

Your complete cloud solution provider



www.azym.com

sales@azym.com +974 4444 2447



Qatar Chamber Chairman opens Al Warkaa Rankoussi factory

Business | 13

Nadal edges Medvedev in five-set thriller to win record 21st major title

Sport | 20



Aster

COVID-19- TEST AVAILABLE AT ASTER

- ✓ Pcr Test (With Qr Code)
- ✓ Rapid Antigen (Ag) Test

Scan the code for more information

44 44 04 99

Ooredoo gives you more!



Free or Half Price Special Numbers Double Nojoom Double Data

Valid until February 15 (March 31) 2022. Terms and conditions apply.

Amir's visit to boost economic, political ties with US



QNA - WASHINGTON

Amir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani arrived in Washington yesterday on a working visit to the United States of America.

On his arrival at Andrews Air Force Base, H H the Amir was received by Chief of Protocol of the United States H E Rufus Gifford, the Commander of the 89th American Air Transport Support Group

Colonel Carlos Alford, Qatar's Ambassador to the United States of America, H E Sheikh Mishaal bin Hamad Al Thani, and members of the Qatari Embassy in Washington. H H the Amir is accompanied by an official delegation.

H H the Amir will meet with H E Joe Biden, the President of the United States of America, in Washington, DC, today.

The discussions of the Amir and the US President will deal

- H H the Amir receives warm welcome at Andrews Air Force Base in the US; to meet President H E Joe Biden today.
- Both leaders to discuss ways to support and strengthen strong bilateral partnership and latest regional, international developments and ways to enhance security and stability in the region.
- Bilateral relations witnessed a quantum leap in the past few years by raising the level of trade exchange between the two countries, exchanging visits at the highest levels, and strengthening the military, economic, security and cultural relations.
- Amir's visit to confirm consensus between Qatar and the US on combating terrorism, urgent international issues including Afghanistan, Yemen, Syria, Libya and climate change .

with ways to support and strengthen the strong partnership and cooperation relations between the two countries, in addition to issues of common interest, foremost of which are the latest regional and international developments and ways to enhance security and stability in the region.

On the eve of visit of H H the Amir, Ambassador of the State of Qatar to the US H E Sheikh

Mishaal has underlined the tireless efforts of H H the Amir and his keenness to strengthen economic, political, and military relations with the US.

The Ambassador said that the Qatari-US relations have witnessed a quantum leap in the past few years, this was demonstrated by raising the level of trade exchange between the two countries, exchanging visits at the highest levels, and



strengthening the military, economic, security and cultural relations.

The Ambassador stressed his confidence that this visit will constitute an opportunity to confirm the consensus of visions between the State of Qatar and the US on many regional and international issues, whether it is related to combating terrorism, Afghanistan, Yemen, Syria, Libya, climate change and other urgent international issues.

The visit constitutes a new step on the road to building and strengthening strategic cooperation and continuous consultation between the two leaderships and the two friendly countries to serve their common goals and interests, and contribute to achieving regional stability, security, and global peace, in a clear indication of the distinguished role played by the State of Qatar under the leadership of H H the Amir on the international scene. ➔P3

Students return to in-person classes under strict measures to prevent spread of COVID-19

SANAULLAH ATAULLAH THE PENINSULA

Under strict adherence to COVID-19 prevention protocols, schools operating across the country yesterday received students for in-person classes.

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education is closely monitoring schools to ensure the compliance to preventive measures such as ensuring social distancing, wearing face masks, and provision of parents/guardians declaration forms showing results of antigen tests, said an official.

"First two weeks antigen test at home is mandatory for all students," said Director of the Health and Safety Department at the Ministry of Education and Higher Education Mohammed Abdullah Al Maraghi.

Speaking to Qatar TV yesterday, he said that the Ministry of Education and Higher Education in coordination with the Ministry of Public Health will be running intensified campaigns to monitor the situation closely during these two weeks.

"The meetings between teams concerned from the two ministries will be held on daily

- » The Ministry of Education and Higher Education is closely monitoring schools to ensure the compliance to COVID-19 preventive measures.
- » In first two weeks antigen test at home is mandatory for all students and there should be a declaration from parents showing result of the test.
- » The Ministry of Education and Higher Education in coordination with the Ministry of Public Health will be running intensified campaigns to monitor the situation closely.



basis to ensure the health situation in schools," said Al Maraghi. Before the end of first two weeks, he said, an appropriate decision will be taken according to the pandemic situation. "However we are optimistic the situation of COVID-19 will be improved by that time."

He thanked the decision of

the government for implementing antigen tests which contributing greatly in providing a safe and healthy environment in school campus.

"The decision is expected to help return to normal life across the country not only in schools. I would like to assure parents and guardians that their

children are safe in school campuses. During past two years, we took several decisions according to the pandemic situation in the country such as 100 percent online and blended learning with 50 percent capacity," said Al Maraghi.

He said that now parents are happy to see their children going back to school attending the classes in person. "With the return of students the life returns in school building presenting a full schooling environment."

He said that it was very important to bring back the students to their classrooms physically in a normal form of learning. "Everyone is very much keen for the safety of students and for their education as well," said Al Maraghi.

He said that the parents wanted to see their children come into routine life such as go to bed on time, get up early in the morning, ready for school, attend the classes in schools, interact with teachers and meet their classmates.

"All these things are very important to provide quality education to students and to build their personality," said Al Maraghi.

Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine gets MoPH approval for children aged 5 to 11

QNA - DOHA

The Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) has approved the administration of Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine for children aged 5 to 11 years.

The Ministry said that this decision is in line with the recent studies that demonstrate the safety and efficacy of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine in this age group, as well as the clinical evidence from countries around the world which have already begun vaccinating children aged 5 to 11 years.

The vaccine is one third of the dose of that used for older age groups and is associated with only mild side effects.

The Ministry stated that this is a very important move to ensure children of this age are protected against COVID-19. Although children have been less at risk of severe infection than older people since the start of the pandemic, a greater number of children have been infected and needing medical care in the Omicron wave.

With the Omicron wave continuing to circulate in Qatar,

Parents can call the PHCC hotline on 4027 7077 to schedule an appointment for their children. Health centres also accept walk-in appointments.

the Ministry urged parents to support their children aged 5 to 11 years in getting their vaccine.

The MoPH noted that the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine for children is administered, for those who wish to take it, as two doses with the second dose given three weeks after the first.

The MoPH said that the COVID-19 vaccines for children will be available at all Primary Health Care Corporation (PHCC) health centres from yesterday, January 30. Parents of eligible children can call the PHCC hotline on 4027 7077 to schedule an appointment for their child. Health centers also accept walk-in appointments for this age group.

NSD activities to be held outdoors following health protocols

QNA - DOHA

The National Sports Day Committee announced that all group sports activities and events to mark the National Sports Day (NSD) this year will be held outdoor, after coordination with the Ministry of Public Health.

This came in accordance with the Cabinet decision and in coordination with the Ministry of Public Health regarding the requirements

and guidelines for sports activities and events in place to curb the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Committee said in a statement today.

The statement said that the number of participants in a single event must not exceed 15 vaccinated people, while they must not exceed five if they did not complete the vaccination doses, such as children under 12, provided that they show

a negative COVID-19 result through the rapid antigens test within 24 hours before participating. Everyone must adhere to safe distance of at least one meter all the time during the activity.

The Committee called on all members of society who practise sports to adhere to the preventive measures, noting the possibility of using all sports training devices in parks, sports tracks and all other

places, in accordance with the decisions of the Ministry of Public Health in this regard. The Committee also stressed the need to commit not to share personal items, such as drinking bottles. Hand sanitizer sites must be available in all activity areas.


The National Sports Day Committee emphasized the need for all participants to download the "Ehteraz" application. ➔P2

MSHEIREB




Msheireb Downtown Doha: Smart and accessible

Included with today's edition is a special supplement



PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR	04.58 am
SUNRISE	06.18 am
DHUHR	11.47 am
ASR	02.55 pm
MAGRIB	05.19 pm
ISHA	06.49 pm



WEATHER TODAY

15°C 24°C
Minimum Maximum
Mild daytime with some clouds at times becomes relatively cold to cold and hazy to misty at places by late night.

- ALRUWAIS : 17° → 21°
- ALKHOR : 13° → 21°
- DUKHAN : 15° → 19°
- WAKRAH : 15° → 24°
- MESAIEED : 13° → 25°
- ABUSAMRA : 13° → 19°

HIGH TIDE 4:13 - 14:59
LOW TIDE 11:56 - 22:20

Follow The Peninsula on Instagram @peninsula_qatar

Minister stresses Qatar's interest in fish farming

QNA — DOHA

Minister of Municipality H E Dr. Abdullah bin Abdulaziz bin Turki Al Subaie, affirmed that Qatar has attached great importance to developing the local fish farming industry with the aim of increasing production and raising the percentage of self-sufficiency in fish from other sources without resorting to excessive exploitation of fisheries.

In a speech delivered at the three-day International Conference and Exhibition on Fisheries in Riyadh, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Minister referred to the establishment of the aquatic biology research centre, which was equipped with the latest technologies in fish farming systems, and has entered the stage of actual production since 2020, pointing out that about 1.5 million small local fish (Hamour, Al Shaam, Al Safi) and about 6 million shrimp larvae were produced by the end



Minister of Municipality H E Dr. Abdullah bin Abdulaziz bin Turki Al Subaie during the International Conference and Exhibition on Fisheries in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

of last year.

The Minister of Municipality highlighted the efforts of Qatar in the field of achieving national food security as one of the goals of regional and global food security as these efforts culminated in the State of Qatar by obtaining first place in the Gulf and Arab countries and 24th place globally in the Global Food

Security Index GFSI 2021.

He also explained that according to the directives of H H the Amir to maximise the role of the private sector in the economic fields in the country, the state has put forward projects for the cultivation of fish and shrimp, and they are currently being implemented by private sector companies using the latest

scientific technologies in this field, taking into account all environmental requirements that ensure the safety of marine resources. The International Conference and Exhibition on Fisheries attracts local and international exhibitors working in the field of fisheries, aquaculture and seafood, in addition to marine tourism and various marine industries.

Qatar-US relations witnessing a quantum leap: Enovy

QNA — DOHA

Ambassador of the State of Qatar to the United States of America H E Sheikh Mishaal bin Hamad Al Thani underlined the tireless efforts of Amir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani and his keenness to strengthen economic, political, and military relations with the US.

In a statement to Qatar News Agency (QNA), the Ambassador said that the Qatari-US relations have witnessed a quantum leap in the past few years, this was demonstrated by raising the level of trade exchange between the two countries, exchanging visits at the highest levels, and strengthening the military, economic, security and cultural relations.

He added that the efforts made by the State of Qatar culminated in the signing of the Qatar-US Strategic Dialogue, which inaugurated a new era of relations between the two countries, pointing out that the last



Ambassador of Qatar to US H E Sheikh Mishaal bin Hamad Al Thani

round of the strategic dialogue between the two countries, which was held in Washington, DC, last November, represented an opportunity to give a strong impetus to the bilateral relations between the two countries.

Also, Qatar's Ambassador to the US noted that this visit by H H

the Amir to the US will contribute to giving new impetus to the distinguished relations between the two countries, indicating that the visit and its timing is an indication of the mutual trust that exists between the officials of the two countries and their keenness to work together to preserve the interests of their peoples and establish security and peace at the regional and international levels.

The Ambassador stressed his confidence that this visit will constitute an opportunity to confirm the consensus of visions between the State of Qatar and the US on many regional and international issues, whether it is related to combating terrorism, Afghanistan, Yemen, Syria, Libya, climate change and other urgent international issues.

He pointed out that what distinguishes Qatar's foreign policy towards international issues is its keenness to consolidate peace and stability through mediation to resolve disputes, stressing that this trend in Qatari foreign policy has prompted many foreign powers, led by the US, to work closely with the State of Qatar to enhance international efforts to resolve crises or reduce their severity, the best evidence of this is the reliance of successive US administrations during the last decade on the mediating role played by the State of Qatar in hot files such as Afghanistan or the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

He pointed to the great role of the State of Qatar in helping the US reach an agreement on the Afghan crisis by hosting several rounds of dialogue between the Taliban officials and the two former US administrations and the current administration.

OFFICIAL NEWS

Amir congratulates President of Italy

DOHA: Amir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, and Deputy Amir H H Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad Al Thani sent yesterday cables of congratulations to President of the Italian Republic H E Sergio Mattarella on his re-election for a second presidential term. -QNA

Ministry inspects temporary establishments on highways sides

QNA — DOHA

The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, represented by the Industrial Inspection and Pollution Control Department, carried out surprise inspection campaigns of temporary establishments scattered on the sides of highways and internal roads and outside the planning of industrial areas.

The establishments carry out concrete and asphalt production activities for infrastructure projects in line with the commitment to the environmental standards stipulated in the Environmental Protection Law No. (30) of 2002 and its Executive Regulations No. (4) of 2005.

These campaigns resulted in issuance of 12 violations related to operating facilities for functioning without obtaining a permit, and referring them to the competent prosecution, and removal of 53 temporary facilities that do not meet the conditions for practicing activity on the site. Some 22 temporary facilities were also seized in violation of laws and regulations or abandoned inside farms without obtaining necessary environmental permits.

Work is currently underway to remove them, through a task team formed for this purpose.

Ministry offers 444 jobs in private sector

QNA — DOHA

The Ministry of Labour launched the first phase of the Qatarization programme for jobs in the private sector, enabling all job seekers to apply for jobs available in private sector companies.

In this context, the Ministry revealed that it has offered 444 jobs in 48 private sector companies in various disciplines through the national employment platform 'Kawader' according to the competencies in the Qatarization of jobs in the private sector.

The Ministry called on Qatari job seekers and those wishing to work in the private sector to apply for jobs offered through the aforementioned national platform for employment and to take advantage of the benefits offered by private sector establishments to citizens within the Qatarization programme. The Ministry stresses its keenness to provide all facilities and

The launch of the first phase of the Qatarization programme for jobs in the private sector comes as one of the main priorities of the Ministry aimed at benefiting from the national workforce.

incentives that would encourage citizens to engage with major private sector companies and to provide an exemplary work environment.

The Ministry indicated that it is developing plans and policies, consulting with private sector institutions, increasing the percentage of Qatarization of jobs through the qualification and training of nationals, and studying the relevant legislative options.

The Ministry is closely following the obstacles that

citizens may face in their work for the local private sector establishments and companies and stressed that it is open to receiving any complaints regarding the Qatarization of jobs in the private sector.

The Ministry of Labour indicated that it will intensify supervision over private sector companies to ensure the implementation of policies and plans for the Qatarization of jobs and to benefit the national workforce.

In this regard, it explained its contribution during the last three months of last year by appointing about 230 citizens to various jobs in the private sector as well as the appointment of 55 children of Qatari women.

The launch of the first phase of the Qatarization programme for jobs in the private sector comes as one of the main priorities of the Ministry of Labour aimed at benefiting from the national workforce and opening new horizons in major private sector companies.

NSD activities to be held outdoors following health protocols

FROM PAGE 1

Only those who appear to have a "Green" health state on the app will be allowed to participate, while those infected will not be allowed to participate unless they have fully recovered and have obtained a negative result in the PCR test or the rapid antigen test, and spent seven days after the infection.

The Committee recommends that non-vaccinated groups, especially people over 60 years old and people with chronic diseases, do not participate in the activities for their safety; and highlighted the importance that participants in the National Sports Day events practice their activities in a way that achieves the desired goals and ensures the preservation of

The Committee recommends that non-vaccinated groups do not participate in the activities for their safety.

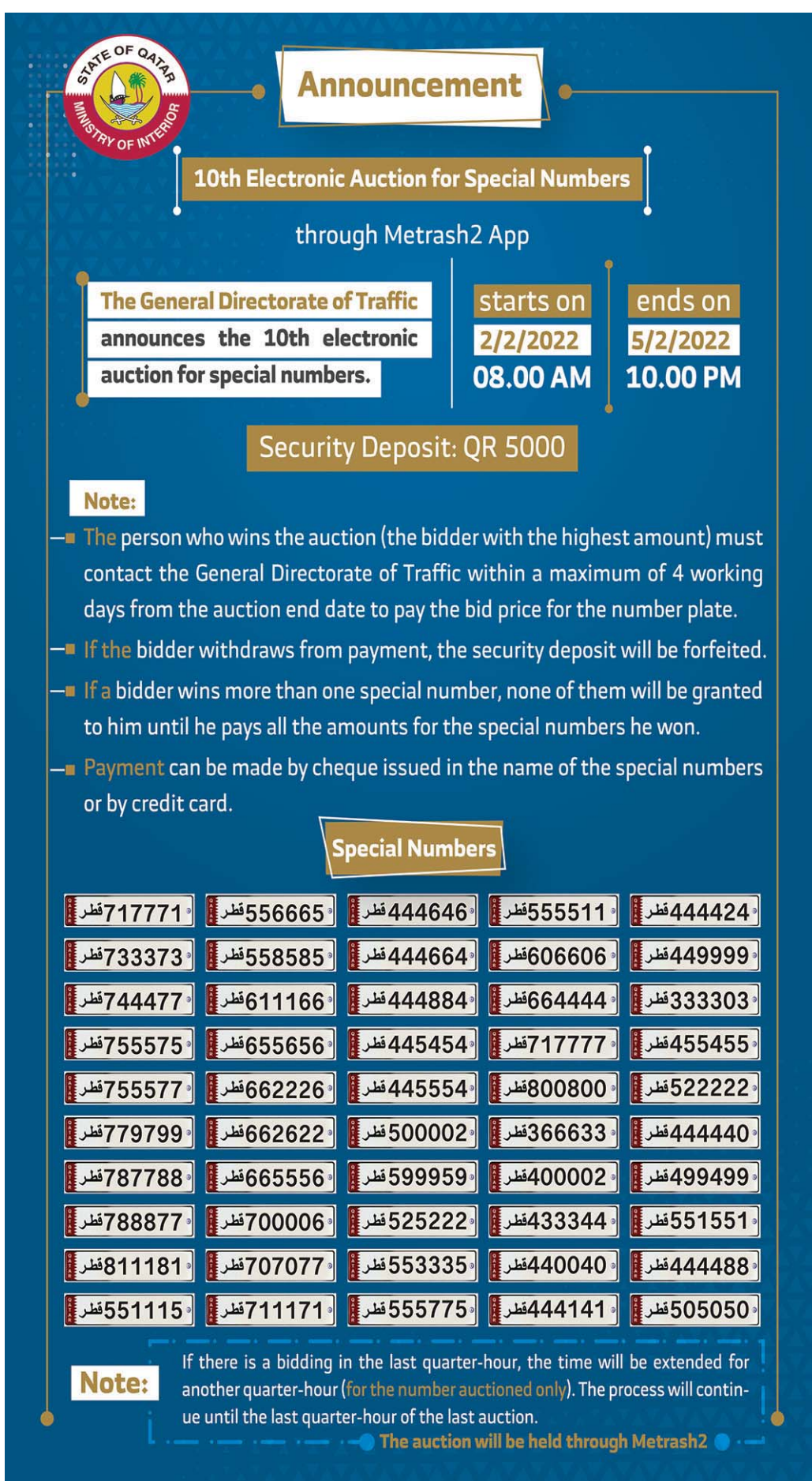
public health and safety for all.

Celebrating a National Sports Day in the State of Qatar every year aims at promoting sports which has moral and human values and many health benefits, and raising awareness among citizens and residents of the importance of practicing sports in daily life and encouraging them to practice it throughout the year.

The State of Qatar celebrated the National Sports Day for the first time in Feb. 2012, after the issuance of Amiri Decision No. 80 of 2011 which stipulated that the second Tuesday of February of every year will be a National Sports Day and a paid holiday.

All state institutions participate in this sporting event and organize activities to raise awareness of the importance of sports and its role in the lives of people and societies.

The State of Qatar was the first to organize a national sports day at the level of the region and the world. Some countries followed the steps of Qatar and started organizing a sports day, given its importance to the individual and the society.



Announcement

10th Electronic Auction for Special Numbers
through Metrash2 App

The General Directorate of Traffic announces the 10th electronic auction for special numbers.

starts on 2/2/2022 08.00 AM
ends on 5/2/2022 10.00 PM

Security Deposit: QR 5000

Note:

- The person who wins the auction (the bidder with the highest amount) must contact the General Directorate of Traffic within a maximum of 4 working days from the auction end date to pay the bid price for the number plate.
- If the bidder withdraws from payment, the security deposit will be forfeited.
- If a bidder wins more than one special number, none of them will be granted to him until he pays all the amounts for the special numbers he won.
- Payment can be made by cheque issued in the name of the special numbers or by credit card.

Special Numbers

717771	556665	444646	555511	444424
733373	558585	444664	606606	449999
744477	611166	444884	664444	333303
755575	655656	445454	717777	455455
755577	662226	445554	800800	522222
779799	662622	500002	366633	444440
787788	665556	599959	400002	499499
788877	700006	525222	433344	551551
811181	707077	553335	440040	444488
551115	711171	555775	444141	505050

Note: If there is a bidding in the last quarter-hour, the time will be extended for another quarter-hour (for the number auctioned only). The process will continue until the last quarter-hour of the last auction.

The auction will be held through Metrash2

Education Minister visits schools to check progress

THE PENINSULA – DOHA

Minister of Education and Higher Education H E Buthaina bint Ali Al Jabr Al Nuaimi paid an inspection visit to a number of government schools to check the progress of the educational process, and their readiness to receive students and its commitment to the precautionary and preventive measures in place to curb spread of COVID-19.

The Minister expressed her happiness with the students' return to their schools and classrooms and their interaction with their classmates and teachers, which enhances their academic achievement and develops their abilities and social skills.

The Minister visited Salah Al Din Preparatory School for Boys and Umama Bint Hamza Primary School for Girls, where she met with school leaders, and

The Minister directed efficient use of resources to compensate for educational losses for students during the past period.

praised their role in the continuity of the educational process despite the pandemic.

She also directed efficient use of available resources to compensate for educational losses for students during the past period, especially in the field of enhancing skills and providing social and psychological support for students with special needs, stressing the importance of the role of qualified teachers in providing students with educational competencies for the coming period.



Minister of Education and Higher Education H E Buthaina bint Ali Al Jabr Al Nuaimi interacting with students at a government school.

Minister of Education stressed to school leaders the need to provide a healthy and

safe school environment that enhances academic achievement, in addition to

strengthening partnership with parents in the educational decision.

Education Minister meets UK official

QNA – DOHA

Minister of Education and Higher Education H E Buthaina bint Ali Al Jabr Al Nuaimi met yesterday with British Minister of State for Middle East and North Africa H E James Cleverly and his accompanying delegation. The meeting reviewed areas of educational cooperation.

Over 500,000 get jobs at Bu Garn vaccination centre

THE PENINSULA – DOHA

Since opening on January 9, more than 500,000 people have received a COVID-19 vaccine dose at the Qatar Vaccination Centre for Business and Industry Sector in Bu Garn.

Registration for 'My Disability is Secret of My Talent' contest extended

QNA – DOHA

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education announced yesterday that the application period to participate in the 4th edition of 'My Disability is Secret of My Talent' competition, under the title of 'World Cup - Qatar 2022' has been extended until February 28.

The Ministry said that the reason for extending the period until February 28, is to give more students the opportunity to participate in the aforementioned competition. The competition targets all students with motor, hearing, intellectual, visual or autistic disabilities, who have a talent in any of the four areas of the competition, at all educational levels in schools and educational and rehabilitation centres.

Amir's visit to boost economic, political ties with US

FROM PAGE 1

His Highness' visit to the US coincides with the two countries' preparations to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between them in 1972.

The two countries have established a solid

base for distinguished regional and international political relations, in addition to understandings, agreements, and a deep economic, investment, security and societal partnership. Doha has become an indispensable centre in the US strategy in the Middle East, the Arabian Peninsula and the Indian Ocean.

Sheikh Hamad Hospital resumes cochlear implants for children in Gaza

QNA – GAZA

Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al Thani Rehabilitation and Prosthetics Hospital in Gaza, funded by the Qatar Fund for Development (QFFD) resumed cochlear implants for the 9th group with a donation from the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs in Qatar.

In a press release published in Gaza yesterday the hospital stated that a group of children who are deaf will undergo cochlear implants for a week for the first time. Chairman of the Board of Directors of Sheikh Hamad Hospital, Sultan Al Asiri said that the resumption of cochlear implants in the hospital is a qualitative leap that has a great

impact and is necessary not only for the hospital but for the presence of such a speciality in the Gaza Strip, which suffers from difficult conditions of siege and difficulty in accessing basics and the populations access to basic health services.

The implants help people with severe hearing loss as a result of damage to the inner ear, and who cannot hear using hearing aids. The technology serves a large group of those who desperately need it in the Gaza Strip to continue the journey of giving and building their future and their communities, he said.

Al Asiri stressed that focusing on such projects is an important boost of hope.



Director of Policy and Planning Department meets British Minister

Director of Policy and Planning Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs H E Dr. Khalid bin Fahad Al Khater met yesterday with British Minister of State for Middle East and North Africa H E James Cleverly. The meeting reviewed the preparations for holding the first Qatar-UK strategic dialogue, which is scheduled to be held in the United Kingdom in March.

Book on Qatar World Cup to be launched on National Sport Day

AYENI OLUSEGUN
THE PENINSULA

Khaled Al Suwaidi, the Supreme Committee for Legacy and Delivery's Stakeholder Relations Senior Manager, has lauded the launch of a book chronicling the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 as a significant legacy achievement during and after the World Cup.

The book *Countdown - Qatar FIFA World Cup 2022* will be launched on National Sport Day, which falls on February 8.

The book will be inaugurated with the support of the SC and is edited by Dr. Buthaina Hassan Al Ansari and published by H a w k a m a h Centre.

The book also tells the World Cup history since its inception in Uruguay in 1930 and the participation of Arab teams in the World Cup finals. It also highlights the challenges that Qatar has faced since winning the hosting rights, how it overcame those challenges, and the state-of-the-art infrastructure that has been built to ensure a successful hosting of the tournament, including the stadiums.

Speaking to *The Peninsula*

during an event to announce the launch at Msheireb Museums yesterday, Al Suwaidi said, "This book comes to document history. It is important to have this legacy through literature that will remain beyond the tournament. This book comes at a perfect time as its launch will be on Sports Day. This day connects a lot of dots around this book. The day itself is significant with a lot of interest from the country and



Officials during a press conference on the book *Countdown-Qatar FIFA World Cup 2022* at Msheireb Museums, yesterday.

contributing to a great social development pillar out of Qatar National Vision 2030. You link it to the biggest tournament that the country will host later in November this year."

"The figures, statistics, and the pictures that will go into this book might be found in some other places, but to have it in one place and documented in one location, officially approved and supported by all

the participating entities, is something different. In addition to that, it's part of the legacy that remains after the tournament.

"At the Supreme Committee, the legacy is a huge part of the mandate of this committee, and we're at the point where the entire legacy plans and will be implemented post the tournament," he added.

Meanwhile, FIFA recently

announced that it had received 2.7 million ticket requests for the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, one week after opening. Most requests are from Qatar, followed by Argentina, England, Mexico, the USA, Spain, Germany, UAE, India, and Brazil. *Countdown - Qatar World Cup 2022* is also supported by the National Human Rights Commission and Alfardan Group.

1,557 new virus cases; 3,351 more recoveries: MoPH

THE PENINSULA – DOHA

The Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) reported 1,557 new cases of COVID-19 yesterday, among them 347 were travellers coming from abroad.

A total of 3,351 people recovered from COVID-19 yesterday, bringing the total number of people recovered in Qatar to 312,539. As many as 6,167 COVID-19 vaccine doses were administered in the past 24 hours

and 5,783,563 COVID-19 vaccine doses have been administered since the start of the National COVID-19 Vaccination Programme.

Also 783,801 booster doses have administered till now. And 86.8% percent of the total population is now fully vaccinated with two doses. The Ministry said that like many countries around the world, Qatar has been confronting a new wave of COVID-19, driven by highly contagious Omicron

variant.

"Data appears to show that we have reached the peak of this third wave as the number of new daily cases is now declining," said the Ministry.

"The support of the community in adhering to the government restrictions and standard COVID-19 precautions as well as the high vaccination rate, has played a significant role in reaching a plateau of new daily cases," it said.



غرفة قطر
QATAR CHAMBER

Invitation

To qualify companies to implement the interior design works of the Qatar Chamber's new headquarters

Qatar Chamber is pleased to invite interested interior design companies to undertake the interior design works for the Qatar Chamber's new headquarters in Lusail City, to provide the Chamber with their profiles and previous projects.

The Chamber will later issue a tender to receive quotes from the qualified companies.

For more information:
44559113 Mobile: 77210121

Shura Council joint committee reviews progress on draft laws

QNA – DOHA

The joint committee formed by Legal and Legislative Affairs, and Financial and Economic Affairs Committees of the Shura Council held a meeting yesterday, headed by Chairman of the Committee H E Abdul Rahman bin Yousuf Al Khulaifi.

During the meeting, Shura members reviewed a report on what the committee accomplished in studying the social insurance and military retirement draft laws, its visions and perceptions about both the projects, and the extent to which they met the aspirations of citizens and to ensure a decent life for retirees.

The committee decided to complete its final report and submit it to the Shura Council as soon as possible.

Last month, Speaker of the Shura Council H E Hassan bin Abdullah Al Ghanim decided to refer the draft laws to the temporary joint committee, to study them and submit a report to the Council.

In this context, the Shura Council had stressed the importance of the two aforementioned draft bills, as they are associated with a large segment of citizens, pointing to the need to study them comprehensively to take the appropriate decision.

Qatar participates in Arab FMs meeting in Kuwait

QNA – KUWAIT

The State of Qatar took part in the consultative meeting of the Arab Foreign Ministers, which was held in the State of Kuwait yesterday.

The State of Qatar was represented at the meeting by Minister of State for Foreign Affairs H E Sultan bin Saad Al Muraikhi.

On the sidelines, Al Muraikhi met with Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs of the State of Kuwait H E Sheikh Dr. Ahmad Nasser Al Mohammad Al Sabah.

They reviewed cooperation and relations between the two countries, in addition to the latest regional developments.



A group photo of participants of a consultative meeting of the Arab Foreign Ministers held in Kuwait yesterday. The State of Qatar also took part in the meeting and was represented by Minister of State for Foreign Affairs H E Sultan bin Saad Al Muraikhi.

Katara all set for Arabian Horse Festival from Feb 2

JOELYN BALUYUT
THE PENINSULA

Cultural Village Foundation, Katara is putting last touches to preparations for the second edition of the Katara International Arabian Horse Festival (KIAHF), slated from Wednesday, February 2 to 12 at Katara Esplanade.

The stage, horse paddocks and horse stable are now ready for the 11-day festival bringing the public a greater deal of activities than the first edition.

Marking its first year in the festival, Arabian Peninsula Horse Show will commence wherein 239 horses will be participating.

Other activities include Arabian Horse Auction where 32 horses will be auctioned; and the prestigious Title Show competitions where 309 horses from 11 countries have been registered.

This year, breeders can also buy egg from the international mare during KIAHF.

Festival sponsors include Ali Bin Ali Luxury as Titanium Sponsor; Ahli Bank as Exclusive Banking Sponsor; Vodafone, Telecom Sponsor; NBK and Al Waab City as Diamond Sponsor; Qatar Insurance Company as Platinum Sponsor; Qatar Airways, as Official Airline Sponsor. And AlKass Channel as Media Sponsor, and



Horse paddock and stage is set for the Katara International Arabian Horse Festival.

Qommunications and White Event Company as Social Media Sponsor.

Recently, Hairaat Jewellery joined as a Diamond Sponsor wherein a signing agreement has been made between Katara

and CEO Nada Khamis Al Sulaiti. The CEO said the agreement is a two-year contract from 2022 to 2023 and the partnership is based on the vision of Hairaat to protect the Qatari heritage. She added that they are looking

forward that the festival will be an amazing one. The Arabian Peninsula Horse Show is set from February 2 to 5, the Arabian Horse Auction on February 7, and the Title Show from February 9 to 12.

QFFD, QRCS deliver winterisation aid to Syrian refugees in Lebanon

THE PENINSULA – DOHA

An official delegation from Qatar Fund for Development (QFFD) has visited Lebanon to check the progress on the winter relief projects co-launched with Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS), under their bilateral cooperation agreement to provide winterisation aid for 37,500 Syrian refugees in Aarsal, Lebanon.

During the visit, which started on January 26, the delegation was received by staff of QRCS mission in Lebanon. They held a series of bilateral meetings. More importantly, it was planned to make a field visit on January 26 to Syrian refugee

camps in Aarsal. However, due to the weather conditions and snowfall, the visit was postponed to Friday, January 28.

In cooperation with the Lebanese Red Cross, the humanitarian aid convoy was deployed to Aarsal, 120km from Beirut. It took them about five hours to arrive at the Syrian refugee camps, just to start distributing winterisation aid, including winter blankets (five per family), coronavirus prevention health kits (one per family), women's essentials (two per family), and winterisation kits (each catering for five persons).

At Aarsal camps, living conditions are almost the same, but the humanitarian team's visit to the tent of a Syrian family with no supporter was somewhat different. The team met Aya, a young girl born in the middle of snow and rain. She told them how hard life was there, with little medication, food, and warmth.

That is partly why QFFD's delegation went there to supervise the



Syrian refugee children in Lebanon carry aid provided by QRCS.

distribution of winterisation aid. Every winter, temperatures drop sharply in Lebanon.

Recently, the country was stricken by the Hiba snowstorm, with a wind speed of up to 100km per hour. The mountainous areas, including Aarsal, Bekaa, were covered in snow. All of this adds to the brunt of the winter for Syrian refugees, who already cannot afford to buy heating

fuel, winterwear, and other supplies.

The delegation's agenda included interviews with some beneficiary families at Syrian refugee camps of Aarsal, Bekaa. They also made a field visit to one of the camps where the tents were equipped with thermal insulation sheets.

After that, they held meetings

with the team of QRCS mission in Lebanon, to discuss the ongoing projects. Another meeting was held with representatives of the Lebanese Red Cross and the Shelter Cluster Coordinator at the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Lebanon.

QFFD and QRCS had signed two grant agreements to support the Syrians during the winter. Under the first agreement, the funds will go to providing winterisation aid for 30,000 beneficiaries in north-western Syria, including heating materials, wool blankets, hygiene kits, and COVID-19 prevention supplies.

The second agreement involves digging 10 water canals and constructing 500 concrete barriers around refugee camps to reduce the risk of rainwater flow into the tents, as well as distributing blankets, winterwear, hygiene kits, and COVID-19 prevention materials. These provisions will benefit 37,500 Syrian refugees in Aarsal.

JOB VACANCY

Required for a financial company

- 1- Financial Manager
- 2- Executive Secretary
- 3- Investment Officer

At least Five years of experience

Please send your CV on the following e-mail
Jobsinfo20222@gmail.com

Dolphin Energy Limited

Invitation to Tender

Tender Number	Description	Tender Bond	Deadline for Submission, 12 Noon (Qatar Time) on
ITT-QO-PCU-1620	Supply of Caustic Soda Liquid at 50% on a Call-Off basis for a period of one year + one year (optional)	QAR 100,000	14 th February 2022

Dolphin Energy Limited (Qatar) is inviting companies to participate in the above Invitation to Tender.

Only companies registered in Qatar with the proven experience and technical knowledge, possessing the required facilities, as well as a demonstrated track record in the supply of the services required should apply.

How to Tender

Complete instructions are included in the Invitation to Tender documents that can be downloaded from the company's website:

www.dolphinenergy.com/procurement

QATARGAS OPERATING COMPANY LTD

Tender Invitation

No.	TENDER NUMBER / DESCRIPTION	TENDER ISSUE PERIOD	TENDER FEE (QAR)	TENDER BOND (QAR)	TENDER CLOSING DATE
1	SUP/C/ITD/5433/21 GLOBAL (COUNTRY-BY-COUNTRY) GUIDE TO ENCRYPTION REGULATION	30/01/2022 to 21/02/2022	0	0	28/02/2022

Scope of Work:
CONTRACTOR shall provide a global jurisdictional assessment of the legal risk for employees in travelling with encrypted data into a number of different countries, in the course of their employment

Bid Validity: Bid should be valid for 180 days from the Tender Closing Date.

Place for Tender Collection and Bid Submission:
ITT document for this tender will be available in Qatargas website under Suppliers tab >Current Open Tenders. The bids shall be submitted through the Qatargas online platform (SMART by GEP).

The World's Premier LNG Company

MoEHE sets date for re-exams for students who missed due to virus

QNA – DOHA

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) decided to repeat examinations of the end of the first semester 2021-22 supplementary examinations for students infected with COVID-19 pandemic for grades 1 to 12 (daytime and adult education).

This came in a circular issued by the Ministry to the principals of public and private schools that apply national standards, in which it specified the date for repeating these exams from today until February 10. The Department of Student Assessment in the Evaluation Affairs Sector of the Ministry stated that the issuance of this circular came in appreciation of the exceptional circumstances that prevented some students from sitting the supplementary exams due to COVID-19 infection.

With regard to students of the General Secondary Certificate (day and adult education), the Ministry has set re-examination on February 13. The examinations will be held at the Secondary Certificate Control Headquarters in the Ministry premises in West Bay.

Sheikh Joaan meets Chinese envoy



Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC) President H E Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad Al Thani met with the Ambassador of the People's Republic of China H E Zhou Jian at the QOC Headquarters, yesterday. During the meeting, bilateral cooperation relations were reviewed. QOC Secretary-General Jassim bin Rashid Al Buenain also attended the meeting.

QNL hosts virtual series on child education, health

THE PENINSULA - DOHA

Qatar National Library (QNL) held its 'Our Children Matter' series with a session on main gross and fine motor development, part of a larger focus on childhood education and health, yesterday.

The virtual workshop, conducted by Zeina Chamoun, Occupational Therapist from The Learning Center at Qatar Foundation, discussed the key milestones for motor and sensory development in children aged 2 to 5. In upcoming sessions, Chamoun will share helpful tips and strategies on how parents can reinforce this development in daily tasks. During the interactive lectures, parents will also be able to share their experiences and learn from each other. The online series, which will be in Arabic, is primarily for families, caregivers and educators. On the occasion, Maram Al



The virtual workshop discussed the key milestones for motor and sensory development in children aged 2 to 5.

Mahmoud, Head of the Children's Library at Qatar National Library,

said, "We are looking forward to hosting this session as we understand the importance of supporting parents and educators, enabling them to potentiate their child's motor and sensory development. Developing parental knowledge and skills at an early stage helps enlighten parents on how they can manage their children's motor and sensory development while improving their overall wellbeing."

The "Our Children Matter" series is part of the Library's educational services that facilitate lifelong learning. By supporting children's education and health in their foundational years, the Library is helping to ensure the wellbeing of the next generation. Throughout the year, the Library offers events for children, young adults, parents and educators that support and empower them with tools and knowledge.



Officials during the launch of the Embassies Football Cup Tournament in Mexico City, sponsored by the Qatar Embassy in Mexico.

Qatari mission in Mexico holds Embassies Football Cup tourney

QNA - MEXICO CITY

The Embassy of the State of Qatar to the United Mexican States announced the launch of the Embassies Football Cup Tournament, sponsored and organised by the Embassy in the stadiums of Magdalena Mixhuca Sports City in Mexico City.

This was announced during a press conference attended by the Director of the Sports Diplomacy Department of the Mexican Government's Ministry of Foreign Affairs Erik Del Angel, in addition to diplomatic representatives from

embassies participating in the tournament: Belgium, Romania, Russia, El Salvador, Chile, Ukraine, European Union, Canada, the United Kingdom, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Peru, and Kazakhstan, as well as a team from the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The Embassies tournament embodies sports diplomacy and represents an opportunity for cultural exchange between Qatar and Mexico and the participating countries in the tournament.

In this regard, Ambassador of Qatar to Mexico H E Mohammed bin Jassim Al

Kuwari said the tournament symbolizes the friendship between the various embassies and the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ahead of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022.

He also said that Qatar is seeking through sport to achieve clear goals of peace and development, particularly sustainable development.

For his part, Erik Del Angel thanked the Embassy of Qatar for the initiative stressing his country's desire to achieve greater communication with different embassies and cultures through sports activities.

Scale7 holds first Demo Day themed 'Walk Fashion, Think Investment'

JOELYN BALUYUT THE PENINSULA

The first-ever Scale7 Demo Day was conducted virtually yesterday themed "Walk Fashion, Think Investment," where ten budding fashion brands presented their business plan to investors.

Among the labels include Hend Rumaihi, Fatima Asaid's Loyal by Fatima, Reem Al Shammri's Witr Jewelry, Alanood Alhedfa's Drizzle, Mohammed Al Hammadis' Gahfia, Qumasha Abdalha's Qalma, Hissa Haddad, Noora Alsharif's Verve, Haifa Alabdallah's Aadima, and Fajer Al Atiya's Trifoglio.

Scale7 is Qatar's first fashion and design business incubator, founded by Qatar Development Bank (QDB) in partnership with M7, aimed to focus awareness among start-ups.

In a speech, QDB Acting CEO Abdulrahman bin Hisham Al Suwaidi said: "Our Demo Day event is a culmination platform for start-ups and investors to find perfect partners in progress and expand their business horizons. In a very short span, Scale7 has achieved great success. This is proven by the excellent response we have been receiving for our various programs. As far as participating requests are concerned, our diversified programs have received more than 250 requests from applicants interested in benefiting from the provided training, workshops, incubation, and accelerations programs."

"Looking at these numbers and new age talents, I am confident that together we will be able to contribute significantly towards the diversification of the national economy, as underlined in the Qatar National



Italian Ambassador H E Alessandro Prunas during the first-ever Scale7 Demo Day.

Vision 2030," he added.

The Italian Embassy has also partnered in this event through Fashion Technology Accelerator, where Italian Ambassador H E Alessandro Prunas highlighted the fashion industries between his country and Qatar.

"The relationship between the Italian fashion industry and Qatar is actually old. Many people are aware that Valentino has been acquired by Mayhoola for investment, and this is actually a very successful investment in Valentino because it produced the growth of the fashion house," he said.

Furthermore, the Ambassador said: "Scale7 is a project that is very close to our hearts because it avails itself of Italian consultant - Fashion

Technology Accelerator is contributing to the success of this venture that is being promoted of Qatar Development Bank, M7, and Qatar Museums. I think this will be a success story because it will allow young Qatari entrepreneurs to actually develop their own skills. I am very proud that this is happening with the help of one of the leading Italian consultants' industry so I can only praise this initiative and encourage to develop it even further."

Fashion Technology Accelerator helps fashion tech start-ups to boost their value through a program to increase sales and brand awareness. It is based in Milan, Italy, and is now located in Silicon Valley, Seoul, and Doha.

HBKU's CPP launches new master's in social policy and program evaluation

THE PENINSULA - DOHA

Hamad Bin Khalifa University (HBKU)'s College of Public Policy (CPP) has launched its newest program, the Master of Social Policy and Program Evaluation (MSPPE).

The full-time two-year MSPPE offers students a unique opportunity to develop the skills to shape the strategic direction of social policy and program evaluation in Qatar and further afield. Commencing in September 2022, the program is open to students of all fields, particularly those with work experience in social policy and/or policy evaluation.

The combination of evaluation and social policy and the intensive training students receive in program evaluation marks the MSPPE as unique to the region. The program will build advanced analytical and substantive knowledge of social policy and program evaluation. Students will learn evaluation skills that are integral to developing reliable evidence to inform programs and policies, support communities, and drive organizational change in the public, private, and non-profit sectors on issues of local and global importance.

The interdisciplinary degree will draw from multiple fields of study, including economics, political science, sociology, psychology, education, law, applied ethics, and public health. Classroom teaching will be supplemented by applied research through CPP's public policy lab as well as internship opportunities that offer real-world, practical experience. All students will be required to complete a master's thesis that addresses a research topic relevant for Qatar, the Middle East, or globally.

"The goal of social policy is ultimately human and societal well-being. With this intent, our new master's program will challenge students to assess the ethical foundations of social policy interventions. With the knowledge they gain, they will become professionals who are ready to lead in assessing and evaluating social policy programs, both to improve outcomes and provide solutions to social problems," said Dr. Anis Ben Brik, Associate Professor, and

Coordinator of the MSPPE Program at CPP.

Dr. Leslie A. Pal, Founding Dean of CPP, said, "The degree program will build vital national capacity in social policy programming and support Qatar's national development through evidence-based and ethically informed social policies."

The MSPPE will be supported by the Program for Social Policy Evaluation and Research (PROSPER) at CPP, whose research agenda is aimed at benefiting social policy and evaluation research at the local, regional, and international level through education programs, research activities, and support for government departments, international organizations, civil society, and private sector bodies.

Admission is now open for the MSPPE and CPP's two-year Master of Public Policy (MPP). Interested students should visit cpp.hbku.edu.qa. Specific inquiries may also be directed to Ayah Deif at ADeif@hbku.edu.qa.

قطر للطاقة
QatarEnergy

The General, Limited Tenders Committees and Supply Chain Department announces the following Tenders:

Important Notice:
Suppliers and Contractors who are already registered with QatarEnergy via e-Registration system and are in possession of a valid SAP ID issued by QatarEnergy can "Buy Tender Online and download Tender Document" from QatarEnergy website. Effective 1st February 2016, payment of Tender Fee by Cash and Manual collection of Tender Document is discontinued.

SL. NO.	TENDER NO.	TENDER SALE PERIOD START DATE	TENDER SALE PERIOD END DATE	TENDER CLOSING DATE	TENDER BOND	BOND CURR.	TENDER FEE	FEE CURR.
1.	LT22100500	31.01.2022	06.02.2022	28.02.2022	200,000.00	QAR	200.00	QAR

Title of Tender: CATHODIC PROTECTION SYSTEM MAINTENANCE SERVICES ON CALL OFF

Mid-Tender Meeting Location: To be advised if required

Mid-Tender Meeting Date & Time: To be advised if required

- Tender documents can be purchased and downloaded from QatarEnergy Website -> Supply Management -> Tenders page during the Tender Sale Period mentioned above against each Tender. Request for issuance of Tender after the specified Tender Sale Period will not be entertained.
- Always refer to QatarEnergy Website (www.qatarenergy.qa) -> Supply Management -> Tenders page for up to date information on QatarEnergy Tenders. Subscribe to Tender Alert to receive notification in your email on new Tenders
- Changes to Tender Sale Period and Bid Closing Date will be updated in QatarEnergy website only.
- Brief Scopes of Work for the above tenders are posted on the QatarEnergy website
- QatarEnergy invites all prospective Suppliers and Contractors interested to participate in QatarEnergy Tenders to register online and obtain a QatarEnergy SAP Vendor Code, a mandatory requirement for the issue of Tender Documents by QatarEnergy.
- Suppliers and Contractors who are in possession of a valid SAP ID issued by QatarEnergy are instructed to maintain their Company Registration and Communication details upto date and valid via QatarEnergy e-Registration system on urgent basis.
- No queries will be entertained, or bids received, from entities who have not purchased tender documents in compliance with the above provisions.

شبكة الجزيرة الإعلامية
ALJAZEERA MEDIA NETWORK

Limited Tender Committee announces the following tender:

No.	Tender Ref. No.	Description	Tender Bond (QAR)	Tender Fee Non-Refundable (QAR)	Bid Closing Date and Time
1	LTC004-22	Call-Off-Agreement for HP Printer Toners	N/A	QAR 300/-	20/02/2022 (13:00 Hrs)

- Bidder must be HP Certified (authorized dealer or reseller) and required to provide a copy of valid certificate as authorized dealers/reseller of HP toners. The copy of valid certificate must be enclosed in the Technical offer.
- Tender documents can be collected from Procurement & Contracts Directorate, Warehouse Building, behind Al Jazeera Media Institute building, TV Complex Area, beside Al Yarmouk Petrol Station, Doha by submitting an authorization letter showing the tender number and ID number of collecting person under the company letterhead, after paying the tender fee at QIB Branch inside Al Jazeera Support Services building.
- Tender documents are to be collected from 31/01/2022 to 06/02/2022, between 7:00 AM to 1:00 PM.
- The offer must be valid for a period of 180 days from the Bid Closing Date.
- The Technical and Commercial offers shall be submitted as per the instructions in the tender documents which shall bear the tender number and bid closing date.
- The last date for accepting the Tender offers shall be 1:00 PM of the bid closing date and any offer submitted after this date will not be accepted.
- For more information, please call 44897131.

www.aljazeera.net www.aljazeera.com

Congratulations

We extend our heartiest congratulations to



مجموعة قطر للتأمين
QATAR INSURANCE GROUP

On being ranked as the

“Top Investment House”

from the MENA region
for the fourth year in a row

by The Asset magazine

We wish them continued success and progress

The Peninsula
Local focus, Global vision

QBG celebrates Queen Elizabeth's platinum jubilee with tree-planting

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

The Qur'anic Botanic Garden (QBG), the first garden in the world to exhibit all the plant species mentioned in the Holy Quran, Hadith, and Sunnah, has presented an Umbrella Thorn tree (as-Samra) to the British Embassy in Qatar to mark Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II's Platinum Jubilee this year.

The tree was planted in the British Ambassador's residence gardens by Her Royal Highness The Countess of Wessex, in the presence of H E Jon Wilks CMG, the British Ambassador to Qatar, and Fatima Al Khulaifi, QBG Director, and in support of The Queen's Green Canopy, a unique initiative created to mark Her Majesty's Platinum Jubilee in 2022, which invites people to plant a tree for the Jubilee. The Countess visited Qatar earlier this year, as Global Ambassador for the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness.

The Umbrella Thorn tree is native to Qatar and the Arabian Peninsula, and integral to environmental efforts to support ecosystems and enhance biodiversity in desert regions.

The tree was planted in the gardens of British Ambassador's residence by Her Royal Highness The Countess of Wessex, in the presence of H E Jon Wilks CMG, the British Ambassador to Qatar, and Fatima Al Khulaifi, QBG Director, and in support of The Queen's Green Canopy, a unique initiative created to mark Her Majesty's Platinum Jubilee in 2022, which invites people to plant a tree for the Jubilee.

The donation is part of QBG's pledge to donate 2.5 million trees to be planted by Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS) volunteers throughout Qatar over a period of 10 years. It is also part of the initiative of the Arab Red Crescent and Red Cross Organization to plant 50 million trees in Arab countries, and is consistent with Qatar committing to planting 10 million trees by 2030.

Commenting on the occasion, Al Khulaifi said: "QBG has enjoyed excellent ties with Doha's diplomatic community since its establishment over a decade ago. Today's event and celebration of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II's Platinum Jubilee with the British Embassy further underscores our

commitment to furthering local and international environmental protection goals through close collaboration with Qatar's diplomatic, humanitarian, and environmental stakeholders. We commend the British Embassy for joining our Ghars tree-planting campaign in 2015 and in 2020, when we had the pleasure of welcoming H E Jon Wilks to our garden. We are pleased to once again work with the British Embassy on this special occasion."

Jon Wilks said: "On behalf of all my colleagues at the British Embassy in Doha, we are grateful for the continued support of the QBG in donating a Samra tree to mark Her Majesty's Platinum Jubilee this year. This tree will stand in the grounds of my



Her Royal Highness The Countess of Wessex planting a tree in the gardens of British Ambassador's residence in Doha, recently.

residence as a beautiful tribute to the long-standing and

well-established relations between our two countries at all

levels, including between our royal families."

Community members welcome Philippine's new quarantine rules

JOEYLN BALUYUT
THE PENINSULA

The Filipino community in Qatar welcomed the new regulation of the Philippine government allowing fully vaccinated international travellers and returning Filipinos to enter the country and will no longer required to undergo facility-based quarantine from February 1.

The Philippine Embassy announced on Saturday on its Facebook page the new guidelines on testing and quarantine protocols for international passengers arriving in Philippines.

Philippine Ambassador, H

E Alan Timbayan said this development is in compliance with the Inter-Agency Task Force for Emerging Infectious Diseases (IATF-EID) Resolution released on January 27.

He explained there will be a temporary suspension of the classifications of countries, territories, jurisdictions as Green, Yellow, and Red, and the lifting of temporary suspension on the entry of fully vaccinated nationals of non-visa required countries under Executive Order No. 408 shall be allowed to enter the Philippines.

For Arian Bautista, who's travelling on February 8, told *The Peninsula*: "This is an

answered prayer especially I am with my one-year-old son and husband. More family and quality time as they removed the 7-day hotel quarantine and now we only have to self-isolate for seven days."

Alpine Gomez who recently went back to Philippines for a vacation said: "The process for departure and arrival is smooth both in Hamad International Airport and Clark International Airport. My hotel quarantine and PCR test result was fast. All were accommodating and coming back home after three years is indeed a good one."

Jean Bahayon said: "Good news! I am glad that we don't have

to undergo quarantine anymore. I cannot wait to see my son and parents personally just like before COVID-19 started where can see them immediately once I arrive in the Philippines."

Fully vaccinated international arriving passengers shall be required to present a negative RT-PCR test taken within 48 hours prior to the departure from the country of origin. Upon arrival, they shall no longer be required to observe mandatory facility-based quarantine but shall self-monitor for any sign or symptom for seven days with the first day being the date of arrival and shall be required to report to the local

government unit of destination upon the manifestation of symptoms, if any.

International arriving passengers must have the following proofs of vaccination against COVID-19 recognised under existing IATF regulations: World Health Organization International Certificates of Vaccination and Prophylaxis; Vax-CertPH or National or State digital certificate of the foreign government which has accepted VaxCertPH under a reciprocal arrangement unless otherwise permitted by the IATF.

Meanwhile, for unvaccinated and partially vaccinated, or individuals whose

vaccination status cannot be independently validated are required to present a negative RT-PCR test taken within 48 hours prior to departure from the country of origin. Also, they shall undergo a facility-based quarantine until the release of their negative RT-PCR test taken on the fifth day. After which, they shall be required to undergo home quarantine until their 14th day with the date of arrival being the first day.

For unvaccinated children below 12 years old, they shall follow the quarantine protocols of the parents or the accompanying adult or guardian traveling with them.

Artwork co-created by VCUarts Qatar displayed at Venice Architecture Biennale

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

Faculty, students and alumni from Virginia Commonwealth University School of the Arts in Qatar (VCUarts Qatar) created an exquisite corpse-style artwork along with their peers at Hongik University IDAS (International Design school for Advanced Studies), in Seoul, Korea.

The artwork was on display at the Korean Pavilion at the 17th Venice Architecture Biennale.

Marco Bruno, Associate Professor, Graduate Studies, VCUarts Qatar, a Qatar Foundation partner university, and Simone Carena, Associate Professor, Digital Media Design, Hongik University IDAS, developed the concept for the artwork to mirror the theme of the Korean Pavilion at the Biennale. They were supported by Reema Abu Hassan, alumna and Adjunct Faculty, Graduate Studies, VCUarts Qatar.

The theme of the Korean pavilion was Future School. Future School is a global coalition that 'connects participants and programs across borders and distance while fostering diverse modes of engagement' with 'the ultimate aim to forge new and multiple solidarities in the face of current and future challenges, including

migration and the growth of the diaspora, the impact of climate change, and the increasing speed of social and technological change'.

'Exquisite corpse' is a game in which each participant takes turns writing or drawing on a sheet of paper – in this case, digitally – conceals his or her contribution, and then passes it to the next 'player' for a further contribution. At times, a participant may create based on a glimpse of the 'end' part of the artwork created by the previous contributor. The end result is one single artwork that captures multiple styles and perspectives. The game gained popularity in creative circles during the 1920s when it was adopted as a technique by artists of the Surrealist movement to generate collaborative compositions.

In this case, students and faculty of three continents, two universities and 13 nationalities designed an artwork that transcended landscapes, languages and cultures. The participants were Simone Carena (Italy), Yvonne Shih, and Li Zheng (China), from Hongik University.

Marco Bruno, Giovanni Innella, and Stella Colaleo (Italy) Yeon Geong Hwang (South Korea), Faheem Khan (Bangladesh), Anurag Wallace (India), Nia Campbell (US), Amna Sana (Pakistan),



The artwork on display at the Korean Pavilion at the 17th Venice Architecture Biennale.

Amna Yandarbin (Chechnya), Abdulrahman Al Muftah (Qatar), Ahmed Nour, and Nada Al-Kharashi (Egypt), Reema Abu Hassan (Palestine), Alaa Albarazy, and Nada Abbarah (Syria), and Gente Retkoceri (Kosovo), made up VCUarts Qatar's team.

"Each participant designed their portion of the project on the basis of a small hint received from the previous collaborator in an exquisite corpse-style exercise," Bruno explains. "The result was a continuous drawing that was produced and displayed at the Biennale, paying tribute to the experimental legacy of 'Superstudio', a radical Italian architecture firm from the 1960's."

The project took an entire semester to complete. Participants started from two geographical sites, Seoul and Venice, and each students had 72 hours

to complete his/her drawing, and share a short sentence, based on the previous hint, and then pass it to the next person. As much as possible, students were asked to create their projects in their respective countries. The project is also representative of the historical routes that existed across Europe, Africa and Asia, facilitating the circulation of people, goods and ideas. The reciprocal nature of those geographical routes can be found in the artwork as well.

"The entire artwork can be read from both sides, either from Seoul to Venice, or from Venice to Seoul," says Bruno. "Each drawing has its own life, and is unique. While most of them are celebratory of the feature or character of their country, some of them are political, and yet some are critical of social issues, such as privatization

of public space."

The artwork was presented on the Future School process wall, and complemented the ambience of the pavilion that had an open kitchen, a circular lounge, and a retreat room constructed entirely in hanji, a traditional, handmade Korean paper. As per the VCUarts Qatar faculty member, the benefits that the students gained from the experience go beyond the obvious.

"Of course, being able to participate at an international event that drew around 300,000 visitors is of significance," he says. "Equally important, though, is the understanding and appreciation that organically developed through the process of discussing and sharing perspectives that touched on different cultures, and the future of education."

Lebanon's response to thawing Gulf ties will be studied: Kuwait

REUTERS — KUWAIT

Kuwait said yesterday that Gulf Arab states will study Lebanon's response to their terms for thawing relations, which have suffered over Iran-backed Hezbollah's growing power in Beirut and the region.

Kuwaiti Foreign Minister H E Sheikh Ahmad Nasser Al Sabah, at a news conference after a meeting of Arab foreign ministers, did not give any details of Lebanon's response, a draft of which had sidestepped the issue of disarming Hezbollah.

"We received the response... it will be studied by the relevant

Kuwaiti Foreign Minister thanked Beirut "for interacting" with the demands, which he said was a positive step.

authorities in Kuwait and in the Gulf to determine what the next step is with Lebanon," Sheikh Ahmad said. He thanked Beirut "for interacting" with the demands, which he said was a positive step. The terms delivered to Beirut on Jan. 22 include setting a timeframe for implementing UN Security Council resolutions, among

them Resolution 1559 which was adopted in 2004 and calls for the disarmament of non-state militias in Lebanon.

The Lebanese draft letter had expressed respect for UN resolutions "to ensure civil peace and national stability" and said that Lebanon "will not be a launchpad for activities that violates Arab countries".

Lebanon's foreign minister said on Friday he was not going "to hand over" Hezbollah's weapons during the meeting in Kuwait and that implementing resolution 1559 "will take time".

Hezbollah supports Iran in its regional struggle for

influence with US-allied Arab states, which say the group has aided the Iran-aligned Houthis movement in the Yemen war.

Hezbollah has a militia more powerful than Lebanon's army and has backed pro-Iran allies in the region, including in Syria. The group and its allies also exercise major sway over Lebanese state policy.

The Gulf rift has added to difficulties facing Lebanon as it struggles with a financial crisis. Ties hit new lows last year when Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states expelled Lebanese ambassadors and recalled their own.

Saudi Arabia reports 3,669 new COVID-19 cases, three deaths

AGENCIES — RIYADH/ABU DHABI

Saudi Arabia announced three deaths from COVID-19 and 3,669 new infections yesterday.

Of the new cases, 1,301 were recorded in Riyadh, 318 in Jeddah, 192 in Dammam, 167 in Hofuf, 132 in Makkah, 102 in Madinah, and 102 in Abha. Several other cities recorded less than one hundred new cases each.

The total number of recoveries in the Kingdom increased to 635,191 after 4,375 more patients recovered from the virus. A total of 8,936 people have succumbed to the virus in the Kingdom so far. Over 56.8 million doses of a coronavirus vaccine have been administered in the Kingdom to date.

The UAE Ministry of Health reported 2,291 new cases in the past 24 hours, bringing the tally to 843,030. In a statement, the ministry said that the total number of COVID-19 related deaths reached 2,240 after recording one new death. Some 1,014 patients had recovered, taking the recoveries total to 776,186, it added.

The Peninsula
Local focus, Global vision
Established in 1996

CHAIRMAN

DR. KHALID BIN THANI AL THANI

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

DR. KHALID MUBARAK AL-SHAFI

editorinchief@pen.com.qa

MANAGING EDITOR

MOHAMMED OSMAN ALI

osman@pen.com.qa

EDITORIAL**Strengthening strategic partnership**

AS the State of Qatar and the United States are preparing to mark the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between them in 1972, Amir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani begun yesterday his working visit to the US.

Since the establishment of the diplomatic relations, bilateral cooperations have increased and strengthened because it was built on solid ground and clear vision, trust, mutual respect, and common benefits. Therefore, throughout the past decades, the relations were witnessing continuous development in various fields to serve the interests of the two countries, the region, and global and regional peace and stability.

H H the Amir will meet President H E Joe Biden at the White House to discuss aspects of developing the existing strategic cooperation between the two countries in various fields and exchange views on regional issues and the most prominent international developments.

The State of Qatar is keen to further enhance its strategic cooperation with the US in different fields of economic, political, and military relations with the US, and this necessitates continuous consultation between the two leaderships and the two countries.

The two countries have established a solid base for working to achieve common goals and interests and contribute to achieving regional stability, security, and global peace, in a clear indication of the distinguished role played by the State of Qatar under the leadership of H H the Amir on the international scene.

In order to consolidate bilateral partnership, Qatar and US have established Strategic Dialogue, of which four rounds have been held in the capitals of the two countries annually. The dialogue is another milestone in the strong historical partnership of the two countries and their cooperation as partners in defence, security, investments, education, energy, and combating terrorism.

Qatar's regional and international role in peace making and restoring stabilities in many countries of the world, through mediation to resolve disputes, has become indispensable for the US strategy in the MENA region. A good example of this is the role played by the State of Qatar in ending the Afghan crisis.

No doubt that the Amir's visit to US and discussions that will take place with President Biden and other senior officials will further strengthen the strategic partnership and serve the common goals and interests of the two countries. As well the visit constitutes an opportunity to lift the partnership to new height and its results will serve the interests of the two nations for the coming decades.

The Peninsula
Local focus, Global vision

D-RING ROAD, POST BOX: 3488, DOHA - QATAR
EMAIL: EDITOR@PEN.COM.QA

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OFFICE

TEL: 4455 7741 / 767

FAX: +974 4455 7758

MANAGING EDITOR

TEL: 4455 7769

DEPUTY MANAGING EDITOR

TEL: 4462 7505

LOCAL NEWS SECTION

TEL: 4455 7743

BUSINESS NEWS SECTION

TEL: 4462 7535

SPORT NEWS SECTION

TEL: 4455 7745

ONLINE SECTION

TEL: 4462 7501 email: info@pen.com.qa

PUBLIC RELATIONS

TEL: 4455 7613 email: pr@pen.com.qa

MARKETING

TEL: 4455 7657 email: marketing@pen.com.qa

ADVERTISING DEPARTMENT

TEL: 4455 7837 / 857

FAX: 4455 7870, email: adv@pen.com.qa

CLASSIFIED DEPARTMENT

TEL: 4455 7857

email: adv@pen.com.qa

SUBSCRIPTION & DISTRIBUTION

TEL: 66766718

WhatsApp: 66766718, email: info@tawseelqatar.com

www.thepeninsula.qa

All editorial related correspondences should be directed to Editor-in-Chief office.
e-mail: editorinchief@pen.com.qa
Post box: 3488, Doha - Qatar

/PENINSULAQATAR

/THEPENINSULAQATAR

/PENINSULA_QATAR

/THEPENINSULANEWS PAPER

+974 66986188 / 55698797

Qatar, US: Half a century of strategic relations, continuous consultation

QNA

H H the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani begun today a working visit to the friendly United States of America, within the framework of the growing strategic relations and the continuous consultation between Doha and Washington. During the visit, His Highness will meet with HE the President of the United States of America Joe Biden at the White House to discuss aspects of developing the existing strategic cooperation between the two countries in various fields and exchange views on regional issues and the most prominent international developments.

The visit constitutes a new step on the road to building and strengthening strategic cooperation and continuous consultation between the two leaderships and the two friendly countries to serve their common goals and interests, and contribute to achieving regional stability, security, and global peace, in a clear indication of the distinguished role played by the State of Qatar under the leadership of HH the Amir on the international scene.

His Highness' visit to the US coincides with the two countries' preparations to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between them in 1972, while that the historical roots of the informal relations between them date back to the thirties of the last century with the beginning of the emergence of oil in the Arabian Gulf region.

Since that date, bilateral relations have remained friendly and solid, based on trust, mutual respect, and common benefits, and in continuous development to serve the interests of the two countries, the region, and global and regional peace and stability.

To strengthen these relations, H H the Amir's visits to the US have become permanent and continuous and enjoy a great deal of importance and welcome from various American circles. Senior officials and personalities from both sides exchange visits on a regular basis, to follow up on prospects for bilateral cooperation at political, economic, commercial, investment, health, cultural and others levels.

The two countries have established a solid base for distinguished regional and international political relations, in

addition to understandings, agreements, and a deep economic, investment, security and societal partnership. Doha has become an indispensable center in the US strategy in the Middle East, the Arabian Peninsula and the Indian Ocean.

Continuous consultation is considered a distinctive feature of the relations of the two friendly countries, and the American circles always praise Qatar's position and its pivotal roles in the region in the interest of regional and international stability and the promotion of international peace and security.

Bilateral relations have deepened and strengthened over the past year, as a result of Qatar's evacuation efforts from Afghanistan. Qatar has worked closely with the US and other international partners around the clock to evacuate tens of thousands from Afghanistan, including American citizens, students, Afghan staff and their families, and journalists from all over the world. The Qatar-US Strategic Dialogue, of which four rounds have been held so far, is the strongest indication of the strength of the relations between the two sides and the keenness and strong desire to support and strengthen them in all fields.

The 4th Qatar-US Strategic Dialogue, which was held in Washington in November, was another milestone in the strong historical partnership between the two countries and their deep friendship and indicated that the two parties are partners in defense, security, investments, education, energy, and combating terrorism.

The dialogue included sessions on the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 in Doha, labor issues, human rights and human trafficking, military and

security cooperation, visa and consular issues, regional and global discussions, energy, climate change, cultural and educational cooperation, law enforcement and counter-terrorism partnership, health cooperation, and economic and trade cooperation.

The strong partnership of Doha and Washington has proven its importance in achieving peace and stability in the region, as many regional and international crises have demonstrated the necessity of this partnership and the vital role of the State of Qatar through its active diplomacy and wise policies seeking peace and prosperity in the region.

The State of Qatar and the US also have extensive economic relations, as the US is the largest foreign investor in Qatar and one of the main equipment suppliers to the Qatari oil and

The two countries have established a solid base for distinguished regional and international political relations, in addition to understandings, agreements, and a deep economic, investment, security and societal partnership. Doha has become an indispensable center in the US strategy in the Middle East, the Arabian Peninsula and the Indian Ocean.



Afghanistan's economy is collapsing, the US can help stop it



SHAH MEHRABI
AL JAZEERA

As an Afghan American, I have worked for the last 20 years to try to help the people of my home country overcome economic woes and build a more prosperous economy for all.

Right now, those hopes are in jeopardy. Afghanistan faces one of the most acute crises I have seen in my career – and the antidote remains locked in New York.

In August, the United States froze \$9.1bn of Afghanistan's national reserves held at the Federal Reserve Bank of New York. As a result, the economic situation in the country has deteriorated rapidly. The people of Afghanistan are increasingly unable to afford basic goods, its currency is facing hyper depreciation, and its already fragile economy is on the brink of collapse.

Make no mistake, a catastrophe is imminent. The Central Bank of Afghanistan is supposed to conduct monetary policy operations to control the US dollar to the afghani exchange rate and keep inflation at bay. It has historically leveraged this auction process to produce remarkably stable exchange rates and inflation for a developing economy, in the single digit percentages. But with no access to its dollar-denominated reserves, the Central Bank is not able to perform this critical market stabilising function.

Due to a heavy reliance on imports, the Afghan economy is dependent on the US

dollar to function even in normal times. With rising demand for foreign currency and reports of 30 percent depreciation of the afghani against the dollar, the effective price of imported goods has increased by at least 20-30 percent over the last few months.

In a country already devastated by the twin crises of war and COVID-19, the desperate lack of dollars in the market is leaving importers unable to pay for their shipments. Food is becoming scarce and grocery stores are unable to fully restock. As prices rise, people are rushing to withdraw and spend their savings before the banking sector collapses. Private businesses are not able to fund operations, shutting down and laying off the privileged few who still have jobs. A growing number of Afghans are suffering from hunger, poverty, and a lack of access to basic goods and services. In short, the country is in a total humanitarian crisis.

While this will devastate every Afghan, the Taliban government in Kabul will avoid the worst of it. They will blame the US for the country's economic woes – and so long as they can point to the assets held frozen under US control, the people will believe them.

The choice for the US government is

In August, the United States froze \$9.1bn of Afghanistan's national reserves held at the Federal Reserve Bank of New York. As a result, the economic situation in the country has deteriorated rapidly.



gas industry. American companies play an important role in developing the oil, gas, and petrochemical sector in the country, especially in recent years, as the State of Qatar is on top of the LNG industry in the world.

The size of the economic partnership between the two countries exceeds USD 200 billion. The State of Qatar has invested hundreds of billions of dollars in the American economy, which translates into providing tens of thousands of jobs throughout the US. About 120 companies, wholly owned by Americans, operate in the Qatari market, along with 640 companies were established in partnership between the Qatari and American sides. The US is the fifth trading partner of the State of Qatar.

In 2021, the activities of the Qatar-USA 2021 Year of Culture, were organized with the aim of building bridges and promoting cultural and artistic exchange between the two countries and their friendly peoples, in confirmation of the two parties' strong and renewed commitment to promoting mutual understanding and dialogue between cultures. American universities receive hundreds of Qatari students each year, and six of them have opened branches in Education City in Doha, including Weill Cornell, Georgetown, Carnegie Mellon, and Northwestern.

It is certain that the visit of HH the Amir to the US and the discussions that will take place during it will constitute a new shift in the relations of cooperation and coordination between the two parties, and its results will serve the interests of the two countries and their friendly peoples and in the interest of establishing security, stability, prosperity and peace in the region and the world.

simple: continue down the path that would lead to total economic devastation for millions of people or do what is needed to help the Afghan people.

I propose that the US allow the Central Bank of Afghanistan limited, monitored, and conditional access to \$150m per month from Afghanistan's foreign reserves – roughly half of what the Central Bank would auction off monthly in the past. This common-sense policy would unfetter the bank to fulfill its role of maintaining price stability and prevent this imminent crisis.

The US would have the ability to verify how these funds are used via one of the independent international auditing firms that are still operating in Afghanistan. The transactions between the Central Bank and commercial banks take place on an electronic exchange where each transaction and its value are automatically recorded. If the US finds any misappropriation, it can cut off the funds at any moment. After all, the vast majority would still be deposited at the New York Federal Reserve. This type of leverage is a win-win for the US.

The Central Bank is an entity independent from the Afghan government. For decades, it has helped to achieve and maintain price stability and advance the economy, all the while remaining a beacon of hope and prosperity for Afghanistan. But if it is not allowed access to its reserves, that could all be lost. As the recent US engagement with the Taliban on the peace deal has shown, Washington has the power to negotiate many issues of national interest without hurting the economic future of the people of Afghanistan.

Shah Mehrabi is member of the Supreme Council of the Central Bank of Afghanistan

Iraqi airstrikes kill 9 IS militants, including 4 Lebanese

AP — BAGHDAD

Iraqi airstrikes killed nine suspected Islamic State (IS) fighters, including four Lebanese, in retaliation for an IS attack on Iraqi army barracks earlier this month, officials said yesterday.

IS gunmen in Iraq broke into a barracks in the mountainous Al Azim district outside the town of Baqouba on Jan. 21, killed a guard and shot dead 11 soldiers as they slept. It was one of the boldest attacks by the militants in recent weeks and came amid an uptick in violence that stoked fears the group has been re-energized.

Yehia Rasool, the spokesman for Iraq's commander in chief, said the joint

The Three air strikes were a retaliation for an IS attack on Iraqi army barracks on January 21 that killed a guard and shot dead 11 soldiers as they slept. Yehia Rasool, the spokesman for Iraq's commander in chief, said the joint military operations room and the air force identified the cell behind the attack as its members hid in Al Azim, north of Baghdad.

military operations room and the air force identified the cell behind the attack as its members hid in Al Azim, north of Baghdad. Three airstrikes were launched that killed the nine militants, he said.

A security official said that four among the killed were Lebanese, natives of the northern

town of Tripoli. He spoke on condition of anonymity.

Tripoli is Lebanon's second largest city and the country's most impoverished. It has been prone to violence and militants who, inspired by the Islamic State group, launched attacks against Lebanon's army in 2014 in the most

serious bout of violence in the city. As Lebanon faces an unprecedented convergence of crises, including a swift descent into poverty, many fear militants may seek to exploit discontent among the city's majority Sunni residents.

Lebanon's *Al Jadeed TV* gave a higher death toll, saying that five Lebanese were killed in Iraq. One family member appealed in the broadcast to Lebanese authorities to facilitate return of the bodies. Also yesterday, Iraqi anti-terrorism units carried out an inspection campaign in seven prisons in Iraq holding IS militants. The move comes after a brazen prison attack IS militants carried out in

northeastern Syria that lasted for over a week.

The attack on the prison in Hassakeh province in north-eastern Syria was carried out by about 200 militants who were joined by rioting inmates, leaving dozens killed while an unknown number of suspects escaped.

On Sunday, the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces announced the end of its sweep operations in the prison "by eliminating the last pockets in the northern dormitories where (IS) terrorists had been barricaded."

The attack on January 20 was carried out on the largest of a dozen detention facilities in Syria that house militants. More than 3,000 suspected IS

militants, including over 600 minors, were held there.

The Kurdish-led SDF said most of the prison inmates and militants have surrendered, and scores were killed.

IS was largely defeated in Iraq in 2017. The group was dealt a final blow in 2019 when it lost its last territory in southeast Syria during the US-led military campaign in cooperation with Syrian Kurdish-led forces.

But thousands of militants melted into the desert and have continued to wage attacks, frequently hitting security forces and military with roadside bombs and firing on military convoys or checkpoints in both countries.

One dead as security forces confront crowds in Khartoum

REUTERS/AP — KHARTOUM

One protester was killed as security forces confronted thousands of people protesting against military rule in Sudan's capital Khartoum yesterday, medics linked to the demonstrations said.

The 27-year-old Mohamed Yousef Ismail was hit in the chest, the Central Committee of Sudanese Doctors (CCSD) said. There was no immediate statement from the military rulers who have been trying to contain a series of protests across Sudan since they took power on Oct. 25.

Security forces fired tear gas to try to disperse the crowds who were marching in defiance of a ban on demonstrations, a Reuters reporter said.

Protesters got within about 2 km of the presidential palace on the banks of the Blue Nile before security forces blocked their way in the early afternoon and started chasing protesters back and forth.

"We go out to demonstrate so that our children can live under a civil, democratic state in the future. We won't allow our children's future to be confiscated," protester Mohamed Abdelrahman, a 51-year-old government employee, said.

The October coup halted a

power sharing arrangement between the military and civilians negotiated in 2019 after former president Omar al-Bashir was overthrown in an uprising.

At least 79 civilians have been killed and more than 2,000 injured in crack-downs on the protests, mainly by gunshots and teargas canisters, according to the CCSD.

Military leaders say peaceful protests are allowed and protest casualties will be investigated.

Protesters, mostly young men and women, marched in the streets of Khartoum and other cities, demanding an end to the military's takeover. They called for a fully civilian government to lead the country's now-stalled transition to democracy.

The coup has upended Sudan's transition to democratic rule after three decades of repression and international isolation under President Omar al-Bashir. The African nation has been on a fragile path to democracy since a popular uprising forced the military to remove al-Bashir and his government in April 2019.

The protests are called by the Sudanese Professionals Association and the Resistance Committees, which were the backbone of the uprising

against Bashir and relentless anti-coup protests in the past three months.

Footage circulated online showed people beating drums and chanting anti-coup slogans in the streets of Khartoum and its twin city Omdurman. They were also seen carrying Sudanese flags and other flags with photos of protesters reportedly slain by security forces printed on them.

They marched towards the presidential palace, an area in the capital that has seen deadly clashes between protesters and security forces in previous rounds of demonstrations.

There were protests elsewhere in the country including the eastern city of Port Sudan, western Darfur region and Madani, the capital city of Jazira province, about 135km southeast of Khartoum. Madani saw a massive anti-coup protest last week.

Ahead of the protests, authorities stepped up security in Khartoum and Omdurman. They deployed thousands of troops and police and sealed off central Khartoum, urging protesters to assemble only in public squares in the capital's neighbourhoods.

The United Nations mission in Sudan on Saturday warned that such restrictions could increase tensions, urging



Smoke rises from burning tyres as people taking part in a protest against the military rule in Khartoum, yesterday.

authorities to let the protests "pass without violence."

Since the coup, at least 79 people have been killed and hundreds of others wounded in a widely condemned crackdown on protests, the doctors group said.

There were also mass arrests of activists leading the anti-coup protests and allegations of sexual violence, including rape and gang rape, in a Dec. 19 protest in Khartoum, according to the UN.

The upheaval in Sudan worsened earlier this month following the resignation of Prime

Minister Abdalla Hamdok, who was the civilian face of the transitional government over the past two years.

The prime minister, who was ousted in the October coup only to be reinstated a month later under heavy international pressure, stepped down on Jan. 2 after his efforts to reach a compromise failed.

Yesterday's protests came as the UN mission continued its consultations to find a way out of the ongoing crisis.

On Saturday, powerful Gen. Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo, deputy head of the

ruling Sovereign Council, and commander of the feared Rapid Support Forces, said they have accepted the UN efforts to resolve the crisis, but that U.N. envoy Volker Perthes "should be a facilitator not a mediator."

Dagalo did not elaborate but his comments showed the challenges the UN mission faces to find a common ground between rival factions in Sudan. The pro-democracy movement has insisted on the removal of the generals from power and the establishment a fully civilian government to lead the transition.

UN: 2,000 children recruited by Houthis died fighting

AP — UNITED NATIONS

UN experts said in a new report that nearly 2,000 children recruited by Yemen's Houthi rebels died on the battlefield between January 2020 and May 2021, and the Iranian-backed rebels continue to hold camps and courses encouraging youngsters to fight.

In the report to the UN Security Council circulated Saturday, the experts said they investigated some summer camps in schools and a mosque where the Houthis disseminated their ideology and sought to recruit children fight in the seven-year war with Yemen's internationally recognized government, which is backed by a Saudi-led coalition.

"The children are instructed to shout the Houthi slogan 'death to America, death to Israel, curse the Jews, victory to Islam,'" the four-member panel

of experts said. "In one camp, children as young as 7 years of age were taught to clean weapons and evade rockets."

The experts said they documented 10 cases where children were taken to fight after being told they would be enrolled in cultural courses or were already taking such courses, nine cases where humanitarian aid was provided or denied to families "solely on the basis whether their children participated in fighting or to teachers on the basis of whether they taught the Houthi curriculum," and one case where sexual violence was committed against a child who underwent military training.

The panel said it received a list of 1,406 children recruited by the Houthis who died on the battlefield in 2020 and a list of 562 children recruited by the rebels who died on the battlefield between January and May 2021.

"They were aged between 10 and 17 years old," the experts said, and "a significant number" of them were killed in Amran, Dhamar, Hajjah, Hodeida, Ibb, Saada and Sana'a.

Yemen has been engulfed in civil war since 2014 when the Houthis took Sanaa, the capital, and much of the northern part of the country, forcing the government to flee to the south, then to Saudi Arabia. A Saudi-led coalition that included the United Arab Emirates and was backed at the time by the United States, entered the war months later, in 2015, seeking to restore the government to power.

The conflict has since become a regional proxy war that has killed tens of thousands of civilians and fighters. The war has also created the world's worst humanitarian crisis, leaving millions suffering from food and medical care shortages and pushing the country to the

brink of famine.

In recent weeks, shifting front lines on the ground have resulted in escalating attacks following gains by UAE-backed forces in the contested province of Marib, which the Houthis have been trying to take for more than a year. Coalition airstrikes followed two Houthi attacks inside the UAE using missiles and drones, killing three in strikes near the Abu Dhabi international airport.

The panel of experts said the Houthis have continued their aerial and maritime attacks on Saudi Arabia, with targets close to the border most at risk and usually attacked several times a week with a combination of unmanned drones and short-range artillery rockets. But the rebels also continue to strike deep inside Saudi Arabia less frequently using longer-range drones as well as cruise and ballistic missiles, they said.

IN BRIEF

Khamenei orders crackdown on smuggled luxury goods

TEHRAN: Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei ordered officials to clamp down "decisively and ruthlessly" on luxury goods imported into the country illegally.

"Luxury goods that have been smuggled in must be thrown into compactors and crushers," Khamenei said on his official Twitter account. Khamenei added that the presence of the items in Iran, driven by strict US trade sanctions that prevent imports of many popular foreign brands, harms domestic industry.

The statement came hours after Khamenei held a meeting with Iranian manufacturers in which he urged government officials to better support producers, and criticised previous administrations for lackluster economic performances.

World powers are currently locked in intense negotiations to revive the 2015 nuclear deal that brought sanctions relief to the Islamic Republic in exchange for caps on its atomic activities. Iran started to heavily restrict imports in 2018 after the US abandoned the landmark accord, triggering an economic crisis. —*Bloomberg*

Macron tells Iran's Raisi nuclear talks need to speed up

PARIS: French President Emmanuel Macron has told his Iranian counterpart Ebrahim Raisi that a deal lifting sanctions on Iran in return for curbs on its nuclear activities is still possible but talks need to accelerate, Macron's office said yesterday.

France, Germany and Britain, known as E3, and the United States are trying to save the 2015 Vienna agreement with Iran but Western diplomats have said negotiations, which have been in their eighth round since Dec. 27, were moving too slowly.

Iran has rejected any deadline imposed by Western powers. "The President of the Republic reiterated his conviction that a diplomatic solution is possible and imperative, and stressed that any agreement will require clear and sufficient commitments from all the parties," the Elysee Palace said in a statement after a telephone call with Raisi on Saturday. —*Reuters*

Israel supports UAE security needs, President says on first visit

DUBAI: Israel's president, making his first visit yesterday to the United Arab Emirates, said his country supports the Gulf state's security needs and wants more countries in the region to join its new detente with the Arab world.

The UAE, along with Bahrain, signed US-brokered normalisation agreements with Israel, dubbed the "Abraham Accords", in 2020. "We completely support your security requirements... We are here together to find ways and means to bring full security to people who seek peace in our region," Isaac Herzog said during a meeting. —*Reuters*

Egyptian court sentences 10 Brotherhood members to death

REUTERS — CAIRO

An Egyptian court has sentenced to death 10 members of the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood group for 'planning attacks' on the police, the state-news agency MENA said.

Country's top religious authority, the Grand Mufti, has to ratify the sentences, it said.

The identities of the defendants were not disclosed and it was not possible to determine how they had pleaded to the charges.

Egypt has mounted one of the biggest crackdowns in its modern history on the Brotherhood following the army's overthrow of Islamist President Mohamed Mursi, the country's first freely-elected president, in 2013 after mass protests against his rule.



Water woes

A woman pushes a barrel filled with water on the outskirts of Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, yesterday.

North Korea tests longest-range missile since 2017

AP — SEOUL

North Korea yesterday fired what appeared to be the most powerful missile it has tested since President Joe Biden took office, as it revives its old playbook in brinkmanship to wrest concessions from Washington and neighbours amid a prolonged stalemate in diplomacy.

The Japanese and South Korean militaries said the missile was launched on a lofted trajectory, apparently to avoid the territorial spaces of neighbours, and reached a maximum altitude of 2,000km and travelled 800km before landing in the sea.

The flight details suggest the North tested its longest-range ballistic missile since 2017, when it twice flew intermediate-range ballistic missiles over Japan and, separately, three intercontinental ballistic missiles that demonstrated the potential to reach deep into the American homeland.

Yesterday's test was North Korea's seventh round of launches this month. The unusually fast pace of tests indicates its intent to pressure the Biden administration over long-stalled nuclear negotiations as pandemic-related difficulties put further stress on an economy broken by decades of mismanagement and crippling US-led sanctions over its nuclear weapons program.

South Korean President Moon Jae-in called an

South Korean President called an emergency National Security Council meeting where he described the test as a possible "mid-range ballistic missile launch" that brought North Korea to the brink of breaking its 2018 moratorium on the testing of nuclear devices and longer-range missiles.

emergency National Security Council meeting where he described the test as a possible "mid-range ballistic missile launch" that brought North Korea to the brink of breaking its 2018 self-imposed moratorium on the testing of nuclear devices and longer-range missiles.

Japanese Defence Minister Nobuo Kishi also told reporters that the missile was the longest-range the North has tested since its Hwasong-15 ICBM in November 2017.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un chaired a ruling party meeting on January 20, where senior party members made a veiled threat to lift the moratorium, citing what they perceived as US hostility and threats.

The latest launch suggests Kim's moratorium is already broken, said Lee Choon Geun, a missile expert and honorary research fellow at South Korea's Science and Technology Policy Institute.

In his strongest comments toward the North in years, Moon said the situation around the Korean Peninsula is beginning to resemble 2017, when North Korea's provocative run in nuclear and long-range missile testing resulted in an exchange of war threats between Kim and Trump.

Moon said the North's latest moves violated UN Security Council resolutions and were a "challenge toward the international community's efforts to denuclearise the Korean Peninsula, stabilize peace and find a diplomatic solution" to the nuclear standoff.

The North "should stop its actions that create tensions and pressure and respond to the dialogue offers by the international community including South Korea and the United States," Moon said, according to his office.

Moon had ambitiously pushed for inter-Korean engagement and held three summits with Kim in 2018 while also lobbying to set up Kim's first summit with Trump in 2018, where they issued vague aspirations for a nuclear-free peninsula.

But the diplomacy derailed after the collapse of the second Kim-Trump meeting in 2019, when the Americans rejected



A General view of the 19th Plenary Meeting of the 14th Standing Committee of the Supreme People's Assembly (SPA) of DPR Korea, yesterday.

North Korea's demand for major sanctions relief in exchange for a partial surrender of its nuclear capabilities.

Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno said yesterday's missile flew for around 30 minutes and landed in waters outside Japan's exclusive economic zone. There were no immediate reports of damage to boats or aircraft.

The US Indo-Pacific Command said the United States condemned North Korea's testing activity and called on Pyongyang to refrain from further

destabilising acts. It said the latest launch did not "pose an immediate threat to US personnel, territory, or that of our allies."

Takehiro Funakoshi, director-general for Asian and Oceanian Affairs at Japan's Foreign Ministry, discussed the launch in separate phone calls with Sung Kim, Biden's special envoy for North Korea, and Noh Kyu-duk, South Korea's nuclear envoy. The officials shared an understanding that yesterday's missile was of enhanced destructive power and reaffirmed trilateral cooperation in the face

of the North Korean threat, Japan's Foreign Ministry said.

Experts say the North could halt its testing spree after the start of the Beijing Winter Olympics next week out of respect for China, its major ally and economic lifeline. But there's also expectation that it could significantly up the ante in weapons demonstrations once the Olympics end in February to grab the attention of the Biden administration, which has been focusing more on confronting China and Russia over its conflict with Ukraine.

Taiwan President pledges to 'stride' into the world

REUTERS — TAIPEI

Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen thanked democratic nations for their support of the island in her Lunar New Year message yesterday and pledged to "stride out" into the world, sounding a defiant note in the face of unrelenting Chinese pressure.

China, which claims the island as its own territory, has increased military activity around Taiwan over the past two years and stepped up efforts to limit its international role, lambasting those who have sought to support Taipei or strengthen ties with it.

In a short pre-recorded video message a day before the eve of Lunar New Year today, the formal start of the most important holiday in the Chinese-speaking world, Tsai expressed appreciation for growing international support for Taiwan.

"I want to especially thank all democratic partners for their support to Taiwan over the past year," she said. "We will continue to deepen exchanges with all countries and stride out into the world." Taiwan has been heartened by support not only from the United States, traditionally its most important backer, but also leaders and politicians in Japan, Europe and by the G7 group of industrialised nations, all of which have angered Beijing.

Tsai neither directly mentioned China nor directly offered it new year greetings, simply extending best wishes to "good friends" around the world celebrating the festival, which is also observed in countries such as Vietnam and South Korea.

Australia anxious as schools back in full swing amidst Omicron wave

REUTERS — MELBOURNE

Thousands of Australian students return to school today after a summer break, as the country remains anxious about the spread of COVID-19, which yesterday killed at least 88 people in the country.

Although some schools reopened last week, most will do so on Monday, many requiring students to be tested twice a week.

Fuelled by the fast-spreading Omicron variant, infections have exploded in Australia since December, the beginning of summer in southern hemisphere.

There have now been two million COVID-19 cases there;

up until December, Australia, a country of 25 million people, had counted just 400,000 since the pandemic began two years ago.

In New South Wales, the country's most populous state, with eight million people, more than 700 have died of COVID-19 this year. In the whole of Australia just more than 3,700 people have died during the pandemic.

"The single most important thing, and I can't stress this enough, if we can roll out our booster programme, lift that uptake of boosters," Kerry Chant, the state's chief health officer, said yesterday, warning that there would be more deaths.

Yesterday, at least 88 people died of COVID-19 across Australia. The death rate has increased sharply recently but remains a fraction of what other developed countries have seen.

Australia has vaccinated more than 93% of its adult population with two doses; nearly eight million have received more than two.

Dan Andrews, the premier of Victoria state, which reported 20 deaths yesterday, flagged that all Australians may soon need to be triple-dosed to be considered fully vaccinated.

"I think it's only a matter of time before the relevant federal agencies confirm that this is three doses, it is not two plus a bonus," Andrews said.



Lanterns herald Chinese Lunar New Year in Jakarta

A general view of a shopping mall bazaar decorated with lanterns ahead of the Chinese Lunar New Year, in Jakarta, Indonesia, yesterday.

Weather, cleanup keep oil slick away from Thailand

AP — RAYONG

Favourable wind and sea conditions kept an oil slick away from beaches in eastern Thailand yesterday, according to authorities, but concerns remained that the spillage may yet strike a popular resort island.

Emergency workers in protective gear removed contaminated sand from the Mae Ram-phueng beach in Rayong province, southeast of Bangkok, which was shut on Saturday.

Some 20-50 tons of oil are estimated to have leaked

Tuesday night in the Gulf of Thailand from an undersea hose used to load tankers at an off-shore mooring point owned by the Star Petroleum Refining Co.

The leak was stopped within hours, the company said. Most of the oil slick was being pushed toward Koh Samet, a popular tourist island that's just beginning to recover from the Coronavirus pandemic slump along with the rest of the country.

Natural Resources and Environment Minister Varawut Silpa-archa said authorities were taking steps to prevent it

hitting the beaches there.

Aircraft have been dropping chemicals to disperse the oil and deploying floating booms to trap it so that it can be skimmed from the surface and removed.

"I am very confident that for one we will be able to prevent the majority of the oil spill to ruin our natural resources, especially the corals," Varawut Silpa-archa told The Associated Press after surveying the Rayong beach.

"Of course some of the corals will be damaged but the majority of it we will be able to

save and we will be able to minimize the effects on the people," he said.

The beachside area is largely dependent on tourists. It has been suffering from the pandemic that has kept visitors away, and the spill will make recovery harder. The local fishing industry was also affected by the pollution.

Asked how long until he could declare the disaster over, Varawut said that "visually it should be over within a week but environmentally it would last years."

IN BRIEF

Hong Kong govt says commenting on its COVID-19 strategy is not 'illegal'

HONG KONG: Having discussions and making "general remarks" about Hong Kong's Coronavirus strategy is not illegal and does not violate the Chinese territory's national security law, the government said yesterday, as it grapples to control a rise in cases.

Hong Kong has followed China in sticking to a zero-COVID policy with the economic and psychological tolls rapidly rising, and measures becoming more draconian than those first implemented in 2020. Experts have said that the current policy is not sustainable as cases continue to increase due to the highly transmissible Omicron strain.

Hong Kong's policy to achieve "Dynamic zero infection" was the most effective way to fight the outbreak and protect public health, the government said in a statement.

The statement came after local legislator Junius Ho said that experts who suggested Hong Kong should live with the virus the way Western experts do may have violated its national security law, public broadcaster RTHK reported. — Reuters

Manila probes online 'assassination' threat against Marcos Jr

MANILA: The Philippines' justice ministry has ordered law enforcers to investigate a post on the social media platform TikTok threatening to assassinate presidential candidate Ferdinand Marcos Jr, acting on a tip received by its cybercrime unit.

"If a bomb joke is actionable, so is a threat of assassination, whether true or not," Department of Justice (DOJ) Secretary Menardo Guevarra told reporters.

Charito Zamora, the head of the DOJ's cybercrime unit, said her office received a "text report" from a concerned citizen on Friday about a TikTok post which said: "We are meeting everyday to prepare to have BBM assassinated."

Get ready," Zamora said her office has referred the matter to the police and the National Bureau of Investigation, and has requested TikTok to preserve data related to the account while authorities conduct a probe. — Reuters

Beijing seals off more residential areas, reports 12 cases

TAIPEI: Beijing officials said yesterday they sealed off several residential communities in the city's northern district after 12 cases of COVID-19 were found.

Residents in the Anzhenli neighbourhood in Chaoyang district were sealed off on Saturday, and will not be allowed to leave their compound. Beijing is on high alert as it prepares to host the Olympic Games opening on Friday.

While the cases are low compared to other countries in the region, China has double down on its "zero-tolerance" policy, which includes breaking the chain of transmission as soon as it is found.

The city is also setting up 19 points in the area to test residents every day until Friday, officials said at a briefing on the pandemic, according to state-backed *Beijing News*. — AP

Malaysian firms facing US bans over forced labour summoned by ministry

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia's Human Resources Ministry said yesterday it would call in all companies facing US import bans over suspected forced labour practices to discuss immediate action to address the allegations.

Malaysian factories, which include major suppliers of palm oil and medical gloves, have been under increased scrutiny over allegations of abuse of migrant workers, who make up a significant part of the country's manufacturing workforce.

US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) said on Friday it would bar imports from disposable glove maker YTY Group based on information indicating that the firm used forced labour, the seventh such ban on a Malaysian company in two years. The agency also determined that Malaysian palm oil producer Sime Darby Plantation Bhd uses forced labour in its operations and that the company's goods were subject to seizure. — Reuters

Storm Malik hits northern Europe with force; at least four dead

AP — HELSINKI

A powerful winter storm swept through northern Europe over the weekend, killing at least four people, destroying houses and cars, closing bridges and causing flooding and halting transport while leaving thousands of households without electricity.

Storm Malik was advancing in the Nordic region yesterday, bringing strong gusts of wind, and extensive rain and snowfall in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden.

Malik reached the Nordic region and northern Germany late Saturday after moving in from Britain where it caused havoc with material damage and transport chaos, hitting Scotland particularly bad.

In Scotland, a boy and a 60-year-old woman were killed on Saturday by falling trees as strong winds battered northern parts of Britain.

Wind gusts of more than 160kph have been reported in parts of Scotland, causing widespread disruption to transport and power cuts to tens of thousands of homes.

Scottish leader Nicola Sturgeon warned that another storm due to hit the region yesterday might be "more severe for parts of Scotland" than anticipated.

In Denmark, excessively strong winds with heavy rain caused the temporary closure of several bridges on Saturday including the key Oeresund road and rail bridge connecting Copenhagen and the Swedish city of Malmo.

Danish media reported that a 78-year-old woman died from severe injuries after falling in strong winds. In neighboring Germany, local media reported that a man was killed on Saturday after being hit by a billboard that was loosened by the storm.

Flooding in many parts of Denmark caused substantial material damage. Several traffic crashes caused by falling trees and flying debris were reported to police.

Southern parts of Sweden were badly hit, too, and thousands of households were without electricity by yesterday afternoon. Ferries to the Baltic Sea island of Gotland were cancelled because of strong winds.

Severe damage to houses, cars and boats, among other things, were reported in Norway while heavy snowfall throughout Finland caused road crashes and disrupted bus and train traffic in parts of the country.

NATO calls on Europe to diversify energy supply

REUTERS — LONDON/MOSCOW

Europe needs to diversify its energy supplies, the head of NATO said yesterday, as Britain warned it was "highly likely" that Russia, a major natural gas supplier, was looking to invade Ukraine.

Russia has massed some 120,000 troops near its neighbour and demanded the western defence alliance pull back troops and weapons from eastern Europe and bar Ukraine, a former Soviet state, from ever joining the Western defence alliance. US officials said on Saturday Russia's military buildup had been expanded to include supplies to treat casualties of any conflict. Across the border in Ukraine, locals trained as army reservists as the government scrambled to prepare.

Moscow denies any plan to invade but said yesterday it

would ask NATO to clarify whether it intends to implement key security commitments after earlier saying the alliance's response to its demands did not go far enough.

"If they do not intend to do so, then they should explain why," Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said on state television. "This will be a key question in determining our future proposals." The United States has said it is waiting to hear back from Russia. It says NATO will not withdraw from eastern Europe or bar Ukraine but it is prepared to discuss topics such as arms control and confidence-building measures.

Washington has spent weeks trying to build agreement with European partners on a strong sanctions package if Russia attacks Ukraine. But the issue is divisive, with Germany urging

"We are concerned about the energy situation in Europe because it demonstrates the vulnerability of being too dependent on one supplier of natural gas and that's the reason why NATO allies agree that we need to work and focus on diversification of supplies," Stoltenberg said.

"prudence". The European Union depends on Russia for around a third of its gas supplies and any interruption would exacerbate an existing energy crisis caused by a shortage.

"We are concerned about the energy situation in Europe because it demonstrates the vulnerability of being too dependent on one supplier of natural gas and that's the reason why NATO allies agree that we need to work and focus on diversification of supplies," NATO Secretary-General

Jens Stoltenberg said. Britain said yesterday it would expand the scope of its own possible sanctions in legislation this week to deter Russian President Vladimir Putin.

"We think it's highly likely that he is looking to invade Ukraine. That is why we're doing all we can through deterrence and diplomacy, to urge him to desist," Foreign Secretary Liz Truss told BBC television. Truss, who is due to visit both Ukraine and Russia in the next two weeks, told *Sky News* the legislation would enable

Britain to hit a much wider variety of targets "so there can be nobody who thinks that they will be immune to those sanctions".

Asked if the new powers could include the ability to seize property in London, Truss said: "Nothing is off the table."

The Centre for American Progress, a US think tank, has Britain would face a challenge uprooting wealthy Russians with Kremlin links from London given close ties "between Russian money and the United Kingdom's ruling conservative party, the press, and its real estate and financial industry".

Asked about this, Truss said: "There's a real threat here to freedom and democracy in Europe. And that is more important than short term economic gains, both for the United Kingdom but also for our European allies."



Social Democratic Party leader Rui Rio casts his ballot at a polling station during the general election in Porto, Portugal, yesterday.

Portuguese vote in elections marked by COVID-19, uncertainty

REUTERS — LISBON

Portuguese voters went to the polls yesterday in a parliamentary election with no clear winner in sight and uncertainty increased by potentially low turnout amid record Coronavirus infections.

Polling stations opened at 8am (0800 GMT). At the University of Lisbon, staff outnumbered mostly elderly voters, with signs on the walls asking people to wear a mask, observe social distancing and to use their own pen. Some even wore gloves for extra protection.

"I have been vaccinated, and I haven't had COVID-19 yet... But I felt very safe," said Maria Odete, 73, adding that the election race appeared too close

to produce a stable government capable of bringing positive change. The government has allowed those infected to leave isolation and cast ballots in person, recommending that they do so in the last hour before polling stations close at 7pm (1900 GMT) and promising "absolute safety" during the vote.

Over a tenth of Portugal's 10 million people are estimated to be isolating because of COVID-19. As in many European countries, infections have spiked lately, stoked by the Omicron variant, although widespread vaccination has kept deaths and hospitalisations lower than in earlier waves. The election is wide open as the centre-left ruling Socialists have lost much

of their lead in opinion polls to the main opposition party, the centre-right Social Democrats, and neither is likely to win a stable majority.

The vote, called in November after parliament rejected the minority Socialist government's budget bill, is likely to worsen political volatility and could produce a short-lived government, unless one of the main parties manages to cobble together a working alliance, which could be a daunting task.

"We want more stability but I don't think that's what is going to happen. I think we'll have one or two years of instability," said Mario Henriques, 42, as he walked out of the polling station in a rush, wearing sports clothes.

IN BRIEF

Italy re-elects President Mattarella

ROME: Italian head of state Sergio Mattarella has been re-elected for a second term, with party chiefs asking him to carry on after a week of fruitless, often fraught voting in parliament to choose a successor.

Relieved party chiefs thanked 80-year-old Mattarella for agreeing to remain, but the failed attempts to replace him during seven rounds of balloting have left deep scars, with potentially dangerous repercussions for political stability.

Nonetheless, financial markets are likely to react positively to the status quo, which will see Prime Minister Mario Draghi, who had made clear he hoped to become president himself, continuing as prime minister instead. Draghi said in a statement that Mattarella's re-election was "splendid news for Italians," thanking him for "his decision to go along with the extremely strong will of parliament." —Reuters

Harry, Meghan voice concern to Spotify over COVID-19 misinformation

LONDON: Britain's Prince Harry and his wife Meghan have expressed their concern to Spotify about COVID-19 misinformation on its platform and are committed to continuing to work with the company, a spokesperson for their Archewell foundation said yesterday.

Singer-songwriters Neil Young and Joni Mitchell are removing their music from Spotify in protest that the popular streaming service has allowed the airing of misinformation about COVID-19 vaccines. Harry and Meghan signed a series of corporate deals, including to produce and host podcasts for Spotify, as part of their efforts to make a living following their split with Britain's royal family announced in 2020. "Hundreds of millions of people are affected by the serious harms of rampant mis- and disinformation every day," the spokesperson said. —Reuters

Northern Ireland marks 50 years since Bloody Sunday

LONDON: Relatives of those killed and injured on Bloody Sunday marched in Northern Ireland to mark 50 years since one of the deadliest days in the conflict known as The Troubles.

Thirteen people were killed and 15 others injured when British soldiers fired on civil rights protesters on Jan 30, 1972, in the city of Derry, also known as Londonderry. Hundreds made their way yesterday to the Bloody Sunday Monument for the annual memorial service and wreath-laying ceremony. UK government apologised in 2010 after an official inquiry found that the soldiers fired without justification on unarmed, fleeing civilians and then lied about it for decades. The report refuted an initial probe that took place soon after the slayings that said the soldiers had been defending themselves against Irish Republican Army bombers and gunmen. —AP

French left weakened in presidential race as candidates reject alliance

AP — PARIS

The French left runs divided and weakened in the presidential race as at least five main candidates rejected any alliance with each other - and an online vote meant to pick a leader yesterday appeared doomed to fail.

The so-called Popular Primary has been organised by left-wing supporters as an initiative meant to unite their ranks before the election scheduled in two rounds on April 10 and 24.

More than 460,000 people registered for the primary. Results of the four-day online vote were expected yesterday evening. But the move already appears bound to fail: key contenders said they wouldn't respect the outcome because they don't respect the process.

At least five main figures from the left and the far-left are running for president, in addition to smaller candidates. At the moment, none of them appears in a position to reach the runoff in April's election.

Centrist President Emmanuel Macron, who doesn't hide his intention to run for reelection, is considered the front-runner. Conservative candidate Valérie Pécresse and two far-right figures, Marine le Pen and Eric Zemmour, are the main challengers

according to polls, placing far-left candidate Jean-Luc Melenchon in fifth position.

Melenchon - a political firebrand with a notorious temper - refuses to form a united front with other left-wing candidates. The 70-year-old politician, who heads the "Rebel France" party, promised to guarantee jobs for everyone, raise the minimum wage, lower the retirement age to 60 and hike taxes on multinationals and rich households.

The Greens' contender, Yannick Jadot, 54, and the Socialist candidate, Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo, 62, also rejected the idea to run together despite a formerly traditional alliance between their parties. Another candidate, Fabien Roussel, 52, is running for the Communist Party.

Hidalgo's campaign so far failed to prompt enthusiasm from leftist voters. Her once-powerful party remains weakened after the election in 2017 of Macron - when Socialist President Francois Hollande decided not to run for reelection amid unprecedented popularity. Jadot unveiled on Saturday his electoral platform during a rally in Lyon, saying climate change is the "biggest challenge" to face.

"Tomorrow's France must get out of energies of the past," he said. He promised not to build any

new nuclear reactor in France and to progressively replace the old ones by renewable energy, which he said could take up to 25 years. France is relying on nuclear power for 70% of its energy.

Jadot also vowed to combat social injustice via ensuring a minimum revenue of 920 euros (\$1,026) financed by the state to all adults living in poverty.

Earlier this month, another well-known figure of the left, former justice minister Christiane Taubira, joined the race in the hope of convincing others to join forces behind her candidacy.

So far, it hasn't worked. Critics and rivals said her candidacy is further splintering the left. Taubira, 69, is a staunch feminist and a champion of minorities. She is revered for championing a same-sex marriage bill into French law in 2013. She last ran for president in 2002, the first Black woman to do so in France, and she garnered 2.3% of the vote.

She agreed to take part in the "Popular Primary" along with some smaller candidates.

"It's embracing democracy and democracy offers no guarantees. The outcome is unpredictable. It's a risk, but it's a risk we have chosen to take together," she told her supporters this week in the southwestern city of Bordeaux.



Protest against COVID-19 curbs

Demonstrators take part in a protest against government measures to curb the spread of the Coronavirus in Nuremberg, Germany, yesterday.

Russia's COVID-19 tally hits pandemic record

AP — MOSCOW

Russia's daily count of new Coronavirus infections surged to more than 121,000 yesterday, an eightfold increase compared with the beginning of the month as the highly contagious Omicron variant spreads through the country.

The state Coronavirus task force reported 121,288 new

infections over the past 24 hours - an all-time high and 8,000 more than a day earlier. The country's infection numbers have rocketed since early January, when only about 15,000 new cases per day were tallied. The task force said 668 people died of COVID-19 in the past day, bring Russia's total fatality count for the pandemic to 330,728, by far the largest in Europe.

Despite the surging infections, authorities have avoided imposing any major restrictions to stem the surge, saying the health system has been coping with the influx of patients.

Earlier this month, parliament indefinitely postponed introducing restrictions on the unvaccinated that would have proven unpopular among vaccine-hesitant Russians.

About 1,400 US flights cancelled after winter storm in Northeast

REUTERS/BLOOMBERG — NEW YORK

About 1,400 US flights were canceled early yesterday after the northeastern part of the country was walloped by a fierce winter storm a day earlier.

Several US states had declared emergencies in response to the storm, which formed in the Atlantic Ocean off the Carolinas and was forecast to continue depositing snow into yesterday morning as it moved north to Maine.

The total number of flight cancellations within, into, or out of the United States was about 1,400 as of 10:30am ET (1530 GMT), according to flight-tracking website FlightAware.com. Another 647 US-related flights were delayed, the data showed.

The LaGuardia Airport and the John F. Kennedy

Several US states had declared emergencies in response to the storm, which formed in the Atlantic Ocean off the Carolinas.

International Airport in New York City and the Boston Logan International Airport each had over 200 flight cancellations as of early Sunday.

The fierce winter storm on Saturday dropped more than 2 feet (60 cm) of snow on some areas while packing high winds, prompting thousands of flight cancellations and leading governors in Rhode Island and other states to curtail access to the roads.

New York's Long Island town of Islip was the hardest hit statewide, Governor Kathy Hochul told *WCBS-TV* yesterday. "We're going to give

them the golden snowball award for this week, this storm. They were at 24.7 inches," Hochul said.

Much quieter weather was expected across the US East Coast on Sunday, the National Weather Service said.

In neighboring Canada, the worst of the cold weather was over in Atlantic Canada, but many communities were dealing with residual blowing snow, rain, strong winds and storm surge yesterday, according to the Weather Network channel.

The conditions on the Massachusetts island of Nantucket were improving after the powerful nor'easter flooded roads and caused a large power outage on Saturday, the local police department said. The water was deep enough for two high school students to row a canoe along a flooded street, according to a photo posted on



People carry sleds in Manhattan as a powerful storm hits the region, in New York City, on Saturday.

social media. In Massachusetts, about 53,000 out of 2.6 million customers were without electricity as of early yesterday, according to the PowerOutage.us website.

The weather may have contributed to the death of an elderly woman who was found

on Saturday in a hotel parking lot in Uniondale, New York, with her car window open, according to an officer at the Nassau County Police Department in Long Island.

Boston tied a daily snow record, and blizzard conditions were confirmed across New

England and Long Island from the storm.

Boston received 23.6 inches at Logan International Airport in 24 hours, tying a 2003 record for the snowiest day, said Kristie Smith, a National Weather Service meteorologist in Norton, Massachusetts.

Argentine truckers stranded at Chile border by slow COVID-19 testing

REUTERS — USPALLATA

Thousands of truck drivers from Argentina were stuck at the Chilean border on Saturday due to slow COVID-19 testing, as Chile faced its second transport delay crisis.

Since Jan. 21, more than 3,000 trucks have been stranded at the customs checkpoint of Cristo Redentor in Mendoza, according to the Argentinean Federation of Business Entities for Cargo Transport (FADEEAC).

The long wait has put both drivers and some of the trucks to the test, as trucks with refrigerator units must stay running at all times to keep the cargos at cold temperatures.

"This is becoming a real problem," said Brazilian truck driver Junior Cesar, whose truck is parked in Uspallata, Argentina, near the Chilean border. "The engines are running day and night and they're starting to fail and affect the cargo." Frustrated drivers waited by their trucks, cooking and sharing whatever food they could buy. They showered using buckets of water or a

Since Jan. 21, more than 3,000 trucks have reportedly been stranded at the customs checkpoint in Mendoza.

bathroom nearby that charges 300 Argentine pesos (\$3) per use.

"I've been here for two weeks," said Ruben Soza, a truck driver from Mendoza. "I have a refrigeration unit as you can see, with garlic, and the gasoline is not enough to run the refrigeration unit." A similar problem has occurred at Chile's northern border in the Tambo Quemado mountain pass, where drivers from Bolivia too face long waits in line for COVID-19 testing.

The FADEEAC has asked Argentina's foreign ministry to intervene and try to prevent further delays and minimize the economic losses, which according to FADEEAC estimates add up to \$700 a day.

On Friday, Chile's health ministry reported 26,727 new COVID-19 cases. Argentina reported 63,884.

Trump says he would pardon Jan. 6 rioters if he becomes president again

REUTERS — CONROE

US former President Donald Trump said on Saturday if he were to run for president and win in 2024, he would pardon people charged with criminal offenses in connection with the deadly Jan. 6 assault by his supporters on the US Capitol.

Trump, who has not said whether he will run for president again after his defeat by Democrat Joe Biden in the 2020 election, was speaking at a rally in Conroe, Texas.

"Another thing we'll do, and so many people have been asking me about it, if I run and if I win, we will treat those people from Jan. 6 fairly," Trump said to applause.

"We will treat them fairly. And if it requires pardons we will give them pardons. Because they are being treated so unfairly."

Thousands of Trump supporters stormed the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, the worst assault on Congress since the War of 1812. Fueled by Trump's false

claims that his November 2020 election defeat was the result of fraud, the attackers sought to stop Congress from certifying Biden's victory.

One police officer who responded to the scene died the day after the attack, while four others who guarded the Capitol died by suicide.

About 140 police officers were injured during the hours-long attack. Four rioters also died. More than 700 people have been charged with joining in the assault.



Former US President Donald Trump speaks during a rally, in Conroe, Texas, on Saturday.

Man held for threatening President Biden

AP — WASHINGTON

A Kansas man who was traveling to Washington was being held on Saturday on charges of threatening President Joe Biden, authorities said.

Scott Merryman was in the Washington County Detention Center in Hagerstown, Maryland, awaiting a court appearance set for Monday, a detention center official said.

A court filing in the case said Merryman phoned police in Independence, Kansas, on Tuesday and told them that he was going to the nation's capital to see the president.

In a telephone interview with a US Secret Service agent on Wednesday, Merryman said that God told him to go to Washington to cut off "the head of the serpent in the heart of the nation," the filing states.

Merryman denied in the interview that Biden was the serpent.

Another Secret Service agent located Merryman at the parking lot of a Cracker Barrel restaurant in Hagerstown. The agent searched Merryman and found three rounds of ammunition and a spotting scope, but no gun or other weapons, according to the court document.

On Thursday, Merryman called the White House switch board and threatened Biden, the document says.

The criminal complaint calling for his arrest on the federal charges was filed on Friday.

The New York Times reported that Merryman made the threats over three days, starting on Tuesday, when he called the police in Independence, Kan., and said he was heading to Washington, DC, to see the president, according to an affidavit filed in the US District Court for the District of Maryland.

Mexican villagers on cartel frontline clash with soldiers

AP — MEXICO CITY

Inhabitants of a town on the front line of a turf war between rival drug cartels in Mexico said soldiers fired on them during a clash on Saturday in the western state of Michoacan.

State police denied the government was responsible for the violence. José Alfredo Ortega, the head of state police, said soldiers were retreating when they came under fire from another direction, and that later someone detonated an explosive device.

The clash occurred in an

area where the Jalisco cartel is fighting a bloody turf war with gangs from Michoacan. The two sides have used trenches, sharpshooters, bombs dropped by drones and homemade armored cars against each other. Increasingly, civilians have found themselves on the front lines of the fighting.

The incident involved protesters from a Jalisco-dominated town, Lomas Blancas. They are angry because they claim government policy favors the Michoacan-based Viagras cartel.

Soldiers are in a difficult

position in Michoacan; the government strategy has been to repel attempts by the Jalisco cartel to gain territory in Michoacan, but do little or nothing about the Viagras, who set up roadblocks to extort money from inhabitants.

Soldiers have apparently been ordered just to keep rival cartels apart, but that angers townspeople in Jalisco-dominated towns like Loma Blanca, because soldiers don't prevent the Viagras from operating.

The protesters provided video of parts of the clash, showing demonstrators and

soldiers engaged in shoving, shouting and rock throwing on both sides. In the video, detonations can be heard, but those may have been tear gas canisters or warning shots.

Ortega said that from a nearby hill, "up there, criminals were firing shots." A statement by his department said two soldiers were wounded and two suspects arrested.

But protest organizer José Francisco Helizondo said several protesters were wounded by some kind of live fire. Videos of one of the men appears to show shrapnel or

shotgun pellets in his leg. Ortega said somebody detonated an explosive device, which he believed may have caused the injuries. Mexico's Defense Department did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The area's produce - limes and cattle heading out, or supplies heading in - have been forced to pay a war tax to the Viagras.

The protesters, who have faced off with soldiers before, are demanding the army open the roads and act with equal force against both cartels.

IN BRIEF

Mexico posts 522 COVID-19 deaths

MEXICO CITY: Mexico's Health Ministry on Saturday reported 522 more fatalities from COVID-19 and 42,582 new infections, bringing the overall death toll since the pandemic began to 305,762 and the number of cases to 4,916,143. — *Reuters*

11 dead in Bolivia bus accident

SUCRE: At least 11 people were killed and 18 injured when a bus fell into a ravine in Cochabamba department in central Bolivia.

It was not immediately known how many people were on the bus. The driver was among those who survived the fall. — *QNA*



Peru oil spill cleanup

Workers clean the beach near Repsol's La Pampilla refinery after the recent oil spill that has caused an ecological disaster on the coast of Lima, in Ventanilla, Peru, on Saturday.

Guatemala detains 10 people in raids on migrant smugglers

REUTERS — GUATEMALA CITY

Guatemalan authorities working with the US Homeland Security agency have arrested 10 people in raids against a migrant smuggling group linked to the massacre of 19 people in Mexico last year, Guatemalan officials said.

Guatemala's Public Prosecutor's Office said 19 raids were being carried out in the western town of Comitancillo to dismantle the human smuggling network that took the Guatemalan migrants to Mexico.

"An operation is underway," said Juan Luis Pantaleon, spokesperson for the Public Prosecutor's Office.

A national police spokesman said eight men and two women had been detained so far. Sixteen of the 19 people

killed in the gruesome massacre in the northeastern Mexican state of Tamaulipas state in January 2021 were Guatemalans. Their bodies, some badly charred and with gunshot wounds, were found along a migrant smuggling route in a remote area of Tamaulipas.

Most of the Guatemalans killed were from Comitancillo, in the San Marcos department, west of Guatemala City. Investigations into the murders pointed to the involvement of 12 members of the Mexican police.

Every year, thousands of Central Americans and Mexicans flee poverty and violence to seek a better life in the United States. Many fall victim to crime on the perilous journey.