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Qatar Airways Cargo eyes 2nd rank by 2018

Sachin Kumar
The Peninsula

Qatar Airways Cargo, is eyeing to become the second largest cargo operator in the world by next year. The cargo division of the Qatar's national carrier is currently the third largest cargo operator.

"We are the third largest cargo operator in the world after Cathay Pacific. We hope that by next year our ranking will become number two," said Akbar Al Baker, Group Chief Executive, Qatar Airways.

"We are ordering more aircrafts. We are taking delivery of second Boeing 747-8 freighter. The cargo business is booming," Salam Al Shawa, Senior Vice-President Marketing and Corporate Communications, Qatar Airways told *The Peninsula* speaking on the sidelines of the press conference held last Thursday. Apart from Boeing 747-8 Freighters, Qatar Airways Cargo also has eight Airbus A330 freighters and 13 Boeing 777-300ER freighters. To continue on its trajectory of rapid growth and expansion, the company will take delivery of more freighters over the next two years.

→ Continued on page 8

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"We are ordering more aircrafts. We are taking delivery of second Boeing 747-8 freighter. The cargo business is booming," Salam Al Shawa, Senior Vice-President Marketing and Corporate Communications, Qatar Airways told *The Peninsula* speaking on the sidelines of the press conference held last Thursday. Apart from Boeing 747-8 Freighters, Qatar Airways Cargo also has eight Airbus A330 freighters and 13 Boeing 777-300ER freighters. To continue on its trajectory of rapid growth and expansion, the company will take delivery of more freighters over the next two years.

Emir, Senegal President witness signing of MoUs



Emir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani receiving the guard of honour upon his arrival in Dakar, Senegal, yesterday.

Dakar
QNA

Emir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani and President of the Republic of Senegal, Macky Sall, witnessed, at the Presidential Palace in Dakar yesterday, the signing of a number of memoranda of understanding (MoUs) between the governments of Qatar and Senegal.

They witnessed the signing of a cultural cooperation agreement, a memorandum of understanding for cooperation in the field of sports and a memorandum of understanding for cooperation in the field of youth. The ceremony was attended by Their Excellencies members of the official delegation accompanying the Emir and Senegal Prime Minister Mohammed Dionne and a number of Their

Excellencies ministers and senior officials. The Emir also attended a dinner banquet hosted by Senegal President.

Emir arrived in Dakar on an official visit to the Republic of Senegal. Upon arrival at Leopold Sedar Senghor Airbase, the Emir was welcomed by the President. The Emir and the accompanying delegation were also welcomed by the Prime Minister of Senegal, Mohammed Dionne, a number of

Their Excellencies Senegalese Ministers, Qatar's Ambassador to Senegal Saree bin Ali Al Qahtani, Ambassador of Senegal to Qatar Mamadou Mamdo Sall, and members of the Qatari Embassy.

Emir's African tour includes visits to Guinea-Conakry, the Republic of Mali, the Republic of Cote d'Ivoire, the Republic of Burkina Faso and the Republic of Ghana.

→ See also page 2

Cabinet expresses regret over UNSC decision on Quds; welcomes OIC communique

The Peninsula

The cabinet has expressed the feelings of the Islamic people and set a road map to oppose the US President's decision regarding Al Quds. The cabinet expressed its regret for the UN Security Council's decision to not adopt the draft resolution submitted by the Arab group rejecting the US recognition of Al Quds as the capital of Israel.

During its regular meeting chaired by Prime Minister and Interior Minister H E Sheikh Abdullah bin Nasser bin Khalifa Al Thani, the cabinet yesterday welcomed the final communique of the extraordinary summit of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), which was held on December 13 in Istanbul, with the participation of the Emir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani.

The cabinet regular meeting was held at its headquarters at the Emiri Diwan. After the meeting, the Minister of Justice and Acting Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs H E Dr Hassan bin Lahnad Al Hassan Al Mohannadi said the cabinet praised the role of President of the Republic of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan in holding the Islamic summit and resulting in a unified Islamic position towards Al Quds.

The cabinet hoped that the international consensus opposing the US decision would result in restoring the full legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, starting with their right in establishing an independent state with Al Quds as its capital, based on the resolutions of international legitimacy and the Arab peace initiative. The cabinet called on a firm and urgent international action to stop and protect the Palestinian people from the brutal repression they are currently facing in the occupied territories because of their rejection against the US decision on Jerusalem.

→ Continued on page 9

New centre for long-term care of patients

Fazeena Saleem
The Peninsula

In an initiative to enhance long-term care for patients, a new specialised medical care center is expected to open in 2019. It will advance the care of patients who no longer need to be in hospital but require long term inpatient medical treatment, said officials yesterday.

The Minister of Public Health, H E Dr Hanan Mohamed Al Kuwari, and Qatar Central Bank Governor and Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Sports and Social Activities Support Fund (Daam), H E Sheikh Abdullah bin Saoud Al Thani, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in regard with the establishing of the new Daam Specialised Care Centre.

Daam will fund building the facility which has already commenced construction in Hamad bin Khalifa Medical City. The new centre with 67 beds, will join Hamad Medical



Minister of Public Health, H E Dr Hanan Mohamed Al Kuwari, and Qatar Central Bank Governor and Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Sports and Social Activities Support Fund (Daam), H E Sheikh Abdullah bin Saoud Al Thani, after signing the documents, at Hamad bin Khalifa Medical City, yesterday. Pic: Salim Matramkot / The Peninsula

Corporation's (HMC) existing Enaya Specialised Care Centers. It will expand the capacity of the Enaya facilities while also providing more privacy for patients who require long-term medical care outside of the hospital setting.

"The focus of our inpatient

specialised care centers is to provide an advanced care system for patients who are well enough to be discharged from hospital but still require specialized medical treatment that is often long term," said Dr Al Kuwari.

→ Continued on page 9

Emir sends message to Mali President

Emir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani has sent a written message to the President of the Republic of Mali, Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, pertaining to bilateral relations and means of enhancing and developing them. Qatar's Ambassador to the Republic of Mali, Abdulrahman bin Ali Ajaj Al Kubaisi, handed over the message during a meeting with the President of Mali in Bamako.

Undersecretary for Education Ministry

Emir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani issued yesterday decree No. 91 of 2017 appointing Dr Ibrahim bin Saleh bin Khalifa Al Nuaimi as Undersecretary of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education.

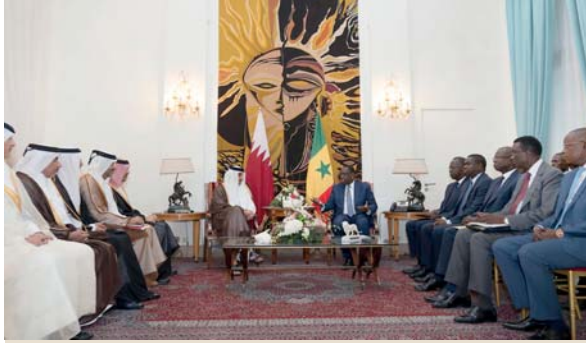


Qatar exempts Hamad City residents in Gaza from 2018 installments

In implementation of the directives of the Emir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, Chairman of the Qatar National Committee for the Reconstruction of the Gaza Strip, Ambassador H E Mohammed Al Emadi, announced that the residents of Hamad City in Khan Younis in Gaza will be exempted from paying the monthly installments for the year 2018.

Al Emadi said in a speech during the celebration of Qatar National Day: "I am happy to convey good news for the people of Gaza. In light of the difficulties they suffer, that the State of Qatar has decided to exempt the residents of Hamad City from the installments for the year 2018."

Emir meets President of Senegal, witnesses signing of MoUs



Emir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani with the President of the Republic of Senegal, Macky Sall, at the Presidential Palace in Dakar, yesterday. They witnessed the signing of a number of memoranda of understanding including a cultural cooperation agreement, MoUs in field of sports and in the field of youth between the governments of the State of Qatar and the Republic of Senegal.



Police College & Turkish Police Academy sign deal

The Peninsula

The Police College yesterday signed a protocol of cooperation with the Turkish National Police Academy to promote scientific cooperation in the framework of cooperation between the two countries.

The protocol of cooperation was signed by the Director-General of the Police College Brigadier Mohammed Abdullah Al Muhana Al Marri on behalf of the Police College, while the President of the Academy Dr Yilmaz Shulat signed it on behalf of the Turkish Police Academy. In a press statement, the Director General of the Police College said that the goal of the protocol is to establish scientific and educational cooperation serving the Police College in Qatar and the Police Academy of the



Director-General of the Police College Brigadier Mohammed Abdullah Al Muhana Al Marri and the President of the Academy Dr Yilmaz Shulat at the signing event.

Republic of Turkey by improving and expanding the local activities of the two institutions. He added that the protocol guarantees areas of joint cooperation to serve the

parties within the scope of the terms of reference and in a manner not inconsistent with national laws and regulations in both countries.

Dr Al Marri pointed out that the two sides agreed to exchange visits, experts and specialists in the academic and training fields, organize joint educational and training programs and activities, exchange information and opinions on issues related to academic and training activities of common concern, and seek to develop human cadres in order to improve the quality of work and benefit from scholarships programs.

For his part, Dr Yilmaz said that the protocol of cooperation comes in the framework of joint work and based on the security agreement signed between Qatar and Turkey in 2009 and the protocol of security cooperation in the fields of training, education and exchange of experiences and the location between the two countries in 2015.

Al Muraikhi meets Palestinian envoy



Minister of State for Foreign Affairs H E Sultan bin Saad Al Muraikhi with Ambassador of the State of Palestine to Qatar, Munir Abdullah Ghannam. They discussed bilateral relations as well as means of boosting them and enhancing prospects for cooperation, in addition to issues of common concern. A number of Foreign Ministry's officials attended the meeting.

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Qatar Embassy in Turkey marks National Day

Celebration was attended by around 1,000 people including Deputy Prime Minister of Turkey and other Ministers as well as a number of diplomatic representatives.

The Peninsula

Qatar Embassy in Turkey yesterday marked the National Day celebration with the participation of top Turkish officials and foreign diplomats. High-profile Turkish officials took part in the event, most notably Deputy Prime Minister of Turkey Mehmet Simsek, Development Minister Lutfi Elvan, Economy Minister Nihat Zeybekci, Health Minister Ahmet Demircan, as well as a number of diplomatic representatives.

The celebration was attended by around 1,000 people and number of members of the parliament, directors of different municipalities and heads of missions. Famous actor Necati Şaşmaz and several businessmen



Qatar's Ambassador to Turkey Salem bin Mubarak Al Shafi and other dignitaries at the National Day celebration.

were among the guests in Qatar National Day celebrations.

"This year 2017 has been full of challenges and difficulties but it has also been a year of opportunities for the State of Qatar," Qatar's Ambassador to Turkey Salem bin Mubarak Al Shafi said while speaking at the event.

Referring to the current Gulf crisis and the siege imposed on Qatar, Al Shafi pointed out that there were many obstacles but by some countries which sought to undermine our progress and

success, but their desperate attempts totally failed. "The siege countries do not respect any customs, values and neighbourhood," he added.

Regarding Qatar-Turkey relations, Al Shafi said our historic bilateral relations "have proved once again that through close cooperation we are capable of confronting challenges and achieving successes."

"We extend our thanks to both Turkish government and people for their continued sup-

port to Qatar," he added. Hailing Qatar-Turkey relations, he stressed that "we are proud of what we have achieved together within the past few years at all levels and we look for further in the future."

For his part, Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Mehmet Simsek said: "In the name of the Turkish government and people, we congratulate Qatar on celebrating its National Day."

"Our relationship with Qatar is at its distinct level currently

and it is experiencing great acceleration in the field of trade and investment from both countries," he added.

Simsek said that 2017 was full of challenges but by cooperation with Qatar they managed to foil all conspiracy plans and worked for peace in the region.

Simsek went on to note that through continuous communication between Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Emir Ham bin Mohammed Al Thani, relations between the

two countries reached a high level in past years.

"We are confident that the Turkey-Qatar relations which are built on strong foundation will allow us to continue on the same path with a view to raise them in the future," he said.

Qatar's National Day is celebrated on December 18 every year as on the same date in 1878 Sheikh Jassim bin Mohammed Al Thani succeeded his father as the Emir and led the country towards full unity.

Ashghal opens loop from Khalifa Street to Onaiza Street

The Peninsula

As part of a series of road openings implemented in conjunction with National Day celebrations and before the end of year 2017, the Public Works Authority 'Ashghal' opened on December 17 a loop leading from Khalifa Street to Onaiza Street (also known as Istiqlal Street).

Eng. Mohamed Arqoub Al Khalidi, Head of Section for Doha Projects in Ashghal, said that the new bridge, which is located near the Imam Muhammad bin Abdulwahab Mosque, will facilitate access from the TV Intersection and Khalifa Street to Qatar Sports Club Intersection through Onaiza Street.

It will also facilitate access for those coming from Onaiza

Street towards Al Corniche and West Bay Area through Khalifa Street. This will enhance traffic flow and reduce travel times on these intersections, especially at peak times.

Eng. Mohamed Arqoub Al Khalidi added: The Public Works Authority has opened the loop leading from Onaiza Street to Khalifa Street last September, and with the completion of the new loop, traffic movement on this intersection is now open in both directions.



Works also include installing street lighting and providing a storm water drainage network. Currently, landscaping works are being implemented and are expected to be completed in Q1, 2018. The opening of this loop is part of a project to develop Khalifa Street and convert TV Roundabout into a signal controlled intersection.

UNGA adopts Qatar's proposed resolution on human rights centre

New York
QNA

The United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution submitted by the State of Qatar on the Doha-based United Nations Center for Training and Documentation in the Field of Human Rights for South-West Asia and the Arab Region, by 188 votes out of 193 votes.

The resolution which was submitted by the State of Qatar and backed by Oman, Kuwait, Morocco, US, Algeria, Lebanon, Libya, Tunisia, Yemen, Mauritania, Australia, Turkey, Bolivia, El Salvador, Cameroon, Eritrea, Antigua and Barbuda, Niger, Nigeria, Venezuela and Kiribati noted with appreciation the successful assistance provided by the United Nations Center for

Human Rights Training and Documentation for South-West Asia and the Arab Region through capacity-building activities in the field of human rights, technical assistance programs, training programs on topics related to human trafficking, human rights and media vehicles, human rights and diplomacy, human rights education and training, as well as police training on human rights, support to national human rights institutions and conducting regional consultations on the themes of United Nations human rights mechanisms.

In its resolution, which was abstained by Syria, the UN General Assembly welcomed the report of the Secretary-General of the United Nations stating that resources from the regular budget of the United Nations had

been allocated to strengthen the Center's staffing and thus enable it to respond to requests for training and documentation in a more timely and appropriate manner and help fill gaps in the level of expertise and appropriate training materials in Arabic.

The General Assembly also reiterated the role of the Center as a source of expertise at the regional level and the need to meet an increasing number of requests for training and documentation, in different languages including Arabic.

The UN General Assembly pointed that the increasing demand for Center's activities by Member States and other stakeholders reveals a growing recognition of its role and impact in strengthening human rights capacities in the region.

Qatar welcomes largest cruise ship

Irfan Bukhari
The Peninsula

As Qatar has attracted over 1.9 million tourists from around the world from January-October 2017, Doha Port yesterday welcomed MSC Splendida, the largest ship with a capacity to carry 4,363 guests.

It is the largest ship to call Doha Port in the 2017-18 cruise season, Mwani Qatar announced.

A delegation of senior representatives from Qatar Tourism Authority (QTA), Qatar Ports Management Company (Mwani Qatar), Hamad International Airport (HIA) and the Ministry of Interior's Immigration Department welcomed MSC Splendida, said a statement issued by Qatar Tourism Authority.

The elegant mega ship, which can carry 4,363 guests, is the second member of the MSC Cruises family to journey to Doha, and is due to make five more calls throughout the 2017/18 season.

At 333 metres in length and 66 metres high, MSC Splendida is one of MSC Cruises' most modern and elegant ships and measures the equivalent of three football fields. The ship was considerably

refurbished and upgraded while in dry-dock in early December 2017. Separately, recently released statistics indicate that Qatar has become a favourite destination of tourists as over 1.9 million visitors from across the world visited the country this year till October 2017.

According to statistics, released this week by the Ministry of Development Planning and Statistics, on number of visitors from January to October 2017, a total of 1,941,752 people visited Qatar.

Qatar Monthly Statistics of October reveal that 720,878 (37%) visitors are from GCC countries while 144,765 (7%) people who visited Qatar are from other Arab countries. According to fresh statistics, 530,107 (27%) were from Asia and Oceania, 384,397 (20%) from Europe, 126,784 (7%) from Americas and 34,821 (2%) from African countries.

Despite ongoing blockade imposed on Qatar, hotel occupancy in all categories remained 57% in October 2017 while hotel apartment occupancy rate in the same month was 64%.

In September this year, Qatar Tourism Authority (QTA) report "Tourism Performance Summary



HI 2017," had indicated healthy growth in tourism sector in the first half of 2017 with visitor arrivals from Europe and the Americas increased by 10% and 7%, respectively when compared to the first half of 2016.

On MSC Splendida arrival in Doha, Hassan Al Ibrahim, Chief Tourism Development Officer at QTA said: "Qatar is fast becoming a more mainstream destination for cruise ships, as evidenced by the growing number of mega ships docking in our ports."

Al Ibrahim added that the Doha Port Redevelopment Project, which is well underway, sets Qatar on track to grow its capacity for

cruise tourists and become a turnaround port. Once complete, the port will be a permanent cruise terminal and tourist hub, with capacity for two mega cruise ships docking simultaneously. Once all development projects are complete, cruise tourism is projected to attract over 500,000 visitors to Qatar and generate QR350m annually by 2026.

Following extensive collaboration between the Ministry of Interior, Mwani and QTA, the guests benefitted from a recently introduced about MSC Splendida making her maiden call in Doha as part of her maiden voyage in the region. MSC Cruises is



Officials welcoming the MSC Splendida crew at Doha Port.

enjoying their day-trip within an hour. The guests are able to select from a variety of activities, choosing to enjoy desert safaris and a relaxing day on the beach, cultural tours around Qatar, shopping tours, or traditional dhow boat cruises.

"Growing Qatar's share of cruise tourists is a significant part of our strategy to diversify source markets. "Though the season has started recently, our year-to-date figures for 2017 already show a 6% increase in European visitors compared to last year," said Rashed Al Qureshi, Chief Marketing and Promotion Officer at QTA.

Gianni Onorato, MSC Cruises' CEO commented: "We are delighted about MSC Splendida making her maiden call in Doha as part of her maiden voyage in the region. MSC Cruises is

committed to support developing the cruise industry in this region and we are seeing a growing demand from our guests globally as they seek new and exciting winter cruise destinations."

MSC Splendida will next visit Doha this winter season January 4 and 25, February 15, and March 8 and 29. The 2017/2018 cruise season kicked off in Qatar in October 2017. A total of 21 ships are expected throughout the season, which continues until April 2018.

The first cruise ship of the current season, Seabourn Encore, docked at Doha Port with more than 500 passengers on board in the last week of October while Mein Schiff 5 docked at Doha Port on November 22, marking the arrival of the first mega cruise ship of the 2017/2018 cruise season.

PHCC National Day events highlight health awareness

The Peninsula

Under this year's Qatar National Day theme Promise of Prosperity and Glory, the Primary Health Care Corporation (PHCC) hosted various activities, highlighting Qatari heritage and creating platforms to raise awareness about healthy practices.

Celebrations included a health awareness booth hosted at the Mall of Qatar, where the members of the public were invited to engage with PHCC clinical staff, health tips were offered and engaging educational material was shared.

Health centres across the country hosted celebrations with

Health centres across the country hosted celebrations with the main event held at the corporation's headquarters.

the main event held at the corporation's headquarters.

The event was graced by Minister of Public Health H E Dr Hanan Mohamed Al Kuwari, and Dr Mariam Abdul Malik, Managing Director, PHCC.

Dr Abdul Malik, said, "In this momentous day and on behalf of PHCC I would like to share a heartfelt congratulations to first

and foremost the wise leadership of Emir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani and Father Emir H H Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani as well as the people of Qatar. We are privileged to play host to a day that celebrates the beauty of Qatar's culture, warm hospitality and heritage, this day is a true testament to the visionary leadership in our beloved country, we are filled with pride and honour to be part of a celebration of prosperity. PHCC will continue in its pledge to provide this nation with excellence in care and service."

Musallam Mubarak Al Nabit, Assistant of Managing Director of the PHCC for financial and Administrative Affairs said, "On



Minister of Public Health H E Dr Hanan Mohamed Al Kuwari and dignitaries with other participants at the National Day celebration event.

this prominent day we celebrate our cherished country Qatar, the great leadership that continuously inspires prosperity and a positive national spirit. We are proud to be part of a country that promotes good will and continuously makes strides towards self-sufficiency."

PHCC also held awareness activities and dietitians in partnership with Qatar Civil Aviation Authority were engaged in educating the public about adopting a healthy lifestyle.



Ooredoo Village at Katara.

Over 30,000 visit Ooredoo Village

The Peninsula

Ooredoo announced yesterday that the Ooredoo Village, a dedicated event hosted at Katara to celebrate Qatar National Day, received a huge number of visitors, with over 30,000 people from across the country visiting the event each day and taking part in activities.

The exhibition in the Cultural Village at Katara Corniche, was part of Qatar National Day events sponsored by Ooredoo.

The Ooredoo Village was open from December 12 - 19, and included activities for all ages, such as demonstrations, traditional food, technology and crafts. As an educational point for children and expatriates, the company exhibited traditional swords and other items, including a 'dala' (traditional coffee pot) to showcase Qatar's strong historic background. To entertain

families, Ooredoo created an immersive desert experience with free camel rides and falcon handling, and a Qatari majlis serving Arabic coffee and tea.

On December 18, the Ooredoo Village also had a live feed of the Qatar National Day parade on the Corniche on a big screen.

For families visiting Katara, and not the Ooredoo Village, Ooredoo also paid the food bill for customers in selected restaurants in Katara from December 16 to 18 to promote togetherness. Restaurants included the popular Chapatti and Karak, Sugar and Spice, Chac'Late, and Sukar Pasha.

Ooredoo also held Qatar National Day celebrations for its employees at its headquarters in West Bay. The internal event, which took place on December 14, invited all Ooredoo staff and their children to gather and celebrate Qatar, and what being a Qatari company means for Ooredoo.

QA's new Russia flight to boost ties

The Peninsula

Qatar Airways kicked off an important year ahead in Russia for both the airline and Qatar with the touchdown of its first daily direct flight to St Petersburg on December 19. At a press conference in St Petersburg yesterday, Qatar Airways Group Chief Executive, Akbar Al Baker, addressed Russian and international media, where he conveyed his vision for the airline in Russia and beyond.

"Touching down at Pulkovo International Airport for the first time yesterday was a significant moment for Qatar Airways. This inaugural flight represents so much more than just a new destination on our global network. It carries with it the weight of our hope and expectations for the future of our airline in Russia and the future of our countries' ongoing friendship and partnership for generations to come," said Al Baker.



Pulkovo Airport Chief Executive Officer, Vladimir Yakushev, who hosted the press conference alongside Al Baker, said: "Qatar Airways coming to St Petersburg is a new historic step in the development of Pulkovo Airport and the city's tourism industry, and is an event of key significance in the light of the approaching 2018 FIFA World Cup to be hosted in Russia."

"As the national carrier of the State of Qatar, we are proud to fly the flag for our country wherever we go. Our presence in Russia will only be strengthened by the launch of this new route as well as by our upcoming sponsorship of the 2018 FIFA World Cup and by the 2018 Qatar-Russia Year of Culture of which we are a huge supporter," he added.

Al Baker also used the press conference as platform to speak out about the illegal blockade against Qatar. "It puts a lot of pressure on both the citizens and the operations of a country when you blockade it - this is

unprecedented since St Petersburg was put under siege during the Second World War. This blockade is illegal because the airspace is above a certain flight level and airspace on international waters does not belong to any country. It belongs to the international community," he said.

"This is a bullying tactic by larger countries on our country to intimidate our political thinking, our freedom, our sovereignty and our independence. They will fail because in Qatar, the people are very proud, like people in St Petersburg during the Second World War: you persevered and you won. And it is the same thing that is happening to us. We will win this blockade and we will make sure that our independence is very strong and our sovereignty is respected," he said.

"With the new daily flights to Doha, the Northern capital and the cultural pearl of Russia, has gained an excellent connection to one of the most modern and dynamic global cities and through it - to more than 150 destinations in Asia, Oceania, Africa and the Americas, on Qatar Airways' worldwide network. We are confident that the new route will be much in-demand among the residents of St Petersburg and Northwest Russia, as well as international travellers planning to visit Russia with leisure and business purposes alike," he added.

Indesit dryer models of 2004-2015 recalled

The Ministry of Economy and Commerce, in collaboration with Video Home & Electronic Centre W.L.L. Company, dealer of Indesit, has announced the recall of Indesit Dryer models of 2004-2015 because the thread of clothing may be touched by a drying heater that can cause a fire.

The Ministry said the recall campaign falls within the framework of its ongoing efforts to protect consumers and ensure that product dealers follow up on defects and repairs. The Ministry said that it will coordinate with the dealer to ensure that the measures have been carried out. The Ministry urges all customers to report any violations to its Consumer Protection and Anti-Commercial Fraud Department through the channels such as 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.

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Qatar takes part in Internet Governance Forum

The Peninsula

A high-level delegation from Qatar, headed by Mohammed Ali Al Mannai, President of the Communications Regulatory Authority (CRA), is participating in the twelfth annual meeting of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF 2017). Organised by the UN, under the leadership of UN Under-Secretary General for Economic and Social Affairs, Wu Hongbo, IGF started on December 18 will end today, in Geneva, under the theme: "Shape Your Digital Future".



Panel discussion at the IGF meet in Geneva.

The Forum addresses different aspects of international internet governance including policy, legal frameworks and regulation, on subjects such as information security and Internet infrastructure. Additionally, the Forum is examining issues related to human rights for Internet users, cybersecurity, the impact of the Internet on the

sustainable development and economic growth, as well as ways to enhance international cooperation. "One of CRA's goals is fostering the digital society of tomorrow. Hence, CRA is keen to participate in forums like IGF, which contribute to the development of a sustainable, robust, secure, and stable Internet worldwide," said Al Mannai.

"IGF is also an opportunity to connect and exchange experiences and enhance cooperation with other government entities and relevant international organisations. Stakeholders users, government and private sectors all share their views at the IGF with the aim of creating a consolidated view from which effective international policies

can be formed," he added.

The Forum includes a number of workshops that discuss various topics related to gender divides, Internet of Things, cybersecurity and data privacy. The Forum also features capacity building workshops designed to educate young participants about their rights and responsibilities as Internet users and to exchange experiences. There are about 3.5 billion people connected to the Internet worldwide and around 6 billion connected devices.

Doris Leuthard, President of the Swiss Confederation, opened the IGF which was also attended by high-level officials and more than 2,000 participants from government and private sectors and civil society institutions as well as representatives from international organisations such as the International Telecommunication Union, The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, UN and Unesco.

National Day venues cleaned in record time

A special cleaning programme was prepared under which 781 workers, drivers, supervisors and 47 equipment were pressed in service to complete the cleaning drive in the shortest possible time.

The Peninsula

The Ministry of Municipality and Environment cleaned Corniche area within three hours in a cleaning drive that saw involvement of 781 workers and 47 equipment, said Safar Mubarak Al Shafi, Director of the General Cleanliness Department. The teams of the General Cleanliness Department at the Ministry of Municipality and Environment cleaned up all venues of the National Day celebrations and its neighbouring areas in a record time.

"The Department did great efforts in maintaining hygiene at Corniche and its surrounding areas during the celebration and after it as the cleaning work was going on round-the-clock and continued till Tuesday morning," said Safar Mubarak Al Shafi.

He said that a special cleaning programme was prepared under which 781 workers,



Safar Mubarak Al Shafi, Director of the General Cleanliness Department.

drivers, supervisors and 47 equipment were pressed in service to complete the cleaning drive in the shortest possible time. The Department took necessary helps from its all branches as it considered it a very impor-



Teams of the General Cleanliness Department at work at the National Day celebration venues.



tant and exceptional occasion.

"The cleanup drive was accomplished in real record time as the cleaning work began at 2am and all areas returned to the normal condition by 5am on Tuesday, before the employees left their homes for the work," said Al Shafi.

Al Shafi highlighted that the Corniche area required hard work as there were huge quantities of paper wastes, stickers and other materials on the ground. "Traffic Department, Lekhwiya and Al Faza'a coordinated and provided necessary support to the cleaning drive," said Al Shafi.

The Department readied before the time for such national occasions by mobilising required equipment and workers to do the job and making a complete plan to cover these events before, during and after the celebration.

The plan was implemented completely focusing by large on celebration venues especially at the Corniche area, Darb Al Saai, parks

and picnic areas. Other cleaning operations were conducted as per the programme for cleaning highways, service roads with special focus on the road at the Corniche area and Darb Al Saai and parade ground starting from the beginning of the celebration week till after end.

FINAL REMINDER

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GU-Q students test their negotiation skills

The Peninsula

Thirty 'student diplomats' at Georgetown University in Qatar (GU-Q) were able to test their skills in conflict resolution and decision making at the annual international negotiation and crisis simulation exercise recently.

Set in a hypothetical future, the eight-hour event served as an introduction to strategic negotiations, requiring participants to work as a team to address a challenge facing the international community. During the exercise, GU-Q students simulated intensive negotiations to address long-standing political, economic, and territorial disputes in Cyprus. Participants were divided into teams to represent key stakeholders, including Greek Cypriots,

Set in a hypothetical future, the eight-hour event served as an introduction to strategic negotiations, requiring participants to work as a team to address a challenge facing the international community.

Turkish Cypriots, Turks, Greeks, and the broader international community.

"As an integral component of our co-curricular experiential and applied learning at Georgetown, this year for the first time, we offered students the opportunity to extend their participation in the crisis

simulation exercise into an optional one-credit course option: The International Negotiation Lab," explained Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs, Dr Christine Schwiwetz.

"The full-day simulation and week-long course engaged students in the study of diplomacy and negotiation using both theory and practice by including workshops on negotiation skills, decision-making, a substantive briefing on the current crisis and underlying political dynamics, as well as targeted readings and assignments and tools necessary to engage in negotiation in the future," she said.

The exercise was led by Dr Schwiwetz and the Director of Studies at the Institute for the Study of Diplomacy at Georgetown University's Main Campus in Washington DC, Professor James Seever. It is designed to



GU-Q students during the crisis international negotiation and crisis simulation exercise.

teach students how to resolve complex issues with multiple stakeholders in a pressured environment. As each delegation received their own secret instructions on what outcome needed to be achieved, the students were given an intensive crash-course on how to negotiate mutually beneficial agreements.

"I wanted to get involved in the simulation exercise because I believe it relates to a very

practical application of what we learn in our classes. We mostly read and write about politics, but to actually be able to apply that knowledge made me curious to sign up for the simulation," explained Sara Lidetoff (SFS '21). "Apart from learning a lot about the Cyprus situation itself, I learned about negotiating skills and how difficult it can be to reach a consensus. I also appreciate catching a glimpse of how negotiation actually works in the

real world."

Each year, the simulation uses historical, predicted or current real-world examples of political, security, and humanitarian concerns as the focus of negotiations. Previous scenarios have included civil war and humanitarian concerns in the Democratic Republic of Congo, conflict in Kashmir, the war between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh, and the humanitarian crisis in Syria.

Quranic Botanic Garden begins second round of 'Fun and Learn'



Students enjoying their time at the Quranic Botanic Garden.

The Peninsula

Quranic Botanic Garden (QBG), a member of Qatar Foundation (QF), has begun the second round of its 'Fun and Learn' educational program for primary school students at Oxygen Park in Education City.

The QBG program is set to welcome more than 40 students from various schools across the country to Oxygen Park every Thursday. In addition, as part of the initiative, QBG will host weekly site visits to the QF plant nursery for pre-school and primary schools. The aim of the program, which will run until the end of March 2018, is to teach participants about plants and the environment.

Fatima Al Khulafi, Manager, QBG, said: "The Fun and Learn" initiative is organised by the Quranic Botanic Garden in

collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education.

The program combines science with a series of fun activities in order to create a healthy educational environment outside of school that will help students explore their natural surroundings and improve their research skills. The initiative also promotes extra-curricular activities and increases young people's awareness of the importance of plant conservation within Qatar to foster sustainable development and inspire student responsibility."

The QBG program aims to teach students about plant life cycles, the importance of plants, the definition of environmental preservation, and the significance of sustainability overall. QBG has designed five interactive stations, including: the

'Vertical Agriculture' activity, which allows students to practice non-traditional planting methods using recycled irrigation pipes; 'Green Dolls', where students reuse old planting pots to create garden decorations; 'Fruit Box', which teaches students about the plants and fruits of QBG; 'Treasure Hunt', where students can learn about Oxygen Park's plants, elements, and different components of the Quranic Botanic Garden, as well as 'Puzzles and Maze', which teaches participants about plant life.

During the 2016-2017 academic year, QBG worked with more than 30 schools and kindergartens in the 'Fun & Learn' program. The initiative was also able to engage with more than 1,200 students at the sessions provided in Oxygen Park and through school visits to the QF plant nursery.

Fahad Al Obaidly launches 'Exploring Expression'

The Peninsula

Qatari artist Fahad Al Obaidly has launched a solo exhibition titled "Exploring Expression" at Art 29 gallery at W Doha Hotel & Residences.

As an artist with multiple interests, Fahad has donned the creative role of a fashion designer, filmmaker, stylist and curator with impeccable finesse. His body of work regularly embodies a state of instability due to the loss of personal identity resulting from the

stagnant conformation of his environment.

With the "Exploring Expression" exhibition, uses bold colours and exaggerated figures to poignantly express the perception of his reality while searching for an escape from the artificial and conventional. Each artwork is inspired by his personal journey in the contemporary and globalized society, fortified by his intense love for culture and heritage.

The exhibition presents viewers a unique opportunity to explore

the world he imagines – free from boundaries and full of infinite belongings.

The artist's work has been previously showcased at the Katara Art Centre in 2015, followed by a group exhibition at the Doha Fire Station in 2016. This year, Fahad gained international exposure at Berlin's legendary Kraftwerk space, where his work was showcased alongside other Qatari artists as part of a large-scale exhibition "Contemporary Art-Qatar" presented by Qatar Museums (QM) to mark the finale of the Qatar Germany 2017 Year of Culture programme.

Art 29 has been established to inspire and nurture creativity by showcasing the works of emerging local, regional and international artists. The expansive gallery has previously featured prominent Qatari names including Ahmed bin Majed Al Maadheed, the artist behind the iconic "Tamim-al-Majid" portrait, Abdulwahed Al Mawlawi who is known for documenting local artistic expression from the late 1990s to 2002, and most recently Lulu M – a self-taught artist recognised for her minimalist abstract compositions.



Qatari artist Fahad Al Obaidly launched his solo exhibition at W Doha Hotel & Residences.

The gallery also played host to the photography works of students at the Virginia Commonwealth University in Qatar and the "Currents" exhibit by Emmergeast, the first online art gallery that brings together emerging Middle Eastern artists and young collectors under one umbrella.

The exhibition is open to the public until January 16 from 9am to 7pm.

قطر للبترول
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SR. NO.	COMMITTEE REF. NO.	GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF COMMUNITY	Non-Refundable BIDDING FEE (Q.R.)	TENDER BOND (Q.R.)	BID CLOSING DATE/TIME
1	LT17MT0126	SALE & REMOVAL OF SCRAP METALS, SCRAPPED LPG STEEL CYLINDERS & CLEANED EMPTY DRUMS ON CALL OFF AGREEMENT BASIS FOR A PERIOD OF FIVE (5) YEARS.	500	16,000/-	Jan. 15 2018 (12:00 hrs)

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

KPMG celebrates Qatar National Day

Over 100 people from KPMG in Qatar came together yesterday to celebrate Qatar National Day by sharing a huge cake and showing their support for the country and the Emir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani. Country Senior Partner Ahmed Abu-Sharkh said: "Thanks to the excellent stewardship of Qatar's government and leadership, KPMG in Qatar has gone from strength-to-strength, since beginning operations in the country nearly 40 years ago. We are excited to come together to recognise this important occasion and to show our gratitude and commitment to Qatar."

Qatar Airways Cargo eyes 2nd rank in world by 2018

Continued from page 1
“Air freight plays a key role in the development of the global economy, and Qatar Airways will continue to seek new opportunities to invest in and grow our cargo business, to benefit not only our customers but the air cargo industry as a whole,” Akbar Al Baker, Group Chief Executive, Qatar Airways had commented recently.
The cargo carrier provides its customers a young and modern fleet of belly-hold aircraft and freighters across a truly global network. Qatar Airways Cargo recently announced the commencement of Boeing 777 freighter services to Pittsburgh, its seventh

freighter destination in 2017 and thirteenth in the Americas, starting on 11 October.
Qatar Airways Cargo has made substantial investment in its operations at its Doha hub to ensure all cargo deliveries are processed efficiently and seamlessly.
Special facilities and well-trained personnel ensure expert handling over a wide variety of product categories, which include express products, livestock, valuables, automobiles, perishables, pharmaceuticals, oversized cargo and general cargo that requires air freight carriage.
The cargo carrier offers QR

Charter, utilising its most modern fleet of Boeing 747-8, Boeing 777 and Airbus A330 freighters. Its portfolio of distinctive products currently includes QR Pharma, QR Fresh, QR Live and QR Express offering efficiency and compliance in the handling of temperature-sensitive pharmaceutical and perishable cargo, transportation of live animals as well as time-critical shipments.
The cargo carrier recently received two awards in Asia: the ‘Overall Carrier of the Year’ award by Payload Asia and ‘Best Cargo Airline in Customer Services’ by the India Cargo Awards.

Foreign Ministry official meets Italy Ambassador



Secretary General of the Foreign Ministry HE Dr Ahmed bin Hassan Al Hammadi met yesterday with Republic of Italy's Ambassador to Qatar Pasquale Salzano. The meeting discussed the bilateral relations and the means to boost and develop them. The meeting discussed topics of common interest.

2nd edition of Mahaseel Festival to open on Saturday

Raynald C Rivera
The Peninsula

The second edition of Mahaseel Festival opens this Saturday at the Southern Area of the Cultural Village Foundation – Katara, organisers announced yesterday.
Held in cooperation with the Agricultural Department at the Ministry of Municipality and Environment, the festival features fresh fruits and vegetables, honey, dairy, poultry and other livestock products sold at cheap prices.
“Everybody is waiting for this festival. Last year thousands of people visited Katara especially for this festival. The number of outlets taking part in the festival has jumped from 14 to 22 which is a good indication that we have succeeded in the inaugural edition of the festival,” Katara General Manager Dr Khalid bin Ibrahim Al Sulaiti told local

Held in cooperation with the Agricultural Department at the Ministry of Municipality and Environment, the festival features fresh fruits and vegetables, honey, dairy, poultry and other livestock products sold at cheap prices.

media on the sidelines of a press conference to officially announce the festival yesterday.
Twenty-two local farms and six livestock companies are participating at this year's edition of the festival in which Katara highlights the role played by the producers and suppliers of both agricultural and livestock companies in



General Manager of Cultural Village Foundation- Katara, Dr Khalid bin Ibrahim Al Sulaiti (right) and Chairman of the Committee of Mahaseel Festival 2017, Salman Mohammad Al Naimi, at a press conference yesterday.
Pic: Kammuty VP/The Peninsula

Qatar, as well as provides a platform for new small, medium and large-scale businesses in the said sectors.
The festival will

be a showcase of high quality products from local farms which aim to increase production in light of the current blockade, which has not created much

impact to the country, said Dr Al Sulaiti.
“We are sure our products which will be sold at the festival will be of higher quality than imported ones,” he stressed.
He added: “Katara is keen to launch the festival, as part of its unceasing efforts to support national products in its various sectors, especially in agriculture, livestock and food supplies, more so as it would help the State of Qatar achieve agricultural sustainability and self-sufficiency in food production and distribution.”
“Mahaseel Festival is a new venture in the agricultural economy of Qatar, which offers a unique platform that creates an awareness amongst residents about Qatar's domestic farms and the competitive prices and quality of homegrown produce.”
The festival also highlights the effective role of Mahaseel as it is held to improve the production rates within

agricultural and food sectors, while encouraging farmers to ensure continuous farm produce,” he explained.
In addition, it will provide visitors with useful information on the vast array of food products on offer and their health benefits through seminars and workshops that would be organized on the sidelines of the festival.
“The festival will feature competitions, exhibitions and interactive events to promote public awareness and interest in Qatari food produce,” he said.
Salman Mohammad Al Naimi, Chairman of the organising committee of second Mahaseel Festival, also spoke at the press conferences.
The festival will be held at Katara's Southern Area from December 23 to 27. From January onwards, it is scheduled to take place every Thursday, Friday and Saturday until the end of March next year.



Adventurer finishes 600km journey around Qatar on foot

The Peninsula

Qatari adventurer Salman Al Khunji (pictured) has completed his 14-day trip on foot, which took him all around Qatar.
Al Khunji started this 600km walk to introduce and promote domestic tourism through his visit to archaeological and tourism sites.
The journey, sponsored and supported by Qatar Youth Hostels, was also aimed at promoting youth tourism.
Qatar Youth Hostels said in a statement today that Al Khunji chose to walk around the country, linking the north of Qatar to the south, a distance of more than 600km, to explore the country deeply and make youth interested in exploring the country. During his walk, he toured Qatar's historic, environmental and heritage landmarks, museums, gardens and natural reserves.
He started from Abu Samra and went on to Al Mashabiya, Arig reserve, Mashash, Bin Shaif, Al Qallayel, Al Amriya, Al Kharara, Al Wukair, Al Wakrah, Doha, Al Thumama, Al

Markhiya, Al Luqta, Education City, Old Al Rayyan, Celebrations Street, Umm Salal, Barzan Towers and from there to Al Khor, Al Zubara Fort, Al Jumailiya, Al Khuzan, Al Shehania, Rawdat Rashed, Umm Tagah, Dahl Al Misfir, Mukaynis, Al Lal Valley, Turayna up to Khor Al Odeid.
Salman Al Khunji, 26, said that through his journey, he sought to encourage young people to travel in Qatar, to visit historical areas, to learn more about the country, have experiences and adventures different from daily routine and city lifestyle. “Everyone has to discover the abilities in his body and challenge himself to discover new skills.”
He expressed happiness with his experience, saying that “there are many areas in the country which are known by the name and history of the place. But during this trip I had meetings with many residents of these areas and they explained the reasons for the name of these areas.”
The Qatari adventurer praised the support of the Qatar Youth Hostels for his journey.

Civil Aviation Authority signs MoU with SESAR project

Brussels
QNA

The Civil Aviation Authority has signed a Memorandum of Cooperation with the Single European Sky ATM Research (SESAR) project to achieve more efficient management of air traffic between the State of Qatar and European countries as well as all the countries of the world.
This Memorandum aims to enhance cooperation in the field of air traffic management modernization initiatives in Qatar

and Europe in order to contribute to the development and harmonization of global aviation standards. It also covers ways to cooperate in the exchange of all information and expertise on the development of air traffic management, and all related activities.
The Memorandum of Cooperation was signed by HE Chairman of Civil Aviation Authority Abdullah bin Nasser Turki Al Subaey, and Executive Director of SESAR Florian Guillemeret.
Commenting on the Signing

of the memorandum, HE Chairman of Civil Aviation Authority said that the aviation sector in Qatar is significantly growing which is reflected on air traffic services and the efficient use of air space in the country, therefore, joint cooperation with SESAR will have a positive impact in creating a balance and interoperability among Air traffic systems, for the benefit of airlines as well as of travellers.
HE also expressed the pride of signing this Memorandum of Cooperation, which will be implemented by the beginning

of 2018.
SESAR Executive Director said that as a global industry, aviation requires continued cooperation in interoperability between countries, with the goal of providing smooth and efficient air traffic across all regions. Through this Memorandum, he said that both sides aim to move together towards ensuring global aviation that is not only robust but has more intelligent and environmental solutions at more affordable prices for both airlines and travelers around the world.

ADLQ hosts annual Junior Scientist Symposium

The Peninsula

For the fifth year in a row, ADLQ hosts the annual Junior Scientists Symposium in order to give young researchers and scientists the opportunity to present and discuss their work.
The one-day symposium is one of a kind platform which is aimed at supporting and encouraging the local talents in the field of Scientific research.
Dr Mohammed Ghanim Al Maadheed, Chairman of the ADLQ Board of Trustees, has opened up the sessions by emphasising on the importance of research and the value of persistence in order to reach the answers they are seeking.
Al Maadheed has thanked all involved in the establishment and development of this symposium which was merely an idea back in 2011, if not for the efforts made by Dr Mohammed Alsayraf, General manager of ADLQ, and Dr Vidya Mohamed Ali, Director of

the Life Sciences Research Division in ADLQ.
The symposium aims at connecting together the scientists and researchers locally and abroad, in addition to reinforcing excellence in research.
Many important local institutes have participated in the symposium like: Qatar University, Well Cornell Medical College Qatar, Hamad Medical Corporation and others. A lot of international institutes have joined in like: Groningen University from Holland, Bristol University and UCL from UK.
Professor David Lomas, Vice-Provost (Health) at University College of London, has expressed his pleasure of the continuity of this program. He has also announced the appointment of Dr Al Maadheed as Visiting Professor in University College of London which is the first to be given to a Qatari scientist by this university in appreciation of his efforts in the field.



Dr Mohammed Ghanim Al Maadheed with Professor David Lomas.

US warning ahead of Jerusalem vote

United Nations
AP

US Ambassador Nikki Haley threatened UN member states with possible retaliation if they support a resolution criticising Washington's decision to recognise Jerusalem as Israel's capital, saying President Donald Trump takes today's vote "personally" – and the US "will be taking names."

Haley's warning letter to most of the 193 UN member states and threatening tweet yesterday drew sharp criticism from the Palestinian and Turkish foreign ministers who are flying to New York for the General Assembly vote. They accused the US of intimidation.

The Palestinians sought the General Assembly vote after the United States on Monday vetoed a resolution supported by the 14 other UN Security Council members that would have required Trump to rescind his declaration

US Ambassador Nikki Haley's warning letter to most of the 193 UN member states and threatening tweet drew sharp criticism.

on Jerusalem as Israel's capital and not move the US Embassy there. Unlike the Security Council, assembly resolutions are not legally binding but they do reflect world opinion.

In yesterday's letter, reportedly sent to over 180 countries, Haley said the Trump administration is "simply asking that you acknowledge the historical friendship, partnership, and support we have extended and respect our decision about our own embassy."

"The president will be watching this vote carefully and has requested I report back on those countries who voted



Palestinians stage a demonstration against US President Donald Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, near the Kalandia check point in Ramallah, West Bank, yesterday.

against us," she wrote in the letter. "We will take note of each and every vote on this issue."

Her tweet was sharper: "At the UN we're always asked to do more & give more. So, when we make a decision, at the will of the American ppl, abt where to locate OUR embassy, we don't expect those we've helped to target us. On Thurs there'll be a vote criticizing our choice. The US will be taking names."

This was not the first time that Haley threatened to keep track of US opponents.

On January 27, the day she arrived at the United Nations as ambassador, Haley announced a new way the United States would be doing business. The Trump administration's goal is to show US strength, speak out, and defend its allies – and for countries opposing America, "We're taking names," she said. The letter on the Jerusalem

vote was the first time since then that Haley vowed to compile a list.

Her action recalled to some veteran UN diplomats the run-up to the Iraq war in 2002 when US President George W Bush launched a campaign against France and other opponents of military action who refused to support a Security Council resolution to authorise war.

The resolution, which then British Prime Minister Tony Blair was pressing for and the US backed, was withdrawn by Britain because it was certain to be defeated as a result of strong council opposition.

What action the United States might take against countries that vote against today's General Assembly resolution remains to be seen.

The resolution is co-sponsored by Turkey, chair of the

summit of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and Yemen, chair of the Arab Group at the UN. Before Haley's letter and tweet, Palestinian UN Ambassador Riyad Mansour told *The Associated Press* he expected "massive support" in the assembly.

The resolution that will be put to a vote is very similar to the defeated Security Council resolution.

It reaffirms 10 Security Council resolutions on Jerusalem, dating back to 1967, including requirements that the city's final status must be decided in direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians.

It "affirms that any decisions and actions which purport to have altered, the character, status or demographic composition of the holy city of Jerusalem have no legal effect, are null and void and must be rescinded."

Qatar Cabinet expresses regret over UNSC decision

→ Continued from page 1

The Cabinet also called on an action to stop the continuous violations of the Israeli occupations forces and the settlers to the sanctity of Al-Aqsa Mosque.

The cabinet then reviewed topics on its meeting's agenda. The cabinet reviewed and took the necessary measures regarding draft law on regulating non-Qatari capital investment in the economic activity and took the necessary measures regarding the report from the Minister of Development Planning and Statistics on the unified and comprehensive presentation on demographics.

The cabinet also approved the draft decision of the Minister of Municipality and Environment to endorse the international standard specifications as Qatari standard specifications. In addition to approval of the draft agreement to cooperate in the cultural field between the governments of the State of Qatar and the Republic of Armenia.

Nine injured in fresh anti-Trump protests

QALANDIA: At least nine Palestinians were injured in clashes with Israeli troops yesterday as fresh protests broke out over US President Donald Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, hospital sources said.

At the Qalandia checkpoint between the occupied West Bank and Jerusalem, Israeli forces fired tear gas, sound grenades and live ammunition at around 1,000 protesters, many of whom were throwing stones, an AFP photographer said.

Palestinian FM slams US threats

Istanbul / AFP

Palestinian Foreign Minister Riyad Al Malki yesterday accused Washington of "threatening" member countries of the UN General Assembly ahead of a vote on rejecting the US decision to recognise Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

Malki said American officials were "committing another mistake when they have distributed this famous letter trying to threaten countries, (and) threaten their sovereign decision to choose how to vote." He spoke at a press conference with his Turkish counterpart Mevlut Cavusoglu in Istanbul, shortly before both men left for New York. "This is really a new definition of world order in politics and it seems that the American administration... are putting their stamp on a new political reality that many countries will reject," Malki said.

"No honourable state would bow to such pressure," Cavusoglu said. "The world has changed. The belief that I am strong therefore I am right" has changed. The world today is revolting against injustices."

Solidarity with Syrian baby



Syrian students covering their left eyes with their hands in support of the Syrian baby Karim, who lost his left eye and his mother after Assad regime's attack on a marketplace at Hammuriye district, poses for a photo, at the Tecemmu Sermeda refugee camp in Qah Village of Idlib, Syria, yesterday.

Air raids leave 11 civilians dead in Yemen rebel bastion

SANAA: The Saudi-led coalition carried out a string of air raids in Yemen, killing 11 civilians in the Houthis stronghold of Saada a day after the rebels fired a missile at Riyadh, a tribal chief and witnesses said.

On the ground, unidentified assailants attacked Houthis guarding the Sanaa residence of former president Ali Abdullah Saleh, who was killed by the Shia rebels earlier this month. An unspecified number of Houthis guards died in the attack, residents said.

The tribal chief said that 11 civilians were killed and eight others wounded in an air strike on the Houthis rebel stronghold of Saada in northern Yemen. The pro-Houthi television channel Al Masirah gave the same death toll.

NEWS BYTES

Kenya watchdog: 92 people dead in election violence

KAMPALA: A human rights watchdog says 92 people were killed during Kenya's months of election turmoil and dozens of others were sexually assaulted. The independent Kenya National Commission on Human Rights says in a new report Wednesday that most of the victims "were felled by the bullet." The group reports 86 cases of sexual or gender-based violence. Opposition leader Raila Odinga has accused Kenyan security forces of killing scores of his supporters. Police have denied it. Odinga lost the August election but successfully challenged the results while alleging irregularities, leading the Supreme Court to nullify the vote in a first in Africa. Odinga boycotted the court-ordered repeat vote in October, saying electoral reforms had not been made. President Uhuru Kenyatta won that election with 98 percent of the votes.

Mnangagwa vows to pull investment into Zimbabwe

HARARE: Zimbabwean President Emmerson Mnangagwa said he would introduce pro-business policies to attract investment and revive the ailing economy after decades of rule under Robert Mugabe. Mnangagwa, who came to power last month after Mugabe was ousted, used his first state of the nation address to underline that his priorities were to boost economic growth and fight corruption. The new president was a long-time ally of Mugabe, and his critics say he is also a hardliner from the ruling ZANU-PF party with a record of alleged graft and repression in Zimbabwe. But Mnangagwa said he wants to improve the rule of law and democracy, as well as the business climate.

Kidnapped aid workers in South Sudan released: UN

JUBA: Six aid workers kidnapped by rebels in South Sudan earlier this week have been released, according to the United Nations and a spokesman for the rebels. The aid workers are from the French organisation Solidarites International and had been kidnapped on Sunday while travelling on a road near the city of Raja, in the west of the country. "All of them were released and they have landed safely in Wau," another city in the west of the country, a United Nations official in Juba who spoke on condition of anonymity told Reuters. He said one of those who had been held by the rebels was a foreigner. Rebel spokesman Lam Paul Gabriel told Reuters that the six humanitarian aid workers had been freed. "All their belongings were given back to them including their vehicles."

New centre to open for long-term care of patients

→ Continued from page 1

The aim of these facilities is to create a comforting, home-like environment in the community. A space that provides the best quality patient-centered medical care while supporting patients in regaining or maintaining optimal levels of functioning," said Dr Al Kuwari.

Sheikh Abdullah Bin Saoud Al Thani, said, "Funding the Daam Specialized Care Center is in line with achieving Daam's vision of integrated social development that benefits people lives on all levels. World-class health care is a pillar of Qatar's National Vision 2030, and also a key feature of the life we at Daam aim

at granting to people. At Daam, we believe that initiatives such as this are at the core of our work as a major contribution and support entity. We have previously supported various projects with HMC and we will continue our partnership for as long as we share mutual goals and objectives, leading to effective and sustained development."

Mahmoud Al Raisi, Chief of Continuing Care at HMC, Dr Hanadi Khamis Mubarak Al Hamad, Chairman of Geriatrics at HMC and Abdul Rahman Al Mamari, Deputy Executive Director of Daam, and several other officials also attended the MoU signing ceremony held at the Bayt Al Dhiyafah, at Hamad

bin Khalifa Medical City.

"The Daam Specialized Care Center will provide medical and rehabilitation services for patients. In long term care we provide patients with multi-disciplinary care by experts including physicians, physiotherapists and dietitians, and provide all required services aiming at preparing the patient for discharge," said Dr Hanadi.

The first Enaya Specialised Care Center opened in 2010 and was called the Skilled Nursing Facility. It was the first of its kind in the region, providing round-the-clock monitoring and treatment from specialist nurses and doctors. Five years later, the facility was expanded to meet

the needs of the country's growing population and in 2015 the Enaya Specialized Care Centers 1 and 2 officially opened. At present, the facilities provide a healing environment with more than 150 patient beds. Once opened, the Daam Specialized Care Center will strengthen the capabilities of these existing facilities. The facilities will be connected via a link bridge, allowing for efficiencies in staffing, equipment, and space.

In addition to the two existing Enaya Specialised Care Centers, HHMC operates two community-based facilities in Mualther and a busy multi-disciplinary Home Healthcare Service which currently cares for over 1,600 patients across Qatar.

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EDITORIAL

Meeting energy demands

Qatar Petroleum, which is the world leader in LNG export, has stepped up its efforts to further consolidate its leadership position. The company has taken many steps this year that will take QP to new heights. Its achievement included inauguration of the North Oil Company (NOC), a joint-venture between Qatar Petroleum owning 70 percent, and the French oil giant Total for the remaining 30 percent. The North Oil Company has successfully completed all transition activities to take over the operation of the giant Al-Shaheen Oil Field. QP also established Ocean LNG Limited for marketing its future international LNG supply portfolio sourced outside Qatar. The company is a joint venture owned by a QP affiliate and an ExxonMobil affiliate. It was driven by its aspirations to continue to be a global LNG leader, and to invest in LNG projects outside Qatar. It also entered into agreements with Chevron, whereby QP acquired 30 percent participating interest from Chevron 75 percent share in three deep-water offshore leases in Morocco.

In April, the US Department of Energy authorised Golden Pass Products (Golden Pass) to export domestically produced LNG to countries that do not have a free trade agreement (FTA) with the United States.

QP made a strategic decision to merge Qatargas and RasGas into a single entity, aiming to create a world-class operator in terms of size, service and reliability, and creating great opportunities for cost savings.

Despite the unjust siege, QP has worked to maximise business opportunities and self-reliance and turn challenges into opportunities.

Despite the unjust siege, QP has worked to maximise business opportunities and self-reliance and turn challenges into opportunities. Just few days after the siege was imposed, Qatar Petroleum and Shell Gas and Power Developments signed an agreement to develop LNG marine fueling infrastructure at strategic shipping locations across the globe. After that, QP launched vessel-borne fueling facility for all vessels lifting any Qatari seaborne imports or exports. Within one month of the illegal siege, Qatar announced plans to raise LNG production from 77 million to 100 million tons per year, an increase by 30 percent, by doubling the size of the new gas project in the southern sector of the North Field, which QP had announced last April.

This will double the size of the project to four billion cubic feet of gas per day, which constitutes a 20 percent increase from the current North Field production rate, or about one million barrels of oil equivalent per day.

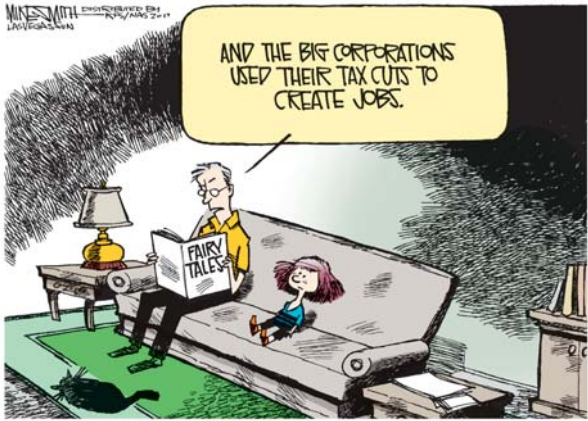
In October, a consortium comprising QP, Shell, and China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) announced the winning bidder for the Alto de Cabo Frio-Oeste block in the prolific Santos hydrocarbon basin offshore Brazil, which contains some of the most promising hydrocarbon prone areas in the world. In November, has entered into an agreement to acquire a 30 percent participating interest in the contractors interest under the exploration and production sharing agreement for Block 52 offshore in Oman, in partnership with the Italian energy company Eni.



QUOTE OF THE DAY

From now on we will be more active in defending the rights of Palestinians. We will work harder for the international recognition of an independent Palestinian state.

Mevlüt Cavusoglu
Turkish Foreign Minister



The Middle East in 2018: Five issues to watch

Joe Macaron
Al Jazeera



The past year was a watershed year for the Middle East and 2018 promises to continue on this path. Wars began to wind down across the region but challenges remain in managing conflict resolution. Next year will be defined by post-war transitions to peace talks, ballot boxes, and reconstruction. Two areas are the exception to this trend: Yemen is the only country that will start the new year without a roadmap to peace and territorial disputes along western Syria, from Idlib to Deraa, will continue next year.

Turmoil across the Middle East makes it harder to narrow down the main political issues that will dominate 2018. However, five of them should be watched in 2018 because of their regional and international impact.

Will Syrian refugees return home? There are currently 5.4 million Syrian refugees registered with UNHCR, most notably in the neighbouring countries of Turkey (3.4 million), Lebanon (1.5 million) and Jordan (650,000). Syrian refugees began to return in small numbers in 2017, and that process might accelerate in 2018 as these countries are facing growing security and socioeconomic tensions. Jordan and Turkey have buffer zones on their border with Syria and will face fewer difficulties in enforcing this decision. However, in the case of Lebanon, the Syrian regime fully controls the border and the challenge is to overcome the Lebanese differences over engaging Damascus. The potential return of Syrian refugees could take precedence over the stalled Syrian peace talks and have a significant impact on reconstruction efforts and local governance.

Jerusalem and remaking regional alliances Palestine is becoming once again a central issue in Arab politics as public pressure is compelling governments to take decisive actions and US recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital was the triggering point. As a result, Jerusalem will continue to play a key factor in reshaping Middle East politics in 2018. Ankara is drifting away further from Washington, Amman is taking distance from Riyadh, and Tehran is seizing the opportunity to rally allies. As no peace process is looming on the horizon, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas will be weakened further and will have to heighten his rhetoric to match Hamas' strategy. The US strategy to rally Saudi Arabia and Israel against Iran will also struggle, as Riyadh will be pressured to take the lead on the Palestinian issue if violence increased in the West Bank. Jerusalem will test old alliances and shape new ones as the Syrian war is winding down.

Shakeup in Riyadh: local politics drive foreign policy The unpredictability of Saudi policies in 2017 will most likely continue in 2018. Since ascending to power as deputy crown prince in 2015, MBS has been amassing powers. He pursued that objective with urgency this year,

which had an effect across the Middle East. Saudi domestic politics have been guiding the country's foreign policy and distracting from the turmoil at home. When former Crown Prince Mohammad bin Nayef was forced to resign in June, Saudi Arabia led the embargo against Qatar. When Saudi princes and businessmen were rounded up in the Ritz Carlton in November, Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri was forced to resign during a trip to Riyadh. If MBS is more secure in ascending to power, Saudi foreign policy could revert to a rather conventional approach. However, uncertainty could risk escalating Riyadh's rhetoric abroad. Saudi Arabia, under MBS, is at a crossroads in 2018.

Going back to the ballot box: Iraq and Libya

The year 2018 will witness a return to the ballot box in key countries across the region. Egypt's presidential elections next March and Lebanon parliamentary elections in May should have no surprises or major impact. However, Libya's presidential and parliamentary elections (tentatively scheduled for mid-2018) and Iraq parliamentary elections in May are consequential.

Iraq's Prime Minister Haider Al Abadi, who scored two recent political victories by defeating the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and aborting the Kurdish independence referendum,

should secure a majority along with his allies. He is leading an anti-corruption campaign in the period leading to the elections, as pro-Iranian factions are coalescing to endorse former Prime Minister Nouri Al Maliki. Abadi staying in power would be the best chance for the US to contain Iran. The question is whether Tehran will flex its political muscles during the elections and purposely make Abadi's victory difficult.

Libya is the major electoral unknown of 2018, as elections are not fully confirmed yet. We might witness an interesting face-off in the presidential race between the old guard, General Khalifa Haftar who served in the Libyan army before defecting and Saif Al Islam, the son of the former ruler of Libya Muammar Gaddafi. Haftar is favourite to win with the current chairman of the UN-backed Government of National Accord and Prime Minister Fayez Al Sarraj likely to keep his post. It remains to be seen whether the country is ready to secure and organise a nationwide election, and whether Libyan rivals can show restraint and overcome their distrust to work together.

Will ISIL make a comeback? ISIL, as a central authority with geographical control, has been decimated but the threat it poses is far from being gone. The radical group is gradually converting into an underground operation that could continue launching attacks in Syria and Iraq or across the world. It remains to be seen whether the group will become an ally of al-Qaeda, or continue to act as a rival. If the lack of stability and reconciliation persists in Syria, Iraq or Libya, ISIL or other radical groups might once again exploit the political vacuum to gain strength.

While these five issues are expected to stand out in 2018, history has not always been kind to the Middle East nor to those who forecast politics. One thing is certain, unpredictability will mark political developments in 2018.

The writer is a policy analyst at the Arab Center, Washington, DC.



There are currently 5.4 million Syrian refugees registered with UNHCR, most notably in the neighbouring countries of Turkey (3.4 million), Lebanon (1.5 million) and Jordan (650,000).



Syrian refugee children play at a refugee camp in the area of Arida, north of Beirut.

OIC's Istanbul summit a positive step forward

Abdullahil Ahsan
Anatolia



The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in its latest Extraordinary Summit Conference held in Istanbul last Wednesday, December 13, declared East Jerusalem the capital of the State of Palestine. This is a remarkable development. Although Muslims act in social media seem to have robustly welcomed it, Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu sarcastically reacted, saying, "All these statements fail to impress us." He was perhaps referring to related statements by the Summit chairman, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas as well as a number of other Muslim leaders attending the Summit.

But why is Netanyahu disregarding so many Muslim leaders so confidently? This question demands serious reflection. One should revisit OIC records in this context. The OIC came into existence in 1969 in response to an arson attack on Jerusalem's Al Aqsa Mosque, which Israel had already occupied two years previously. Since then the OIC has adopted numerous resolutions condemning Israel's aggressive, illegal and rude behavior. During the early years, it resolved to launch diplomatic jihad, economic jihad, and jihad in many other fields in support of the Palestinian struggle for self-determination. But now, with almost half a century gone by, the OIC is too shy even to use the word 'jihad' in its resolutions.

Let us examine the OIC's record on one or two related issues. In 1978, when Egyptian President Anwar Sadat broke OIC and Arab League ranks and decided to unilaterally establish diplomatic relations with Israel, the OIC warned Egypt by adopting a resolution, saying:

"The Conference called upon all States and peoples of the World to refrain from extending any military, human or material support that would encourage the continuation of the Israeli occupation of Arab territories and declared that continued support to Israel from those States will oblige the Member States to adopt the appropriate attitude against these States. It condemned the position taken by those States that provide Israel with assistance and arms, and considers that the real purpose of submerging Israel with such huge quantities of means of death and destruction is to consolidate Israel as a base of colonialism and racism in the Third World in general, and in Africa and Asia in particular."

After Egypt violated the OIC's stance on the issue, the latter not only suspended Egypt from the organization but also adopted a resolution in May 1979, condemning Egypt for its unilateral action.

It said: "[The OIC] condemns the Camp David Accords, signed in September 1978, as well as the Washington Agreement signed on March 26, 1979 between the government of Israel and the regime in Egypt and considers them a blatant deviation from the provisions of the Charter of the Organization of the Islamic Conference and a violation of International law and United Nations resolutions on



Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, during a press conference in Istanbul.

Palestine question and the occupied Palestinian and Arab territories, rejects all their consequences and effects, and deems them null and void and not binding to the Arabs and the Muslims, particularly the Palestinian people."

In another resolution, the OIC decided to "suspend the membership of the Arab Republic of Egypt to the Organization of the Islamic Conference and all its agencies and bodies up to the time when the reasons that provoked this suspension are eliminated."

A year later, the OIC not only condemned Egypt with a tougher wording, it also urged member countries to sever all diplomatic and economic relations with Egypt. It condemned "vehemently the Egyptian government for normalising relations with the Zionist entity, and regard this step as a disavowal of the principles of the Holy Jihad, leading eventually to grave dangers and harm affecting the Muslim Ummah (nation) and its principles, ideals, heritage, culture, and civilisation."

But interestingly, within four years, the OIC reversed its stance on the issue and took Egypt back to its fold without providing any credible explanation. [5] Also in 1978, the OIC adopted a resolution not to allow the stationing of foreign troops in their soil to be used against another member state. But within years, some member states broke that commitment. Osama bin Laden is reported to have sought legitimacy for his extremist activities by citing these resolutions.

Now the question is, why should Netanyahu not make fun of OIC leaders and its resolutions? Has the OIC not failed to deliver on its promises so far? "Oh, I see...?" One should, however, not just raise questions about Netanyahu's remarks but should also seriously ponder why the state of affairs of the OIC is so pathetic? Why do people refer to the institution as "Oh, I see...?" The answer to this question is a simple one. The OIC did raise hopes for many people in the Muslim world but it has failed to deliver. It has failed to translate its words into deeds. How has

it happened? It is because individual member countries have slowly lost interest in the Palestinian cause, the cause that gave birth to the OIC in the first place.

But how did individual countries lose interest in the issue? Take the case of Saudi Arabia, for example. In 1969, Saudi Arabia under the leadership of King Faisal bin Abdulaziz (1906-1975) was one of the strongest supporters of the OIC. The OIC's first secretary general, Malaysia's Tunku Abdul Rahman (1903-1990) repeatedly said that without the King's support, it would not have been possible for him to make the institution functional.

The OIC had decided to establish its headquarters in Jerusalem, but since the territory was under Israeli

occupation, on King Faisal's request, it was decided that the headquarters would be temporarily located in Jeddah until Jerusalem was freed from Israeli occupation.

Saudi Arabia enjoyed the support of many other member countries because of its stance on the Palestinian cause. In 1973-74, through the October/Ramadan war and an OPEC oil embargo, Saudi Arabia made a significant contribution to the Palestinian cause.

However, the situation has since changed dramatically. Israel has made inroads into internal politics of many OIC-member countries, successfully turning the tide in many countries. This has been possible because of the lack of transparency and accountability in these countries. In Saudi Arabia, particularly under the current King Salman bin Abdulaziz, special arrangements were made to make Saudi Arabia the destination of Trump's first overseas visit. The visit has hardly served to alleviate the sufferings of the Palestinian or Muslims in other parts of the world.

Saudi Arabia's neglect of the Palestinian cause has been glaring in its approach toward the latest OIC Extraordinary Summit conference held in Istanbul. It sent a very insignificant delegation to represent the country. The Jeddah-based OIC's website covering the news about the Extraordinary Summit has failed even to name the Turkish president, the chairman of the Summit. Therefore, the OIC must be rescued from the Saudi sway. But how? Who will lead?

Turkey most competent member
At the moment Turkey seems to be the most competent member to lead the OIC out of the current quagmire under Saudi influence. Providence has put Turkey at the helm of affairs. Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu has already announced steps to implement the Istanbul call to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine. "Recognition of the Palestinian state is in line with UN decisions. We will strive for recognition of East Jerusalem as Palestine's capital."

he is reported to have said.

Following the foreign minister's statement, the Turkish president's spokesperson noted: "Turkey's consulate in East Jerusalem has already been serving as an embassy."

Since his storming out of a Davos panel held for Gaza in 2009, Erdogan has gained huge popularity. Turkey's transformation under Erdogan's leadership from an internationally indebted country to a major aid donor has attracted the attention of many OIC countries. It is, therefore, time for the rest of the OIC members to come forward. They should do this not only to support the Turkish initiative, but primarily to make their own countries self-sufficient and independent in the real sense.

The issue of Palestine is very popular in OIC countries: Here in Malaysia where I live, both the government and the opposition are competing against one another to demonstrate their care for Palestine by holding demonstrations against Donald Trump's decision on Jerusalem.

The first step that the OIC needs to undertake, even before the issue is taken up at the UN, is to move its own head office to the originally intended spot: Jerusalem. If Turkey is able to maintain its consulate office in East Jerusalem, the OIC should also be able to maintain its office in the city, at least symbolically. Moving the OIC head office to Jerusalem will also enhance the original 1947 UN plan of internalisation of the city. The faster other OIC countries follow Turkey's example, the better it will be for their own future.

The Peninsula

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Anti-immigration fervour is different this time

Noah Smith
Bloomberg



The wave of anti-immigration sentiment that boosted the Donald Trump presidential campaign has eerie historical parallels. In 1955, historian John Higham wrote a book titled, "Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925." The restrictionist movements, ideas and legislative efforts chronicled in Higham's history bear a distinct resemblance to those that have emerged in the present day. But there are good reasons to think that this time is different because economic and cultural changes make it unlikely the US will go down the same isolationist path it trod in the early 20th century.

"Strangers in the Land" traces three distinct kinds of American nativism. The first, anti-Catholic sentiment, mostly died out after Irish immigration trailed off. But the recurrent bouts of panic over a papist fifth column bear an interesting resemblance to modern fears of Islam:

"Catholic meetings were spied upon for evidence of military preparations. In Toledo the mayor, the police commissioner, and others bought Winchester rifles to repel an anticipated invasion, and many... were afraid to go to bed at night... A rural schoolteacher in Minnesota went about heavily armed for weeks to defend himself against the anticipated massacre [of Protestants]."

Higham's second type of nativism is anti-radicalism — basically, early

anti-communism. The third type, however, which became dominant in the 1920s, was racial nativism, or the belief that people of Northern and Western European descent were superior to others, and that the US would collapse if they didn't remain a majority. It was this sentiment that ultimately led to the restrictive Johnson-Reed Act of 1924, which severely limited immigration and set quotas ensuring that most immigration would come from the racially favored countries.

The 1924 law was recently praised by Trump's attorney general, Jeff Sessions. Meanwhile, the idea of preventing racial demographic change is central to the ethos of the alt-right activists who have been at the vanguard of agitating for immigration restriction. As in the early 20th century, a panic over changing demographics is leading to calls for the US to close the gates. Higham's history seems to be repeating itself. But things might not turn out the same way as they did 100 years ago. In the 1910s and 1920s, public pressure for immigration restriction was intense — now, it's supported only by a shrinking minority of Americans. A Gallup poll finds that support for decreased immigration has fallen in the last decade.

Trump's election hasn't sparked a general hardening of attitudes against immigrants, as occurred in the 1910s and 1920s. In fact, Americans of all political persuasions say more positive things about immigrants in 2017 than they did in previous years, an NBC poll shows.

Americans are even less militant toward illegal immigrants. A Fox poll shows increasing support in 2017 for giving unauthorized immigrants a path to citizenship rather than deporting them.

Why are Americans so pro-immigration, even in the age of Trump? One possible reason could be that they're more comfortable with diversity than their forebears were in the age Higham writes about. Americans certainly express fewer reservations about diversity than do people in Europe, a Pew Research Center poll shows.

A second reason could be that some — though not all — of the changes restrictionists want have already happened on their own, with no need for new legislation. Illegal immigration, long the chief target of restrictionists' ire, has effectively stopped — since 2007, the unauthorized immigrant population has fallen. Immigration from Mexico, the main source of population inflow during the 1990s and early 2000s, has been in reverse for a decade, with more Mexicans going south than coming north. Overall, low-skilled immigration to the US is trailing off — the main group now coming into the US are educated people, mostly from East and South Asia.

A third reason, though, is that the economy of 2017 is simply much different from the economy of 1917. In the days of rapid industrialisation, immigrants mostly supplied cheap labor, working in factories and mines. Unions were afraid that immigrants would hold their wages down, while business owners were worried that foreign workers would come bearing radical anti-capitalist sentiment. This meant that both sides of the class divide were comfortable with the 1924 laws.

Today, however, the US economy has transitioned from one based on low-wage manufacturing to one based on knowledge work and innovation. Whether immigrants ever threatened the jobs and wages of the native-born once upon a time, they probably don't threaten them now. There's plenty of evidence that knowledge workers complement each other, so that high-skilled foreigners raise the wages of high-skilled and low-skilled native-born workers alike.

In other words, enacting new laws and regulations against immigration — such as the RAISE Act now being considered by Congress, or various other moves by the Trump administration — would strike directly at the heart of US economic leadership. Rather than boosting incomes for the native-born, it would lower them, by weakening American dominance in innovative industries.

So there's a good chance that history won't repeat itself. The 2010s and 2020s may not prove to be an echo of the xenophobic moment of 100 years ago. Even if Trump does enact some measures to keep out immigrants, it's likely that there will be pressure from both the public and from business groups for Trump's successor to reverse these measures.

India unveils 'anti-smog gun' to curb air pollution

New Delhi
AFP

India yesterday unveiled a new weapon against air pollution — an "anti-smog gun" which authorities hope will clear the skies above New Delhi but which environmentalists say amounts to a band-aid solution.

The cannon's Indian manufacturers say the fine droplets of water it ejects at high speed can flush out deadly airborne pollutants in one of the world's smoggiest capitals.

The giant mister — shaped like a hair dryer and mounted on a flatbed truck — was tested in Anand Vihar, an area of Delhi's east bordering an industrial zone that often boasts the dirtiest air.

The US embassy website yesterday showed concentrations of the smallest and most harmful particles known as PM2.5 at Anand Vihar hit 380

The cannon's Indian manufacturers say the fine droplets of water it ejects at high speed can flush out deadly airborne pollutants in one of the world's smoggiest capitals.

— more than 15 times the World Health Organization's safe maximum.

The cannon — designed to combat dust on mining and construction sites — costs roughly \$31,000 but government officials appear ready to open the cheque book.

"If it proves to be successful, then we will roll these out on Delhi's streets as soon as possible," Imran Hussain, Delhi's environment minister, told AFP in Anand Vihar as the cannon spurted mist under hazy skies.

Manufacturer Cloud Tech said it can blast up to 100 litres of water per minute into the skies and clear 95 percent of airborne pollutants.

Greenpeace was less than impressed, saying the cannon was a distraction from the root causes of Delhi's winter pollution, a phenomenon so bad the city's own chief minister described it as a "gas chamber". Delhi chokes every winter as cool air traps a toxic blend of pollutants from crop burning, car exhausts, open fires, construction dust and industrial emissions close to the ground.

"This is definitely not the solution. You can use it occasionally at sensitive locations but the solution to pollution lies in controlling it at the source rather than spraying water on it," Greenpeace's Sunil Dahiya said.

"The Delhi government should look at more sustainable solutions rather than creating business for a few companies."



Anti-smog gun, a device that sprays water into the air to reduce pollution, being tested in Anand Vihar area of New Delhi, yesterday.

Delhi has struggled to curb the annual scourge, with drastic short-term measures — such as shutting factories and brick kilns and restricting car use — falling to lower hazardous pollution levels. The crisis was so serious in November that doctors

declared a public health emergency as schools were shut across the capital.

Cloud Tech admitted one or two cannons would do little to combat the city's notorious air, suggesting instead 30 to 40 would be required. "This is a

solution for when you're helpless," the company's Vimal Saini said. Beijing experimented with a mist cannon in 2014 but critics slammed officials for wasting money on a machine that scientists agreed did little to lower pollutants.

Rupani, Patel likely to continue as Gujarat CM, Deputy CM



FROM LEFT: Finance Minister Arun Jaitley; Home Minister Rajnath Singh; Prime Minister Narendra Modi; Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) President Amit Shah and senior BJP leader L K Advani attending the BJP parliamentary meeting in New Delhi, yesterday.

Gandhinagar
IANS

Vijay Rupani and Nitin Patel are widely expected to continue as Gujarat's Chief Minister and Deputy Chief Minister after the BJP retained power in keenly fought elections but some others are said to be eyeing the top post.

Among those wanting to take Rupani's place are ministers from Gujarat in the Narendra Modi government, party sources said yesterday.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in all likelihood will want Rupani and Patel to hold on to their posts until the 2019 general election. The source said Rupani was an acceptable face in the party and the BJP did well in the just ended Assembly elections in his home district. But there are grievances against Rupani and Patel, with the BJP seat tally not touching even 100 — compared

to BJP President Amit Shah's repeated claims that it will win 150 seats.

The saffron party lost a sizable number of seats in Saurashtra region where, in some districts, it failed to capture even a single seat.

Among those said to be wanting to be Gujarat Chief Minister is Union Minister of State for Agriculture Purshottam Rupala, who has a good standing in the Patidar community.

The others are union minister Mansukh Mandavia, another Patidar, and Rajya Sabha member Smriti Irani.

"We are carrying out the necessary procedure for the new government to be formed. The central team from the party comprising observers like Arun Jaitley are here," said state BJP President Jitu Vaghani.

But party sources admit that there will definitely be new faces in the new cabinet.

India & China to hold talks on disputed borders

New Delhi
AFP

India announced yesterday it would host China for another round of talks on long-running border disputes, the first since they defused one of their worst deadlocks in decades.

The foreign ministry said China's special representative on borders would meet his counterpart in New Delhi on Friday for the 20th meeting on the unresolved "boundary question".

The regional giants have been arguing over their border since the 1960s when they went to war over the Himalayan territory of Arunachal Pradesh.

Special representatives from both sides have been holding regular talks since 2003, but disputes remain.

This week's meeting on borders is the first since India and China resolved a summer standoff in a different Himalayan region.

The area known as the Doklam plateau, or Donglang in Chinese, is claimed by both China and by Bhutan, which is an ally of India.

The dispute began in mid-June after Chinese troops started building a road on the plateau, and India deployed troops to stop the project.

The confrontation escalated until August when the two nuclear-armed nations pulled back their troops, averting a full-blown crisis.

India and China have a long history of mistrust as they jostle for regional supremacy. China has fostered closer ties with India's arch-rival Pakistan in recent years.

India and Myanmar ink MoU for Rakhine's uplift

New Delhi
IANS

India and Myanmar yesterday signed a MoU to develop Rakhine State, from where thousands of Rohingya Muslims have fled to Bangladesh following a military crackdown.

Foreign Secretary S. Jaishankar and Myanmar's Deputy Minister for Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement U Soe Aung signed the Memorandum of Understanding.

"This MoU is the first government to government agreement signed by the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement of Myanmar with a cooperation partner focussed on socio-economic development and livelihood initiatives in Rakhine State," the External Affairs Ministry said.

"This is intended to help the government of Myanmar achieve its objective of restoration of normalcy in Rakhine State and enable the return of displaced persons," a statement said.

It stated that the Indian government proposed to take up, among others, a project to build prefabricated housing in Rakhine State, so as to meet the immediate needs of returning

people.

Jaishankar's visit is of strategic importance after more than 650,000 Rohingyas fled to neighbouring Bangladesh since violence erupted in Rakhine in August.

The minority Rohingya community does not enjoy citizenship in Myanmar and is sparingly given refugee status in Bangladesh.

Human rights monitors have accused Myanmar's military of atrocities against the Rohingyas.

India has maintained that the issue should be handled in a humane manner, development activities should be initiated in Rakhine State and conditions should be created for the safe and secure return of the refugees to their homes.

Jaishankar, during his day-long visit, also called on Myanmar State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, Union Minister in State Counsellor's Office U Kyaw Tin Swe and Union Minister for Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement Win Myat Aye. All matters relating to bilateral cooperation, including follow-up on decisions taken during the visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Myanmar.

Salman's new movie faces political threat

Mumbai
IANS

The upcoming Salman Khan starrer mega-budget film "Tiger Zinda Hai" has run into a political controversy barely two days ahead of its scheduled December 22 release.

While the Maharashtra Navnirman Chitrapat Sena (MNCS) has warned cinema owners against booking all shows for Tiger Zinda Hai and denying slots to two Marathi films, other parties like the Congress and the Shiv Sena also joined the controversy with their own party lines.

MNCS President Amey Khopkar told the media that the screening of the movie should

not be at the cost of the Marathi films, "Deva" and "Gachhi", which must be allotted suitable prime time slots.

"We are not against the release of any film, including Tiger Zinda Hai, our objection is why should all the slots be reserved for just one film and all others have no slots to exhibit their films," Khopkar said.

On Tuesday, the MNCS shot off letters to all cinemas, demanding proper prime-time slots for the Marathi films, failing which it would agitate against the Salman Khan film.

Mumbai Congress President Sanjay Nirupam has come out in favour of "Tiger Zinda Hai", but a party legislator Nitesh Rane has espoused the cause of

the Marathi film industry, while the Shiv Sena has also toed a pro-Marathi line in this matter. Terming the plight of Marathi film-makers "comparable to hawkers", Sena MP Sanjay Raut demanded that they should be given equal treatment in releasing their films.

However, theatre owners are in a quandary since Tiger Zinda Hai is the first mega-budget film after several months, and probably the last this calendar year, after protests and threats pushed back the release of the much-anticipated Sanjay Leela Bhansali film "Padmaavat" to 2018.

Nearly 95% of all shows in all theatres in the state have been blocked for its release.

Man in Rajasthan burns two wives to death in car

Jaipur
IANS

In a horrific incident, a man burnt his two wives to death in a car after an argument broke out between the women while travelling together in Rajasthan's Jalore district, police said yesterday.

In order to hoodwink the police, accused Deeparam concocted a sob story, but ultimately spilled the beans on

his crime committed on Tuesday in Chilatwana village. He has since been arrested.

Police said Deeparam and his two wives Malu, 27, and Daryia, 22, were accompanying him to market along one of his sons to buy jewellery when a verbal dust ensued.

Already frustrated by their frequent fights, Deeparam took the car to a deserted street, doused it in petrol and set it afire even while the two

women were inside, burning them alive.

Deeparam told police that while they were on way to the market, the car developed a snag, following which he got down to check. He claimed that the car doors got auto-locked even as the car caught fire. Area villagers helped him in dousing the flames, he told policemen. Not convinced by his narration of the whole incident, police quizzed passers-by

and others. A rural woman told police that one of the women victims, before she was burnt alive, had come running to her while she was working in the fields. Even as they were talking, Deeparam arrived there and pulled away his wife and made her sit in the car, the village woman allegedly told police. Deeparam then drove away the car and later villagers saw the car ablaze a few kilometres ahead.

No possibility of early polls in Pakistan

Islamabad
Internews

With the support of Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf (PTI), the Senate in Pakistan has finally closed the option for early election by approving 24th Constitutional Amendment, signed into law on yesterday. The amendment will ensure holding of Senate elections in March next year.

There have been serious apprehensions about the holding of Senate elections in March 2018 amid political demands and unconfirmed reports of possible dissolution of assemblies to hold early elections.

The 24th Constitutional Amendment makes it mandatory for the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) to hold 2018 elections on the basis of newly allocated distribution of National Assembly seats among provinces for which delimitation of constituencies as per 2017 provisional census has to be done.

ECP sources said that after the passage of 24th Amendment there is no possibility of early elections that Imran Khan has been demanding. The sources said that the constitutional amendment has re-allocated the National Assembly seats share among the provinces on the basis of provisional result of 2017 census.

As per the new census and on the basis of re-allocation of NA seats, these sources explained, the ECP has to do the delimitation of constituencies on the basis of which the next

The Senate in Pakistan has finally closed the option for early election by approving the 24th Constitutional Amendment, signed into law yesterday.

elections will be held. The exercise of delimitation will start soon and the ECP expects to complete it by end April 2018 to ensure that the next elections are held on time.

Although the ECP wanted this constitutional amendment to get through by November 10 this year to avoid any delay in 2018 election, a standoff between the government and the opposition delayed the process which ultimately completed on Tuesday.

The amendment has been finally approved by the Parliament after 39 days of the deadline set by the ECP but Commission sources are positive about the completion of the delimitation work well in time to ensure that the elections are not delayed.

NA had already passed the bill but Senate was unable to vote on the bill on November 17 due to lack of quorum.

As the delay was seriously jeopardising the holding of next general elections on time, Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi last week met the parliamentary leaders of different political parties and decided to pass the amendment.

Fighting polio



A Pakistani policeman guards lady health workers during a polio campaign in Karachi, yesterday. Pakistan is one of only two countries in the world where polio, a crippling childhood disease, remains endemic.

Afghan migrants press charges over daughter's death in Balkans

Zagreb
AFP

The parents of a six-year-old Afghan migrant girl who was killed by a train at the Serbian border have pressed charges against Croatian authorities over her death, their lawyer said yesterday. Madina Husseinli, whose family was hoping to reach London, was struck down in the dark in November as she walked along the tracks with relatives as they retreated from Croatia to Serbia.

The family says that Croatian police intercepted the group and sent them back to the Serbian frontier—a version of events denied by Croatian authorities. "I can confirm that we have lodged a complaint with the prosecutor's office in

Vukovar (eastern Croatia) because of the circumstances in which the six-year-old girl died," lawyer Sanja Bezbradica Jelavic said.

Prosecutors must now consider the complaint and decide whether it is admissible, said Bezbradica Jelavic. The family accuse Croatian border authorities of abuse of power, an act against human life leading to death, inhumane behaviour and violation of children's rights, the lawyer said.

"According to the family, the police found them while they were resting on Croatian territory and refused to respond to their expressed wish to seek asylum, instead escorting them to the rail track and ordering them to go to Serbia," said the lawyer.

Croatia's interior ministry

denies this account of a police escort, saying Madina's mother Muslima "voluntarily" accepted to return to Serbia after the accident happened.

After the train struck, the family took the motionless child's body back to the Croatian police and an ambulance was called—although Croatian officials say the accident itself happened in Serbia.

In an earlier interview, Muslima said police also denied her requests for the family to return in daylight, after the children had rested.

The Husseinlis left Afghanistan around two years ago with the aim of reaching Britain, joining thousands of migrants still crossing the "Balkan route" towards western Europe, although it was officially shut down in early 2016.

Pakistan to allow family to visit jailed Indian officer

Islamabad
AP

Pakistan's Foreign Ministry will allow the mother and wife of an Indian naval officer facing the death penalty for espionage and sabotage to visit him in prison.

The ministry said in a statement that visas were issued to the women yesterday. They are expected to fly to Islamabad on December 25, where they will meet with Kulbhushan Jadhav, who was arrested in 2016 and later sentenced to death by a military tribunal. Jadhav's wife, who has not been named publicly, has petitioned for him to be spared the death penalty. Authorities have not issued a final ruling on the sentence.

Special children meet PM Abbasi

Islamabad
Internews

Special children belonging to various schools and institutes visited the Prime Minister Office in Islamabad and "occupied" the chair and chamber of the premier.

The children were invited by Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi in line with the traditions set by former prime minister Nawaz Sharif who used to invite the special children to PM's House and offer them food. He had started comprehensive plan for the rehabilitation of the special children. State Minister Dr Tariq Fazal Chaudhry and other officials were also present on the occasion.

Turkish agency opens 'Corner' in Islamabad

Islamabad
Anatolia

Turkey's state-run aid body, Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TICA) has established the first 'Corner' at Pakistan's National Library in Islamabad.

Turkish Ambassador to Pakistan Sadik Babur Gargin and Pakistan's Federal Secretary for National History and Literary Heritage Amir Hasan jointly inaugurated the Corner.

Speaking on the occasion Ambassador Gargin said the well-equipped centre would help researchers better understand the Turkish culture and promote the people-to-people relations between the two countries. "Turkey and Pakistan have a long history of relations and cherish the close ties between the two peoples."

This year marks the 70th anniversary of the beginning of official diplomatic relations between the two countries," Gargin said. He also announced that the Turkish government would soon establish a cultural centre in Lahore, which would promote the cultural exchange between the two nations. "And another one will soon be inaugurated in the port city of Karachi," he added.

Amir Hasan thanked the Turkish government for their support to Pakistan and said the establishment of the Turkish corner.

Duterte declares week-long truce with communist rebels

Manila
AP

The Philippine president has declared a Christmas truce with communist guerrillas and urged them to reciprocate the goodwill gesture after recently scrapping peace talks with the insurgents and declaring them terrorists. President Rodrigo Duterte (pictured) decision, made public by his spokesman Harry Roque Jr. yesterday, reflects the contrasting moves the volatile leader has taken to deal with the 48-year communist insurgency.

The Department of National Defence has recommended the

president not to declare a ceasefire.

Roque said in a statement that the December 24-January 2 ceasefire aims to ease public apprehension during the Christmas and New Year's holidays, when many Filipinos travel to the provinces and the countryside, where the Maoist insurgents are active.

Duterte still appeared undecided but was worried about public safety if he would not call for a unilateral truce. "They might say there's no cease fire, a gunbattle erupts, then you put a lot of strain on the people," he told reporters after attending the wake of a police officer, who was



gunned down by a drug suspect this week. "A lot of people are going around, even at night, enjoying Christmas day or whatever, going to church."

There was no immediate sign if the guerrillas would take a similar step.

Both sides have traditionally declared a cease fire to allow their combatants to take a break and return to their families during the holidays.

The prospects of a peace deal with the guerrillas appeared high when Duterte pursued peace negotiations brokered by Norway and appointed left-wing activists to a number of Cabinet posts when he took power last year.

Duterte and military officials, however, later protested continuing rebel assaults on troops, repeatedly snatching the talks.

Duterte formally halted talks

with the Maoist guerrillas in November due to continuing rebel attacks and declared them as terrorists in the first step of a legal process to proscribe their group.

If approved by a court, the communists will be the second group to be proscribed under a seldom used 2007 anti-terror law after the Abu Sayyaf group that was blacklisted in 2015 for alleged involvement in kidnapping, killings and bombing.

The guerrillas have scuttled peace talks in the past after accusing the Philippine government of helping the United Nations and the United States designate them as terrorists.

Anniversary celebration



Members of the Philippines' military brass band perform during a ceremony marking the anniversary of the military at Camp Aguinaldo in Quezon City, suburban Manila, yesterday.

Vandals smash dinosaur footprint in Australia

Sydney
AFP

Vandals have taken a hammer to a 115 million-year-old dinosaur footprint at a world renowned site in Australia. Officials yesterday slammed the "sad and callous" act.

The footprint of the medium-sized theropod was found by palaeontologists in 2006 at Flat Rocks in Victoria state—one of only a handful of polar, or ice-age, dinosaur sites in the world.

Last week officials discovered it had been deliberately damaged as they took a school group to see it. "It is sad to think a person or persons who knew

the location of the footprint would deliberately damage an important local icon that is recognised as being of international scientific significance," said Parks Victoria ranger Brian Martin.

Soon after its 2006 discovery palaeontologists made a silicon rubber mould of the find. But rather than remove and store it at a museum, they decided to leave it in the rock, so visitors could have the thrill of seeing it in its natural state.

It is located at an area known as the Dinosaur Dreaming site within the rocky Bunurong Marine Park, discovered in 1991 and which has yielded thousands of bones and teeth.

China holds multiple drills near Taiwan

Taipei
AFP

Chinese jets conducted drills near Taiwan's airspace yesterday for the sixth time this month, as relations between the two rivals worsen.

China sees self-governed Taiwan as part of its territory to be reunified at some point – by military force, if necessary.

The two sides split after a civil war in 1949. Although Taiwan is a self-ruling democracy, it has never formally declared independence.

The latest drills come just days after China's warplanes

Taiwan's Defence Ministry announced yesterday that Beijing had directed several planes including jet fighters through the Bashi Channel south of the island, to the Pacific and back.

flew over the Sea of Japan (East Sea) prompting South Korea and Japan to scramble jets.

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Beijing had directed several planes including jet fighters through the Bashi Channel south of the island, to the Pacific and back.

"China's long-distance (drills) have become more frequent," it said, but urged Taiwanese people not to worry.

It added that it would dispatch its own aircraft and ships to monitor drills "according to protocol".

Relations between Taipei and Beijing have rapidly deteriorated since the inauguration of Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen, who refuses to acknowledge both sides are part of "one China". Beijing has cut

all official communication with Taipei and stepped up pressure on Tsai's government, including staging a series of naval and air drills near Taiwan since last year.

Local media reports estimate Chinese warplanes have conducted drills around Taiwan at least 20 times this year, compared with a total of eight times last year.

A spokesman for China's air force said last week that bombers and reconnaissance planes had been deployed near Taiwan for "island encirclement patrols" on December 11 in routine training drills. These exercises aimed to "increase the capacity to safeguard the national sovereignty

and the territorial integrity", said Shen Jinke.

In August a Chinese military aircraft entered Taiwan's air defence identification zone (ADIZ) during a drill, prompting Taiwan to urge restraint.

The ADIZ stretches beyond Taiwan's airspace and is used to give early warning of possible incursions.

Five Chinese warplanes entered South Korea's ADIZ during Monday's drill, according to Seoul's joint Chiefs of Staff.

China's air force said it was the first time its aircraft had flown through the Tushima Strait between South Korea and Japan.

Myanmar probes mass grave in Rakhine State

Yangon
Reuters

Myanmar's army said yesterday that it had appointed a senior officer to investigate whether any members of the security forces were involved in the killing of 10 people whose bodies have been uncovered in a mass grave in Rakhine State.

A violent crackdown by the security forces in response to attacks by militants in the western state has caused around 650,000 Rohingya Muslims to flee to Bangladesh in recent months.

The discovery of the grave, at the village of Inn Din, about 50km north of the state capital Sittwe, was announced by the military two days ago.

In a statement, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, the army said a five-member investigation team had left the capital Naypyitaw yesterday.

The team, led by Lieutenant General Aye Win, would "investigate whether the security forces took part or not, in relation to the unidentified dead bodies found in Inn Din village graveyard".

It gave no further details and military officials were not immediately available for comment.

General Aye Win is the same officer who led a wider probe into the conduct of troops in a conflict that began in late August, which concluded in a report last month that no atrocities took place.

Myanmar's armed forces launched what they termed clearance operations in northern Rakhine, where many of the stateless Muslim minority lived, after Rohingya militants attacked 30 police posts and an army base on August 25.

Myanmar government bans UN rights envoy

Geneva
AFP

The UN's rights envoy for Myanmar said yesterday the government had banned her from the country, adding her exclusion suggests something "awful" is happening in Rakhine state.

UN Special Rapporteur Yanghee Lee had been due to visit Myanmar in January to assess the state of human rights across the country including in Rakhine, which was plunged into crisis by a military crackdown on the Rohingya minority Muslim community in late August.

Some 655,000 of them have fled for Bangladesh since then, with accounts of arson, murder and rape at the hands of soldiers and vigilante mobs in the mainly Buddhist country. The UN has accused troops of ethnic cleansing and possible "elements of genocide" against the Rohingyas – charges

the government vigorously denies as it faces intense global outrage. "I am puzzled and disappointed by this decision by the Myanmar government," said Lee, who is required to go to the country twice a year in order to report to the Human Rights Council and the UN General Assembly. "This declaration of non-cooperation with my mandate can only be viewed as a strong indication that there must be something terribly awful happening in Rakhine, as well as in the rest of the country."

The S Korean academic said she was told the decision was based on a statement she made after her last visit to Myanmar in July, in which she sharply criticised the government's rights record.

The government criticised the statement as "biased and unfair". The UN confirmed Myanmar had withdrawn all cooperation for the duration of Lee's tenure.



An emergency worker dressed in a protective suit walks out of a scrubbing-down shower tent as part of a nuclear emergency drill in Hong Kong, yesterday.

HK holds nuclear emergency drills

Hong Kong
AFP

Workers in protective suits, decontamination tents and a staged evacuation were part of a large-scale nuclear emergency drill

carried out yesterday on Hong Kong's farthest-flung island, which stands near mainland Chinese reactors.

The drill took place on sparsely-populated Tung Ping Chau, a remote island much closer to the mainland than the

rest of Hong Kong and around 20km away from the Daya Bay nuclear power plant in China's city of Shenzhen.

Around 100 tourists and residents joined 3,000 government staff to create drill scenarios on the rugged island.

Japan urged to take stronger stance on journos' arrest

Tokyo
Reuters

A Tokyo-based non-governmental organisation, Human Rights Now, yesterday called on the Japanese government to take a stronger stance over the arrests of two Reuters journalists detained in Myanmar last week.

Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono on Tuesday said freedom of the press was vital and that Japan was closely monitoring the situation, but he did not call for the journalists' release.

Human Rights Now Secretary-General Kazuko Ito told Reuters that Japan should send a stronger message about the arrests.

Ito said that by not joining in international calls for the journalists' release, Japan might be sending a message that it was ok for the Myanmar government to violate human rights. "Therefore, I would like to exercise care in its comments and clearly express a stance of standing together with those who are victims of human rights violations," she said. "I will refrain from details but the government has already directly conveyed its concerns regarding this incident to the government of Myanmar." Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said.



Visitors watch fireworks exploding over the Disney castle at Shanghai Disneyland in Shanghai, yesterday.

Govt employee fined for media leak in Singapore

Singapore
AFP

A Singapore civil servant was yesterday fined but escaped jail for leaking confidential information to a journalist, a prosecution that a rights group described as an attempt to spread a "culture of fear".

Government housing agency employee Ng Han Yuan, who could have been jailed for up to two years under the Official Secrets Act, was fined \$52,000 (\$1,500) for passing details about a still confidential public housing resale portal to Janice Tai of the Straits Times daily. Such leaks rarely happen

in the city-state, where the media is tightly controlled and the civil service is highly regarded. Public housing policies are seen as sensitive in rich but land-starved Singapore because more than 80 percent of the population lives in government-subsidised housing.

The 25-year-old Ng met Tai, 29, on a mobile dating app and they had gone out several times. They discussed an upcoming government portal through which people will be able to resell government-subsidised flats. The portal is meant to speed up the resale process but there had reportedly been concerns it could threaten jobs in the property industry.

South Korea seeks delay in US military exercises

Seoul
AFP

South Korean President Moon Jae-In has proposed delaying annual joint military exercises with the US in an attempt to ease tensions with the nuclear-armed North during next year's Winter Olympics.

Moon's comments were the first confirmation that Seoul is seeking to postpone the annual Key Resolve and Foal Eagle drills, which usually start in late February or early March and run until the end of April.

South Korea will host the Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang

from February 9-25 next year, with the Paralympics scheduled to begin on March 9.

But the venue is just 80km south of the tense border with North Korea, and tensions tend to rise during the drills, which Pyongyang condemns as rehearsals for invasion.

Moon told US television channel NBC the two allies were considering postponing the exercises. "I have made such a proposal to the US and the US is now reviewing it," he said on his way to Pyeongchang to promote the Games. But it would depend on the North's actions, he added.

"If North Korea stops its

provocations leading up to the Pyeongchang Olympics, it will greatly help in holding a safe Olympics," he said. "Also, it will help in creating conducive atmosphere towards inter-Korean as well as US-North Korean dialogue."

Key Resolve and Foal Eagle are two of the allies' biggest joint drills, involving tens of thousands of troops. Pyeongchang often responds to them with new provocations, such as missile launches, as it accelerates the weapons programmes that have seen it subjected to multiple sets of UN sanctions.

China and Russia have both

touted a "freeze for freeze" proposal, under which the North would suspend missile and nuclear tests while the US and South suspend joint exercises.

But Washington and Seoul have explicitly rejected the concept.

Analysts differed on Moon's suggestion. Moon Seong-Mook, senior researcher at the Korea Research Institute for National Strategy, said Pyeongchang had long demanded the drills' "total suspension" rather than a delay.

The president's proposal would only raise concern in Washington about Seoul's resolve rather than persuading

the North to respond positively. "If we delay the drills for the Pyeongchang Olympics, I'm afraid it would help justify the North's claim that they were indeed the source of tension," he added. But Kim Yeol-Su, senior researcher at the Korea Institute for Military Affairs, said the offer could act as "a small step to create new momentum for opening dialogue".

"There's a certain level of self-contradiction in holding an event largely promoted as a peaceful global event while tens of thousands of soldiers are staging war games on the sidelines," he said.

Putin calls for joint efforts against terrorism

Moscow
AP

President Vladimir Putin hailed Russian spies on their professional holiday yesterday, saying they have thwarted more than 60 terror attacks in Russia this year.

In a Kremlin speech marking the 100th anniversary of the creation of the Bolshevik secret police, the Cheka, Putin emphasised that it and Soviet-era successor agencies such as the KGB were an "inalienable part of our history."

Putin served with the KGB for 16 years and briefly headed the main state security agency that followed it, the Federal Security Service, or FSB, before his ascent to the presidency.

He said in his speech that "no matter how the times were changing, the majority of people who chose that difficult profession were true patriots and defenders of the state."

Earlier yesterday, Maria Alekhina, a member of the Russian punk band, was detained after she unfurled a banner that read "Happy Birthday, Hangmen!" outside the Moscow headquarters of the FSB.

Alekhina and her bandmate Nadezhda Tolokonnikova spent nearly two years in prison for an anti-Putin protest inside Mos-

60 terror crimes halted

President Putin praised Russia's intelligence and security agencies in his speech for preventing "over 60 terrorist crimes," but mentioned no specifics.

Putin noted that Russia was ready to "act together with other nations, all those who fight that global threat and ready for joint work and information exchange."

cow's cathedral in 2012.

One of Russia's top human rights groups, Memorial, said that the celebrations of the Cheka's anniversary represented "the mockery of the memory of millions of victims" of Soviet-era purges. "It's a shame of today's Russia," it said in a statement.

Putin made no reference to such criticism in his holiday speech, praising Russian security agencies for "outfoxing foreign intelligence services and dealing blows to organised crime and corruption."

The Russian leader underlined that the fight against

terrorism is a top priority, noting that Russia would continue working to "resolutely neutralise hotbeds of international terrorism" following its campaign in Syria.

"It's necessary to strengthen both external and internal security contours protecting Russia from terrorism, conduct work to uproot the criminals' financial and recruitment networks, counter attempts by the extremists and the radicals to influence the young and spread the ideology of hatred, religious intolerance and aggressive nationalism," he said.

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On Sunday, Putin called President Donald Trump to thank him for a CIA tip that the Kremlin said helped prevent the bombing of the Kazan cathedral and other terror attacks in St Petersburg last weekend.

The Kremlin's account of the call was Russia's first public assertion that information from the US has helped prevent an attack. Putin also assured Trump



Russian President Vladimir Putin (fourth left) with Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev; SVR foreign intelligence service head Sergei Naryshkin and FSB security service head Alexander Bortnikov, watches the gala celebrating the Day of Security Service Staff, in Moscow, yesterday.

that if Russian intelligence agencies obtain any information about potential terror threats against the US and its citizens, they will immediately share it with their US counterparts.

In his comments yesterday, Putin nonetheless emphasised the

need to counter foreign spies and block foreign attempts to meddle in Russia's domestic politics.

Putin, who runs for re-election in the March 18 vote, has accused the US in the past of trying to foment unrest in Russia.

"It's necessary to put up a

reliable barrier against foreign interference in our social and political life, stop the activities by foreign secret services who have been trying to step up their operations in Russia," he said, without naming any specific country.

Catalonia's separatist leaders face investigation

Madrid
AFP

Spanish courts are probing 18 candidates running in Catalonia's election over their role in the northeastern region's independence drive.

They could face prison sentences of 15 years or more, with three of the candidates are already behind bars awaiting trial.

The judge investigating the ousted regional president Carles Puigdemont and his cabinet accuses them of being "part of an organisation that had a pre-meditated and perfectly coordinated strategy" to split Catalonia from Spain.

A Barcelona judge is looking into the alleged theft of official data to create an independent treasury.

Barcelona's appeals court is also investigating whether the ousted government diverted public funds to hold the referendum.

The officials are also under investigation for disobedience for going ahead with the plebiscite despite the constitutional ban.

High Court Judge Carmen Lamela in October ordered the leaders of two grassroots separatist groups, Jordi Sanchez of the ANC and Jordi Cuixach of Omnium Cultural, to remain in custody while they are investi-

gated for sedition.

The two men allegedly urged supporters to take part in protests in Barcelona that made it harder for police to carry out raids on Catalan government buildings in September.

The leaders of the separatist groups had stood on a police car to address demonstrators.

During one protest officers were trapped in a building for hours and their vehicles were vandalised.

Under Spanish law the crime of sedition carries a sentence of up to 15 years in jail.

After Catalonia's parliament declared independence on October 27, Lamela agreed to hear a lawsuit for "rebellion" filed by

public prosecutors against the Catalan government.

Under Spanish law the crime of rebellion consists of rising up "violently and publicly" to achieve a goal, such as "the independence of part of the national territory". It carries a sentence of up to 25 years in jail.

The case was transferred to Supreme Court Judge Pablo Llarena, who was already investigating members of the Catalan parliament. This investigation is also looking into the alleged crimes of sedition and misuse of public funds.

In total 22 people are under investigation. Among them are the 14 members of the deposed Catalan government, the

leaders of the two grassroots separatist groups and the ousted president of the Catalan parliament, Carme Forcadell.

Puigdemont and four members of his government who fled to Belgium after the parliament's declaration of independence will be arrested if they return.

The lawyers for the candidates under investigation argue that the charges are excessive, since the separatist movement has always been peaceful.

They also say that the three jailed candidates' political rights have been violated, given that they have been allowed no more than 10 phone calls a week, each five minutes long, which makes it hard to campaign.

Prince George terror-accused trial date set

London
Reuters

A British man accused of posting a picture of four-year-old Prince George and the address of his London school as part of a series of possible targets for militants will face trial from April 30, a London court said.

Husnain Rashid, 31, is accused of posting information on the Telegram messaging service to encourage jihadists to carry out attacks, along with information to help them with possible targets such as sports venues.

Seven hurt in Greece migrant centre clash

Athens
AP

Greek authorities said at least seven people have been injured in an overnight brawl at an overcrowded migrant detention centre on the island of Lesbos.

Police said yesterday that the fight broke out Tuesday night between Kurdish and Arab men in the Moria camp and lasted for hours, leaving several tents inside the camp burnt.

French premier defends costly private flight

Paris
AP

French Prime Minister Edouard Philippe said he will "assume responsibility" for spending \$414,000 on a private flight back from a French territory in the South Pacific.

Philippe said yesterday on RTL Radio that "it's complicated and expensive to travel as prime minister."

Philippe took a commercial

flight to New Caledonia earlier this month. For the return, he rented a roomy Airbus A340 for himself and his 60-member delegation instead of travelling on a French military plane that was available.

He said the private flight was his only option for arriving in Paris before President Emmanuel Macron's departure for Algeria the same day. Philippe cited an unwritten rule implying that one of them always must be in France.



Russian and Ukrainian military officers work at the Joint Centre for Control and Coordination (JCCC) in the town of Soledar, in Ukraine.

Ukraine slams Russia's monitoring team pullout

Minsk
AP

Ukraine yesterday Russia's decision to withdraw its military observers from a joint group monitoring the truce in eastern Ukraine, saying it could fuel hostilities.

Russia announced the move earlier this week, saying that Ukraine was putting up obstacles and restrictions obstructing Russian officers' work and

recently introduced new demands that made their further involvement in the group impossible. The development is the latest sign of heightened tensions in the area, where fighting has spiked in recent days.

Observers from a special monitoring mission for eastern Ukraine at the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe voiced concern Tuesday about the fresh violence, saying that the number of

cease-fire violations increased by 35 percent in the past week compared with a week earlier.

Darka Oliver, a spokeswoman for Ukraine's former president Leonid Kuchma who represents the country in talks with Russia and separatists in eastern Ukraine, said in a statement posted yesterday on Facebook that the Russian withdrawal of military observers violated Moscow's obligations and raised the risks of a military escalation.

Cyberattack suspects detained in Romania

Ankara
Anadolu

Over the last week Romanian police have detained five suspects for spreading ransomware through Europe and the US, according to the European police agency Europol.

"During the last week, Romanian authorities have arrested three individuals who are suspected of infecting computer systems by spreading the CTB-Locker (Curve-Tor-Bitcoin Locker) malware—a form

of file-encrypting ransomware. Two other suspects from the same criminal group were arrested in Bucharest in a parallel ransomware investigation linked to the US," said a Europol statement.

The arrests came after a joint investigation carried out by the Romanian Police's cybercrime division, Romanian and Dutch prosecutors, the Dutch National Police, the UK National Crime Agency, and the FBI, with the support of Europol's European Cyber-crime Centre (EC3) and the

Joint Cybercrime Action Task-force (J-CAT).

During searches in Romania, police confiscated a significant number of hard drives, laptops, external storage devices, cryptocurrency mining devices, and documents.

"The criminal group is being prosecuted for unauthorized computer access, serious hindering of a computer system, misuse of devices with the intent of committing cyber-crimes and blackmail," said the statement.

EU tells Poland to reverse judicial reforms

Brussels
AFP

The European Commission launched unprecedented disciplinary proceedings against Poland yesterday over its highly controversial judicial reforms which Brussels says threaten the rule of law.

In a major escalation against one of the EU's biggest states, Brussels triggered article seven of the EU treaty over what it sees as "systemic threats" to the independence of the Polish judiciary from the nation's right-wing government.

Never before used against an EU member state, the proceedings can eventually lead to the "nuclear option" of the suspension of a country's voting rights within the bloc.

The row underlines growing east-west tensions within the European Union, with former Soviet bloc states like Poland and

Article 7

Brussels triggered article seven of the EU treaty over what it sees as "systemic threats" to the independence of the Polish judiciary from the nation's right-wing government.

Commission Vice-President Frans Timmermans said that 13 new laws have allowed the government to "interfere significantly" in the judiciary.

Hungary refusing to toe the Brussels line on several thorny issues including judicial and media independence as well as immigration.

"It is with a heavy heart that



we have decided to initiate Article 7.1. But the facts leave us with no choice," Commission Vice-President Frans Timmermans (pictured) said.

The Dutch commissioner said that 13 laws adopted by Poland in the space of two years had created a situation where the government "can systematically politically interfere with the composition, powers, the administration and the functioning" of judicial authorities.

But Timmermans gave Warsaw three months to remedy the situation, saying Brussels could withdraw the measures if it did.

European Commission chief Jean-Claude Juncker said on Twitter it was "a difficult day for Poland, but also for the EU" and said he would meet Poland's new Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki early next month.

Poland's right-wing Law and Justice (PiS) government began making changes to the judiciary after coming to power in late 2015 and says the reforms are needed to combat corruption and overhaul the judicial system still haunted by the communist era. Brussels has repeatedly warned Warsaw that it views the changes as a threat to the democratic principles and rule of law Poland signed up to when it joined the European Union.

"Poland deplores the European Commission's launch of the procedure foreseen in article seven, which is essentially

political, not legal" in nature, the Polish foreign ministry said in a statement, adding that it risks undermining "mutual trust".

Morawiecki, who last week insisted on his country's "absolute right" to reform its own judicial system, struck a more conciliatory note while insisting on Warsaw's sovereignty in the matter.

"Poland is as devoted to the rule of law as the rest of the EU. Current judicial reform is deeply needed," he wrote on Twitter.

The dialogue between the Commission and Warsaw needs to be both open and honest. I believe that Poland's sovereignty and the idea of United Europe can be reconciled."

The initial phase set in motion by the EU's commission, the bloc's executive arm, allows member states to "determine that there is a clear risk of a serious breach" of the rule of law.

Such a ruling would need the backing of 22 states out of 28. Any possible sanctions would

only come at a second stage and would need unanimous support of all EU members—apart from Poland.

Hungary has already said it would veto such a move, making sanctions unlikely, but Brussels is hoping the start of proceedings will have significant symbolic power.

Poland's parliament last week adopted new reforms allowing it to choose members of a body designed to protect judicial independence and reinforce political control over the Supreme Court.

Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights Nils Muiznieks has said the new reforms will undermine judicial independence by making judges "subordinate" to the executive and legislature.

As well as heavy criticism from Brussels, the reforms have sparked street protests in Poland and concern from the US State Department.

Protest against Labour law



People attend a demonstration called by French General Confederation of Labour (CGT) union to protest against French President's executive orders on Labour law and violence in the workplace, in Paris, yesterday.

Russia rejects UN claims of Crimean Tatars' abuse

Moscow
AFP

The Kremlin yesterday dismissed UN accusations of human rights "violations" and "discrimination", in particular against the Crimean Tatar population on the peninsula that Moscow annexed from Ukraine in 2014.

The UN General Assembly adopted a resolution condemning "violations, abuses, measures and practices of discrimination against the residents of the temporarily occupied Crimea, including Crimean Tatars... by the Russian occupation authorities."

The resolution was adopted with 70 voting in favour, 26 against and 76 abstentions. The Assembly condemned the "imposition and retroactive

application of the legal system of the Russian Federation, and its negative impact on the human rights situation in Crimea."

But Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said: "We consider such formulations incorrect and we do not agree with them."

Moscow annexed Ukraine's Black Sea peninsula of Crimea in March 2014 following a hastily organised referendum watched over by Russian troops and not recognised by the international community.

Crimean Tatars are a Muslim ethnic which mostly opposed the annexation and have been under severe pressure from the Russian authorities on the peninsula, with many community leaders imprisoned or exiled.

Dutch judges ban violent motorcycle gang

The Hague
AFP

Dutch judges yesterday banned violent biker gang the Bandidos and ordered all its chapters to close down, saying it posed a public threat.

"The Bandidos characterise themselves as lawless and use slogans that contain violent messages," the court in the Dutch city of Utrecht said in its ruling.

"The club has a culture in which carrying out serious violence is encouraged," it added, highlighting how patches crowing "Expect No Mercy" were handed out to members after bloody fights.

"A ban is therefore necessary in order to protect society."

The case had been brought by the Dutch prosecution service, which alleged the bikers were involved in drugs and arms trafficking as well as prostitution.

The lawyer for the Bandidos, Marix van der Werf, told the NOS public broadcaster they would appeal. The club has argued that they should not be banned for the acts committed by individuals.

But the Minister for Legal Protection Sander Dekker welcomed the ruling, saying in a tweet that "such clubs undermine our legal system."

He added that the government would press ahead with its pledge to outlaw all motorcycle gangs.

Emmanuel Macron's popularity ratings on the rise again

Paris
Reuters

French President Emmanuel Macron's popularity jumped back above 50% thanks in part to better ratings among the young and the working class, an opinion poll showed yesterday, confirming a rebound that started at the beginning of December.

Macron's popularity dropped quickly after he swept to an electoral victory in May on a centrist platform,

shattering a long-standing two-party system in France.

But while the former investment banker has struggled to shake off a "president of the rich" tag pinned on him by rivals for policies such as cuts in housing benefits, Macron's efforts to defend French interests abroad have helped lift his ratings.

His popularity rose above 50% for the first time since his election in early December, and a new poll yesterday, taken on Monday and Tuesday, showed the president scoring a 52%

approval rating.

That was a six-percentage-point jump from November, according to the BVA poll, carried out for Orange and La Tribune and released on the eve of Macron's 40th birthday.

As well as praising Macron's international efforts, those surveyed also highlighted that he was delivering on campaign promises, BVA said, even though some policies like a labour reform that gives employers greater freedom to hire and fire staff were deeply

unpopular with many of his detractors.

The president is most popular with older voters and higher earners, but made the biggest progress in the latest poll with the young, BVA added.

Other surveys this week also confirmed Macron was making headway, although a ViaVoice poll for Liberation published on Tuesday put his popularity rating lower, at 46%. That was also a six-percentage-point improvement on the previous month. An Odoxa

survey gave Macron a 54% approval rating.

Macron's turnaround in polls comes as political rivals are scrambling to regroup and form a stronger opposition, at a time when both the left and right are deeply fragmented.

The president's office recently played down attacks from some opponents over Macron's planned birthday celebrations with his family in the grounds of a former royal palace, which drew jibes about him being out of touch.

German coalition talks in January

Berlin
AFP

German Chancellor Angela Merkel and the centre-left Social Democrats (SPD) agreed yesterday to hold week-long exploratory talks until a January 12 deadline on forming a coalition government in coming months.

Germany has been in political stalemate since veteran centre-right leader Merkel won a September 24 election without a governing majority.

Merkel's hopes for a four-year term were complicated when initial talks to build an alliance between her conservative bloc, the liberal Free Democrats and the Greens collapsed in November.

She is now hoping for a re-run of her current left-right "grand coalition" with the second biggest party, the SPD, which is however reluctant to govern in her shadow again after a dismal election result.

SPD leader Martin Schulz, facing a sceptical party base, has only agreed to "open-ended" talks that could also lead to the toleration of a Merkel minority government—an option she however rejects.

Schulz, 62, has vowed to push key SPD demands, from EU reform to changes in health insurance and education, to allowing more refugees to bring their families to Germany.

Merkel's CDU, her Bavarian allies the CSU and the SPD y agreed to hold exploratory talks

from January 7 to 12. "The party chiefs had held "good talks in an atmosphere of mutual trust", said a joint statement.

If successful, the talks would lead to the next phase—formal coalition negotiations to hammer out common policies and assign cabinet posts, an effort expected to take many more weeks.

Major hurdles remain on the SPD side, where in a January 21 party congress in the western city of Bonn some 600 delegates would have to agree to the launch of formal coalition talks.

Finally, the labour party's rank-and-file members will get to vote on whether to enter into a new coalition with Merkel—or head into opposition, as Schulz had vowed to do straight after the September election loss.



Social Democratic Party (SPD) leader Martin Schulz arrives for talks to form a new government, in Berlin, Germany, yesterday.

Senators closing in on immigration deal

Washington
Bloomberg

Republican and Democratic senators working on an immigration deal say they are closing in on an agreement combining a border-security package with deportation protections for young undocumented immigrants, though a final resolution isn't likely to come until January.

The progress may remove one hurdle for passage of a temporary extension of government funding to avert a shutdown on Saturday. Democrats had been insisting on including the deportation protections for the group known as 'dreamers' in the must-pass spending resolution, but party leaders in the Senate won't demand unified opposition to the funding measure if the immigration provisions aren't included.

"We make progress every day," said Republican Senator James Lankford of Oklahoma, who is participating in the talks, adding that "there are too many issues that are outstanding" to finish work before lawmakers leave Washington for a holiday recess.

Seven senators participating in the negotiations met yesterday with White House Chief of Staff John Kelly and US Customs and Border Protection officials, Lankford said.

Kelly walked through changes that the administration is already making at the US-Mexico border and what further resources it says are needed, part of an effort to help complete that part of the legislation.

Support

▶ **Senator Thom Tillis, a North Carolina Republican said that Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has told him he's supportive of moving their immigration measure through the chamber, so long as it can draw broad support from Republicans.**

A Democratic aide familiar with the talks said that Democrats are pushing Republicans to make final decisions and can't say at this point when an accord will be reached.

The aide, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal party deliberations, also said that while Democrats have been demanding that the deportation protections be included in a stopgap measure to keep the government open, Democratic leaders will let members vote their own way if the spending bill is drafted without those provisions.

The protections for the young immigrants covered by President Barack Obama's Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, or DACA, have been up in the air throughout the first year of Donald Trump's presidency.

Trump in September agreed with Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer of New York and House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi of California to move a border security bill by year's end, and pair it with protections for the immigrants. He

later backed away from it.

The bipartisan talks are led by Senator Dick Durbin of Illinois, the No. 2 Democratic leader, and Senator Lindsey Graham, a South Carolina Republican. They will continue today.

Senator Thom Tillis, a North Carolina Republican who is part of the discussions, said Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has told him he's supportive of moving their immigration measure through the chamber, so long as it can draw broad support from Republicans who will control the Senate with a slim 51-seat majority next year.

"I think we can come up with something that will have significant Republican support if we do it right," Tillis said.

Tillis said participants are continuing to consider some ideas Republicans are pushing, including sanctions for "sanctuary cities" that limit cooperation with the federal government over enforcement of immigration laws.

Those are ideas that could draw Democratic opposition. But providing protection for some illegal immigrants also is likely to draw vocal opposition from conservative Republicans in the House, presenting a major challenge for passage of the legislation.

Graham said the group is discussing including the "Dream Act," which would provide both deportation protections and a pathway to citizenship for 800,000 young undocumented immigrants brought to the US by their parents.

Temporary deportation protections for those immigrants end in early March.

Arms destruction



Weapons seized by police forces during various criminal investigations over the last ten years are being destroyed at a military base, in Deodoro, Rio de Janeiro, yesterday. The weapons were destroyed by an army steamroller to render them inactive and beyond use.

Chicago charity gives \$100m to Syrian children scheme

Chicago
AP

A Chicago foundation awarded \$100m yesterday to two New York-based organisations to help educate millions of Syrian refugee children through home visits, learning centres and local versions of the educational program "Sesame Street."

The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation announced Sesame Workshop and the International Rescue Committee as joint winners of a competitive grant program aimed at solving critical problems. Their project was chosen from more than 1,900 submitted proposals.

Officials with the organisations said they will use the five-year grant to address "toxic

stress" experienced by displaced children in Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Syria, in addition to educational basics. Roughly 9.4 million children will have access to the local version of "Sesame Street" in Arabic and Iraqi Kurdish through television, cellphones and direct services. The emphasis will be on language, reading, math and social skills, along with lessons on inclusion and equality.

The programme will also include child development centers; community sites where organizers envision families will have access to books and videos; and home visits to bring books, toys and parenting resources. An estimated 15 million children will receive in-person services, organisation officials said.

Trudeau to attend Sherman's funeral

Ottawa
AFP

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and other dignitaries will attend a memorial service for pharmaceutical tycoon Barry Sherman and his wife Honey, who were found strangled to death in their Toronto home, today.

The service for "family, friends and dignitaries" will also be open to the public at the International Centre in Mississauga, near Toronto, the family announced.

Trudeau's office confirmed that the prime minister would attend.

The founder of generic drug company Apotex and his wife were found dead Friday in the basement pool area of their Toronto home.

Florida man drags officer for half-mile

Pembroke Pines
AP

Authorities say a man dragged a Florida police officer with his car for a half-mile and led other officers on a high-speed chase that ended in his capture.

Pembroke Pines police said in a news release that 38-year-old Thomas Cabrera was charged with attempted murder for his actions.

Police body-camera video shows Officer Jon Cusack reaching into a sitting car in which Cabrera and a woman were suspected of using drugs. The video then shows Cabrera taking off, dragging the 19-year police veteran for a half-mile before Cusack tumbles off.

Authorities say Cusack will survive but has significant injuries.

Maduro says 'terrorists' stole arms from military unit

Caracas
Reuters

Venezuelan leftist President Nicolas Maduro said yesterday that "terrorists" had broken into a National Guard unit over the weekend and stolen weapons, the latest sign of volatility in the oil-rich country convulsed by a profound economic crisis.

Oscar Perez, a rogue Venezuelan police pilot wanted for lobbing grenades and shooting at government buildings in June, claimed responsibility for the attack, which he called "Operation Genesis."

A video posted on Perez's YouTube account shows armed, masked men taking control of military barracks under cover of night. They smash photos of Maduro and his predecessor, the late Hugo Chavez, handcuff around a dozen soldiers and



Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro arrives for a meeting with pro-government governors and mayors, at Miraflores Palace, in Caracas, yesterday.

berate them for supporting "dictatorship" in Venezuela.

"You yourselves are dying of hunger. Why have you not done anything, given you have weapons? Why do you keep protecting these drug-trafficking dictators?"

the assailants shout at gagged soldiers crouching on the floor of what appears to be a bathroom.

"Soon we'll win the war... so that Venezuela can be free," says Perez, under the cover of a black balaclava.

His Twitter account later posted a purported summary by authorities of the attack. The summary says some 49 armed men stole around 26 Kalashnikov AK-103's and over 3,000 munitions for the rifles, as well as pistols, in Miranda state near Caracas during the early hours of Monday.

An action film star who portrays himself as a James Bond cum-Rambo figure on social media, Perez has added surreal twists to Venezuela's long-running political drama.

He rose to fame in June after hijacking a police helicopter flying over Caracas' centre. He fired shots at and lobbed grenades on the Interior Ministry and the Supreme Court to fight what he said was a tyrannical government. He went into hiding after the attack, only to pop up two weeks later at an opposition vigil for anti-government protesters

killed during demonstrations that rocked the country earlier this year.

Perez's latest offensive highlights instability in Venezuela, an OPEC member state heaving under malnutrition, disease and the world's steepest inflation rate.

Maduro denounced the attackers yesterday, whom he did not name, as "terrorists" sent by his ideological enemy the United States.

"Wherever they appear, I've told the armed forces: Fire at the terrorist groups!" he said during a speech on state television, as he blamed opposition groups in Miami for orchestrating the raid.

"Do these people think they can attack a unit of the armed forces to steal some guns and threaten democracy and that that's going to be tolerated? Zero tolerance!" Maduro said.

Nadler wins top Democratic post on Judiciary committee

Washington
AP

Democrats yesterday elected longtime New York Rep. Jerrold Nadler to serve as the ranking member on the House Judiciary Committee, which would take the lead on impeachment proceedings against President Donald Trump if Democrats reclaim the House majority next year.

The 14-term Nadler is replacing former Rep John Conyers of Michigan, who

resigned in the wake of sexual harassment allegations. Nadler ousted incumbent Rep Zoe Lofgren of California for the position, winning by a vote of 118-72.

Democrats look forward to Nadler's "fierce, fearless leadership to defend the promise of justice and liberty for all," House Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., said in a statement.

Pelosi's statement made no mention of the potential impeachment actions if Democrats capture control of the House in the 2018 elections.

US officials vow more help for Puerto Rico

San Juan
AP

Two US Cabinet secretaries visited Puerto Rico yesterday and promised to speed up recovery efforts and increase federal assistance for an island struggling nearly three months after Hurricane Maria.

Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen said officials talked about areas "where things are not moving as quickly as they could," speaking during a one-day trip to the US territory with Housing and Urban Development Secretary Ben Carson.

Nielsen said federal officials

will look into how to help get more supplies to Puerto Rico to speed up power restoration as well as provide federal assistance more quickly and possibly open more recovery centres across the island.

She noted that the number of people who registered for financial assistance in Puerto Rico after the Category 4 storm is greater than all those from hurricanes Katrina, Irma and Sandy combined.

On September 20, Maria ripped across the island with winds of up to 154 mph, killing dozens of people and causing damages estimated at up to \$95bn.

"This was an unprecedented

storm," Nielsen said. "We will not rest until the families here are back in their repaired homes, until parents are back at work, children are back at school and communities are back to life."

Nielsen and Carson did not visit any areas affected by the storm and instead met with local and federal officials to talk about the recovery process that many Puerto Ricans have complained has been inadequate and slow.

Power generation is at 65 percent of normal, with nine of Puerto Rico's 78 municipalities still completely in the dark, and the US Army Corps of Engineers has estimated power will not be fully restored across Puerto Rico

until May, more than eight months after the hurricane hit. In addition, more than 200,000 homes were damaged and more than 30,000 people have lost their jobs, sparking an exodus of more than 200,000 people to Florida alone.

Federal officials said they would focus recovery efforts on power restoration and housing, with Carson pledging to do what is needed to help Puerto Rico get back on its feet.

He said his agency is considering practical steps to get people back into their homes, such as moving them into the first floor while the second floor is being repaired.

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QND celebrations go on at embassies abroad

QNA

In Washington, Qatar's Ambassador to US Sheikh Mishaal bin Hamad Al Thani hosted a reception on the occasion of Qatar National Day.

The function was attended by US Secretary of the Treasury Steven Mnuchin, House of Representative's Democratic Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, Senator Chris Coons of Delaware State and over a thousand people including officials diplomats, businessmen, media men and intellectuals in addition to Qatari citizens and student in the US. The function reflected the importance of the Qatar-US relations.

In his speech at the ceremony, HE the Ambassador noted the close relations and partnership between Qatar and the US, stressing that the aspects of this partnership have been strengthened during this year, especially cooperation in the fight against terrorists and their sources of funding, in addition to the US-Qatar joint military exercises and operations. These relationships have also been strengthened in the areas of trade, investment and culture, he added.

"Qatar continues to implement its National Vision 2030 and moves ahead with its economic, social and human development goals," HE Sheikh Mishaal said.

For his part, Senator Coons said he was grateful for the US-Qatar partnership in addressing common challenges, including terrorism, throughout the Middle East. He added that US diplomats and commanders praise Qatar's cooperation and valuable role as a security partner. Senator Coons also thanked the State of Qatar for its "good efforts" to resolve conflicts in the Gulf region.

"Qatar continues to implement its National Vision 2030 and moves ahead with its economic, social and human development goals," said Sheikh Mishaal.

Nancy Pelosi focused on cultural, educational, investment and other relations between Qatar and the United States, referring to her numerous trips to Qatar.

She stressed the security cooperation between the two countries saying that the national security of the two countries is the most important aspect of cooperation. She also thanked the State of Qatar for hosting two US military bases, comprising 11,000 US troops and a counterterrorism operations center tackling terrorism in the region countries, including Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan.

"US-Qatari relations are very important," she said. "Let's all work to make them stronger."

HEUS Secretary of the Treasury Steven Mnuchin who attended the ceremony, met earlier with HE Sheikh Abdullah bin Mohammed bin Saud, CEO of Qatar Investment Authority in Washington. The meeting focused on increasing investments between the two countries. Qatar has already allocated 45 billion dollars for investments in United State.

HE Ambassador of the State of Qatar to the Kingdom of Malaysia Issa Mohammed Al Mannai, held a reception on the occasion of Qatar National Day in Kuala Lumpur.

Over 400 people attended the function, led by HE Minister in the Prime Minister's Office

Shahidan bin Kassim, representing the Malaysian government along with a number of senior government officials, foreign ministry departments' directors, representatives of different ministries and government bodies, businessmen, media men, academics, members of Arab communities in Malaysia and a number of ambassadors and members of diplomatic missions accredited to Malaysia.

In Addis Ababa, HE Qatar's Ambassador to Ethiopia and Permanent Representative to the African Union Abdulaziz bin Sultan Al Rumaihi held a reception on the occasion of the National Day of the State of Qatar.

The ceremony was attended by the Director of the Middle East department in Ethiopia's Foreign Ministry as the 'Guest of Honor' in addition to senior officials, heads and members of diplomatic missions, officials from the African Union and regional and international organizations, businessmen, media men and community dignitaries.

During the ceremony, the Director of the Middle East Department of the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs conveyed his country's congratulations to Qatar on the occasion of the National Day.

In his speech, the Qatari Ambassador welcomed the attendance at the National Day ceremony.

On the sidelines of the ceremony, the Embassy set up a tent and a pavilion to introduce the traditional heritage and food of the State of Qatar.

Ambassador of Qatar to Romania Abdullah Nasser Al Humaidi held a reception on the occasion of Qatar National Day. The ceremony was attended by Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs for Globalization Affairs, Advisor of the Romanian President for Defense Affairs, Member



Qatar's Ambassador to US, Sheikh Mishaal bin Hamad Al Thani; US Secretary of the Treasury, Steven Mnuchin; House of Representative's Democratic Minority Leader, Nancy Pelosi; Senator, Chris Coons of Delaware State and other officials during the reception on the occasion of Qatar National Day in Washington.



A view of the venue where the reception took place in Washington.

head of missions accredited by the State.

In Moscow Ambassador of Qatar to Russia Fahad Bin Mohammed Al Attiyah held a reception ceremony on the occasion of Qatar National Day. The ceremony was attended by a host of political, economic, and cultural Russian personalities. His Excellency gave an overview of the National Day of the State of Qatar, and called on the attendees to visit the country and enjoy the many experiences it offers. The celebration came on the eve of the launch of the Qatari-Russian cultural year. It included a special pavilion on the World Cup 2022, and another one for the State of Qatar.

In Warsaw, Qatar's Ambassador to Poland held a reception ceremony on the occasion of Qatar National Day. The event was attended by Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development Krzysztof Jurgiel, Minister of Health Konstanty Radziwill, Deputy Minister of Finance, Director-General of the Ministry of Energy, along with a number of high ranking officials and representatives of diplomatic missions accredited by the state.

HE the ambassador praised the strong bilateral ties the two sides enjoy, and highlighted that they've seen a marked improvement in recent years on all levels. He stressed on the strength of the State of Qatar and its ability to overcome the siege, evident by the economic growth the country is witnessing despite the siege and the contribution the country continues to make internationally and regionally.

In Santo Domingo, Qatar's

attended by Minister of Defense Lieutenant General Ruben Dario Paulino, as well as a number of ranking officials, MPs, representatives of the armed forces and leading political and media figures in the country. The Ambassador explained the relevance of Qatar national day as one were the people renew their trust in their leadership. His Excellency also praised the achievements of the State of Qatar in different fields. HE the ambassador highlighted that Qatar's foreign policy principles were represented in achieving the road map placed by Emir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, particularly when it comes to the country's role in mediation and resolving conflicts. In addition to the country's efforts in maintaining peace, security, and respecting human rights, His Excellency added.

In Hanoi, Qatar's Ambassador to the Socialist Republic of Vietnam Mohammed Ismael Al Emadi held a reception ceremony on the occasion of Qatar National Day. The ceremony was attended by the Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs, a number of ranking officials, and head of diplomatic missions accredited by the state. A number of members of the Arab communities there attended the ceremony as well.

In San Jose, Qatar's Ambassador to Costa Rica Mohammed Bin Kurdi Taleb Al Marri held a reception ceremony on the occasion of Qatar National Day. The event was attended by H E Minister of Communications will be Mauricio Herrera Ullao, Vice Chancellor of the Republic of

and head of diplomatic missions accredited by Costa Rica. There were also a number of MPs, leaders of the business community and intellectuals.

Ortiz congratulated the State of Qatar on its national day, wishing it further success and prosperity in the future. For his part, HE the ambassador explained the details of the unjust siege the State of Qatar has been subjected to since June 5. His Excellency also stressed on the development in bilateral relations between Qatar and Costa Rica in all fields.

In Buenos Aires, HE Qatar's Ambassador to Argentina Fahad Bin Ibrahim Al Hamad Al Mana held a reception ceremony on the occasion of Qatar National Day. A number of ranking officials from Argentina, along with a host of intellectuals and academics as well as local and international institutions focused on human rights. Ambassadors accredited by the State also attended the ceremony. HE the ambassador expressed his appreciation to the efforts of both the Qatari and Argentinian leadership in advancing ties.

In Colombo, Qatar's Ambassador to Sri Lanka Rashid Bin Shafie Al Fahida Al Merri held a reception ceremony on the occasion of Qatar National Day. A number of ministers, MPs, heads of Arab and foreign delegations accredited by the state attended the ceremony. The event featured presentations on the biggest achievements of the State of Qatar under the leadership of the Emir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani.



Qatar Ambassador and other officials during QND celebrations in different countries.



