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OUTSTANDING GRADUATES HONOURED

Amir patronises graduation ceremony of Ahmed bin Mohammed Military College

QNA — DOHA

Amir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani patronised the graduation ceremony of the 18th batch of cadets of Ahmed bin Mohammed Military College, at the College's headquarters yesterday.

The ceremony was attended by Prime Minister and Minister of Interior H E Sheikh Khalid bin Khalifa bin Abdulaziz Al Thani, and a number of Their Excellencies Sheikhs and Ministers.

The ceremony was also attended by leaderships of security, military and university colleges, institutes and academies in brotherly and friendly countries, Their Excellencies heads of diplomatic missions accredited to the State, officers of the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Interior, the Amiri Guard, the Internal Security Force (Lekhwiya), the State Security, and guardians of the graduates.

The national anthem was played at the beginning of the ceremony. Then the commander of the graduates' queue came forward requesting H H the Amir to inspect the 250 graduates from the State of Qatar, the State of Kuwait and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

After the march of the graduates' and the military parade, Amir honoured 11 outstanding graduates. After that, the flag was handed over from the 18th batch to the 19th batch, and the appointment order was read out. At the end of the ceremony, officers of the 18th batch took the oath and recited the College anthem.



PATIENT WITH CONGENITAL ABNORMALITY

HMC performs rare robotic surgery

FAZEENA SALEEM
THE PENINSULA

A team at Hamad Medical Corporation's Bariatric and Metabolic Surgery Center conducted a remarkably successful robotic sleeve gastrectomy surgery for a middle-aged woman with a rare condition.

The surgery was performed on a 30-year-old woman with Situs inversus totalis - a rare congenital abnormality characterized by a mirror-image transposition of both the abdominal and the thoracic organs. The surgery is considered arguably the first of its kind in the world, said Consultant of Metabolic, Bariatric, and Robotic Surgery at HMC, Dr. Jassim Fakhro while addressing the media yesterday.

"On February 6 we performed a sleeve gastrectomy surgery for a very rare case, where the patient has congenital condition Situs inversus totalis in which the major visceral organs are reversed or mirrored from their normal positions. It is very rare and happens only one in 10,000 people," he said.

> The surgery performed on a 30 years old woman with Situs inversus totalis - a rare congenital abnormality characterized by a mirror-image transposition of both the abdominal and the thoracic organs.

"This is the first robot-assisted sleeve gastrectomy surgery to be done on a patient with such a condition, according to published research. The patient is doing well and has been discharged from the hospital," said Dr. Fakhro who performed the surgery along with a team from the Bariatric and Metabolic Surgery Center.

Dr. Fakhro said that the patient is leading a normal life and she had to undergo the surgery as she met the criteria for a bariatric surgery.

"She was having some problems related to obesity and surgical treatment was necessary for her. So she can live a normal life without any complications related to obesity," said Dr. Fakhro.

"As she informed us about the congenital abnormality, we did all required investigations to make sure that everything is in the right order and to conduct the surgery with the least possible complications," he added.

Dr. Fakhro that the patient will not need any additional care but will go through the stranded follow-up checks for three years – which is common for anyone who undergoes bariatric surgery.

According to Dr. Fakhro although there are no obvious abnormalities in the function of transposed organs, anatomical irregularity causes important technical difficulties in the surgical procedure of the patient.

"Most of the surgeons are right-handed and the right hand is the dominant hand. But in cases such as the patient we operated on; everything is the opposite hand. So everything which you used to do with your dominant hand now the left hand has to be the dominant hand. We used the robot because it can avoid any tumors in the hand the 3D vision helps in performing the surgery," he said.

Bariatric surgery, or weight-loss surgery, provides a long-lasting weight-loss solution for obese patients. The surgery, whether it would be a gastric bypass or gastric sleeve, makes changes to the stomach and digestive system that limits the amount of food that can be eaten and how many nutrients can be absorbed. ➔P2

DEADLY EARTHQUAKE

Qatari search and rescue team pulls out survivors in Gaziantep

THE PENINSULA DOHA

The Qatari search and rescue team managed to pull out two survivors from the rubble of a collapsed building in southern Turkiye.

The Turkish embassy in Doha said in a Tweet that the Qatari team managed to rescue a 12-year-old boy, who was stuck for long hours under the rubble, in Nordag, Gaziantep.

The Qatari International Search and Rescue Group of the Internal Security Force (Lekhwiya) arrived in Turkey on Tuesday coinciding with the arrival of the first flights of the air bridge allocated by Qatar to support Turkiye after the deadly earthquake.

The group has started managing the coordination cell for the operations of search and rescue teams for international organizations in the Turkish province of Gaziantep.

Meanwhile, Qatar TV urged everyone to participate in a relief campaign tomorrow evening to support the victims of the earthquake in Turkiye and Syria under the title "Support and Help" (Sanad and Uon).


Members of Qatari International Search and Rescue Group in Turkiye.

CHALLENGING CLIMATE CRISIS

Investment in clean energy could mitigate impact of climate change: Official

AYENI OLUSEGUN
THE PENINSULA

Countries like Qatar can invest and advocate for clean energy to combat desertification and mitigate the impact of climate change on the environment and the region, Director of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific, Indrika Ratwatte has said.

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is a crucial meeting point in a global network, given that it is a destination, transit, and origin of people and resources vital to the world's economy. However, with its arid climate, the region is also the hardest hit by climate change. According to a new study, the temperatures in the Middle East and the eastern Mediterranean are rising almost twice as fast as in the rest of the world.

"I think in that respect, a couple of things can be considered. One is clean energy. Harnessing this in this part of the world blessed with solar power would help the region. Solar energy is incredibly cheap if one knows how to harness it," Ratwatte told *The Peninsula* on the sidelines of a roundtable discussion titled "The Humanitarian Situation in Afghanistan and the Rohingya Refugee Crisis" hosted by the Center for Conflict and Humanitarian Studies at Doha Institute.

The challenging climate crisis has also caused a significant increase in migration. The MENA region has 12 of the world's 17 most water-stressed countries. According to United Nations reports, Arab countries hosted almost 15 per cent of migrants and refugees worldwide, with 12 Arab countries hosting 15 % of migrant workers globally in 2020. In the same year, there were around 2 million newly internally displaced persons due to natural disasters.

> The Middle East and North Africa region is a crucial meeting point in a global network, given that it is a destination, transit, and origin of people and resources vital to the world's economy. However, with its arid climate, the region is also the hardest hit by climate change.

Immigrants from within the Arab world, Africa, and South and Southeast Asia struggling with extreme weather events and water and land insecurities usually migrate to rich Arab Gulf states.

Ratwatte added that by tapping into the solar energy potential of the region, remote areas would be connected to renewable energy, which would reduce or cancel the dependence on generators, adding, "investment in areas and communities which are climate impacted would see that their vulnerabilities don't bottom out (reach the lowest point before any improvement begins)."

"That's what makes people move, and that's incredibly important, and I think Qatar is going to that technological side of clean energy and advocating for that. Promoting and supporting those initiatives would be great," the UNHCR regional head added. ➔P2

Unified electronic system for linking traffic violations between Qatar, UAE implemented

QNA — DOHA

The General Directorate of Traffic begin implementing yesterday unified electronic system for the linking of traffic violations between the State of Qatar and the United Arab Emirates.

This comes within the framework of joint efforts to enhance traffic safety and achieve the GCC initiative regarding the unified system for the linking of violations and exchanging of traffic data and information.

Director of the Traffic Awareness Department Brigadier Dr Mohammed Radi Al Hajri affirmed that the unified electronic system for the linking of traffic violations between Qatar and the UAE would enable vehicle driver to receive a text message on his mobile phone immediately once the traffic violation is recorded, and would allow him to pay the fine without the need to pay it in host country.

EDITORIAL ↘09

Relief initiatives

AS THE death toll from the devastating earthquakes that struck southern Turkey and northern Syria rose to nearly 20,000 and the number of those injured increased in what is the worst-ever disaster to hit both countries.

BUSINESS ↘ 10

Infrastructure facilities to accelerate

QATAR'S ECONOMY is steadily growing with pivotal projects that were carried out in recent years due to FIFA World Cup 2022 and major events in the country.

SPORT ↘ 15

Mikkelsen, Ostberg and Lindholm set to compete in Qatar

NORWEGIAN WRC stars Andreas Mikkelsen and Mads Ostberg and flying Finn Emil Lindholm have added a little touch of Scandinavian sparkle to an impressive entry list announced by QMMF for Qatar International Rally.

Amir honours graduates of Ahmed bin Mohammed Military College



TOP AND BELOW LEFT: Amir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani patronised the graduation ceremony of the 18th batch of cadets of Ahmed bin Mohammed Military College, at the College's headquarters yesterday. H H the Amir honoured 11 outstanding graduates. The ceremony was attended by Prime Minister and Minister of Interior H E Sheikh Khalid bin Khalifa bin Abdulaziz Al Thani, and a number of Their Excellencies Sheikhs and Ministers.





Amir opens new buildings at Al Dehailiyat Army Camp

Amir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani inaugurated yesterday the strategic communications building and remote sensing building of Qatari Amiri Signal and Information Technology Corps at Al Dehailiyat Army Camp. H H the Amir listened to a briefing on the various modern facilities and equipment. His Highness was also briefed on the latest technological means and information technology as well as mechanisms related to communications system. H H the Amir was accompanied by Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defence Affairs H E Dr. Khalid bin Mohammed Al Attiyah, Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces H E Staff Lieutenant General (Pilot) Salem bin Hamad bin Aqeel Al Nabit, Commander of Qatar Amiri Signal and Information Technology Corps H E Brig. Gen. Zayed Ahmed Al Kuwari, a number of Their Excellencies the Ministers, and senior army officers.

Shura Council attends preparatory panel meeting of Arab Parliament's 5th Congress in Cairo

QNA — CAIRO

The Shura Council is participating in the meetings of the Preparatory Committee of the 5th Congress of the Arab Parliament and Speakers of Arab Assemblies and Parliaments, which is set to be held in Cairo tomorrow – Saturday.

The meetings, which started Wednesday and will conclude yesterday, addressed the congress' draft document regarding the parliamentary vision to achieve Arabian food security, which is scheduled to be submitted to the 5th Congress for discussion and adoption by the heads of councils and parliaments.

In this regard, member of the Shura Council H E Badi bin Ali Al Badi, the Shura Council representative during the meetings, reviewed the State of Qatar's pioneering experience in the food security field, calling on the Arab Parliament to use that experience along with other relevant Gulf experiences as a reference.

The conference addresses the most prominent challenges and threats facing the Arab countries in the food security issue and the role that parliamentarians can play in this regard. In addition, the conference will address issues of instability and the continuation of crises and conflicts in some countries in the Arab world.

The conference will also discuss the repercussions of the current international crises, climate change impacts on Arab food security, and challenges of population increase in that regard.

The draft document will include ways to achieve Arab food security and the role that parliamentarians can play in promoting these efforts.

MSDF and QU sign agreement to boost scientific, administrative research

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

The Ministry of Social Development and Family (MSDF) signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Qatar University (QU). The ceremony was attended by Dr. Hassan Rashid Al Derham, President of Qatar University, and by several representatives from both institutions.

The MoU seeks to strengthen cooperation in the areas of research, mutual exchange of expertise, and community development. It also aims to conduct research and studies to support the design, implementation, and evaluation of policies and programs that contribute to the development of families in Qatar.

The MoU was signed by Ghanem Mubarak Al Kuwari, Assistant Undersecretary for Social Affairs at the Ministry of Social Development and Family, and Prof. Mariam Ali Al Maadeed, Vice President for Research and Graduate Studies at Qatar University.

The MoU provides a framework for collaboration in research, training, and community service. It will also support the exchange of knowledge and expertise, as well as provide opportunities for students and faculty to participate in projects and programmes related to social development and family welfare. It will allow QU to provide technical and academic support to the Ministry to improve the quality of life for individuals and families in Qatar. The agreement seeks to build cooperation with experts at QU in conducting Sharia, legal, social, economic, and psychological research, and benefit from research centers at QU in conducting statistical studies.

> The MoU provides a framework for collaboration in research, training, and community service. It will also support the exchange of knowledge and expertise, as well as provide opportunities for students and faculty to participate in projects and programmes related to social development and family welfare.

Al Kuwari indicated that the Ministry is keen to prepare and implement national strategies, plans, and policies related to the care of the family and seeks to provide a decent life for Qatari families by raising the efficiency of social workers.

"The signing of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Social Development and Family and Qatar University is an affirmation of the importance of institutionalizing cooperation and benefiting from the available capabilities to serve the two institutions. The MoU aims to act as a bridge to exchange knowledge and expertise to increase the effectiveness of both parties, in addition to developing, organizing, managing, and implementing programs and training courses on specializations related to social development," Al Kuwari said.

"The university represents the distinguished national academic organization among the universities in the region. It has long-standing expertise in all specialties, and we are keen to work in the field of joint development and building the skills, knowledge, and capabilities required for social workers," he added.

In her statement, Prof. Al Maadeed said: "We are pleased today to sign a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of Social Development and Family, as we believe in the importance of cooperation between state institutions in the fields of knowledge and research, and as a commitment from Qatar University to community and family development."

She added, "The memorandum aims to enhance cooperation between the two parties in the fields of research and studies, the exchange of expertise, and the organization of academic and social events, including research, training, scientific publishing, and everything that serves the common goals of the two parties to support the family and society."

The agreement will further strengthen the relationship between QU and the Ministry and will help the two institutions work together more effectively to support Qatar's development. The MoU is part of QU's ongoing commitment to foster collaboration in research, training, and community development.



Dr. Jassim Fakhro

HMC performs rare robotic surgery

FROM PAGE 1

Bariatric and Metabolic Surgery Center are one of the largest centers specializing in obesity treatment and bariatric surgery in the world, as it has steadily continued to expand since 2011 to provide integrated, evidence-based medical services at the highest international standards.

"At HMC bariatric surgeries are performed at Hamad General Hospital and the Al Wakra Hospital. We have performed more than 10,000 surgeries since 2011; among that in 2022 we conducted 703 surgeries. Robotic surgeries were introduced in 2012 and since then 135 surgeries were performed," said Dr. Fakhro. According to Dr. Fakhro HMC follows National Guidelines for bariatric surgery and a protocol equal to international standards for bariatric surgeries.

INSPECTION CAMPAIGN

MoCI shuts down fruit and vegetables section at three food outlets

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI) has announced the closure of the vegetable and fruit section in three food outlets in Hazm Al Markhiya, Lusail, and Old Airport for violation of Article 7 of Law 8 of 2008 on consumer protection.

The affected outlets include Marza Hypermarket, Family Food Center, and Abu Khalifa Trading.

According to a statement from the ministry, the violations consisted of displaying products that included misleading data by changing the country of origin for some products and mixing products of different quality with the aim of selling them at a higher price, which is considered a violation of consumers' rights.

The closure period will be three days for each outlet, from February 7 to 9, the MoCI said.

"This measure comes as part of the intensive inspection campaigns carried out by the Ministry to monitor markets and commercial activities in Qatar and aims at controlling prices and uncovering abuses and fraudulent, counterfeit, and non-conforming goods," the ministry noted.

MoCI stressed that it would not tolerate any negligence in terms of meeting obligations stipulated in Law No. 8 of 2008 on Consumer Protection and its executive bylaws.

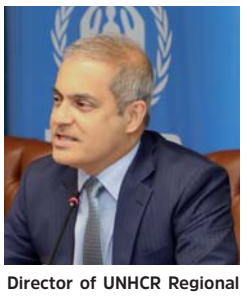
"The ministry is working to intensify its inspection campaigns in order to control violating practices and to refer violators of laws and Ministerial decisions to the competent authorities so that appropriate measures can be taken," it said.

Investment in clean energy could mitigate impact of climate change: Official

FROM PAGE 1

Ratwatte cited the high use of plastic products in the supply chain, leading to environmental degradation if not disposed of sustainably.

"We use a lot of plastic and products in our supply chains collectively -- which is single-use, and it pollutes many things. I think looking at reusable plastics, our supply chains, what we produce, and what we use in a greener manner would help." Meanwhile, during the roundtable talk, Ratwatte discussed the refugee crisis in Afghanistan and the Rohingya crisis. He disclosed that there are over 100 million refugees worldwide, mainly due to forced displacement (civil wars, insecurity and climate change). He noted that the refugee crisis poses a significant challenge citing the largest refugee camp in the world in the Cox's Bazar region of Bangladesh, which holds over 500,000 refugees.



Director of UNHCR Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific, Indrika Ratwatte.

> Ratwatte cited the high use of plastic products in the supply chain, leading to environmental degradation if not disposed of in a sustainable way.

Ratwatte called on the international community to protect refugees, provide humanitarian assistance and support repatriation.



Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defence Affairs H E Dr. Khalid bin Mohammed Al Attiyah during the award ceremony.

Qatari parachuting team dives into Guinness World Record for fourth time

QNA — DOHA

Under the patronage of Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defence Affairs H E Dr. Khalid bin Mohammed Al Attiyah, the award ceremony for breaking the world record for freestyle skydiving within the Guinness Book of World Records was held for the Qatar Skydive Team of the Qatar Air Sports Committee of the Joint Special Forces.

The ceremony was held in the presence of Commander of the Joint Special Forces Staff Brigadier General H E Jassim bin Ali Al Attiyah, secretary-general of the Qatar Air Sports Committee Hazaa Hamad Al Attiyah, and representatives of the Guinness Book of World Records.

The Qatar Skydive Team broke three Guinness World Records, the first of which was in 2018 in Deland, Florida, USA, by breaking the world record of the largest parachuting canopy formation at night with 25 parachutists.

The Qatar Skydive Team broke the world record for the largest parachuting canopy formation at night with 37 parachutists representing Qatar in the event which was held in Florida, USA.

The Qatar Skydive Team broke three Guinness World Records, the first of which was in 2018 in Deland, Florida, USA, by breaking the world record of the largest parachuting canopy formation at night with 25 parachutists. In November 2020, the team managed to break the world record of the most parachuting sequences in a canopy formation by a team of 5 in Evora, Portugal.

The third time was in June 2021 when they broke the record of the most canopy formation 4 sequences in a full break large formation in Zephyr Hills, Florida, USA.

With this record, the Qatar Skydive Team of the Qatar Air Sports Committee of the Joint Special Forces now holds 4 world records in the Guinness Book of World Records.

'ILLUMINATIONS' INITIATIVE

Education Ministry discusses World Cup legacy

QNA — DOHA

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education yesterday held the fifth discussion session of the 'Illuminations' initiative, entitled 'The World Cup legacy', which highlighted the lessons learned from Qatar's FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 hosting.

Moderated by General Supervisor of the 'Illuminations' initiative, Maryam Al Mohannadi, the session discussed the World Cup's impressive success, which transformed the concepts of volunteerism and sustainability into a tangible reality that stunned the world.

Addressing the session held under the slogan 'We Dialogue.. We Enlighten.. We Rise', Official Spokesperson for the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy (SC), Khaled Al Nama highlighted Qatar's success in overcoming the huge challenges related to the mega-event hosting.

He said that the tournament will have a positive impact on society, leave a sustainable legacy, and enhance many aspects, particularly its contributions to the positive change in the country.

The session discussed the World Cup's impressive success, which transformed the concepts of volunteerism and sustainability into a tangible reality that stunned the world.

Al Nama said that the tournament discovered many young leaders who contributed to the awe-struck World Cup and presented Qatar as an ideal model for organizing an exceptional edition.

He said that Qatar earned the respect of the world by formulating success criteria while preserving its identity and customs and fulfilling its promises.

The SC is currently cooperating with the Qatar Olympic and Sports Museum to document all World Cup scenes and events to allow the next generation to learn about this inedible trip.

Sustainability Executive Director at the SC, Eng. Bodour Al Meer said that the World Cup hosting faced many challenges, which the SC was able to deal with by finding solutions that would benefit future generations, as sustainability and legacy were among the priorities in organising the tournament.

She stressed that Qatar was able to reach the most sustainable championship, and translated this into reality in partnership with FIFA, where about 70 projects were implemented to keep pace with sustainable development, and succeeded in setting new standards that will change the way of thinking and planning for major sports tournaments and the way they are organised in the future.

To ensure sustainability, the World Cup stadiums were established in strategic locations to serve the local community after the tournament, taking into account issues of climate change and waste recycling, Al Meer said.



FROM LEFT: SC's Official Spokesperson, Khaled Al Nama; Sustainability Executive Director at the SC, Eng. Bodour Al Meer; Director of the Volunteer Strategy Department at SC Nasser Al Mogaiseeb and Moderator Maryam Al Mohannadi during the fifth discussion session.

She said that over 80 percent of waste and materials resulting from construction operations were recycled, and this percentage amounted to 90 percent in some stadiums.

Al Meer said that there will be a big Qatar National Library pavilion that will document all the World Cup-related sustainability achievements, Al Meer said.

Director of the Volunteer Strategy Department at SC Nasser Al Mogaiseeb said that the World Cup helped develop a culture of volunteer work, which is a very important factor in building a society.

Al Mogaiseeb said that the SC volunteering strategy was launched in 2018, attracting more than 20,000 volunteers, the largest record for a World Cup edition, adding that no effort was spared in providing volunteers with all the necessary skills and training.

He noted that SC has developed the national volunteering strategy in partnership with Qatar22, which focused on several aspects, such as developing legislative laws for volunteering in Qatar, setting a national volunteer day, and encouraging more people to volunteer and take part in the best volunteer experience during the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022.

Qatar Airways' Paris Premium Lounge reopens

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

Qatar Airways re-opened its luxurious Premium Lounge at Paris-Charles de Gaulle Airport (CDG), complementing the airline's triple daily flights, available for Premium passengers and eligible oneworld alliance partners.

The Premium Lounge features all of the facilities and qualities of the airline's premium product, including both The Brasserie and The Global Deli, prayer rooms, business centre, shower facilities, Wi-Fi and zoned seating for more than 200 guests. Far-reaching views of Paris and the Eiffel Tower, contribute to a warm and relaxing atmosphere.

Commenting on the airline's latest Premium Lounge re-opening, Qatar Airways Group Chief Executive, H E Akbar Al Baker, stated: "This milestone illustrates our focus on continuous product enhancements. The re-opening of the Qatar Airways Premium Lounge at Paris-Charles de Gaulle Airport, marks our fifth global lounge within our growing network. This further demonstrates our commitment to providing unparalleled services to our customers, especially in France."



At more than 1,000 square metres, the Qatar Airways Premium Lounge at Paris-Charles de Gaulle offers Qatar Airways First and Business Class passengers a sophisticated, modern and spacious environment in which to relax and commence their five star journey experience.

Catering to exceptional premium culinary standard, the lounge is equipped with a full kitchen for freshly-prepared à la carte orders, in addition to an existing buffet spread, offering an international menu from across the globe.

Qatar Airways Paris Premium Lounge launched its operations in 2017 to serve the growing capacity of passengers travelling with the airline from Charles de Gaulle Airport. Today, Qatar Airways operates 18 weekly flights to Paris, offering passengers with the ultimate connectivity to Skytrax' World's Best Airport, Hamad International Airport.

A multiple award-winning airline, Qatar Airways was recently announced as the 'Airline of the Year' at the 2022 World Airline Awards, managed by the international air transport rating organisation, Skytrax. The airline continues to be synonymous with excellence having won the main prize for an unprecedented seventh time (2011, 2012, 2015, 2017, 2019, 2021 and 2022), while also being named 'World's Best Business Class', 'World's Best Business Class Lounge Dining' and 'Best Airline in the Middle East'.

Qatar Airways currently flies to more than 150 destinations worldwide, connecting through its Doha hub, Hamad International Airport, currently named the 'Best Airport in the World" by Skytrax World Airport Awards 2022.

GAC, General Tax Authority participate in Zakat, Tax and Customs Conference

QNA — RIYADH

The General Authority of Customs (GAC) and the General Tax Authority participated in the Zakat, Tax and Customs conference, which discussed customs and tax mechanisms and concluded yesterday in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

The two authorities were represented in the conference by President of the General Tax Authority H E Ahmed bin Issa Al Mohannadi and Assistant Chairman of the GAC for Customs Affairs Mohammed Ahmed Al Mohannadi.

During the conference, the delegation was briefed on the role of digitization and automation in enriching the experience of taxpayers, in addition to ways to elevate tax culture, contribute to raising the level of voluntary compliance, and raise public awareness of taxpayers, customers including importers and exporters, as well as researchers.

The most important global and local experiences and developments in the tax sector, digital transformation, and electronic billing that the system is currently witnessing, were also reviewed during the conference.

The two-day conference discussed a number of axes related to supporting national economies by encouraging investment and adopting economic initiatives, the importance of the customs role for security and trade facilitation, mechanisms for voluntary commitment with dealers, and integration between customs and taxes in the process of controlling the inputs of local markets.

It also discussed the role of the "Authorized Economic Operator" program as a tool for the supply chain, the completion of the digital transformation in customs and tax services, the zakat and tax treatment of financial instruments, and other topics related to the conference and its agenda.

KATARA INTERNATIONAL ARABIAN HORSE FESTIVAL

Roses and perfumes delight visitors at KIAHF final weekend

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

The various cultural and artistic events accompanying the ongoing 11-day Katara International Arabian Horse Festival (KIAHF-2023) continue to regale visitors to the Cultural Village Katara.

Besides, the many events being held on the sidelines of KIAHF-2023, Katara has also put up a lane of floral delight with 15 florists having put up attractive displays of roses and other decorative flowers through the street near the Katara Amphitheater and leading to the main arena of the Katara International Arabian Horse Festival.

Two outlets of these also have perfumes on offer, extracted from natural roses with wafting fragrance attracting visitors of all ages and groups.

The flower shops, which take place on Ibn Al Rayeb Cultural Street in Katara, compete in providing everything related to the world of flower arrangements with high artistic and aesthetic touches with various charming colours, beauty and attractiveness.

KIAHF organising committee has also prepared many artistic segments for visitors to enjoy at the weekend during the prestigious KIAHF Title Show, such as watching giant puppet shows and acrobatics that take many forms of garden roses in a scene that gives the audience more joy. There is also a segment for live and direct drawing and colouring. It has been specially prepared for children with the aim of creating an atmosphere of entertainment and pleasure and introducing them to various types of roses through the various drawings on the walls of the wooden house set up by the organizing committee.



A view of a flower shop during KIAHF-2023.

The flower shops, which take place on Ibn Al Rayeb Cultural Street in Katara, compete in providing everything related to the world of flower arrangements.

The event (The Roses) is also full of an artistic paragraph that mixes music and singing. A singer and a player on the Oud instrument perform and sing songs that are famous in our Arab heritage and reveal the amazing beauty of flowers and roses.

Among the other many activities is the pavilion that displays approximately 28 books on roses and the art of cultivating and gardening, and the aesthetic of roses and creative effects.



Deputy Prime Minister, US Special Envoy for Iran discuss relations

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs H E Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani met yesterday with US Special Envoy for Iran H E Robert Malley, in Washington, DC. They discussed bilateral relations between the two countries and the latest developments in the nuclear agreement talks, in addition to a number of issues of common interest.

EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

QU, MCW sign MoU to boost cooperation

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

Qatar University (QU) and the Medical College of Wisconsin (MCW) signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to leverage shared opportunities and enhance cooperation between the two institutions.

The MoU was signed by Dr. Mariam Ali Al Maadeed, Vice-President for Research and Graduate Studies at QU and Dr. Ramani Ramchandran, Professor of Paediatrics and Chairman of the Teaching Faculty at MCW.

The MoU outlines exchange of experiences and information, including publications, journals, studies, statistics, and data, in addition to organising studies, conferences, meetings, and training.

> The MoU outlines exchange of experiences and information, including publications, journals, studies, statistics, and data, in addition to organising studies, conferences, meetings, and training.

In a brief statement, Prof Al Maadeed said, "I am pleased to sign an agreement on behalf of Qatar University with the Medical College of Wisconsin. The university is committed to developing international cooperation in all fields, especially in research priority areas of Qatar University."

"Qatar University values local and international experts in health education and scientific research fields, and through cooperation with the Medical College of Wisconsin, which combines high-level medical education, research, and healthcare practices for patients, we aim to enhance and continue cooperation in various fields, including infectious diseases, cardiovascular diseases, personalised medicine, and cancer.

"We hope that this effort will benefit students, researchers, and faculty members at both institutions," Dr. Al Maadeed added.

SPORTS COLLECTIONS

Doha Festival City warms up for National Sports Day

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

Doha Festival City, Qatar's one and only mall of choice for shopping, dining, and entertainment, is ramping up the excitement for the National Sports Day with a myriad of offers available for shoppers to indulge in throughout the year.

Last year, Doha Festival City unveiled its exclusive Sports Club, one of the Mall's most recent shopping club concepts that avails members a wide array of discounts and special offers on sporting equipment, gym, and apparel from its wide range of sporting retailers.

From flagship stores through to celebrated top retailers for sports clothing, shoes, and equipment, shoppers can benefit from up to 15% discounts at some of the outlets as part of Festival City's Sports Club, including Adidas, a brand that goes beyond creating sportswear to partner with the best in the industry and match athletic needs; Go Sport, delivering the best multi-brand sporting goods experience from all of the major and local sports brands as well as global sports shopping chain Sports Corner; Cole Haan, American footwear retailer specialised in luxury shoes and accessories for women and men and Foot Locker, a leading global athletic apparel and footwear retailer.

The numerous discounts and offers also span other anchor stores and flagship brands such as the Nike and Footlocker, as well as Decathlon, Fila, Puma, the newly opened Asics, and much more.

Members of the Sports Club can also avail special bargains and limited time gifts from Edge Fitness Gym, a state-of-the-art fitness facility providing special deals on exercise classes such as HIIT, Pilates, yoga, Zumba, and boxing, with separated facilities for men and women to help them reach their fitness goals.

TechnoGym, the world's leading manufacturer of state-of-the-art fitness equipment, is also offering special prices on a range of fitness equipment and gifts on purchases. Furthermore, creator of custom fruity arrangements, Edible Arrangements, is putting up 25% discount on its healthy, fresh fruit creations.

In line with Qatar's goal to become a global sports hub, Doha Festival City is always keen on annually celebrating National Sports Day to help promote a healthier lifestyle and raise awareness on the importance of exercise and weight management toward a healthier society. The Mall is gearing up to reveal big plans for the National Sports Day event which will take place this year on February 14.

Robert Hall, Doha Festival City's General Manager, said: "Sports and healthy lifestyle are the cornerstone of a healthy society, yielding many benefits for wellbeing and development. As a socially responsible mall in Qatar, Doha Festival City is keen on supporting the Sports Day and other such valuable celebrations, national events, and occasions that bring us all together. "We hope everyone benefits from our discounts generously offered to our Sports Club members by our retail partners throughout the year, and we also have surprises lined up for our visitors that we will reveal soon".

Earlier this year, the Mall unveiled its new brand positioning "It's my place, my choice" tailored for 2023, with the main aim of bolstering its position in the market as the ultimate destination for shopping, dining, and entertainment, while further diversifying its offering, activations, and events for a truly bespoke experience to each of its visitors. To join the Sports Club, an online application needs to be filled and then validated at the Customer Service Desk. https://www.dohafestivalcity.com/home/whats-on/SportsClub



An inside view of Doha Festival City.



Al Hammadi signs book of condolence

Secretary-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) H E Dr. Ahmed bin Hassan Al Hammadi with Chargé d'Affaires of the Syrian Embassy in Qatar, Dr. Belal Tourkya, yesterday, after signing a book of condolence to honour the victims of the earthquakes, which hit the northern west of Syria on February 6. The Syrian embassy opened the book of condolence on Wednesday and yesterday. Several diplomats, dignitaries and public signed the book expressing their solidarity with people of Syria. PIC BY SALIM MATRAMKOT

Doha Fire Station unveils 'Birthday Ceremony ' exhibition

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

The Fire Station has opened an exhibition titled 'Birthday Ceremony,' by Qatari Artist and former Fire Station resident Hana Al Saadi which is on display at Gallery 3 at Fire Station and will run until March 4.

The exhibition, housed in the Fire Station, focuses on Hana Al Saadi's reflection of a home, and her experience during her childhood, adolescence and throughout her development, exploring the subjects of memory and traditions.

She depicts privacy through material that is domestic in nature, using paradox as the main medium, while her works tend to be playful and exhibit a dark sense of humour.

Khalifa Ahmad Al Obaidly, Director of Fire Station, said: "The Fire Station provides a key platform for regional and local artists to present their work and engage with people. We are excited to introduce the work of Hana Al Saadi, a talented Qatari artist whose art explores childhood and adolescence from several angles. We look forward to welcoming the public to enjoy the exhibition."



ENTERTAINMENT

All set for sold-out 'Moira, The World Tour Qatar' concert today

MARIVIE ALABANZA
THE PENINSULA

The tickets to the much-awaited 'Moira, The World Tour Qatar' are sold-out. The multi-platinum Filipino singer and songwriter, Moira Dela Torre, is expected to bring together some 4,200 spectators at the Al Gharafa Sports Club Indoor Hall tonight at 7pm.

"I've come to Qatar wearing my heart on my sleeve. I'm just very excited to do our best and to give you guys a great show," said the hitmaker at a press conference yesterday.

"I'm very touched by the warm and sweet welcome by everyone, the Filipino community, and I'm just so happy that besides my band, I have guests that can dance and can make the audience laugh, so there's no pressure for me to do those parts," she added.

Moira was referring to her featured guests, the young Filipino actor-singer Kyle Echarri and two popular Filipino comedians, Boobay and Ate Guy.

The Qatar concert is the first leg of Moira's first-ever world tour before she performs across the US and Canada. "Kicking off my world tour here in Qatar is such a big thing. To be in front of you and looking at each one of you right now— I'm so thankful and I really, really mean it," she said to audience applause.



FROM LEFT: Filipino performers Ate Guy, Moira Dela Torre, Kyle Echarri, and Royal Sports and Events CEO Jonar Paz. PIC: CARMINA SOBERANO

When asked by *The Peninsula* if she has a ritual before every performance, Moira replied: "Besides emotional preparations, I drink a lot of water, I try to vocalise, I avoid sweets, and I also make sure that I'm mentally prepared for the show because I don't want to get up on stage and sing you empty songs."

After the press conference at Central Cafe, a 'Meet & Greet' event with fans was held at the Ezdan Towers West Bay. Produced by Royal Sports and Events, 'Moira, The World Tour Qatar' promises a night of quality entertainment to OFWs (Overseas Filipino Workers) and other nationalities, said the CEO, Jonar Paz.

Moira transformed her career by lending her voice to corporate jingles and commercials to become an award-winning recording artist and Spotify's most-followed and most-streamed Filipino singer for six consecutive years.

Known for her heartfelt music and delicate voice, she currently has 2.7 million followers on Twitter, 4.2 million on Instagram, and 3.1 million subscribers on YouTube.

Moira plans to stay in Qatar for a day or two to explore popular landmarks in the country, but first she said she can't wait to see fans and supporters at the concert.

STRUGGLING TO STAY WARM

Turkiye, Syria quake death toll tops 19,000

AP — ANTAKYA

Thousands who lost their homes in a catastrophic earthquake huddled around campfires and clamoured for food and water in the bitter cold, three days after the temblor and a series of aftershocks hit Turkiye and Syria, killing more than 19,300.

Emergency crews used pick axes, shovels and jackhammers to dig through twisted metal and concrete – and occasionally still pulled survivors out. But in some places, they switched the focus to demolishing unsteady buildings.

While stories of miraculous rescues briefly buoyed spirits, the grim reality of the hardship facing tens of thousands who survived the disaster cast a pall. The number of deaths has surpassed the toll in a 2011 earthquake off Japan that triggered a tsunami, killing more than 18,400 people.

In northwest Syria, the first UN aid trucks to enter the rebel-controlled area from Turkiye since the quake arrived – underscoring the difficulty of getting help to people in the country riven by civil war. In the Turkish city of Antakya, meanwhile, dozens of people scrambled for aid in front of a truck distributing children's coats and other supplies.

One survivor, Ahmet Tokgoz, called for the government to evacuate people from the devastated region. While many of the tens of thousands who have lost their homes have found shelter in tents, stadiums and other temporary accommodation, others have spent the nights outdoors.

With the chances of finding people alive in the rubble dwindling, teams in some places began demolishing buildings. In others, they simply had to move on.

"Especially in this cold, it is not possible to live here," he said. "If people haven't died from being stuck under the rubble, they'll die from the cold." Winter weather and damage to roads and airports have hampered the response in both Turkiye and Syria, where a civil war that displaced millions has further complicated efforts. Some in Turkiye have complained the response was too slow – a perception that could hurt President Recep Tayyip Erdogan at a time when he faces a tough battle for reelection in May.

In the Turkish town of Elbistan, rescuers stood atop a high stack of rubble from a collapsed home and fished out an elderly woman who had been submerged.

Teams urged quiet in the hopes of hearing stifled pleas for help, and the Syrian paramedic group in the rebel-held northwest known as White Helmets noted that "every second could mean saving a life." But more and more often, the teams pulled out dead bodies from under the rubble. In Turkiye's Antakya, over 100 bodies, covered by blankets and awaiting identification, lay in a makeshift morgue outside a hospital and in refrigerated trucks.

With the chances of finding people alive in the rubble dwindling, teams in some places began demolishing buildings. In others, they simply had to move on.

In Adiyaman, *Associated Press* journalists saw a local resident plead with rescuers to come and sift through the rubble of a building where relatives were trapped. The crew refused, saying there was no one alive there, and they had to prioritise areas where there may be survivors.

A man, who gave only his name as Ahmet out of fear of government retribution, later asked the *AP*: "How can I go home and sleep? My brother is there. He may still be alive." In Nurdagi, throngs of onlookers – mostly family members of people trapped inside – watched as heavy machines ripped at one building that had collapsed, its six floors pancaked together.

Mehmet Yilmaz watched from a distance, estimating that around 80 people were still beneath the rubble – but that it was unlikely any would be recovered alive.



Rescuers sift through the rubble of a collapsed building in the northern city of Aleppo, searching for victims and survivors days after a deadly earthquake hit Turkiye and Syria, yesterday. (AFP)

"There's no hope," said Yilmaz, 67, who had six relatives, including a 3-month-old baby, trapped inside. "We can't give up our hope in God, but they entered the building with listening devices and dogs and there was nothing." Authorities called off search-and-rescue operations yesterday in the cities of Kilis and Sanliurfa, where destruction was not as severe as in other impacted regions.

Across the border in war-riven Syria, assistance trickled in. Smaller aid organisations have sent in shipments to Syria's rebel-held northwest, but the first UN trucks arrived yesterday. The UN is only authorised to deliver aid through one border crossing and road damage has prevented that thus far. UN officials said more was needed, and they pleaded for humanitarian concerns to take precedence over politics.

The scale of loss and suffering to tend to remained massive. Turkish authorities said yesterday that the death toll had risen to more than 16,100 in the country, with more than 64,000 injured. On the Syrian side, which includes in government-held and rebel-held areas, of the border, more than 3,100 have been reported dead and more than 5,000 injured.

It was not clear how many people were still unaccounted for in both countries.

Among the missing were members of a high-school volleyball team from northern Cyprus, as well as teachers and parents who had been staying in a hotel that collapsed, said Nazim Cavusoglu, the education minister in the breakaway Turkish Cypriot north, on Turkiye's NTV television.

ISRAELI POLICIES

Barcelona mayor brands Israel apartheid state, cuts ties

AP — MADRID

The mayor of Barcelona has severed her city's official ties with Israel, accusing the country of "the crime of apartheid against the Palestinian people." Yesterday's decision by Mayor Ada Colau has little practical impact – with the most concrete effect being a halt to its 25-year-old twinning agreement with Tel Aviv.

But the announcement by the city, a popular tourist destination and home to one of the world's best-known soccer clubs, carries significant symbolism and adds to a growing list of critics that have labelled Israel an apartheid state. Israel rejects such accusations as delegitimising and antisemitic and called the decision "unfortunate."

In a letter to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Colau said the step came in response to a campaign by dozens of local groups and thousands of activists. She cited a number of Israeli policies, including its 55-year military occupation of the West Bank, its annexation of east Jerusalem and its construction of settlements on lands claimed by the Palestinians for a future state.

"As mayor of Barcelona, a Mediterranean city and defender of human rights, I cannot be indifferent to the systematic violation of the fundamental rights of the Palestinian population," she wrote. "It would be a severe mistake to apply a policy of double standards and turn a blind eye to a violation that has been, for decades, widely verified and documented by international organizations." In recent years, three well-known human rights groups – Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and Israel's B'Tselem – have accused Israel of apartheid, both inside the country as well as in the occupied territories.

Amnesty and the other groups say the very fragmentation of the territories in which Palestinians live is part of an overall regime of control designed to maintain Jewish hegemony from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River.

Cholera kills over 1,200 in Malawi

AFP — GENEVA

The deadliest cholera outbreak in Malawi's history has killed at least 1,210 people, while vaccines remain scarce, the World Health Organisation said yesterday.

The southern African nation has been battling its worst cholera outbreak on record, with nearly 37,000 cases reported since March 2022.

WHO said in a statement that active transmission was now ongoing in 27 out of Malawi's 29 districts, with the country seeing a 143-percent increase in the number of cases last month compared to December.

"With a sharp increase of cases seen over the last month, fears are that the outbreak will continue to worsen without strong interventions," WHO warned in a statement.

But the UN health agency pointed out that the crisis in Malawi is occurring against a backdrop of surging cholera outbreaks worldwide, which have "constrained the availability of vaccines, tests and treatments."

10 killed in gold mine collapse in Burkina

AFP — OUAGADOUGOU

Ten people were killed when a makeshift gold mine collapsed in western Burkina Faso, a miners' association said yesterday.

"In the early hours of February 8, miners... were trapped" near the town of Hounde, according to Abasse Derra, an official with the local gold miners' association.

"The death toll so far is 10," he added giving a provisional toll confirmed by Moussa Ouedraogo, another member of the association. Collapses are frequent at Burkina Faso's gold mining sites, where local communities feel they receive little benefit. Gold has overtaken cotton to become the poor West African country's main export, with 17 industrial mines producing around 70 tonnes per year.

Informal mining employs around 1.5 million people and generates a further 10 tonnes of gold every year, according to the mining ministry.

In April 2022, Russian gold company Nordgold said it had halted activity at its main private mine in northern Burkina Faso for "security reasons".

P IN BRIEF

West Africa junta regimes hold talks in Burkina

AFP —OUAGADOUGOU: Foreign ministers from three West African countries that have undergone military coups met in Burkina Faso yesterday on the heels of a trip to the region by Russian envoy Sergei Lavrov.

The talks brought together ministers from Mali, Guinea and Burkina — countries to which Lavrov promised Russian support.

The Burkinabe foreign ministry said that the trio — Abdoulaye Diop of Mali, Morissanda Kouyate of Guinea and Burkina's Olivia Rouamba — would hold a press conference after a working session.

A string of coups has unfolded in the three countries since 2020, bringing in juntas that have bristled at external demands to restore civilian rule.

Mali has fallen out with France, the region's former colonial power and traditional ally, in favour of close military ties with the Kremlin, and speculation is rising that Burkina will follow suit.

"This is the first time that I have been in Burkina Faso since the struggle of the Burkinabe people, which led to a correction enabling the recovery of sovereignty and territorial integrity in this brother country," Diop said.

Zimbabwe's opposition would win free and fair election: Poll

BLOOMBERG —HARARE : Zimbabwe's biggest opposition party would win a free and fair election, according to one of the first surveys to be released ahead of a vote expected from July this year.

Nelson Chamisa, the leader of the Citizens Coalition for Change, would garner 53% of ballots, while his party would get 52% in a separate parliamentary vote, the survey conducted by the Sabi Strategy Group and released on Wednesday showed. President Emmerson Mnangagwa and his ruling Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front would both win 40% of votes.

Still, every Zimbabwean election since 2000 has been marred by violence and allegations of vote rigging and 47% of those surveyed said they don't expect the election to be free and fair. In 2000, the Movement for Democratic Change, from which the CCC later splintered, narrowly lost to Zanu-PF, then led by Robert Mugabe, who was ousted in a coup in 2017.

The survey also showed that the electorate doesn't agree with government policies.

TIGRAY CONFLICT

Eritrean President dismisses as 'fantasy' alleged Tigray abuses

AP—NAIROBI

Eritrea's president in rare public comments has dismissed as "a fantasy" allegations that his country's forces carried out indecent assaults, looting and other abuses in the war in neighbouring Ethiopia's Tigray region.


Kenyan President William Ruto (left) and Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki walk together after a joint press conference following their meeting at the State House in Nairobi, Kenya, yesterday. (AFP)

President Isaias Afwerki, the only leader Eritrea has known in its 30 years since independence, spoke to journalists yesterday during a visit to Kenya during which the two countries announced the expected return of the long-reclusive Eritrea to a regional organisation addressing security and drought.

Since the start of the two-year Tigray conflict that killed an estimated half-million civilians and ended with a peace agreement in November, the presence of Eritrean forces allied with Ethiopian ones was a major issue.

For months Ethiopia's government denied that Eritrean forces were even in Tigray. But human rights groups and United Nations experts alleged they were responsible for many abuses against ethnic Tigrayans, such as gang abuses.

Eritrea is not a party to the peace deal, and some of its forces have remained inside Tigray, though the United States recently said they have withdrawn to the border area.

The Eritrean president, who rarely speaks to independent media, said his country has "no intention of interfering" in the peace process in Ethiopia and has "no agenda" there.

"You talk about withdrawal, non-withdrawal, we say this is nonsense," the 77-year-old leader said.

"Don't provoke us" to cause misunderstandings, he added: "Let's assume that the peace process in Ethiopia is going without obstacles."

Growing visibly irritated with questions, Isaias also accused those alleging human rights abuses of "fabricating lies and misinformation" with an aim of disrupting the peace process. "You're wasting your time," he said.

In northern Nigeria, fuel, cash crisis taints election campaign

AFP — KANO

It was just after dawn and tempers were fraying outside the First Bank in the northern Nigerian town of Kano, where scores of customers jostled to get on a waiting list to withdraw money.

Long before the branch had opened its doors, crowds had formed of people desperate to take out cash, which was being limited to 10,000 naira — just $20 — per person.

The reason: a government plan to swap old banknotes for a new design has run into chaos, limiting the number of bills in circulation and creating a cash shortage.

Near the bank, hundreds of cars, motorbikes and rickshaw taxis had sat since early morning outside filling stations waiting to fill their tanks because of another shortage: petrol.

Little more than two weeks before an election to pick President Muhammadu Buhari's successor, the twin shortages in Africa's largest economy are overshadowing campaigning, angering voters and causing jitters over vote preparations.

Riots erupted in frustration over the cash crunch last week when Buhari visited Kano state, one of his power bases and a key election battleground with the second largest number of registered voters.

Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) Chairman Mahmood Yakubu yesterday reassured Nigerians the February 25 ballot would happen, with three major presidential candidates in a tight race.

But watching the lines outside Kano's banks, market trader Mohammed Ali Danazumi said elections were far from his mind. He was on a second hours-long wait to get cash after failing to get naira the day before.

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

Japan, Philippines agree to boost defence ties

AP — TOKYO

The new agreement allows Japan to deploy its forces for humanitarian missions and disaster response in the Philippines, an arrangement Japan hopes to eventually upgrade to include joint military training, cooperation and mutual visits.



Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos (second left) and his wife Louise Araneta-Marcos (third left) meeting with Japan's Emperor Naruhito and Empress Masako at the Imperial Palace in Tokyo. (AFP)

The leaders of Japan and the Philippines agreed yesterday to sharply boost their defence ties, allowing Japanese troops greater access to Philippine territory, as tensions rise in Asia amid China's growing influence.

Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr is visiting Japan shortly after he and US Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin reached an agreement on allowing the United States more access to Philippine military bases to keep China's territorial ambitions in check.

The defence arrangement signed by Marcos and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida will allow Japanese troops to join training exercises to respond to natural disasters and humanitarian needs in the Philippines. The agreement is seen as a step toward broader military cooperation and could lead to similar agreements between Japan and other Southeast Asian nations.

Kishida said the two countries will continue talks to further strengthen and streamline their militaries' joint exercises and other operations, while seeking to expand the transfer of Japanese defence equipment and technology to the Philippines and strengthen cooperation trilaterally with the United States.

"After our meeting, I can confidently say that our strategic partnership is stronger than ever as we navigate together the rough waters buffeting our region," Marcos said at a joint news conference with Kishida. "The future of our relationship remains full of promise as we continue to deepen and expand our engagements across a wide range of mutually beneficial cooperation."

The new defence agreement allows Japan to deploy its forces for humanitarian missions and disaster response in the Philippines, an arrangement Japan hopes to eventually upgrade to include joint military training, cooperation and mutual visits, Japanese officials said.

The two leaders "resolved" to increase the defence capabilities of their own countries and strengthen overall security cooperation with reciprocal port calls and aircraft visits and the transfer of more defence equipment and technology, according to a joint statement released later yesterday. It said Japan will transfer air surveillance radar systems to the Philippines and provide related personnel training.

The two leaders also agreed to strengthen cyber and economic security. They also confirmed Japan's continuing assistance to the Philippine coast guard in reinforcing its capabilities, including the improvement of port facilities at Subic Bay, a former US naval base.

Last year, the two island nations held their first four-way security talks among their defence and foreign ministers and agreed to strengthen their defence ties.

Kishida's government in December adopted key security and defence upgrades, including a counterstrike capability that breaks from Japan's post-World War II principle of self-defence only, while also doubling defence spending in five years.

Under the new strategy, Japan will also use development assistance to support poorer nations as they strengthen their maritime safety and other security capabilities. It's meant to counter China's growing regional influence.

"President Marcos's visit here gives us impetus for Japan and the Philippines to further elevate our cooperation in recent years to even higher levels as we contribute to the peace and stability of the region and the international community," Kishida said at the news conference.

Kishida announced 600bn yen ($4.6bn) in economic assistance from the public and private sector for the Philippines through March 2024, primarily to improve infrastructure, such as construction of a commuter railway, and disaster response. The two sides also signed an agreement to work together in information and communication technology and to cooperate in energy security and industrial development.

"When you think about the stability in the region and sea lanes and deterrence of China's maritime assertiveness, deepening cooperation with the Philippines is crucial for the security of Japan and the United States," said Heigo Sato, a Takushoku University professor and expert on defence and security. "Having access to bases in the Philippines would expand strategic options for the Japan-US alliance" in case of an emergency involving Taiwan and China, he said.

BEIJING CALLS FOR FAIR TREATMENT

Australia to remove Chinese-made cameras from defence sites

AFP — SYDNEY



People walk past a security camera in Melbourne, yesterday. (AFP)

Australia's defence department will strip its buildings of Chinese-made security cameras to ensure they are "completely secure", the government said yesterday.

It follows similar moves in the United States and Britain, which have taken measures to stop government departments installing Chinese-made cameras at sensitive sites.

Both countries have expressed fears that Chinese companies could be forced to share intelligence collected by the cameras with Beijing's security services.

Beijing accused Australia of "misusing national might to discriminate against and suppress Chinese enterprises", calling on Canberra to ensure "fair" treatment for its businesses in the country.

At least 913 Chinese-made cameras have been installed across more than 250 Australian government buildings, according to official figures compiled by opposition politician James Paterson.

This includes offices and facilities belonging to the departments of defence, foreign affairs and finance, as well as the attorney-general's department. Australian Defence Minister Richard Marles said officials would hunt down and remove all Chinese-made security cameras within the department's buildings.

"It's a significant thing that's been brought to our attention and we're going to fix it," he told national broadcaster ABC.

"It's important that we go through this exercise and make sure that our facilities are completely secure." The government-funded national War Memorial — a sprawling 14-hectare (35 acres) complex in Canberra — also confirmed it would remove a small number of Chinese-made cameras, out of an "abundance of caution".

Paterson, a vocal critic of the Chinese government, had said Australian government buildings were "riddled" with "spyware", and that every Chinese-made camera should be urgently ripped out.

The cameras were made by companies Hikvision and Dahua, which have been blacklisted in the United States for allegedly helping the Chinese government carry out a "campaign of repression".

IS threatens to target Chinese embassy in Afghanistan: UN

BLOOMBERG — KABUL

Islamic State (IS) militants have threatened to target Chinese, Indian, and Iranian embassies in Afghanistan in an effort to isolate the Taliban from a handful of countries it counts as diplomatic allies.

The local affiliate of the Islamic State of Syria and Iraq, is attempting to "undermine the relationship between the Taliban and member states in the region," according to United Nations report on the group's activities. The report is expected to be discussed at United Nations Security Council in New York.

The militants are one of the Taliban's most serious security threats, carrying out large-scale attacks in densely populated areas in Afghanistan. It was behind the deadly attacks against Russian and Pakistani embassies, as well as a hotel in Kabul often frequented by Chinese nationals.

Saudi Arabia closed its embassy in Kabul on February 2 because of the recent threats made by the militant group and its staff were evacuated to Islamabad. The Gulf country was one of seven nations that kept its embassy open after the Taliban took over power a year and a half ago.

While the Indian embassy in Kabul is not fully operational, it reopened last year to coordinate New Delhi's humanitarian aid to Afghan people. The threat is a significant setback for the Taliban in its efforts to reestablish international ties and gain legitimacy to help boost a battered economy.

IN BRIEF

Court quashes Godrej plea in win for India's first bullet train

BLOOMBERG — MUMBAI: An Indian court rejected Godrej & Boyce Manufacturing Co Ltd's plea against the government acquiring its land for the nation's first bullet train, helping fast-track the project that has seen inordinate delays. A two-judge panel of the Bombay High Court dismissed the petition challenging land acquisition for Mumbai-Ahmedabad high-speed rail, ruling the project was in the larger public interest and a "dream" for the country.

The project initially pegged at 1.08 trillion rupees ($13bn) is funded by Japan International Cooperation Agency and covers a track of 508km. A segment of this was proposed on the land owned by Godrej but the engineering company challenged it arguing the compensation of 2.64bn rupees offered by the government was low.

The bullet train is part of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ambitious plan to modernise India's 170-year-old rail infrastructure. The 200mph train will cut the travel time between financial hub of Mumbai and Ahmedabad, a city in Modi's home state of Gujarat, by a fourth. The project has faced legal troubles in the past too, leading to time and cost overruns.

IMF and Pakistan in last-ditch talks as visit winds up

AFP — KARACHI: Pakistan's government yesterday remained locked in crunch talks with the IMF over the release of a crucial financial bailout on the last scheduled day of the global lender's visit.

An International Monetary Fund (IMF) delegation landed in Islamabad last week to thrash out tough conditions that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif called "beyond imagination".

Pakistan's economy is in dire straits, stricken by a balance of payments crisis as it attempts to service high levels of external debt amid political chaos and deteriorating security.

"The IMF is clearly asking for much more than what the government is willing to do, even with a little bit of arm twisting," said economic analyst Abid Hasan, a former adviser to the World Bank, in the capital Islamabad.

"Both sides are waiting for the other to blink." Finance Minister Ishaq Dar told reporters yesterday that "a final round of talks is going on". "There is no deadlock," Pakistan Energy Minister Khurram Dastgir Khan told local media on Wednesday.

COVID-19 CURBS

Singapore drops most pandemic mask mandates as threat recedes

BLOOMBERG — SINGAPORE

Singapore will remove mandatory mask-wearing on public transport - the most enduring and visible of the COVID-19 curbs - as authorities see significantly reduced threats from the virus.

The government said Singapore's virus situation had remained stable despite the increased travel, the winter season in the northern hemisphere and China's shift from a COVID Zero policy. Singapore's alert level was reduced to green from yellow, indicating the disease was mild.

From February 13, mask wearing on buses and trains will no longer be mandatory. The health ministry will however retain a practice of mask-wearing in healthcare settings to protect against infectious diseases.

"It is time to step down the remaining measures in Singapore," Deputy Prime Minister Lawrence Wong, who co-chairs the country's virus taskforce, said in a briefing yesterday. "We've had to deal with many unexpected curveballs and surprises along the way. But we managed to reach this point together because we all did our part."

The city-state is credited with implementing one of the world's most successful COVID-19 prevention regimes, using a balance of strict measures, emergency capacity building and vaccine awareness. It also became the first major economy in Asia to remove all restrictions for fully vaccinated travellers entering the island city last year.

"In Singapore we have a very strong, what we call, hybrid immunity - a combination of protection arising from for both vaccination as well as safe recovery from Covid," Health Minister Ong Ye Kung said at the briefing. "We estimate that probably close to 90% of residents here have already gotten Covid."

Singapore sheds the longstanding curbs as the daily number of Covid patients who require intensive care remain in the single digits and there haven't been any deaths since the start of February. Officials also have a mind on further stimulating economic activity as the financial hub grapples with the prospect that growth may come under pressure.

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong last month pointed to China as an example of countries that may determine the course of the global economy after the North Asian nation ended its strict COVID-19 policy in December. While Singapore expects to avoid a recession, Lee warned that new variants may continue to emerge and called for vigilance. More than four in five among the eligible population are protected against COVID-19. Some 99.5% of known cases had either no or mild symptoms.

Kim Jong-un shows off daughter, missiles at N Korean parade

AP — SEOUL



North Korea's leader Kim Jong-un, his daughter presumed to be named Ju Ae and wife Ri Sol Ju attending a military parade in Pyongyang. (KCNA)

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un and his young daughter took centre stage at a huge military parade, fuelling speculation that she is being primed as a future leader of the isolated country as her father showed off his latest, largest nuclear missiles.

Wednesday night's parade in the capital, Pyongyang, featured the newest hardware in Kim's growing nuclear arsenal, including what experts said was possibly a new solid-fuel intercontinental ballistic missile he could test in the coming months.

That missile was part of around a dozen ICBMs Kim's troops rolled out at the event - an unprecedented number that underscored how he continues to expand his military capabilities despite limited resources in the face of deepening tensions with his neighbours and the United States.

The parade was the fifth known public appearance by Kim's daughter, Kim Ju Ae, his second-born child who is believed to be around 10 years old. On Tuesday, Kim Jong-un brought his daughter to visit troops as he lauded the "irresistible might" of his nuclear-armed military.

State media have signaled a lofty role for Kim Ju Ae. She has been called "respected" and "beloved," and a photo released Wednesday showed her sitting in the seat of honour at a banquet, flanked by generals and her parents.

The parade marked the 75th anniversary of the founding of North Korea's army and came after weeks of preparations involving huge numbers of troops and civilians mobilized to glorify Kim's rule and his relentless push to cement his country's status as a nuclear power.

EMOTIONAL APPEAL

Ukraine's Zelensky makes emotional appeal for EU membership

AP — BRUSSELS

President Volodymyr Zelensky said yesterday that "a Ukraine that is winning" its war with Russia should be a member of the European Union, arguing the bloc wouldn't be complete without it.

Zelensky made his appeal during an emotional day at EU headquarters in Brussels as he wrapped up a rare, two-day trip outside Ukraine to seek new weaponry from the West to repel the full-scale invasion that Moscow has been waging for nearly a year. As he spoke, a new offensive by Russia in eastern Ukraine was under way.

Zelensky, who also visited the UK and France, received rapturous applause and cheers from the European Parliament and a summit of the 27 EU leaders, insisting in his speech that the fight with Russia was one for the freedom of all of Europe.

"A Ukraine that is winning is going to be member of the European Union," Zelensky said, building his appeal around the common destiny that Ukraine and the bloc face in confronting Russia.

Zelensky made his appeal during an emotional day at EU headquarters in Brussels as he wrapped up a rare, two-day trip outside Ukraine to seek new weaponry from the West to repel the full-scale invasion that Moscow has been waging for nearly a year.

"Europe will always be, and remain Europe as long as we ... take care of the European way of life," he said.

He added that membership talks should start later this year, an ambitious request, considering the huge task ahead. Such a move would help motivate Ukrainian soldiers in their defense of the country.

"There is no rigid timeline," warned EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen.

He held up an EU flag after his address and the entire legislature stood in somber silence as the Ukrainian national anthem and the European anthem "Ode to Joy" were played in succession.

Before his speech, European Parliament President Roberta Metsola said allies should consider "quickly, as a next step, providing long-range systems" and fighter jets to Ukraine. The response to Russian President Vladimir Putin's war against Ukraine "must be proportional to the threat, and the threat is existential," she said.

Metsola also told Zelensky that "we have your back. We were with you then, we are with you now, we will be with you for as long as it takes." A draft of the summit's conclusions seen by The Associated Press said "the European Union will stand by Ukraine with steadfast support for as long as it takes." German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said the bloc will send Zelensky "this signal of unity and solidarity, and can show that we will continue our support for Ukraine in defending its independence and integrity." Military analysts say Putin is hoping that Europe's support for Ukraine will wane as Russia is believed to be preparing a new offensive.

The Kremlin's forces "have regained the initiative in Ukraine and have begun their next major offensive" in the eastern Luhansk region, most of which is occupied by Russia, the Institute for the Study of War, said in its latest assessment. "Russian forces are gradually beginning an offensive, but its success is not inherent or predetermined." Zelensky used the dais of the European Parliament hoping to match Wednesday's speech to Britain's legislature when he thanked the nation for its unrelenting support.



Ukraine's president Volodymyr Zelensky delivers a speech at the start of a summit at EU parliament in Brussels, yesterday.

That same support has come from the EU. The bloc and its member states have already backed Kyiv with about €50bn ($53.6bn) in aid, provided military hardware and imposed nine packages of sanctions on the Kremlin.

The EU is in the midst of brokering a new sanctions package worth about €10bn ($10.7bn) before the war's anniversary. And there is still plenty of scope for exporting more military hardware to Ukraine as a Russian spring offensive is expected.

Russia is also watching Zelensky's movements closely. On Wednesday, Russian state television showed the flight path of a British air force plane that Zelensky used to travel to London taken from a flight monitoring site. The anchor noted that the plane flew from the Polish air base in Rzeszow that serves as a hub for Western arms deliveries to Ukraine.

Dmitry Medvedev, deputy head of Russia's Security Council chaired by Putin, visited a Siberian arms factory Thursday and declared that Russia will respond to the Western aid by churning out thousands of tanks.

"Our enemy was begging for aircraft, missiles and tanks on a trip abroad," Medvedev said during a visit to the factory in Omsk. "We will naturally increase the output of various types of weapons and military equipment, including modern tanks. We are talking about production and modernization of thousands of tanks." Zelensky's visit to EU headquarters should add to the goodwill to help Ukraine become part of the bloc. Ukraine wants membership in a matter of years, while in practice it can take decades to join.

MELONI LIKELY TO TRIUMPH

Italian PM faces popularity test in regional votes

AFP - ROME

Italy's two most populous regions vote on Sunday and Monday in elections seen as a test of the popularity of Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's three-month-old government.

Candidates backed by her hard-right coalition are expected to triumph in elections to choose a new president and assembly members in Lombardy, Italy's northern economic powerhouse, and Lazio, which includes the capital Rome.

Local issues will play a part, but "these elections represent a test for the government in the sense of how they are interpreted politically", said Jean-Pierre Darnis, a political expert at Nice and Rome's Luiss universities.

"The right seems ahead, and that will be presented by Giorgia Meloni as a continuation of the momentum of September," when her far-right Brothers of Italy party came top in national elections, he told AFP.

However, the vote will be closely watched for signs of tensions between Meloni and her coalition partners -- Matteo Salvini's far-right League and Silvio Berlusconi's right-wing Forza Italia.

The rise of the Brothers of Italy has been largely at the expense of its right-wing allies, and while the League candidate is expected be re-elected president of Lombardy with the coalition's support, Meloni's party is expected to secure the most votes.



Giorgia Meloni

Her party made history by securing 26 percent in September's legislative elections, and in October Meloni became Italy's first female prime minister, at the helm of the most right-wing government in Rome since World War II.

After a campaign dominated by anti-immigrant rhetoric, she has clamped down on migrant rescue charities operating in the central Mediterranean, but on international affairs she has followed a conventional line.

Despite her euro-scepticism and often strident nationalism, Meloni has maintained ties with Paris and Berlin, while strongly backing the EU's support for Ukraine following Russia's invasion.

Brothers of Italy is currently polling at more than 29 percent, according to a YouTrend survey published on February 2.

NO ROOM FOR DIPLOMACY

Russian diplomat says ties with US in 'unprecedented crisis'

AP - MOSCOW

Russia-US relations are in a state of "unprecedented crisis" without any sign of improvement, a senior Russian diplomat said yesterday.

Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov argued that the White House's emphasis on increasing weapons supplies to Ukraine to ensure Russia's defeat leaves no room for diplomacy.

"I don't see any prospect for a productive political and diplomatic process," Ryabkov said at a briefing. "We have a very deep and unprecedented crisis in Russia-US relations. The Biden administration has driven them into a deadlock." Ryabkov warned that the US and its allies must carefully assess the risks stemming from supplying increasingly powerful Western weapons to Ukraine.

"The Americans need to thoroughly and deeply weigh the risks linked to their unabashedly cavalier course," he said.

Ryabkov noted that Moscow doesn't trust Western statements about self-imposed restrictions on a range of weapons supplied to Ukraine in order to avoid escalation, adding that such assurances in the past have served as cover for a steady expansion of the assortment of arms deliveries.

"We don't see any sign of reason in any of the NATO and EU members' capitals," Ryabkov said. "What they are doing isn't going to strengthen their security." He rejected the US argument that Russia's refusal to allow the resumption of inspections of its nuclear facilities represents a breach of the New START treaty, the last remaining nuclear arms control pact between the two countries.

The New START treaty, signed in 2010 by President Barack Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, limits each country to no more than 1,550 deployed nuclear warheads and 700 deployed missiles and bombers. The agreement envisages sweeping on-site inspections to verify compliance.

Just days before the treaty was due to expire in February 2021, Russia and the United States agreed to extend it for another five years.

Russia and the US have suspended mutual inspections under New START since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, but Moscow last fall refused to allow their resumption, raising uncertainty about the pact's future. Russia also indefinitely postponed a planned round of consultations under the treaty.

Ryabkov on Thursday insisted that Russia has continued to comply with the treaty and exchange information in accordance with it.

ONLINE DISINFORMATION

European Union calls out Twitter for incomplete disinformation report

AP - LONDON

Twitter failed to provide a full report to the European Union on its efforts to combat online disinformation, drawing a rebuke yesterday from top officials of the 27-nation bloc.

The company signed up to the EU's voluntary 2022 Code of Practice on Disinformation last year - before billionaire Tesla CEO Elon Musk bought the social media platform.

All who signed up to the code, including online platforms, ad-tech companies and civil society, agreed to commit to measures aimed at reducing disinformation. They filed their first "baseline" reports last month showing how they're living up to their promises.



Google, TikTok, Microsoft as well as Facebook and Instagram parent Meta showed "strong commitment to the reporting," providing unprecedented detail about how they're putting into action their pledges to fight false information, according to the European Commission, the EU's executive arm. Twitter, however, "provided little specific information and no targeted data," it said.

"I am disappointed to see that Twitter report lags behind others and I expect a more serious commitment to their obligations stemming from the Code," Vera Jourova, the commission's executive vice president for values and transparency, said in a statement.

UK paid £2.3bn to EU for settling China import case

BLOOMBERG

The UK government paid £2.3bn to the European Union to settle a long-standing fraud case relating to imports of Chinese textiles and footwear, saying the payment was necessary to fulfill its international obligations.

Britain made payments to the bloc of €1.2bn (£1.1bn) on February 6 and €700m on January 13, in addition to €678m paid out in June 2022, Chief Secretary to the Treasury John Glen said in a written statement to Parliament yesterday.

"These are substantial sums but represent the final payments and draw a line under this long-running case," Glen said.

The European Commission had sued the UK in March 2018 over undervaluation fraud involving Chinese imports, and the European Court of Justice ruled against Britain in March 2022.

The UK had been contesting the case, saying it took appropriate steps to counter the fraud in question. But Glen yesterday said that even though Britain has now left the EU, the UK government is "committed to fulfilling its international obligations" and was "keen to resolve" the case.

IMPASSE OVER BREXIT TRADE

Britain to extend Northern Ireland election deadline by a year

AFP — BELFAST

Britain will extend a deadline for elections in Northern Ireland, the government said yesterday, as an impasse over Brexit trade in the UK-run province shows little sign of swift resolution.

In a statement the UK said it would push back the deadline for Northern Ireland's parties to form a government for a year to 18 January 2024 but reserved the right to call an election at any time in the intervening period.

The government's previous cut-off point for parties to form a power-sharing executive at Northern Ireland's devolved assembly expired on 19 January 2023.

Northern Ireland has been without a devolved government since February last year because of a walk-out by the pro-UK Democratic Unionist Party (DUP).

It had been due to share power with pro-Ireland Sinn Fein, which became the biggest party in the assembly after the elections last May.

"Twelve months and one assembly election later, it is disappointing that people in Northern Ireland still do not have the strong devolved government that they deserve," Northern Ireland Secretary Chris Heaton-Harris said.

The DUP collapsed the power-sharing executive in February 2022 because of its opposition to the Northern Ireland Protocol.

The protocol, signed between London and Brussels as part of the UK's Brexit divorce from the European Union, governs trade in the British province, and keeps Northern Ireland in the European single market.

The DUP wants the deal overhauled or scrapped entirely, arguing it casts Northern Ireland adrift from the rest of the UK and makes a united Ireland more likely.

Heaton-Harris said that following discussions he had concluded "an election in the coming weeks will not be helpful or welcome".

He added the extension was designed to give Northern Ireland's parties "more time... to work together and return to government as protocol discussions continue between the UK and EU".

Heaton-Harris met the Vice-President of the European Commission, Maros Sefcovic, in Brussels on Wednesday.

The British government said it is "working hard to resolve the problems caused by the protocol, and the desire to see an agreed solution with the EU".

It added the extension to the Northern Ireland deadline "does not influence protocol discussions and that the UK Government wants to see a deal between the UK and EU as soon as possible".

INTELLIGENCE-GATHERING

China's balloon was capable of spying, says US

BLOOMBERG — WASHINGTON

The alleged Chinese spy balloon that flew over the US was capable of collecting communications signals and was part of a broader People's Liberation Army intelligence-gathering effort that spanned more than 40 countries, a State Department official said yesterday.

High-resolution imagery provided by U-2 spy planes that flew past the balloon revealed an array of surveillance equipment that was inconsistent with Beijing's claim that the balloon was a weather device blown off course, the official said in a statement provided on condition of anonymity.

The statement, released before State and Defence Department officials testified in open hearings and closed briefings to Congress yesterday, marks the fullest accounting yet for the Biden administration's insistence over the course of a week-long drama that the balloon was meant to spy on the US.

DefenceSecretary Lloyd Austin said in an interview with CBS News that the Pentagon

US is looking at taking action against Chinese entities linked to the intelligence-gathering effort in US airspace.

acted to limit what the balloon could learn about US nuclear capabilities. Austin said Chinese balloons flew over parts of the US in previous years, passing over Texas and Florida.

"Certainly all of our strategic assets, we made sure were buttoned down and movement was limited and communications were limited so that we didn't expose any capability unnecessarily," Austin said.

The US is now trying to expose and counter broader Chinese spying efforts alongside allies, the official said. It's also looking at taking action against Chinese entities linked to the intelligence-gathering effort in US airspace after identifying a Chinese balloon manufacturer that sells products to the Chinese military, according to the State Department official.

The new details released yesterday, including the contention that the device was part of a broader military-directed fleet, will add to the strain on US-China relations. The disclosure of the balloon last week led to the postponement of Secretary of State Antony Blinken's long-planned trip to China as part of an effort to normalize ties between the world's two largest economies. The balloon was shot down by an F-22 fighter off the coast of South Carolina on Saturday.

"The United States was not the only target of this broader programme, which has violated the sovereignty of countries across five continents," Blinken said at a briefing alongside NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg on Wednesday.

As US efforts continue to unveil the sheer size of the Chinese surveillance-gathering effort, with a separate balloon found drifting over Central and South America at the same time, Beijing may also find countries more suspicious of its foreign and economic policies.

US officials have said they took measures to nullify the intelligence-gathering efforts of the balloon as it traversed the continental US, but the new revelations that it was capable of actively gathering sensitive communications could fuel further Republican criticism that the Biden administration should have acted sooner to shoot down the balloon instead of waiting for it to cross the country so that it could be downed over water.



Sailors assigned to Explosive Ordnance Disposal Group 2 recover a high-altitude surveillance balloon off the coast of Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, in the Atlantic ocean on Sunday. (AFP)

After an administration briefing for House members, Representative Adam Schiff, a California Democrat, said, "They answered all the questions that we had. And I think that the administration made the right decision about shooting it down and when they chose to shoot it down. I think it would have posed a real risk to people on the ground."

But Republican Susan Collins of Maine told a Senate hearing that "it defies belief that there was not a single opportunity to safely shoot down this spy balloon" as it crossed the country.

"By the administration's logic, we would allow the Chinese to fly a surveillance balloon over the Pentagon."

POLITICAL PRISONERS FLY TO WASHINGTON

Nicaragua frees 222 opponents of Ortega

AP — MEXICO CITY

Some 222 inmates considered by many to be political prisoners of the government of Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega flew to Washington yesterday, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said.

Blinken said the prisoners had been jailed "for exercising their fundamental freedoms and have endured lengthy unjust detentions." "The release of these individuals, one of whom is a US citizen, by the government of Nicaragua marks a constructive step towards addressing human rights abuses in the country and opens the door to further dialogue between the United States and Nicaragua regarding issues of concern," Blinken said.

He said that among those on the plane were political and business leaders, journalists, civil society representatives and students. Blinken credited "concerted American diplomacy." A senior Biden administration official, speaking on condition of anonymity, had said earlier that the government of Nicaragua decided "unilaterally" to release them.

Ortega has maintained that his imprisoned opponents and others were behind 2018 street protests that he claims were a plot to overthrow him. Tens of thousands have fled into exile since Nicaraguan security forces violently put down those antigovernment protests in.

The Nicaraguan opposition's latest count on "political prisoners" held had been 245. It was not immediately clear who was not released.

The US official said the United States facilitated the transportation of the freed individuals to the United States, where they will be paroled for humanitarian reasons into the country for a period of two years. The plane landed at Washington's Dulles International Airport shortly before midday.

The official said all of those who left Nicaragua did so voluntarily and are to receive medical and legal assistance upon arrival in the US.

A Nicaraguan judge read a statement saying that the 222 prisoners had been "deported." Octavio Rothschuh, a magistrate on the Managua Appeals court, said the deportation was carried out under an order issued Wednesday that declared the prisoners "traitors to the country." He said they were deported for actions that undermined Nicaragua's independence and sovereignty.

Later yesterday, Nicaragua's Congress unanimously approved a constitutional change allowing "traitors" to be stripped of their nationality. It will require a second vote in the next legislative session later this year.

Arturo McFields, Nicaragua's former ambassador to the Organization of American States, celebrated the release, which he said the US State Department had confirmed to him. "It is a massive freeing" of prisoners seldom seen, McFields said. He credited the prisoners' families for never letting up the pressure.

Family members of some of those released also confirmed that the prisoners were flying to Washington. Berta Valle, the wife of opposition leader Felix Maradiaga, said the State Department told her that her husband was on the plane.

According to US officials, also among those aboard the flight were Cristiana Chamorro, who had been a leading presidential contender before her arrest in 2021. Daughter of former President Violeta Chamorro, she was sentenced last March to eight years in prison. She was convicted of money laundering through her mother's nongovernmental organization as Ortega pursued NGOs that received foreign funding. She was being held under house arrest.

Other one-time presidential hopefuls Arturo Cruz and Juan Sebastian Chamorro were also on the flight, US officials said.

Ortega upped his pursuit of political opponents in early 2021, looking to clear the field ahead of presidential elections in November of that year.

Disney lays off 7,000 as streaming subscribers decline

AFP — SAN FRANCISCO

Entertainment giant Disney said Wednesday it was laying off 7,000 employees, in CEO Bob Iger's first major decision since he was asked back to lead the company late last year.

The layoffs follow similar moves by the US tech giants that have laid off thousands of workers as the economy sours and companies dial back a hiring spurt that began during the height of the pandemic.

"I do not make this decision lightly. I have enormous respect and appreciation for the talent and dedication of our employees worldwide," Iger said on a call to analysts after Disney posted its latest quarterly earnings.

According to its 2021 annual report, the group employed 190,000 people worldwide as of October 2 of that year, 80 percent of whom were full-time. The storied company founded by Walt Disney also said its streaming service saw its first ever fall in subscribers last quarter as consumers cut back on spending.

Subscribers to Disney+, the streaming archrival to Netflix, fell one percent to 168.1 million customers on December 31, compared to three months earlier. Analysts had broadly expected the decline, and the Disney share price remained was eight percent higher in post-session trading.

Investors were reassured by Disney's lower-than-expected operating losses for its streaming platforms at $1bn for the October to December period. Across its vast entertainment empire, the Disney Group saw revenues of $23.5bn for the three month period, better than analysts had hoped.

Iger, who stepped down as CEO in 2020 after nearly two decades helming the storied company, was brought back after the board of directors ousted his replacement Bob Chapek. It was disappointed in his ability to rein in costs.

Chapek was also singled out for centralizing power around a small group of executives who made important decisions on content despite having little Hollywood experience.



Chilean President Gabriel Boric (right) speaks to local residents on Wednesday, as he visits Huallerehue, a sector of Santa Juana, south of Concepcion, Chile, where fires have been raging for a week. (AFP)

Chile declares curfew in two regions affected by forest fires to prevent theft

AFP — CONCEPCIÓN

Chile has announced a nighttime curfew in regions where forest fires have been blazing for more than a week, leaving at least 24 people dead, a military chief said yesterday.

The curfew will come into effect on Friday and last from midnight until 5:00 am in at least 20 municipalities in the central regions of Biobio and La Araucania, said rear admiral Jorge Keitel, the military chief for Biobio.

The move is aimed at preventing thefts and looting in the affected regions.

General Ruben Castillo, the military chief for La Araucania, said the curfew implied restrictions to public transport, "especially in Malleco province." That is one of the provinces most affected by clashes between radical groups from the Mapuche Indigenous community and state forces.

The Mapuche have carried out arson attacks on private property and logging machinery. They are fighting for the restoration of ancestral lands seized by the Chilean state more than a century ago and now in the hands of logging companies.

Chile President Gabriel Boric had said on Wednesday he would impose a nighttime curfew in the three regions where a state of disaster has been declared due to the fires: Biobio, La Araucania and Nuble.

He had said the curfew was necessary "to guarantee the safety of people affected by the emergency." However, no curfew has yet been announced in Nuble.

The fires have left 24 people dead and more than 2,000 injured, while destroying more than 300,000 hectares of forest in the regions of Biobio, La Araucania, Nuble and Maule, an area equal to that of Puerto Rico.

More than 1,100 homes have been destroyed, leaving more than 5,500 people homeless, according to official reports.

IN BRIEF

Police probe killing of young boy by stolen car's owner

AP — DENVER: Police said yesterday they were investigating a car theft and the fatal shooting of a 12-year-old boy found inside by the car's owner after an exchange of gunfire.

No arrests have been made in Sunday's shooting, and it is still not known who stole the vehicle, police said. They spoke at the scene with man who owns the car.

The car's owner used an app to track his vehicle, found it stopped in an area about 12 miles away and, when he approached it, there was an "exchange of gunfire" with at least one person inside the car, police said in an initial update on the shooting.

The boy drove a few blocks away, and police said they found him inside with a gunshot wound. He died after being taken to the hospital.

Other people who were in the vehicle apparently ran away before officers arrived, police said.

Police confirmed that the boy who was shot is the same one they issued an alert for in 2021 after he ran away from home at age 10.

When police complete their investigation, they said, they will provide their findings to the Denver District Attorney's Office, which will decide on any criminal charges.

Peru reopens train service to historic Machu Picchu

AFP — MACHU PICCHU: Train services to Peru's historic Machu Picchu partially resumed on Wednesday following nearly three weeks of suspension caused by anti-government protests.

The service to the jewel in Peru's vital tourism industry resumed with locals looking to return to the small town at the foot of the ancient Inca site. The Machu Picchu citadel itself remains closed.

Peru has been shaken by two months of protests by supporters of former president Pedro Castillo, who was impeached and arrested on December 7 after attempting to dissolve parliament and rule by decree.

At least 48 people have been killed since then in clashes between security forces and demonstrators.

The first train arrived at the small town just after dawn Wednesday with around 80 people on board, including a handful of tourists, AFP reporters saw. The train left again with about 280 passengers.

The town had been suffering from shortages after it was cut off for 18 days.

The train is the only way to reach the town other than by foot and takes an hour and a half from the tourist town of Ollantaytambo.

Nobel winner Vargas Llosa joins Academie Francaise

AFP — PARIS: Peruvian Nobel-winning author Mario Vargas Llosa joined the fabled Academie Francaise in Paris yesterday, the first member never to have written a book in French.

The 86-year-old novelist, who also has Spanish citizenship, controversially invited the former king of Spain, Juan Carlos, to his inauguration ceremony.

Vargas Llosa won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2010 and is the first holder of the award at the Academie Francaise since Francois Mauriac, laureate in 1952.

He is considered among the most influential Latin American writers, often taking a sharp look at the region's politics and history with novels such as *The Time of the Hero* (1963), *The Feast of the Goat* (2000), and continuing through to 2021's *Harsh Times*.

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EDITORIAL

Relief initiatives

AS the death toll from the devastating earthquakes that struck southern Turkey and northern Syria rose to nearly 20,000 and the number of those injured increased in what is the worst-ever disaster to hit both countries, it is essential to appreciate the untiring efforts of search and rescue teams who have rescued so many trapped under the rubble, despite extreme winter weather which is impacting these efforts. Aftershocks are also a potential hazard — at least 125 measuring 4.0 or greater have occurred since the 7.8 magnitude quake struck southern Turkey.

Since the earthquake, the State of Qatar was among the first countries to send urgent aid. Under the directives of Amir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, the Qatar Fund For Development (QFFD), in cooperation with Qatar Red Crescent Society and Qatar Charity, has sent urgent aid to earthquake-affected people in Turkiye and Syria through a Qatar Emiri Air Force air bridge.

On the other hand, the Qatari International Search and Rescue Group of the Internal Security Force (Lekhwiya) is working with other rescue teams to save lives as they dig through the rubble. Efforts to support those affected by the quake are not limited to the official level. Various sectors of the Qatari society began collecting aid and donating to the victims.

In cooperation with Qatar Red Crescent and Qatar Charity, the Qatar Fund for Development has successfully delivered 108 tonnes of urgent aid onboard three planes. Qatar Charity said it would distribute 27,000 hot meals in Gaziantep, where it has an office, and is supplying relief items to shelters in Turkey and Syria. The group allocated $6m for the first stages of its response.

Today, at 5:30, the urgent relief campaign for the earthquake-affected people in Syria and Turkey will start under the slogan "Support and Help" (Sanad & Oun). It is organised by the Qatar Media Corporation and Qatar TV, cooperating with the Qatar Red Crescent, the Regulatory Authority for Charitable Activities, and Qatar Charity.

Similar initiatives have been taken by various entities, including media outlets like Dar Al Sharq Group, which decided to donate one-week income revenues of its four newspapers; The Peninsula, Al Sharq, Al Arab, and Lusail newspapers which started yesterday (Thursday), to the victims of the devastating earthquake.

The initiative is part of the relief efforts undertaken by entities in Qatar, including civil society organisations and charitable and humanitarian societies, to support the victims of the devastating earthquake.

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To compete with China, US should put real trade deals on table

THE WASHINGTON POST



Japan is increasing its defense budget, and the United States is beefing up a marine regiment on Okinawa. The Philippines has given the American military access to four additional bases. The United States is increasing the number of its bombers and fighter jets in Australia. A new deal will see the United States jointly produce weapons with India. That has all happened in the past few weeks.

As tensions with China rise, President Biden has pursued an aggressive Indo-Pacific strategy to shore up old alliances and build new security partnerships. What's missing is the other important pillar of an Asia strategy, and the one many Asian countries care a great deal about: a trade policy.

Without a trade component, many Asian officials and analysts have groused, the U.S. strategy to counter China in the region amounts to all guns and no butter. It's a fair criticism.

A decade ago, under the Obama administration's "pivot" to Asia, the economic leg of the Pacific strategy was supposed to be the Trans-Pacific Partnership, or TPP, the mammoth 12-nation trade agreement that Biden was involved in crafting as vice president. Mr. Obama hailed the TPP as the centerpiece for achieving America's geopolitical goals in the Asia-Pacific region and the best way to meet the rising challenge from China.

But by 2016, big, comprehensive trade deals such as the TPP had become politically toxic, blamed for hollowing out U.S. manufacturing. On the campaign trail, both Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton trashed the TPP - even though Clinton had earlier championed it. Trump kept his campaign pledge and withdrew from the deal on his first full day in office - something he was able to do because Congress never ratified the treaty. "That sound you hear is the clinking of champagne glasses in Beijing," tweeted Tufts University professor Daniel W. Drezner at the time.

Biden's new initiative to add an economic element to his Asia policy is the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework, or IPEF, unveiled last spring. It sets standards for the digital economy, labor rights, supply chain resiliency and clean energy, among other things.

Biden's new initiative to add an economic element to his Asia policy is the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework, or IPEF, unveiled last spring. It sets standards for the digital economy, labor rights, supply chain resiliency and clean energy, among other things. But it has no provisions for increasing market access or lowering tariffs, both important goals for Asian countries.

In fact, the IPEF is not even an agreement at all, but more like an outline to begin talks about possibly reaching an agreement sometime down the road. Small wonder the reception in Asia was largely cool.

In proposing a plan so limited in scope, Biden is likely bowing to domestic political considerations. Large multi-country trade deals are easy targets for criticism, from Republicans as well as elements in the Democratic Party.

But China isn't waiting. Beijing - whose one-party regime doesn't have to worry about domestic opposition - has been aggressively pushing ahead on the trade front. The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, or RCEP, which came into force last year, is a free-trade pact among 15 countries, including China, Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand and the 10 members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, or ASEAN. It covers some 30 percent of the world's population and about a third of global gross domestic product. China was an early champion of the RCEP, and its premier hailed the signing in 2020 as a major "victory."

An opinion piece in the Hong Kong newspaper South China Morning Post last October carried the headline: "RCEP allows East Asia to step out from under US hegemony." The two authors, both independent researchers, wrote, "The RCEP is emblematic of the decline of the United States' economic clout in East Asia.... Despite the US' continued engagement with players in the region, they have been purposefully security-focused, failing to solidify economic partnerships."

China has also applied to join the 11-member Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, or CPTPP, which is the successor to the TPP after the US withdrew. Its chances are slim, because Beijing's state-run economy clashes with some provisions of the pact. The irony is that Beijing is now trying to join a largely American-created trade bloc that Washington walked away from.

One of the stated goals of these trade pacts is to boost more cross-border investment. That's already happening as many multinational companies, including American firms, are moving to end their overreliance on China and geographically diversify their factories and supply chains. Many are going to Southeast Asia and India.

They were spurred by China's three years of COVID-19 lockdown, as well as growing US-China trade tensions and the rising cost of doing business in China, where wages are rising and the population of factory workers has been steadily declining.

When Biden unveiled the IPEF plan, his trade representative, Katherine Tai, faced bipartisan criticism on Capitol Hill for failing to include market access. Sen. Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.) asked, "Why can't we be for opening market access right now and getting rid of tariffs?" Sen. Mike Crapo (R-Idaho) said, "Why take the carrot of market access off the table?" The timing is opportune for the United States to actively pursue a comprehensive trade policy for Asia. For the right kind of deal, with the right safeguards, there might be more bipartisan support than the administration thinks.harder than you'd suppose.

The older workers of France need a revolution

LIONEL LAURENT
BLOOMBERG

Whatever the slogans wielded by striking workers angry at Emmanuel Macron's pension reform might say - such as "commute, work, die" - the French are anything but lazy. The country's unemployment rate is at its lowest in years, and France has a greater share of 25-to-54-year-olds in work than the European Union average, or indeed the U.S. The pace of job creation is above pre-pandemic levels.

Where France punches below its weight, however, is in its share of workers over 55. Macron wants to raise that number but not just by pushing the retirement age to 64 from 62; he wants to prod companies to hire more people in their 50s and 60s, setting targets for diversity by age. Similar steps have been taken elsewhere, such as when UK firms including Aviva and Walgreens Boots Alliance pledged in 2017 to hire more over-50s. The French version looks distinctly less touchy-feely, with the threat of fines if companies don't play ball.

If Macron is tying the idea of tougher age quotas to pension reform, it's also as a sop to critics and unions who say lifting the pension age will worsen unemployment as older workers get laid off before retirement.

Expanding the labor pool is an issue of great economic significance - potentially even more so than the estimated 17.7 billion euros ($19 billion) the Macron administration hopes the reform will unlock. If France lifted its over-55s employment rate by around 10 percentage points to 66 percent (the G-7 average) by 2032, that might mean an extra 825,000 workers and almost 50 billion euros in extra gross domestic product by one estimate.

This isn't just a French thing - PwC has suggested the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development as a whole could add $3.5 trillion to GDP if it lifted over-55s' employment share to 78 percent - but France is a clear retirement outlier.

In principle, publishing more data at the corporate level would be a good way to shine a light on divergent national and company practices, beyond the basic hike to the retirement age if the reform goes through. There does seem to be a gap worth tackling: Luxury goods behemoth Louis Vuitton Moet Hennessy SE has a higher share of staff aged 50-59 in France than elsewhere, but has more over-60s working at the firm in the U.S. than in its home market. Transport company Transdev Group has 20 percent-30 percent of drivers over 60 in Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands and the US; in France, it's 12 percent, according to France Inter radio.

Macron wants to raise that number but not just by pushing the retirement age to 64 from 62; he wants to prod companies to hire more people in their 50s and 60s, setting targets for diversity by age.

In principle, publishing more data at the corporate level would be a good way to shine a light on divergent national and company practices, beyond the basic hike to the retirement age if the reform goes through. There does seem to be a gap worth tackling.

But just as raising the pension age feels like a blunt tool for today's workers watching today's retirees enjoy wealthier and healthier twilight years, quotas won't fix the deeper issues below the surface.

If the French aren't thrilled about working longer, it may be because many feel like they've already paid their dues. French executives are the world's worst workaholics, a BUPA survey found, which might be one reason few retirees are misty-eyed about going back. Perceptions of cost and skills gaps with younger workers also encourage ageism: A 2015 Eurobarometer survey found 75 percent of French managers believed a job candidate older than 55 would be at a disadvantage. Any silver quota will likely be shrugged off by key sectors like technology, where 40 is the new "old" and where young coders are seen as competitive advantages.

What should really happen instead is a reevaluation of the "three-stage life" - education, work and retirement - that is proving resistant to change, even as the prospect of living to 100 becomes less outlandish.

Instead of tacking on concepts like mentoring to one's late-career life, retraining should happen more regularly (maybe every decade). Instead of associating older workers with high health costs, it's worth following the example of BMW's "2017 production line," in which a small investment in physical well-being - wooden floors, magnifying lenses, adjustable chairs - boosted productivity. And the carrot of a more flexible transition between work and retirement, such as by combining part-time work with partial pension payments, or by sharing one older hire between small businesses, might be better than the stick of quotas.

This may seem like a sideshow next to the core issue of the retirement age that has put hundreds of thousands of protesters out on the street, and that has Macron's opponents in parliament pressuring the government to back down. Ideally, his reform would be made fairer and more acceptable by sharing the financial burden between companies and retirees, not just workers. But the reality of demographic and economic decline means that the long-term question of silver workers - and the effectiveness of quotas - is the far bigger one. "Commute, work, die" should be retired.

Lionel Laurent is a Bloomberg Opinion columnist covering digital currencies, the European Union and France.



Net profits of QIMC, Doha Insurance surge 9.28% and 39.35% respectively

The net profit of Qatar Industrial Manufacturing Company (QIMC) rose 9.28 percent during 2022 ➔P12

Credit Suisse posts $1.4bn pre-tax loss as woes go on in 4Q

Credit Suisse yesterday reported a pre-tax loss of more than 1.3bn Swiss francs ➔P13









COMPOUND ANNUAL GROWTH RATE

Infrastructure facilities to accelerate in years ahead

JOEL JOHNSON
THE PENINSULA



A general skyline view of the buildings in Doha.

Qatar's economy is steadily growing with pivotal projects that were carried out in recent years due to FIFA World Cup 2022 and major events in the country. As a result, the infrastructure industry in the country is estimated at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 7 percent from 2023 to 2028.

"Main infrastructure projects include the completion of highways, expansion of water and electricity networks, and the launch of the Sharq Crossing Project, linking the Ras Abu Aboud area of Doha and the West Bay Highway District, which is expected to be completed within four years," said Mordor Intelligence in a report.

The industry has contemplated unique plans in the region to augment its facilities benefitting the economy of the country. Infrastructure covers various sectors including social infrastructure, transportation infrastructure, extraction infrastructure, and manufacturing infrastructure.

"Construction makes a large contribution to GDP due to government initiatives in infrastructure", the report highlighted stating that the industry of construction will grow by 15.9 percent GDP.

The report mentioned that the sector has been elevated positively impacting the economy due to the successful mega tournament held last year in the country and the government's constant support and colossal investments in the infrastructure sector. ➔P12

FISCAL YEAR RESULT

Industries Qatar posts record net profit of QR8.8bn an increase of 9 percent

THE PENINSULA – DOHA

Industries Qatar ("IQ" or "the Group"; QE Ticker: IQCD), yesterday reported a record net profit of QR8.8bn for the year ended 31 December 2022, representing an increase of 9 percent compared to YE-21.

Commenting on the Group's financial and operational performance for the year, H E Saad Sherida Al Kaabi, Chairman of the Board of Directors, said: "Industries Qatar had a remarkable operational and financial year, despite a challenging global economic climate. Our focus on operational excellence and HSE, as well as our strength in the global supply chain, aided in our seamless operations. We also made strategic investment decisions, including investing in a new environmentally responsible World's largest blue ammonia train leading to a sustainable future growth.

As we report a strong performance for 2022, I would like to thank the Board of Directors, Chief Executive Officers, senior management and all the employees of QAPCO, QAFAC, QAFCO and Qatar Steel, without whom we would not have achieved these excellent results.

Going forward, we will continue to thrive for operational excellence, by focusing on our human capital and environment, along with responsible growth and creating long term value for our shareholders."

Macroeconomic environment remained volatile throughout most of the year, as a result of geopolitical uncertainty amid Russian-Ukraine conflict, recessionary fears on account of inflationary pressures and hawkish stance on interest rates by most of the Central banks.

Also, exceptionally high energy prices in Europe are persistently weighing on most of the European producers. Additionally, China's zero-Covid policy and related lockdowns, coupled with slowdown in Chinese construction sector remained key catalysts for volatile global economic context during 2022.

Specifically on the domestic steel market front, recently concluded activities related to FIFA 2022 World Cup weighed on the domestic steel demand, amid muted construction activity that led to lower price trajectories.

On overall basis, product prices across the Group's basket of products declined during 4Q-22 versus 3Q-22 due to cautious consumer demand on account of macro-headwinds, coupled with comparatively lower crude prices. ➔P12

UNITED DEVELOPMENT COMPANY (Q.P.S.C.)

UDC المتحدة للتنمية UNITED DEVELOPMENT CO.

Financial Highlights
Visit udcqatar.com

Invitation to UDC Annual Ordinary General Assembly

The Board of Directors of United Development Company Q.P.S.C (the "Company") has the honor to invite all shareholders to the Annual Ordinary General Assembly Meeting (AGM) that will be held on Monday 6 March 2023 at 5:30 pm, electronically using Zoom application platform or by attending in person the AGM that will take place in United School International in The Pearl Island. In the event that the required quorum is not reached in the meeting, the meeting will be held on Monday 13 March 2023 at 5:30 pm, via the same options that are mentioned above.

In case you are unable to attend this meeting, you are kindly requested to delegate another shareholder to attend on your behalf, using the proxy form in the invitation letter available at www.udcqatar.com

Agenda for the Annual Ordinary General Assembly

1. Hear the Board of Directors' report on the Company's performance, future and its financial position for the fiscal year ending December 31, 2022.
2. Hear and ratify the Auditor's report, the Company's balance sheet, and the loss and profit accounts, for the fiscal year ending December 31, 2022.
3. Discuss and approve the Company's balance sheet, and the loss and profit accounts, for the fiscal year ending December 31, 2022.
4. Hear the External Auditor's Reports in accordance with Article (24) of the Corporate Governance Code for Companies & Legal Entities listed on Qatar Stock Exchange issued by Qatar Financial Market Authority, Board Decision No (5) of 2016.
5. Discuss the Board of Directors' recommendation regarding the distribution of QR 194,747 million as dividends, equivalent to 5.5% of the initial value which is equivalent to 5.5 Qatari Dirhams for each share.
6. Discharge the members of the Board of Directors from liability for the year ending December 31, 2022 and approve their remuneration.
7. Approve Corporate Governance Report for the year 2022.
8. Appoint the External Auditor for the fiscal year 2023 and determine their fees.

Important Remarks

1. In accordance with provisions of Commercial Companies Law No. 11 of 2015 (and its amendments) this invitation shall be held as a legal notice to all shareholders without any need for private invitations to be sent by post.
2. Every individual shareholder may authorize another shareholder to participate in the meeting, provided that such an authorization is in writing and given specifically for the purpose of participation in the meeting. A Director may not be authorized for this purpose and the number of shares held by a proxy in this capacity shall not exceed 5% of the share capital of the Company. In case the shareholder is a corporate entity, the representative of the shareholder shall send a written authorization from such corporate entity duly signed and stamped in order for the representative to be able to participate in the meeting.
3. Minors & interdicted will be represented by their legal guardians.
4. Attendees are able to discuss the agenda, address questions to the Board of Directors or the External Auditor during the meeting. As for the voting on the meeting's agenda, a shareholder who has an objection on an item must raise their hand, at the time of voting on the subject item, to express his/her objection. In the event that the shareholder does not raise his/her hand, this will be considered as an endorsement for the subject item.

UDC Chairman's Message

Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of myself and the Board of Directors, I am pleased to present to you United Development Company's (UDC) annual report for the year 2022 which includes the audited financial statements for the fiscal year concluding on December 31, 2022.

The past year was full of achievements that speak for themselves as the Company managed to distinguish itself in every field and reach the world through its sustainable real estate and investment projects and firm commitment to fulfilling the promises made to shareholders, especially in striving to deliver projects before the start of the World Cup 2022.

UDC was able to strengthen the position of The Pearl Island as an international leisure tourist destination, and this falls within UDC's commitment as a private sector company to achieving the vision of the State of Qatar and its wise leadership in making the tourism sector one of the priority sectors for building a diversified and vibrant national economy.

In this context, UDC reported for the year 2022, a net profit of QR 390 million and revenues of QR 1.8 billion, while the net profit attributable to equity holders of the parent stood at QR 388 million and basic earnings per share at QR 0.110. The Board of Directors has recommended the distribution of cash dividends equivalent to 5.5% of share par value.

Thus, the proposed dividends for the year 2022 are in line with value of the real-estate projects that the Company is developing and cash out flow that will be spent on these projects during the year 2023 in accordance with the UDC's five-year business plan.

During the year 2022, UDC focused on delivering new residential and commercial projects to satisfy the ever-increasing demand for buying/renting real estate on The Pearl Island and Gewan Island in light of the great diversity of our projects and their fulfillment of various aspirations, whether investment or residential.

In the last quarter of the year, UDC organized various entertainment events to keep up with the recreational activities and functions hosted by the country during the 2022 World Cup. The far-reaching success of UDC's events at The Pearl Island was evidenced by the record-breaking number of visitors achieved, which in turn reflected positively on the Island's retail business.

Accordingly, the Company was proud to host international events held in Qatar for the first time, which attracted foreign tourists to The Pearl Island and transformed it into a convergence point for East and West. UDC, in light of its strategy to diversify and enrich its residents' lifestyle as well as public facilities on The Pearl and Gewan Islands, has recently delivered two parks in time for the World Cup quickly becoming visitor hotspots and prized additions to The Pearl Island's extensive list of resident facilities and privileges. This is in addition to the inauguration of Corinthia Club Golf in the neighboring Gewan Island and the new Corinthia Yacht Club in Porto Arabia, which have equally received public acclaim and attracted many visitors.

For 2023, UDC renews its pledge to shareholders to complete its development projects on Gewan Island and attract potential investors, buyers and tenants, and to also play an active role in supporting the Qatari economy and promoting Qatari tourism, the latter increasingly gaining importance in recent times.

In conclusion, on behalf of all members of the Board of Directors, executive management, and employees of UDC, I wish to extend my sincere thanks to His Highness the Amir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, for his continuous and generous support to all Qatari companies.

I would also like to express my great thanks to all members of United Development Company's family, including management and employees, for their tremendous and exceptional efforts to achieving impressive financial results for the year 2022. My sincere gratitude finally goes to our shareholders for their trust as well as unwavering support, and I assure them once again that we will live up to their aspirations and expectations, by sustaining a high performance culture at UDC.

Yours Sincerely,
Turki bin Mohammed Al-Khater
Chairman

UNITED DEVELOPMENT CO. Q.P.S.C | UDC Tower, The Pearl Island | P.O.Box: 7256 Doha, Qatar | T: +974 4409 8400 | F: +974 4409 8500 | C.R.No. 22980 | Capital (paid in full) QR 3,540,862,500

CONSOLIDATED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

As at and for the year ended 31 December 2022

UNITED DEVELOPMENT CO.

Financial Highlights

Visit udcqatar.com

INDEPENDENT AUDITOR'S REPORT

TO THE SHAREHOLDERS OF UNITED DEVELOPMENT COMPANY Q.P.S.C.

Report on the audit of the consolidated financial statements

Opinion

We have audited the consolidated financial statements of United Development Company Q.P.S.C. ("the Company") and its subsidiaries (together referred as the "Group"), which comprise the consolidated statement of financial position as at 31 December 2022, and the consolidated statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income, consolidated statement of changes in equity and consolidated statement of cash flows for the year then ended, and notes to the consolidated financial statements, including a summary of significant accounting policies.

In our opinion, the accompanying consolidated financial statements present fairly, in all material respects, the consolidated financial position of the Group as at 31 December 2022 and its consolidated financial performance and its consolidated cash flows for the year then ended in accordance with International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRSs).

Basis for opinion

We conducted our audit in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (ISAs). Our responsibilities under those standards are further described in the *Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the consolidated financial statements* section of our report. We are independent of the Group in accordance with the International Ethics Standards Board for Accountants' *International Code of Ethics for Professional Accountants (including International Independence Standards)* (IESBA Code) together with the ethical requirements that are relevant to our audit of the consolidated financial statements in State of Qatar, and we have fulfilled our other ethical responsibilities in accordance with these requirements and the IESBA Code. We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion.

Key audit matters

Key audit matters are those matters that, in our professional judgment, were of most significance in the audit of the consolidated financial statements of the current period. These matters were addressed in the context of the audit of the consolidated financial statements as a whole, and in forming the auditor's opinion thereon, and we do not provide a separate opinion on these matters. For each matter below, our description of how our audit addressed the matter is provided in that context.

We have fulfilled the responsibilities described in the *Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the consolidated financial statements* section of our report, including in relation to these matters. Accordingly, our audit included the performance of procedures designed to respond to our assessment of the risks of material misstatement of the consolidated financial statements. The results of our audit procedures, including the procedures performed to address the matters below, provide the basis for our audit opinion on the accompanying consolidated financial statements.

Key audit matter	How our audit addresses the key audit matter
Valuation of investment properties	
The Group owns investment properties (lands and buildings) located primarily in The Pearl Island, State of Qatar. The fair value of Group's investment properties as at 31 December 2022 amounted to QR 10,794 million (2021: QR 9,822 million), which is approximately 52% (2021: 49%) of the Group's total assets at the reporting date. The Group recorded a net fair value loss of QR 66 million for the year ended 31 December 2022 (gain 2021: QR 15 million) as disclosed in Note 10 to the consolidated financial statements. Valuation of investment properties was considered a key audit matter due to the significance of the balance and the extent of significant judgments and estimates applied in assessing the fair values.	Our audit procedures included the following key areas, among others: • We performed walkthrough procedures and obtained understanding of the controls relating to the valuation of investment properties including valuation methods, assumptions and estimates used in the valuation of investment properties. • We assessed the competence, capabilities and objectivity of the external valuer appointed by the management along with the terms of appointment and the scope of work. • With the assistance of our internal valuation specialist, we assessed: – whether the valuation approach and methodology used by the management are in accordance with generally accepted valuation standards practices; and – appropriateness of the assumptions and data used in the valuation such as annual cash flows, operating costs, terminal value, growth rate, weighted average cost of capital and market comparable prices where applicable. • We reviewed the adjustments made in the books in relation to the change in fair value of investment properties. In addition, we assessed the adequacy of the related disclosures in the consolidated financial statements including the disclosure of key assumptions and judgments.

Other matter

The consolidated financial statements of the Group for the year ended 31 December 2021, were audited by another auditor who expressed an unmodified opinion on those consolidated financial statements on 2 February 2022.

Other information included in the Group's 2022 Annual Report

Other information consists of the information included in The Group's 2022 Annual Report other than the consolidated financial statements and our auditor's report thereon. Management is responsible for the other information. The Group's 2022 Annual Report is expected to be made available to us after the date of this auditor's report.

Our opinion on the consolidated financial statements does not cover the other information and we will not express any form of assurance conclusion thereon.

In connection with our audit of the consolidated financial statements, our responsibility is to read the other information identified above when it becomes available and, in doing so, consider whether the other information is materially inconsistent with the consolidated financial statements, or our knowledge obtained in the audit or otherwise appears to be materially misstated.

Responsibilities of management and Board of Directors for the consolidated financial statements

Management is responsible for the preparation and fair presentation of the consolidated financial statements in accordance with IFRSs, and for such internal control as management determines is necessary to enable the preparation of consolidated financial statements that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

In preparing the consolidated financial statements, management is responsible for assessing the Group's ability to continue as a going concern, disclosing, as applicable, matters related to going concern and using the going concern basis of accounting unless management either intends to liquidate the Group or to cease operations, or has no realistic alternative but to do so.

The Board of Directors are responsible for overseeing the Group's financial reporting process.

Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the consolidated financial statements

Our objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the consolidated financial statements as a whole are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an auditor's report that includes our opinion. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance, but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with ISAs will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of these consolidated financial statements.

As part of an audit in accordance with ISAs, we exercise professional judgment and maintain professional skepticism throughout the audit. We also:

- Identify and assess the risks of material misstatement of the consolidated financial statements, whether due to fraud or error, design and perform audit procedures responsive to those risks, and obtain audit evidence that is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion. The risk of not detecting a material misstatement resulting from fraud is higher than for one resulting from error, as fraud may involve collusion, forgery, intentional omissions, misrepresentations, or the override of internal control.
- Obtain an understanding of internal control relevant to the audit in order to design audit procedures that are appropriate in the circumstances, but not for the purpose of expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of the Group's internal control.
- Evaluate the appropriateness of accounting policies used and the reasonableness of accounting estimates and related disclosures made by management.
- Conclude on the appropriateness of management's use of the going concern basis of accounting and, based on the audit evidence obtained, whether a material uncertainty exists related to events or conditions that may cast significant doubt on the Group's ability to continue as a going concern. If we conclude that a material uncertainty exists, we are required to draw attention in our auditor's report to the related disclosures in the consolidated financial statements or, if such disclosures are inadequate, to modify our opinion. Our conclusions are based on the audit evidence obtained up to the date of our auditor's report. However, future events or conditions may cause the Group to cease to continue as a going concern.
- Evaluate the overall presentation, structure and content of the consolidated financial statements, including the disclosures, and whether the consolidated financial statements represent the underlying transactions and events in a manner that achieves fair presentation.
- Obtain sufficient appropriate audit evidence regarding the financial information of the entities or business activities within the Group to express an opinion on the consolidated financial statements. We are responsible for the direction, supervision, and performance of the group audit. We remain solely responsible for our audit opinion.

We communicate with Board of Directors regarding, among other matters, the planned scope and timing of the audit and significant audit findings, including any significant deficiencies in internal control that we identify during our audit.

We also provide Board of Directors with a statement that we have complied with relevant ethical requirements regarding independence, and to communicate with them all relationships and other matters that may reasonably be thought to bear on our independence, and where applicable, actions taken to eliminate threats or safeguards applied.

From the matters communicated with Board of Directors, we determine those matters that were of most significance in the audit of the consolidated financial statements of the current period and are therefore the key audit matters. We describe these matters in our auditor's report unless law or regulation precludes public disclosure about the matter or when, in extremely rare circumstances, we determine that a matter should not be communicated in our report because the adverse consequences of doing so would reasonably be expected to outweigh the public interest benefits of such communication.

Report on other legal and regulatory requirements

Furthermore, in our opinion, proper books of account have been kept by the Group, an inventory counts have been conducted in accordance with established principles, and the consolidated financial statements comply with the Qatar Commercial Companies' Law No. 11 of 2015, whose certain provisions were subsequently amended by Law No.8 of 2021 and the Company's Articles of Association. We have obtained all the information and explanations we required for the purpose of our audit and are not aware of any violations of the above mentioned law or the Articles of Association having occurred during the year, which might have had a material adverse effect on the Group's consolidated financial position or performance.

Date: 8 February 2023
Doha, State of Qatar

Ahmed Sayed
of Ernst & Young
Auditor's Registration No. 326

CONSOLIDATED STATEMENT OF PROFIT OR LOSS AND OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME

for the year ended 31 December 2022

	2022 QR'000	2021 QR'000
Revenue	1,810,690	2,038,427
Cost of revenue	(1,115,380)	(1,397,216)
Gross profit	695,310	641,211
Dividend income	38	984
Other operating income	226,338	82,842
Fair value gain/(loss) on investment securities	1,670	(1,964)
Reversal of/(provision for) impairment on trade receivables	2,283	(8,446)
General and administrative expenses	(298,452)	(307,978)
Sales and marketing expenses	(65,110)	(14,659)
Operating profit	562,077	391,990
Fair value (loss)/gain on investment properties	(65,596)	15,471
Finance income	66,621	71,580
Finance costs	(164,527)	(118,824)
Net finance costs	(97,906)	(47,244)
Net share of results of associate	(4,118)	1,121
Profit before tax	394,457	361,338
Income tax	(3,980)	(5,724)
Net profit for the year	390,477	355,614
Net profit for the year attributable to:		
Equity holders of the Parent	388,114	325,808
Non-controlling interests	2,363	29,806
	390,477	355,614
Earnings per share attributable to equity holders of the Parent:		
Basic and diluted earnings per share (QR)	0.110	0.092
Other comprehensive income	-	-
Total comprehensive income for the year	390,477	355,614
Total comprehensive income for the year attributable to:		
Equity holders of the Parent	388,114	325,808
Non-controlling interests	2,363	29,806
	390,477	355,614

CONSOLIDATED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

as at 31 December 2022

	2022 QR'000	2021 QR'000
Assets		
Non-current assets		
Property, plant and equipment	3,561,834	3,050,943
Investment properties	10,794,047	9,822,212
Right-of-use assets	8,913	11,698
Intangible assets	3,911	2,498
Investment in associate	27,436	37,954
Investment securities	51,493	49,823
Accounts and other receivables	575,438	831,257
Deferred costs	122,037	119,789
Total non-current assets	15,145,109	13,926,174
Current assets		
Inventories	101,827	953,001
Work in progress	1,738,505	1,769,583
Accounts and other receivables	1,870,725	1,543,372
Deferred costs	14,676	13,809
Cash and bank balances	2,029,082	1,795,865
Total current assets	5,754,815	6,075,630
Total assets	20,899,924	20,001,804
Equity and liabilities		
Equity		
Issued capital	3,540,862	3,540,862
Legal reserve	1,770,431	1,770,431
Other reserve	1,212,049	1,212,049
Retained earnings	4,582,726	4,399,063
Equity attributable to equity holders of the parent	11,106,068	10,922,405
Non-controlling interests	70,688	75,568
Total equity	11,176,756	10,997,973
Liabilities		
Non-current liabilities		
Loans and borrowings	3,545,201	3,012,139
Accounts and other payables	105,417	114,240
Retention payable	153,862	181,575
Deferred revenue	650,688	607,462
Employees' end-of-service benefits	54,279	49,708
Lease liabilities	7,544	9,273
Total non-current liabilities	4,516,991	3,974,397
Current liabilities		
Loans and borrowings	1,828,332	1,521,084
Accounts and other payables	3,228,730	3,333,787
Retention payable	82,414	112,943
Deferred revenue	64,736	58,731
Lease liabilities	1,965	2,889
Total current liabilities	5,206,177	5,029,434
Total liabilities	9,723,168	9,003,831
Total equity and liabilities	20,899,924	20,001,804

These consolidated financial statements were approved by the Board of Directors and signed on their behalf on 8 February 2023 by:

Ibrahim Jassim Al-Othman
President and Chief Executive Officer

Turki Bin Mohamed Al-Khater
Chairman of the Board

CONSOLIDATED STATEMENT OF CASH FLOWS

for the year ended 31 December 2022

	2022 QR'000	2021 QR'000
Operating activities:		
Profit before tax	394,457	361,338
Adjustments:		
Net share of results in associates	4,118	(1,121)
Depreciation	109,305	102,743
Loss on disposal of property, plant and equipment	243	11,461
Amortisation of intangible assets	627	226
Amortisation of right-of-use assets	3,117	2,722
Net finance costs	97,906	47,244
Dividend income	(38)	(984)
(Reversal of)/provision for impairment of trade receivables	(2,283)	8,446
Fair value (gain)/loss on investment securities	(1,670)	1,964
Fair value loss/(gain) on investment properties	65,596	(15,471)
Provision for employees' end-of-service benefits	8,311	6,213
Operating profit before changes in working capital	679,689	524,781
Changes in working capital:		
Inventories	178,983	515
Work in progress	(634,049)	(244,629)
Accounts and other receivables	(70,983)	(44,449)
Accounts and other payables	(127,939)	44,345
Retention payable	(58,242)	72,582
Deferred revenue and cost, net	46,116	(21,057)
Cash generated from operating activities	13,575	332,088
Finance costs paid	(150,993)	(107,359)
Employees' end-of-service benefits paid	(3,740)	(4,482)
Income tax paid	(5,345)	(8,392)
Net cash (used in)/generated from operating activities	(146,503)	211,855

	2022 QR'000	2021 QR'000
Investing activities:		
Additions to property, plant and equipment	(211,259)	(221,851)
Proceeds from the sale of property, plant and equipment	-	5,137
Additions to intangible assets	(2,040)	(2,015)
Finance income received	68,558	75,079
Additions to investment properties	(109,293)	(217,468)
Movement in time deposits maturing after three months	826,858	(76,328)
Acquisition of non-controlling interest	-	(412,023)
Dividend received from associate and other investees	6,438	7,384
Net cash generated from/(used in) investing activities	579,262	(842,085)
Financing activities:		
Proceeds from loans and borrowings	1,392,270	1,194,573
Repayment of loans and borrowings	(559,365)	(531,814)
Dividend	(201,991)	(191,192)
Repayment of lease liabilities	(3,598)	(3,051)
Net cash generated from financing activities	627,316	468,516
Net increase/(decrease) in cash and cash equivalents	1,060,075	(161,714)
Cash and cash equivalents at the beginning of the year	336,103	497,817
Cash and cash equivalents at the end of the year	1,396,178	336,103

Note: The above published financial information are not the full set of the consolidated financial statements. Full set of consolidated financial statements are available on the Company's website : www.udcqatar.com

REBOUND

Wall Street pivots toward gains before opening bell

AP — NEW YORK

Wall Street appeared poised for a rebound yesterday during a week of mixed corporate earnings and continued anxiety over inflation.

Futures for the Dow Jones industrials rose 0.6 percent, and the S&P 500 gained 0.7 percent.

Stocks pulled back Wednesday despite comments from Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell that an exceptionally strong US jobs report last week would not oblige the central bank to return to a more aggressive stance on raising interest rates to tame inflation.

Another Fed official, John Williams, the president of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, said Wednesday that he still thinks the Fed's main interest rate hitting a target of 5 percent to 5.5 percent by the end of the year is "a very reasonable view."

The federal funds rate is now at a range of 4.50 percent to 4.75 percent. Williams spoke at a CFO Network summit hosted by the Wall Street Journal.



Traders work on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange in New York City, US.

"Traders are keeping a close eye on policymakers' remarks to position accordingly ahead of key upcoming inflation figures and job market data before next month's rate decision," Anderson Alves of ActivTrades said in a commentary.

The Fed has been saying that it plans to hike interest rates a couple more times and then hold them at a high level at least through the end of the year. Williams warned that interest rates may need to go higher if stock prices rally and bond yields fall too much, among other loosening financial conditions, because that could drive inflation higher.

Companies have so far been reporting relatively lackluster earnings for the last three months of 2022, as rising costs eat into their margins.

PepsiCo yesterday topped sales expectations after it hiked prices to offset its rising costs.

Mattel tumbled more than 10 percent in after-hours trading after the toymaker reported a big sales decline in the all-important holiday quarter. The company's revenue fell 22 percent from the same period a year ago, while net income slid to $16m from $226m the year before.

Walt Disney rose about 7 percent after it reported surprisingly good fiscal first-quarter financial results, but said it will cut about 7,000 jobs as part of a "significant transformation" announced by CEO Bob Iger. The job cuts amount to about 3 percent of the entertainment giant's global workforce.

In Europe, Germany's DAX added 1.3 percent, as did the CAC 40 in Paris. Britain's FTSE 100 gained 0.8 percent at midday.

In Asia, Tokyo's Nikkei 225 fell 0.1 percent to 27,584.35 and the Kospi in Seoul fell 0.1 percent to 2,481.52. Australia's S&P/ASX 200 declined 0.5 percent to 7,490.30. In Mumbai, the Sensex gained 0.2 percent. Shares fell in Bangkok, Taiwan and Singapore.

Hong Kong's Hang Seng index gained 1.6 percent to 21,624.36, while the Shanghai Composite index advanced 1.2 percent to 3,270.38.

In other trading, US benchmark crude oil gained 7 cents to $78.54 per barrel in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange. It added $1.33 on Wednesday to $78.47.

Brent crude, the pricing basis for international trading, advanced 15 cents to $85.24 per barrel.

The US dollar slipped to 130.94 Japanese yen from 131.42 yen. The euro rose to $1.0760 from $1.0714.

On Wednesday, the S&P 500 fell 1.1 percent and the Nasdaq fell 1.7 percent. The Dow industrials gave back 0.6 percent.

QCB issues QR5bn treasury bills

QNA — DOHA

Qatar Central Bank (QCB) issued yesterday treasury bills and Islamic sukuk worth QR5bn.

In a tweet, the QCB said the treasury bills and sukuk would be for terms of one week, one month, three, six and nine months indicating that the total value of bids submitted amounted to QR8.530bn.

The teasury bills were distributed as follows:

QR1bn for one week at an interest rate of 5.0050 percent.

QR2bn for one month at an interest rate of 5.0625 percent.

QR1bn for three months at an interest rate of 5.1450 percent.

QR 500m for six months at an interest rate of 5.2025 percent.

QR500m for nine months at an interest rate of 5.2500 percent.

FINANCIAL RESULTS

Net profits of QIMC, Doha Insurance surge 9.28% and 39.35% respectively

QNA — DOHA

The net profit of Qatar Industrial Manufacturing Company (QIMC) rose 9.28 percent during 2022 to reach 152,131,122 in comparison to net profit of QR 139,208,661 for the same period of 2021.

The company figures published on the Qatar Stock Exchange (QSE) website on Wednesday indicated that Earnings per share (EPS) amounted to QR 0.32 as of December 31, 2022 versus Earnings per share (EPS) QR 0.29 for the same period in 2021, in addition to the proposed distributions of QR 0.13 per share.

In turn, the net profit of the Doha Insurance surged 39.35 percent during 2022 to reach QR 102,105,514 in comparison to net profit of QR 73,269,695 for the same period of the 2021.

The company figures published on the QSE website indicated that the company's EPS amounted to QR 0.20 as of December 31, 2022 versus the EPS of QR 0.15 for the same period in 2021.

The Board of Directors has also decided to submit a proposal to the General Assembly in its upcoming meeting to ratify a distribution of cash dividends of 15 percent from the share par value QR 0.15 for each share.

Industries Qatar posts record net profit of QR8.8bn an increase of 9 percent

FROM PAGE 10

However, on a year-on-year basis product price trends remained positive on account of post-pandemic recovery phase, despite macroeconomic fundamentals remained mostly unstable throughout the year.

Group's operations continue to remain stable and strong as production volumes for the current year improved by 9 percent to reach 16.7 million MT's. This improvement in production was largely driven by (a) higher operating days in polyethylene segment, as the segment was on major planned maintenance during the fourth quarter of 2021; (b) higher production within the fuel additive facilities during the current year, as the MTBE facility was on a commercial maintenance during first quarter of 2021, along with overall operational improvement across the fuel additive facilities; (c) increased fertilizer production volumes on account of higher plant availability; and (d) restart of the previously mothballed DR-2 facility within steel segment with a larger capacity. Plant utilization rates for YE-22 reached 100 percent, while average reliability factor stood at 98 percent. Production volumes during 4Q-22 slightly increased by 1 percent compared to the previous quarter, amid improvement in production volumes noted across all the segments. Group reported a consolidated net profit of QR8.8bn for the year ended 31 December 2022, demonstrating a growth of 9 percent versus last year. The reported net profit for 2022 remains Group's highest profit, since the Group's incorporation in 2003. Earnings per share (EPS) for 2022 was QR 1.46 versus QR 1.34 for 2021.

Group revenue for the year grew significantly by 28 percent to reach QR25.8bn as compared to QR20.2bn reported for the last year. The Group's consolidated revenue for 2022 also remained the highest, since inception. Group's financial performance for the year ended 31 December 2022 was largely attributed to the following factors: Blended average product prices significantly surged by 18 percent versus last year and reached USD 711/MT. Growth in product prices contributed to an increase of QR3.7bn in the Group's net earnings. The increase in product prices was mainly linked to elevated market prices across the segments, on account of constructive macroeconomic drivers carried forward from the latter part of the last year. However, macroeconomic fundamentals remained volatile during most part of the current year with signs of economic slowdown. Sales volumes for the year increased by 8 percent versus the last year, primarily driven by higher plant operating rates and restarting of certain production facilities.

Industries Qatar will host an Earnings call with investors to discuss the latest results, business outlook and other matters yesterday, 16th February 2023 at 1:30 pm Doha time. The IR presentation that accompanies the conference call will be

Japan's Nissan reports better profit as chip crunch eases

AP — TOKYO

Nissan reported a 55 percent jump in its October-December profit yesterday, as the Japanese automaker gears up for a less bumpy journey with its French alliance partner Renault.

Profit for the quarter at Yokohama-based Nissan Motor Co. totaled 50.6bn yen ($386m), up from 32.7bn yen in the previous year.

Quarterly sales surged 29 percent to 2.8 trillion yen ($21bn), as a shortage of computer chips that has bedeviled the world's automakers gradually eased, according to Nissan. The crunch was caused by pandemic-related disruptions that also hindered Nissan's ability to deliver its vehicles to customers. Some buyers were waiting for a year for their Z sportscars or Ariya sport utility vehicles, said Nissan's chief operating officer, Ashwani Gupta. "We really don't want our customers to wait this long," he told reporters.



This picture shows the logo of Japanese automaker NISSAN Motor at the company's head office in Yokohama, Japan.

The rising cost of raw materials, inflation pressures and volatile exchange rates have added to the risks for the auto industry, including Nissan.

Nissan, maker of the Leaf electric car and Infiniti luxury models, now expects to sell 8 percent fewer vehicles for the full fiscal year through March than previously projected, at 3.4 million vehicles, because of the semiconductor supply shortages and the impact from the spread of coronavirus infections in China. Chief Executive Makoto Uchida acknowledged the quarter was extremely challenging, while expressing optimism for the future. "The new models we introduced in each market have been very well received by customers," he said.

Earlier this week, Nissan, with Renault and smaller Japanese carmaker Mitsubishi Motors, announced how they were redefining their mutual relationship.

The boards of both companies approved equalizing the stake each automaker holds in the other to 15 percent, bringing a better balance to the alliance, according to an announcement in London. Before, Renault Group, whose top shareholder is the French government, was holding 43.4 percent of Nissan while Nissan owned just 15 percent of Renault.

The automakers also vowed to cooperate in markets worldwide, including India and Latin America, while Nissan said it will invest up to 15 percent in Ampere, Renault's electric vehicle and software entity in Europe. Nissan has been eager to put behind it the 2018 arrest of Carlos Ghosn, a once-superstar executive who was sent in by Renault to save Nissan from bankruptcy in 1999, and successfully turned it around. Ghosn jumped bail and is now in Lebanon. He says he is innocent of financial misconduct charges. The scandal highlighted disgruntlement at Nissan over Ghosn's perks and his power over the company.

Infrastructure facilities to accelerate in years ahead

FROM PAGE 10

In previous years, essential investments were implemented in both residential and non-residential areas as part of Qatar's economic diversification strategy under National Vision 2030. "Apart from World Cup-related projects, several other large-scale social and commercial construction projects are underway which will spur growth in the residential and non-residential sector," it said.

As the market looks very steady with burgeoning sectors in the country, Qatar's infrastructure-related projects and facilities anticipate expanding rapidly across the region, resulting in a healthy-driven economy.

COST SAVINGS

Disney jumps on Iger's $5.5bn savings plan

BLOOMBERG — CALIFORNIA

Disney shares rose 3.7 percent at 9:33 a.m. yesterday in New York after a gain of 5.7 percent, the biggest intraday advance in more than two months.

Walt Disney Co.'s shares climbed after Chief Executive Officer Bob Iger announced plans for a dramatic restructuring of the world's largest entertainment company, including 7,000 job cuts and $5.5bn in cost savings.

The reductions include plans to trim $3bn from its budget for movies and TV shows and the rest in non-content related areas. About $1bn of the savings are already underway, Iger said Wednesday on a conference call with investors.

As part of the change, Disney's CEO also announced that the company will be reorganized into three divisions: an entertainment unit that includes its main TV, film and streaming businesses; the ESPN sports networks; and the theme-park unit, which includes cruise ships and consumer products.

"The hard work is ahead, but substantive and specific cost savings suggest a sense of urgency to maximizing long-term returns," Benjamin Swinburne, an analyst with Morgan Stanley, said in a note.

Disney shares rose 3.7 percent at 9:33 a.m. yesterday in New York after a gain of 5.7 percent, the biggest intraday advance in more than two months.

The stock had declined about 22 percent in the 12 months through Wednesday, though the shares had been regaining ground this year following Iger's appointment at the end of 2022.

Eventually, Iger said, Disney will offer the ESPN network as an a la carte option online, but there are no imminent plans to do.



World Bank approves $120m to support access to finance for tunisian SMEs

QNA — TUNIS

The World Bank has approved a $120m loan for Tunisia to support access to finance for Tunisian Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs).

According to a World Bank press release, the project aims to address the primary long-term liquidity constraints faced by Tunisian firms by financing long-term lines of credit that will be on-lent by the Ministry of Finance to participating financial institutions for lending to eligible SMEs. World Bank Country Manager for Tunisia Alexandre Arrobbio said: "The COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine have caused macroeconomic imbalances in Tunisia, which have exacerbated challenges faced by SMEs and weakened their performance and financial health."

SETBACKS

Credit Suisse posts $1.4bn pre-tax loss as woes go on in 4Q

AP — GENEVA



Credit Suisse yesterday reported a pre-tax loss of more than 1.3bn Swiss francs (about $1.4bn) in the fourth quarter of last year, as its new managers vie to right the top-drawer Swiss bank that has faced a string of setbacks in recent years.

The bank also announced the $175m purchase of the investment banking business of US-based M. Klein & Co. and plans to roll those operations into the revived CS First Boston investment bank.

The Zurich-based company, Switzerland's No. 2 bank after UBS, said net revenue sank 20 percent compared with a year ago, coming in at 3bn francs for the fourth quarter. The pre-tax loss was nearly 1.32bn francs, compared with 1.67bn in the same period a year earlier.

Credit Suisse saw its investment bank business shrink and its Swiss bank and wealth management operations increase as a share of revenue. The company says it expects losses in both the investment bank and wealth management units for the first quarter of this year, partly due to a drop in assets under management and lower deposits since announcing a broad restructuring in October.

The bank's performance last year overall "was mainly driven by significantly lower" investment banking revenue, pointing to an "industry-wide slowdown in capital markets" with major indices all falling in 2022, it said in a statement.

In October, Credit Suisse unveiled a "radical strategy" to revamp itself through measures including cost cuts, staff reductions, steps to lower risk and a cash infusion through a share purchase from the Saudi National Bank.

US jobless claims pick up for first time in six weeks

BLOOMBERG — WASHINGTON

Applications for US unemployment benefits rose for the first time in six weeks but remained historically low, underscoring the resilience of the job market despite mounting economic uncertainty.

Initial unemployment claims rose by 13,000 to 196,000 in the week ended Feb. 4, Labor Department data showed yesterday. The median forecast in a Bloomberg survey of economists called for 190,000 applications.

Continuing claims, which include people who have already received unemployment benefits for a week or more, increased to 1.69 million in the week ended Jan. 28. The US labor market has remained firm in the backdrop of the Federal Reserve's most aggressive tightening campaign in a generation. Despite a rising number of layoffs spreading beyond tech companies, many business - particularly smaller ones - are still struggling to hire, while others are holding onto staff they worked so desperately to on-board.

A survey of chief executives by the Conference Board, in collaboration with the Business Council, found that 57 percent report some problems attracting qualified workers, while 81 percent expect to boost wages by at least 3 percent over the coming year.

Walt Disney Co. said Wednesday it's cutting 7,000 jobs as part of a broader restructuring that will save the entertainment company $5.5bn. Boeing Co. expects to cut about 2,000 jobs this year primarily in finance and human resources, the Seattle Times reported this week.

The data come a week after a separate government report showed payrolls unexpectedly surged last month while the unemployment rate fell to a 53-year low. A survey of chief executives by the Conference Board, in collaboration with the Business Council, found that 57 percent report some problems attracting qualified workers, while 81 percent expect to boost wages by at least 3 percent over the coming year.

"While CEOs are still girding for a recession in 2023, they continue to experience a tight labor market," Roger Ferguson, vice chairman of Business Council and trustee of the Conference Board, said in a statement yesterday.

StanChart in play as Abu Dhabi's FAB explores $35bn offer

BLOOMBERG — ABU DHABI

- **FAB - which is worth about twice as much as Standard Chartered - is exploring an all-cash bid of in the range of $30bn to $35bn.**
- **The drop in British pound also adds to the attractiveness of the bank that trades at just 0.56 times its book value.**

First Abu Dhabi Bank PJSC is pressing ahead with a potential offer for Standard Chartered Plc, after a move to put earlier takeover plans on hold didn't halt its ambitions to become a global financial powerhouse.

Under the code name Silver-Foxtrot, officials at the Abu Dhabi bank are working under the radar on a possible bid once a cooling off period required by UK takeover rules elapses, according to people familiar with the matter. FAB, as the bank is known, recently completed due diligence on the London-based lender, the people said, asking not to be identified because the matter is private. Any deal would be dependent on market conditions and the performance of Standard Chartered's share price, they said.

FAB - which is worth about twice as much as Standard Chartered - is exploring an all-cash bid of in the range of $30bn to $35bn, the people said. Any acquisition would be funded by its backers, which include Abu Dhabi sovereign fund Mubadala Investment Co. and the emirate's ruling Al Nahyan family, they said. FAB's Chairman Sheikh Tahnoon bin Zayed Al Nahyan is a powerful royal, and has in recent years taken on a more prominent role to spearhead the emirate's political and economic goals.

After a period of higher crude prices, Abu Dhabi is keen to use its oil windfall to transform the city's financial sector, which has lagged many of its other key industries such as energy, tourism and logistics. Such an attempt would represent a step beyond the moves other wealthy Gulf nations have made to take minority stakes in firms like Barclays Plc and Credit Suisse Group AG.

Shares of Standard Chartered in London were trading up 9.6 percent at 1:13 p.m. local time after jumping as much as 12 percent. FAB ended trading slightly higher in Abu Dhabi.

Strong Proposition FAB last month said it had explored a bid for Standard Chartered, but that it was no longer considering an offer. The British bank's relatively small market value - about $24bn compared with FAB's $43bn - and the lure of a business with exposure to some of the world's fastest growing economies make it a strong proposition for the Abu Dhabi lender. The drop in British pound also adds to the attractiveness of the bank that trades at just 0.56 times its book value. Wall Street veteran Ken Moelis is working closely with FAB executives, key members of Abu Dhabi's ruling family and some of the emirate's sovereign funds on a possible transaction, the people said. Citigroup Inc. is also advising the Abu Dhabi bank on the plans, the people said.

Still, getting a deal done would be complicated and ambitious given the hurdles and the differences in the scale of the two banks. Regulatory approvals and compliance are seen as the biggest obstacles to a successful acquisition, the people said. FAB would need approval from the US Treasury to run Standard Chartered's dollar clearing license, for example, one of the people said.

Under one scenario being considered, Standard Chartered could be delisted from exchanges in Hong Kong and London and the merged bank's headquarters could be shifted to Abu Dhabi from the UK capital, the people said. Such a move is likely to face strong opposition in Standard Chartered's home market, they said.

What Bloomberg Intelligence says: First Abu Dhabi Bank's potential bid for Standard Chartered confirms its takeover appeal, given a wide emerging-market footprint, improving efficiencies and supportive capital return. A $30-35 billion likely offer implies an above-0.85x 2023 book value (40% premium), and we expect an upper range would be needed to get shareholder approval. FAB would most likely need to raise capital to complete the deal, with competing bidders possibly to emerge as well.

- Jonathan Tyce and Tomasz Noetzel, BI banking analysts FAB's exploration of such a deal shows the growing ambition of Middle East lenders and the wealthy oil-rich nations that back them. A successful outcome would catapult FAB into an emerging markets banking giant with more than $1 trillion in assets - and likely into the club of 30 banks that global regulators consider systemically important. It would also mark a turning point in Chief Executive Officer Hana Al Rostamani's two-year reign.

A representative for FAB referred to its January statement where said it had evaluated a possible offer for Standard Chartered but was no longer doing so, and said the bank is bound by takeover rules in the UK and Hong Kong. A representative for Standard Chartered declined to comment.

Pepsi price hikes fuel 10% jump in Q4 sales

AP — NEWYORK

PepsiCo reported better-than-expected sales in the fourth quarter after hiking prices for its drinks and snacks.

Revenue rose more than 10 percent to $28bn. That was better than the $26.8bn Wall Street had forecast, according to analysts polled by FactSet.

Pepsi raised prices in a number of markets as it continued to battle double-digit percentage cost increases for ingredients like cooking oil, potatoes and seasonings.

Frito-Lay snacks and Quaker products booked double-digit revenue gains in North America even though sales volumes were down 1 percent and 3 percent, respectively.

In Europe, Pepsi said its costs for packaging materials, cooking oil and other commodities surged 141 percentage points.

Revenue and sales volumes both fell in that market. Revenue and sales volumes rose elsewhere, including Asia and Latin America.

In prepared remarks, Pepsi Chairman and CEO Ramon Laguerta said consumers have been resilient despite higher prices, and continue to gravitate toward familiar brands like Doritos and Cheetos.

But he said the company is "diligently monitoring spending patterns and behavior." Pepsi's net income fell 60 percent to $535m, largely due to a $1.5bn tax impairment charge for its SodaStream brand and other assets. Without one-time items, Pepsi earned $1.67 per share in the October-December period, beating analysts' forecast of $1.65.

Pepsi also said it would buy back about $1bn worth of its own shares and raised its annual dividend by 10 percen

The Purchase, New York, company expects to deliver organic revenue growth of 6 percent this year, a slower pace from its full-year organic growth of 14.4 percent in 2022. It also plans $1bn in share repurchases. The company said it expects full-year adjusted earnings of $7.20 per share, up 6 percent from 2022.

That came in lower than Wall Street's forecast of $7.27 per share, according to FactSet.

Pepsi also said it would buy back about $1bn worth of its own shares and raised its annual dividend by 10 percent.

Pepsi shares rose more than 1 percent in pre-market trading.

P IN BRIEF

Netflix takes effort to get paid for account sharing

AP — CALIFORNIA: Netflix has a plan to deal with rampant account sharing: a program that lets subscribers pay extra to share their account with people outside their household.

The streaming giant introduced paid sharing in Canada, New Zealand, Portugal and Spain on Wednesday. It was previously rolled out in multiple markets in Latin America.

While Netflix won't say when paid sharing will come to other countries, some version of the plan is expected to be introduced in the US in the next few weeks. Around one-third of Netflix's subscribers live in the U.S. and Canada.

Netflix has more than 231 million paid subscribers in 190 countries. The Los Gatos, California-based company estimates that 100 million households are currently sharing their accounts with others, which impacts the company's ability to invest in new programming.

"We've always made it easy for people who live together to share their Netflix account with features like profiles and multiple streams," the company said in a blog post Wednesday.

Brazil mulls early review of inflation goals to boost

BLOOMBERG — BRASÍLIA: Brazil's economic team is considering an early review of the country's inflation targets in an attempt to defuse tensions between the central bank and President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, who has been publicly pushing for higher goals and lower interest rates, according to two government officials with knowledge of the matter.

The national monetary council, the government body responsible for setting such targets, traditionally holds a discussion about the subject in June, when it was expected to define a goal for 2026.

But Lula's growing complaints that 13.75 percent interest rates are choking the economy have some members of the economic team trying to bring forward a discussion to possibly increase the goals, currently set at 3.25 percent for 2023 and 3 percent for the next two years, said the people, who asked for anonymity because the discussion isn't public.

SAM BANKMAN-FRIED

FTX founder keeps talking, ignoring typical legal strategy

AP — NEW YORK

For federal prosecutors, Sam Bankman-Fried could be the gift that keeps on giving.

After the November collapse of FTX, the cryptocurrency exchange he founded in 2019, Bankman-Fried unexpectedly gave a series of interviews intended to present his version of events. He was indicted in December and charged with perpetrating one of the biggest frauds in US history - and he's still talking, either in person or on the internet. The atypical chattiness for a criminal defendant is likely causing Bankman-Fried's attorneys to scratch their heads, or worse. Prosecutors can use any statements, tweets or other communications against him at his trial, which is scheduled for October.

"Prosecutors love when defendants shoot their mouths off," said Daniel R. Alonso, a former federal prosecutor who is now a white-collar criminal defense attorney. If Bankman-Fried's public comments before trial can be proven false during the trial, it may undermine his credibility with a jury, he said.

Bankman-Fried's most immediate concern, however, is a recent private communication. Prosecutors say he sent an encrypted message over the Signal texting app on Jan. 15 to the general counsel of FTX US, a likely witness for the government. Bankman-Fried will be back in a New York court Thursday, where a judge could impose new bail restrictions because of what could be seen as an attempt to influence a witness. Before its collapse, FTX was the world's second-largest crypto exchange and Bankman-Fried, 30, was its CEO and a billionaire several times over, at least on paper. Celebrities and politicians alike vouched for FTX and its founder, and Bankman-Fried was considered a leading figure in the crypto world.

In interviews and Twitter posts, Bankman-Fried has said he never intended to defraud anyone. He's maintained that running FTX took up all his time and that he was unaware of the financial problems at the hedge fund until it was too late.



Sam Bankman-Fried, CEO and Founder of FTX, walks near the US Capitol, in Washington, US/AP.

However, the broad collapse of cryptocurrencies last year caused severe financial stress for numerous companies in the crypto universe, from lenders to exchanges to firms focused on investing in digital assets. FTX sought bankruptcy protection in November after customers pulled out their money in the crypto equivalent of a bank run.

Federal prosecutors have said Bankman-Fried devised "a scheme and artifice to defraud" FTX's customers and investors right from FTX's inception. They say he illegally diverted their money to cover expenses, debts and risky trades at Alameda Research, the crypto hedge fund he started in 2017, and to make lavish real estate purchases and large political donations.

In interviews and Twitter posts, Bankman-Fried has said he never intended to defraud anyone. He's maintained that running FTX took up all his time and that he was unaware of the financial problems at the hedge fund until it was too late.

Those assertions are likely to be refuted by one of the government's key witnesses. Caroline Ellison, the former CEO of Alameda, has agreed to plead guilty for her role in FTX's collapse and to testify against Bankman-Fried. In a plea hearing in December, Ellison said she knew FTX had used billions in customer funds to make loans to Alameda and agreed with Bankman-Fried and others to take steps to conceal the nature of the loans. Gary Wang, who co-founded FTX with Bankman-Fried, also struck a deal for cooperation. At his own plea hearing, Wang said that he made changes to computer code to enable FTX customer funds to be transferred to Alameda. Another claim made often by Bankman-Fried is that he's trying to help recover funds for FTX customers, but that FTX's new management has cut him off and has taken steps, including filing for bankruptcy protection, that could inhibit customers from getting their money back.

For instance, Bankman-Fried says that when FTX collapsed, outside parties had made funding offers totaling billions of dollars, and if given a few weeks the company could have raised enough money "to make customers substantially whole."

EXCITING CONTESTS

Ghannam outpaces Sha'alan to clinch Al Arish Cup honours

FAWAD HUSSAIN
THE PENINSULA


The connection of Ghannam celebrate after the Abdullah Saeed Abdullah Al Mesnad-owned seven-year-old horse won the Al Arish Cup at Al Uqda Racecourse yesterday. PICS: JUHAIM/QREC

Abdullah Saeed Abdullah Al Mesnad-owned Ghannam grabbed top honours at the Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club's (QREC) 16th Al Uqda Meeting, clinching the Al Arish Cup after a thrilling race yesterday.

Following a tough competition with Sha'alan in the feature, the seven-year-old, which had Alberto Sanna in the saddle, won the 1300m Conditions for 4YO+ Purebred Arabians to steal show at Al Uqda Equestrian Complex.

Ghannam, which is trained by Wasim Al Sahn, held on gamely to secure a neck victory over Sha'alan under jockey Marco Casamento. Soufiane Saadi rode Quepos to third place in the race that carried a total prize purse of QR80,000. The winners of the feature were honoured by Al Uqda Equestrian Complex Manager Abdulaziz Jassim Al Boenain.

In penultimate contest of the day, Ghazwan Racing's Midrass completed a double in a span of only five days, landing the title for 1400m Handicap (0-95) for 5YO+ Purebred Arabian after an impressive run.

Soufiane Saadi piloted the Hadi Al Ramzani-trained to quarter-of-a length win, which was second for the pair that also claimed the Mesaieed Cup triumph on Saturday.

The victory also completed a quickfire double of the day for Saadi, who earlier teamed up with Khalid Abdulaziz Al Kuwari's Selous to lift the 1400m Handicap (65-85) for 4YO+ Thoroughbreds trophy.

The pair's thrilling win by a neck over Main Reef also sealed a brace of victories for trainer Zuhair Mohsen.

Abdulaziz Ali Al Kathiri's Shivraj gave trainer Mohsen his first win of the day when he emerged fastest in the 1400m Novice for 3YO+ Thoroughbreds. Ridden by Ronan Thomas, the four-year-old gelding stormed to the finish line two-and-a-half lengths ahead of runner-up Glory Of The Stars.


Jockey Alberto Sanna guides Ghannam towards the finish line.

Also yesterday, Al Sareh, owned by Al Anood Stud, got off the mark in style prevailing over his opponents in the 1400m Maiden for 4-6YO Local Thoroughbreds. The six-year-old gelding trained by Alanoud Khalifa Al Malki, registered a dominant five-and-a-half-length victory under Carlos Henrique.

Meanwhile, Al Shaqab Racing's homebred Gasham outpaced Aria Du Soleil, recording a thrilling short head win to earn the 1400m Purebred Arabian Maiden Plate title. Lukas Delozier rode the four-year-old colt, trained by Eric Lemartinel.

The opening contest of the seven-race card day saw Faleh Suwayed Al Ajami's Brazen Bow – trained by Mohammed Ghazali – sealing the 1400m Handicap (0-65) for 4YO+ Thoroughbred title after a half-length triumph under Casamento.

16TH RACE MEETING - AL ARISH CUP

(Horse, trainer, jockey)
Al Arish Cup - Purebred Arabian Conditions
Ghannam (QA), Wasim Al Sahn, Alberto Sanna
Purebred Arabian Handicap 0-95
Midrass (FR), Hadi Al Ramzani, Soufiane Saadi
Thoroughbred Handicap 65-85 (Class 4)
Selous (FR), Zuhair Mohsen, Soufiane Saadi
Thoroughbred Novice Plate (Class 5)
Shivraj (GB), Zuhair Mohsen, Ronan Thomas
Local Thoroughbred Maiden Plate
Al Sareh (QA), Alanoud Khalifa Al-Malki, Carlos Henrique
Purebred Arabian Maiden Plate
Gasham (FR), Eric Lemartinel, Lukas Delozier
Thoroughbred Handicap 0-65 (Class 6)
Brazen Bow (FR), Mohammed Ghazali, Marco Casamento


India's Ravindra Jadeja (left) celebrates with teammate Suryakumar Yadav. AFP

Jadeja bags 5-47 as India dominate Australia on day 1

AFP – NAGPUR

Indian spinner Ravindra Jadeja grabbed a five-wicket haul on his international return as India ruled the opening day of the first Test against Australia yesterday.

Jadeja returned figures of 5-47 and fellow spinner Ravichandran Ashwin took three wickets to bowl out Australia for 177 in the final session on a turning Nagpur pitch.

In reply, India were 77 for one at stumps, with skipper Rohit Sharma on 56 and Ashwin, yet to score, at the crease. The hosts still trail Australia by 100 runs.

Rohit began by hitting three boundaries off Australian skipper Pat Cummins' first over, and put on 76 runs with opening partner KL Rahul, who made a laboured 20.

The Indian captain reached his fifty with a four off Nathan Lyon and remained sharp to see off the day's play.

Rahul fell caught and bowled off debutant spinner Todd Murphy, who celebrated his first Test wicket.

Jadeja, a left-arm orthodox bowler who came back into the Indian side after a knee injury, stood out with his guile, taking key wickets including those of Marnus Labuschagne (49) and Steve Smith (37).

Both Australians had launched a fightback with their third-wicket 82-run stand after losing openers Usman Khawaja and David Warner early in the day.

Peter Handscomb (31) and wicketkeeper-batsman Alex Carey (36) also put on a partnership of 53 before Ashwin ended Carey's spell at the crease to record his 450th Test wicket.

Jadeja's double strike on successive balls soon after lunch rocked the tourists as he sent back Labuschagne and then trapped Matt Renshaw for a first-ball duck.

He later bowled Smith with a delivery that went through his bat and pad.

Ashwin and Jadeja kept up the charge to get into the Australian tail when the tourists took tea at 174-8, and added just three runs in the final session.

Earlier, seamer Mohammed Siraj struck on his first ball to get Khawaja trapped lbw for one with a delivery that swung in to the left-hander, after the tourists elected to bat at the start of the four-match series.

An appeal was turned down by the on-field umpire but India successfully reviewed the decision.

Mohammed Shami raised the noise in the next over when the seamer bowled the left-handed Warner for one.

BRIEF SCORES
INDIA 77 for 1 (Rohit 56*) trail **AUSTRALIA** 177 (Labuschagne 49, Smith 37, Jadeja 5-47) by 100 runs


Thomas Bach

Ukraine-led 2024 boycott call is against Olympic principles: IOC President Bach

AFP – LAUSANNE

IOC President Thomas Bach has told Ukraine that its calls for a boycott of the 2024 Paris Games over the possible participation of Russian competitors goes against Olympic "principles".

In a letter to the Ukrainian National Olympic Committee revealed on Thursday, Bach said Ukraine's efforts in "pressuring" other countries to boycott the 2024 Games was "extremely regrettable".

The International Olympic Committee said last month it was exploring a "pathway" to allow Russian and Belarusian competitors to take part in the Paris Olympics, under a neutral flag.

Ukraine has reacted furiously, threatening to pull out of the Games. Nordic and some eastern European countries have said they would join a boycott.

"Threatening a boycott of the Olympic Games which, as you inform me, the NOC of Ukraine is currently considering, goes against the fundamentals of the Olympic Movement and the principles we stand for," Bach said in the letter to Ukraine's Olympic chief Vadym Goutzeit.

Bach said the participation of Russian and Belarusian athletes "has not even been discussed in concrete terms yet".

"Therefore, your letter at this premature stage to your fellow NOCs, to the International Federations, IOC Members and to future Olympic hosts, pressuring them in an attempt to publicly influence their decision-making, has been perceived by the vast majority of them as, at the very least, extremely regrettable," Bach added.

Singapore replaces Russia as host of swimming World Championships

AFP – SINGAPORE

Singapore will host swimming's World Championships in 2025, the sport's governing body said yesterday, replacing the Russian city of Kazan.

Singapore will be the first Southeast Asian nation to host the World Aquatics Championships, which also features diving, open water swimming, synchronised swimming and water polo. Exact dates are yet to be confirmed.

"World Aquatics could not be happier to know that the hosting of our main event for 2025 is in such good hands, thanks to the team here in Singapore," its president Husain Al Musallam said in a press release.

Governing body World Aquatics, formerly known as FINA, pulled the world junior swimming championships from Kazan last year and said no other events will be held in Russia "if this grave crisis continues", referring to Moscow's invasion of Ukraine. Melbourne then replaced the Russian city as host of the world short-course championships, held in December.

beIN Sports to serve up over 88 hours of live action with exclusive coverage from Qatar's WTA, ATP events

THE PENINSULA – DOHA

beIN Sports (beIN) will broadcast more than 88 hours of live action this month across the Middle East & North Africa (MENA) from the upcoming WTA 500 Qatar TotalEnergies Open and ATP 250 Qatar ExxonMobil Open taking place at Doha's Khalifa International Tennis & Squash Complex from February 13-18 and February 20-25 respectively.

The two high-profile tournaments will be broadcast up to eight-and-a-half hours per day in Arabic on beIN Sports 5 and in English on beIN Sports English 3, with fans also able to enjoy a range of support shows accompanying the live coverage. A daily 26-minute highlights episode will be broadcast in Arabic, as will daily mini matches and a trio of five-minute fillers.

Mohammed Al Bader, Managing Director of beIN Channels – MENA said, "We are excited at beIN to be able to provide more than 88 hours of coverage across the two weeks of elite tennis, and even more thrilled that we can offer exclusive insights from our knowledgeable, experienced pundits every day from our home turf. Tennis has more fans in the region than ever before and beIN, with its comprehensive coverage of a wide range of ATP and WTA events brings fans in MENA an unmatched viewing experience."

Coverage of the WTA 500 Qatar TotalEnergies Open will start one day prior to the start of the tournament with an hour-long preview show on February 12 from 18.00 MECCA. Daily on-court coverage gets underway from 15.00 MECCA on February 13 and runs until the final five days later, when a four-and-a-half hour special starts at 14.30 MECCA.





The ATP 250 Qatar ExxonMobil Open will meanwhile be headed by World No.5 Andrey Rublev and Canada's rising star Felix Auger-Aliassime, ranked No.7 in the world. They will be joined by Alexander Zverev, the 2020 US Open finalist, former World No.1 and 2021 US Open champion Daniil Medvedev, among many others. Similar to the women's tournament,a preview show on February 19 will run at 18.30 MECCA, with daily coverage continuing throughout until the final on February 25 with three-and-a-half hours of coverage starting from 17.30 MECCA.

As the official broadcaster, beIN's flagship beIN Sports English 3 channel will air a world feed with commentary in English, ensuring comprehensive coverage of all matches from both tournaments.

beIN has lined up a roster of tennis experts to provide detailed analysis during both tournaments. beIN's presenter and resident tennis expert Areej Sleem will be joined in the studio daily by a panel of former professionals, including Morocco's Anass Lamrani and Karim Alami, the latter a national champion and former World No.25, as well as Kuwaiti Adel Al Shatti and Selima Sfar, Tunisia's second-highest ranked female.

The WTA 500 Qatar TotalEnergies Open boasts an impressive field consisting of six of the world's top 10, including World No.1 Iga Swiatek, who returns as defending champion following her victory in 2022, and both Jessica Pegula and Coco Gauff, the American pair ranked World No.4 and No.6 who won the doubles tournament in Doha last year.

AL ATTIYAH HEADS QUALITY FIELD

Mikkelsen, Ostberg and Lindholm set to compete at Qatar International Rally

THE PENINSULA – DOHA

Norwegian WRC stars Andreas Mikkelsen and Mads Ostberg and flying Finn Emil Lindholm have added a little touch of Scandinavian sparkle to an impressive entry list announced yesterday (subject to FIA approval) by the Qatar Motor and Motorcycle Federation (QMMF) for next weekend's Qatar International Rally (February 16-18).

The second round of the 2023FIA Middle East Rally Championship (MERC) has attracted 24 cars in the FIA field and competitors from 13 nations, in addition to teams competing in a national status event running behind the main rally.

While Ostberg will be taking part in the event for a second successive season after retiring from the outright lead in 2022, both Mikkelsen and Lindholm will be competing in Qatar for the first time. Mads has also previously tackled the Jordan round of the FIA World Rally Championship.

The Scandinavians will drive a trio of Škoda Fabia Rally2 Evos run on the event by Sports Racing Technologies (SRT), the team which also ran Ostbergand Kris Meeke in Qatar last February.

Thirty-five-year-old Ostberg's solitary WRC win came in Portugal back in 2012, but the Norwegian has won 65 WRC special stages, the 2020 FIA WRC2 Championship with PH Sport and finished second in 2021 with the TRT World Rally Team. As a factory driver with Citroën, he also finished as runner-up in the 2019 WRC2 Pro series. In 2022, the Norwegian won the Hungarian Rally Championship. Sweden's Patrik Barth is his regular co-driver.

Like Ostberg, Mikkelsen, 33, is an experienced WRC campaigner and a multiple WRC event winner. His best three WRC performances netted wins in Spain in 2015 and Poland and Australia in 2016 with the official Volkswagen team. He also claimed the 2011 and 2012 Intercontinental Rally Challenge titles and won both the FIA WRC2 title and the FIA European Rally Championship in 2021. Torstein Eriksen will co-drive for his fellow countryman.

Lindholm is the youngest and least experienced of the three Scandinavians, although the 26-year-old is the defending FIA WRC2 champion. He claimed category wins last year in Finland and Greece and finished third in Croatia, Estonia and Japan. Thirty-four-year old Finnish female Reeta Hämäläinen will co-drive for Emil.

For the third year, Al Attiyah and his Andorra-based co-driver Mathieu Baumel will face WRC competition on the defending champion's home rally. Al Attiyah has 16 victories under his belt in Qatar, although he will start the rally from second place in the regional championship after missing out on victory to Abdullah Al Rawahi in Oman last month.

The home challenge has been boosted by a pair of QMMF Rally Team entries for the 2012 event winner Abdulaziz Al Kuwari and Khalid Al Suwaidi, a two-time winner of the Kuwait International Rally. They drive two further Škoda Fabia Rally2 Evos, with Abdulaziz's father Sadoon entered in a QMMF-backed Volkswagen Polo GTI Rally 2, as the veteran celebrates 40 years as an active competitor.

MERC series leader Abdullah Al Rawahi will be seeking valuable championship points in his quest for a maiden regional title and Qatari veteran Nasser Khalifa Al Atya rounds off the Rally2 entrants in his Ford Fiesta R5.

Eleven derivatives of the Mitsubishi Lancer Evolution and a pair of Subaru Impreza STIs will contest the FIA MERC2 category. Kuwait's Meshari Al Thefiri claimed the winner's laurels in Oman last month and heads a field that includes fellow countryman Yousef Al Dhafeeri and the Jordanian sextet of Shaker Jweihan, Sheikh Bader Al Fayez, Issa Abu Jamous, Ihab Al Shorafa, Shadi Shaban and Sami Fleifel.

The MERC2 field is boosted by Lebanese drivers, Ahmad Khaled and Jad Al Aawar, and a QMMF-supported Mitsubishi in the hands of local driver Abdullah Al Rabban and a QMMF-backed Subaru for Rashid Al Muhannadi.

T4 cross-country cars are also eligible for the MERC and Italy's Stefano Marrini (Can-Am) and Qatar's Khalid Al Muhannadi (Polaris) will duel for class honours.

The rally is again being held under the chairmanship of QMMF President Abdulrahman Al Mannai, senior committee member Abdulrazaq Al Kuwari and the QMMF's Executive Director Amro Al Hamad.

"We are delighted to announce a formidable entry for Qatar's round of the regional rally championship," said Amro Al Hamad. "This is the third year we have attracted some top names from the WRC and we have a record nine Rally2 cars in the field, including five drivers from Qatar. We have two winners of WRC rallies, the last three WRC2 winners, our five-time Dakar Rally winner and four drivers who have previously won rounds of the MERC."

Officials at the QMMF have laid on a slightly revised three-day format that offers 13 timed special stages and 209.69km competitive kilometres in a routeof 618.52km.

The competitive action fires into life with a new floodlit 3.27km super special stage at Lusail, starting at 20.00hrs next Thursday evening (February 16).


Nasser Saleh Al Attiyah in action during the Saudi Baja-Hail.


Andreas Mikkelsen


Mads Ostberg


Emil Lindholm

2023 QATAR INTERNATIONAL RALLY – LEADING ENTRIES

1. **Nasser Saleh Al Attiyah** (QAT)/Mathieu Baumel (AND) Volkswagen Polo GTI
2. Emil Lindholm (FIN)/Reeta Hämäläinen (FIN) Škoda Fabia Rally2 Evo
3. Andreas Mikkelsen (NOR)/Torstein Eriksen (NOR) Škoda Fabia Rally2 Evo
4. Mads Østberg (NOR)/Patrik Barth (SWE) Škoda Fabia Rally2 Evo
5. Abdullah Al Rawahi (OMN)/Ata Al Hmoud (JOR) Škoda Fabia Evo
6. Nasser Khalifa Al Atya (QAT)/Giovanni Bernacchini (ITA) Ford Fiesta R5
7. Abdulaziz Al Kuwari (QAT)/Lorcan Moore (IRL) Škoda Fabia Rally2 Evo
8. Khalid Al Suwaidi (QAT)/Hugo Magalhães (PRT) Škoda Fabia Rally2 Evo
9. Sadoon Al Kuwari (QAT)/TBA Volkswagen Polo GTI
10. Meshari Al Thefiri (KWT)/Nasser Al Kuwari (QAT) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X
11. Shaker Jweihan (JOR)/Nancy Al Majali (JOR) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X
12. Yousef Al Dhafeeri (KWT)/Carlos Hanna (LEB) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X
14. Sheikh Bader Al Fayez (JOR)/Emad Juma (JOR) Mitsubishi Lanver Evo X
15. Issa Abu Jamous (JOR)/Yazan Juma (JOR) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX
16. Zakariya Al Aamri (OMN)/Mohammed Al Mazroui OMN) Subaru Impreza WRX STI
17. Ihab Al Shorafa (JOR)/Yousef Juma (JOR) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X
18. Rashid Al Muhannadi (QAT)/Fares Allouh (QAT) Subaru Impreza STI
19. Jad Al Aawar (LEB)/Vicken Kanledjian (LEB) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X
20. Ahmad Khaled (LEB)/Samer Sfeir (LEB) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX
21. Shadi Shaban (JOR)/Samer Issa (JOR) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X
22. Abdullah Al Rabban (QAT)/Hassan Ali Obaid (ARE) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X
23. Sami Fleifel (JOR)/Ahmed Al Khatab (JOR) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo VIII
24. Stefano Marrini (ITA)/Stefano Tiraboschi (ITA) Can-Am Maverick X3
25. Khalid Al Muhannadi (QAT)/Pedro Santos (PRT) Polaris Pro XP




Andreas Mikkelsen in action with Toksport in Sardinia last year.

Malinovskyi fires Marseille to French Cup win over PSG

AFP – PARIS

Ruslan Malinovskyi scored an excellent second-half winner as Marseille downed rivals Paris Saint-Germain 2-1 at Stade Velodrome on Wednesday to reach the French Cup quarter-finals.

Alexis Sanchez gave Marseille the lead just after the half-hour mark from the penalty spot, before Sergio Ramos equalised on the stroke of half-time.

But Ukraine international Malinovskyi blasted the hosts back in front and they held on to beat PSG at home for the first time since 2011.

It was a second straight early Cup exit for record 14-time winners PSG after last season's last-16 loss to Nice.

Igor Tudor's Marseille will now be among the favourites to lift the trophy for an 11th time but first since 1989. Marseille, who slipped eight points behind leaders PSG on Sunday after a 3-1 home loss to Nice, started slowly.

But they grew into the game after goalkeeper Pau Lopez had denied Nuno Mendes an early opener, with Matteo Guendouzi's shot excellently saved by Gianluigi Donnarumma.

Ramos was the culprit as Marseille forged ahead, clumsily fouling Cengiz Under just inside the area.

Sanchez stepped up to send Donnarumma the wrong way and score his 11th goal of a productive first season since joining OM from Inter Milan.

Lionel Messi, with a free-kick, and Neymar both came close to levelling, before Ramos did just that by steering a header into the far corner from a Neymar set-piece in first-half stoppage time.

Marseille restored their lead in the 57th minute as a loose ball broke to Malinovskyi on the edge of the box and the on-loan Atalanta midfielder hammered a left-footed strike into the top corner.

PSG rarely carried a threat but almost forced a penalty shootout when Neymar set Messi in the clear, only for the seven-time Ballon d'Or winner to fire off target.

Ramos had an injury-time effort chalked off for a clear offside and headed a good chance straight at Lopez as Marseille clung on.

Earlier on Wednesday, holders Nantes edged past Ligue 1 bottom club Angers on penalties after Florent Mollet scored an 87th-minute equaliser to force spot-kicks following a 1-1 draw.

Lyon also won a shootout against Lille to progress, having earlier blown a two-goal lead to draw 2-2.

Toulouse saw off in-form Reims 3-1, while second-tier clubs Rodez, Annecy and Grenoble all also booked their places in the last eight.



ANNOUNCEMENT ON FEB 27

World Cup winner Scaloni leads FIFA 'Best' coach award shortlist

AFP – PARIS

Argentina's World Cup-winning coach Lionel Scaloni **(pictured)**, Carlo Ancelotti of Real Madrid and Manchester City's Pep Guardiola were named as FIFA's finalists for the 2022 'Best' coach of the year award yesterday.

Scaloni harnessed Lionel Messi's powers as a battling Argentina impressed at the Qatar World Cup, while Ancelotti's Real Madrid also showed depth of character in a series of comebacks to eventually win the Champions League.

Lyon's Champions League winner Sonia Bompastor, Brazil's Pia Sundhage and Sarina Wiegman, who led England to Euro 2022 glory, were the final three in the women's category.

Former Chelsea coach Thomas Tuchel and the Chelsea women's coach Emma Hayes won in 2021 and FIFA will reveal their successors in Paris on February 27.

From each country the national team coach, captain and a journalist get a vote, while fans also get a shout via an internet vote.

FIFA will announce the much-awaited players shortlist today.

Ghanaian player Atsu's well-being, whereabouts unknown

AP – ANKARA

Ghana international soccer player Christian Atsu is missing after the earthquake in Turkiye, his club and agent said yesterday, following earlier reports he was rescued from the rubble of a collapsed building and taken to a hospital.

Atsu's well-being and whereabouts were unknown. Aydin Toksoz, the deputy head of Hatayspor soccer club, told Turkiye's state-run *Anadolu Agency* that club sporting director Taner Savut was also missing after the massive earthquake that struck southern Turkiye and Syria and has now killed more than 19,000 people, with that number expected to rise.

The 31-year-old Atsu, who previously played for English clubs Chelsea and Newcastle, signed for Hatayspor late last year. The club is based in the southern city of Antakya, near the epicenter of the earthquake that struck in the early hours of Monday and devastated the region. Atsu and Savut were believed to have been in buildings that collapsed, the club had said.

Nana Sechere, the agent for Atsu, said in messages to The Associated Press that he travelled to Turkiye to try to find Atsu but the player "is yet to be found." Hatayspor and the Ghana soccer association announced on Tuesday that Atsu was rescued from a ruined building on Monday night and taken to a medical facility for treatment.

Toksoz said Hatayspor was now "not able to confirm this information."

Duplantis in Berlin to break own record

AFP – BERLIN

Swedish pole vaulter Mondo Duplantis headlines the Berlin indoor athletics meet today where the 23-year-old Swede is gunning to break his own world record.

Duplantis warmed up for this latest attempt at bettering the 6.21m mark he set in 2022 in Sweden last week.

Despite 2,000 home fans willing him on he failed to complete his jump three times when going for 6.22 metres.

With that first competition of the season under his belt he says the record is the only thing on his mind as he prepares for Berlin, followed by two meets in France.

The Olympic champion remains undecided about whether to compete at the European athletics indoor championships in Istanbul next month.

"We will see," he said on Thursday about appearing at Istanbul.

"What I'm really trying to do in the indoor season is to break the world record.

"That's the main focus, and pretty much the only goal in mind. If I'm able to do that in the next three meetings, then that would be a nice thing and I would be able to get ready for outdoors."

He added: "I know it's a world class set-up here in Berlin. The reason why I'm here is to try to give myself another chance to break my own world record."

If the pole vault superstar elects to skip Istanbul he will forgo a chance to defend the European indoor title he won in Poland in 2021.

His big target this year is the world championships in Budapest in August.

The Peninsula
Local focus, Global vision
SPORT

QOC to celebrate National Sport Day through 'Team Qatar Village'



THE PENINSULA – DOHA

The Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC) announced its' event to celebrate the National Sport Day in its 12th edition which will take place on February 14.

The QOC will organise several events and activities at Oxygen Park in Qatar Foundation, with participation of National Federations, Team Qatar athletes, people with special needs, the QOC family, schools and community members.

The new edition of National Sport Day will underline Qatar's Commitment to sport as Qatar is one of the first few countries in the world to dedicate a national holiday for sport to raise awareness for the importance of sport and its vital role for the life of individuals and communities.

While marking the National Sport Day, the QOC aims to highlight the concept of unity in sport by inspiring community members especially youngergenerations to take up sport and welcoming people of all backgrounds, genders, and abilities to join the National Sport Day festivities.

During the National Sport Day, the QOC will focus lights on Qatar's image as a sustainable global sporting hub, utilizing sport as a mean for positive change and living a healthy balanced life.

The QOC will also promote upcoming edition of Judo World championship to be staged at the Ali bin Hamad Al Attiyah Arena from May 7-14 and celebrate the year of the Asian games by organising the Asian Games fun run.

It's worth mentioning that, the QOC organises many community events and activities throughout the year to raise awareness among all segments of community about the importance of sport.

The Qatar Olympic Committee will organise several events and activities at Oxygen Park in Qatar Foundation, with participation of National Federations, Team Qatar athletes, people with special needs, the QOC family, schools and community members.

BLOCKBUSTER DECIDER

Al Sadd, Al Duhail to clash in Qatar Cup final

FAWAD HUSSAIN
THE PENINSULA

Seeking a hat-trick of titles, Al Sadd outsmarted Al Arabi 3-1 in the first semi-final on their home turf that later witnessed Al Duhail bouncing back to edge a spirited Al Wakrah side 2-1 in the second semi-final.

Defending champions Al Sadd and current QNB Stars League (QSL) leaders Al Duhail set up a mouth-watering Qatar Cup 2023 final after winning their respective semi-finals at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium yesterday.

Seeking a hat-trick of titles, Al Sadd outsmarted Al Arabi 3-1 in the first semi-final on their home turf that later witnessed Al Duhail bouncing back to edge a spirited Al Wakrah side 2-1 in the second semi-final.

The final of Qatar Cup, which has returned after a year's break, is scheduled to be played on April 6. Al Sadd were victorious in the 2020 and 2021 editions while Al Duhail last won the prestigious title in 2018.

The fiery first clash saw three red cards and seven yellow cards, and was clearly dominated by Al Sadd with more ball possession and flurry of attacks against Al Arabi.

The Wolves, who fired eight shots on target against the Dream Team, started attacking right from the start with Akram Afif leading most of the attacks.

They benefitted from Al Arabi's first red card when Ahmed Suhail was sent off after he stepped on Baghdad Bounedjah's shoe as the striker chased the ball towards the danger area.

Santi Cazorla in a resulting free kick fired a perfect dipper for Jung Woo-Young and the South Korean's brilliant header put Al Sadd ahead in the 43rd minute.

The Juan Manuel Lillo's side doubled their lead through a stunning show from Bounedjah, who broke past three Al Arabi defenders to net Al Sadd' second goal in 45+1 minutes.

The second half started with the same pace and nine minutes after the break Al Sadd were also reduced to 10 men with Tarek Salman being shown the red card for bringing down Al Arabi's Hamed Ismail.

Al Arabi lost another player in the 63rd minute when Marc Muniesa was given the marching orders for pushing Afif.

Nine minutes after coming off the bench, substitute Musaab Khedir extended Al Sadd's lead with a strike in 79th minute. Al Arabi, who were unable to score despite several attempts, finally got a goal when man-marking Boualem Khoukhi while trying to thwart a free kick sent the ball into his own goal four minutes before time.

After the goal, Al Arabi tried hard to make a fightback as Yousef Msakni's free kick just missed the target and another attempt by the Tunisian was cancelled by goalkeeper Meshaal Barsham.

"It was an eventful and exciting semi-final," Al Sadd coach Lillo said after the match.

"We created many chances and took control of the match after scoring two goals in the first half. I am happy with players' performance in both the halves. We deserved the victory and I hope we will be stronger in the final," he added.



Al Sadd's players celebrate after Baghdad Bounedjah scored their second goal against Al Arabi, yesterday.



Al Duhail players celebrate after winning the semi-final against Al Wakrah.

Al Duhail bounce back to reach final

The second semi-final at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium also produced thrilling action with Al Duhail rallying to edge Al Wakrah after scoring twice in the second half.

Competing for the first time in the tournament since it was renamed in 2014, Al Wakrah took the lead in 15th minute when Mohamed Benyettou after receiving a long ball launched a strike which bounced over goalkeeper's head into the net after taking a defender's touch.

Hernan Crespo's Al Duhail failed to find equaliser in the first half but they were better after the break with Michael Olunga bringing them back in the semi-final with a goal in 51st minute.

The Kenyan striker received a through pass from Sultan Al Brake and his slight touch from near the penalty spot was enough to beat a defender and goal keeper Saoud Mubarak Al Khater.

Olunga played a role in Nam Taee-hee's winning goal in 72nd minute too as Al Khater trying to block his cross from the left failed to hold the ball and the South Korean made no mistake, firing the decisive blow on Al Wakrah into an open net.

"Al Wakrah gave us a tough fight and we lacked solutions against them in the first half despite having the ball," Al Duhail star Bassam Al Rawi said after the match.

"We spoke during the break and everybody was determined to make a fightback in the match. We availed our chances well in the second half. We will now give our best in the final to regain the title," he added.

Record $1.5bn spent by clubs on transfers last month

AFP – PARIS

Football clubs worldwide spent a January transfer record $1.57bn last month, a FIFA report said yesterday, as the number of international transfers for the winter window reached an all-time high.

Fuelled by heavy spending from English Premier League clubs, the total outlay represented a near 50 percent increase from the same period last year -- and eclipsed the January 2018 record by some $230m.

English clubs accounted for 57.3 percent of the overall spend after splashing out a combined $898.6m, with Chelsea alone forking out £320m ($390m) on eight new players.

France came in a distant second at $131.9 million. The number of international transfers for the January window also reached new highs -- there were 4,387 in men's football and 341 in the women's game.

The $774,300 spent in transfer fees in women's football also set a new January record.

Longines Hathab: Alsemaitt, Triolet shine in dressage events



The podium winners of dressage competitions pose with officials during the presentation ceremony.

Maryam Ahmed Alsemaitt and Azade Apa Triolet clinched top honours in the dressage competitions on the opening day of the 10th round of the Longines Hathab Qatar Equestrian Tour at Al Shaqab, yesterday. Alsemaitt rode San Francisco to clinch the top spot in the Medium (Level 1) category at the Longines Indoor Arena yesterday as she bagged the biggest individual prize cheque of the day, worth QR4,950. Alsemaitt and the 14-year-old stallion secured 68.646 points. Jessica Waldon (Givenchy Utopia, 66.250 points) came second while young rider Maryam Ahmad Al Boinin (Silvan, 66.146 points) rounded up the podium. Meanwhile, the Istanbul-based lawyer Triolet, astride 13-year-old bay mare What A Pleasure, scored 69.457 points to win the Preliminary Level 2 class ahead of Jassim Mohammed Al Fahd Al Kuwari (Special Edition 19, 69.348 points) and Khalid Sanad Al Nuaimi (Medea VD Donkhoeve, 69.022 points) who finished second and third respectively.