousted in a military coup, finally returning to the kingdom in August 2023.

He landed in Bangkok on the same day his family's Pheu Thai party took office at the head of a coalition government backed by their conservative former enemies, fuelling suspicions a backroom deal had been struck.

12 dead and four missing after China bridge collapse

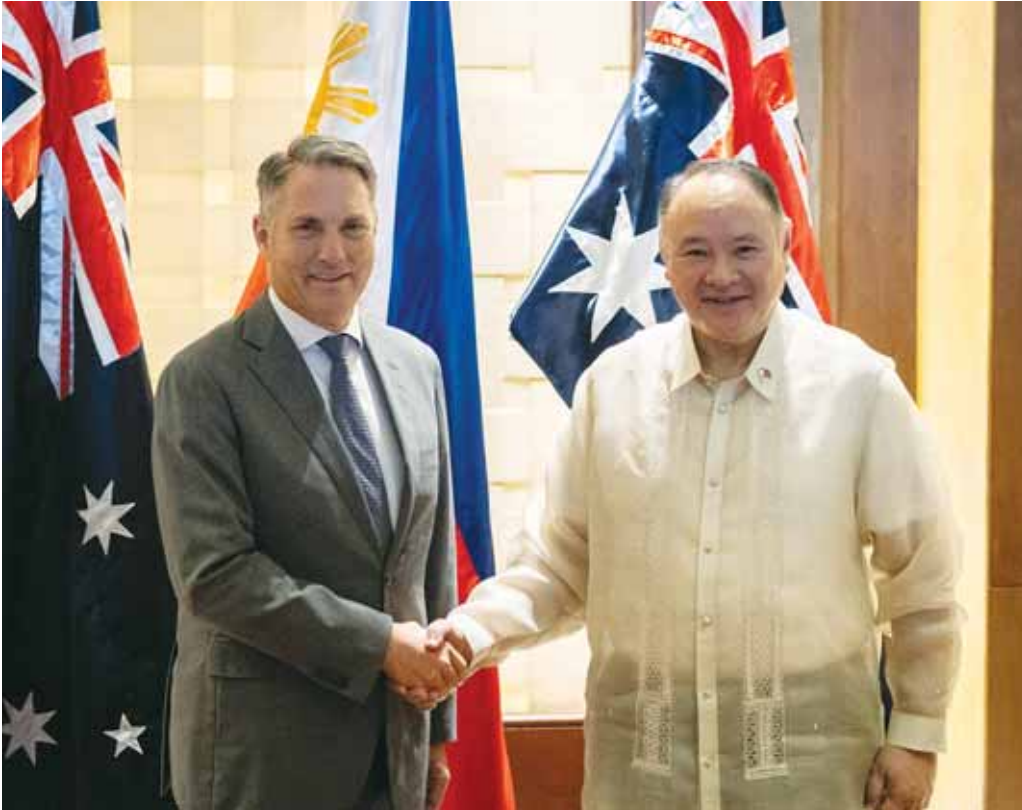
Twelve people were killed and four are missing after part of a bridge under construction collapsed yesterday in northwest China, state media reported.

A video published by state broadcaster CCTV showed the middle of the bridge's arch section suddenly giving way and plunging into the waters of the Yellow River below.

The cause was a steel cable failure, state news agency Xinhua said.

The People's Daily newspaper said 15 workers and a project manager were on-site at the time.

Twelve people have been confirmed dead and four people are still missing, CCTV reported. The bridge on the Sichuan-Qinghai Railway is the world's largest-span double-track continuous steel truss arch bridge, according to People's Daily. It is also China's first railway steel truss arch bridge to span the Yellow River - the country's second-longest - the report said.



Philippine Defence Minister Gilberto Teodoro and his Australian counterpart Richard Marles shake hands ahead of their bilateral meeting in Makati City, Metro Manila, Philippines, yesterday.

Philippines, Australia aim to sign new defence pact

AFP
Manila

The Philippines and Australia plan to sign a new pact to develop the southeast Asian nation's military infrastructure, their defence chiefs said yesterday, as they seek to counter China's "unilateral activities" in the region.

The plan was announced as Australia and the Philippines staged joint military exercises, which included live-fire drills and involved about 3,600 personnel, in the western and northern Philippines.

Beijing and Manila have had a series of confrontations in the disputed South China Sea, a crucial waterway China claims in almost its entirety despite an international ruling that its stance has no legal basis.

"We both acknowledge and are experiencing the pressure that the rules-based order is being placed under here in the Indo-Pacific," Australian Defence Minister Richard Marles told reporters after meeting his Philippine counterpart in Manila.

He said the new pact, expected to be signed next year, would seek to boost the Philippines' defence infrastructure and better coordinate military exercises between them.

"This will be a really important step forward in terms of our defence relationship," Marles said.

The Philippines, a US treaty ally, has been deepening its network of alliances with like-minded countries to counter China's growing assertiveness in the Asia-Pacific region.

It signed a visiting forces pact with New Zealand this year and similar deals are in the works with France and Canada.

Documents show New Zealand unease at China warships in South Pacific

AFP
Sydney

China set off alarm bells in New Zealand when it dispatched powerful warships on unprecedented missions in the South Pacific without explanation, according to military documents.

Beijing has spent years expanding its reach in the southern Pacific Ocean, courting island nations with new hospitals, freshly paved roads and generous offers of climate aid.

But these diplomatic efforts have increasingly been accompanied by more overt displays of military power.

Three Chinese warships sailed the Tasman Sea between Australia and New Zealand in February this year,

the first time such a task group had been sighted in those waters.

"We have never seen vessels with this capability so close to our shores - ships equipped for air, land and sea warfare," New Zealand Defence Force officials wrote in briefings released under freedom of information laws.

The flotilla included a Renhai-class destroyer, one of the most advanced warships in the world and China's "most capable surface combatant", according to the documents.

It was only the second time a Renhai-class destroyer - first commissioned in 2020 - had been seen in the South Pacific, New Zealand defence officials noted.

The first foray came just months earlier, in October 2024, when a Renhai-class ship docked in Pacific

island nation Vanuatu.

"We have not been informed by the Chinese government why this task group has been deployed into our region," read a New Zealand Defence Force briefing from February. "And we have not been informed what its future plans are."

Escorted by a supply tanker and a smaller naval frigate, the Renhai-class destroyer Zunyi was spotted off the eastern coast of Australia in mid-February.

"We have, in an unprecedented way, put in place assets to shadow the task group so that we know exactly what's happening," Australian Defence Minister Richard Marles said at the time.

Australia and New Zealand were caught off guard when the Zunyi started live-fire drills underneath a

busy flight path in the Tasman Sea, forcing dozens of commercial planes to change course.

While both Canberra and Wellington stressed the task group was within the bounds of international law, they were unhappy about its conduct. "We have concerns about the manner in which the task group notified its intention to conduct live fire exercises, which we do not consider meets best practice," New Zealand officials wrote.

At several points during its voyage, the Chinese task group entered Australia's exclusive economic zone, according to a separate batch of documents released by Canberra.

Australia's Office of National Intelligence said this year it was the "furthest south a People's Liberation Army-Navy task group has op-

erated". Foreign policy expert David Capie said the presence of the Chinese naval task group was "unprecedented" - and clearly designed to send a message.

"The idea they could hold a military exercise, even a fairly routine one, was startling to a lot of New Zealanders," said Capie, the director of the Centre for Strategic Studies at Wellington's Victoria University.

"They didn't come this far south to see the penguins."

Capie said it also served as a pointed rebuke to Australia and New Zealand, which regularly join patrols in contested parts of the South China Sea that Beijing has tried to claim.

"This is a reminder that two can play at that game."

China sent shivers through the South Pacific in September 2024,

when it test-fired a nuclear-capable missile into the high seas near French Polynesia.

It was China's first long-range missile launch over international waters in more than 40 years.

Beijing has shrugged off both the naval exercises and the missile test as nothing more than routine military manoeuvres.

"I don't see there's any reason why the Chinese side should feel sorry about that, or even to think about apologising for that," China's ambassador to Australia said in February, speaking about the ships.

"As a major power in this region... it is normal for China to send vessels to different parts of the region to conduct various types of activities," ambassador Xiao Qian told national broadcaster ABC.

OpenAI to launch first India office in New Delhi this year

ChatGPT parent OpenAI will open its first India office in New Delhi later this year, deepening its push in its second-largest market by user numbers. OpenAI, which is backed by Microsoft, has been established as a legal entity in India and has begun hiring a local team, the company said in a statement yesterday. India is a critical market for ChatGPT, where it launched its cheapest yet monthly plan at \$4.60 just this week, targeting the nearly 1bn internet users in the world's most populous nation. OpenAI faces legal challenges in India, with news outlets and book publishers accusing the firm of using their content without permission to help train

ChatGPT. The company has denied any wrongdoing. "Opening our first office and building a local team is an important first step in our commitment to make advanced AI more accessible across the country and to build AI for India, and with India," OpenAI CEO Sam Altman said in the statement. The company faces strong competition in India from rivals like Google's Gemini and AI startup Perplexity, both of which have launched offerings that make their advanced plans free for many users in the market. India has the largest population of student users on ChatGPT, and weekly active users here have quadrupled in the past year, OpenAI said in newly shared market data yesterday.

Khelo India festival at Srinagar



Participants row during water sports events at the Khelo India festival at Dal Lake in Srinagar, India, yesterday.

Court revises Delhi stray dogs policy after outcry

AFP
New Delhi

India's Supreme Court yesterday scaled back its order to catch and remove tens of thousands of stray dogs from the capital, after feasibility questions about the sheer scale of the exercise.

The court earlier this month handed city authorities a deadline of eight weeks to round up all dogs, ordering that they be held in shelters and not released.

Indian media had suggested there were as many as a million

stray dogs in Delhi, although only nationwide figures are available, with 15mn stray dogs registered in the government's 2019 live-stock census.

The court yesterday issued a fresh order, saying that stray dogs should be "released after they are vaccinated and sterilised" unless they are suspected to have rabies or "display aggressive behaviour".

As the court ruling was issued, pro-dog activists celebrated.

"Everyone was praying," said Sonali Kalra, 59, a businesswoman. "People are looking after street dogs like their own chil-

dren, but it's not practical that they all can be taken into private homes - so the focus is sterilisation."

In 2024, there were more than 25,000 reported cases of dog bites in Delhi, a sprawling megacity of 30mn people, according to government figures, but zero recorded human deaths from rabies.

The city's media, however, regularly report on attacks by stray dogs, particularly on children and the elderly, a crisis exacerbated by a lack of sterilisation programmes and legal restrictions on canine culling.

London Tube workers to strike next month over pay demand

London Underground workers will stage rolling strikes for seven days next month in a dispute over pay and working conditions, railway trade union RMT said. The strikes, starting from September 5, will see different grades of staff taking industrial action at differing times, and is part of a dispute over pay, fatigue management, shift patterns and a reduction in the working week, the RMT said. In a separate dispute, workers on the Docklands Light Railway, which connects the financial centres of Canary Wharf and the City of London, will also be striking in the week beginning September 7, the union added. "Our members... are not after a King's ransom, but fatigue and extreme shift rotations are serious issues impacting on our members health and wellbeing," RMT general secretary Eddie Dempsey said. Dempsey said the union would continue to engage with London Underground to reach a negotiated settlement.



Union Jack and St George's flags hang as people walk through a pedestrian crossing near the Britannia International Hotel in Canary Wharf, which the government reportedly plans to use for asylum accommodation, according to Tower Hamlets Council, in London, Britain, yesterday.



MAC Cosmetics lipsticks are displayed at a cosmetics store in a mall, in Mumbai, India.

Global beauty firms look to carve up Indian market as 'last bastion' of growth

Reuters
Chennai

From Japan's Shiseido to France's L'Oreal, global cosmetics giants are doubling down on India, betting on the world's most populous nation as a key growth market for premium offerings while sales slow in developed economies.

India's luxury beauty market is expected to quintuple to \$4bn by 2035 from \$800mn in 2023, driven by its young, affluent, social-media savvy shoppers with rising disposable incomes, consulting firm Kearney and luxury beauty distributor LUXASIA said in a report.

Luxury beauty makes up just 4% of the \$21bn beauty and personal care market, compared with 8-24% across top southeast Asian countries and 25-48% in developed markets including China and the US. That means there is plenty of room for growth.

"India is the last bastion of growth for premium beauty," said Sameer Jindal, managing director for investment bank Houlihan Lokey's corporate finance business in India.

"The Indian consumer is willing to experiment and try out new things."

US beauty giant Estee Lauder, home to the brands Clinique and MAC, expects a strong runway for expansion and long-term growth in India, even as it grapples with soft sales in the Americas and Asia-Pacific. "India today, within the Estee Lauder network, is looked at as one of the priority emerging markets," said country general manager Rohan Vaziralli, highlighting plans to initially target 60mn women in the nation of more than 1.4bn.

Homemaker R Priyanka, based in the southern city of Chennai, said she was thrilled to have better access to Estee Lauder's Jo Malone London fragrance in India, as a benefit of the companies' efforts.

"It is easier than asking someone (abroad) to get it for you every time," she added.

While global beauty brands might have to modify some of their prod-

ucts for India, which bakes in sultry temperatures in summer and oppressive humidity at other times, they face little competition from homegrown brands.

Kearney and LUXASIA identified only Forest Essentials and Kama Ayurveda as their major rivals, underscoring how domestic brands make up less than a tenth of luxury beauty sales. In the more established markets of China, Japan and South Korea by comparison, domestic brands account for a 40% share.

"There is, of course, a premium perception gap between globally established brands and Indian brands," said Devangshu Dutta, founder of retail consultancy Third Eyesight.

Global beauty giants' huge marketing budgets also give them an edge over domestic brands, other industry watchers said.

Estee Lauder is studying online sales patterns to identify the smaller cities to target, such as Siliguri in West Bengal state, partnering with designers such as Sabyasachi Mukherjee, and launching products such as kohl, an eyeliner Indians favour. It has also invested in Forest Essentials, a brand with herbal ingredients, and in a programme offering funding to domestic beauty start-ups.

This year France's L'Oreal said it was investing more in India and tapping into the "elevated beauty desires" of the nation's young, digitally

savvy, empowered women shoppers to drive growth. It declined further comment.

South Korea's Amorepacific, known for brands such as Innisfree and Etude, is trying to leverage the Korean beauty craze in India with products geared to the market.

These include items for the popular "cleanser, serum, moisturiser, and sunscreen" beauty regimen, the country head, Paul Lee, said.

Japan's Shiseido, with a history of more than 150 years, brought its NARS brand to Indian beauty retailer Nykaa's website this year, and plans to step up growth of its brands in the subcontinent.

Global brands are very excited about India, where consumers are splurging more to stay on top of trends such as "cherry makeup", Nykaa co-founder Adwaita Nayar said, referring to a look featuring flushed cheeks, glossy lips, and soft pink eyes. Amazon, which has also been seeing a big boom in beauty demand in India, aims to identify emerging global trends and bring in more brands, said Siddharth Bhagat, director of beauty and fashion at the e-commerce company in India.

Retailer Shoppers Stop, which also pioneers foreign labels, plans to open 15 to 20 beauty stores in each of the next three years to boost its revenue from the segment to a quarter from less than a fifth now, its beauty business CEO Biju Kassim said.

UK to appeal against ruling on asylum hotel

Reuters
London

The British government will seek to appeal a court ruling that will force asylum seekers to be removed from a hotel that has become a focal point for anti-immigration protests, Security Minister Dan Jarvis said yesterday.

The Bell Hotel in Epping, just north of London, has seen weeks of anti-immigration demonstrations and counter protests since an Ethiopian asylum seeker living in the hotel was charged last month with sexual assault. He denies the charges.

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer's Labour government has pledged to end the costly practice of housing the thousands of asylum seekers arriving in small boats in hotels around

the country, but has said it will do so in a gradual manner.

Epping council's successful legal action to have migrants removed from the Bell Hotel has spurred other local councils to consider similar action, pressuring the government's ability to comply with its legal duty to provide accommodation for asylum seekers.

"We're going to close all asylum hotels in this parliament," Jarvis told broadcasters. "But this needs to be done in an ordered and managed fashion, and that's why we've taken the decision to appeal the legal ruling."

Hundreds of people have protested outside the Bell Hotel in recent weeks, with 16 people also having been charged in relation to what police described as criminal disorder. Similar protests have been held outside other hotels housing migrants.

AI helps UK woman rediscover lost voice after 25 years

AFP
London

British woman suffering from motor neurone disease who lost her ability to speak is once again talking in her own voice thanks to artificial intelligence (AI) and a barely audible eight-second clip from an old home video.

Sarah Ezekiel, an artist, was left without the use of her voice after she was diagnosed at the age of 34 with MND while pregnant with her second child 25 years ago.

The condition, which progressively damages parts of the nerv-

ous system, can cause weakness of the tongue, mouth and throat muscles, leading some sufferers to lose their speech completely.

In the years after her diagnosis Ezekiel, from north London, was able to use a computer and voice generating technology to help her communicate, albeit in a voice that sounded nothing like her own.

She was also able to continue her career as an artist using a computer cursor to create her images.

But her two children, Aviva and Eric, grew up never knowing how their mother had once spoken.

In recent years, experts have increasingly been able to use technology to create computerised ver-

sions of a person's original voice.

But the technique has generally required long and good quality recordings, and even then tended to produce voices that while sounding something like the sufferer were "very flat and monotone", said Simon Poole of the UK medical communication company Smartbox.

Poole said the firm had originally asked Ezekiel for an hour's worth of audio.

People who are expected to lose their ability to speak due to conditions like MND are currently encouraged to record their voice as soon as possible as a way of preserving their "identity" alongside

their ability to communicate.

But in the pre-smartphone era, having suitable recordings to draw upon was far less common.

When Ezekiel could locate only one very short and poor quality clip, Poole said his "heart sank".

The clip from a 1990s home video was just eight seconds long, muffled and with background noise from a television.

Poole turned to technology developed by New York-based AI voice experts ElevenLabs that can produce not only a voice based on very little but can also make it sound more like a real human being.

He used one AI tool to isolate a

voice sample from the clip and a second tool - trained on real voices to fill the gaps - to produce the final sound.

The result, to Ezekiel's delight, was very close to her original, complete with her London accent and the slight lisp that she had once hated.

"I sent samples to her and she wrote an e-mail back to me saying she nearly cried when she heard it," Poole said. "She said she played it to a friend who knew her from before she lost her voice and it was like having her own voice back," he added.

According to the UK's Motor Neurone Disease Association, eight in 10 sufferers endure voice difficul-

ties after diagnosis. But the timing, pitch and tone of current computer generated voices "may be quite robotic".

"The real advance with this new AI technology is the voices are really human and expressive, and they just really bring that humanity back into the voice that previously sounded a bit computerised," Poole said. Personalising a voice was a way of preserving someone's "identity", he added.

"Particularly if you acquire a condition later in life, and you lost your voice, being able to speak using your original voice is really quite important, rather than using some off the shelf voice," he said.



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GULF TIMES

The Global South must claim the climate mantle at COP30

Of all the seismic geopolitical shifts in recent years, perhaps the most striking is the West's rapid decline as a force in global climate governance. Under President Donald Trump's second administration, the US has become both more aggressive and more isolationist. Meanwhile, the European Union has grown timid, fragmented, and inward-looking. Will the Global South – especially Brazil, South Africa, India, and China – step up to fill the climate leadership vacuum?

Many developing countries have long feared that climate policies might reinforce historical inequalities or constrain their growth. But now, the Global South has an opening to ensure that the international agenda reflects its priorities.

Policymakers recognise the need for a change. While global co-operation has produced numerous important climate commitments, such as those made at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit and those contained in the 2015 Paris climate agreement, they remain largely unfulfilled. Moreover, financial support from the rich world has been well below what is needed, hindering climate action in developing countries, eroding trust in Western leaders, and lowering global ambitions.

Many developing countries have long feared that climate policies might reinforce historical inequalities or constrain their growth. But now, the Global South has an opening to ensure that the international agenda reflects its priorities

The West has controlled the climate narrative for decades, because it dominates the science that informs the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the multilateral development banks that provide climate financing, and the global media outlets that shape public opinion.

Many Global South governments have already played key roles in shaping the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris climate agreement.

There are signs that Brazil, India, South Africa, and China are building on this foundation to forge a cohesive climate

agenda ahead of the UN Climate Change Conference (COP30) in Belém, Brazil, which is focused on collective action, or *mutirão*. In April, Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and UN Secretary-General António Guterres brought together 17 heads of state from the Global South and the EU for a summit aimed at elevating countries' climate ambitions in the lead-up to COP30.

Brazil has also leveraged its Brics+ presidency to build momentum for COP30, creating a roadmap for expanding co-operation on energy security and establishing the Brics Laboratory for Trade, Climate Change, and Sustainable Development. In early July, the Brics+ Summit of presidents and heads of state approved a Leaders' Framework Declaration on Climate Finance. Whether these initiatives will deliver tangible results remains uncertain, given Brics+ countries' divergent interests.

Meanwhile, South Africa is using its G20 presidency to amplify African voices and push for debt relief, green industrialisation, and low-cost finance – in other words, it is attempting to address the structural barriers that prevent vulnerable countries from investing in climate mitigation and adaptation. With the right financial and technological support, the green transition can drive broad-based prosperity in the developing world.

The costs of clean tech have plummeted, largely owing to China's industrial capacity, making some of the material conditions for climate leadership in the Global South more favourable. Moreover, China could finance decarbonisation projects in other countries through renminbi loans, export credits, and debt-for-clean-energy swaps. If successful, Brics+ members' de-dollarisation efforts could overcome financial bottlenecks and reduce dependence on Western banks.

In today's fragmented world, multilateralism remains essential, and South-South co-operation on agreed climate targets offers a powerful platform to help revitalise it. The Global South is also well-positioned to lead plurilateral initiatives that advance climate solutions.

Of course, Western countries must be held accountable at COP30 for their historic emissions and unmet climate-finance promises. But the summit represents a vital opportunity for the Global South to demonstrate that climate and development goals are not mutually exclusive. To seize it, these countries' leaders must subordinate their differences to their overriding interest in presenting a clear-eyed vision of an energy transition that uplifts their people and protects the planet. – Project Syndicate

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Gaza's hungry children slide towards starvation as emergency treatments dwindle

Reuters

Gaza City/Geneva/Cairo

The hunger crisis in Gaza is at a tipping point, with critically low supplies of fortified milk and special nutritious pastes exacerbating food shortages and pushing greater numbers of children into starvation, according to aid agencies, malnutrition experts and the United Nations.

Almost two years since Israel's invasion, famine was formally confirmed for the first time in parts of Gaza yesterday with almost a quarter of the population facing starvation, according to the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), the main global hunger monitor working with the UN and other aid agencies.

After a global outcry at Israel severely restricting aid from March, its military began allowing more food into Gaza in late July.

But volumes are too small and distribution too chaotic to stop greater numbers of the enclave's over 2mn people becoming malnourished, while those who are already starving or vulnerable are not getting life-saving supplements, three hunger experts and aid workers from six agencies said.

According to figures from Gaza's health ministry, verified by the World Health Organisation (WHO), deaths from malnutrition and starvation are spiking. In the first seven months of the year, 89 fatalities were attributed to malnutrition or starvation, mostly children and teens. Just in August, there have been at least 138 deaths, including 25 minors, the ministry said yesterday.

Many more could follow, the IPC said. Without a ceasefire and immediate large-scale and unimpeded aid, at least 132,000 children under the age of five were at risk of death from acute malnutrition through June next year, the monitor said, doubling estimates made in its last report in May.

"We are seeing the worst possible humanitarian catastrophe that we can even measure," said Jeanette Bailey, a child nutrition lead at the International Rescue Committee, a New York-based aid organisation.

There are "going to be a lot more children dying, a lot more pregnant and lactating women suffering from malnutrition."

Some of the most malnourished children are in the few hospitals still operating in Gaza, where doctors are scrambling for supplies of special therapeutic milks.

At Rantisi Hospital in Gaza City, doctor Ahmed Basal held up an infant, arms stick thin and wizened from wasting. He said normal formula, even when available, cost up to \$58 per carton, while mothers were themselves too malnourished to breastfeed.

Gaunt-looking Aisha Wahdan gave her eight-month-old son Hatem fortified milk from a bottle, saying that before coming to hospital she



Palestinian doctor Ahmed Basal examines a child for malnutrition at Al-Rantisi Hospital in Gaza City.

tried to wean him on wild plants such as carob, chamomile and thyme because she could not breastfeed.

"There was no milk. I used natural herbs and tried everything because there was no milk substitute," she said. Malnutrition in childhood can cause lifelong physical and cognitive damage, Doctors Without Borders said yesterday.

Some ordinary baby formula, needed for those whose mothers are dead or unable to breastfeed, or when the child is unwell, has entered Gaza since the aid blockade was loosened, Unicef said on Tuesday. However, the agency said it only has stocks for 2,500 babies for a month and estimates that at least 10,000 babies need formula.

"Without consistent entry and distribution of items like specialised supplementary feeding items - high energy biscuits and fortified foods - we are watching a preventable crisis turn into a widespread nutrition emergency," said Antoine Renard, Palestine country director of the World Food Programme.

"At first it affects the most vulnerable groups but of course that will broaden," he said.

Malnutrition experts say deaths among people with existing health problems are typical in the early stages of a hunger crisis.

Israel has recognised shortages of food, but blames the United Nations for failing to effectively distribute supplies.

Ismaail al-Thawabta, the director of the Hamas-run Gaza media office said the government believed famine conditions were "more grave" than reported. "Hamas is keen more than anyone else for aid to flow into Gaza and to reach our people," he said. The United Nations human rights office in June accused Israel of "weaponising" food for civilians, calling it a war crime, after documenting hundreds of people killed by the Israeli military as they tried to reach aid distribution sites run by Israel- and US-backed organisation the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF).

The Israeli military has acknowledged that its forces have killed some Palestinians seeking aid and says it has given its troops new orders to improve their response.

Kholoud al-Aqra is three months old and weighs only 2kg, her mother Heba al-Aqra said, far below the nearly 6kg average for girls of that age listed by the World Health Organisation. Aqra is still breastfeeding, but with very little food herself she is not producing enough milk and there is none to buy, she said. Aqra said she sometimes goes one or two days with nothing to eat but a single bowl of soup.

"I am exhausted myself. I feel dizzy when I breastfeed her because there is no good food for me also," Aqra said from their shelter in Deir Al-Balah in central Gaza.

A typical treatment for an acutely malnourished nursing child like Kholoud would involve several weeks of feeding with therapeutic milk, as well as an abundance of food for her breastfeeding mother, including supplements, three nutrition experts said. Despite the increase in aid and commercial food supplies entering Gaza, there is still very little available in the market or in the charitable community kitchen where the family seeks food daily, Aqra said.

They have also not managed to find supplements for either the baby, her mother, or the family's two older children.

When malnourished people do not get supplements that they can take at home alongside an adequate amount of normal nutritious food, their condition starts to deteriorate, said Mariana Adrianopoli, a nutrition lead for the WHO.

"Those children are vulnerable. Their immune system is compromised. They are susceptible to infections that can increase rapidly," she said.

"The deterioration of health conditions in a malnourished population can be very fast," she said.

In an environment like that of Gaza today, where most people live in tents or shelters with very little clean water, and with much of the sewage system destroyed, illness is rife and people with weakened immunity are at even greater risk, all the aid agencies said.

All agencies pointed to alarming indicators showing a rapid deterioration last month that they say would require greatly increased food imports to reverse alongside weeks

of sustained extra supplements such as peanut butter paste and enriched milk formula for those most at risk. The number of children under five recorded as suffering wasting from food shortages nearly doubled from June to over 12,000, the WHO said, while more than 2,500 had the most severe form of extreme weight loss that can lead to death from starvation.

Those figures only represent children who showed up at clinics or hospitals, so the true number is likely much higher, all the agencies and hunger experts said.

At the same time, of 290,000 children under five who need supplements to prevent them sliding into severe malnourishment, only 3% were reached in July, a report by UN aid agency OCHA said, a major drop from an average of 26% between April and June. In response to questions, OCHA attributed the drop to limits on the quantities allowed in, active conflict and desperation that results in looting.

Unicef said its stocks of the small packs of the nutritious pastes have either run out or nearly run out, with only enough for 5,000 children for the next month, the agency said. Last month, media reported Gaza would also run out of another specialised therapeutic food needed to save children already suffering the severe malnutrition that causes wasting by mid-August if nothing changed.

Unicef has since been able to bring in some of those supplements, known as RUTF, but only enough for just below 5,800 children for one month. Unicef calculates a current caseload of 70,000 children requiring RUTF.

Agriculture and fishing, traditionally the main sources of food inside Gaza, have been decimated by the war and the enclave's more than 2mn people rely almost entirely on imports.

Israel ended a ceasefire in March and imposed a near total blockade on aid entering Gaza until late May, when the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation began distributing food boxes at four places in the enclave.

GHF, in partnership with Samaritan's Purse, an evangelical Christian aid organisation, began bringing in supplementary pastes last week, according to GHF's daily reports, totalling more than 150,000 packs so far, enough for around 5,000 children for a month.

GHF and Samaritan's Purse did not immediately respond to requests for comment. Commercial supplies have also started entering Gaza - a step seen as crucial to increasing overall food amounts and preventing a sharper slip towards widespread malnutrition by providing fresh produce and richer foods like eggs, dairy and meat. But few people can afford to buy.

"The overall volume of nutrition supplies remains completely insufficient to prevent further deterioration. The market needs to be flooded. There needs to be dietary diversity," said Rik Peepers, World Health Organisation representative for Palestine.

Who really wins in the US-EU trade deal?

By Laura Tyson and George Papaconstantinou
Berkeley/Florence

US President Donald Trump's "reciprocal tariffs" have overturned the system of global trade. The vague, non-binding "agreements" he has announced are an obfuscation. Each has been unilaterally imposed, leveraging America's economic and geopolitical power to extract concessions from trading partners. That is why the tariff rates vary both by country (sometimes reflecting political motives) and by sector (steel, autos and auto parts, and semiconductors).

The average US tariff rate now stands at 18.6%, the highest since the Smoot-Hawley tariff that crippled the global economy and contributed to the Great Depression. Gone are the principles of national treatment (treating foreign and domestic producers equally) and most favoured nation (treating trading partners equally), the cornerstones of the postwar order that fostered trade, cross-border investment flows, and economic development around the world.

Trump is asserting that he, rather than Congress, has the authority to set tariffs in response to a "national emergency". But since there is no emergency, the US Supreme Court should deem the tariffs unconstitutional when it finally rules on the matter. Whether it will, however, is uncertain. The recent US trade deal with the European Union (EU) – "negotiated" in a peremptory meeting between Trump and European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen – underscored one of Trump's ostensible goals: to achieve America's re-industrialisation through protectionism for domestic producers and commitments by trading partners to invest in the US.

Hence, the tariffs are limited to trade in goods. While the US has consistently run a merchandise-

trade deficit with the EU (\$183bn in 2023), its services trade with the bloc has consistently been in surplus (\$127bn in 2023).

The EU is also a major source of investment, production, and employment in the US. Before the handshake deal, EU companies had already invested more than \$2.4tn in the US economy, and cross-border investments between the US and the EU were valued at nearly \$5tn in 2023. Many EU business investments in the US are in the same sectors as EU exports to the US – biotech (pharmaceuticals), automobiles, aerospace, and chemicals. In 2023, European companies employed more than 3.4mn US workers.

But now, most imports of European goods will face a 15% tariff. Certain strategic items are exempted, and the tariff for steel and aluminium will be 50% (a policy at odds with Trump's re-industrialisation goal, since it increases US manufacturing and construction costs). While the Europeans see the 15% rate as a ceiling, Trump sees it as a baseline.

Nor are the tariffs reciprocal: the EU agreed to eliminate its remaining low tariffs on most US industrial goods, while "improving" market access for some US agricultural and fishery products. Meanwhile, the EU will maintain its low tariffs on imports from other trading partners, in keeping with its most-favoured-nation commitments. As part of the deal, the EU also agreed to purchase \$750bn worth of US energy by 2028, and to mobilise \$600bn in business investment in the US by 2029.

The investment commitment is not enforceable, since those decisions ultimately fall to European companies. Still, the \$600bn target is reachable, considering that EU companies invested about \$605bn in the US over the last three years. The energy commitment, however, is delusional. US companies would struggle to supply \$250bn in energy exports to the EU each year, given that their

global energy exports totalled only \$165bn in 2024. In any case, pursuing the \$250bn target would disrupt energy-market dynamics globally.

Ultimately, the energy deal is sure to fail, as did the 2019-21 US-China energy deal. And over the longer term, Trump's anti-renewables policies will weaken US producers in those sectors, handing the future to China and other Asia-Pacific countries, which already account for 90% of the global manufacturing capacity in EV batteries and fuel cells, and for almost all solar panels.

So, who "wins" in the US-EU agreement? Many see the EU as the clear loser, since the US clearly managed to use its hegemonic power to extract favourable terms. But this power rests on the strength of the US economy, which Trump's policies – unsustainable deficits, cuts to scientific research, attacks on central-bank independence, immigration restrictions, handouts to the fossil-fuel industry – are quickly subverting.

Moreover, in the short run, the tariffs will raise prices for US consumers and increase costs for US producers (including foreign investors in the US), slowing the economy. The resulting disruption in global trade will raise prices and slow growth in the EU, too, but by considerably less.

The EU faced a choice. It could pursue a costly trade war or agree to "the best deal we could get under very difficult circumstances" – circumstances that included an implicit US threat to withdraw support from Nato.

The EU can counter the negative effects of the tariffs by diversifying its trading partners and negotiating new trade agreements with them. US tariffs are already encouraging closer trading relations with likeminded developed countries like Australia, Canada, Japan, and South Korea. They may also lend momentum to trade talks between the EU and Latin America's Mercosur bloc, as well as with Asean "connector" economies that are critical to global supply chains. – Project Syndicate

Activists block Oslo financial institutions

AFP
Oslo

Climate and pro-Palestinian activists, including Greta Thunberg, temporarily blocked access to Norway's central bank yesterday and occupied the headquarters of the country's largest bank in protest at their Israeli and fossil fuel investments.

The actions in Oslo were part of a civil disobedience campaign intended to last around 10 days, with the aim of influencing parliamentary elections scheduled for September 8.

Members of environmental group Extinction Rebellion and a pro-Palestinian group blocked access to the central bank, which also oversees country's massive sovereign wealth fund.

In a statement, they accused the central bank of keeping investments, through the sovereign fund, in companies "that support the illegal occupation and genocide in Palestine".

Another group of activists stormed and occupied the lobby of DNB bank, demanding that it stop funding the development of fossil fuels.

"DNB is the Nordic bank that invests the most money in oil and gas, nearly three times more than the runner-up," activist Lea Wiggen said in the statement.

"When we demand an exit from fossil fuels, this also applies to companies investing in the collapse of our society," she added.

Norway, western Europe's biggest oil and gas producer, is regularly criticised for its huge fossil fuel output, but its main political parties have no plans to end production.

Russia rejects meeting with Zelensky

AFP/Reuters
Moscow/Kyiv

Russia has ruled out an immediate meeting with Volodymyr Zelensky, as diplomatic tension with the Ukrainian president escalated and US mediation efforts appeared to stall.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said "no meeting" between Vladimir Putin and Zelensky was planned, as North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato) chief Mark Rutte visited Kyiv, largely to discuss security guarantees for Ukraine.

US President Donald Trump had raised expectations for a swift summit between the Russian and Ukrainian presidents by saying earlier in the week they had agreed to meet, but yesterday compared the two men to "oil and vinegar".

"They don't get along too well, for obvious reasons," he told reporters in Washington.

Lavrov also poured cold water on hopes for direct Putin-Zelensky talks to resolve the conflict, now in its fourth year, by questioning the Ukrainian president's legitimacy and

repeating the Kremlin's maximalist claims.

"There is no meeting planned," Lavrov said in an interview with NBC's *Meet the Press* with Kristen Welker.

Lavrov told the US broadcaster that Putin was "ready to meet Zelensky" as soon as an agenda was prepared, adding that the agenda was "not ready at all".

In Kyiv, speaking alongside Rutte, Zelensky said Ukraine had "no agreements with the Russians", saying Ukraine had agreed only with Trump on how the diplomatic direction could proceed.

Zelensky said that Russia was doing everything it could to stop a meeting between him and Vladimir Putin from taking place.

The Ukrainian leader has repeatedly called for Putin to meet him, saying that it is the only way to negotiate an end to Russia's war in Ukraine.

"The Russians are doing everything they can to prevent the meeting from taking place," he said yesterday at the press conference with Rutte. "The meeting is one of the components of how to end the war. And since they don't want to end it, they will look for space to (avoid it)."

The question of eventual security guar-

antees for Ukraine has been front and centre during the latest US-led diplomatic push to broker a peace deal to end the conflict.

Trump earlier said Russia had agreed to some Western security guarantees for Kyiv.

However, Moscow later cast doubt on any such arrangement, Lavrov saying on Wednesday that discussing them without Russia was "a utopia, a road to nowhere".

"When Russia raises the issue of security guarantees, I honestly do not yet know who is threatening them," said Zelensky, who wants foreign troops in Ukraine to deter Russian attacks in the future.

The Kremlin has long said it would never accept that, citing Ukraine's Nato ambition as one of the pretexts for its assault.

"There are several principles which Washington believes must be accepted, including no Nato membership, including the discussion of territorial issues, and Zelensky said no to everything," Lavrov told NBC.

On a visit to Kyiv, during which an air raid alert sounded across the city, Rutte said security guarantees were needed to ensure "Russia will uphold any deal and will never ever again attempt to take one square kilometre of Ukraine".

Moscow signed the Budapest Memorandum in 1994, which was aimed at ensuring security for Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan in exchange for them giving up numerous nuclear weapons left from the Soviet era.

Russia violated that first by taking Crimea in 2014, and then by starting a full-scale offensive in 2022, which has killed tens of thousands of people and forced millions to flee their homes.

Russia has maintained its longstanding demand for Ukraine to give up land it still holds in two eastern regions while proposing to freeze the front line in two more southerly regions Moscow claims fully as its own and possibly hand back small pieces of other Ukrainian territory it controls.

Zelensky meanwhile has dropped his demand for a lengthy ceasefire as a prerequisite for the leaders' meeting, even though he has previously said Ukraine cannot negotiate under the barrel of a gun.

Yesterday he called on his country's allies to pressure Russia into "at least a minimally productive position", including by applying fresh sanctions if Russia showed no interest in moving towards peace.

German, French post offices restrict packages to US over tariffs

The postal services of Germany and France have announced a raft of restrictions on package deliveries to the United States due to tariffs imposed by President Donald Trump.

DHL, which owns the Deutsche Post service, said that from today it would "temporarily suspend" its standard category of US package delivery, the preferred option for many small businesses.

"The reason for the restrictions, which we expect to be temporary, are new processes for postal delivery which have been put in place by the US authorities," DHL said in a statement. "Important questions have not yet been answered, including who will have to pay the tariffs and how."

France's La Poste told AFP it would suspend from Monday package deliveries to the US, except for gifts sent by in-

dividuals with a value of less than €100 (\$116).

It said the new rules had been issued only on August 15, "leaving European postal services with an extremely limited timeframe to get prepared".

"Moreover, their related documentation still requires further clarification," La Poste added in a statement.

Each year the French service sends 1.6mn packages to the US, 80% from businesses and 20% from individuals.

Other European postal services, including in Belgium, Austria and Denmark, have already taken similar measures. DHL said a more expensive "express" service for packages weighing up to 70kg (154 pounds) would still be available.

Individual customers will also still be able to send items as presents with a maximum value of \$100 (€86) but DHL warned that these would be subject to extra checks to pre-

vent the service being used for commercial goods.

In late July the Trump administration said that as of August 29 it would abolish a tax exemption on small packages entering the US.

Such packages with a value of less than \$800 will now be taxed at 15%, the same rate as other imports from the European Union.

That general tariff rate was agreed under a deal struck between Brussels and Washington late last month.

In April, DHL said it was suspending delivery of packages to the United States with a value in excess of \$800.

It cited changes to US Customs rules as part of Trump's trade war, which lowered the threshold at which parcels to individuals require formal entry processing by US Customs to \$800 from \$2,500 - leading to significant delays. - **AFP**

Chinese tiger, French berets and space cannons mark Gamescom

By Kilian Fichou and Tom Barfield
AFP

A new instalment in Chinese action saga *Black Myth*, a long-awaited indie favourite and stereotypically French cosplay have all marked the vast Gamescom trade fair this week in Cologne.

The event draws more than 300,000 people each year to the city on the Rhine.

Announced with video of a towering tiger straddled by a grim bearded warrior, *Black Myth: Zhong Kui* - the follow-up to 2024's smash hit *Wukong* - had more gamers leaping out of their seats than the next instalment in the long-running *Call of Duty* shooter series.

The second game from Chinese developers Game Science was acclaimed by the audience at Gamescom's Tuesday opening night, with cheers far outstripping those for *Call of Duty: Black Ops 7*.

Anticipation is high based on *Wukong*, which sold more than 25mn copies to become 2024's biggest gaming success story.

Game Science calls the upcoming title a new chapter in a broader sequence drawing on Chinese mythology, rather than a direct follow-on to the original - itself adapted from the 16th-Century novel *Journey to the West*.

The developers have yet to let on about a release date.

After a years-long wait for the sequel to a beloved indie hit, fans finally got their hands on *Hollow Knight: Silksong* at Gamescom, ahead of a September 4 release on PC and consoles.

Developed by a small Australian indie studio, *Silksong* sees the return of the original game's diminutive grey hero with huge black eyes.

Queues to test out the game got so long that organisers had to restrict access, handing out tickets for lucky fans to show up at a given time slot.

"I'm only here at Gamescom to see *Resident Evil* and *Silksong*... now nobody can get in and play without a ticket," complained Jens Ragas, 45, adding that he loved the original game as a way to connect with his 11-year-old son.

More than 5mn people had added *Silksong* to their wishlists on games publishing platform Steam ahead of Gamescom, a rarely attained figure that is a sign of fans' powerful appetite.

The first *Hollow Knight* has sold more than 9mn copies since its 2017 release, according to specialist data firm Alinea Analytics.

No shortage of spiky-haired anime heroes, giant robots and sword-wielding warriors were visible among Gamescom attendees who dressed up for the occasion.



This picture taken on Wednesday shows German Minister for Research, Technology and Space Dorothee Baer, and Minister-President of North Rhine-Westphalia Hendrik Wuest, at Gamescom 2025 in Cologne. - **Reuters**

Left: A cosplayer is seen at the *Arknights Endfield* video game booth during the Gamescom video games trade fair. - **AFP**



Gamers play the *World Warcraft Midnight* video game during the Gamescom video games trade fair at the Trade Fair Centre in Cologne. - **AFP**



A giant robot walks during the Gamescom video games trade fair. - **AFP**

Attacks kill 18 in Colombia

Two attacks blamed on dissident guerilla groups killed 18 people and wounded dozens in Colombia on Thursday, one involving a truck bomb while a drone downed a police helicopter in the other, deepening the country's most serious security crisis in decades.

The latest deadly attacks, which struck the southwestern city of Cali and a coca farm in the north, pose fresh challenges to Colombia's fragile peace processes ahead of elections next year.

Around 3pm local time (2000 GMT), a truck loaded with explosives was detonated on a busy street near a military aviation school in Cali, killing six people and wounding more than 60, officials said.

"There was a thunderous sound of something exploding near the air base," 65-year-old eyewitness Hector Fabio Bolanos told AFP.

Defence Minister Pedro Sanchez blamed the attack on the Central General Staff (EMC) guerrilla group, led by warlord Ivan Mordisco.

The group broke away from the defunct Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Farc) after it agreed to lay down arms in 2016.

Earlier on Thursday in the northeast of the country, guerrillas from another breakaway Farc rroup attacked police overseeing the eradication of coca crops, which are used to produce cocaine.

The fighters shot down the helicopter and killed 12 police officers, wounding three more, Antioquia departmental governor Andres Julian Rendon told a press conference. - **AFP**

Danish students to be allowed to use AI for English exams

AFP
Copenhagen

Students in some high schools in Denmark will be allowed to use artificial intelligence (AI) to prepare for English language exams from next year, the education ministry announced yesterday.

The move comes as education authorities around the world debate whether AI is a useful learning tool for those entering an increasingly digital economy, or a slippery slope to producing dumbed-down graduates.

The Danish government said the permitted use of AI in the English curriculum from 2026 would be experimental, and apply only to the oral component of the English exam for the high school diploma.

In that test, once a student is handed their topic, they would have one hour to prepare, during which they would be "permitted to use all available tools, including generative AI", the ministry said.

The students would then have to give their oral presentation in person in front of an examiner.

"We are launching pilot schemes to try to find the right balance," Education Minister Mattias Tesfaye said in a statement, emphasising the need to encourage digital learning while upholding teaching standards. "With students growing up in both analogue and digital worlds, we need to ready them in the best way possible for the reality they will encounter after their schooling."

When it comes to the written part of the English test, the ministry said students would have to do part of it handwritten to ensure no reliance on computers.

That will be a break from previous years, when students typed into computers connected to the Internet.

"For certain linguistic aspects, it is prudent to have exams that are totally non-digital," the minister said. "That limits cheating and helps students to develop their own style of language."

In Europe, high school students already have to do similar exams using handwriting, not computers.

Denmark has been allowing students to use the Internet since 2008 when they take their exams.

The Danish AI experiment will only be open to high schools that volunteer to take part.



Students visit correctional and penal institutions

The Department of Penal and Correctional Institutions received a number of diploma students in Police Sciences from the Police Institute of the Police Academy, the Ministry of Interior said in an X post.

The visit was part of co-operation with the Academy to train and qualify its members, and fulfil the requirements of both theoretical and practical studies. The students were welcomed by Major-General Nasser Mohammed Issa al-Sayed,



the director of the Department of Penal and Correctional Institutions, and assistant director Colonel Yousef Bilal al-Abdullah, along with a number of officers and staff of the department. The visit programme included an intro-

ductory lecture highlighting the department's role in rehabilitating and reforming inmates, and reviewing its main responsibilities and efforts in providing a safe and motivating environment for positive change. The students also took a field tour of the

institution's facilities, where they were briefed on the range of services provided to inmates, including educational, training, and rehabilitation programmes designed to enhance their opportunities for positive reintegration into society.



Very hot, dusty weather forecast

Hot to very hot and slight dusty weather is forecast today (Saturday) across Qatar by the Met office. The expected minimum and maximum temperatures are in the 30-34° Celsius and 40-46C range, respectively. Yesterday's minimum and maximum temperatures were in the 31-35C and 38-45C range, respectively. Pictured is a dusty scene from late afternoon yesterday in Doha. **PICTURE:** Shaji Kayamkulam



The 10-day event showcases an array of Thai dishes, including its popular sticky rice with mango (pictured below). **PICTURES:** Joey Aguilar and supplied



Thai envoy sees 'two-way street' in tourism, culinary exchange

By Joey Aguilar
Staff Reporter

Events such as the newly launched 'Thai Restaurant Week 2025: A Thai Culinary Journey in Qatar' draw visitors to Thailand and position the Gulf nation as a popular culinary tourism hub, Thai ambassador Sira Swangsilpa said.

Speaking to *Gulf Times* on the sidelines of the 10-day gastronomic celebration's opening on Thursday (August 21) at Grand Hyatt Doha Hotel, the envoy highlighted the significant tourism flow between the two countries, revealing that more than 40,000 Qataris visited Thailand in 2024 alone.

This number, he noted, excludes other GCC nationals, underscoring the strong travel interest from Qatar.

"Absolutely!" Swangsilpa stressed when asked about the impact of such events on attracting visitors to Thailand. "But likewise, it is not only one-way tourism."

He pointed out that by hosting more events like the Thai Restaurant Week, Qatar itself can cultivate its identity as a tourism destination, particularly in the culinary sphere.

Swangsilpa said that a greater number of these culinary events in Qatar could transform the nation into a significant tourism hub, especially for food lovers, capitalising on its lively food scene to achieve a reciprocal tourism benefit.

The envoy also projected continued growth for Thai restaurants within Qatar, citing the current count of over 20 establishments, both within and outside hotels.

This expansion, he attributed to the deep-rooted cultural and people-to-people relations that have flourished over the past 45 years of diplomatic ties between Thailand and Qatar.

"Every sector, every dimension of our relations is strong not only political and economic, but also people-to-people and cultural through our Thai traditions, Thai food," Swangsilpa said.



Thai ambassador Sira Swangsilpa at the 'Thai Restaurant Week 2025: A Thai Culinary Journey in Qatar'. He said such kind of events position the Gulf nation as a popular culinary tourism hub, apart from attracting visitors to Thailand.

He said that the Thai embassy in Doha remains committed to fostering this cultural exchange, collaborating with local Thai restaurants and actively seeking the support of Qatari friends.

This initiative, he added, not only enriches Qatar's cultural diversity but also solidifies the bonds of friendship between their peoples.

About the popularity of Thai food in Qatar and the region, Swangsilpa pointed to a crucial element beyond the dishes themselves: hospitality.

"Not only our cuisine but our hospitality," he said. "Thai people always extend our hearts to our guests."

This feeling of warmth and welcome, he noted, is palpable whether one visits Thailand or any Thai establishment, including the restaurants in Qatar, which feature Thai chefs, waiters, and authentic decorations to evoke that characteristic Thai spirit.

The launch of Thai Restaurant Week 2025, with the participation of 13 Thai restaurants across Qatar, welcomed more than 100 guests, including Wasan al-Baker, the director of Ministry of Public Health's Food Safety Department, ambassadors, and food enthusiasts, among other guests.

"This initiative goes beyond dining, it is about inspiring a passion for Thai food, honouring the creativity of Thai restaurants in Qatar, and promoting meaningful cultural exchange between our two countries," Swangsilpa said.

