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Leaders tell Iran to stop meddling in region

GCC Summit issues final communique

Manama/Doha
The Peninsula

The 37th GCC Supreme Council meeting which concluded in Manama yesterday expressed satisfaction over the achievements made for implementation of defence integration among the GCC countries to build a strong partnership and establish an effective defence system to confront the different challenges and threats.

Emir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani attended the closing session of the summit, along with other GCC leaders.

A statement issued at the end of the summit, the council also lauded steps as well as the steps taken to establish a unified military leadership and instructed that all remaining procedure to have it completed be taken. The council was briefed on a report submitted by the joint defence council as an outcome of its meeting held in Riyadh in November 2016 on the joint defense field and endorsed them.

The council confirmed the GCC's firm positions towards terrorism and extremism and their rejection of all their forms and kinds as well as their motives and justifications whatever their source and urged for working to dry up their source of finance.

The Supreme Council expressed its total rejection of the continuation of Iranian interference in the internal affairs of the GCC countries and the region, and called for full commitment to fundamentals and the basic principles and foundations based on the principle of good neighborliness and respect for sovereignty, non-interference in internal affairs, non-use or threat of force.

The Supreme Council stressed the need for Iran to change its policy in the region, so as to abide by international conventions and treaties and not to embrace and harboring terrorist groups on its territory, including Hezbollah militia and support of terrorist militias in the region, and not to ignite sectarian strife in region. The Supreme Council denounced the attempts of Iran aimed at politicizing the Haj aimed to offend the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, calling on Iranian officials to refrain from such actions and attitudes, and cooperate with the official authorities in Saudi Arabia to organise the Haj season, to allow Iranian pilgrims to perform rituals.

The Supreme Council expressed its condemnation for the continuation of Iranian interference in the internal affairs of countries in the region, including Bahrain, and by supporting terrorism, training of terrorists and the smuggling of weapons, explosives and inciting sectarian strife and continuing statements at various levels to disturb security and order and stability.

The Supreme Council welcomed the condemnation by the Human Rights Council in September of the blatant and systematic violations in Syria by the Syrian political regime and its militias. With regard to Yemen, the GCC highlighted its full commitment to the unity of Yemen, the respect of its sovereignty and independence and the rejection of any interference in its internal affairs.

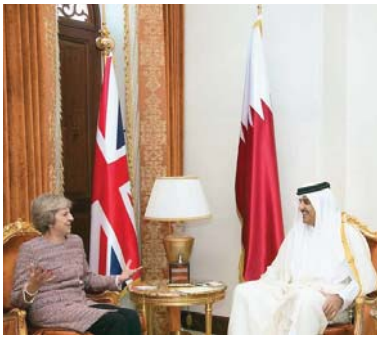
➔ Continued on page 3



Emir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani with British Prime Minister Theresa May and GCC leaders during the GCC-United Kingdom First Summit in Manama, Bahrain, yesterday.



Emir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani participating in the GCC Summit, along with members of the official Qatari delegation.



Emir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani with British Prime Minister Theresa May, in Manama, Bahrain, yesterday.

GCC & UK agree on Strategic Partnership

Manama/Doha
The Peninsula

A joint summit between GCC leaders and British Prime Minister Theresa May, in Bahrain's capital Manama yesterday agreed to launch the GCC-UK Strategic Partnership to foster closer relations in all fields, including political, defence, security, and trade.

The two sides also agreed to enhance people-to-people contact, and develop collective approaches to regional issues.

The Emir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani participated in the summit, along with his Personal Representative H H Sheikh Jassim bin Hamad Al Thani and members of the official Qatari delegation.

Addressing the meeting, May said her country will spend over £3bn on defence in the Gulf region over the next decade, "spending more on defense in the Gulf than in any other region of the world." On the issue of Gulf security, May said: "We must also continue to confront state actors whose influence fuels instability in the region. So I want to assure you that I am clear-eyed about the threat that Iran poses to the Gulf and the wider Middle East."

On regional conflicts, the leaders decided on a set of common principles, including a shared recognition that there is no military solution to the region's armed civil conflicts.

"These can only be resolved through political and peaceful means, respect for all states' sovereignty and non-interference in their internal affairs contrary to international law, the need for inclusive governance in conflict-ridden societies, as well as protection of all minorities and of human rights," said a joint communique issued at the end of the summit. statement.

The leaders committed to continue working towards a sustainable political resolution in Syria that ends the war and establishes an inclusive government that protects all ethnic and religious communities, and preserves state institutions. They agreed to increase regional pressure on the Assad regime and its backers by heightening financial disruption and economic constraints.

The GCC states and the UK further affirmed their commitment to assisting the Iraqi Government and the International Global Coalition in their fight against Daesh, including post-liberation stabilisation efforts.

➔ Continued on page 4

DEC to become modern entertainment city

The Peninsula

The Technical Committee for the Promotion of Private Sector Engagement in Development Projects at the Ministry of Economy and Commerce yesterday announced plans to change the Doha Exhibition Center (DEC) into a modern entertainment city and has invited tenders from prospective private investors.

The committee has invited interested investors to take part in the project in collaboration with Qatar Tourism Authority.

A total area of 84,875 sqm has been allocated for private investment which includes 57,600 sqm built-up area, along with parking space with total area of 26,075 sqm. it also includes the outside open places with total areas of 1,200sqm and exhibition area of 14,992 sqm, and shops with a total area of 479 sqm.

➔ Continued on page 4

The Peninsula CSR
Included with today's edition is a 4-page supplement on CSR



'Sekak': Nama Center honours 30 teachers

The Peninsula

Nama Center, a member of Qatar Social Work Foundation, yesterday honoured 30 teachers who have successfully completed the "Sekak" project, which is centred on Life Skills & Style Enhancement.

At the end of the five-day intensive training programme, Nama Center organised an honoring ceremony for the teachers who participated in the "Sekak" project, at the Qatar National Convention Center (QNCC). The training started on the November 20, 2016, at Nama Center.

"Youth capacity-building is at the core of Nama's vision, which aims to create a platform that is conductive to investing in their creative abilities and harnessing their potential as active partners in civil work, community development, and the renaissance of our nation said Mariam bint Abdullatif Al Mannai – Director of the Community Services Department, and the Director in charge of running Nama's affairs.

Achievement of such mission requires training the trainers who in turn will mentor and teach young people to innovate, take action and lead the way, she added.

Teachers honoured

- **Nama Center organises honouring ceremony for teachers who participated in the 'Sekak' project.**
- **Teachers empowered with the knowledge and skills necessary to better handle and train school students.**

The event was held in the presence of Fawzia Abdulaziz Al Khater, Assistant Undersecretary for Educational Affairs at the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, and Amaal bint Abdullatif Al Mannai, CEO of Qatar Foundation for Social Work, along with a number of school principals.

The newly-graduated teachers, who come from various schools across the country, have been empowered with the knowledge and skills necessary to better handle and train high school students as well as develop their basic cognitive and life skills.

Mariam Al Mannai added: "We are incredibly proud of all the teachers who participated, committed themselves and successfully concluded their 'Sekak' multi-dimensional training programme. They are entrusted to carry out the mission of empowering our country's youth with the life skills and knowledge they need to create a better tomorrow for themselves and their communities."

The multi-faceted training sessions of Sekak project worked on boosting the training skills of trainers (Training the Trainers), and their capacity to effectively convey life skills, concepts and ideas through short and effective presentations.

The project focused on helping teachers instill into high school students the right set of personal, psychological and communication skills that will assist them in making informed decisions, communicating effectively, as well as developing their coping and self-management skills, thereby leading them to live a healthy and productive life.

DICID participates in Doha Book Fair

The Peninsula

The Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue (DICID) is participating in Doha Book Fair 2016 with a variety of publications and activities including seminars and workshops.

The center's publications showcased at the book fair include a book entitled "Spiritual and Intercultural Safety in the Light of Religious Doctrines" which includes the proceedings of the 12th Doha Interfaith Conference. This is not the first time DICID is participating in Doha book fair because the event is a cultural festival embodying the real meaning of dialogue, said Ibrahim Saleh Al Naimi, Director of the Board of Directors of DICID.



GCC supports French initiative on Palestine

Continued from page 1

The Supreme Council stressed the importance of a political solution in accordance with the Gulf initiative, the outcome of the National Dialogue Conference, and the unconditional implementation of United Nations Resolution 2216 (2015).

The Supreme Council said that the formation of a so-called national salvation government and political council by the Houthis and supporters of Abdulla Saleh were a violation of the internationally recognised constitutional legitimacy and represented obstacles to a political solution.

The council expressed profound concern and denunciation of the US Congress law called Justice Against Sponsoring Terrorism Act, contrary to all international norms and laws and bases of relations among world member countries and the principle of sovereign immunity, hoping that the US authorities would reconsider this legislation as it would have negative reflections on relations among countries, including the United States, in addition to the international economic harms that might be sustained from it.

The Council assigned the consultative commission to study the following issues: Importance and hazards of social media networks, Role of women in comprehensive development in the GCC framework and fields of strategic cooperation among the GCC and Africa.

FREE TRADE TALKS

The Supreme Council blessed the resumption of free trade negotiations with China. The council was briefed on the progress of negotiation rounds.



Emir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani with the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bahrain Prince Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa at the Sakhir Palace in Bahrain yesterday.

The Supreme Council reaffirmed its support for the French initiative and all Arab and international efforts to broaden participation to solve the Palestinian Cause and speed up holding of the International Conference on Peace and work on ending Israeli occupation and establishment of an independent State of Palestine with full sovereignty.

The Council called on the international community to pressure Israel to end its occupation of all occupied Arab territories including the Syrian Golan Heights.

The council reviewed a number of reports on the routine common integration march including the following: progress of GCC monetary council, GCC railway project, GCC common market, water network and water comprehensive strategy, implementation of education-related resolutions of the Supreme Council, the GCC preventive plan to combat contagious diseases

The Council approved a proposal to link the payment systems of the GCC countries and authorised the monetary agencies, and central banks of the member states to possess, run and finance the project through establishing an independent company. This is intended to provide a safe and swift environment for money transfers across the GCC.

Emir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani attended the closing session of the summit, along with other GCC leaders.

ECONOMIC INTEGRATION

The Supreme Council reviewed the economic and developmental integration march among the GCC countries and underscored the importance of continuing consolidating cooperation and integration among the member states prior to reaching the implementation of the Supreme Council resolutions as regards the implementation of perfect equality of reciprocal treatment among the citizens of the GCC countries in the field of Gulf common market.

The Council approved the exchange of credit information among the member states according to a short-term working plan and the comprehensive framework for the mechanism of facilitating the exchange of credit data of the council.

The Council approved the law on combating commercial cheating in the GCC countries as an imperative system of all

The council underscored the importance of commitment to implement the GCC railway project and decided transferring the matter to the economic and developmental affairs to forge the necessary mechanism to complete the project as prescribed and as per the vision of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques.

The Council blessed the secretariat-general's initiative to recruit female and male youths as consultants at the secretariat general on the youths issues and interests and underscored the importance of the secretariat general continuing to organize youths events as part of the annual GCC days.

The Council instructed the embassies and consulates of the GCC countries as well as competent authorities to get reassured of the health of expatriates using the electronic test system linking the GCC countries.

The Supreme Council conveyed condolences on the death of Grandfather Emir H H Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad Al Thani, recalling his efforts in the establishment of the GCC and supportive positions for its joint march and enhancing it in all fields.

The Council followed with profound concern and strong denunciation the targeting by Houthi militias and Saleh of Makkah using a ballistic missile in flagrant negligence of the city's sanctity for the whole Islamic nation, a move considered by the Supreme Council as leading to tampering the security of the Islamic Ummah, spreading sectarian sedition and supporting terrorism in the region.

The Council congratulated the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on being re-elected member of the Human Rights Council by the UN general assembly for three years, starting 2017.

The Council congratulated Donald Trump on winning the US presidential elections, looking forward to enhancing the historic and strategic relations between the U.S. and the region and wishing the U.S. friendly people steady progress and prosperity under the new president's leadership.

The Council followed up with great concern the abduction of a number of Qatari citizens in southern Iraq who entered the country with official entry visas and upon coordination with the Qatari embassy in Doha.

The Council considered this terrorist act as a flagrant breach of the international law and violation of human rights in addition to being contrary to the rules of Islamic religion and harms the relations between Arab brothers.

The Council expressed solidarity with the Qatari government and supports whatever measure it might take to secure their return and requests the Iraqi government to spare no effort to secure their release.

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GCC and Britain to intensify cooperation

Continued from page 1

They encouraged the Iraqi Government to achieve genuine national reconciliation by urgently addressing the legitimate grievances of all elements of Iraqi society through the implementation of reforms, including those previously agreed, and by ensuring that all armed groups operate under the strict control of the Iraqi state.

With regard to Yemen, the GCC states and the UK emphasised the need to resolve the conflict peacefully through political dialogue and negotiations facilitated by the UN based on the GCC initiative, the outcomes of the National Dialogue Conference, the UN Security Council Resolution 2216 and other relevant UNSC Resolutions.

The GCC states and the UK look forward to working together on Yemen's reconstruction – including rebuilding the economy, sea ports, and public services – once the peace process is concluded.

The leaders decided to move jointly to convince all Libyan parties to accept an inclusive power-sharing agreement under the framework of the UN-brokered Libyan Political Agreement according to UNSC resolutions 2259, 2278 and the Skheirat Accord, and to continue to focus on countering the terrorist presence in the country.

They strongly affirmed the necessity of resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the basis of a just, lasting, comprehensive peace agreement that results in an independent and contiguous Palestinian state living side-by-side in peace and security with Israel, based on the Arab Peace Initiative and UN resolutions.



The GCC leaders and British Prime Minister Theresa May at the 37th session of GCC Supreme Council in Manama yesterday.

The GCC and the United Kingdom will hold a Working Group on Counter-Terrorism and Border Security to follow up on previous efforts to cooperate on border security, countering the financing of terrorism, cyber-security, and critical infrastructure protection.

The leaders also decided to strengthen counter-terrorist work on financing, through the GCC member states and UK increasing efforts to cut off terrorist financing, including through enhanced intelligence exchange and enforcement efforts to freeze assets of individuals and entities designated under relevant UN Security Council Resolutions, especially in the region.

The GCC states and the UK will work together to counter Iran's destabilising activities in the region.

They stressed the need for Iran to engage the region according to the principles of good neighbourliness, strict non-interference in domestic affairs, and respect for territorial integrity consistent with international laws and the United Nations Charter, and for Iran to take concrete, practical steps to build trust and resolve its differences with its neighbours through peaceful means.

The GCC and the UK decided to enhance joint efforts to improve defence cooperation, as well as on maritime security and cyber-security.

They will build on existing bilateral relations and expand towards increased military cooperation to tackle current threats and fortify defences in the region through joint exercises and including maritime and border security. This includes a UK presence throughout the Gulf, including coordination through the Regional British Defence Staff to be based in Dubai.

The GCC member states and the UK will also establish a National Security Dialogue to build GCC member states' capacity to coordinate security issues more effectively, and develop a framework for a regional response to crises. This Dialogue will broaden and integrate security cooperation to include, for example, cyber, serious organized crime, and counter-extremism.

The UK expressed its readiness to support GCC efforts to diversify their economies, provide more effective governance, and adapt to the new economic challenges, by emphasizing innovation, non-oil industries, technical education and training, and services.

They pledged to work together to enhance their efforts to support refugees and fight human trafficking through supporting victims and pursuing perpetrators.

The GCC and UK will build on their long-standing co-operation to unlock the full potential of their trade and investment relationship.

Bilateral trade between the UK and GCC was worth over £30bn last year and at this summit there were announcements covering a number of key sectors, including healthcare, innovation and the knowledge economy, education, finance, defense and security.

The leaders also decided to hold a GCC-UK PPP Conference in London in the first quarter of 2017, focusing on GCC national transformation and economic diversification plans.

They agreed to meet annually in a similar high-level format, in order to advance and build upon the UK-GCC Strategic Partnership announced yesterday.

Emir to honour winners of Anti-Corruption Awards in Vienna

QNA

Emir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani will honour the winners of the Anti-Corruption Awards at its first round in the Austrian capital Vienna on Friday at a ceremony which will be held under United Nations auspices, and in the presence of its Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and heads of UN organisations in Vienna.

The Award comes in recognition of Emir's efforts of those in charge of the fight against corruption at the international level, as well as the support of the State of Qatar and the United Nations mission in the fight against corruption and the fight against organised crime. The award was announced for the first time on October 31, 2015, and is offered in collaboration with the United Nations, and includes four categories: scientific research, innovation, and creativity of young people, and Lifetime Achievement.

Emir condoles with Pakistan President

EMIR H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani sent yesterday a cable of condolences to President of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan Mamnoon Hussain on the victims of the plane that crashed in northern Pakistan yesterday. Deputy Emir H H Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad Al Thani has also sent condolences on the plane crash.

Qatar Emiri Corps of Engineers (Q.E.C.E) (Tenders Notice)

Qatar Emiri Corps of Engineers (Q.E.C.E) invites the bids for the following tenders:

Tender Ref.	Title	Tender System	Tender Bond	Tender Fee	Closing Date	Classification
QECE/G/M-530-01/16	Refurbishment of Air Conditioning System	(Technical-Financial)	220,000	3,000	28/12/2016	B
QECE/L/F-545-01/16	Conversion of Volleyball Court to Classroom	(Technical-Financial)	60,000	2,000	28/12/2016	D
QECE/L/F-546-01/16	Construction of Rest Room	(Technical-Financial)	48,000	2,000	28/12/2016	D
QECE/G/RW-555-01/16	Refurbishment of Road	(Technical-Financial)	300,000	2,000	28/12/2016	B

Terms & Conditions:

1. Tender's documents are available and ready to collect during office hours from QECE-Al-Sailiya Camp. The documents will be handed over only to the representative of a company/organization upon showing the dully signed and sealed authority letter along with his/her Identity Card. Only those companies/organizations are eligible to obtain the tender documents that have the valid registration number and valid business license and valid classification certificate.
2. To pay the due amount of Documents cost (non-refundable) in cash with Qatar National Bank in the account of Tenders and Auctions Committee (A/c No. 0013-002037-052). The amount must be deposited in cash (**Depositing of cheques is not acceptable**).
3. While collecting the tender's documents, submitting the original deposit slip to confirm the deposit of money in bank, the slip must have written on it the name of company/organization, tender number and value of the slip.
4. The bid Must be accompanied with a bank guarantee letter or a bank cheque payable and drawn on any local bank without any restriction or condition, it must be payable with its full amount as temporary security and must be valid for (120) days from the last date of the submission of bids (the Closing Date). The committee may exclude a tender nonaccompanied with temporary security in full.
5. The owner of accepted bid will submit a final security amount not less than (10%) of total value of the tender and valid for a period of (07) days after the completion of the procedures of final contract execution, including the warranty period.
6. The validity of accepted bid will be (90) days from the date of opening the envelops. The Qatar Armed Forces, after due approvals from "Tenders and Auctions Committee" will have the right to add or reduce the quantity of the items and their value with a proportionate not more than (20%) of the total cost of the contract according to its terms and rates, provided that the addition must be in the same sort of contracted items.
7. The bids may by submitted in the tenders box available with the office of" "Tenders and Auctions Committee" in the ministry of defense- Al-Saliya Campus, the bids must be inside the envelops closed, sealed with red wax, and addressed to: The Chairman, Tenders and Auctions Committee, Ministry of Defense (P. O. Box: 24363). The envelops must have written on it the tender number, its subject and closing date.
8. The last time for the submission of the bids will be 12:00 of the **Wednesday 28th December 2016** (Closing date, and any bid/s submitted after the time above will not be entertained.
9. For any enquiries, please contact Tel: (44612780 / 44612762), Fax: 44612740

Tender forms available at the Ministry

Continued from page 1

According to the committee, the interested investors are required to develop the current hall and the available facilities and change them to a modern entertainment city.

The contract duration is 25 years. The committee said the project proposal should include development of the current building and the open areas with shops, restaurants, nursery, parking spaces and other tourism activities. Prospective investors are required to submit their tender offers before April 4, 2017. They can collect the tender documents from the Purchasing Section at the Ministry of Economy and Commerce at the 4th floor in the ministry's headquarters in Lusail Tower B. The project is part of government committeement to evolve private sector in development projects especially in torisuim sector.

Qatar Petroleum

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SR. NO.	COMMITTEE REF. NO.	GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF COMMODITY	Non-Refundable DOC. FEE (QR)	TENDER BOND (QR)	BID CLOSING DATE/TIME
1	LT16MT0103	WIRELINE MAST FOR DRILLING OPERATIONS	500/-	20,000/-	26.12.2016 (12:00 HRS.)
2	DT1600087	MOORING ROPE, DOUBLE LEG	100/-	8,000/-	27.12.2016 (12:30 HRS.)
3	DT16/00085	SUPPLY OF TEXT BOOKS FOR DUKHAN ENGLISH SCHOOL	100/-	10,000/-	26.12.2016 (12:30 HRS.)

- IMPORTANT NOTICE -

QP invites all prospective suppliers interested to participate in QP Tenders to register online (www.qp.com.qa) and obtain a QP SAP Vendor Code, a mandatory requirement for the issue of Tender Documents by QP.

Suppliers who are already registered with QP via e-Registration system and are in possession of a valid SAP Code issued by QP can buy tender online from QP website. Tender collection period is one (1) week from the date of the Advertisement **(08.12.2016 - 14.12.2016)** only.

We hereby informed that, effective 1st February 2016, QP will discontinue the current method of payment of Tender Fee by cash at QNB and manual issue/collection of Tender Documents against Open/Public Tenders/Auctions.

Hence, we request all Suppliers and Contractors to make use of the e-Tender Fee Payment System with immediate effect. QP reserves the sole and absolute right not to issue Tender document against Open/Public Tenders to Suppliers and Contractors who are not complying with the above System.

Changes to Tender Sale Period and Bid Closing Date will be updated in QP website only.

Always refer to QP Website (www.qp.com.qa) Supply Management page for up to date information on QP Tenders. Subscribe to Tender Alert to receive notification in your email on new Tenders.

No queries will be entertained, or bids received, from entities who have not purchased tender documents in compliance with the above provisions.

Qatar attends Asia & Pacific meeting

QNA

Qatar participated in the 16th Asia and the Pacific Regional Meeting held in the Indonesian city of Bali. The Qatari delegation was headed by Minister of Administrative Development and Labour and Social Affairs H E Dr Issa bin Saad Al Jafali Al Nuaimi.

The Minister said that the State of Qatar was making every effort towards supporting its citizens and expatriates to improve the well-being of its residents and their families in labour-sending countries. This comes from the firm conviction of the State of Qatar under the wise leadership of Emir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani and the importance of sustainable development as a key factor for the stability and prosperity of people, he said. The Minister also said that the decent work and the provision of protection and welfare of workers are one of the pillars of sustainable development in the State of Qatar which is proceeding confidently towards achieving its Vision 2030.

HGH's pharmacy robot cuts waiting time for patients

The Peninsula

Hamad General Hospital's (HGH) automated dispensing unit – known as the pharmacy robot – has helped reduce the time patients spend in the Outpatient Department's Pharmacy by half.

At present dispensing 1,600 packets of tablets a day, the MACH4 Omnicell system, which was inaugurated in April, is two robots – 'Medimat' and 'Speedbox' – combined.

The system manages the dispensary of both complex prescriptions as well as fast moving items that are in high demand. The total stock capacity of the system is 14,000 packets.

"This means not only a shorter waiting time for patients, but means our highly trained pharmacists can spend more time with each patient, ensuring they have all the information they need," said Dr Mona Al Bakri, Assistant Director of the Pharmacy Department at HGH.

She also said that the Pharmacy Department is working to integrate the pharmacy robot with the Clinical Information System (CIS), which was implemented across HMC's network of hospitals and services this year. The CIS implementation at HMC saw all patient records transferred to a state-of-the art electronic system, helping clinicians improve continuity of care and provide more proactive care.

"This has had an even greater impact on our patients as all systems are integrated, ensuring a smoother and faster experience. When fully integrated, patients will only have to show their health card to the pharmacy team to collect their medications," said Dr Al Bakri.



The automated dispensing unit, known as the pharmacy robot.

Two robots

- **Dispensing 1,600 packets of tablets a day, the MACH4 Omnicell system is two robots combined.**
- **Pharmacists find the system convenient as it enables them to spend more time with patients.**

Dr Noora Malallah, Supervisor of the Outpatient Department Pharmacy added that pharmacists find the system not only more convenient, but it also enables them to spend more time with each patient.

"The time our patients spend inside the pharmacy can be spent on education and counselling," she said. "Our pharmacy team can fully explain the medications to patients and answer any questions they may have."

HGH has the second automated pharmacy system installed at a HMC hospital, with a similar one operating at Al Wakra Hospital.

The system at Hamad General has the capacity to not only dispense medications in a more timely manner, but it can carry three days' supply of medications, reducing the need for 'downtime' to restock. It also has a special section for 'fast moving medications' for conditions like diabetes and blood pressure which can be dispensed quickly.

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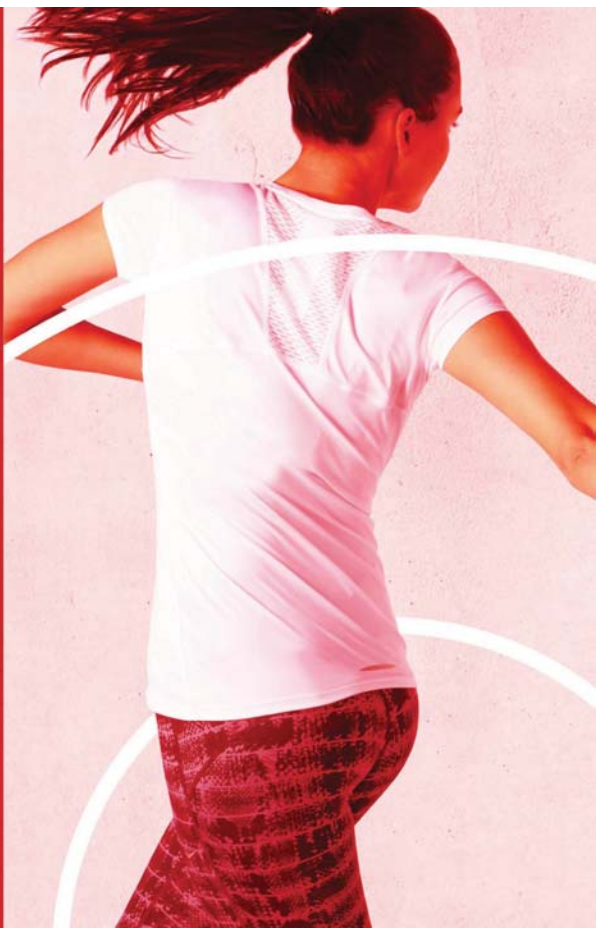
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Kayakers from Kuwait dock at Katara beach

Green Voyage

Kuwaiti duo to leave for Saudi Arabia on journey meant to raise environmental awareness.

The Peninsula

Kuwaiti kayakers Bashar Al Huneidi and Mansoor Al Safran, who have embarked on an expedition around GCC in a bid to raise environmental awareness, docked at Katara beach yesterday.

Welcoming the duo, General Manager of the Cultural Village Foundation- Katara, Dr Khalid bin Ibrahim Al Sulaiti stressed on the importance of preserving the maritime tradition and Katara's efforts in this regard as it continues to host numerous festivals like the traditional Dhow Festival and Senyar Championships which remind the new generation of their rich maritime tradition.

"Our seas need us now more than ever. We have a responsibility to help our governments to protect and manage our natural world and resources," said Al Huneidi, Founder of Kayak4Kuwait — a local four-man team formed with the aim of creating awareness on the importance of preserving the Arabian Gulf.

Kayak4Kuwait is supported by the Kuwait Environment Public Authority and other local organisations.

Al Huneidi, and Al Safran are on a journey from Kuwait to Oman to raise environmental awareness around marine conservation and protection in the region.

Dr Al Sulaiti presented a gold-plated memento shaped as a nose-clip depicting a maritime object to the kayakers.

The duo set off on their journey from Kuwait on November 10. From Qatar they will continue their voyage to Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates before arriving in Oman.



Katara General Manager Dr Khalid bin Ibrahim Al Sulaiti presents a memento to Kuwaiti kayakers Bashar Al Huneidi and Mansoor Al Safran.





A Qatar Charity vehicle distributing winter provisions to Syrian refugees in Lebanon. RIGHT: Medicine for use by the refugees.

QC aid for Syrian refugees in Lebanon

The Peninsula

As part of its continuous campaign, "Syria...cold and hunger", Qatar Charity, supported by Qatari philanthropists, provided urgent winter aid for Syrian refugees in Lebanon, to help them overcome tough conditions during winter.

2000 Syrian families in Lebanon benefited from the relief aid including heating, shelter, food, health services and medicines.

"QC is in a race against time to help protect thousands of Syrian refugees in Lebanon from the severe cold. QC's teams conducted a survey to identify the priorities of the Syrians refugees and changed the courses of the storm water run-off to protect Syrian refugee camps in Arsal, Lebanon," said Faisal Al Fahida, QC's executive director of operations.

Al Fahida extended his thanks and appreciation to Qatari philanthropists and humanitarian organisations for their efforts in helping and supporting the affected Syrian people. He said QC has launched many campaigns since the Syrian crisis that began in 2011 including "Syria, endless winter" to implement many huge relief projects that would alleviate the pain of the Syrians.

QC has launched the campaign — "Syria.....Cold and Hunger" — to help Syrians face the harsh winter conditions either in Syria or in neighbouring countries. The campaign aims at collecting more than QR100m, and provide help to about 3.5 million people in many fields including shelter, food and health.

The campaign was launched after the opening of "below zero" exhibition, which was organised by QC. The refugee simulation exhibition displayed the life of Syrian refugees and those internally displaced in shelters. The exhibition, "below zero," aims at educating visitors on the sufferings of Syrian refugees.

QC will provide help to affected Syrians in the following areas: shelter including tents, equipped caravans, winter clothing, blankets, toiletries and food including safe drinking water, flour, bread, ready meals to eat. QC is running bakeries and kitchens, providing health services including medical equipment, first aid kits, medicines, ambulances and building and operating hospitals.

Ministry recalls Kia Optima 2016 model

The Peninsula

The Ministry of Economy and Commerce, in collaboration with Al Attiya Motors and Trading Co, dealer of KIA vehicles in Qatar, has announced the recall of KIA Optima model year 2016 due to the noise from the right front axle drive shaft.

The ministry said the recall campaign comes within the framework of its ongoing efforts to protect consumers and ensure that car dealers follow up on vehicle defects and repairs. The Ministry said that it will coordinate with the dealer to follow up on maintenance and repair and will communicate with customers to ensure that repairs are carried out.

The Ministry has urged customers to report violations to its Consumer Protection and Anti-Commercial Fraud Department on call center: 16001; email: info@mec.gov.qa; social media accounts: Twitter: @MEC_Qatar; Instagram: MEC_Qatar; Ministry of Economy and Commerce mobile app for Android and IOS: MEC_Qatar.

Experts from 15 countries join cancer research meet

The Peninsula

Qatar University (QU) hosted the sixth annual meeting of The Middle Eastern Association For Cancer Research (MEACR) recently emphasising the need for collaboration between academic institutions in fighting cancer.

The three-day conference is organised by MEACR in collaboration with QU-Health (Colleges of Medicine, Pharmacy and Health Sciences), Biomedical Research Center (BRC) and National Center for Cancer Care and Research (NCCCR), and supported by Qatar National Research Fund (QNRF).

It brought together clinicians and cancer researchers from more than 15 countries. QU Vice-President for Medical Education and CMED Dean Dr Egon Toft said, "Many of the countries in the region have very ambitious and promising research and health care systems, but they are mostly working in isolation from each other. I view meetings like this one, as opportunities to reduce any such isolation. Within the College of Medicine, we are equally committed to this collaborative approach, from the focus on inter-professional education, to the recent formation of a cluster that bring all medicine and health colleges under one umbrella.

Qatar General Electricity & Water Corporation
"KAHRAMAA" has the pleasure to announce the following tender;

Tender Number	Brief Description on Required Items, Works or Services	Requesting Party	Specialty/ Classification	Tender Submission Process	Tender Bond Value QAR	Tender Fee QAR	Bid Closing Date
LTC /1093 /2016	Third Party Audit Services for ISO 27001 Certification & Surveillance	Kahramaa Planning & Quality Department	General	Five Envelopes	5,000.00	500/-	09/01/2017 Not later than 11 AM

- Tender Documents can be obtained from Kahramaa website(km.qa) during official working hours, by an authorization letter from the company.
- A Temporary bond is to be attached to the offer (Tender Bond), vide a payable check or bank guarantee letter issued by a local bank or authorized bank in Qatar, to be valid for a period not less than 120 days from the bid closing date.
- Offers to valid for a period not less than 90 days from the bid closing date.
- Value of the final guarantee (Performance Bond) shall be 10% of the contract value, to submit vides an acceptable Bank Guarantee from a local Bank or a bank approved in Qatar.
- The Government Party shall be entitled during the contract period to increase or decrease the quantities of items or works or services, after approval of the relevant Tenders Committee.
- Offers to be signed & stamped by the company's seal, enclosed in closed envelopes addressed to the Chairman of the relevant Tenders Committee, to be submitted to the Committee's Secretary at Kahramaa main building in Dafna, 8th floor.
- Clarifications related to the tender to be submitted to the relevant Department in Kahramaa, within the time period from receiving tender documents until 10 days before the bid closing date.
- Companies that submitted their offers or their representatives can attend the Tenders opening meeting onMonday...../...../.....
- For clarification, telephone 44845445, email: pqsecretary@km.com.qa

For more details, please visit KAHRAMAA website:
km.qa Or Tel: 44845555

Registration opens for Winter Career Camp for Qatari students

The Peninsula

Qatar Career Development Center (QCDC) has opened registration for its Winter Career Camp 2017, which will welcome Qatari preparatory school students for the third consecutive year.

The camp aims to instil the basics of a strong career culture in students and help them discover their skills and talents, which will allow them in-turn to carefully choose their careers.

Abdulla Al Mansoori, Director of QCDC, said: "The Winter Camp has continuously attracted eager participants over the last three years. We call on Qatari students to step up and take part in the various activities that will feature in the camp's third edition. The programme is specifically designed to enhance students' self-confidence and guide them to make intelligent decisions that will reflect positively on their professional and academic futures. It also aims to demonstrate the dynamics of Qatar's labour market, the country's various economic sectors and the future needs of Qatar."



Students on a visit to Sidra Medical and Research Center (Sidra) as part of last year's Winter Career Camp.

The one-week camp will feature educational and cultural activities as well as interactive workshops that have been designed to develop students' personal skills and empower them to pursue academics in line with their career aspirations.

Shaheen Al Sulaiti, Senior Operations Officer, QCDC, said: "The camp will give Qatari students the opportunity to visit leading organisations in Qatar, allowing them to gain first-hand insight into jobs at these companies and find out which professions match their skills and potentials."

Diversions on two streets in Al Khor

The Peninsula

THE Public Works Authority, Ashghal, has announced that it will implement a closure on both directions of Bilal bin Rabah Street near the street known as Nasser bin Abdulla Al Misned Street in Al Khor. Traffic will be diverted to the street known as Ibn Taimiyah Street and to the alternative local roads. The closure will start on Thursday, December 15, 2016 and last for three months, in coordination with the Traffic Police Department.

Ashghal will also close part of the service road (in both directions) on the road known as Umm Birkah Road. The part to be closed is located after Umm Birkah Interchange for those coming from Al Thakhira, and traffic will be diverted to an alternative road adjacent to the closed part.

The closure will last for three months starting from Saturday, December 10, 2016.

The two closures aim to enable the works of laying sewage and treated sewage effluent rising mains as part of the Design, Build, Operate and Maintain of Al Thakhira Sewage Treatment Works and Transfer Pumping Station and Associated Pipelines project.

Ashghal has requested road users to abide by the speed limit.

Mega cruise ship arrives

Tourism Boost

Cruise season that continues until April 2017 is expected to bring an estimated 50,000 visitors to Qatar.

The Peninsula

Doha Port yesterday welcomed MSC Fantasia — the first ever mega cruise ship to arrive in Qatar.

The giant ship carried over 3,000 passengers and 1,300 crew members on its maiden voyage to Qatar and is scheduled to make a total of six calls to Doha throughout the 2016/2017 cruise season.

At 333 metres in length and 66 metres high, MSC Fantasia is one of MSC Cruises' most modern ships and measures the equivalent of three football fields The on-board experience is designed to meet the needs of a wide range of guests and boasts a diverse choice of sports and entertainment facilities, from tennis and basketball courts, a mini-golf course, a jogging track and gym to an aqua park complex, Formula 1 simulator and 4D cinema.

Qatar Ports Management Company- Mwani Qatar, the exclusive operator of the state's commercial and touristic ports, has provided all means to ensure the successful docking of the giant ship and offered the best services to passengers.



Mega cruise ship MSC Fantasia docked at Doha Port cruise ship terminal yesterday.

In a statement Mwani Qatar said that the success achieved by Doha Port in receiving one of the largest cruise ships in the world reflects the great efforts exerted by all concerned parties. "Along with our partners, we are making great strides towards ensuring that Qatar becomes a key port of call on all cruise itineraries that cover this region," Mwani said.

New measures have been taken to facilitate the docking of mega ships and smooth disembarkation of large groups of passengers in order to provide a seamless tourist experience for everyone on board, Mwani added. The Museum of Islamic Art, Souq Waqif, Katara and Msheireb Museums were among the famous tourist spots the cruise passengers visited yesterday.

Mwani noted that the current cruise season is set to witness the arrival of cruise ships visiting Qatar for the first time. Other ships making their maiden calls to Qatar this season include Azamara Journey, Crystal Esprit, Thomson Celebration and Silver Whisper.

This cruise season, which began in October 2016 and continues until April 2017, is expected to bring an estimated 50,000 visitors to Qatar. Compared to last season, this marks an increase of over 1,000 percent in the number of cruise passengers visiting the country.

CSR main goal of firms in Qatar: Official

Sidi Mohamed
The Peninsula

Qatar is considered among the top countries which have developed Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) for companies through which they are allocating a part of their budgets to achieve social projects and developments, said a top official.

"Social responsibility has become one of the main goals for companies in Qatar. The companies are having competition in this regard," Sultan Rashid Al Khater, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Economy and Commerce and a member of the board of directors of the Social & Sport Contribution Fund said yesterday while addressing the Fourth Conference for Corporate Social Responsibility organised by Dar Al Sharq and attended by top officials, businessmen and ambassadors.

The two day conference also organised an awards ceremony for companies and institutions and launched the fourth edition of the White Book 2016 on "social responsibility practices for companies and institutions".

Abdullatif Al Mahmoud, CEO, Dar Al Sharq Group, said that the principles of corporate social responsibility have become a global trend, aimed at integrating the sum of the private sector in local development efforts.

"We through our engagement with the country institutions have become more effective in spreading the CSR practice year after year," he said while addressing the Fourth Conference on Corporate Social Responsibility.

"We began with 70 companies and institutions in the first conference in which 36 companies qualified to compete and the figure has now risen to 120 participants in the conference today in which 60 companies and institutions have qualified to compete. This indicates the extent of the great interest that these companies and national institutions are taking in the society and its members," he added.

Ewa Polano, Ambassador of Sweden to Qatar, said that the presence of a large number of businessmen at the conference had reconfirmed the growing interest in CSR in Qatar.

Polano observed that charity was very good and important but it is not the right definition of CSR. "CSR is about respect for human rights in the relation between employer and employee, it is to do business in a sustainable and non-corrupt way," she added.

Ten companies have been chosen among 45 companies which applied for Social Responsibility Awards (SRA), said Sheikh Thani bin Ali bin Saud Al Thani, Chief of CSR Committee.

Abdullatif Al Mahmoud, CEO, Dar Al Sharq Group, and Sultan Rashid Al Khater, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Economy and Commerce, handed over the awards to the winner companies.

Qatar Airways starts accepting UnionPay cards on website

The Peninsula

Qatar Airways has announced it will now accept UnionPay credit and debit cards through its website for ticket and other sales, expanding payment options for customers around the world.

With more than 5.8 billion cards issued globally, UnionPay is an international bankcard network and is the preferred method of payment for the Chinese market. The option to pay with UnionPay cards provides Qatar Airways travellers with a high quality and secure payment service worldwide, and is accepted in 160 countries and regions. Qatar Airways customers can now book via the airline's website in currencies including Chinese Yuan, British Pound, Euro, US Dollar, Australian Dollar, Hong Kong Dollar, Japanese Yen, South Korean Won, Malaysian Ringgit, New Zealand Dollar, Singapore Dollar and Thai Baht using their UnionPay cards.

Qatar Airways Group Chief Executive, Akbar Al Baker, said: "Our partnership with UnionPay International, one of the world's most popular bank card issuers, provides our global customers with more flexible payment options when they choose to book with Qatar Airways. We are committed to finding ways to better serve our customers; from our recently launched Apple Pay feature to our new digital membership card for our valued Privilege Club members. We are tireless in our pursuit to provide the most secure and convenient options to travellers."

JX Nippon Oil & Gas Exploration (Qatar) Limited

Warning Announcement to Fishermen and Mariners
Rig Move and Drilling Operations in Qatari Waters

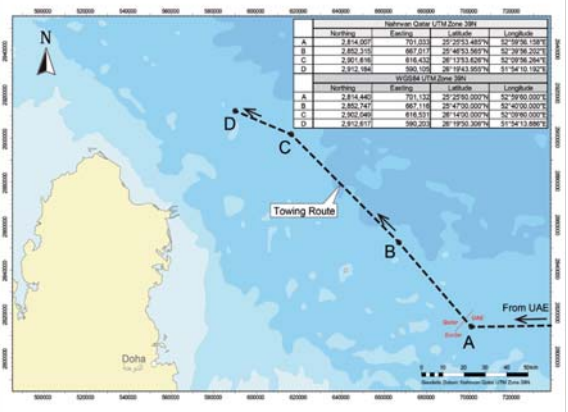
In pursuant to and under directives from the Department of Marine Regulations, Ministry of Transport & Communications, this announcement is to inform all fishermen and mariners that JX Nippon Oil & Gas Exploration (Qatar) Limited (**"JX Nippon"**) intends to commence its rig move of the mobile offshore drilling unit, **"Noble Houston Colbert"** from U.A.E. Waters to Qatari Waters and drill a well.

Noble Houston Colbert will be towed from U.A.E to Location D final location passing through Location A, B and C as below. Towing operations will be carried out approximately six (6) days between 8th December 2016 and 13th December 2016 inclusive. Following the towing, Noble Houston Colbert will be stationary at Location D for several months until further announcement, for the purpose of drilling a well.

JX Nippon warns all vessels to be observant and take care their activities during this towing and drilling period and fishermen are reminded to remove their equipment at or around Location D.

Vessels ignoring this warning shall be responsible for all liabilities arising from their negligent behavior (e.g. damage to equipment and delay times) which will also result in their significant financial loss.

JX Nippon assumes no responsibility for any damage or loss of equipment following this advertisement.



For more details contact - Tel: +974 4485 0465, Fax: +974 4483 7638

Free Vehicle Recall

وزارة الاقتصاد والتجارة
Ministry of Economy and Commerce



KIA Optima
Model Year 2016

Defect: The right front axle drive shaft noisy

Process: Contact the dealer for the free required repair

Contact: Al-Attiya Motors and Trading Co.
Phone: 44600081

For any consumer protection issues
please contact us on the hotline 16001

mec_qatar | +97466111400 | 16001
www.mec.gov.qa | info@mec.gov.qa

25% of adults may have pre-diabetes

Fazeena Saleem
The Peninsula

Health Scare

Some four percent of adults in Qatar have undiagnosed diabetes, says HMC expert.

Some four percent of the adult population in Qatar has undiagnosed diabetes and many are diagnosed only after being admitted to hospital as a result of medical emergency such as a stroke or heart attack.

Also, some figures estimate that between 20 and 25 percent of the adult population may be pre-diabetic, but it is difficult to know the exact percentage as many of these individuals are unaware of their condition, said Prof Abou Badi Abou Samra, Senior Consultant, Internal Medicine, at the Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC).

Pre-diabetes describes a condition in which blood glucose levels are higher than normal, but not high enough to be diagnosed with type 2 diabetes. Individuals who are pre-diabetic have a high risk of developing type 2 diabetes and are also at increased risk of developing heart disease.

"One of the greatest challenges with addressing pre-diabetes is that there are often no signs or symptoms and it isn't always apparent which individuals are impacted. The problem is that while the patient does not have symptoms, his heart, eyes, kidneys, brain, limbs are affected by the diseases in a cumulative way," Prof Abou Samra told *The Peninsula*.

"The longer the disease is not treated, the worse the complications. We cannot stress enough the importance of early screening, particularly for those at high risk. The main risk factors for type 2 diabetes include family history of diabetes, being overweight, older age, a low level of physical activity and a history of gestational diabetes. If you have more than one of these risk factors, it is important to get tested," he added.

Screening for diabetes and pre-diabetes not only helps create greater awareness of diabetes risk factors and signs and symptoms, but it also helps health care professionals share important information about the importance of healthy lifestyle choices.

"During Ramadan, we launched a screening programme while people were fasting and we discovered that about 23 percent were pre-diabetic and four percent of them had diabetes and were not aware of it," said Prof Abou Samra.

He also said that the pre-diabetes condition is completely reversible when the person adopts a healthy lifestyle that reverses risk factors, which could include healthy food habits, daily physical activity, such as 30 minutes of walking daily, stopping smoking and treatment of associated conditions such as high blood pressure and high cholesterol.



A young student speaking at the 'International conference of the Future Generation' at QNCC yesterday. Pic: Kammutty VP/ The Peninsula

Children from 17 nations detail plans at international meeting

Amna Pervaiz Rao
The Peninsula

Childhood Cultural Center opened the second annual edition of 'International Conference of the Future Generation' at Qatar National Conventional Center yesterday under the title 'We realize the issues of the world'.

The aim of the conference is to be the first in terms of quality and impact to transfer from the world of simulation into the world of reality. The conference is inspired by Qatar's National Vision 2030 and its four pillars that seek to build up he children's future and the community at large.

The conference also seeks to be a formal international forum for children "The World Conference on the Future Youth" that stimulates and ensues from the United Nations (UN) in terms of its structure. The members will be from youth who will have a role in the process of decision-making and a greater one in leading their respective countries in the future based on leadership skills they gain through global forums.

The 17 countries participating in the conference are Qatar, Jordan, United States, Iran, Bangladesh, Turkey, Tunisia, Sudan, Syria, Philippines, Palestine, Finland, Lebanon, Libya, Egypt, India and Yemen.

Mansoor Al Saadi, Manager at Childhood Cultural Center, said: "We came to this conference to listen not to talk, it is a real international conference far away from the political sensitivities and interests. All who are present at the conference are unofficial representatives of their country."

"We promise all the participants to carry their recommendations to ambassadors of their countries because they represent 70 percent of the world population," he added.

Amal Al Mannai, CEO at Qatar Foundation for Social Work, said: "Today we meet here to refrain our commitment to enhance children's prosperity and ensure their promising future. "

"We in Qatar have proved our achievements in areas of supporting children and youth by adopting initiatives that strengthen the right of children from local and international levels and supporting children who suffer from lack of shelter, security and schools," she added.

A young Qatari representative said in his speech: "Programs like 'Teach a child', 'Education for all' and 'Granting scholarships to Arab intellects' are evidence of Qatar's support of childhood issues. Qatar believes that investment in human beings is the noblest investment especially childhood programmes. This comes in alignment with Qatar's National Vision 2030."

166,145 kids vaccinated during MMR campaign

The Peninsula

THE Ministry of Public Health inoculated 166,145 children during the national Measles, Mumps and Rubella (MMR) vaccination campaign which ran in Qatar from October 17 to November 30. The vaccines provided as part of the campaign were free and targeted children between 1 and 13 years of age.

Some 70,142 children were vaccinated in 125 private schools and 40,176 in 214 government schools. Also, 55,827 were vaccinated in the various participating health facilities including 42,449 vaccinated in Primary Healthcare Centers (PHCC) and 13,378 received their vaccines in private health care facilities.

The Ministry stated that the campaign was successful and saw widespread demand from citizens and expats. MoPH also clarified that no serious side effects of the vaccine were recorded among the vaccinated children till the end of the campaign. The Ministry attributed this achievement to the high quality and standards followed during administering the vaccine.

The campaign was supported by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Center for Disease Control in USA (CDC–Atlanta).

The campaign was conducted to promote the Ministry's goal to eliminate measles in Qatar. This focus is in line with WHO recommendations which require all member states to implement similar campaigns at a national level for elimination of measles from the world. WHO aims to achieve total elimination in the Eastern Mediterranean region by 2020.

In the last three months, MoPH had recorded six confirmed measles cases. Added to this, earlier this year, some 22 cases of measles were also reported. However, the incidence rate and number of measles cases in Qatar have dropped rapidly during the last few years, from 160 confirmed cases in 2012 to 18 cases in 2015.

Vaccination was also administered at Qatar petroleum clinics, Ras Gas Al Khor Medical Center and Sidra Research and Medical Center.

Ooredoo urges use of Inland Sea app

The Peninsula

With the camping season in full swing, Ooredoo yesterday urged everyone who travels or camps at the Inland Sea to download its recently updated desert navigation app.

The 'Ooredoo Inland Sea' application, which was the first ever Qatar desert navigation app, was designed to help easily navigate people through the desert dunes to safe spots and tourist attractions. With the new updates, users now have the ability to get directions to landmarks on the map using Google Maps.

To ensure families stay safe, the Ooredoo Inland Sea App also has a direct contact button to several emergency service numbers, aimed to provide aid for drivers lost and stuck in the desert.

Fatima Sultan Al Kuwari, Director, Community and Public Relations, Ooredoo, said: "Thanks to the cooler weather, lots of people are heading into the desert and we want to remind and urge Qatar's adventurers to download the Inland Sea App. Staying safe should be everyone's number one priority and the app offers helpful tips, as well as navigation to safe spots and emergency numbers if anything goes wrong."

Importantly, the application provides users with information such as geography and terrain, camping sites and efficient satellite navigation through the desert using Ooredoo's Supernet, offering peace of mind for families and friends visiting the area.

For desert visitors wishing to document their trip online, the app also highlights Ooredoo's Supernet signal towers, so that they can stay connected.

Anyone with a smartphone can download the application now at *https://itunes.apple.com/qa/app/ooredoo-inland-sea/id1061454154?mt=8* for iOS users, and *https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=qa.ooredoo.android.inlandsea* for android.



Map of Inland Sea.

Masraf Al Rayan staff donate blood

The Peninsula

Masraf Al Rayan, a leading bank in Qatar and the region, yesterday held its annual blood donation campaign in collaboration with the Blood Donation Unit at Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC).

The annual humanitarian event, which was held at the bank's head office, came as part of Masraf Al Rayan's social responsibility strategy and programmes set to provide HMC's blood bank with the necessary supplies that could be used in saving lives and at the same time in raising awareness of the significance of donating blood. Nasser Raeissi, Assistant General Manager, Human Resources & Administration at Masraf Al Rayan, praised the campaign and the level of participation by the bank's employees. He also commended the effective collaboration with HMC in their mutual action to reach higher humanitarian goals.

The participants, from all departments of the bank, expressed great satisfaction with the cause, as they are being part of this year's campaign and the contribution they are making to alleviate the suffering of many people who may be in need of medical help.



A Masraf Al Rayan employee being honoured for participating in the blood donation campaign.

Home for mental patients expanded

The Peninsula

Hamad Medical Corporation's (HMC) Mental Health Service has expanded the capacity of its female residential care accommodations based on positive feedback from patients and their families.

The Enaya Continuing Care Center 2 in Muaither (West Doha) offers a residential service for women who have complex mental healthcare needs that require professional support but not necessarily acute care. Its community-based group home was launched in 2015, in line with the Qatar National Mental Health Strategy.

"Our centre, considered the first of its kind in Qatar, provides patients with care in a more home-like setting which has been shown to be a more effective alternative to hospital-based treatments for many of our residents. The facility offers safe and high quality rehabilitation and recovery care based on international best practice," said Dr Mohamed Ali Siddig Ahmed, Senior Consultant Psychiatrist and Director of the Enaya Continuing Care Center 2 in Muaither.

"Some of our female patients were transferred from the acute psychiatric unit, often after spending many years of their lives institutionalised in an acute inpatient setting. Once they had settled into their new environment, our residents demonstrated a marked improvement in their mental state," said Dr Ahmed.

Community College to be reorganised

Cabinet Decision

- CCQ aims to prepare specialist technical personnel who are academically and practically trained.

The Peninsula

The State Cabinet yesterday approved a draft Emiri decision to organise the Community College of Qatar (CCQ).

The draft decision will replace Emiri Decision No. 52 of 2011 regulating CCQ, to reorganise it by opening new specialisations to meet the demands of the job market and grant a bachelor's degree.

The draft defines CCQ as an independent entity of an academic nature for academic, technical and practical university education, and has a legal personality, an independent budget annexed to the general budget of the state, and based in the city of Doha, with the possibility of establishing other branches and setting their locations based on a decision from the college's board of trustees and with a suggestion from the president of the college.

CCQ aims to prepare specialist technical personnel who are academically and practically trained in fields that meet the needs of the community and the job market.

It also aims to qualify diploma graduates certified to complete bachelor's degrees at the college or at different universities as well as qualifying graduates with a bachelor degree to directly join the labor market.

The college aims also to offer continuous education programmes and application programme according to the needs of ministries, public institutions, and public and private sectors.

A board of trustees is in charge of college management, and comprises board president, a deputy that replaces the president in case of absence or position vacancy, and five to seven members with experience and high academic status.

Job affairs of the college's teaching staff are decided via a cabinet decision based on a proposal from the cabinet and the Minister of Education and Higher Education.

The cabinet also approved the application of provisions of Law No. 24 of 2002 on retirement and pensions on Qatari employers of Elan Decaux companies.

The cabinet ratified four draft agreements between Qatar and Turkey- a draft agreement on cooperation and mutual assistance in customs , a draft memorandum of understanding for cooperation in the field of higher education, a draft memorandum of understanding in the fields of youth and sports and a draft memorandum of understanding on cooperation in the energy sector.

The cabinet reviewed a memo from the Foreign Minister about a proposal to amend Article 12 of Law No. 14 of 1993 concerning passports. The meeting reviewed a letter by the Minister of Culture and Sports on a proposal to transfer the overseeing of the Qatar Amateur Radio Society from the Ministry to the Ministry of Administrative Development, Labor and Social Affairs.

Dukhan Highway project 95% complete

Sanaullah Ataullah
The Peninsula

The Dukhan Highway Central project will partly open to traffic from tomorrow, providing one-way exit to the Mall of Qatar, which is expected to open soon. The Public Works Authority (Ashghal) yesterday announced completion of 95 percent of the project.

The central project includes a 1.5km tunnel, a 2.2km extension of Al Rufaa Street and other flyovers and local link roads. The tunnel, flyovers and local link roads will open to traffic tomorrow .

The QR1.28bn tunnel will provide an underground route that extends from the Mall of Qatar to the Dukhan Highway, facilitating a free-flowing one way route underneath the Al Jahhaniya Interchange. This will enable motorists to seamlessly reconnect with traffic heading towards Doha.

The project, which forms part of Ashghal's Expressway Programme, is expected to be complete in first quarter of 2017 and will establish a 15km strategic link from the west of Doha to Al Sheehaniya and other key future public venues and residential areas, Ashghal officials announced during a media tour to the site, yesterday. The tunnel is comprised of 34 structural units, with sophisticated mechanical and electrical equipment, including a central control room which will monitor the operation of the roadway on a 24 hour basis, ensuring the safety and protection of road users.



The tunnel built by Ashghal to provide one-way exit to the Mall of Qatar.
Pic: Abdul Basit/ The Peninsula

Ashghal has also constructed parallel internal corridors to provide an emergency passage for pedestrians, and powerful ventilation systems to maintain sufficient air volume in the tunnel at all times.

Ashghal began excavating land for the tunnel in 2014, moving over 450,000 cubic metres of material to enable the construction of the tunnel itself. Approximately 125,000 cubic metres of concrete and close to 10,000 tonnes of asphalt were used to build the efficient new transport route.

The completion of the tunnel is one of several milestones achieved on the Dukhan Highway Central project in the past month, with the project team completing a 2.2km extension of Al Rufaa Street and multiple link roads and flyovers connecting to and from the Dukhan Highway.

The extension of Al Rufaa Street will create direct access points for road users to and from North Road to Doha, providing two lanes in each direction and enhancing mobility to key public venues, including the Al Rufaa Celebration Hall Complex.

The project is being constructed by a joint venture contractor Consolidated Contractors Group and Teyseer, with WS Atkins & Partners Overseas serving as the supervision consultant.

1,903 commercial licences issued

The Peninsula

The Ministry of Economy and Commerce has issued 1,903 commercial licences for opening new companies and branches over the last month.

The contracting companies took the lion's shares — 407 licences — followed by eateries and fast food restaurants that received 193 licences. Trades for construction materials accounted for 172 licences and businesses for general goods, clothes and garments shared 142 licences.

The Ministry shut down 292 companies in November.

The closed companies account for 15.3 percent of the total number of new companies.

The highest number, 26 percent of total companies shut down, were related to contracting followed by businesses for general goods, clothes and garments at 19 percent. The ministry received 26,931 applications through its headquarters and branches across the country last month.

The Ministry received 42 fresh requests for patent rights and 115 for renewal.

The requests for trademarks numbered 3,166. Sixteen certificates were also issued for copyrights.

Qatar Museums restores two old mosques

The Peninsula

Qatar Museums (QM) yesterday announced that it has completed the conservation and restoration of two mosques in Qatar, located in Old Salata and Fuwairit.

The project, run under the patronage of its Chairperson, H E Sheikha Al Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, is part of a larger initiative by QM's Architectural Conservation Department in the Division of Cultural Heritage to restore historical and archaeological sites throughout Qatar, helping to preserve Qatar's architectural identity and heritage whilst also balancing progress and embracing the future.

Located in Old Salata, the Bin Obaid mosque was built in 1935. The original structure of the mosque was built from palm tree trunks, with the ceiling made from palm tree branches. The conservation consisted of replacing damaged materials with traditional, internationally recognised materials, whilst also carefully preserving the authenticity and style of the original building. Following the success of the restoration, which took ten months to complete, the mosque is now ready to welcome Muslims for prayers.

The second mosque is located in Fuwairit, an important coastal village in Qatar, approximately 80km north of Doha. It is an important site for Qatar's oil industry and rose to regional prominence as the home of the Al Thani family during the early 19th century. The mosque was first built in the 1920s and was later rebuilt in the late 1960s over the traditional design and the ruins of the first structure.

The latest conservation and rehabilitation of the Fuwairit mosque included removing damaged plaster layers and waterproof layers off the ceiling, resetting the wall stone structure, treating wooden areas against termites and applying plaster using traditional and waterproof materials.

Ali Al Kubaisi, Chief Archaeology Officer at QM, said:"At QM, we are very proud to successfully restore these significant and historical mosques. Qatar is a country with a proud and rich heritage, stretching back over thousands of years, and preserving this history for our future generations is vital. This is not the first time that we have restored an important element of our heritage and it will most certainly not be the last. We will continue our commitment to put local communities, young and old, in touch with their past, reminding them of their ancestors skills, wisdom, and heritage."

Over the last ten years, the QM Architectural Conservation Department has rehabilitated traditional buildings in the North of Qatar, in Al Shamal, Al Ruwais and Abu Dhelouf. The team has also restored mosques in Al Wakra, Sumaisma and Dukhan; palaces in Al Wajba and Al Shamal and the village of Al Mufair. In addition to the two most recent mosques, Fuwairit and Bin Obaid, QM is now finalising the restoration of the Al Ruwais mosque.





The old mosque in Fuwairit, an important coastal village in Qatar. BELOW: The mosque after restoration.

Much to do in QF tent at Darb Al-Saai

The Peninsula

Qatar Foundation (QF) is set to celebrate this year's National Day by hosting a tent at Darb Al-Saai, packed with fun and exciting activities from today until December 20.

The theme of the Darb Al-Saai tent will be 'Siraj'; QF's new 3D animation edutainment TV series, which aims to instill a love of the Arabic language from an early age. Visitors to the tent will be accompanied by Rashid and Noura, the main characters of the programme, as they move through different sections of the tent.

"A key component of Qatar National Day is the preservation of our local heritage and culture, and it is for this reason that the theme of this year's tent is 'Siraj'. We want to encourage children to embrace our language, as well foster a spirit of innovation and reinforce positive values, to help protect our culture. As at QF we believe this is crucial to the development of our society," said Fahad Saad Al Qahtani, President of Community Development, Qatar Foundation.

Some of the exciting activities on offer this year include the QF Tram experience, which will take visitors on a journey detailing Education City's facilities, while highlighting QF's ongoing sustainability efforts.

Additionally, QF's popular National Reading Campaign will host a series of interactive games and learning opportunities for children, such as a book swap, story maze, and scrabble, as well as the innovative Reading Truck.

QF's National Day schedule will have activities catering to all ages. Qatar National Library will have story-telling activity, while Musheireb Properties will host workshops on a number of subjects, Qatar Green Building Council will have an educational video game, Qatar Botanic Garden's Green Doll activity will demonstrate community on recycling, Qatar Pearls legacy will demonstrate entire pearling process and Qatar Diabetes Association will organise various educational and fun actives.

The Yalla Natural Trailer truck, an initiative of the 'Your Health First' campaign run by Weill Cornell Medicine – Qatar (WCM – Q), will allow visitors to plant seeds in mini plant pots as well as create amazing abstract paintings. Children can create their own healthy fruit smoothies using pedal power from bicyles.

The universities and institutions under QF will organise various activities based on their specialisations. Also, an exhibition from the Stars Of Science (SoS) TV show will showcase prototypes created by SoS alumni. The QF's Darb Al-Saai tent will open at 4pm today. Qatar National Day celebrations will take place in the morning from 8am to 12noon and in the evening from 4pm to 10pm, with the evening of December 17 exclusively for ladies.

Syria accuses Israel of new missile attack

Damascus
Bloomberg & AFP

No casualties

Several Israeli missiles struck near the Mazzeh airbase outside Damascus overnight without causing any casualties.

Syria accused Israel of attacking near Damascus for the second time in a week, raising frictions between enemies who have labored to keep spillover from the war in Syria from entangling them in their own, separate conflict.

Israel fired surface-to-surface missiles at Al Mezzeh airport west of the Syrian capital, causing no injuries, the official *Sana* news agency reported, citing an unidentified military source. It said the missiles were fired from Abu Al Nada, a mountain located in the section of the Golan Heights that Israel captured from Syria in the 1967 Middle East war.

Several Israeli missiles struck near the Mazzeh airbase outside Damascus overnight without causing any casualties, Syrian state media reported.

"At 3am (0100 GMT), the Israeli enemy fired several surface-to-surface missiles from inside occupied territory," *Sana* said, citing a military source.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based monitor, earlier reported the sounds of explosions in the area of the airbase and said fires had erupted inside the facility afterwards. It did not confirm the source of the explosions.

The Mazzeh airbase, less than eight kilometres southwest of Damascus, hosts the headquarters of the feared air force intelligence service and its notorious prison. It was the second time in eight days that Israel, which is technically still at war with Syria, had targeted positions outside Damascus.

The Jewish state has sought to limit its involvement in the five-year conflict in Syria, but has carried out sporadic sorties against Hezbollah inside Syria.

The Israeli military had no comment. In a meeting with European diplomats yesterday, Defense Minister Avigdor Liberman reassured Syria that his country has no intention of intervening in its civil war, but confirmed, without specifically addressing the Syrian allegations, that Israel was working to prevent arms transfers from its northern neighbour.

"We are trying to prevent the smuggling of sophisticated weapons, military hardware and weapons of mass destruction from Syria to Hezbollah," he said. The Iran-backed Hezbollah, a Lebanese militant group, warred with Israel in 2006 and is now fighting alongside President Bashar Al Assad in Syria.

With the US reducing its role in the region, Israel increasingly sees the need to intervene in Syria as Russia's military backing of the Syrian government emboldens Iran and Hezbollah, according to Jonathan Rynhold, a political scientist at Bar Ilan University near Tel Aviv.

"The US has taken a step backwards and that vacuum has been filled by forces that are unfriendly to Israel, including Iran and ISIS," said Rynhold, using an acronym for Islamic State. "That is forcing Israel to become more active because the Russians tipped the balance in Syria. While Israel doesn't like either side, it mostly doesn't want Iran to be strengthened."

Israel has been accused or suspected of striking multiple targets inside Syria since violence erupted there in 2011. Syria alleged on November 30 that Israeli missiles fired from Lebanese airspace hit the outskirts of Damascus. Israeli aircraft killed four Islamic State jihadists in Syria on November 28 after they opened fire at Israeli forces on the Golan Heights, according to the army.



Pro-government soldiers patrol the newly captured Al Safa neighbourhood of Aleppo, yesterday. Rebels in Aleppo called for a five-day truce and the evacuation of civilians after losing more than three quarters of their territory including the Old City to a Syrian army offensive.

Lawyers' protest



Lawyers in Tunisia stage a march from courthouse towards government building during a demonstration, demanding the cancellation of the finance law which will take effect in 2017, in Tunis, yesterday.

Turkey calls for extradition of 8 soldiers who fled to Greece

Istanbul
Agencies

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu yesterday called for the immediate extradition of eight Turkish soldiers who fled to Greece and sought asylum following a coup attempt in July.

A Greek court earlier this week had ruled that three of the eight could be extradited while the Appeals Court had ruled that three other Turkish soldiers should not be returned home.

Speaking to state-run broadcaster *TRT* in Brussels, Cavusoglu said all the soldiers were coup plotters. "Our wish is the immediate extradition of these people to Turkey," he said.

Meanwhile, Nato's top military officer says that around 150 Turkish officers have been recalled or retired from the alliance's high command in response to the failed coup attempt in Turkey in July.

US Army General Curtis Scaparrotti said that he was concerned about the welfare of the officers and their families, but had received assurances from Turkey's army chief that they would be treated well. Scaparrotti said the move had placed "an extra load on our remaining people" and that "it obviously has an impact on their military."

Special forces seize land from IS in eastern Mosul

Mosul
AP

Iraq special forces captured a new neighbourhood yesterday from the Islamic State group in eastern Mosul, according to a senior commander — the latest gain in a massive military operation now its seventh week.

The commander of a joint operations center that oversees the Mosul campaign, Lt Gen. Abdul-Amir Yarellah, said in a statement that troops had "fully liberated" the Al Elam neighbourhood and raised the Iraqi flag over its buildings. Yarellah added that IS militants "suffered losses" without elaborating.

The announcement came hours after an overnight attack carried out by IS militants against Iraqi security forces in the southeastern part of Mosul, a day after troops advanced deeper into that part of the city, an army officer said.

The attack "inflicted heavy losses," Iraqi Army Sgt. Maj. Hakim Saranbii said, without giving specific casualty figures or further details.

On Tuesday, Army troops rolled into the southeastern neighborhood of al-Salam, taking a hospital before meeting stiff resistance from IS militants. Convoys of dozens of armored Iraqi special forces and army Humvees could be seen moving into the southeastern neighbourhood last morning.

"What we see here is the enemy reacting to a new axis of advance," said coalition spokesman U.S. Army, Col. John Dorrian, explaining that the new push is putting increased pressure on IS.

After the advance on Tuesday, Iraqi forces said that they pushed the front line back more than 2km and retook Mosul's Al Salam hospital, but only a few hundred meters (yards) appeared to be secured and clashes continued into the evening. When Iraqi forces initially launched a push into eastern Mosul in early November, troops advanced rapidly at first but soon came under heavy counterattacks. Islamic State militants have depended on suicide car bombs, sniper fire and a network of underground tunnels to slow the security forces.

The Iraqi government has not publicized the casualty figures for government troops and paramilitary forces fighting in Mosul and elsewhere in northern Iraq. Last week, the UN said in a report that nearly 2,000 members of the Iraqi forces were killed last month, but after coming under fire from the media arm of the Iraqi military, it announced it would discontinue publishing casualty figures for Iraq's security forces.

2 million Israelis exposed to rocket fire: Report

JERUSALEM: More than two million Israelis lack adequate shelter in case of rockets fired from Gaza to the south or from Lebanon or Syria to the north, an official report said.

State comptroller Yossef Shapira, who is in charge of assessing state policies and the use of public funds, said in the report that Israel had not learned its lesson from the July-August 2014 Gaza war, when Palestinian groups fired thousands of rockets at the Jewish state.

The Israeli military believes the Palestinian Islamist movement Hamas which controls the Gaza Strip, and its allies, still have some of their arsenal and are also working to rearm. In Lebanon, Israel estimates the powerful Shia militant group Hezbollah has more than 100,000 rockets and missiles capable of reaching most of Israeli territory. "Although the military has envisaged a scenario in which Israel would be the target of thousands, or even tens of thousands of rockets and missiles, it is doubtful whether it has adequate capacity to defend the country properly," media quoted Shapira's report as saying.

35 people rescued from ferry that sank off Yemen

ADEN: At least 35 of the 64 people who were on a ferry that sank off Yemen have been rescued, a Yemeni minister said yesterday.

Rescue teams continued to look for survivors from the boat that was en route from Hadramout province in mainland Yemen to the island of Socotra, Fisheries Minister Fahad Kaffen said on his Facebook page. Socotra and Hadramout are under the control of the government of President Abdrabuh Mansur Hadi, which is in a war with the Houthis who control most of northern Yemen. *The Aden Al Ghad* news website said the ship was believed to have suffered an accident and authorities at Hadramout's Mukalla port lost contact with it on Tuesday evening.

Egypt protest law amendment offers little change

Cairo
Reuters

Egypt's cabinet yesterday approved an amendment to a law that bans protests, making it more difficult for the Interior Ministry to disperse them, but lawyers said it would not expand people's freedom to demonstrate.

Protests have become a sensitive issue since Egyptians took to the streets in huge numbers to oust Hosni Mubarak in 2011, and the army toppled freely elected President Mohamed Mursi after mass demonstrations against him in 2013. Protests have resulted in hundreds of people being jailed or shot dead. The law on protests passed in 2013 says the Interior Ministry must be notified of any public gathering of more than 10 people at least three days in advance.

It also imposes jail sentences of up to five years for those who violate a broad list of restrictions and allows security forces to disperse illegal demonstrations with water cannon, tear gas and birdshot. The cabinet amended a controversial article of the protest law which allowed the Interior Ministry to cancel or change the location of any protest deemed a threat to security.

The amendment requires the ministry to ask permission from a court, based on evidence or information that the protest poses a security threat, before it can disperse or change its location, Justice Minister Mohamed Hossam Abdelrehim told a news conference.

Protesters are still banned from gathering in public without prior approval.

"This development looks better on paper but in the end it is same, same," said Abdel Hakim Al Kordy, a lawyer who defends activists and non-governmental organisations.

"It will not make it more difficult for the Interior Ministry to disperse protests because we can see a marriage between the judiciary and the Interior Ministry," he said referring to cases in which protesters were given hefty sentences for protesting. Officials from the Interior Ministry were not reachable for comment.

In May, a court sentenced 152 protesters to between two and five years in prison after they demonstrated against a decision to transfer two Red Sea islands to Saudi Arabia. In similar protests, on April 15, thousands of people demanded "the fall of the regime", a slogan from the uprisings which ended Mubarak's 30 years in power. More than 100 people were detained at those protests, security officials said at the time. Most were later freed without charge, judicial sources said.

"We want the right to protest to be given to us without any restrictions or conditions," Kordy said.

Ghana votes in tight presidential election

Kibi
AFP

Ghanaians began voting yesterday in an unpredictable presidential election that is being seen as a litmus test of stability in Africa's most secure democracy.

Once praised by US President Barack Obama for its peaceful transfers of power, Ghana has come under fire amid reports of voter intimidation and questions over the independence of the country's election agency.

Charismatic incumbent John Mahama is running for re-election against veteran politician Nana Akufo-Addo, who has chipped away at the popularity of the ruling National Democratic Congress (NDC) party by criticising the country's sluggish growth and high-profile corruption scandals.

Some 15 million people are registered to vote, and polling stations opened across the country at 0700 GMT.

Test of stability

- **John Mahama is running for re-election against veteran politician Nana Akufo-Addo, who chipped away at the popularity of the ruling National Democratic Congress party by criticising the country's sluggish growth and high-profile corruption scandals.**
- **Some 15 million people are registered to vote, and polling stations opened across the country at 0700 GMT.**

"We are facing a lot of problems economically, everything is messy," Julie Amofah, a 26-year-old who cast the first ballot at a polling station in Kibi, a town 80km from the capital, Accra.

"I voted for change so we can move forward."

Shadrack Opoku, an 18-year-old high school student, said Akufo-Addo of the New Patriotic Party (NPP) is the "right person for our country" who can secure future growth.

"When we complete university, we want better jobs," Opoku said. "Right now it's not good."

In the final days of the campaign, Mahama flexed his significant resources to reach as many battleground regions as possible where he inaugurated blockbuster infrastructure projects, including railways and airports.

"Mahama has done well for us," said Abudula Alhassan, a 40-year-old driver in the northern town of Bole, a government stronghold.

An exporter of gold, cocoa and oil, Ghana was once hailed as a regional growth model but has now taken on too much debt and in 2015 had to go to International Monetary Fund for a bailout.

There are seven candidates battling for the top job and if the smaller parties perform well and deny either man a majority, a presidential run-off will be held later in December.

But ahead of the vote, tensions were building with police saying an NPP supporter was beaten to death and six others were critically wounded during clashes on Monday between supporters of the two parties following a rally in north.



Electoral officers explain how to vote for the presidential election at a polling station in Kibi.

Indonesian quake death toll nears 100



Residents gather outside a damaged mosque after a 6.5-magnitude earthquake struck the town of Pidie Jaya, in northern Sumatra, yesterday.

Meureudu
AFP

The death toll from a powerful earthquake that struck western Indonesia yesterday has nearly doubled to 97, the military said, as more bodies were pulled from the rubble of shattered buildings.

The shallow 6.5-magnitude quake struck Pidie Jaya district in Aceh province at dawn as many in the mainly Muslim region on Sumatra island were preparing for morning prayers.

The death toll has steadily climbed as rescue crews search, often by hand, through the homes, mosques and shops reduced to ruins.

The earlier figure of 52 dead was revised up significantly by the Indonesian military, which has taken over responsibility for the search and rescue operation.

"So far 97 people have been killed and the number keeps growing," Aceh military chief Tatang Sulaiman said.

"When we retrieve bodies sometimes there's five, sometimes 10 corpses."

More than 1,000 soldiers and about 900 police have been deployed to the worst-hit areas to set up shelters and evacuation points, he added.

Hundreds of houses and shops had been levelled by the quake, leaving countless people homeless and in need of basic supplies like food and water, officials said.

"The electricity is still off. Some places have generators, but there are not many," local disaster agency head Puteh Manaf said.

Parliament orders Park's aide to attend hearing

Seoul
AFP

A South Korean parliamentary probe into a corruption scandal engulfing President Park Geun-hye sought yesterday to compel the woman in the eye of the storm to answer questions after she rejected a summons.

Choi Soon-Sil, a close friend of Park, has been charged with meddling in state affairs and using her presidential connections to force dozens of conglomerates to donate tens of millions of dollars to two foundations she controlled.

"This hearing is being criticised as a Choi Soon-Sil trial without Choi Soon-Sil," Kim said.

"We will undertake all measures to make them appear," Kim said, referring to Choi, some of her family members and close associates, as well as some former officials from the presidential Blue House.

Half of the witness seats at the hearing were empty.

On Kim's direction, a group of around 20 men in dark suits and matching ties came forward and were handed envelopes with the names of the absent witnesses.

He instructed them to bring the witnesses to the National Assembly by the beginning of the afternoon session, and added that any who refused would be held in contempt and punished.

Non-compliance can carry a maximum five-year prison term.

But by the time the afternoon session began, Choi's seat remained empty with only her niece turning up to face questioning.



Lawmakers and members of South Korea's opposition parties hold banners urging President Park Geun-hye's ruling party to back their push for impeachment for Park at a protest at the National Assembly, in Seoul, yesterday.

Kenyan govt dismisses 127 traffic officers for corruption

Nairobi
Anatolia

A total of 127 traffic police officers in Kenya have been fired after failing a vetting process, authorities said.

National Police Service Commission Chairman Johnston Kavuludi said the officers were among 904 police officers who had undergone a suitability test.

The officers were dismissed for corruption that has long plagued the country's police traffic department.

Most of the officers who were dismissed had large sums of money in their bank accounts and could not account for funds.

Kavuludi said some senior officials received large sums of money from junior officers in the traffic department.

"[With] 127 officers out of the 904 traffic officers so far having been vetted and dismissed from work, it is a clear demonstration of the endemic vice of corruption in the traffic department," Kavuludi said.

He added that unlike in 2015 where only 4 percent of vetted police officers were dismissed.

Ugandan rebel leader pleads not guilty at ICC

Kampala
Anatolia

A former Ugandan rebel commander has pleaded not guilty to charges before judges of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in the Hague.

The former Lords Resistance Army (LRA) commander Dominic Ongwen faces 70 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in the northern part of the East African country.

"In the name of God, I deny all these charges in respect to the war in northern Uganda," he said on his first day of trial on Tuesday when asked what he pled.

Ongwen, who surrendered in January 2015, argued that he was a victim of the LRA atrocities and that it was not him who committed the heinous crimes.

Ongwen was captured by the LRA when he was 10 years old and later rose through the ranks turning into a fierce commander who allegedly killed mercilessly.

He is one of five commanders of the Lords Resistance Army rebels who were indicted by the ICC for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Speaking to journalists in the Ugandan capital Kampala, ICC registrar Herman Von Hebel described Ongwen's trial as "a difficult situation".

He added: "It's about accountability. Was Ongwen responsible for the atrocities? What the lawyers will present is what the judges will use to base to get the verdict."

Myanmar stops workers from going to Malaysia

Yangon
Reuters

Myanmar has stopped workers going to Malaysia after Malaysia's leader criticised its treatment of Muslims, while Indonesia joined a growing chorus of concern about the fate of Myanmar's stateless Rohingya Muslims.

The prime minister of mostly Muslim Malaysia, Najib Razak, on the weekend described the violence as "genocide" and called for foreign intervention.

Myanmar government on Tuesday summoned Malaysia's ambassador over what it described as Najib Razak's "unverified and unsubstantiated allegations".

The deputy permanent secretary of Myanmar's Labour Ministry, Maung Maung Kyaw, said Myanmar workers had been temporarily stopped from going to Malaysia because of security worries.

He declined to comment when asked if the ban was in response to Najib's criticism, saying only it was "because of the ongoing situation".

"We instructed all licensed overseas employment agencies to pause sending migrant workers to Malaysia effective December 6 as there are reasons to worry about their security," Maung Maung Kyaw said.

It was not clear how long the freeze would last, he said.

Labour-short Malaysia hosts about 147,000 Myanmar migrant workers, according to latest data available from Myanmar.

A "sizeable number" of undocumented workers from Myanmar are also in Malaysia, Myanmar officials say.

Myanmar authorities have rejected accusations from residents and rights groups that soldiers have abused Rohingya women, burnt homes and killed civilians during the latest crackdown.

Ethnic Rakhine Buddhists and the Rohingya Muslims have lived separately in Rakhine State since clashes in 2012 in which more than 100 people were killed.

Indonesia's foreign minister Retno Marsudi said yesterday she had expressed her concern to Aung San Suu Kyi over the treatment of Rohingya Muslims.

"I have conveyed Indonesia's concern to State Counselor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi about the situation in Rakhine State," Marsudi said in a statement.

"The Myanmar government has opened its doors for humanitarian aid from Indonesia to reach Rakhine State."

Indonesia has the world's biggest Muslim population. There are more than 135,000 Myanmar refugees living in Malaysia, including about 55,000 Rohingyas, according to the UNHCR.

The Peninsula
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EDITORIAL

Marching forward

The 37th summit of the Supreme Council of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) concluded in Manama yesterday with a call for concerted action to address the crises facing the world and our region. The summit came at a time when the world and our region are facing unprecedented challenges. The complexity and gravity of these challenges call for an unprecedented response, and the biggest achievement of the summit was that the leaders of all the six Gulf countries spoke of the need for determination and unity to face these challenges.

Qatar's high-level official delegation to the session was headed by Emir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani. This high-level participation underlines the importance which Qatar attaches to the summit. Qatar has always worked for the unity of Gulf nations and for greater integration and cooperation in all areas, which has been one of the core elements of the vision of the Qatari leadership under His Highness the Emir. The Emir expressed his hope that the summit's outcome "will help in enhancing the march of our council, achieving its desired goals and consolidating our region's security and stability".

The 37th session of the GCC Supreme Council was historic in its resolve to face the challenges facing our region with unity and determination.

The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud of Saudi Arabia set the agenda of the session when he said that the current circumstances in the region are highly complicated "requiring all of us to work together to confront and deal with them in a spirit of responsibility and determination and intensify efforts in order to consolidate the foundations of security and stability of our region as well as development and prosperity for our countries and peoples." Leaders spoke candidly at the summit about the threats and challenges facing the Gulf and the Middle East, and set a framework for joint action. The summit also highlighted the great strides made by the bloc since its formation in a number of fields, especially in achieving economic and social integration and unity, which give confidence to leaders to take the cooperation and unity to greater heights. The leaders also expressed their resolve to work for a better future for GCC citizens and to fulfill their aspirations for more prosperity and a dignified living.

The Gulf unity and cooperation has been a bulwark against multiple threats facing our region. As the nature and intensity of these threats change with the changing geopolitical dynamics of our region and the world, this unity too has deepened accordingly, embracing new areas and dimensions. The visit of King Salman to Qatar and the rousing welcome accorded to the King by the Qatari leadership and people are manifestations of the Gulf unity and cooperation reaching new heights.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

We have to recreate the conditions for a two-state solution and we are determined more than ever to do everything to implement our initiative. The sooner the better.



Jean-Marc Ayrault
French Foreign Minister

Majority of Arab youth reject radicalism: Report

Jad Chaaban
Al Jazeera



Arab youths are suffering from pervasive social exclusion, the highest unemployment levels in the world, and low female labour force participation, the Arab Human Development Report for 2016 has found. The annual report, entitled Youth and the Prospects of Human Development in a Changing Reality, was launched at the American University of Beirut in late November by the United Nations Development Programme.

The report brings to light a number of matters worth considering.

On one hand, the Arab region as a whole has achieved remarkable progress in educational enrolment and the fight against illiteracy, especially among women. Overall extreme poverty and hunger have declined, and there has been an increase in life expectancy.

Yet on the other hand, the region has witnessed a dramatic increase in armed conflict, militarisation and violence. Fifteen years ago, when the first Arab Human Development Report, or AHDR, was published, five out of 22 Arab states were witnessing conflict or political violence. Today, this number has gone up to 11.

Half of the Arab region is living in conflict, and the situation does not seem to be improving.

Young people in the region are the main victims of this grim [economic] situation. They constitute the largest segment in society and suffer from pervasive social exclusion.

In the past couple of decades, the region has seen low economic growth with very little job creation, which has translated into a general decline in the standards of living for the majority of Arab citizens.

Low oil prices have put government budgets, cross-border investments and workers' remittances under stress, and Arab societies have witnessed a degradation of their social, physical and environmental capital.

With more than 75 percent of the Arab population living in major cities in the region, one just needs to visit these urban areas to witness the extent of air pollution, degraded living conditions, shrinking public spaces and the general malaise of a majority of the population.

Young people in the region are the main victims of this grim situation. They constitute the largest segment in society – 105 million are aged 15-29, 30 percent of the Arab region's population – and suffer from pervasive social exclusion.

Unemployment among youths is the highest in the world at more than 30 percent; young women's labour force participation is at an all-time low; and with an increasing education most university graduates migrate when they can to find better opportunities abroad.

The less fortunate ones live idle lives, waiting for things to change. This "waithood" has caused a delay in family formation and autonomy, a higher exposure to health risk factors, such as smoking and drug use, and ultimately pushed some youths to engage in extremist activities and armed conflict.

Yet the AHDR 2016 seeks to dispel several misconceptions about young Arabs that have been prevalent in previous analysis and reporting on the region. The first misconception is that the vast majority of young Arabs are prone to radicalisation and extremism.

A massive amount of recent opinion polling data analysed for the Report revealed that an overwhelming majority of youths rejects terrorism and radicalisation, albeit remaining largely conservative in their social and religious attitudes.

The second misconception is that young migrants originating from Arab countries constitute a major threat to developed economies. The AHDR 2016 found that most Arab countries are marked by outward migration; yet, the vast stock of immigrants in Gulf Cooperation Council countries means that Arab countries as a whole receive more migrants – Arab and non-Arab – than they send out.

An estimated 27 million immigrants live within the borders of the Gulf countries of the region; these countries took in about 80 percent of all immigrants – Arab and non-Arab – in the region in 2010–2014.

With the rise in conflicts in the region, forced migration has pushed many Arabs to migrate mostly to other neighbouring Arab countries, with a much smaller share going to countries outside the region such as Europe.

Young people in the region are the main victims of this grim [economic] situation. They constitute the largest segment in society and suffer from pervasive social exclusion.

The third misconception is that following the failure of the 2011 uprisings many young Arabs have become apathetic and less interested in civic engagement and political change.

While it is true that the data reveals life dissatisfaction among youth in the region is the highest in the world, they are more civically engaged and socially mobilised, especially young women, than similar youth in other countries around the world.

With an extremely high electronic connectivity – more than 70 percent of young people in the region have access to social media – Arab youths are more exposed to globalisation and connected than any other previous generation. This raises their expectations and aspirations, yet at the same time increases their frustration when nothing is improving in their daily life.

The AHDR 2016 is a wake-up call for policymakers and citizens in the region to address the systemic issues that are plaguing their societies. Achieving peace and security is a core priority, with the necessity of increasing youth involvement in peace building and conflict resolution.

Tackling rising economic inequality and inequality of opportunity, especially in access to good education and healthcare, is another crucial cross-regional priority. Arab countries are witnessing a widening divide between the "haves" and the "have-nots", and young Arabs living in slums and peripheral areas have less chances of obtaining quality education and access to affordable health services. The Report calls for increased government investments in the expansion of public education and providing free universal health coverage.

It also calls for opening up the political space for Arab youth, and treating them as real partners in planning the future of the Arab countries, not just as a burden or a threat.



Young Arabs are more civically engaged and socially mobilised, especially young women, than similar youth in other countries around the world.

Libya could become even more chaotic after IS defeat

Sudarsan Raghavan
The Washington Post





Libyans celebrating as forces are close to securing last Islamic State holdouts in Sirte, Libya.

Libyan militias backed by American airstrikes said they have cleared the stronghold of the Islamic State in Libya, a defeat that would set back the group's ambitions in North Africa. The country, however, remains very unstable amid battles between rival militias and the remaining militants could still undermine a fragile US-backed unity government, analysts said.

Libyan fighters erupted in celebration in the coastal city of Sirte on Tuesday after a nearly seven month struggle to oust the Islamic State, as the mostly pro-government forces were searching for any remaining militants.

The Islamic State's hopes of extending their self-proclaimed "caliphate" beyond Syria and Iraq into Libya have been dashed, at least for now. But while their propaganda war and recruiting efforts have also been weakened, analysts said, the group remains active in other parts of the country.

Libya now faces the specter of clandestine cells staging terrorist attacks, much like they've done recently in Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan, after battlefield reverses there.

"The retaking of Sirte is certainly a negative blow to Islamic State affiliates in Libya because they will no longer have a territorial stronghold in the country," said Claudia Gazzini, senior Libya analyst for the International Crisis Group. "This is significant because it no longer gives them the possibility to operate in the open or to recruit and levy taxes directly."

Yet despite its demise, Gazzini said, "we cannot rule out" that the group will carry out attacks in other parts of the country.

Libya descended into turmoil following the death of dictator Muammar Gaddafi in 2011 in the aftermath of the country's Arab Spring uprising. The oil-producing nation fractured into fiefdoms controlled by competing groups of former rebels. Rival governments were established in the capital, Tripoli, and in the east, with each claiming authority.

In the vacuum, the Islamic State and other extremist groups emerged in Libya. In early 2015, in alliance with other radical factions, the Islamic State's affiliate seized parts of Sirte, situated in the heart of Libya's oil crescent. Within months, the militants had tightened their grip on the city and sought to create their own government.

The militants viewed Sirte as a possible fallback capital if their headquarters in the Syrian city of Raqqa fell. Recruits from other parts of Africa and the Middle East as well within Libya streamed to Sirte, which was where Gaddafi was born.

"Operationally, it was an important base and logistics hub for other ISIS fronts in Libya," said Frederic Wehrey, a Middle East analyst with the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

The fall of Sirte arrives at a tense moment for Libya. Rival militias have been battling for territory and economic gain in recent days in the worst eruption of fighting in the capital in more than a year. Clashes are also underway in Benghazi, Libya's second-largest city, pitting Islamists against forces loyal to Gen. Khalifa Hifter, a powerful commander who recently seized control of key oil terminals, while his rivals were concentrated on besieging Sirte.

The violence has further challenged the authority of the unity government, which has struggled to exert control since it arrived in Tripoli in March. Those challenges are poised to become even more complicated as the Islamic State plots its next moves – and a possible revival.

"For it to find a place to govern and rule it would need to find a locale suffering from marginalisation and some sort of tribal or social constituency that would welcome it – as well as a pre-existing jihadist infrastructure," Wehrey said.

Today, some ISIS militants are fighting in Benghazi. Analysts say that others who fled Sirte may have relocated to southern Libya, including the city of Sebha. The south offers a safe haven to regroup, but its remoteness makes it more difficult for it to attract recruits and stage attacks.

There have also been reports of Islamic State activity in western Libya, including in the town of Bani Walid, where sympathetic tribes have provided the militants with safe houses, and in the coastal town of Sabratha, where ISIS has strong links to smuggling and other criminal networks.

"It's hard to predict whether they still have a leadership capable of thinking up next steps," said Mattia Toaldo, a Libya analyst and senior policy fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations. "The real question is whether the single jihadists will find a new 'home' in other jihadist groups."

Tripoli could become the militants' next target. Violence in the capital would further undermine the government's authority and dissuade foreigners from returning. Tensions are also growing between Islamist militias in city, and any eruption of fighting could aid Islamic State cells.

"Any outright conflict between these groups would certainly throw in disarray what little security there is in Tripoli, and this could open space for radical groups like IS," said Gazzini, referring to the Islamic State.

Even as the unity government seeks to capitalize on the liberation of Sirte and bolster its international legitimacy, many of its supporters are increasingly dissatisfied. The militias that ousted the Islamic State are mostly from the city of Misuruta. Many Misuratans believe the recent clashes in Tripoli are an attempt by their rivals to claim the capital.

"The Misuratans are not happy with this and might try to mobilize forces to Tripoli in the upcoming weeks," Gazzini said.

Or they could end up fighting Hifter's forces, Toaldo said.

The more the instability, the greater the possibility that the Islamic State will regroup and that other extremist groups will form in Libya.

"The important thing to underscore is that jihadism and the radical threat in Libya is still very much present, especially given the institutional breakdown of the state, the alienation of vast swathes of youths, marginalised towns and tribes," Wehrey said.

The Turkey-EU fallout

Galip Dalay
Bloomberg



On November 24, 2016, The European Parliament passed a non-binding resolution in favour of freezing Turkey's EU membership accession process. This issue will be on the table for the final verdict when the European Council convenes on December 15-16. Even though Turkey-EU relations are going through a difficult period, it is unlikely that European leaders will shut their doors to Turkey when they meet. Mutual interest, rather than altruism, stands in the way of complete termination of accession talks, which have achieved little and are going nowhere at present.

Europe and Turkey are pointing fingers at each other, but neither side is willing to pull the plug and take all the blame.

The EU is saying that Turkey's lack of reform, democratic backsliding and post-coup crackdown stand in the way of continuing negotiations, whereas the Turkish government accuses the EU of lack of commitment to the accession process, going back on its pledge to liberalise visas for Turkish citizens, and issuing a tepid response to the failed coup attempt.

Though all these factors have certainly played their part in the current stagnation in bilateral relations, they do not explain it fully.

Power struggles, political battles and a failed coup attempt have defined the Turkish political scene in recent years. In this climate, democratization and reform are fast disappearing from political parlance in Turkey.

Yet Turkey-EU relations hit a wall long before the former started wavering off the democratic path. Between 2004 and 2007, a period often considered to be the "golden era" in these relations, Turkey's membership was effectively put on hold.

This was due to the election of Angela Merkel in Germany and Nicolas Sarkozy in France and the accession of Cyprus to the EU.

Although the standstill was framed as Turkey's inability to fulfil criteria in the 35 accession chapters, the real reason for it was Turkey's Muslim identity, which caused anxiety in Germany and France, coupled with the unresolved nature of the Cyprus issue.

This culturalist rejection, coupled with rising xenophobia, Islamophobia, and anti-immigration sentiments across Europe, has fed anti-EU sentiments in Turkey and has gradually marginalised the pro-western section of Turkish society.

This group no longer has the moral high-ground to urge the government to adopt "European values" to further Europeanise or democratize the country. Thus, the EU has ceased to be a reference point for Turkey's reforms and democratization, which has effectively come to a halt in recent years due to much more pressing domestic political struggles. Having said that, no other reference point can replace the EU's previous anchoring role, and its disappearance bodes ill for Turkish democracy.

In recent years, another set of factors have pushed Turkey further away from the EU. First, the EU appears to spend more time selling putative European values, but not necessarily always upholding them. The trouble is that the EU's value-trade has fewer and fewer customers, both internally and externally.

The EU's credibility relies more on how EU countries uphold these values domestically than how far they project them externally. In short, the view of the Turkish government has been that Europe needs to put its house in order before lecturing others.

Second, from the government's perspective, the EU membership process has lost its instrumental value. The legislative harmonisation with the EU immensely contributed to the government's successful drive to rein in Turkey's previously meddlesome and unruly military and other high bureaucracy.

Though the failed coup attempt has demonstrated that civil-military relations are not ideal, there is no power centre able to challenge the government. Therefore, an external anchor is no longer needed to deal with a threatening undemocratic power group such as the military or the Gulenist religious cult. Third, the power struggles of recent years and failed coup attempts have taken their toll on Turkey's state structure, resulting in the weakening of institutions.

On top of this, Turkey is poised to change its political system from a parliamentary system to an executive presidency. Both of these initiatives indicate that Turkey will be busy transitioning to a new political system while embarking on restructuring the state in coming years. The government appears to believe that abiding by EU rules will decrease the government's room for manoeuvre in this process.

In addition, historically, Turkey's centre-right and conservative circles hoped the westernisation project would achieve three goals: economic progress; internal political security; and geopolitical security in the case of Turkey's Nato membership.

> **Turkey-EU relations hit a wall long before the former started wavering off the democratic path.**

But there is growing recognition that the first can be attained through engagements with other parts of the world and the need for the second – internal political security vis-a-vis a hostile Kemalist establishment – no longer exists. Though Turkey institutionally remains anchored to Nato, there is increasing questioning of Turkey's role and membership.

To put it differently, the growing appreciation that there are alternative modernisation paradigms, accompanied by a search for different models of democracy, not just the liberal one, lessen the appeal of the EU path. This partially explains President Recep Erdogan's exploration of whether the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation can be a viable alternative to the EU for Turkey.

In the long term, these questions will be more effectively dealt with once the EU and Turkey come to clear decisions about their identity, historic mission and orientation. But there are short-term actions that can be taken to save relations from further deterioration.

The accession framework isn't working at present. Sticking to it will only generate more bickering, animosity and tension between Ankara and Brussels. A more realistic framework that can breathe new life into the relations with attainable goals and feasible conditionality would be mutually beneficial. Upholding the terms of the refugee deal, upgrading Turkey's custom union agreement with the EU and investing more energy into a settlement in Cyprus will add positive dynamism into the relations.

Once this is achieved, Turkey and EU officials need to come together to put a more realistic framework for bilateral relations on the table instead of remaining prisoners to the current dysfunctional framework.

The Peninsula

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Rebels threaten to end ceasefire in Philippines

Manila
AP

Philippine communist rebels warned President Rodrigo Duterte yesterday that they may be forced to end their months long ceasefire and resume fighting if he does not suspend the government's counterinsurgency programme and withdraw troops from rebel-influenced areas.

The Communist Party of the Philippines said that if Duterte fulfills the demands by January and releases remaining political detainees through an amnesty, it can guarantee the cease-fire's extension, helping to foster peace talks brokered by Norway.

New People's Army guerrillas, however, will be forced to engage troops if the president presses the military's deployment of troops in what the rebels claim as "guerrilla zones" in the countryside, the outlawed party said in a statement.

"He will only have himself to blame if this forces the hand of the Communist Party of the Philippines to terminate its unilateral ceasefire declaration," it said.

Blame game

- **The Communist Party said that if Duterte fulfils the demands by January and releases remaining political detainees through an amnesty, it can guarantee the ceasefire extension, helping to foster peace talks brokered by Norway.**
- **The guerrillas have complained that troops continued to be deployed in rebel areas to carry out surveillance and other counterinsurgency operation in what they say are violations of the government's own truce.**

While no fighting has erupted since both sides declared separate cease-fires in August, the Maoist guerrillas have complained that troops continued to be deployed in rebel areas to carry out surveillance and other counterinsurgency operation in what they say are violations of the government's own truce.

The military is unlikely to relent to the rebel demands.

It has denied rebel allegations that it has violated the government cease-fire by deploying counterinsurgency troops in rural areas where the rebels claim to have influence. Troops deployed in rural areas were either accompanying government workers or helping to carry out rural projects, military officials say.

Lieutenant General Eduardo Ano, a longtime combat intelligence officer who was inaugurated as the new military chief of staff yesterday, said the military would support government efforts for the peaceful resolution of armed conflicts.

"But even as we uphold and respect the primacy of peace, make no mistake about it, we shall remain to be a lethal force capable of destroying any threat to our nation," Ano said.

"We will not let our people cower in the face of lawlessness and terrorism."



Soldiers parade for the change of command for the new Armed Forces chief at a military camp in Quezon City, Metro Manila, yesterday.

Battle setbacks, surrenders and infighting have weakened the leftist rebel group, which is blacklisted as a terrorist organisation by the United States government.

A confidential Philippine government assessment obtained by *The Associated Press* says the guerrillas had declined to 3,800 fighters with more than 4,500 firearms in the first half of the year, with about 700 of the country's 42,000 villages affected by the insurgency.

Duterte defends cops linked to death of mayor

Manila
Reuters

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte **(pictured)** yesterday defended police officers who killed a detained mayor on a list of top drug suspects even after another law enforcement agency concluded the death was an extrajudicial killing.

The National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) on Tuesday disputed a police account that the mayor from central Leyte Province, Rolando Espinosa, was killed in a shootout in a jail when police came to search for guns and drugs last month.

The bureau described Espinosa's killing as a "rub out".

"I will have to defend them," Duterte said during a ceremony at the main army in Manila, referring to the police officers.

"I will listen to the story and I will take it as the true version ... because they are under me, I should believe them."

Earlier, Duterte had put



Espinosa's name on a list of top drug suspects.

The mayor, who denied involvement in narcotics, was arrested on October 5 this year on dangerous drugs and firearms charges.

Police said Espinosa and a fellow prisoner, Raul Yap, fired at a police team that had come to search their cells.

Police returned fire and killed them.

Police say 2,004 people have been shot and killed by officers in self-defence during anti-drug operations since the president took office on July 1.

Espinosa's killing was also investigated by senators, who doubted the police version of events because they said there were many inconsistencies in the official report.

Duterte said he did not believe the investigation done by the NBI because they had no credible witnesses.

"As a matter of fact, I'm ready to go to jail for them, no problem," he added.

Investigators have filed murder cases against 21 police officers in connection with Espinosa's death.

NEWS BYTES

Teenager jailed for Australia terror plot

AN 18-year-old was sentenced yesterday to seven years in prison for planning a Mother's Day attack in Melbourne.

The young man, who was 17 when he was arrested by police last year, pleaded guilty to one charge of committing an act, or planning the preparation of an act, of terrorism.

He will be eligible for parole in five years and three months.

The Australian Broadcasting Corporation said the teenager was making pipe and pressure cooker bombs for a May 10 Mother's Day attack last year when he was arrested.

Militant to hang for attack on UK envoy

BANGLADESH'S highest court yesterday upheld the death sentence handed down to a top militant and two of his followers for a 2004 attack on the British ambassador that left three people dead.

The Supreme Court rejected the appeals by Mufti Abdul Hannan, head of Harkatul Jihad Al Islami (HuJI) and two members of the banned militant group.

The appeals are "dismissed", Chief Justice S K Sinha told the court in a brief ruling.

They could now be hanged within months unless they seek a review of the apex court's verdict.

Pardoned Cambodia oppn leader back in parliament

Phnom Penh
Reuters

The leader of Cambodia's opposition party returned to parliament yesterday after receiving a royal pardon, a move that could ease a year of political tension in the Southeast Asian country.

The opposition complains that Prime Minister Hun Sen's ruling party has launched a crackdown in a bid to intimidate critics before a general election due in 2018.

Kem Sokha, the acting leader of the Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP), said he would work with Hun Sen and his Cambodian People's Party (CPP) to end disputes.

Kem Sokha was sentenced to five months in prison in September after failing to appear in court over a case against two lawmakers from his party.

Since May he had been holed up at the CNRP headquarters in the capital, Phnom Penh, to avoid arrest, and he received a royal pardon at Hun Sen's request last week.

Hun Sen, who has ruled Cambodia with an iron fist for 30 years, congratulated Kem Sokha on his appointment as parliament's minority leader on yesterday and said he looked forward to working with the opposition leader.

"He's my dialogue partner to discuss national issues," Hun Sen told parliament yesterday.

Kem Sokha urged politicians to end their rhetoric.



Cambodia's opposition leader Kem Sokha (centre) walks after a parliamentary meeting at the National Assembly, in Phnom Penh, yesterday.

Thailand probes BBC over King's profile

Bangkok
AFP

Thai authorities are investigating the BBC over a Thai-language profile of the new king, officials said yesterday, after the article outraged ultra-royalists in a country where criticism of the monarchy is outlawed.

A harsh royal defamation law has been used to jail scores of critics and spawned a culture of self-censorship across the kingdom's media, academia and the arts.

The BBC is now under scrutiny for the profile published out of its London offices of King Maha Vajiralongkorn, who ascended to the throne last week.

The royal succession was Thailand's first in seven decades and is considered a delicate moment for the institution.

Vajiralongkorn does not command the respect enjoyed by his late revered father.

The BBC profile included information about Vajiralongkorn's personal life that is well-known inside the kingdom but rarely printed by Thai media.

The article, which has since been blocked online in Thailand, quickly went viral on social media but attracted a torrent of criticism from royalists.

Any member of the public can allege royal defamation and authorities are duty bound to investigate.

A team of police officers visited the BBC's Bangkok office but found it closed.

"This case is in the process of investigation but I cannot disclose the details," Pornchai Chalordej, the commander of the Bangkok police station, said.

Top leaders from Thailand's royalist junta defended the probe.

"As they have an office in Thailand and Thai reporters work there they must be prosecuted when they violate Thai law," Junta Chief Prayut Chan-O-Cha said.

The junta's number two, defence minister Prawit Wongsuwon, stressed the police's duty to investigate any wrongdoing.

UN urges China to probe case of missing lawyer

Beijing
AFP

UN human rights experts have urged China immediately to investigate the fate of a prominent Chinese rights lawyer missing for over two weeks.

Jiang Tianyong took on numerous high-profile rights cases, including those of Falun Gong practitioners, Tibetan protesters, victims of the 2008 contaminated milk powder scandal and those of fellow lawyers Gao Zhisheng and Chen Guangcheng before being disbarred for his activism in 2009, according to Amnesty International.

He disappeared on November 21 en route to Beijing from Changsha, the capital of the central province of Hunan, where he had gone to inquire about the situation of a detained human rights lawyer.

"We fear that Mr Jiang's disappearance may be directly linked to his advocacy and he may be at risk of torture," a group of three UN experts said in a statement on Tuesday, adding that they could not "rule out the possibility" that state agents were to blame for his disappearance.

UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights Philip Alston met Jiang on a visit to China in August and said he feared the disappearance was in part a retaliation against the lawyer's assistance to UN experts.

"The international standards are clear: states must refrain from and protect all persons from acts of reprisal" for such cooperation, Alston said.

President Xi Jinping has overseen a tightening of controls on civil society since assuming power in 2012, closing avenues for legal activism that had opened up in recent years.

While the government initially targeted political activists and human rights campaigners, it has increasingly turned its attention to the lawyers who represent them.

In the most striking example, authorities detained more than 200 people last year during the so-called "709 crackdown".

All 48 feared dead in Pakistan plane crash

Saddha Batolni
Agencies

Deadly crash

- **It was not immediately clear what caused the crash. The military, which was part of rescue operations, said 38 bodies had so far been retrieved from the wreckage.**
- **Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) Flight PK661 came down on a flight from the city of Chitral to Islamabad.**

A Pakistani plane carrying 48 people crashed yesterday in the country's mountainous north and burst into flames, authorities said, as rescue workers pulled dozens of bodies from the wreckage and officials expressed little hope for survivors.

Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) Flight PK661 came down on a flight from the city of Chitral to Islamabad, the civil aviation authority said.

It was not immediately clear what caused the crash, which occurred near the village of Saddha Batolni in Abbottabad district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. The military, which was part of rescue operations, said 38 bodies had so far been retrieved from the wreckage.

"The way the plane crashed and broke into pieces, there is no chance of any survival," Sardar Aurangzeb Nalota, a local legislator, said.

Villagers were collecting body parts in shawls and on woven beds, he said, while police and rescue teams were searching the site with torches.

"The fuel tank is still on fire. the plane debris is scattered in the mountains and residents told me that it is completely destroyed," Nalota said. Ilyas Abbasi, a police official in the nearest town Havelian, said the site was more than four kilometres away over hilly terrain and had to be reached on foot. The airline said the plane was an ATR-42 turboprop aircraft, which lost contact en route from Chitral.

"A plane has crashed and locals told us that it is on fire," Saeed Wazir, a senior local police official, said earlier.

Among those on board was Junaid Jamshed, a former Pakistani pop star turned evangelical Muslim who was embroiled in a blasphemy controversy in 2014, according to the Chitral airport manager and a local police official. The singer's Twitter account had said he was in Chitral.

Tributes were pouring in on social media for the former lead singer of the country's first major pop band, whose popular "Dil Dil Pakistan" became an unofficial national anthem.

"The voice of my youth, the voice of my generation.... #JunaidJamshed you will be sorely missed," tweeted user Huma A Shah.

The terrain around Havelian is hilly, roughly the same altitude as the Margalla Hills which overlook Islamabad.

Pakistan's most recent air disasters involved helicopters, both in 2015. In May that year a Pakistani military helicopter crashed in a remote northern valley, killing eight people including the Norwegian, Philippine and Indonesian envoys and the wives of the Malaysian and Indonesian envoys.

In August 2015 another army helicopter crashed killing 12 people, all military. The deadliest air disaster on Pakistani soil was in 2010, when an Airbus 321 operated by private airline Airblue and flying from Karachi crashed into the hills outside Islamabad while about to land, killing all 152 on board.



A Pakistani woman hugs a relative of Junaid Jamshed, a former Pakistani pop star turned evangelical Muslim, at his house in Karachi yesterday, after his death in plane crash.

An official report blamed the accident on a confused captain and a hostile cockpit atmosphere.

But the deadliest accident involving PIA came when an Airbus A300 crashed into a cloud-covered hillside on approach to the Nepalese capital Kathmandu in 1992 after the plane descended too early, killing 167 people.

Despite this, PIA has been crash free for 10 years, and received a 7 out of 7 rating on the highly-cited AirlineRatings.com, which launched its annual listing in 2013.

Notices to 60 over Panama Leaks

Islamabad
Internews

The Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) of Pakistan has sent out tax notices to 60 individuals whose names appeared in the Panama Leaks for imposition of penalty out of the total 336 individuals owning offshore companies in known tax havens abroad.

"Yes, the FBR has issued penalty show cause letters to 60 individuals whose names appeared in the Panama Leaks under Section 182 of the Income Tax Ordinance (ITO) 2001," official sources confirmed on Wednesday.

According to official documents on update with regards to the ongoing probe in the case of Panama and Bahamas leaks, the FBR's Directorate General Intelligence Revenues (IR) sent out letters to 46 directors of these offshore companies for providing their services to them. So far, the FBR got information from 57 individuals appeared into Panama Leaks. There are 23 non-resident Pakistanis while 39 have denied that they owned any offshore company abroad.

Of total 336 individuals of Panama, the FBR found that 11 were dead. There are 31 individuals into Panama who have sought adjournment against proceedings undertaken by the FBR. Only 14 admitted that they owned offshore companies and information provided into Panama Leaks was correct. There are 10 individuals who have further contested the FBR's information.

About eight individuals have raised jurisdiction issues after receiving notices from the FBR. There are 37 individuals where FBR's letter could not be served and the notices remained undelivered.

In case of BahamasLeaks where 109 names appeared so the FBR sent out tax notices to them.

Of total tax notices, 6 remained undelivered and 5 sought adjournment. There are 11 individuals where the FBR got information and five denied that they owned any offshore companies into Bahamas. Two individuals raised jurisdiction issued and 11 were those who owned duplicate companies.



Pakistani cricketer-turned-opposition leader and head of Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI), Imran Khan, leaves the Supreme Court after attending a hearing on the Panama Papers in Islamabad, yesterday.

182 people named in leaks untraceable

Islamabad
Internews

The whereabouts of nearly 200 Pakistanis named in Panama Papers and Bahamas Papers remain a secret for the country's taxman. The Panama and Bahamas Papers are huge collections of classified documents leaked by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) in April and September, respectively.

These Papers revealed names of around 600 Pakistanis, including Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's children, who owned offshore companies in international tax havens. The Supreme Court is already hearing a number of petitions primarily seeking Sharif's disqualification in the wake of these revelations.

The Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) has already sent notices to those individuals whose exact identities and addresses are available. However, the FBR's Intelligence and Investigation (Inland) Directorate is still struggling to ascertain exact identities of some 182 of these Pakistanis. In this regard, the FBR directorate has sought help of the country's top database authority, the National Database Registration Authority (NADRA), for the purpose of their identification. Last month, the FBR wrote a letter to NADRA requesting it to find out and furnish the computerised national identity cards (CNICs), passport details and 'verisys' of these individuals.

Interestingly, the list of 182 individuals sent to NADRA for a search also contains names of some well-known persons including a sitting judge of the Lahore High Court Justice Farrukh Irfan Khan and his daughter Maria Farrukh Irfan Khan.

It also includes name of Zain Iftikhar Sukhera – a family friend of former PM Yousuf Raza Gilani – who was also named in Hajj corruption case; and Rukhsana Qayyum, a family member of former attorney general Malik Muhammad Qayyum. And yet the FBR is clueless about these 'famous' Pakistanis. Names of prominent politicians from Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and members of Sharif family are not included in the list as they are already in correspondence with the FBR over the issue.

NEWS BYTES

Nuclear security at par with global standards

IT IS PART OF Pakistan's policy to provide awareness and transparency about measures taken by it to strengthen nuclear security nationally, an official report said.

On the occasion of the second Ministerial Nuclear Security Conference of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs published a brochure outlining Pakistan's nuclear security regime.

The brochure stated that Pakistan has established a comprehensive and effective national nuclear security regime which is at par with the latest international standards and guidelines, the ministry said in a statement yesterday.

Gender gap in voters reaches 12.7 million

THE GENDER gap in Pakistan's registered voters has reached an alarming level as statistics show there are 12.7 million fewer women compared to men in the newly updated electoral rolls.

The Election Commission of Pakistan yesterday released updated electoral rolls that show that the total number of registered voters in the country as of December 2016 is 97.01 million. These would easily cross the 100 million mark by the next elections due in 2018. Among registered voters, 54.59 million are male, while 42.17 million are female, showing a gap of 12.7 million an increase of more than a million during the last three years.

In the last general elections held in May 2013, the gender gap was 10.97 million.

Female cyclists push boundaries one wheelie at a time

Kabul
Reuters

Brushing aside suicide bombings and public scorn, the young women of Afghanistan's first freestyle cycling club hope their pop-a-wheelies, bunnyhops and backflips will trailblaze a new path for future generations in this conservative Muslim nation.

Fifteen women, mainly teenagers, are among 50 members of the small Kabul club, established two months ago to help keep young Afghans away from drugs, petty crime and violence.

"Most of the time people are harassing us because they see girls cycling as a bad thing," said Zahra Ronna, 18, wearing a black Nike hat on her red and white bicycle. "We are tired of war and we want to practise new things in our lives," she said. Under the Taliban in the 1990s, women in Afghanistan were banned from going to school or stepping outside their home without a male family member.

Women's rights have made gains since the hardline Islamist group's ouster in 2001, but observers worry that progress is at risk as violence against women persists and they remain under-represented in politics.

"We ask people to set their girls free so they can achieve their goals and liberty. Women are not only supposed to work at home," Ronna said.

Ronna and other cyclists gather three times a week at a concrete playground in the capital, using metal tables, wooden crates and boxes to perfect stunts they have seen performed on YouTube, Facebook and other social media.

The club's founder, Asghar Mehrzada, said the group is attracting a lot of interest from young Afghans, who pay a membership fee of 400 afghanis ($6) per month. He hopes the Afghan government and international aid groups will help fund its expansion with better bicycles and facilities.

"The big challenge that we face is insecurity. We are not confident of the security to go out and do this sport," said Mehrzada, a civil society activist when he is not on his bike. For Fatima Mahdawi, another female cyclist, the club offers a much-needed escape from violence, which has worsened over the past year due to a resurgent Taliban.

"There are lots of problems in this country we live in," she said. "But whenever I come to the club, it gives me huge energy and joy. I feel like I'm flying."



A young Afghan cyclist performs with a bicycle during an exercise on the outskirts of Kabul.

77 died after Jayalalithaa's illness & demise: AIADMK

Chennai
IANS/AFP

Tamil Nadu's ruling AIADMK yesterday said that 77 people died due to shock after hearing about the illness and later the demise of chief minister J Jayalalithaa and announced a solatium of Rs300,000 to their families.

Jayalalithaa died on Monday evening after suffering cardiac arrest. According to the statement a sum of Rs50,000 will be paid to a party cadre who attempted self-immolation on hearing about Jayalalithaa's ill health and to another person who sacrificed a finger after heard about her death. The party also conveyed its condolences to the family members of the dead.

Thousands of people flocked to the seaside grave of Jayalalithaa, a day after a burial ceremony restricted to politicians, film stars and relatives of the reclusive but hugely popular leader.

Men wearing white dhotis lined up on plastic chairs beside hastily-erected police barricades around the grave to have their heads shaved, a Hindu mourning tradition usually reserved for the death of a close relative.

Who will inherit?

Media reports said her nephew was among the few relatives who attended, and there has been intense speculation about who stands to inherit the vast wealth she accrued during her time in power.

Many of the mourners were poor women who had travelled long distances in intense heat to pay final respects to the revered former chief minister of the southern state of Tamil Nadu, who died on Monday aged 68.

Among them was Vanita, 50, who ekes out a living rolling the cheap Indian cigarettes known as bidis. Vanita, who like many people in southern India uses only one name, said she had travelled to the state capital Chennai to see Jayalalithaa many times, and once asked for her help getting treatment for a heart complaint.

"She made sure I got the operation I needed. She even gave me money for medicine. And the next time I met her she remembered me and asked how I was," said Vanita, pulling her sari to one side to reveal the scar from her surgery. "She once said, 'I am everything to my children and they are everything to me'," she said of the woman who was known simply as "Amma" or mother to her adoring fans.

The former movie star and a populist champion of the poor, she was one of India's most powerful female leaders.

She was buried on Tuesday alongside M G Ramachandran, her on-screen lover and predecessor as chief minister, at a ceremony attended by the stars of the film world and top political leaders including Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Media reports said her nephew was among the few relatives who attended, and there has been intense speculation about who stands to inherit the vast wealth she accrued during her time in power.

An estimated one million people lined the streets to watch her glass coffin transported to the burial site amid tight security in a city that has seen outbreaks of violence after the deaths of past leaders.

Most shops and restaurants reopened yesterday as the city began returning to normal, although schools and colleges will remain closed for another two days. The atmosphere at her graveside was largely calm, the peace occasionally broken by anguished cries of "Amma" from the mourners.

One woman screamed and beat her head repeatedly with her hands, banging herself against the police barricades around the grave. "She took care of everything and we wanted for nothing," said 47-year-old Paramashiva after having his head shaved.





Supporters of J Jayalalithaa light candles in front of her picture as they pay homage outside the burial site in Chennai yesterday. BELOW: People pay tribute at the memorial where Jayalalithaa was laid to rest.

Huge spike in honour deaths last year: Minister

New *Delhi*
AP

India has registered nearly an 800 percent spike in the number of so-called honour killings reported last year, leading state officials and women's rights groups to urge investigations into how such crimes persist.

Indian police registered 251 cases of honor killing in 2015, compared with just 28 a year earlier when India began counting them separately from murder, according to a statement this week by Junior Home Minister Hansraj G Ahir to Parliament.

The surge could partly reflect more willingness by people to report such crimes, which many still consider just punishment for women and men who defy communal customs by marrying outside of their religion, clan or caste. Often, the perpetrators are relatives seeking to punish young couples for bringing "shame" to the family.

Women's rights activists say the government must pass legislation to recognize the crime as unique in order to target perpetrators for prosecution. "These figures show that the government has to take this as a priority," said Sudha Sundaraman, head of the All India Democratic Women's Association. Though police are now asked to count honor killing separately, the lack of a separate law defining such crimes means that some officers still record them in the larger murder category and do not investigate the cases further, she said.

Honour killings are still common enough among Hindus and Muslims to regularly make newspaper headlines in a country where most marriages are arranged by families. Most cases are reported in northern states such as Uttar Pradesh and Haryana, where caste councils wield enormous power in village life.

The highest number of honour killings recorded last year was in Uttar Pradesh, where police counted 131 killings compared with just two cases in 2014, Ahir said, citing data from the National Crime Records Bureau. State police officers were sceptical. Such a jump "is astronomical" and needs to be looked into, Deputy Inspector General D K Chaudhary said.

Women's activists say that's missing the point, and that having 279 honour killings recorded over two years still vastly underestimates the actual numbers. One 2011 study suggested about 900 people are murdered in honour killings ever year in India. The study by the All India Democratic Women's Association was based on surveys conducted nationwide.

"There is severe underreporting of such honor crimes. Families are often ashamed to report such crimes," said Annie Raja of the National Federation of Indian Women.

Raja said the situation had worsened in the last few years, noting an increasing trend in village councils run by unelected elders promoting conservative, anti-women values in the name of preserving Indian culture and tradition.

Some observers also noted that social changes were creating friction in communities, as more women step away from traditional home-making roles to join the work force. That makes them more likely to want to delay marriage, while also increasing the chance of finding partners outside of their community.

"There has been a backlash of conservatism," Raja said. "Young people are facing violence and attacks from their families if they fall in love."

Analysts say that even as politicians push for better health care and education for girls, they have been unwilling to act against village councils that influence large numbers of voters. "Indian society is unwilling to accept the choices made by young women when it comes to their marriage," said Ranjana Kumari of the Centre for Social Research, a New Delhi-based think tank. "People also have to learn to respect women."



Tamil cinema legend Cho Ramaswamy is dead

Chennai
IANS

Comedian actor, political satirist and editor Cho Ramaswamy, a legend in his own right, died here early yesterday, just a day after viewing on TV the burial of his old friend J Jayalalithaa. A former member of the Rajya Sabha, Cho, as he was widely addressed, suffered a cardiac arrest and died just before 4am at Chennai's Apollo Hospitals, where the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister too passed away.

The 82-year-old Cho had been in and out of hospital since January 2015, family members and friends said. Messages of condolences poured in from across the country, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi describing him as a friend and "a multi-dimensional personality, towering intellectual, great nationalist and fearless voice who was respected and admired".

Cho founded and edited the political magazine *Thuglak*, where he earned universal respect as one who did not allow his personal friendship to pass impartial judgement on political events and personalities.

Between 1963 and 2005, the versatile Cho acted in 180 Tamil films, directed five movies, wrote and directed 20 plays, scripted and acted in 27 TV serials and also wrote 10 books. According to Cho's family, he learnt about the death of Jayalalithaa from his hospital bed.

Resourcesat-2A put into orbit

Sriharikota
IANS

India yesterday successfully put into orbit its own earth observation satellite Resourcesat-2A in a text book style.

"Today we had a successful launch of Resourcesat-2A to provide three tier imaging data. The satellites solar panels were deployed. The launch was perfect," A S Kiran Kumar, Chairman, Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), said soon after the launch. Kumar said that for the first time a camera was put on the rocket, and as a result the launch of the satellite and the deployment of solar panels were seen.

Around 10.25am the PSLV-XL variant rocket standing 44.4 metres tall and weighing 321 tonne tore into the morning skies with fierce orange flames at its tail. Gathering speed every second, the rocket raced towards the heavens amidst the cheers of the ISRO officials and the media team assembled at the port here. Around 18 minutes into the flight, the rocket slung the 1,235kg Resourcesat-2A into an 817 km polar sun synchronous orbit. The PSLV rocket is a four stage/engine rocket powered by solid and liquid fuel alternatively.

Resourcesat-2A is a follow on mission to Resourcesat-1 and Resourcesat-2, launched in 2003 and 2011 respectively. The new satellite Resourcesat-2A is intended to continue the remote sensing data services to global users provided by it two predecessors. The Resourcesat-2A carries three payloads which are similar to those of the earlier two Resourcesat's. They are a high resolution Linear Imaging Self Scanner (LISS-4) camera operating in three spectral bands in the Visible and Near Infrared Region (VNIR) with 5.8 m spatial resolution and steerable up to 26 degree across track to achieve a five day revisit capability.

The second payload is the medium resolution LISS-3 camera operating in three-spectral bands in VNIR and one in Short Wave Infrared (SWIR) band with 23.5 m spatial resolution. The third payload is a coarse resolution Advanced Wide Field Sensor (AWiFS) camera operating in three spectral bands in VNIR and one band in SWIR with 56 m spatial resolution. The mission life of Resourcesat-2A is five years.



ISRO's Resourcesat-2A carrying the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle PSLV-C36 after the launch from Sriharikota yesterday.

Kerala's 'Green initiative' to be launched today

Thiruvananthapuram
IANS

The 'Haritha' Kerala Mission, a comprehensive programme for creating new development perspectives by maximum utilisation of opportunities through waste management, water resources and agricultural development using organic farming will be launched by Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan today.

A state level task force will oversee the project and Vijayan has already spoken to district collectors to see that this programme is taken to the grassroots and people are involved for its success.

He also asked them to seek the support of educational institutions, NGOs, industries among others. The massive project aims to clear and remove waste from all the water bodies in the state, ensure disposal of solid waste and removal of waste water and measures to increase the area of land under cultivation.

State Chief Secretary S M Vijayanand, who is playing a stellar role in the project, has drawn up a road map for the successful implantation of this on the lines of past successful programmes including the literacy mission, democratic decentralisation and peoples' planning programmes.

Among the immediate programmes that will be launched include the cleaning of vacant lands which will be used for vegetable cultivation, and a comprehensive waste management plan to collect, separate and recycle waste in panchayats and municipalities. Power generation from solar energy and wind energy will also be a part of this project, for which the Kerala State Electricity Board has already set the ball rolling.

A state government official said that one unique initiative under this programme would be setting up a 'swap shop' at 93 places across the state, where reusable products that are not of use by any family can be conserved and given to another, free of cost.

Digital payment providers at great hacking risk: Experts

Hacking threat

- The demonetisation drive and the cash crunch have led to digital wallet firms witnessing an unprecedented rise in their usage and popularity
- The country's largest m-wallet, Paytm, registered over 7 million transactions worth Rs 1.2bn in a day.

New *Delhi*
IANS

With more and more people logging into e-wallets or m-wallets for daily payments, the target for hackers has increased exponentially, experts warn, suggesting that upgraded security is the only way to safeguard millions of first-time users and small and medium businesses from losing their hard-earned money.

The government's demonetisation drive and the resultant cash crunch have led to digital wallet firms witnessing an unprecedented rise in their usage and popularity -- with people using them for everything from buying groceries and vegetables to local travel.

The country's largest m-wallet, Paytm, registered over seven million transactions worth Rs 1.2 billion in a day after the demonetisation drive began as millions of consumers and merchants across the country started opting for mobile payments on its platform for the first time.

Another mobile wallet major, MobiKwik, which launched MobiKwik 'Lite' late last month, registered over two million downloads within the first two days of the 'Lite' offer. Global payment solutions provider PayU observed a hike in average daily transactions from Rs 1.2 million to Rs 2.5 million post-demonetisation. Cyber experts emphasise that as the numbers swell, newer forms of vulnerabilities will be exposed in the payment gateways.

"Unarguably, with the digitisation drive comes the responsibility to safeguard against cyber pickpockets (cyber criminals) who will be on the prowl against unsuspecting consumers. Considering that cashless payments will become both a necessity and a huge convenience, it is imperative that security becomes embedded by design rather than a bolt-add-on from mobile-wallet payment firms," Anand Ramamoorthy, Managing Director, South Asia, Intel Security, said.

This essentially means that data security infrastructure along with customer-redressal mechanisms will have to be well thought of and the purview of IT laws for cyber crimes will have to be expanded to include mobile-wallet payment systems.

This is how hackers can attack your money in e-wallets: Create multiple fake accounts to collect money in small amounts; cheat people who are digital novices by psychological manipulation; and breach servers and steal data.

According to Vidit Baxi, Director (Technology) at the IT risk assessment and digital security services provider Lucideus, e-wallets are at greater risk than ever as users grow and hackers identify digital payment gateways as a lucrative opportunity. "That being said, let's understand that even the largest banks on the planet have been digitally hacked, so there is nothing like 100 per cent security. It's all about managing the risk and minimising it to whatever extent possible," Baxi said.

Rs1.5 crore in new Rs 2,000 notes seized in Goa; 2 held

Two persons were detained yesterday with Rs70 lakh in the new currency notes of Rs 2,000 denomination even as Rs1.5 crore in the new notes has been seized across the state in the last 24 hours, police said. Superintendent of Police Karthik Kashyap told reporters that that two persons identified as Ramesh Narvekar and Siddhu have been detained on a tip-off, after they were caught by the police ferrying the cash on a scooter in the jurisdiction of the Porvorim police station in North Goa. Kashyap also said that another raid conducted by the Crime Branch had netted Rs35 lakh in the new Rs 2,000 denomination notes in South Goa's Ponda area. "In all, in 24 hours Goa police has seized Rs. 1.5 crore new currency notes," he said.

Policeman held for breaking ATM in Manipur

Two persons, including a policeman, have been arrested in Manipur on charges of destroying an ATM here after failing to get cash, police said yesterday. Hemchandra Oinam, who is from Manipur Rifles, and Bobby Nameirakpam entered an ATM booth belonging to the State Bank of India located at the PWD complex on Tuesday evening to draw money. When they realised the ATM was dry, they smashed its screen and the machine itself. An official said CRPF personnel at the PWD office overpowered the two men and handed them over to police. A police officer said: "An FIR has been lodged against them. It is a serious crime since a security personnel was involved in the destruction of public property." Most ATMs in Manipur are shut down due to lack of cash following the demonetisation of high value currency.

19.1bn new notes pumped

With growing concerns over the circulation of new notes with the public post-demonetisation, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Deputy Governor R Gandhi yesterday clarified that 19.1 billion pieces of new currency have been put back into the public domain. Gandhi also said almost Rs12 lakh crore old notes (Rs11.85 lakh crore) have been deposited by public so far.

Cashlessness sting continues

New *Delhi*
IANS

A day to the month after high denomination notes were banned, there was no respite in sight for cash-strapped people yesterday as queues outside banks and ATMs for money withdrawal continued across the country with rising anger and pain.

There was a crowd of about 30-40 customers at the Axis Bank in Sector 16 of Noida, adjoining Delhi. Many among the crowd were arguing with the guard for not informing them that the bank had run out of cash. Out of desperation, they asked the guard to let them in and see for themselves that there was no cash.

"The bank ran out of cash at 10.30am. I have been telling people to return, but they won't listen," the bank guard said.

Customers complained that they were never informed whether there was any cash left or not. "Are we fools to stand here for hours, only to hear that there's no money left," an angry young woman shouted. Marmik, an HCL Technologies employee, said he joined the queue at 6.30am after returning from his night shift. He was yet to get money even at 2pm.

"There were 40 people outside the bank in the morning, three hours befor the bank opened. By the time my turn came around 1 p.m., the bank officials announced there was no cash. My shift starts at 5:30 p.m. and I'm now not only cashless, but sleepless too," said Marmik.

The situation at the adjoining Kotak Mahindra bank was worse since it received no cash at all during the day. "We didn't receive any cash today (Wednesday). We had cash on Monday. We are not certain if we will have it on Thursday," Customer Service Manager Ishwar said. "Our ATM hasn't seen any money since November 8. We can't say when it will have money," he added.



People wait for a bank to open to withdraw and deposit their money in Ahmedabad.

Many people who live in rented accommodations found their pain doubled, when their landlords refused to accept cheques or payments through e-wallets. Many said they were threatened with being thrown out if they didn't pay in cash.

"We are seven tenants here and my landlord has always dealt in cash. He wouldn't accept cheques from us, and threatened to kick us out," Anubhav Dey, a student in New friends Colony, in south Delhi, said.

Many among the hundreds of people standing in queues were heard blaming Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the pain of cashlessness after the government's November 8 demonetisation decision.

"Modi is not going to come back to power for the next 15 years," said a man standing in queue at an SBI ATM on Parliament Street.

Lucky from Paschim Vihar, in west Delhi, asked where were the 'achche din', recalling the government's promise of better days after the BJP came to power in 2014.

The efficacy of e-wallet apps like Paytm was also in question as issues kept emerging related to network connectivity resulting in transaction failures. "Modi's idea of infrastructure building is Paytm! The success of its working depends upon many things. What if my phone dies on me? What if I am at a place where I have no internet connectivity? I am dangerously dependent on my phone now and I am not liking it," Victor, a trained biologist, said.

Logjam in Parliament

PANDEMONIUM continued to prevail in Parliament yesterday with a vociferous opposition disallowing normal business -- prompting veteran BJP leader L K Advani to describe the prevailing situation as disgraceful and question the manner in which the proceedings were sought to be conducted.

The Lok Sabha witnessed protests over demonetisation with the opposition insisting on a debate under a rule entailing voting but the house, nevertheless, managed to take up Question Hour and Zero Hour. However, the Rajya Sabha could not conduct any business due to the prevailing chaos and logjam.

In the Lok Sabha, the opposition kept raising slogans against Prime Minister Narendra Modi and created a ruckus. Amid the din, however, the Question Hour went on for around half hour and all Zero Hour submissions were made. The house was adjourned for the day, minutes after it met at 2 p.m.

In the Rajya Sabha, a heated argument took place between the opposition and the treasury benches before two quick adjournments prior to the lunch break. The upper house was finally adjourned for the day soon after it re-assembled post-lunch.

Leader of Opposition Gulam Nabi Azad said over 80 people have died since demonetisation was introduced on November 8 and demanded that accountability should be fixed for these deaths.

Two dead as train derails in Bengal

Siliguri
IANS

Two persons were killed and six others injured when the engine and two coaches of the Guwahati-bound Capital Express derailed in West Bengal on Tuesday night, an official said.

The engine, an SLR coach and a second class coach derailed near Samuktala Road station in Alipurduar district, near the West Bengal-Assam border, at around 9.15pm on Tuesday, the NorthEast Frontier Railway official said in a release.

The train had originated from Rajendra Nagar terminal station in Patna. The two deceased, both male and residents of Faridabad in Haryana, have been identified as Munshi Nath (65) and Mahesh Nath (40). Two of the injured - Indrajit Mandal (25) and Saha Jamal (35) - had to be hospitalised.

The four other injured - Parikshit Mandal (40), Pritam Mandal (16), Rupa Mandal (34) and Surender Prasad (38) - left for home after they were administered first aid. All six injured were given ex-gratia of Rs5,000. About 150 of the stranded passengers were taken back to Alipurduar by the Kamakhya-Alipurduar Intercity Express.

The unaffected portion of the 19 coach train was detached and resumed its journey at 5.10 a.m. on Wednesday after completion of rescue and relief operation and reached Guwahati station at 11am with the remaining passengers.

The prima facie cause of the accident was overshooting of signal by the driver, the release said.

"Preliminary investigation shows the red signal was overlooked by the driver," a railway official said.

Railway Minister Suresh Prabhu has ordered a "thorough inquiry" to fix responsibility.



Villagers gather where the Rajendra Nagar-Guwahati Capital Express train derailed at Samuktala Road station in the Alipurduar district of West Bengal, yesterday.

Most parts of UP shiver as mercury plummets and icy winds blow

Lucknow
IANS

Most parts of Uttar Pradesh continued to shiver under a cold wave yesterday as the mercury plummeted to season's lowest at 10 degrees Celsius at midnight, a Met official said. The maximum temperature hovered at around 17 degrees Celsius in the past 24-hours till yesterday morning. With no sunshine and added moisture in the air, cold conditions have intensified in western, eastern and central UP.

"Difference between the maximum and minimum temperature has narrowed down to six degrees Celsius, making it colder," an official at the regional Met office said. The lowering of temperature at night has triggered early fog, he added. Regional Met Director J P Gupta said the existing weather conditions would prevail for the next three days and sun will only shine bright after December 10.

School timings in the state capital have been rescheduled and primary schools are now opening at 9.30am rather than at the usual timing of 8am. District Magistrate of Lucknow, Satyendra Singh has asked school authorities to ensure adherence to new timings or face action.Icy winds are blowing in many parts of the state, making it unusually cold for this part of the season. At many places visibility remained at around 50 metres while the humidity is at 100 per cent. Places in North India such as Delhi, Chandigarh, Amritsar, Ludhiana, Hisar and Karnal remained colder than hilly tourist destinations like Shimla, Dharamsala and Palampur, the Met office said.



A Kashmiri fisherman casts his net during dense fog on Dal Lake in Srinagar, yesterday.

Italy's Prime Minister Matteo Renzi resigns

Rome
Agencies

Prime Minister Matteo Renzi tendered his resignation to the head of state yesterday following a weekend referendum in which Italians resoundingly rejected his proposed constitutional reforms.

President Sergio Mattarella asked Renzi to carry on in a caretaker capacity while he holds consultations with the political parties to decide the next steps, a statement from the president's office said.

The consultations will begin today at 1700 GMT and are due to end on Saturday afternoon.

After consultations Mattarella is expected to ask a member of Renzi's cabinet, or a politician from his Democratic Party to try to form a new government. Elections are due in 2018 but many politicians are calling for them to be held earlier.

Prior to handing back the keys to his Palazzo Chigi residence, the 41-year-old chaired a meeting of the executive of his Democratic Party (PD).

"We are not afraid of anything or anybody, if other parties want to go to the polls .... the PD is not afraid of democracy or elections," Renzi said in a reference to an opposition clamour for a nationwide vote due in early 2018 to be brought forward by up to a year.

Caretaker PM

President Sergio Mattarella asked Renzi to carry on in a caretaker capacity while he holds consultations with the political parties to decide the next steps, a statement from the president's office said.

Ironically, Renzi's rule came to an end with his government winning a vote of confidence in Senate, the parliamentary chamber he tried to emasculate via a referendum in which he suffered a crushing defeat on Sunday.

The confidence vote curtailed prolonged discussion on approval of Italy's 2017 budget—an unfinished task which had prompted President Sergio Mattarella to ask Renzi to delay his departure for a few days.

"Budget law approved. Formal resignation at 1900. Thanks to everyone and viva l'Italia!" ("long live Italy!") he tweeted.

After the talks at his party headquarters, Renzi said he assumed full responsibility for the referendum but gave no indication he was considering stepping down from the leadership.

He said today he would spend, a public holiday, celebrating his grandmother's 86th birthday. "We have to thank the elderly," he said in a reference to pensioners supporting him in the referendum debate.

"And hopefully tomorrow I will have more luck in the Playstation battle with my sons than I have had here ... ," he added.

Renzi's speech sounded at times like the launch of an election campaign, with the former Florence mayor boasting of how he had left Italy with "fewer taxes and more rights" and pointedly playing up his leadership in the aftermath of a series of devastating earthquakes between August and October.

The fallout from the referendum remains unclear however with the PD beset by internal divisions that were painfully exposed by the vote.

Frost cover



Hoarfrost covers the trees on the Trepliner See near Treplin, eastern Germany.

Greek former data chief wins legal battle

Athens
AFP

A Greek court has acquitted country's former statistics chief of breaching his duty, the first step in a long legal battle to clear his name over charges he exaggerated deficit figures.

Judges found former Elstat chief Andreas Georgiou not guilty of a criminal breach of duty by briefly keeping his job at IMF for a few months after starting at Elstat in 2010.

The court also threw out charges that Georgiou did not convene Elstat's board of directors as he was legally required to do. However, the main charge has yet to be addressed: that he allegedly inflated Greek deficit figures to help international creditors impose harsher terms for a multi-billion-euro bailout in 2010.

EU has publicly defended Georgiou, with European social affairs commissioner Marianne Thyssen insisting "data on Greek government debt during 2010-2015 have been fully reliable and accurately reported."

Georgiou stepped down last year amid claims that data during his 2010-2015 mandate exaggerated Greek overspending and contributed to punishing austerity measures .

Nato chief wants pressure on Russia over Ukraine

Brussels
AP

Nato Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has urged Western allies to maintain diplomatic pressure and sanctions on Russia until it respects peace agreement in Ukraine.

After talks with Nato and Ukraine foreign ministers, Stoltenberg told reporters yesterday of a "massive increase in cease-fire violations" in the conflict-torn east of former Soviet republic. He said hundreds of explosions are reported daily, including many caused by heavy weapons banned under the Minsk peace accords.

"The international community must keep pressuring Russia to respect its obligations, especially while the security situation in eastern Ukraine remains so serious," Stoltenberg said. "It's important that economic sanctions be maintained."

More than 9,600 people have been killed since April 2014 in eastern Ukraine, where Russia-backed separatists are fighting Ukrainian government troops. Russia and Ukraine have blamed each other for lack of progress in settling the conflict.

A meeting last week of foreign ministers from Russia, Ukraine, France and Germany intended to shore up the shaky peace process ended without result, raising fresh questions about whether the process will work.

"Diplomacy offers the only viable solution to the conflict in Ukraine, so it is unfortunate that last week's meeting of the Normandy format was inconclusive," Stoltenberg said.

The Minsk peace deal envisaged that Ukraine regains control of rebellious region's border with Russia after granting the area a special status, holding local elections and offering amnesty to the rebels.

The EU has imposed sanctions on Russia over the Ukraine conflict. Some of the measures are due to be extended in January but cracks have appeared in EU unity, and some countries with strong energy and business links to Russia want to see the sanctions eased.

Nato's ties with Russia have been under heavy strain since Russian forces annexed the Crimean peninsula from Ukraine in 2014, and Stoltenberg said the seizure will not be recognised.

After a freeze in talks, their main forum for dialogue — the Nato Russia Council — has met twice this year, without making progress.

Macedonia to hold early vote on Sunday

Skopje
AP

Macedonia is holding an early general election after a nearly two-year political crisis that has roiled the government and threatens country's ambitions of joining Nato and the European Union.

Sunday's vote was called as part of a deal to address the crisis, which was sparked by opposition reports that government was behind a large-scale illegal wiretapping operation that targeted 20,000 people, including politicians, judges, journalists, police and religious leaders.

Over several months, opposition leader Zoran Zaev released audio of dozens of wiretapped phone conversations that he said indicated former conservative Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski and his aides were involved in multimillion-dollar corruption deals, tampered with election results and brought spurious criminal prosecutions against opponents.

The conservatives vehemently rejected the charges, saying wiretaps were conducted by unnamed foreign spies and accusing Zaev of plotting a coup.

Gruevski is under investigation by country's Special Prosecution branch and has already been charged with enticement and carrying out a criminal act against public order.

The scandal led to months of street protests and has been the worst political crisis in Macedonia, which gained independence from the former Yugoslavia in 1991, since the country survived an ethnic conflict between government forces and members of the ethnic Albanian minority in 2001.

Gruevski, who had headed the government since 2006, stepped down earlier this year as part of a Western-brokered deal to defuse the crisis.

The agreement included holding early elections, which have been postponed twice so far. Signed by heads of country's four main political parties, the deal created an interim government that lead Macedonia to early vote and established a special prosecution office to examine the wiretap scandal.

Nearly 1.8 million registered voters are eligible to choose 123 lawmakers for the parliament. In all, six political parties and five coalitions are running, while three parliamentary seats are reserved for the diaspora.

Gruevski, 46, heads a 25-party coalition titled "For a Better Macedonia" and is seeking a secure majority of 63 seats by promising 70,000 new jobs and decreasing the unemployment rate from 24 percent to 17 percent. He blames the opposition and others for creating the political crisis.

"Millions of euros have been invested in this scenario and the campaign of the opposition," Gruevski told supporters in the capital of Skopje. "They do not think of your well-being or that of the country."

Prosecutors seek life term for 'Butcher of Bosnia'

The Hague
AFP

PROSECUTORS yesterday urged UN war crimes judges to impose a life sentence on former Serb military commander Ratko Mladic, once dubbed "Butcher of Bosnia."

"It would be irresponsible and an affront to justice to impose anything other than a life sentence," prosecutor Alan Tieger told the International Criminal Tribunal as the prosecution wrapped up its case after a four-year trial.

"Time has come for General Mladic to be held accountable for those crimes against each of his victims and community he destroyed."

Mladic, 74, has denied 11 charges including two of genocide, as well as war crimes and crimes against humanity for his role in the bloody 1992-95 Bosnian conflict.

Over 100,000 people died and 2.2 million others were left homeless in what prosecutors say was a relentless campaign of ethnic cleansing, aimed at chasing all non-Serbs from Bosnian territory.

Mathematics gallery



People walk through a new gallery, Mathematics: The Winton Gallery, inside the Science Museum during a press view in London, yesterday. The Gallery was designed by Zaha Hadid architects.

Croatia unions reject govt offer on wage hike

Zagreb
Reuters

Public sector trade unions yesterday rejected a wage bill increase proposed by the Croatian government and invited the country's conservative prime minister to join the negotiations in person.

The government agreed in early 2009, at beginning of global financial crisis, that it would increase wages of public sector workers 6 percent a year once the economy grew on average 2 percent in two consecutive quarters.

That condition was met last year but the government, led by the HDZ party which was also in power in 2009, now says the salary increases are unsustainable given the country's fragile budget.

The government proposes a small compensation payment for 2016 before a two percent wage rise in January and an additional two percent increase next December, union leaders said.

"We do not accept the government's proposal. We invite Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic to join the talks which are set to continue tomorrow," Branimir Mihalinec, one of the union leaders, told a news conference.

The Unions want the full six percent increase in 2017 which they say could be done in phases and a solution for the raise they say they were due this year.

The annual cost of the salary increase promised in 2009 would be an estimated 1.5 to 2.0bn kuna ($284.64m), or some 0.5 percent of gross domestic product, according to the government and unions.

Brexit not legally binding: Lawyer to court

London
Reuters

The referendum in which Britons voted to leave the European Union is not legally binding, the Supreme Court was told yesterday during a hearing on who has the power to trigger Brexit.

The court is considering an appeal by the government against a ruling last month that ministers cannot invoke Article 50 of the EU's Lisbon Treaty, the first formal step in the process of leaving the bloc, without parliament's explicit approval.

If Supreme Court upholds that ruling, the risk for government is that proceedings in parliament could delay Prime Minister Theresa May's plan to trigger Article 50 by end of March, watering down her Brexit strategy.

The case has inflamed passions in Britain, with pro-Brexit critics saying those challenging the government through the courts were seeking to thwart the will of the people.

Yesterday, police announced they had arrested a man on suspicion of making racist threats against Gina Miller, the lead claimant in the case against the government.

Technical issues

David Pannick, lawyer for Gina Miller, the lead claimant in the case against the government, told the 11 Supreme Court justices that Parliament has deliberately chosen a model which does not involve any binding legal effect.

David Pannick, the lawyer acting for Miller, told the court the June referendum, in which Britons voted for Brexit by 52 percent to 48, had important political consequences but not legal ones.

"Parliament has deliberately chosen a model which does not involve any binding legal effect," he told the 11 Supreme Court justices during an exchange on the 2015 act of parliament that set the rules for the referendum to take place.

Pannick argued that the 2015 act did not say what should happen after the referendum, and that since triggering Article 50 would effectively nullify the 1972 act through which Britain joined the EU, only parliament could authorise such a step.

Pannick's assertion that the outcome of the referendum was merely advisory goes to the heart of the controversy generated by the case.

Many politicians in May's Conservative Party and some pro-Brexit newspapers say the courts would be overstepping their constitutional role if they ignored the express will of the people.

Miller and Pannick counter that their case is not aimed at blocking Brexit but rather at ensuring parliament is properly involved in the process. They won convincingly in the High Court in November.

Supreme Court President David Neuberger questioned Pannick yesterday over whether the parliament needed further involvement.

"One could say it (the referendum process) is parliament ceding the ground ... to the people, to a referendum. It's done that, and then it's over to the government," Neuberger said.

"It could be said to be a bit surprising that ... an act such as the Referendum Act and an event such as the referendum has no effect as a matter of law."



Gina Miller is escorted by bodyguards as she arrives at the Supreme Court for the third day of the challenge against a court ruling on EU referendum, in Parliament Square, central London, yesterday.

A stone's throw away from the Supreme Court, parliament will vote on whether to back May's timetable on Article 50.

Pannick said even parliament voted in favour of March deadline, that would make no difference to his case that parliament, not ministers, had the power to authorise triggering the article. "Our submission is that a motion in parliament does not affect, cannot affect, the legal issues in this case," he said.

Merkel's party wants dual nationality rule scrapped

Essen
AFP

German Chancellor Angela Merkel's party yesterday toughened its stance on immigration and integration, demanding that dual nationality be scrapped for German-born children of foreigners and calling for a partial ban on the Muslim full-face veil.

The hardline measures set the party on a collision course with its junior coalition partner Social Democrats (SPD) ahead of elections next year, and underlined the challenges faced by Merkel to rein in the more conservative wing of her party.

Merkel herself had on Tuesday voiced her backing for a prohibition against *niqab* or burqa "wherever it is legally possible", before leadership of her Christian Democratic Union (CDU) voted on issue yesterday.

The party has also proposed to ease deportation process for rejected asylum-seekers.

But some in her party sought to go further, with youth wing defying leadership and winning a vote for a dual nationality rule to be reversed.

Allowing dual nationality was a key demand of the SPD during negotiations with Merkel's conservatives after the last elections in 2013 that resulted in a hard-fought deal on teaming up in a left-right government.



German Chancellor and leader of conservative Christian Democratic Union party, Angela Merkel receives flowers from an association of multiple child families before the start of the final day of the party convention in Essen, yesterday.

The move mainly affects Turkish migrants, many of whom had come to Germany in 1960s and 1970s to work but have stayed on and started families here.

Before 2014, their children had to give up either their parents' citizenship or their German one by the age of 23.

European Union citizens are already permitted to hold both German citizenship and that of their country of origin.

Interior Minister Thomas de Maiziere warned during a heated debate on the dual nationality motion that it would be wrong to tear up a compromise with its governing partner.

"We don't want to reverse that," he said, adding that it was also a blow for children of foreign origin at a time when the country is struggling with integration issues.

No other party would back such a motion, warned de Maiziere, whose separate proposal for jihadists to be stripped of their German nationalities was also approved by the congress.

But party delegates voted narrowly, with 319 votes in favour and 300 against, to scrap the compromise.

The decision quickly drew a rebuke from the SPD, with Justice Minister Heiko Maas saying that reversing the rule "would be a step backwards for integration".

SPD vice-chair Aydan Ozoguz accused the CDU of attacking "an important integration success".

Given lack of backing for it from other parties, the measure is unlikely to be ever implemented.

Hungary defends verdict over border riot

Budapest
AFP

HUNGARY fiercely defended yesterday a jail term given to a Syrian-Cypriot man for his role in a border riot last year, a verdict criticised by both Washington and Amnesty International.

Ahmed Hamed, 40, was jailed for 10 years last week by a court for committing "illegal border crossing and an act of terror while participating in a mass disturbance".

Prosecutors accused him of using a megaphone to stir up violence and of throwing "three solid objects" at police when several dozen migrants tried to cross into Hungary from Serbia on September 16, 2015, a day after the border was sealed with razor wire.

Hamed's verdict was criticised by US State Department which it said was "based on a broad interpretation of what constitutes 'terrorism'".

But Hungarian authorities rejected the criticism with foreign ministry spokesman Tamas Menczer calling Toner's remarks "outrageous and unacceptable".

"To attack Hungarian border, for hours to direct attacks against Hungarian police protecting the border is a serious crime which carries a serious punishment," Menczer said.

"It is strange the State Department which regularly lectures the world about separation of powers is now calling on a government to intervene in a court's business," Menczer said.

During the clashes Hungarian riot police used tear gas and water cannon to force the group of migrants back onto Serbian territory. Around 15 police and 100-150 migrants were injured, including women and children.

A resident of Cyprus for around a decade, Hamed told the court he was escorting his elderly parents from Syria to Germany.

He said he had used his knowledge of English to mediate by megaphone between the migrants and the riot police.

Swiss unveils plane for stratosphere flight

Payerne, Switzerland
AFP

A Swiss adventurer yesterday unveiled a solar plane aimed at reaching the stratosphere.

The SolarStratos, a sleek, white two-seater aircraft with long wings covered with 237 square feet of solar panels, is set to become first manned solar plane to make a stratospheric flight, according to Raphael Domjan, who is behind the project.

"Our goal is to demonstrate that current technology offers us possibility to achieve above and beyond what fossil fuels offer," he said, after unveiling the plane at the Payerne airbase in western Switzerland.

"Electric and solar vehicles are amongst major challenges of 21st century," said the 44-year-old, adding the SolarStratos "can fly at an altitude of 82,000 feet."

SolarStratos is scheduled to begin test flights next February, while medium altitude flights are planned for next summer, and the first stratospheric flights should take place in 2018, the statement said.

To keep down the weight, the plane will not be pressurised, and Domjan will wear a spacesuit, also powered by solar energy, which will also mark a world first, it added.

The statement also claimed the craft could "reach space."

"Travelling to the stratosphere will take approximately five hours: 2.5 hours to reach space, 15 minutes of broad daylight and stars, then three hours to return to Earth," it said.

The stratosphere lies above Earth's lowest atmospheric layer, called the troposphere.

At middle latitudes, the stratosphere runs from a lower boundary of about 10,000 metres to an upper boundary of about 50,000 metres.

3 German teens on trial for jihadist attack

Berlin
AFP

THREE teenage boys went on trial in Germany yesterday, accused of a jihadist bomb attack on an Indian wedding that left a Sikh priest seriously wounded.

The three extremists, all 16 at the time, allegedly set off a home-made bomb in April outside a prayer hall where a Sikh wedding was taking place, also leaving two others with lesser injuries.

The youths had met on social media after being radicalised and got together to commit the attack in the western city of Essen.

Prosecutors charge they had sought to kill "non-believers" with a device they had built from a fire extinguisher shell and chemicals ordered from online shopping site Amazon.

On last voyage



HMS Illustrious, a light aircraft carrier of British Royal Navy, and affectionately known as 'Lusty', is towed out of Portsmouth Harbour in Portsmouth, southern England, yesterday, on her last journey to Turkey where she has been sold for scrap.

Plane crash: Airline's president held

Cochabamba, Bolivia
AP

The head of the charter airline whose plane crashed in the Andes last week was detained by Bolivian prosecutors for questioning as authorities look into whether the tragedy that killed 71 people stemmed from negligence.

Gustavo Vargas, a retired Bolivian air force general, was picked up in Santa Cruz along with a mechanic and secretary who worked for him at LaMia airline. All are being questioned about their roles in letting a British-built short-range jet attempt a more than four-hour flight from Santa Cruz to Medellin, Colombia, for which it barely had enough fuel in violation of aviation norms.

Prosecutors said the interrogation was expected to last eight hours and afterward they would decide whether any of the three would be formally arrested. Earlier, authorities raided the airline's offices as well as those of the agency that oversees air traffic in Bolivia.

Authorities are also looking into whether LaMia, which received permission to fly only earlier this year, was favoured by Vargas' son, who headed the office responsible for licencing aircraft in Bolivia's civil aviation agency.

Probe advances

Gustavo Vargas, a retired Bolivian air force general, was picked up in Santa Cruz along with a mechanic and secretary who worked for him at LaMia airline.

After the crash, LaMia had its licence revoked and several aviation officials, including Vargas' son, were suspended.

The plane was carrying a Brazilian soccer team to the opening match in the Copa Sudamericana tournament's finals when it crashed outside Medellin on November 28.

Prosecutors from Brazil, Bolivia and Colombia are expected to meet in Santa Cruz to combine efforts in determining the causes of the crash.

They also are studying how the airline, which despite a dodgy history amassed an impressive list of clients from among South America's top soccer clubs, was ever allowed to operate.

One of the six survivors of the crash said yesterday that he had been reassured by the airline before takeoff that the plane would make a refueling stop in the Bolivian town of Cobija, as it had on previous flights north.

"I don't know if it was a fuel problem — the investigation will determine that," Erwin Tumiri told a section of press during a brief interactioin in Cochabamba, where he is recovering from the crash.

"But every time we flew we went first to Cobija and returned the same way to refuel. On this occasion they said we'd do the same."

Meanwhile, an employee in Bolivia's aviation agency turned up yesterday in Brazil seeking asylum.

In a document widely circulating in Bolivian media, the worker, Celia Castedo, appears to have pointed out a number of irregularities in the aircraft's flight plan, including not having enough fuel, to LaMia's dispatcher, who was killed in the crash. The authenticity of the document couldn't be immediately verified.

Brazilian federal police said Castedo applied for refugee status upon crossing the border by land.

In Bolivia, a top government official said Castedo, who was among officials suspended following the crash, was potentially evading justice and should be immediately deported.

"What she has done is very serious," Government minister Carlos Romero told reporters, denying that Castedo faced any persecution in Bolivia. "It's a way of escaping the judicial system."

Messages sent to various social media accounts apparently belonging to Castedo were not immediately returned. Reached by a section of press via Facebook, Castedo's son, Sebastian Castedo, said that the truth would "come later by authorities other than those in Bolivia." He said he did not know his mother's whereabouts.

Hacker gets five years jail for stealing scripts & videos

New York
AP

A BAHAMIAN man who boasted after his arrest for hacking into celebrities' email accounts that he will someday write a book to "shake up Hollywood" had the book thrown at him by a federal judge who said five years in prison was only way to keep him from harming victims.

US District Judge Paul A Engelmayer cited 24-year-old Alonzo Knowles' jailhouse conversations in doubling the sentence he might have received if judge believed he showed genuine remorse and was no threat to society.

"So far, the criminal justice system has totally failed to get your attention," Engelmayer told Knowles as he announced sentence for stealing scripts and personal information from celebrities.

The celebrities were not identified, though Engelmayer noted 20th Century Fox submitted a letter describing danger Knowles posed.

The judge cited the book Knowles claimed he would someday write, reading a jailhouse communication in which Knowles said: "When I get out, I'm going to shake up Hollywood." Engelmayer also read from a letter submitted by a celebrity who said significant punishment for Knowles was the only way for victims to feel relief.

Knowles pleaded guilty in to copyright infringement and identity theft charges, months after his arrest after he flew from Bahamas to New York City to sell 15 scripts and personal information on several celebrities for $80,000 to a law enforcement agent posing as an interested buyer. He recently turned over computer containing information on celebrities and it was destroyed.

Three kids dead in shooting: Police

Albuquerque, New Mexico
AP

Critically wounded, an Albuquerque mother struggled in vain to pull her three children to safety after a gunman shot them during a confrontation inside family's home in what police described a violent and senseless act.

Police Chief Gorden Eden confirmed during a news conference yesterday that the children, who ranged in age from 5 to 9, were killed and that the mother remained in critical but stable condition following the encounter.

Eden said preliminary evidence suggests the family was attacked by George Daniel Wechsler, 45, who was believed to have had a brief relationship with the 36-year-old mother.

Investigators believe Wechsler forced his way into the home and waited for the family to arrive before shooting them. Police said Wechsler had asked to visit to give the children Christmas gifts but the mother told him no after he repeatedly sought to visit.

Wechsler was found unconscious with a self-inflicted gunshot. He died at the hospital.

Eden said the mother, despite being wounded, fought to protect her children.

As the only surviving witness, he said investigators have not been able to talk to her as they try to piece together a possible motive and the events that led up to the shooting. The victims' names have not been released pending the notification of other family members.

Outrage over inhuman act



People shout slogans as riot police transfer alleged murderer of a seven-year-old girl from the clinic where he was treated for a cocaine overdose to court, in Bogota, Colombia, yesterday. The girl was abused, tortured and murdered by a 38-year-old man, police said.

Teens arrested for robbing wife of Missouri governor-elect

St. Louis
AP

THREE teenagers are in custody in the armed robbery of the wife of Missouri Governor-elect Eric Greitens, and the former Navy Seal officer who takes office next month said it's a good thing police got to them before he did.

Eric and Sheena Greitens spoke at a news conference, after Sheena Greitens was robbed at gunpoint while in her car outside a coffee shop in St. Louis. She was unharmed.

"We are also aware that what happened to me and to our family last night happens to far too many people and far too many families and that cannot continue," she said.

Police said the suspects, ages 14, 15 and 19, were involved in several crimes.

Sheena had arrived at a coffee shop in Central West End, where she planned to do some work. She was looking at a cellphone in her car when a young man opened the door, pointed a gun, and demanded her belongings.

The suspect took her phone and laptop and ran, along with the others. As police were investigating the crime they learned another car in the same parking lot had been broken into.

Brazil presidency seeks to end crisis between Senate & court

Brasilia
Reuters

Brazil's presidency was working to defuse a constitution crisis between Supreme Court and the Senate yesterday, amid reports the tribunal could allow the head of Senate to keep his post if he steps out of presidential succession.

The Supreme Court was to decide whether to uphold or overturn an injunction by one of its justices ordering removal of Renan Calheiros as Senate president, after he was indicted for embezzlement last week.

Removal of Calheiros would put a leftist senator in charge of Senate whose Workers Party opposes a public spending cap that is the centerpiece of President Michel Temer's efforts to restore fiscal discipline to Brazil.

Calheiros, whose mandate in charge of chamber expires when Congress goes into its Christmas recess, refused to step down, heightening a standoff between the legislature and judiciary.

"The President's office is working to reduce tensions between judiciary and legislature, and will respect decisions they take," Temer's chief spokesman Marcio de Freitas said.

Calheiros is second in line to presidency after speaker of lower house, as Brazil currently has no vice president. However, his term will expire when Congress goes into the Christmas recess and senators are due to elect a new president at start of the next session.

The government is keen for Supreme Court justices to find a way around a recent majority ruling by court that no person indicted for a crime could be in presidential line of succession.

The Supreme Court has yet to complete its ruling on the ban. The vote was suspended after 6 of its 11 justices had already voted in favour of it because one judge asked for further discussion of the case.

Folha de S Paulo and *Estado de S Paulo* newspapers reported an agreement was in works to allow Calheiros to end his term on the condition that he could not become president of Brazil in the absence of Temer or the speaker of the lower house of Congress, who is the first in line.

The overturning of the injunction to remove Calheiros would be a blow to the judiciary in a growing confrontation with the legislature over attempts by lawmakers to curb the powers of prosecutors and shield corrupt politicians.

Investors have been closely watching the situation amid fears that the crisis could derail the passage of a major reform to tackle Brazil's massive budget deficit. The Senate has suspended business until it is resolved.

NYC touts UN benefits in new report

United Nations
AP

New York mayor's office is touting benefits of hosting United Nations headquarters with a new report examining the world body's economic impact on the city.

Penny Abeywardena, NYC Commissioner for International Affairs, said the UN Community generated $3.69bn in total economic output resulting in approximately $56m in net fiscal benefits to the city.

"While the UN is much more than sum of its economic impact, this study is an important reminder of very real and tangible benefits the UN community makes in our global city," Abeywardena said.

Approximately 25,000 full- and part-time jobs are created by the UN, which directly employs 16,000 people, she said.

The report estimates the UN community generates $110m in fiscal revenue and costs the city some $54m including costs for security and schooling, leaving some $56m in revenue.

Peter Yeo, President of the Better World Campaign said the UN's impact is felt beyond New York City with over a billion dollars in contracts being awarded to US companies in more than 30 states over past two years.

National honour



Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Mila Mulroney applaude Brian Mulroney Canadian former prime minister before he is presented with the Commander of the National Order of Legion of Honour at the French Embassy in Ottawa, yesterday.

Trump taps John Kelly for DHS

Washington
AP

Homeland security

Highly respected, often outspoken, and known as a fierce, loyal commander, John Kelly will take over the nation's newest federal agency.

US President-elect Donald Trump has chosen retired Marine General John Kelly, whose last command included oversight of Guantanamo Bay detention center, to run Department of Homeland Security (DHS), people close to the transition team said yesterday.

Kelly, who joined the Marine Corps in 1970, retired earlier this year, wrapping up a final, three-year post as head of US Southern Command, which spanned some of the more fractious debate over Obama administration's ultimately failed pledge to close Guantanamo.

He served three tours in Iraq, and holds the somber distinction of being the most senior military officer to lose a child in combat in Iraq or Afghanistan. His son, Marine 2nd Lt. Robert Kelly was killed in November, 2010, in Helmand Province, Afghanistan.

Highly respected, often outspoken, and known as a fierce, loyal commander, senior Kelly will take over nation's newest federal agency, with its expanse of responsibilities — from airport security and terrorism to immigration and the Coast Guard. The department was formed after the September 11 terror attacks in an effort to get the US government better-positioned to prevent and respond to future attacks.

If confirmed by the Senate, Kelly would be fifth person to lead the department and the first one who is not a lawyer. It is comprised of agencies that protect the president, respond to disasters, enforce immigration laws, protect the nation's coastlines and secure air travel.

His selection, however, also bolsters concerns about an increase in military influence in US policy in a Trump White House. And it raises scepter of militarisation along the border, as Trump moves forward on his signature issue of immigration and his promise to build a wall along southern border and go after people living in the country illegally.

Transition officials confirmed Trump's pick of Kelly on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorised to speak publicly before any official announcement.

In Kelly, Trump would have another four-star military officer for his administration. James Mattis, a retired four-star Army general, is Trump's pick for defence secretary.

Immigration enforcement is a familiar issue for Kelly. Southern Command, which is based in South Florida, regularly works with DHS on missions to identify and dismantle immigrant smuggling networks. And it has partnered with Immigration and Customs Enforcement in an operation targeting human smuggling into the US and helped with the rescue of children arriving alone at US borders.

The department has struggled with its identity, trying to balance its ties with the military and maintain its role as a civilian law enforcement agency. Customs and Border Protection — which includes the Border Patrol — and the Coast Guard routinely partner with Southern Command to coordinate drug smuggling investigations in the Caribbean.

If immigration enforcement is prioritised the way Trump promised during his presidential campaign, the department will be challenged with beefing up the screening of immigrants allowed to come into the US, and finding additional resources to track down and deport people living in America illegally. It will also need to find a place to house these immigrants while they're waiting for deportation.

Scraping for federal funds and equipment to battle such problems will not be a new challenge for Kelly. As the head of Southern Command, he was often blunt about his need for more resources to fight the drug trade that sweeps into the US from South America.



US President-elect Donald Trump addressing an audience at Crown Coliseum in Fayetteville, North Carolina, yesterday.

Time Magazine names Donald Trump 'Person of the Year'

Washington
Reuters

***TIME** Magazine* named US President-elect Donald Trump its Person of the Year yesterday, citing the upheaval in American politics brought about by the New York businessman's election campaign and victory.

"It's hard to measure the scale of his disruption," *Time* said in its announcement, noting Trump's career as real estate magnate and reality television star before he won the presidency.

Trump, who will be sworn in on January 20, ran an unconventional and controversial campaign against Democrat Hillary Clinton. *Time* noted that views of him were deeply divided. "For those who believe this is all for better, Trump's victory represents a long-overdue rebuke to an entrenched and arrogant governing class," the magazine said.

"For those who see it as for worse, the destruction extends to cherished norms of civility and discourse, a politics poisoned by vile streams of racism and nativism."

The magazine said its short list for person of the year included Clinton, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and singer Beyonce.

"It's a great honour, it means a lot," Trump told NBC's *Today* show in an interview shortly after the announcement.

But he rejected *Time's* characterisation of the country as fractured. The magazine's cover called him the "president of the divided states of America."

20 gunmen dead in police shootout in Mexico

Xalapa, Mexico
AP

TWENTY suspected criminals were killed in a series of shootouts with police and troops in recent days in Mexico's troubled Gulf coast state of Veracruz, authorities said yesterday.

The state's joint security agency had previously announced that 14 presumed gang gunmen died in a shootout in Veracruz, which is a smuggling corridor and a hotspot for drug cartel violence.

Yesterday, the agency updated death toll, saying six other suspected criminals had been killed in shootouts with military units in the same area over the weekend and Monday, putting the three-day death toll at 20.

In the most serious incident, authorities said a police patrol came under fire on a road in the town of Jesus Carranza, near the border with Oaxaca state. The patrol called for backup, and marines arrived to join in a firefight that killed 14 suspects, officials said.

A separate shootout in Jesus Carranza resulted in the deaths of three attackers Saturday, officials said. The agency also reported three more gunmen killed in similar circumstances in the same area, but gave no details on when or where.

Police and military reinforcements dispatched to the area found a total of 28 weapons, including 13 assault rifles and a weapon capable of piercing armoured vehicles, officials said. They also found about 67kg of cocaine.

Violent protest



Civil servants protest against austerity measures in front of the Rio de Janeiro state Assembly in Brazil, yesterday, where lawmakers began voting the measures promoted by governor Luiz Fernando Pezao pushing budget cuts in response to nearly empty public coffers.

Immigrants released from Texas detention centres

Chicago
AFP

Hundreds of female and underage immigrants were released from detention centres in Texas after a state judge ruled that such sites could not legally house children, an immigrant advocacy group said yesterday.

The 470 detainees were being held at two privately-run detention centres, according to US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), which confirmed their release.

Asylum-seeking immigrants are routinely released after their cases are initially processed, but this release was unusually high, according to San Antonio-based group Refugee and Immigrant Center for Education and Legal Services (RAICES). At least four times more people were released than usual, said RAICES policy director Amy Fischer.

"We're in process of moving them out, getting them on flights and buses," Fischer said.

The release came after a ruling by Travis County District Court Judge Karin Crump that the detention sites could not be considered child care providers.

In a statement, ICE said the releases were "scheduled as a part of normal operations and not in response to court ruling," and it is reviewing the judge's decision. The agency did not respond to request for comment on the size of the release.

The immigrants had been held at the South Texas Family Residential Center and the Karnes County Residential Center, both located south of San Antonio. Their detentions ranged in length from a few hours to a few weeks, Fischer told reporters.

More than a quarter of the released detainees had not been interviewed to assess whether they fear persecution or torture in their home countries, a requisite step for asylum seekers, Fischer said.

One was also sent to a hospital for a severe, untreated leg infection, she said.

"The medical care in detention is extraordinarily poor," Fischer said, adding that underage detainees had in the past been released with untreated pneumonia.

No evidence of bomb on LA metro

Los Angeles
AFP

An anonymous bomb threat against Los Angeles metro appears to have been a hoax, officials said yesterday after a heightened alert lasting much of the day.

Police deployed in force throughout the system following a tip from overseas about an imminent attack on a busy station.

But early yesterday the FBI said in a statement there was "no evidence" of a threat to the city's metro system.

"Working with our law enforcement partners, the FBI has found no evidence that the threat made to the Los Angeles Metro Red Line is credible," the bureau said.

"Based on significant similarities, law enforcement partners also believe the anonymous caller may have, on a previous occasion, reported threats that did not materialise."

Last year an emailed threat forced the closure of Los Angeles schools for a day before it was determined to be a hoax

Throughout the day about a dozen officers, some in full tactical gear and accompanied by sniffer dogs, patrolled the Red Line's Universal City metro stop, where an anonymous phone caller warned that a bomb would go off.

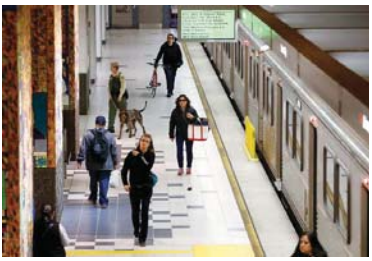
The man, who spoke English, relayed threat in a telephone call to a public safety line run by an unidentified foreign government, which passed on the information to the FBI's terrorism task force.

The threat prompted authorities to hastily organise a news conference to relay the information to public and announce that security was being stepped up.

In a bid to allay fears, Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti rode the metro from Universal City. Orange barriers were put up around the station as police randomly searched people's bags.

Some commuters appeared unnerved by the added patrols while others went about their normal business.

Even though authorities said they no longer believe a threat exists, they urged Los Angeles residents to stay vigilant and said stepped-up patrols would continue.



LA County Sheriffs Deputies patrol inside Universal City Metro subway station after a reported threat of bomb.

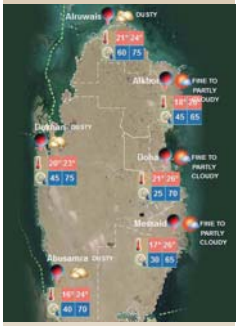


PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR	04.45 am		
SHOROOK	06.07 am		
ZUHR	11.26 am	MAGHRIB	04.46 pm
ASR	02.24 pm	ISHA	06.16 pm

WEATHER TODAY

21°C Minimum | **26°C** Maximum



Expected strong wind. Hazy at first becomes mild temperature daytime with slight dust to blowing dust at places and some clouds, cold by night.

HIGH TIDE 11:00 LOW TIDE 03:15 - 18:45

Courtesy: Qatar Meteorology Department





Today in History

December 08, 1886

▲ Influential Mexican muralist Diego Rivera was born. His work usually addressed social themes, featuring the plight of peasants and labourers of his native land

1660: A woman appeared on a public stage in England for the first time in a production of Shakespeare's Othello. Previously men played female roles

1966: A ban on nuclear weapons in space was agreed by 28 countries

2003: Robert Mugabe pulled Zimbabwe out of the Commonwealth after leaders extended its suspension indefinitely

2010: SpaceX launched the first commercially-developed spacecraft to return to Earth from orbit

Picture: Newscom © GRAPHIC NEWS

The Ivory Game short-listed for Oscar

Paris
Reuters

A documentary film on the slaughter of elephants in Africa produced by Hollywood star Leonardo DiCaprio has made an initial Oscar short-list, beating an unlikely rival entry from a former top aide to Russia's president.

Critics have been touting DiCaprio's "The Ivory Game", about Africa's illegal ivory trade, for a prestigious Academy Award in the documentary film category.A new list of 15 came out in Los Angeles late on Tuesday night. The five official nominees for the award will be announced on January 24 and the winner on February 26.

DiCaprio's film – which debuted at the Toronto Film Festival in September – had earlier made it to a long list for Oscar consideration along with another documentary on the same subject by Sergey Yastrzhembsky, the Kremlin's best-known spokesman in the West for more than a decade.

The silver-haired former diplomat spent most of his working life deflecting media criticism as Russian President Vladimir Putin's spokesman on Chechnya and special envoy to Brussels, and earlier as the Kremlin's voice under the late Boris Yeltsin.

Now Yastrzhembsky is trying to cause a stir with his "Ivory – A Crime Story", which names and shames top ivory buyers such as China, the Vatican and Buddhist monks in Thailand. "I congratulate DiCaprio and I am happy that his film was selected because it is important that someone talks about the real threats elephants are facing," Yastrzhembsky told Reuters on Wednesday. His documentary took three years and cost $1m to make, and won prizes earlier this year at the Montreal, Rome and New York film festivals. Yastrzhembsky's film highlights how the population of elephants in Africa has dropped to less than 500,000 from 1.5 million in the past 30 years, and that every 15 minutes on average, an elephant is killed by poachers for its ivory.

Wrenching scenes include one of an elephant being shot and then moaning as it is hacked to pieces by poachers. If nothing is done, conservationists say the African elephant could be extinct in the wild within a generation. Yastrzhembsky said Pope Francis saw a shortened version of his film before publicly speaking out in Nairobi against ivory poaching in Kenya. He said he showed a trailer to DiCaprio three years ago on the yacht of a mutual friend, the real-estate oligarch Vladimir Zemstov, in the French resort of Saint Tropez. Yastrzhembsky said he invited DiCaprio to take part in his project financially or do the voiceover, but talks never bore fruit. "I think DiCaprio wanted to do his own film," he said.



Leonardo DiCaprio, wearing a Giorgio Armani tuxedo, at the 88th Academy Awards in Hollywood, California.

Polar bear numbers to plunge by a third

Paris
AFP

Polar bear numbers could drop a third by mid-century, according to the first systematic assessment, released yesterday, of how dwindling Arctic sea ice affects the world's largest bear. There is a 70 percent chance that the global polar bear population -- estimated at 26,000 -- will decline by more than 30 percent over the next 35 years, a period corresponding to three generations, the study found.

Other assessments have reached similar conclusions, notably a recent review by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), which tracks endangered species on its Red List. The IUCN classified the seafaring polar bear -- aka. Ursus maritimus -- as "vulnerable", or at high risk of extinction in the wild.

But the new study, published in the Royal Society's Biology Letters, is the most comprehensive to date, combining 35 years of satellite data on Arctic sea ice with all known shifts in 19 distinct polar bears groupings scattered across four ecological zones in the Arctic. "Polar bears depend on sea ice for most aspects of their life history," the study notes. Most importantly, they use it as a floating platform to hunt seals, which can outswim them in open water.

Researchers led by Eric Regehr of the US Fish and Wildlife Service in Anchorage, Alaska projected three population scenarios out to mid-century, and all of them were bad news for the snow-white carnivores.

The first assumed a proportional decline in sea ice and polar bears.

Despite year-to-year fluctuations, long-term trends are unmistakable: the ten lowest Arctic ice extents over the satellite record have all occurred since 2007. The record low of 3.41 million square kilometres (1.32 million square miles) in 2012 was 44 percent below the 1981-2010 average. This week, the US National Snow and Ice Data Center reported that sea ice extent in October and November was the lowest ever registered for both months. The culprit is global warming, which has raised the region's surface temperatures by more than two degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) compared to the pre-industrial era level, twice the global average.

On current trends, The Arctic could see its first ice-free summers sometime in the 2030s, according to climate scientists. In the second and third scenarios, the same sea ice projections were matched with available data about changes in specific polar bear populations spanning at least a decade, in small areas in one case, and across the four larger "eco-zones" in the second. Averaging all three scenarios, the probability that polar bear numbers would drop by a third in 35 to 41 years is more than 70 percent, the study concluded.

Costly skeleton



The skeleton of an Allosaurus is exhibited at Lyon Brotteaux Aguttes auction house in Lyon. Named "Kan", the skeleton, whose value is estimated €800.000, will go under the hammer in December.

Sea ice in Arctic & Antarctic coast hits record lows

New York
IANS

Warm temperatures have led to record decline in the extent of sea ice in the Arctic and off the coast of Antarctica in November this year, say scientists.

While unusually high air temperatures and a warm ocean have led to a record low Arctic sea ice extent, in the Southern Hemisphere, Antarctic sea ice extent also hit a record low for the month, caused by moderately warm temperatures and a rapid shift in circumpolar winds, the researchers said.

"It looks like a triple whammy -- a warm ocean, a warm atmosphere, and a wind pattern all working against the ice in the Arctic," said Mark Serreze, Director, National Snow and Ice Data Center (NSIDC) at University of Colorado Boulder in the US. Arctic sea ice extent averaged 9.08 million square km for November, 1.95 million square km below the 1981 to 2010 long-term average for the month. Although the rate of Arctic ice growth was slightly faster than average, total extent actually decreased for a brief period.

Breathing rhythm enhances memory recall

New *York*
IANS

It is not without any reason that we tend to breathe faster when we find ourselves in a dangerous situation. Scientists have now discovered that the rhythm of breathing creates electrical activity in the human brain that enhances emotional judgments and memory recall. These effects on behaviour depend critically on whether you inhale or exhale and whether you breathe through the nose or mouth.

In the study, individuals were able to identify a fearful face more quickly if they encountered the face when breathing in compared to when breathing out.

Individuals also were more likely to remember an object if they encountered it on the inhaled breath than the exhaled one. The effect disappeared if breathing was through the mouth, said the study published in the Journal of Neuroscience.

"One of the major findings in this study is that there is a dramatic difference in brain activity in the amygdala and hippocampus during inhalation compared with exhalation," said lead author Christina Zelano, Assistant Professor at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine in Chicago, Illinois.

The scientists first discovered these differences in brain activity while studying a small number patients with epilepsy who were scheduled for brain surgery.

A week prior to surgery, a surgeon implanted electrodes into the patients' brains in order to identify the origin of their seizures.

The recorded electrical signals showed brain activity fluctuated with breathing. The activity occurs in brain areas where emotions, memory and smells are processed. The findings imply that rapid breathing may confer an advantage when someone is in a dangerous situation.


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