The Peninsula
Local focus, Global vision

WEDNESDAY 22 MARCH 2023 | 30 SHA'BAAN | 2 RIYALS WWW.THEPENINSULA.QA /PENINSULAQATAR /THEPENINSULAQATAR /PENINSULA_QATAR +974 55698797







CONSUMER PROTECTION

# MoCI initiatives to curb price hike during Ramadan

SANAULLAH ATAULLAH
THE PENINSULA

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI) has launched a number of initiatives to curb unjustified price hike of food commodities during holy month of Ramadan, said a top official.

"On the occasions like Ramadan, when demand of food commodities surge may lead to unjustified price hike of some consumables," said Dr. Mohamed Ahmed Al Bohashem Al Sayed, Director of Quality Licensing and Market Control Department at the MoCI.

Speaking to Qatar TV recently, he said to ensure price stability, the Ministry launched a number of initiatives ahead of blessed month, including the joint national initiative to encourage local production and subsidise sheep meat prices.

Speaking to Qatar Radio yesterday, Al Sayed said that under the initiative, which was launched on March 18, so far about 4,800 sheep have been sold.

He said that MoCI, under which Consumer Protection Department falls, deployed a dedicated team of inspectors for conducting inspection campaigns at food outlets across the country to ensure the compliance of the provisions of consumer protection law.

Al Sayed urged consumers to report to the Ministry of Commerce and Industry through its communication channels if they come across any violations by commercial outlets. He said that the Ministry is keen to provide all types of food commodities and services to consumer at reasonable prices.

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry, in coordination with the Ministry of Municipality and Widam Food Company (Widam), launched the joint national initiative to encourage local production and subsidised sheep meat prices for the blessed month of Ramadan.

The sales started on March 18, and will continue until the end of the holy month. The initiative aims to ensure the availability of sheep meat to citizens during Ramadan at affordable prices, and to create a balance between supply and demand to ensure stable market prices. Widam is providing about 30,000 local sheep to be sold at reduced prices to citizens (two sheep per citizen).

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry also launched an initiative to provide over 900 commodities at discount prices during Ramadan, in coordination with major sales outlets, from March 12 until the end of the holy month.

The initiative comes within the framework of the Ministry's continued keenness over the past years to launch such initiatives by providing the needs of citizens and residents for consumer goods at reduced prices during this holy month, as spending on the purchase of food and consumer goods increases.

- A joint national initiative is providing around 30,000 local sheep at a subsidised price to citizens, out of which 4,800 have been sold so far.
- The MoCI has deployed a dedicated team of inspectors for conducting inspection campaigns at food outlets.



# Amir awards Hamad Bin Khalifa Sash to Sheikh Khalid bin Khalifa



Amir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani awarded the Hamad Bin Khalifa Sash to H E Sheikh Khalid bin Khalifa bin Abdulaziz Al Thani in recognition of his valuable efforts in serving the country, when H H the Amir met him at Sheikh Abdullah Bin Jassim Majlis at the Amiri Diwan, yesterday. For his part, H E Sheikh Khalid bin Khalifa bin Abdulaziz Al Thani expressed his pride in this honour, extending his thanks and gratitude to H H the Amir for his support throughout His Excellency's tenure.

MEDICAL CARE

# Quality ensured across HMC hospitals: Official

FAZEENA SALEEM
THE PENINSULA

A robust programme by Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC) is being implemented across hospitals to maintain highest level of quality and safety of the care provided to patients.

The HMC engages in an array of collaborative activities and has created a sustainable infrastructure within the hospital network to continue the improvement of quality and safety, said Prof Abdul Badi Abou Samra, Director of the Qatar Metabolic Institute and Chairman of Internal Medicine at the HMC, while speaking on the sidelines of recently held Middle East Forum on Quality and Safety in Healthcare 2023.

> HMC engages in an array of collaborative activities and has created a sustainable infrastructure within the hospital network to continue the improvement of quality and safety.

"We are focusing on quality of every new HMC hospital; we are looking into quality planning from the staff. So we have set a plan and a dedicated quality teams to implement it. Through it we want to maintain certain level of quality control and safety and ensure how the hospitals will be safe," he said.

Prof. Abou Samra said that timely and safe transitions of care ensure people receive the support they require in the right place and at the right time, moving swiftly and seamlessly through services and settings as their needs change.

"The processes in the hospital are integrated so we have smooth transition for the patient, he said, adding that well-managed transitions between care settings provide continuity of care, such as at discharge from hospital to home. ➔P5

# Ramadan to begin on Thursday in Qatar

QNA – DOHA

The Crescent Sighting Committee at the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs announced that today (Wednesday, March 22), is the final day of Sha'ban and that tomorrow (Thursday, March 23), will be the first day of the holy month of Ramadan.

This came in the Committee's statement after its meeting at the headquarters of the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs yesterday evening under the chairmanship of Sheikh Dr. Thuqail Al Shammari.

In a statement, the Crescent Sighting Committee at the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs said that it held its meeting yesterday, Shaaban 29, 1444 AH, according to the Qatari calendar corresponding to March 21, 2023, to sight the crescent of the holy month of Ramadan and to prove the testimony of whoever see it.

The Committee said the Ramadan crescent was not sighted and as a result announced that Thursday, March 23, the first of the holy month of Ramadan.

The Committee extended greetings to Amir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, Father Amir H H Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, and Deputy Amir H H Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad Al Thani, as well as the esteemed government, the people of Qatar and all Muslims, on the advent of the holy month of Ramadan.

EDITORIAL ↘09

## Special measures for Ramadan

The holy month of Ramadan will begin tomorrow as the Crescent Sighting Committee at the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs announced that the Ramadan crescent was not sighted and as a result today

BUSINESS ↘ 12

## Startup innovators awarded at QSTP XLR8 Demo Day

Qatar Science and Technology Park (QSTP), a member of Qatar Foundation (QF), recently hosted its cycle 13 flagship program XLR8 Demo Day, where top innovators and startups demonstrated their excellent solution providers to the modern world.

SPORT ↘ 17

## Wejdan confident of securing spot at Olympics

**NOT MANY** knew Wejdan Majed Al Malki – Qatar's first international five-star Grand Prix dressage rider – battled health problems and was hospitalised twice before she made a comeback at the CHI Al Shaqab last month.




Included with today's edition is a special supplement

SILVER ANNIVERSARY

# Qatar-Kyrgyzstan ties are 'future-oriented'

JOELYN BALUYUT
THE PENINSULA

Qatar-Kyrgyzstan bilateral relations now in its 25th year have reached a new level of partnership and are now "future-oriented."

This was said by Kyrgyzstan Ambassador to Qatar, H E Chyngyz Eshimbekov in a recent interview in celebration of the silver anniversary of relations between the two countries.

"Our bilateral relations are future-oriented and we have huge plans for the future. The most important factor is that our leaders have mutual understanding and agreement to develop our multi-faceted relations," the envoy told *The Peninsula*.

He revealed that a number of agreements have been developed over the last few years and are ready to be signed. These partnerships cover economic, cultural, sports, tourism and educational collaboration.

The ambassador did not divulge details of agreements or memorandum of understandings (MoU), instead said that they will be signed "when the occasion arrives" as everything is ready for signature.



> Our bilateral relations are future-oriented and we have huge plans for the future. The most important factor is that our leaders have mutual understanding and agreement to develop our multi-faceted relations."
>
> **H E Chyngyz Eshimbekov**

The Qatar and Kyrgyzstan established ties on March 3, 1998. In the past two decades, there have been numerous official visits of top officials from each country. The number of agreements and MoUs already signed between the two countries in various fields has reached 16, according to the Kyrgyzstan Embassy in Qatar.

Among the signed agreements and MoUs are: letter of intent for cooperation between the Qatari Ministry of Interior and the Kyrgyzstan Ministry of Interior, memorandum of understanding signed between Qatar Red Crescent and Kyrgyz Red Crescent in Bishkek, memorandum of understanding signed between the Civil Aviation Authority of Qatar and the Civil Aviation Agency of the Kyrgyz Republic in Doha, and agreement for reciprocal exemption of entry visas for the holders of diplomatic and private passport.

Meanwhile, as part of the 25th anniversary of Qatar-Kyrgyzstan ties, the Cultural Village Foundation, Katara, and the Kyrgyzstan Embassy in Qatar hosted a musical event called "The Kyrgyz Culture through Music, Patterns, and Ornaments," which was presented by the folklore and ethnographic theatre "Ordo Sakhna."

HELPING HAND

# QFFD signs deal to support 30,000 Afghan students

QNA – DOHA

Qatar Fund for Development (QFFD) yesterday signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Ministry of Education of Afghanistan regarding new commitments to support the out-of-school children's education project in Afghanistan.

This came during a meeting of Director-General of Qatar Fund for Development Khalifa bin Jassim Al Kuwari with Minister of Education of Afghanistan H E Habibullah Agha Haqqani.

The project aims to enrol 30,000 students, of whom 50 percent are girls, to complete their primary education in several Afghan provinces.

The joint project, which extends for three years, will enable most of the children who are not enrolled in schools and those in need, including girls and students with disabilities.

The work and coordination will be done with community education schools to build and renovate classrooms and improve sanitation facilities.

> The project aims to enroll 30,000 students, of whom 50 percent are girls, to complete their primary education in several Afghan provinces.

It will also provide training for community teachers and adding more teachers, and engaging key stakeholders to enroll students.

Khalifa bin Jassim Al Kuwari said: "We believe that education is one of the most important pillars for the prosperity of least developed countries. Unfortunately, there are 3.7 million out of school children in Afghanistan today, 60 percent of whom are girls."

He added: "Through this agreement, we will target 30,000 male and female students, 50 percent of whom will be girls, and this is part of our vision to support fair access to education for all." ➔P4


We extend our heartiest greetings to
His Highness
Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani
Amir of the State of Qatar
His Highness
Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al Thani
Father Amir
His Highness
Sheikh Abdullah Bin Hamad Al Thani
Deputy Amir
and to all the honorable people of Qatar on the occasion of
Ramadan
We hope for more returns of this memorable occasion and
wish that Qatar always enjoys security, welfare and prosperity
under the wise leadership of His Highness The Amir
Ramadan Kareem
Al Meera
الميرة

# Amir, Rwandan President discuss bilateral cooperation

QNA — DOHA

Amir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani met with President of the Republic of Rwanda H E Paul Kagame at Sheikh Abdullah Bin Jassim Majlis at the Amiri Diwan yesterday.

During the meeting, they discussed relations between the two countries and ways to support and enhance them in various fields of cooperation, especially in the economic and investment fields.

They also exchanged views on regional and international issues of common concern.

The meeting was attended by a number of Their Excellencies the Ministers. From the Rwandan side, it was attended by the members of the official delegation accompanying the President.

H H the Amir also hosted a luncheon banquet in honour of the President of Rwanda and the accompanying delegation.



Amir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani meeting President of Rwanda H E Paul Kagame at the Amiri Diwan yesterday.

DEVELOPING STUDENTS' CAPABILITIES

# Initiative to encourage sports among students launched

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education and the Ministry of Sports and Youth yesterday launched an initiative for joint cooperation to enhance and coordinate efforts and integrate roles and responsibilities.

The launch ceremony was attended by Minister of Sports and Youth H E Salah bin Ghanim Al Ali and Minister of Education and Higher Education H E Buthaina bint Ali Al Jabr Al Nuaimi. The Minister of Education and Higher Education, said: "The initiative reflects the extent of cooperation between the two ministries to achieve benefit and exchange experiences.

"The programmes aim at enhancing the school environment, by developing students' skills and creating opportunities for creativity, innovation and a spirit of competition in order to improve and develop students' capabilities and potentials, while preserving the authentic Qatari culture".




Minister of Sports and Youth H E Salah bin Ghanim Al Ali and Minister of Education and Higher Education H E Buthaina bint Ali Al Jabr Al Nuaimi with schoolchildren at the launch of the initiative for cooperation between the two ministries.

The joint cooperation initiative aimed at exchanging experiences, best practices and optimal utilisation of capabilities, to develop the capabilities of students, teachers, employees, parents, the media and society, in all fields.

It also aims at discovering talents, exploding creative energies, investing leisure time, enhancing life skills, and raising the status of stakeholders on both sides. The initiative also encourages sports among students and youth, builds and enhances their self-confidence, helps them achieve all their potential, attracts and nurtures people with specific talents, raises the cultural level of young people and consolidates their national identity.

**The initiative aims to develop capabilities of students, teachers, employees, parents, the media and society, in all fields.**

It will also increase community participation in sports, achieve sports excellence, and enhance the use of available sports and recreational facilities.

The joint cooperation initiative included several areas, including organising summer activity between youth centres and schools, in a way that contributes to serving youth and students during the summer holidays, expanding the activities and programmes of the Qatari Scientific Club in coordination with schools, and organising periodic competitions between schools.

# Qatar participates in meeting of heads of criminal investigation in GCC

QNA RIYADH

The State of Qatar participated in the 37th meeting of the directors general of criminal investigations in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, which concluded at the headquarters of the Council's General Secretariat in Riyadh yesterday.

Qatar was represented at the two-day meeting by Director General of Criminal Investigation at the Ministry of Interior, Brigadier General Jamal Mohammed Al Kaabi.

The meeting discussed a number of issues of common concern related to strengthening cooperation in the criminal field and exchanging expertise and experiences in this context.

# PHCC implements growth charts programme in public schools

QNA — DOHA

The Primary Health Care Corporation (PHCC) announced the implementation of annual growth charts and visual acuity test programmes in all public schools in the country, in cooperation and prior coordination with the Non-communicable Diseases Department at the Ministry of Public Health.

The PHCC stated that the application of the World Health Organization's growth charts programme targets all public school students from the first to 12th grade on an annual basis, pointing out that the program aims to provide a database and build a surveillance system to monitor the growth of school students, and early detection of cases of growth disorders that may be related to the diet or lifestyle in general, which is represented in weight loss or short stature on the one hand, or weight gain and obesity on the other hand.

The School Health Department succeeded in completing the implementation of health surveys for the two programs of growth plans and examination of visual acuity, and the completion of all procedures and requirements necessary for their implementation. The number of those targeted in the growth plans programme reached 93,218 male and female students, and 92,984 male and female students were examined, with a rate of 98.1 percent, the PHCC said.

It noted that the results of the health surveys of the growth charts program showed that approximately 8,226 students have a defect in their growth indicators, and it was found that 43,000 suffer from short stature problems, 6,817 suffer from obesity problems and 463 suffer from thinness and underweight problems, explaining that all these students were transferred to health centers to be followed up by doctors specializing in this field and to receive the necessary medical care.

The PHCC explained that the visual acuity test program aims at early detection of cases of weakness and defects in visual acuity among students, as school health nursing has received theoretical and practical training on appropriate methods and the health requirements followed in examining visual acuity, in addition to the mechanism of electronic documentation and the proper transfer of cases discovered for students who suffer from a vision rate less than normal and transferring them to the ophthalmology clinic and the optometry clinic of the PHCC in order to dispense medical glasses and provide them with appropriate treatment.

As for the implementation of the visual acuity test program, the PHCC revealed that the number of targeted students reached 50,065 students, as the visual acuity was measured for 48,923 male and female students at a rate of 97.8 percent, indicating that the results of the surveys revealed 6,256 male and female students, which constitutes a rate of 12.8 percent, suffer from poor visual acuity, and 99.6 percent of the detected students were transferred to the health centers of the PHCC for follow-up and to receive the necessary medical care.

Out of keenness to achieve the goals of the program and with the joint cooperation with the Ministry of Public Health, a training workshop was organized for all school health nurses on how to use devices that measure indicators of growth and body mass indexes recommended by the World Health Organization, the PHCC said.

The PHCC confirmed that it was able, through the health files system, to follow up and track the implementation stages of the two programs accurately and effectively, in cooperation with the PHCC's Department of Health Information Systems.

OFFICIAL NEWS

## Amir sends congratulations to President of Namibia

QNA — DOHA: Amir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, and Deputy Amir H H Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad Al Thani sent yesterday cables of congratulations to President of the Republic of Namibia H E Hage Geingob on the anniversary of his country's Independence Day.

Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs H E Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani also sent a cable of congratulations to Prime Minister of Namibia Saara Kuugongelwa-Amadhila on the occasion.

## Qatar condemns Israeli minister's remarks against Palestinian people

QNA — DOHA

The State of Qatar condemned in the strongest terms the statements by the Israeli Minister of Finance, in which he denied the existence of the Palestinian people while using a map of Israel that included borders of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the occupied Palestinian territories.

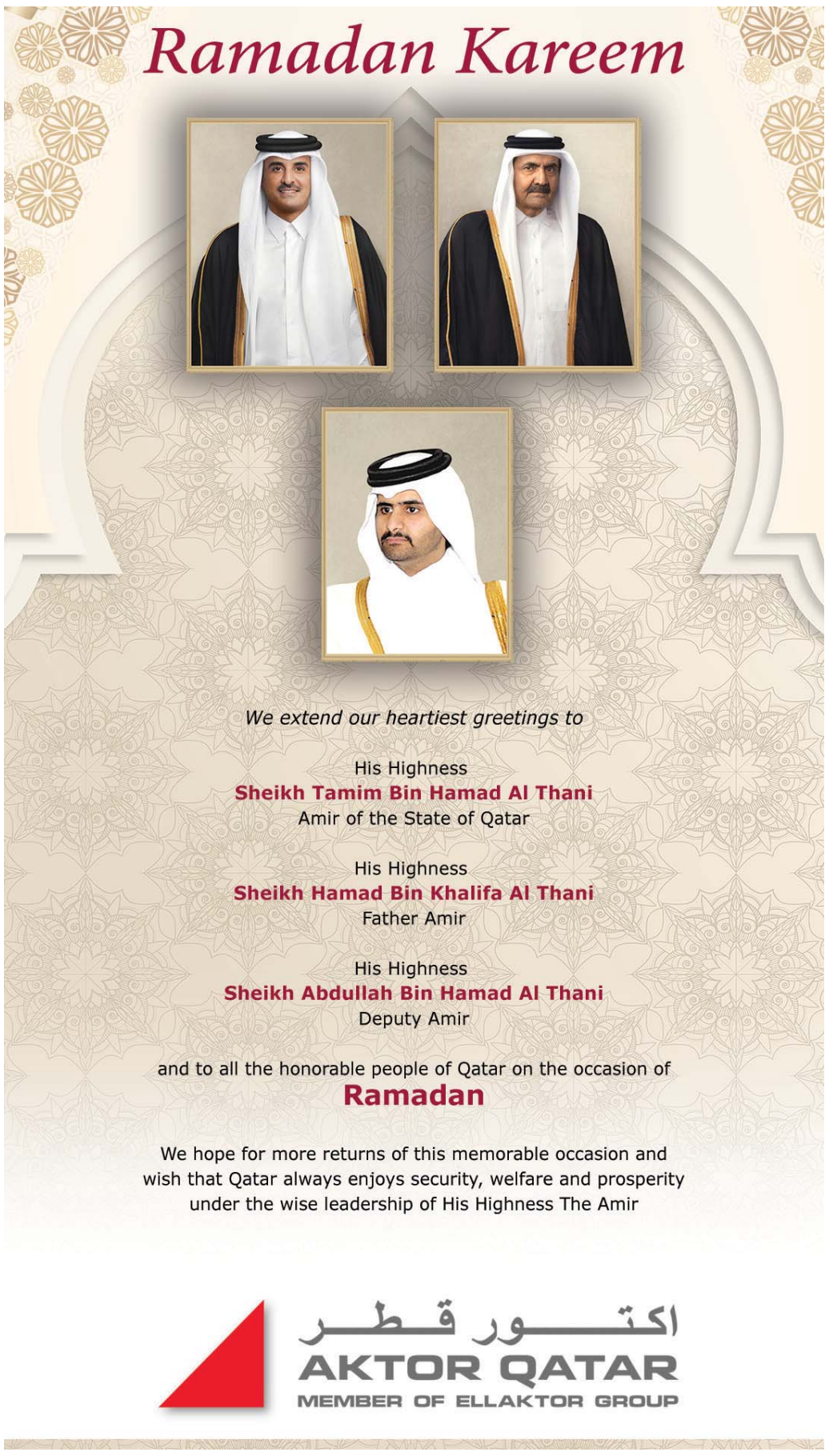
In a statement issued yesterday, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs considered the statements of the Israeli minister as new evidence of the racism of the occupation government and an attempt to falsify history and deny the right of the Palestinian people to exist, stressing at the same time that these extremist statements and flimsy allegations that contradict human values are denied by history that confirms the existence of the Palestinian people on this land since eternity.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs considered the minister's use of the map as a flagrant violation of international norms and covenants, calling on the international community to assume its responsibility and force Israel to respect the resolutions of international legitimacy.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs reiterated Qatar's firm stance on the just Palestinian cause, the legitimate rights of the brotherly Palestinian people, and the establishment of their independent state on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

## Director-General of QFFD meets Afghan Health Minister

QNA — DOHA: Director-General of Qatar Fund for Development (QFFD) H E Khalifa bin Jassim Al Kuwari met with Afghan Minister of Public Health H E Dr. Qalandar Ebad. The meeting dealt with discussing cooperation and issues of joint interest.



COORDINATION OF EFFORTS

# Qatar hosts meeting on polio eradication in Afghanistan

QNA — DOHA

Qatar hosted a roundtable meeting between delegations from the Ministry of Health of the Afghan caretaker government, the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef), and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to coordinate efforts to eradicate polio and discuss the health situation in Afghanistan.

Minister of Health in the Afghan caretaker government H E Dr. Qalandar Ibad; Assistant Foreign Minister H E Lolwah bint Rashid Al Khater; Assistant Minister of Health Affairs at MoPH, H E Dr. Salih Al Marri, representing the Minister of Public Health; WHO representatives headed by Director of the Polio Eradication Program at the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean Dr. Hamed Jafari; Unicef representatives led by Deputy Regional Director of Unicef South Asia Noala Skinner; and Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation delegation chaired by the Foundation's Director of the Polio Eradication Program Dr. Jay Wenger participated in the meeting.

During the meeting, they discussed the progress made by the Ministry of Health in the Afghan caretaker government to eradicate polio and identified existing challenges and plans that could be adopted by the authorities to support the efforts of the Ministry of Health in the Afghan caretaker government in responding to the disease. The meeting also discussed the possibility of expanding polio eradication programmes to build solid foundations for a health system that responds to the needs of the Afghan people.

> The Assistant Foreign Minister affirmed Qatar's position in support of Afghanistan and its people.

In her opening speech at the meeting, Assistant Foreign Minister affirmed Qatar's position in support of Afghanistan and its brotherly people, praising the important role played by specialists and workers in the healthcare field, both women and men.

She pointed out that good healthcare helps in the prosperity of local economies, stressing the readiness of the State of Qatar to contribute by providing training and projects to build the capacity of the health cadre in Afghanistan.

Dr. Salih Al Marri stated that polio is one of the diseases that the global community is about to eradicate. He underlined that concerted international efforts to eradicate the disease in Afghanistan would contribute to the total eradication of the disease, which is the goal that the WHO Subcommittee on Polio Eradication, co-chaired by the State of Qatar, is working on.

In turn, the delegation of the Ministry of Health in the Afghan caretaker government extended their thanks to Qatar for its support for the Afghan people.

The delegation affirmed their readiness to support international programs that benefit the Afghan people, and the importance that those programs employ Afghan staff. The delegation also expressed their hope for taking decisions on the promises previously made regarding various projects.

During the discussions, the delegations of Unicef, WHO, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation praised the efforts of the Ministry of Health in the Afghan caretaker government during the past period to address COVID-19 and polio, enumerating the restrictions that impede their work in Afghanistan and ways to facilitate their work by the caretaker government. The delegations noted the identification of the eastern and southeastern regions as areas of the spread of the disease and the measures taken to implement the optimal model for testing the population and providing preventive vaccinations by intensifying home visits.

In the closing session, the Qatari and the Afghan sides agreed to work together to facilitate the work of international health agencies in Afghanistan and employ Afghan cadres in their projects. The delegation of the Ministry of Health in the Afghan caretaker government shall present a clean sheet indicating the basic needs of the Afghan health sector, in addition to the preparation of signing an MoU between MoPH of Qatar and the Afghan Ministry of Health.

# Rwandan President meets PM



QNA — DOHA

President of Rwanda H E Paul Kagame met with Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs H E Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani in Doha yesterday.

During the meeting, they discussed relations between the two countries and ways to support and enhance them in all fields, in addition to discussing a number of regional and international issues of common concern. The Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs affirmed during the meeting Qatar's keenness on supporting international endeavours to achieve security, stability and development in the African continent.

# Assistant FM meets Afghan Health Minister

QNA — DOHA

Assistant Foreign Minister H E Lolwah bint Rashid Al Khater met yesterday with Minister for Public Health of the Afghanistan Caretaker Government H E Qalandar Ebad, who is visiting the country.

During the meeting, they discussed progress in the plan to develop the health field in Afghanistan, in addition to the results of the round table meeting, which was hosted by the State of Qatar, between a delegation from Afghanistan and two delegations from the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (Unicef).

The Assistant Foreign Minister stressed the State of Qatar's position in supporting the Afghan people, especially in the health and education sectors. She commended the efforts made by the Afghan Ministry of Public Health despite the scarcity of resources, stressing the importance of the international community's continued support for the health sector in Afghanistan, as well as strengthening the infrastructure that most Afghan cities lack.

She also praised the continued work of Afghan women in the health sector, calling for the continuation of developing the human capacities of the health sector in Afghanistan.

# CSGDB holds Sharek platform coordination meeting for govt agencies

QNA — DOHA

The Civil Service and Government Development Bureau (CSGDB) organised yesterday the first coordination meeting for the Sharek platform project, to introduce participating government agencies to the platform.

A total of 120 representatives of 30 government agencies took part in the coordination meeting.

President of CSGDB H E Abdulaziz bin Nasser bin Mubarak Al Khalifa said that linking all government agencies' digital media platforms via the Sharek platform is a significant step, unifying communication to a single platform, accelerating responsiveness, improving coordination and allowing for user experience measuring mechanisms, which can then be used to improve service quality.

He highlighted the cooperation between CSGDB and GCO in supporting agencies to successfully transition digitally through practical training.

Director of the Government Communications Office (GCO) Sheikh Jassim bin Mansour bin Jabor Al Thani said that the CSGDB's efforts in creating the Sharek platform and its employment of advanced technology of artificial intelligence is qualitative, innovative, and a highly efficient addition to the system of interactive government communication, connecting with users on social and media platforms.

He expressed the GCO's readiness in permanent and fruitful cooperation with CSGDB in supporting all government initiatives to enhance state services provided to citizens and residents in the State of Qatar, expressing its constant keenness to improve government institutional performance in response to the vision and aspirations of the country's leadership.



Participants during first coordination meeting for the Sharek platform project organised by CSGDB.

The mechanism for implementing the stage of linking all digital media affiliated with government agencies through the Sharek platform was also discussed, which is one of several stages that will contribute to creating a comprehensive unified platform that guarantees a distinct experience for both customers and government service providers.

Director of Government Development Affairs at CSGDB, Hassan Abdulrahman Al Ibrahim, said the platform is one of the CSGDB's strategy most important components for government development.

CSGDB development affairs' strategies focus on achieving the Qatar National Vision 2030 by developing a competitive government sector capable of monitoring and measuring the performance of its agencies and services, as well as developing them according to customers' need.

CSGDB had announced earlier developing the Sharek platform in cooperation with the Sprinklr software company, as a unified governmental service digital platform, in a manifestation of CSGDB's priority to simplify governmental procedures and enhance communication with users.

Sharek will also reduce response time, by taking advantage of chat bots and workflows related to artificial intelligence by Sprinklr, enabling government agencies reduce response time, solve problems, and unify communication channels in service of citizens and residents.

**QATARGAS OPERATING COMPANY LTD**
**Tender Invitation**

| No. | TENDER NUMBER / DESCRIPTION | TENDER ISSUE PERIOD | TENDER FEE (QAR) | TENDER BOND (QAR) | TENDER CLOSING DATE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | LTC/C/MNT/6091/23 Provision of Transformer Oil Filtration Services on Call Off Basis | 22/03/2023 to 29/03/2023 | 0 | 80,000 | 10/04/2023 |

**Scope of Work:**
Contractor shall perform Transformer Oil Filtration work (for mineral oil and silicon oil, as applicable), to remove impurities from transformer oil such as moisture, dirt, air and other dissolved gases, for Transformers installed (current and future installations) in all assets at Company's Worksite (Onshore and Offshore). The duration of the awarded Contract shall be five (05) years with a sole option for Company to extend it further up to two (02) years.

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

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

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قطرغاز QATARGAS

**SALE OF ITEMS BY AUCTION**

The liquidator of the Gulf Investments Group Company - a private joint stock company announces the sale of a group of servers, storage units and firewalls as follows :

**(HPE Synergy 12000 Frame) /**
**(HPE Synergy 480 Gen10)**
**(HPE Primera Storage C630) /**
**(HPE MSA Storage 2062/2060)**
**(FortiGate 1100E / 600E) /**
**(Aruba Switch CX 8325 / 6300M)**
**(Silverpeak - WAN Optimization)**

by auction at 12:00 pm on Wednesday 29/03/2023, at the headquarters of Fahad Al - Ansari Law Firm located in Al Sadd. Area No. 39 . Villa No. 131 , Street No. 343

*For viewing and inquiries , please contact :*
**Mobile No : 0097430453080**
**Email : law@fmalawfirm.com**

## QFFD signs deal to support 30,000 Afghan students

FROM PAGE 1

For his part, Fahad Al Sulaiti, CEO of Education Above All Foundation, the executing agency of the project, said: "The signing represents a milestone for the children of Afghanistan, and these projects will have a positive impact on the opportunities available to marginalized children in the country, and enable them to achieve a brighter future for themselves and their families."

This agreement affirms the Qatar Fund for Development and Education Above All Foundation's continued commitment to the sustainable development goals, with a focus on the fourth goal of the sustainable development goals, "ensure quality, equitable and inclusive education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" by 2030.

RECOGNITION

# Education Minister honours winners of Youth Research Forum 2023

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

Minister of Education and Higher Education and Chairperson of Qatar National Commission for Education, Culture and Science H E Buthaina bint Ali Al Jabr Al Nuaimi has honoured the winners of the Fifth Youth Research Forum 2023.

The honouring ceremony was organised by Qatar University Young Scientists Center in cooperation with Qatar National Commission for Education, Culture and Science at the university campus, in the presence of QU President, Dr. Hassan Rashid Al Derham.

The theme of this year's forum was "Higher Education Institutions and their Role in Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals". The prizewinners provided a brief summary of their winning research and posters.

The Minister had previously expressed her happiness during her participation with a recorded speech at the opening of the forum, which was held virtually on March 8–9, 2023, on the significance of the role of youth in leading, developing opportunities for scientific progress through scientific research, creativity, and innovation, and also linking research to the needs of society in order to achieve the goals of sustainable development.



Minister of Education and Higher Education H E Buthaina bint Ali Al Jabr Al Nuaimi (7th right); QU President Dr. Hassan Rashid Al Derham (6th right); and other officials at the honouring ceremony.

# Ooredoo introduces Shahry+ and Qatarna+

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

Ooredoo – Qatar's leading telecommunications operator – has announced a major overhaul of its postpaid offering, with its Shahry 5G and Qatarna 5G plans being revamped in line with evolving customer needs and market trends.

The new Shahry+ and Qatarna+ plans offer a wide range of features and benefits, with two key elements; customers can always rest assured they remain in complete control of their bills, and will not ever pay a riyal more than they expect, and that they can remain connected with unlimited voice calls and data depending on their choice of plan.

Sheikh Ali bin Jabor Al Thani, CEO at Ooredoo, said: "We are so excited to launch our new Shahry+ and Qatarna+ plans; plans we have meticulously designed after extensive market research and assessment of customer wants and needs. These new plans will enable our customers to upgrade their worlds, in perfect alignment with our strategic commitment to complete customer satisfaction."

The new Shahry+ and Qatarna+ range includes three plans under each product; Shahry+ Select, Active and Max, and Qatarna+ Pro, Premium and Platinum, enabling customers to choose the features and benefits that best suit their needs.

All plans automatically feature the Worry-Free Key, protecting customers from any charges beyond their agreed monthly plan price and ensuring they remain in complete control of their bills. Unlimited voice calls and data feature heavily across the six options, meaning customers will be able to stay connected throughout each month.

Customers looking to design their own plan and pay only for what they want will enjoy Shahry+ Select, which enables customisation of allowances and the option to make changes to both allowances and Add-ons each and every month if required. Extra benefits can also be purchased throughout the month.

Current Shahry S customers will automatically be upgraded to the new Shahry+ Active plan and will be able to enjoy more benefits such as more local data and more non-telco benefits such as entertainment and lifestyle subscriptions.

Customers who currently have a Qatarna 5G Platinum plan will automatically be upgraded to a Qatarna+ Platinum plan, with the plan price staying the same and the benefits being enhanced with unlimited roaming voice calls and data in 27 countries including the GCC, the USA and across Europe.

Nasser Al Attiyah, Qatar's motor racing star, is the face of the new campaign, under the theme of 'Greatness'. Marketing campaigns for the new plans focus on Nasser's rise to greatness, and highlight the many ways in which customers can upgrade their worlds and aim for greatness with the many features and benefits on offer.

Sheikh Ali concluded: "We believe our new Shahry+ and Qatarna+ plans will meet and exceed customer wants and needs, both now and as we move further into the age of complete digitalisation, and we look forward to seeing a positive response in the market."




Sheikh Ali bin Jabor Al Thani, CEO at Ooredoo, and Nasser Al Attiyah at the launch event.



# MoFA Secretary-General bids farewell to Algerian Ambassador

**Secretary-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs H E Dr. Ahmed bin Hassan Al Hammadi met yesterday with Ambassador of Algeria to Qatar H E Dr. Mustafa Boutoura on the occasion of the end of his tenure in the country. The MoFA Secretary-General extended thanks to the Ambassador for his efforts in bolstering and enhancing the bilateral relations, wishing him success in his new duties.**

# Quality ensured across HMC hospitals: Official

FROM PAGE 1

Prof. Abou Samra, a co-chair of the Middle East Forum on Quality and Safety in Healthcare 2023, said the forum brought experiences from the region, US and the Europe to Qatar and vice versa.

"Through interactions we learn from the solutions which they have implemented somewhere else to similar problems. The conference discussed the concept of quality improvement in all healthcare providers, so they start thinking about quality every time they (healthcare providers) deliver healthcare. They will think about the patient's problem and needs and what should be done. This is very important in healthcare quality," he said.

HMC in partnership with Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI) held the Middle East Forum on Quality and Safety in Healthcare 2023. IHI is partnering with HMC for over ten years to support five central activities: strategic guidance and will building, the annual Middle East Forum on Quality and Safety in Healthcare, leading patient safety and quality improvement initiatives, testing and implementing methods to increase efficiency and value, and dissemination.

# MoPH workshop educates children, adolescents on their rights, duties

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

The National Team for Child Protection against Violence organised yesterday the third awareness workshop entitled "Better Together", at the National Service Academy, to educate children and adolescents from 10 to 18 years old about their rights, duties, and proper upbringing.

The programme of the awareness workshop "Better Together" was developed in collaboration with the entities concerned in Qatar and with the participation of social, educational, and mental experts specialised in this field.

The National Team for the Protection of Children from Violence comprises representatives from ministries and entities concerned with Child Protection in Qatar and was established by the decision of Minister of Public Health in 2021.

Professor Khalid Mohammed Al Ansari, Head of the National Team for Child Protection against Violence, said the workshop aims to educate children and adolescents on building a sound culture that is consistent with religion and values and to protect them against the risks they are exposed to, which have been aggravated by the negative content on social media and lack of censorship.

"We are guided by Qatar National Vision 2030 and its goals especially those related to the pillars of social and human development. Caring for children, protecting, and raising them properly based on religious and moral values requires hard work and cooperation between all concerned entities in Qatar, embracing innovations and developing best practices in this aspect."

Mohamed Yahya Taher, Head of the Moral Guidance Department at the National Service Academy, explained the importance of the workshop in protecting young students, especially in this period of globalization, explaining that by protecting children from destructive extraneous ideas, such workshops contribute to protecting society.

From biological and health perspective, Professor Al Ansari, who is also Head of the Pediatric Emergency Department at Sidra Medicine, spoke about the stages of growth of both genders and the biological change.

Abdulrahman Al Kadmani, a psychologist at the Behavioral Health Support Center, spoke about the importance of fulfilling the societal duty by providing correct information to children and adolescents from reliable scientific sources. Fai Al Hajri, a social specialist at the Naufar, discussed the risk of psychotropic substances abuse, ways of prevention, and the center of Naufar and the services it provides.

Dr. Muhammad Abdul Latif Al Nuaimi, Family Advisor at the Ministry of Endowment and Islamic Affairs, provided key information on educating adolescents within the framework of religious teachings, social standards, and moral values in society, adding that the Islamic approach is the key to leading a sound and stable life, preventing one from emotional distress accompanied by a loss sense of self.

First Lieutenant Mohammed Abdullah Al Naama, Officer of the Awareness and Information Section at the Juvenile Police Department, discussed the importance of educating children on prominent disruptive behavioural issues that they may face in adolescence and the role of the Juvenile Police Department in addressing these issues.



Participants from National Service Academy at the workshop.

# 'Remarkable improvement in awareness of special needs children in Qatar'

VICTOR BOLORUNDURO
THE PENINSULA

There has been a remarkable improvement in Qatar regarding the awareness of special needs children, and the country has done a lot over the years to cater to their needs in every aspect through several innovative methods, Olcay B. Connor, Principal of Step By Step Centre for Special Needs, has said.

Step By Step Centre for Special Needs provides specialised academic learning and therapeutic intervention plans for children aged 3 to 20 who have special educational needs.

Speaking on the sidelines of a community awareness activity recently, Connor said many previously associated autism with physical disability.

"They don't even know that it actually has nothing to do with physical deformation or anything like that. But now, many have come to realise that a lot of autistic children are actually cognitively very able and capable of doing so much, and many of them are very talented in different areas as well," she noted.

Connor said that thanks to the efforts of the authorities and corporate bodies, children with special needs in Qatar have been receiving the attention they need and are enjoying everyday life while contributing their quota to the development of the society.



Olcay B. Connor

The educationist said that one of the major goals of her centre is transitioning children with special needs into mainstream schools after studying at the center.

"Once they come in here, we focus on improving them by setting up individual plans to improve their skill sets so that they're ready to be mainstreamed as soon as possible.

"We treat each student uniquely while giving them the needed attention, and we've had remarkable success with this over the years with many of our previous students graduating from mainstream schools while some are currently enrolled in many of them," said Connor, whose centre provides a vocational programme for children above the age of 12 aside from the early intervention and comprehensive learning programme for children aged 6 to 12 and the full-time individualised programmes.

She emphasised the importance of early intervention for children with special needs transitioning into mainstream schools. "The earlier there's intervention, support, and therapy provided, the quicker they see the results, and then the quicker the improvement we see. Obviously, a child who received intervention between the ages of 3 and 6 is more likely than a child or young person who is 14 years old to transition into a mainstream school. It is going to be much more difficult to teach skills and change certain behaviours at certain ages. Though it can be done, however, it is much easier in the early years. So, these are the optimum years for children to learn the skill sets and improve and balance this process at the same time," Connor said.

Speaking about the future plans for Step By Step, Connor said they plan to put more emphasis on the early intervention program by helping not just the children but training the parents as well on how to best handle their children.

"We are already part of a programme called Early Bird. This is a free-of-charge parent training programme by the National Autistic Society in the UK, which is being run by PHCC in Qatar," she said.



# Minister of Justice chairs Lawyers Admission Committee's meeting

QNA — DOHA

Lawyers Admission Committee held yesterday a meeting chaired by Minister of Justice H E Masoud bin Mohammed Al Amri.

The committee considered the topics on its agenda, including the swearing-in of four new lawyers before the committee, and examining applications for the registration of three corresponding business owners in the list of practicing lawyers.

The committee reviewed the applications of a number of new lawyers whose training period has ended, interviewed a number of applicants to practice the profession, and approved the list of six under-training lawyers.

The committee also considered requests to transfer of three lawyers to the list of practicing lawyers before the Court of Cassation and the Court of Appeal, and considered cancelling the list of three under-training lawyers.

During the meeting, the committee covered a number of organisational issues and controls for the work of the legal profession, and the appropriate decisions were taken in this regard.

ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION

# MoECC discusses circular economy in Qatar

QNA — DOHA

The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (MoECC) has organised a workshop on the state of the circular economy in Qatar.

The workshop was hosted in cooperation with the Global Green Growth Institute (GGGI).

The workshop comes within the framework of joint cooperation between the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change and the Global Green Growth Institute, to promote the circular economy as one of the main work streams to support economic diversification, and to integrate circular principles and sustainable consumption and production into the planning and implementation of national development, as well as the strategies and operations of companies in Qatar.

The workshop aimed to provide basic evidence and best practices for developing circular economy policies and frameworks in Qatar, exchanging knowledge and consulting with stakeholders on circular economy initiatives, and the relevant policy landscape in Qatar and at the international level.

In addition to enhancing awareness and capacity building on the concept of the circular economy, and what It means in practice, between stakeholders in the public and private sectors, sharing the findings to achieve international best practices in key sectors.

The two-day workshop gathered stakeholders from the government, private sector, non-governmental organizations to familiarize them with the circular economy and the role it can play in combatting climate change and diversifying the economy.

DISTINCTIVE EXCELLENCE

# Qatar University gets prestigious accreditation from WSCUC

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

Qatar University (QU) yesterday announced it has received accreditation from WSCUC, Senior College and University Commission.

Commenting on the accreditation, Dr. Hassan Al Derham said obtaining this important international accreditation is in line with the mission of Qatar University to be regionally recognised for its distinctive excellence in education and research, and an institution of choice for students and scholars and a catalyst for sustainable socio-economic development in Qatar.

Dr. Al Derham added that the university's selection of the most prominent internationally known accreditation institutions such as WSCUC, reinforces the university's commitment to continuous improvement and providing a high-quality educational environment for the institutional accreditation is one of the initiatives that contribute to achieving Goal 5.7 of the university's current strategic plan, which contributes to achieving the fifth goal 'Institutional Excellence,' which stipulates that Qatar University is recognized as a benchmark for organizational and operational excellence, and sustainability."



QU President Dr. Hassan Al Derham (third right) addresses the attendees, which included Vice Presidents, Deans, and senior officials at the QU and members of the press.

He added, "Qatar University's obtaining institutional accreditation from WSCUC is an important and essential step to confirm the university's commitment to its students and community to continuous improvement, and provide a high-quality educational environment whose objectives and procedures are in line with local and international standards.

"The initiative to obtain enhancing institutional effectiveness through continuous self-improvement, and spreading the culture of evidence-based decision making to support institutional planning.

Dr. Moumen Omar Hasnah, Director of Institutional Research and Effectiveness at QU, who oversaw the process of accreditation said, "Qatar University has the institutional practices and resources necessary to obtain international institutional accreditation. Qatar University has reached a level of advancement and institutional stability that enabled it to successfully achieve its goal of obtaining institutional accreditation."

Dr. Khalid Al Khanji, QU Chief Strategy and Development Officer, spoke about some of the desired objectives of institutional accreditation, such as reassuring stakeholders of QU's commitment to high-quality education, facilitating the process of transferring students' earned credit hours between accredited institutions, community, based on the mission of WSCUC.

The purpose of the Commission is to foster excellence in elementary, secondary, adult and postsecondary institutions, and supplementary education programs. It encourages school improvement through a process of continuing evaluation and recognizes institutions through granting accreditation to the schools that meet an acceptable level of quality in accordance with the established criteria.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

# Diplomatic missions host 'diplomat for a day' for students

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

In commemoration of International Women's Day, female Ambassadors and Deputy Heads of mission of diplomatic missions in Doha, hosted the "Diplomat for a Day" programme for female Qatari and international students from Georgetown University-Qatar throughout March.

Participating diplomats from embassies of the United States, Greece, Netherlands, Canada, Austria, Bulgaria, Guinea, Mexico, Thailand, Singapore, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the United Nations Offices of Counter-Terrorism, Trade and Development, and International Organization for Migration, were part of the programme.

The programme aimed to encourage students to become leaders and advocates in their communities by providing them with mentorship opportunities and first-hand experience of what it means to be an official representative.

Students were paired with female heads of diplomatic missions to learn about their day-to-day work, including attending meetings and briefings with consular, public affairs, and trade sections.

The programme concluded with a reception where the participants had the opportunity to network with other diplomatic missions and meet their counterparts.

Participating ambassadors shared their observations of meeting young women eager to learn about the work of diplomats. Austrian Ambassador, H E Karin Fichtinger-Grohe said, "The programme encourages young women to pursue careers in diplomacy, politics, and other fields where they can make a positive impact."

Ambassador of Canada, H E Isabelle Martin highlighted the importance of strong female role models in empowering women and continuing the work of integration for total and systematic gender equality. Ambassador of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in Qatar, H E Valerie Lusamba Kabeya emphasised the necessity of women's active participation for the development of nations and the importance of gender equality.

US Deputy Chief of Mission Natalie Baker said, "The programme is part of the US Embassy's efforts to promote gender equality and women's empowerment. We are committed to supporting initiatives that empower women and girls and promote their full and equal participation in all spheres of life, including in diplomatic missions."

Inna Cherniak, a Georgetown University student, described the programme as one of the highlights of her university experience and renewed her hope for her country's future. Fatima Al Kuwari, a participant in the programme, described the initiative with the Austrian Ambassador as a truly immersive experience that taught her a lot about the work of diplomats. Shiekha Aldana Nasser Al Thani described the Diplomat for a Day programme with the Royal Thai Embassy as an unforgettable experience that expanded her understanding of diplomacy and its role in promoting global harmony and progress.




# UDC launches tree planting initiative at The Pearl-Qatar

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

United Development Company (UDC), master developer of The Pearl-Qatar and Gewan Island, has reaffirms its commitment to practicing the highest standards of global environmental sustainability by launching eco-friendly initiatives.

This is in line with Qatar National Vision 2030 objectives represented in the Qatar National Strategy for the Environment and Climate Change.



A view of greenery at The Pearl-Qatar.

In keeping with UDC's development vision that emphasises environmental sustainability, UDC has stepped up its efforts to make The Pearl-Qatar a healthy and sustainable community for all residents and employees, by launching a variety of environmental initiatives that contribute to environmental sustainability.

Among the most prominent initiatives launched by UDC recently, is to plant trees for every new employee who joins the company and successively for every five years spent at UDC. The initiative aims to reduce carbon dioxide emissions in the air and maximize the Island's green spaces which currently house 7,700 trees compensating for almost 197 tonnes of carbon dioxide.

The initiative, which was launched in October 2022 during Qatar Sustainability Week, reiterates UDC's international commitment to the Paris Climate Change Agreement, which aims to reduce carbon emissions.

To set off the initiative at The Pearl-Qatar and Gewan Island, 600 different trees were planted thus far with each new employee receiving a certificate recognising his tree's planting and commemorating his joining in an eco-friendly way. In partnership with the United Nations, the Green Organization has planted 160 trees as part of its global campaign to plant a trillion trees.

UDC stressed that reducing carbon dioxide emissions is more effective than offsetting them, which is key to achieving environmental sustainability and preserving the environment for future generations. To achieve this, UDC urged individuals to practice sustainable solutions to the environment such as turning off lights and air conditioners after working hours, separating food waste, using reusable water bottles, limiting the use of non-biodegradable plastic, and rationalizing energy and water consumption.

UDC has also urged its staff and residents at The Pearl-Qatar to recycle waste as a daily habit, partake in recycling campaigns, tree planting, and use products of sustainable materials, in aims of protecting the planet.

UDC's environmentally friendly practices continue inspiring The Pearl-Qatar visitors, residents, and UDC staff to work together towards accomplishing UDC's vision of environmental sustainability and reflecting eco-friendly values through facing climate change, increasing environment awareness, and preserving the Island's marine environment.

CONDEMNATION

# Saudi Arabia slams racist statements by Israeli official against Palestinians

AGENCIES — RIYADH/PARIS

Saudi Arabia has condemned the offensive and racist statements made by an official of the Israeli occupation government against Palestine and its people, Saudi Gazette reported.

A statement issued by the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs confirmed the Kingdom's position in rejecting these remarks, which are contrary to the truth, and contribute to spreading violence and hate speech, and undermine all efforts made for dialogue and international peace.

The Ministry renewed Saudi Arabia's support for all the international efforts aimed to solve the Palestinian issue, on the basis of the Arab peace initiative, and ensuring the establishment of a Palestinian state on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital.

**Other Arab and Western countries have also censured the offensive comments by the far-right Israeli minister.**

It is noteworthy that Israel's Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich made a statement while delivering a speech in Paris, in which he said: "There is no such thing as a Palestinian nation. There is no Palestinian history. There is no Palestinian language." France yesterday also described as "irresponsible" the firebrand Israeli minister's remarks.

"We call on persons who have been called to high office within the Israeli government to show the required dignity, to respect that of others, and to refrain from all action or declaration that could contribute to the escalation of tensions," the foreign ministry said.

The comments sparked condemnation from the Palestinian Authority, Egypt and Jordan. Farhan Haq, deputy spokesman for UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, dubbed the minister's remarks "completely unhelpful," adding that the Palestinian people "obviously" exist.



## Iraqi Premier visits Turkiye

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan (left) welcomes Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia' Al Sudani at an official ceremony at the Presidential Complex in Ankara Yesterday. (AFP)

VIOLENCE

# Killing of Kurds in northern Syria sparks protests, tensions

AP — JINDERIS, SYRIA

Thousands of Kurds took to the streets of the earthquake-ravaged Syrian town of Jinderis yesterday to protest the killing of four men as they lit a fire to celebrate the Kurdish new year the night before.

The attack on the Kurdish men rekindled tensions between Turkish-backed armed groups controlling the area and Kurdish residents. It fed into a power struggle between rival armed factions that control different parts of northwest Syria.

At the request of Kurdish residents, fighters from the armed opposition group Hayat Tahrir Al Sham deployed en masse around Jinderis yesterday. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an opposition war monitor, reported that the group had taken over the headquarters of the Ahrar Sharqiya group, a Turkish-backed armed opposition group, in the area.



Mourners march with the bodies of some of the victims killed the previous night, in Jindayris in the rebel-held province of Aleppo, yesterday. (AFP)

A HTS spokesperson declined to comment on the matter, but there was a heavy presence of the group's fighters in and around the city as crowds of Kurds attended the funerals of the victims. Meanwhile, Turkish forces deployed on the road linking the town of Atmeh, controlled by HTS, with Jinderis.

The assailants who shot the Kurdish men as they were lighting a fire in celebration of the Nowruz holiday allegedly belonged to Jaish Al Sharqiya, a splinter group of Ahrar Sharqiya.

The Syrian National Army, an alliance of the various Turkish-backed factions in the area, issued a statement condemning the killing of the Kurdish men in "the strongest possible terms" and promising to bring the perpetrators to justice.

Jinderis was controlled by Kurdish fighters until 2018 when it was taken by Turkiye-backed opposition fighters who still hold it. The capture of the town displaced many Kurds, while those who remained complain that they are often mistreated and subjected to discrimination. In the hours after the shooting, some Kurds from Jinderis travelled in a convoy to the town of Atmeh, about 15km away, where they called on HTS to seize control of Jinderis from the Turkish-backed militias.

## Yemeni YouTubers sentenced by Houthi court: Lawyer

AFP — SANAA: Three Yemeni YouTubers captured by Houthi rebels received prison sentences of up to three years yesterday for publishing videos alleging abuses by the Iran-backed fighters, according to their lawyer.

Mustafa Al Mawmari, Ahmad Hajar and Ahmad Elaw were detained in Sanaa, in December. They were charged with "spreading misinformation", "harming public interest", and "inciting the masses to commit acts of chaos", according to court documents seen by AFP.

A Sanaa criminal court handed down the prison sentences and ordered them to delete their YouTube channels, their lawyer Abdul Majid Sabra told AFP. Elaw was sentenced to three years. Mawmari received an 18-month term and Hajar 12 months, Sabra said. Together, the three men had more than three million followers. They were each ordered to pay a fine of nearly $20,000, the lawyer added.

In December, Hajar, 43, was the first of the group detained after he accused the Houthis of "robbing the Yemeni people", in a video watched around half a million times.

Yemen's war has caused hundreds of thousands of deaths, both directly and indirectly.

The Huthis have increasingly limited individual liberties, including free speech and the movement of women in areas they control.

## Chad jails 400 rebels for life after ruler's death

AFP — N'DJAMENA

More than 400 rebels in Chad were handed life sentences yesterday, mainly in connection with the death of former ruler Idriss Deby Itno, who was killed in 2021, the prosecutor told AFP.

After a mass trial, they were sentenced for "acts of terrorism, mercenarism, recruitment of child soldiers and assaulting the head of state," said Mahamat El Hadj Abba Nana, public prosecutor for the capital N'Djamena.

He did not give a detailed figure for those jailed, saying only that "more than 400 were sentenced" to life, while 24 other defendants were acquitted. The trial opened last month behind closed doors in the Criminal Court of the Court of Appeal. It took place within Klessoum prison about 20 kilometres (12 miles) southeast of the capital. In early 2021, the country's main rebel group, the Front for Change and Concord in Chad (FACT), launched an offensive on the north of the country from its bases in Libya.

On April 20, the army announced that Marshal Deby, Chad's iron-fisted ruler for the previous three decades, had died from wounds sustained in the fighting. His death was announced just a day after he had been declared victor of a presidential election that gave him a sixth term in office. He was immediately succeeded by one of his sons, General Mahamat Idriss Deby Itno, who took the helm at the head of 15-member military junta. He promised to hold free elections within 18 months, but that deadline was extended.

Protests last October to mark the initially promised end to military rule were met by a crackdown in which 50 people were killed, according to an official toll contested by opposition groups.

TIGRAY CONFLICT

# Ethiopia rejects US war crime allegations as 'inflammatory'

AFP — ADDIS ABABA

Ethiopia's government yesterday accused the United States of unfairly apportioning blame for crimes committed during the two-year Tigrayan conflict.

The US allegations were "partisan," the foreign ministry said, adding: "The US statement is inflammatory." Washington on Monday accused all parties to the conflict of committing war crimes.

But it singled out Ethiopian, Eritrean and regional Amhara forces for crimes against humanity, without mentioning the Tigrayan rebels.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who last week made his first visit to Ethiopia since a breakthrough November 2022 peace deal between the federal government and Tigrayan rebels, on Monday made a forceful call for accountability on his return to Washington.



In this file photo taken on June 20, 2021, people walk near a tank reportedly abandoned by Ethiopian army, near Dengolat, southwest of Mekele in Tigray region, Ethiopia. (AFP)

He said the State Department carried out a "careful review of the law and the facts" and concluded that war crimes were committed by federal troops from both Ethiopia and its ally Eritrea as well as by the rebel Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and forces from the neighbouring Amhara region.

"Many of these actions were not random or a mere byproduct of war. They were calculated and deliberate," Blinken said as he presented an annual rights report.

Blinken added that the State Department also found crimes against humanity by Ethiopian, Eritrean and Amhara forces, including killings and sexual violence, although he did not mention the TPLF.

Ethiopia's foreign ministry said the US statement "unfairly apportions blame among different parties in the conflict." "The statement appears to exonerate one party from certain allegations of human rights violations such as rape and other forms of sexual violence despite the clear and overwhelming evidence about its culpability," it said.

"This partisan and divisive approach from the US is ill-advised," it added, calling it "unwarranted".

TPLF officials did not respond to AFP requests to comment about the US report.

Blinken had called for accountability during his trip to Addis Ababa, where he held an unusually long meeting with Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and spoke separately with senior TPLF leader Getachew Reda.

But he did not directly mention war crimes or crimes against humanity and sounded upbeat about the prospects for peace during his visit.

The war badly soured US relations with Ethiopia, Africa's second most populous nation.

'OVERBLOWN' CONCERNS

# Tunisia rejects EU warnings of collapse

AFP — TUNIS

Tunisia yesterday dismissed as "overblown" concerns of a looming economic or social collapse after the EU's top diplomat warned of a "very, very dangerous" situation in the North African country.

European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell had warned Monday that if crisis-torn Tunisia "collapses economically or socially then we will be in a situation where new flows of migrants will come to Europe".

Tunisia's foreign ministry rejected his comments as "overblown, both in view of the well-established resilience of the Tunisian people throughout its history, and in view of the threat of migration to Europe from the south".

An EU delegation arrived in Tunisia yesterday to examine "the political and socio-economic situation" and discuss cooperation over irregular migration, according to a statement from the 27-nation bloc. In the statement, it said Borrell's comments were "selective".

Tunisia has suffered over a decade of economic and political crisis since its 2011 revolution, culminating in a July 2021 power grab by President Kais Saied, whose rivals have accused him of mounting a coup. Saied has since overturned the country's post-revolution constitution and granted himself almost limitless powers, as well as launching a crackdown against the opposition.

Tunis is in prolonged talks with the International Monetary Fund for a $2bn bailout package to help the heavily indebted treasury balance its books. Saied in February made an incendiary speech blaming "hordes of illegal migrants from sub-Saharan Africa" for a crime wave and saying a "criminal plot" was underway to change the nation's demographic make-up. The World Bank effectively suspended new lending to Tunisia after Saied's remarks, a move that put pressure on the IMF not to approve a bailout.

Borrell on Monday said that finalising the deal was "indispensable". "Tunisia is a neighbour, is a close partner and what happens there has an immediate impact on us," he said. "Not only because it increases migration flows, because it creates more instability and insecurity in the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region, in the Mediterranean."

"We cannot turn a blind eye to what's happened," Borrell said, urging Tunis to respect the "rule of law... (and) human rights". In its statement, the Tunisian foreign ministry praised the "constructive support of several partners" including Italy, and said it was open to "a responsible, respectful and equal partnership with all its partners".

ANTI-GOVT PROTESTS

# Hundreds arrested in South Africa opposition rallies

AFP — PRETORIA

More than 550 people were arrested during South Africa's opposition rallies, security forces said yesterday, a day after marchers called for the departure of President Cyril Ramaphosa over the ailing economy and crippling energy crisis.

The National Joint Operational and Intelligence Structure said the arrests covered "public violence, intimidation, damage to critical infrastructure, theft and attempted looting".

The left-wing Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), the country's third-largest party, had called for a "national shutdown," sparking fears of a repeat of bloody clashes and looting just under two years ago. But turnout was low and calls for strikes went unheeded as the government mobilised thousands of police, backed by troops, to stifle unrest.

About 5,000 people demonstrated outside Ramaphosa's official residence in the capital Pretoria. In other parts of the country, protesters gathered in groups varying in size from dozens to hundreds.

The protest call rekindled memories of clashes in July 2021 that saw the worst violence since the end of apartheid and advent of democracy in 1994.

At least 350 people were killed when protests sparked by the jailing of ex-president Jacob Zuma spiralled into riots and looting.

Ramaphosa, a former union boss who turned business tycoon after apartheid and became president in 2018, had vowed to prevent "anarchy" at the latest protests. His popularity ranking has slumped, battered by his handling of the economy, chronic electricity shortages and joblessness.

PEOPLE FLEE HOMES

# Strong quake rattles Afghanistan, Pakistan

AFP — ISLAMABAD KABUL

A strong earthquake lasting for at least 30 seconds was felt across much of Afghanistan, Pakistan and parts of India yesterday night, with the United States Geological Survey putting the magnitude at 6.5.

"It was a terrifying tremor. I had never felt such a tremor before in my life," Khatera, 50, a resident of Kabul, told AFP after rushing out of her fifth-storey apartment in the capital.

The USGS said the quake was centred near Jurm in northeastern Afghanistan and had a depth of 187km.

The region is frequently hit by earthquakes -- especially in the Hindu Kush mountain range, which lies near the junction of the Eurasian and Indian tectonic plates.

Two people, including a child, were killed in Laghman province, Shafiullah Rahimi, spokesman for Afghanistan's Ministry of Natural Disaster Management, told AFP.

Government spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said health centres across the country had been put on high alert.

Noor Mohammad Hanifi, a shopkeeper in Kabul, set up tents in a street for his family to spend the night in.

"Nobody dares to go inside their homes," Hanifi told AFP as his family, cloaked in blankets, took shelter.

**At least 180 people who suffered minor injuries were taken to hospitals across the northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan**

Hanafi said he felt dizzy when the quake hit as he had just returned from a long trip.

"But when I heard the doors and windows shaking I realised it was an earthquake."

In Pakistan, frightened people fled their homes as the tremor hit.

"People ran out of their houses and were reciting the Koran," said an AFP correspondent in Pakistan's city of Rawalpindi.

Ikhlaq Kazmi, a retired professor in the city, said his entire house started shaking.

"The children started shouting that there is an earthquake," he said. "We all ran out."

Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif ordered the National Disaster Management Authority to be ready to deal with any emergency.

At least 180 people who suffered minor injuries were taken to hospitals across the northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan, Shahidullah Khan, a senior government official, told AFP.

In Afghanistan, many families were out of their homes celebrating Nowruz, the Persian New Year, when the quake struck.

"I heard people screaming and yelling as they came out in the streets," said Masieh, who was outside with his family when the tremor hit.

"It's possible that there could be another tremor so I'm still waiting outside." Those indoors also quickly left their houses and apartments.

"They just fled without wearing shoes, just carrying their children in their hands," an AFP correspondent said.

The powerful tremors sent many people fleeing their homes and offices in Pakistan's capital of Islamabad, some reciting verses from the Quran. Media reports suggested cracks had appeared in some apartment buildings in the city.

In June of last year more than 1,000 people were killed and tens of thousands made homeless after a 5.9-magnitude quake -- the deadliest in Afghanistan in nearly a quarter of a century -- struck the impoverished province of Paktika.



## Creative hub for Papuan youths inaugurated

President Joko Widodo wearing a traditional Papuan headwear during the inauguration of the creative hub for Papuan youths in Jayapura in Papua province. (AFP)

## German Education Minister begins first cabinet-level trip to Taiwan in 26 years

AFP — TAIPEI

Germany's education minister yesterday inked a technological cooperation deal with Taiwan, kicking off the first cabinet-level German visit to the island in 26 years.

Bettina Stark-Watzinger signed the Science and Technology Agreement with Taiwan's National Science and Technology Council (NSTC) on the first day of a trip that drew sharp criticism from China.

At the signing ceremony in Taipei, Stark-Watzinger said it was "a great pleasure and honour" for her to be the first German government minister to visit in more than two decades.

"This arrangement stands for enhancing cooperation on the basis of democratic values, transparency, openness, reciprocity and scientific freedom," she said.

China's foreign ministry said the country "firmly opposes" the "malicious" visit.

"China has lodged solemn protests and expressed strong dissatisfaction with the German side in Beijing and Berlin," said spokesman Wang Wenbin at a regular press briefing yesterday.

He said China had urged Germany "to immediately stop its collusion and interaction with the separatist forces in Taiwan, to immediately stop sending them the wrong signal and to immediately stop using the Taiwan question to interfere in China's internal affairs".

## Australia charges ex-soldier with murder over Afghan killing

AP — CANBERRA

Police have charged the first Australian veteran with murder for a killing in Afghanistan three years after a war crimes investigation found that 19 Australian special forces soldiers could face charges for illegal conduct.

Former Special Air Service Regiment trooper Oliver Schulz, 41, was arrested in New South Wales state and charged by police with the war crime of murder, an Australian Federal Police statement said.

"It will be alleged he murdered an Afghan man while deployed to Afghanistan," the statement said.

Schulz's charge was mentioned late Monday in a Queanbeyan court where his lawyer did not apply for his release on bail. Schulz was remanded in custody to appear in a Sydney court on May 16.

Australian Broadcasting Corp broadcast helmet camera video in 2020 of a soldier it said was Schulz shooting an Afghan man in 2012 in a wheat field in Uruzgan province.

Schulz, who was awarded the Commendation for Gallantry for his service in Afghanistan, faces a potential sentence of life in prison if convicted.

Police are working with the Office of the Special Investigator, an Australian investigation agency established in 2021, to build cases against elite SAS and Commando Regiments troops who served in Afghanistan between 2005 and 2016.

A military report released in 2020 after a four-year investigation found evidence that Australian troops unlawfully killed 39 Afghan prisoners, farmers and civilians. The report recommended 19 current and former soldiers face criminal investigation.

Benjamin Roberts-Smith, Australia's most highly decorated member of the armed services when he left the SAS in 2013, has been accused by former colleagues of unlawful treatment of prisoners, including illegal killings. The former corporal, who was awarded the Victoria Cross and the Medal for Gallantry for his service in Afghanistan, has denied any misconduct.

His defamation trial against *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Age* and *The Canberra Times* newspapers ended in July 2022 but a judgment has yet to be announced.

**Crosswords and Sudoku are only available in the print edition of *The Peninsula***

## Thailand sets election date, populist party tops polls

AP — BANGKOK: Thailand's general election will take place on May 14, the country's election regulator said yesterday, one day after the dissolution of Parliament initiated by Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha, who is seeking a fresh term.

The Election Commission said registration of candidates would begin April 3.

The election will pit the popular opposition Pheu Thai party, backed by billionaire populist Thaksin Shinawatra, against parties representing the conservative establishment and closely linked to the military, which has staged two coups in the last two decades.

Other parties are likely to win enough seats to be wooed to join a coalition government.

Pheu Thai's top candidate for the prime minister's post is his 36-year-old daughter Paetongtarn Shinawatra, whom polls show to be the most popular choice by a large margin.

## Court grants Imran Khan bail in terrorism cases

AP — LAHORE: A Pakistani court yesterday granted former Prime Minister Imran Khan a weeklong bail in two new cases in which he faces terrorism charges, officials said. The ruling gave the embattled ousted premier and now popular opposition leader another brief reprieve from arrest.

In the latest terrorism cases, Khan is accused of inciting people to violence when he traveled to Islamabad last Saturday to face indictment in a graft case. His followers clashed with police outside the court and Khan never appeared before the judge.

The graft case was later postponed till later in March. A separate terrorism case against Khan pertains to a rally last year when he verbally threatened a female judge.

Khan denies all charges against him, saying he is being victimized by Sharif's government. After Tuesday's ruling by a court in Lahore, the capital of eastern Punjab province, a close Khan associate repeated those claims.

The Peninsula
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## EDITORIAL

### *Special measures for Ramadan*

**THE** holy month of Ramadan will begin tomorrow as the Crescent Sighting Committee at the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs announced that the Ramadan crescent was not sighted and as a result today (Wednesday, March 22), is the final day of Sha'ban.

Ministries and other organisations have taken many steps for the benefit of people during the holy month.

The General Endowments Department at the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs recently announced that they will serve 10,000 Iftar meals daily through their tents which will be set up in densely populated areas across the country. The Ministry has also lined up thousands of religious activities, including religious lectures and cultural competitions for all age groups. They will also provide food baskets to the needy. The Ministry has readied over 2,000 mosques across the country for receiving worshippers during the holy month.

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI) has launched several initiatives to curb the price hike of food commodities during Ramadan. MoCI has deployed inspectors for checking food outlets across the country to ensure compliance with consumer protection laws.

The Ministry has also launched an initiative to provide over 900 commodities at discounted prices in coordination with major sales outlets. This initiative kicked off on March 12 and will continue till the end of the holy month.

Recently the ministry announced another initiative through which the share of some rationed basic goods for citizens was doubled for one time, for the blessed month of Ramadan.

Qatar has always taken measures to protect the interest of the consumers by introducing various measures like ensuring a proper supply chain, publishing price bulletins, and market inspections to curb practices like hoarding, which is the cause of steep inflation in many countries. The last few years also saw a major push in the promotion of local products and achieving self-sustainability in many sectors.

In their regular weekly meeting on Monday, Shura Council praised the government's policies to address inflation by implementing measures that contributed to reducing the impact and made several recommendations to address the issue.

The Shura Council members called on authorities to monitor the prices by intensifying their campaigns, encouraging free competition and preventing monopoly, providing all means of support for the local products and making them available on a bigger scale in the local market as well as encouraging exports and support it to compete abroad.

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# Qatar, Rwanda: Close friendship, ambitious, promising partnership

QNA



**The State of Qatar is seen as a strategic partner to the Republic of Rwanda and the relations between the two countries have witnessed steady growth since establishing the diplomatic relations in 2017.**

Within the solid and distinguished relations that bond the State of Qatar to the Republic of Rwanda and their friendly peoples, comes the visit of HE President of the Republic of Rwanda Paul Kagame to Doha, where Amir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani welcomed him to a meeting where they discussed bilateral relations between the two countries and ways to support and enhance them in various fields of cooperation, especially in the economic and investment fields.

The visit is seen as a good sign of the strength of relations between Doha and Kigali, reflecting the aspiration and keenness of the leadership in both countries to boost, strengthen, and develop them in all fields to serve the interests of both countries and their peoples. The visit and the talks that will take place during it will form a chance to strengthen the bonds between the two sides, discuss various partnership aspects, and contribute to boosting bilateral cooperation in all fields, especially trade, economic, financial, and investment aspects.

The State of Qatar is seen as a strategic partner to the Republic of Rwanda and the relations between the two countries have witnessed steady growth since establishing the diplomatic relations in 2017. Since then, the leaders of the two countries have met regularly, and the exchanged high-level visits between the two sides have contributed to boosting joint cooperation in various vital fields and enhancing the partnership between the two countries. In this regard, Amir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani visited Rwanda in April 2019 and made another visit in June 2022 to participate in the 26th Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Kigali. Meanwhile, HE President of the Republic of Rwanda paid several visits to Doha in February 2022, October 2021, October 2019, December 2019, and November 2018.

Despite the novelty of the relations between the State of Qatar and the Republic of Rwanda, it can be described as ambitious and promising and reflects the determination of both sides to strengthen and enhance them in a way that serves the interests of the two friendly countries and peoples. The two countries are continuously working on building exemplary partnerships between them and cooperating on many issues to serve their interests and those of others.

Relations between the two countries are regulated by agreements and memoranda of understanding that cover several fields, such as politics, diplomacy, economy, trade, agriculture, culture, sport, investment, aviation cooperation, and avoidance of double taxation. The two countries also signed an agreement to acquire 60 percent of the shares of Bugesera International Airport in Rwanda, and Qatar Airways signed two agreements with the Rwandan tourism air transport company and an agreement with the Rwanda civil aviation authority. There is also a memorandum of understanding (MoU) for defense cooperation between the two countries. Qatar's Hassad Food Company, which invests in the food sector, signed an MoU with the Rwandan government aimed at opening opportunities for cooperation between the two sides and studying investment opportunities in the agricultural and food fields.

The Qatar Financial Centre (QFC) also signed an MoU with the Rwanda Finance Limited to launch joint initiatives that contribute to promoting the growth and international expansion of the business of QFC and the Kigali International Financial Center, in addition to the partnership between Qatar Airways and Rwanda's flag carrier, RwandAir, which enables travelers to reach 160 destinations in the combined networks of both airlines.

In previous statements, President of the Republic of Rwanda Paul Kagame expressed his country's aspiration to enhance its relation and economic partnership with the State of Qatar, stressing that Qatar's development path is exemplary and that there is a great opportunity to develop economic and trade cooperation between Qatar and his country as one of the fastest growing economies in Africa.

Rwanda offers a thriving and stable investment system in industries such as textiles, clothing, leather, agriculture, livestock, industry, tourism, information and communication technology, and pharmaceuticals, in addition to the services sector's provision of a significant contribution to the gross domestic product, he added, affirming that his country enjoys many advantages for investment, but it must rely on itself to achieve what it aspires to, by working hard and persistently.

Rwanda is located in the middle of the African continent to the south of the equatorial circle within the range of the Plateau of Lakes, and it is an inland country that has no coasts, connected to the outside world through its neighboring countries, especially through the ports of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania and Mombasa in Kenya. Rwanda's area exceeds 26,000 square kilometers, and its population is estimated at 12 million, 83 percent of whom live in rural areas.

In the early 1990s, the country witnessed one of the bloodiest ethnic clashes in history, but was able to rise and stand on its feet again to build a prosperous unified country, full of hope, success and competitiveness at the regional and global levels.

The story of Rwanda's success is one of brightest examples of the human ability to change and transform, as this small and poor country in Africa was able to achieve great accomplishments in several areas, starting from achieving political and security stability, to transforming its economy from traditional agriculture to a technology-based knowledge economy service, in addition to encouraging foreign investments, easing restrictions on them, allocating incentives for foreign investors and opening all sectors to them.

In regard to this track, Rwandan President Paul Kagame said that Rwanda united its ranks, dealt with its differences, invested in the human element through education, provided an environment conductive to foreign investment, and developed a 2000-2021 vision, as well as another for the next 30 years. Rwanda also achieved integration in the field of energy, dealt with regional issues while building partnerships and relations with Africa and the outside world, made efforts to extract the largest number of lessons, and build on the gains and achievements, he added, pointing out that this is why Rwanda has grown and aspires to become a middle-income country during the next 30 days.

Visitors of Rwanda - the land of a thousand hills, will notice the features of the economic boom in this country, as it attracts tourist from all around the globe because of its rare and picturesque natural and wild life.

# This banking crisis won't wreck the economy

TYLER COWEN — BLOOMBERG

**In the post-recession years of the 1980s, we had major financial sector problems from the savings-and-loan crisis and what was then called "Third World debt," but no collapse. Today's details differ, but history shows that not all financial sector problems have to be explosive ones.**

With the regulatory resolution of Silicon Valley Bank, the forced sale of Credit Suisse and reports of other troubles at regional US banks, the question arises whether America or perhaps the broader world will go through another major financial crisis and "Great Recession." Fortunately, the answer so far appears to be no.

One reason for (relative) optimism is simply that the world, and policymakers, have been preparing for this scenario for some time. Not only do memories of 2008-2009 remain fresh, but we are coming out of a pandemic that in macroeconomic terms induced unprecedented policy reactions in most countries. Before 2008, in contrast, macroeconomic peace had reigned and there was common talk of "the great moderation," meaning that the business cycle might be a thing of the past. We now know that view is absurdly wrong.

Circa 2023, we can plausibly expect further disruptions and macroeconomic problems. But this time around the element of surprise is going to be missing, and that should limit the potential for a true financial sector explosion.

The kinds of bank financial problems we are facing also lend themselves to relatively direct solutions. Higher interest rates do mean that the bonds and other assets that many banks hold have lower values, which in turn could imply liquidity and solvency problems. But those underlying financial assets usually are set to pay off their nominal values as expected, as with the government securities held by Silicon Valley Bank.

That makes it easier for the Federal Reserve or government to arrange purchases of a failed institution, or to offer discount window borrowing. The losses are relatively transparent and easy to manage, at least compared with 2008-2009, and in most cases repayment is assured, even if those cash flows have lower expected values today, due to higher discount rates.

To the extent an economic slowdown does start, interest rates will fall again, which in turn boosts the values of those underlying securities, alleviating the problem. In contrast, the earlier Great Recession only pushed home prices down all the more. That in turn led to high numbers of foreclosures, which destroyed yet further value in real estate markets, worsening the cycle.

Another protective factor is that this time around household balance sheets are in decent shape. The sharp increase in pandemic-induced savings is now behind us, and balance sheets have been worsening for several quarters as consumers spend down their liquid surpluses, but still the overall situation appears acceptable. That limits the risk of economywide declines in consumption. Today's problems are more likely to remain localized in banks and other financial institutions, compared with, say, 2008-2009.

Some of the current doomsayers are suggesting that further bailouts of insolvent banks will induce very high rates of inflation, due to the money creation required to implement such bailouts. Yet the net pressures of failing banks are deflationary, as an actual failure would result in the destruction of numerous bank deposits. Fed actions to rescue these financial institutions in fact forestall pending decreases in money supply growth. The Fed has been very active with its discount window activities as of late, but from that we should not expect any kind of hyperinflation.

The various bailouts we have been engaging in are not costless. For instance, they may induce greater moral hazard problems the next time around. But that does not mean we should expect a spectacular financial crash right now. More likely, we will see increases in deposit insurance premiums and also higher capital requirements for financial institutions. The former will fund the current bailouts, and the latter will aim to limit such bailouts in the future. The actual consequences will be a bleeding of funds from the banking system, tighter credit for regional and local lending, and slower rates of economic growth, especially for small and midsize firms. Those are reasons to worry, but they do not portend explosive problems right now.

In short, the rational expectation is that the US will muddle through its current problems and patch up the present at the expense of the future. For better or worse, that is how we deal with most of our crises. We hope that America's innovativeness and strong talent base will make those future problems manageable.

Part of our current mess is a higher risk of stagflation moving forward. Problems in the financial system may discourage the Fed from raising interest rates at the previously planned pace. That raises the risk of persistent price inflation of 4% to 5%, and America could end up with stagflation, at least if the financial sector troubles lower employment and economic growth.

In the post-recession years of the 1980s, we had major financial sector problems from the savings-and-loan crisis and what was then called "Third World debt," but no collapse. Today's details differ, but history shows that not all financial sector problems have to be explosive ones.

LABOUR REFORM

# French govt survives no-confidence votes over pensions

AP — PARIS

Parliament adopted a divisive pension bill on Monday raising the retirement age in France from 62 to 64, after lawmakers in the lower chamber rejected two no-confidence votes against the government.

But the bill pushed through by President Emmanuel Macron without lawmakers' approval still faces a review by the Constitutional Council before it can be signed into law. The council has the power to reject articles within bills but usually approves them.

The first no-confidence motion, proposed by a small centrist group with support across the left, narrowly missed approval by National Assembly lawmakers on Monday afternoon, garnering 278 of the 287 votes needed to pass. The second motion, brought by the far-right National Rally, won just 94 votes in the chamber.

Macron's centrist alliance has more seats than any other group in the lower chamber.

The speaker of the National Assembly, Yael Braun-Pivet, said the failure of both votes means parliament has adopted the pension bill.

**The bill pushed through by President Emmanuel Macron without lawmakers' approval still faces a review by the Constitutional Council before it can be signed into law.**

Yet this is not the end of the complex path to turn the bill into law. Opponents said they would ask the Constitutional Council to review the text before it is formally promulgated, opening the door to the possible rejection of articles within the measure if they are not in line with the constitution. Far-right leader Marine Le Pen said she would ask the council to censure it.

After the first vote Monday, some leftist lawmakers called for Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne to resign.

"Only nine votes are missing ... to bring both the government down and its reform down," hard-left lawmaker Mathilde Panot said.

"The government is already dead in the eyes of the French, it doesn't have any legitimacy any more." The Senate, dominated by conservatives who back the retirement plan, approved the legislation last week.

The head of The Republicans' lawmakers, Olivier Marleix, earlier explained why his group would reject the motions.

"We acknowledge the need for a reform to save our pension system and defend retirees' purchasing power," he said during the debate Monday afternoon.

A minority of conservatives lawmakers strayed from the party line and voted in favor of the first motion.

Centrist lawmaker Charles de Courson, whose allies introduced the motion supported by the left, deplored the government's decision to use a special constitutional power to skirt a vote on the pension bill last week.




People hold a banner reading "Pensions, public services, wages, employment. We don't give up on anything, we take it all back" during a demonstration against the law reforming the pension system outside Montpellier railway station in Montpellier, southern France, yesterday. (AFP)

"How can we accept such contempt for parliament? How can we accept such conditions to examine a text which will have lasting effects on the lives of millions of our fellow citizens?" he exclaimed.

France, like many richer nations, has a low birth rate and its citizens have longer life expectancy.

The tensions in the political arena have been echoed on the streets, marked by intermittent protests and strikes in various sectors, including transportation, energy and sanitation workers. Garbage in Paris has piled ever higher and reeked of rotting food on the 15th day of a strike by collectors.

PARTYGATE SCANDAL

# Johnson denies lying over 'lockdown parties'

AFP — LONDON

Britain's former prime minister Boris Johnson **(pictured)** said yesterday he inadvertently misled parliament over the "Partygate" scandal but blamed top aides, ahead of a televised grilling that could determine his political fate.

Johnson released a 52-page dossier detailing why he denied breaking the rules over two years of COVID-19 lockdowns, when his staff were often partying in 10 Downing Street.

He was fined himself by police for one gathering, along with his then finance minister and current prime minister Rishi Sunak.



The former Conservative leader apologised and corrected the parliamentary record last May after previously insisting to MPs that the gatherings were above board.

Johnson refused to quit at the time but did so in July, after a ministerial rebellion over a separate ethics scandal, and the stakes are high as his supporters agitate now for his return to power.

"I did not intentionally or recklessly mislead the House on 1 December 2021, 8 December 2021, or on any other date," he wrote in the submission, which was reportedly drafted by one of London's most expensive lawyers.

"I would never have dreamed of doing so." The cross-party privileges committee of MPs is investigating whether he lied in his previous denials, prior to May, and is due to interrogate Johnson for up to four hours on Wednesday.

A guilty verdict could lead to his suspension from the House of Commons. If the suspension is more than 10 sitting days, it could trigger a special election for his west London seat, if enough voters demand one.

Johnson said his apology and correction in May came at the earliest opportunity — after London police and senior civil servant Sue Gray had concluded their own investigations.

## NATO chief warns allies must boost defence spending

AFP — BRUSSELS

NATO chief Jens Stoltberg warned yesterday that allies are not boosting defence expenditure fast enough in the face of Russia's attack on Ukraine, as the number of countries hitting a key spending target fell.

After Moscow's seizure of the Crimea peninsula in 2014, NATO's 30 members pledged to try to increase their spending to two percent of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 2024.

Yesterday, the alliance's annual report said only seven — Greece, the United States, Lithuania, Poland, Britain, Estonia and Latvia — hit that level in 2022. That figure was down from eight alliance members in 2021 and 11 in 2020. "Many Allies have announced significant defence spending increases since Russia's invasion," Stoltenberg told a press conference.

"Now these pledges must turn into real cash, contracts, and concrete equipment, because defence spending underpins everything we do." He put the fall in the number of countries matching their pledge down to the fact that the economies in several allies had performed better than expected, making their defence budgets look proportionally lower.

'NO-LIMIT FRIENDSHIP'

# Putin hosts Xi in Kremlin with imperial palace pageantry

AP — MOSCOW

Russia and China showcased their "no-limit friendship" yesterday during a pomp-laden Kremlin ceremony intended to further cement ties amid the fighting in Ukraine.

After hosting Chinese leader Xi Jinping over a seven-course private dinner for 4½ hours the previous night, Russian President Vladimir Putin greeted him in the old imperial palace for talks involving top officials from both countries.

Xi walked slowly up the opulent red-carpeted staircase of the Grand Kremlin Palace as guards in 19th century-style parade uniforms snapped at attention.

Putin was waiting to greet the Chinese leader in St. George's hall where walls are covered by white-marble plaques with gold engravings of the names of military units and soldiers awarded with the order of St. George, a top military award established by Catherine the Great.

In a tightly choreographed ceremony filled with imperial grandeur, the two leaders entered the huge chandeliered room from opposite sides and shook hands in the middle to the tune of the Russian and Chinese national anthems.

They walked past a lineup of Russian and Chinese officials to sit down for talks. Putin and Xi both wore black suits and dark red ties.

The pageantry reflected the importance of Xi's three-day visit to Russia that gave a strong political boost to Putin just days after the International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant for the Russian leader on charges of alleged involvement in abductions of thousands of children from Ukraine.

Moscow, which doesn't recognize the court's jurisdiction, dismissed the move as "legally null and void," but it further ramped up the pressure on the Russian leader as the fighting in Ukraine has dragged into a second year.

The U.S. has criticized Beijing's plan as a move intended to allow Russia to shore up its gains.

Prior to attending the Kremlin talks, Xi met with Russian Prime Minister Milkhail Mishustin. Unlike them, Russian and Chinese officials who attended the talks wore medical masks - a reminder of the COVID-19 pandemic that halted mutual visits.

Xi briefly referred to it, telling Mishustin he was happy to be back in Moscow after a long break because of the pandemic. He said that he invited



Russian President Vladimir Putin with China's President Xi Jinping (first left) at the Kremlin in Moscow, yesterday. (AFP)

Speaking at the start of their meeting on Monday, Putin welcomed China's proposals for a political settlement and a cease-fire in Ukraine.

Putin over Monday's dinner to visit China later this year to attend a top-level meeting of China's Belt and Road regional initiative.

# Millions in extra funding pledged for ICC work in Ukraine

AP — LONDON

An international conference in London raised £4m ($4.9m) to support the International Criminal Court in its investigations into alleged war crimes in Ukraine and its work to hold Russia to account, officials said on Monday.

Justice ministers from over 40 countries met in London for the war crimes conference days after the global court issued an arrest warrant for Russian President Vladimir Putin, accusing him of personal responsibility in the abduction of children from Ukraine. Friday's move was the first time the court has issued a warrant against a leader of one of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council.

"We share the belief that President Putin and the wider leadership must be held to account," Britain's Justice Secretary and Deputy Prime Minister Dominic Raab said as he opened the meeting.

"Let's make sure that we back up our words with deeds, that we back up our moral support with practical means to effectively investigate these awful crimes." Karim Khan, the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, said the warrant for Putin was not a moment of triumph but a "sombre occasion" reminding the world that joint international action is key to delivering justice for Ukraine.

"If we don't at this moment of world affairs cling to the law, if we don't look at ourselves and ask how we can do better ... we will not only miss an opportunity but we may not have further opportunities," Khan said. Monday's conference drummed up extra international funding for the ICC, as well as other offers of resources from European countries including investigative support and forensic expertise, Raab said.

The global court on Friday also issued a warrant for the arrest of Maria Lvova-Belova, the commissioner for Children's Rights in the Office of the President of the Russian Federation.

## P IN BRIEF

### Scribe freed in Mali welcomed in France by Macron

**AP** — PARIS: French journalist Olivier Dubois, who was held hostage by Islamic extremists for nearly two years in Mali, was welcomed home by French President Emmanuel Macron yesterday, one day after he was released.

Dubois was kidnapped in April 2021 from northern Mali, a region of the country wracked by jihadi violence linked to Al Qaeda and the Islamic State group.

Leaving the plane at the Villacoublay military airport, southwest of Paris, with a big smile on his face, Dubois was applauded by the group of people waiting for his arrival. He was greeted with great joy by his sister and father, and then hugged Macron.

The conditions of Dubois' release, including whether it involved a ransom, have not been disclosed. Reporters Without Borders, also known by its French acronym RSF, thanked French authorities on Monday for "having implemented the necessary means to obtain his release," without elaborating. Dubois' release took place on the same day that an American aid worker was freed in Mali.

### Spanish government faces no-confidence vote

**AP —BARCELONA:** Spain's leftist coalition government faces a no-confidence vote brought by the nation's far-right Vox party as lawmakers yesterday debated the motion, which has little chance of succeeding.

The vote will be held in the 348-member lower chamber today. No other party said that it would support the attempt by Vox's 52 lawmakers to topple the Socialist-led government of Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez.

In a move that has been widely panned by other political parties and Spanish media, Vox leader Santiago Abascal has broken with custom and isn't presenting himself as an alternative prime minister. Instead, in an attempt to lure votes from centrist and leftist legislators, Vox convinced a former communist party member and university professor to lead the no-confidence measure.

Ramón Tamames, 89, who was a lawmaker in the 1970s and 1980s, has pledged that if the vote were to succeed, his only act as prime minister would be to immediately call for a national election to coincide with a local election already scheduled for May 28.

### Dutch govt staff discouraged from apps such as TikTok

**AP —THE** HAGUE: The Netherlands is moving to stop central government employees having apps including popular video sharing service TikTok installed on their work phones, amid concerns over data security.

Countries including the United States and Britain, as well as the European Union 's executive branch, have banned the use of TikTok on government staff phones over fears that its Chinese owner, ByteDance, could share user data with the authoritarian government in Beijing.

"For civil servants employed by the national government, it is immediately discouraged to have apps from countries with an offensive cyber program against the Netherlands and/or Dutch interests installed and used on their mobile work devices," the government said in a statement yesterday that did not identify TikTok by name. The new policy came after lawmakers asked whether it was possible to ban central government staff from using the app on work devices.

The advice follows an assessment by national intelligence agency AIVD that warned that apps from such countries - which include China, Russia, North Korea and Iran - "carry a heightened risk of espionage." A law China implemented in 2017 requires companies to give the government any personal data relevant to the country's national security.

POSSIBLE CRIMINAL CHARGES

# Trump waits as New York braces for protests

AP — NEW YORK

Facing the possibility of criminal charges, Donald Trump waited it out in Florida yesterday as New York braced for disruptions that could follow an indictment. Republican contenders in the 2024 race sized up the impact a prosecution could have on a campaign in which the former president is a leading contender.

Trump over the weekend claimed without evidence that he would be arrested, but there was no indication that prediction would come true. A Manhattan grand jury did appear to take an important step forward on Monday by hearing from a witness favorable to Trump, presumably so prosecutors could ensure the panel had a chance to consider any testimony supporting his version of events.

The next steps were unclear, and it was uncertain if additional witnesses might be summoned. But a city mindful of the riot by Trump loyalists at the US Capitol more than two years ago took steps to protect itself from any violence that could accompany the unprecedented prosecution of a former president.

Monday's testimony from Robert Costello, a lawyer with close ties to numerous key Trump aides, appeared to be a final opportunity for allies to steer the grand jury away from an indictment. Costello was invited by prosecutors to appear after saying he had information to undercut the credibility of Michael Cohen, a former lawyer and fixer for Trump who later turned against him and then became a key witness in the Manhattan district attorney's investigation.

Costello had provided Cohen legal services several years ago after Cohen himself became entangled in the federal investigation into the hush money payments. In a news conference after his grand jury appearance, Costello told reporters he had come forward because he did not believe Cohen, who pleaded guilty to federal crimes and served time in prison.

"If they want to go after Donald Trump and they have solid evidence, then so be it," Costello said. "But Michael Cohen is far from solid evidence." Responding on MSNBC, Cohen said that Costello was never his lawyer and "he lacks any sense of veracity." There were no signs that Costello's testimony had affected the course of the investigation. Cohen had been available for over two hours in case prosecutors wanted him to rebut Costello's testimony but he was told he was not needed, his attorney said.

The testimony came two days after Trump said he expected to face criminal charges and urged supporters to protest his possible arrest. In social media posts through the weekend, he criticized the investigation, directing particularly hostile rhetoric toward Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg, a Democrat.

New York officials have been monitoring online chatter of threats of varying specificity, but even as portable metal barricades were dropped off to safeguard streets and sidewalks, there were no immediate signs that Trump's calls for protests were being heeded.

Yesterday morning, Manhattan court proceedings were temporarily halted by a bomb threat called in via 911, according to a court spokesman. That delayed the start of a hearing in a separate case, the New York attorney general's lawsuit accusing Trump and his company of a yearslong fraud scheme.

Costello briefly acted as a legal adviser to Cohen after the FBI raided Cohen's home and apartment in 2018. At the time, Cohen was being investigated for both tax evasion and for payments he helped orchestrate in 2016 to buy the silence of two women who claimed to have had sexual encounters with Trump.



People show their support for former President Donald Trump near his Mar-a-Lago home in Palm Beach, Florida, yesterday. (AFP)

# Gun used in kidnapping of Americans in Mexico came from US

AP — BROWNSVILLE

A man who admitted to purchasing firearms that he knew would be going from the US to a Mexican drug cartel has been arrested in Texas after the discovery that one of the weapons was linked to the deadly kidnapping of four Americans, according federal court records.

Roberto Lugardo Moreno made an initial appearance Monday at a federal court in Brownsville and was appointed a public defender, who did not immediately respond to a voicemail seeking comment. His detention hearing is scheduled for Thursday.

The kidnapping occurred in Matamoros, Mexico, which is located just across the border from Brownsville.

According to a federal complaint filed Saturday, Moreno has been charged with conspiring to illegally export a firearm. The complaint said that he admitted to buying firearms for people he knew were going to provide them to a member of the Gulf Cartel in Mexico.

The serial number of a firearm he purchased in October 2019 matched that of a gun recovered by authorities that was linked to the March 3 kidnappings, according to the complaint. Moreno said he didn't apply for a license to export the firearm from the U.S. to Mexico, and knew it would be illegally exported, the complaint said.

Moreno told authorities that he received $100 for the purchase of the guns.

Four friends who were traveling to Mexico so one member of the party could have cosmetic surgery were caught up in a drug cartel shootout in Matamoros.

# Venezuela's oil minister resigns over graft probe

AFP — CARACAS

Venezuela's oil minister Tareck El Aissami resigned on Monday after prosecutors opened a corruption investigation into officials at the state oil company PDVSA.

Anti-corruption police on Sunday arrested two people closely linked to El Aissami: top PDVSA official Antonio Perez Suarez, and Joselit Ramirez, who manages oil industry funds through cryptocurrencies.

"Given the investigations that have begun into the serious acts of corruption in PDVSA, I have taken the decision to submit my resignation as oil minister with the aim of totally supporting, accompanying and backing this process," El Aissami wrote on Twitter.

El Aissami, who had been in the position since April 2020, added that he supported the government's "crusade" against corruption.

Authorities have been probing high-ranking officials "who could be involved in serious acts of corruption and embezzlement", the national police force said.

Legislator Hugbel Roa was among those detained, alongside a prominent lawyer, an anti-terrorism judge and a mayor.

It is not the first investigation into graft at the state oil company.

Former oil ministers Eulogio Del Pino and Nelson Martinez, who died while in police custody, were previously arrested as part of a corruption investigation.

President Nicolas Maduro said he had "decided to accept the resignation to facilitate the investigations that should result in the establishment of the truth, and the punishment of the culprits." El Aissami, who is under US sanction, is one of the most powerful leaders of the ruling Socialist Party of Venezuela. He had previously served as vice president, as well as minister of the interior and industry.

The newspaper Ultimas Noticias, which is close to the ruling party, reported that Ramirez diverted some $3bn from last year's oil sales that were conducted in cryptocurrencies to circumvent US sanctions against Venezuelan crude.

The firm Ecoanalitica estimated that the foreign currency income of the Venezuelan state in 2022 totalled $25bn, said company director Adrubal Oliveros.

"For us to understand the magnitude of the embezzlement of $3bn," Oliveros said, "what disappeared is equivalent to 12 percent of last year's revenue."

# End of truce: Colombia kills two cartel members, captures one

AFP — BOGOTÁ

The Colombian army said yesterday it had killed two members of the infamous Gulf Clan drug cartel and captured one of its bosses as operations resumed after the government called off a ceasefire.

On New Year's Eve, the government of new President Gustavo Petro had declared a bilateral ceasefire with armed groups including the Clan, National Liberation Army (ELN) rebels and dissidents of the disarmed former Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) guerrilla group.

It was a first step in leftist Petro's "total peace" plan to end decades of armed conflict through negotiation. But on Sunday, Petro suspended the truce with the Gulf Clan, accusing it of being behind attacks on civilians.

The government said the group had been supporting attacks by illegal gold miners since March 2 in the country's northwestern Antioquia department.

Workers in illegal mines have been protesting the government's destruction of the heavy machinery they use to dredge up soil to find gold.

Miners have shut down roads, and attacked a town hall and a bank in the Caucasia district.

On Monday, the army said, it had captured the alleged "coordinator of the hired killers... of this illegal group," a man known as "Andres," in the Antioquia region.

According to Defense Minister Ivan Velasquez, some 10,000 policemen and soldiers were deployed to the area.

And in a video sent to the media, the military said a "confrontation" in the neighbouring Bolivar department "caused the deaths of two members of the Clan." The troops will "continue military operations," added Colonel Luis Cifuentes, in charge of operations against the Clan.

Criminal groups in Colombia make almost as much money from illegal mining as they do from trafficking cocaine, authorities say.

According to official estimates, the Gulf Clan -- Colombia's biggest cartel -- is behind between 30 and 60 percent of the drugs exported from Colombia, the world's largest cocaine producer.



A Colombian soldier stands guard next to a burnt truck in Taraza Municipality, Cauca, Colombia, on Monday. (AFP)

# Plastic rocks: Scientists make 'disturbing' find on remote island

AFP — RIO DE JANEIRO

There are few places on Earth as isolated as Trindade island, a volcanic outcrop a three- to four-day boat trip off the coast of Brazil.

So geologist Fernanda Avelar Santos was startled to find an unsettling sign of human impact on the otherwise untouched landscape: rocks formed from the glut of plastic pollution floating in the ocean.

Santos first found the plastic rocks in 2019, when she travelled to the island to research her doctoral thesis on a completely different topic — landslides, erosion and other "geological risks."

She was working near a protected nature reserve known as Turtle Beach, the world's largest breeding ground for the endangered green turtle, when she came across a large outcrop of the peculiar-looking blue-green rocks.

Intrigued, she took some back to her lab after her two-month expedition.

Analyzing them, she and her team identified the specimens as a new kind of geological formation, merging the materials and processes the Earth has used to form rocks for billions of years with a new ingredient: plastic trash.

"We concluded that human beings are now acting as a geological agent, influencing processes that were previously completely natural, like rock formation," she told AFP.

"It fits in with the idea of the Anthropocene, which scientists are talking about a lot these days: the geological era of human beings influencing the planet's natural processes. This type of rock-like plastic will be preserved in the geological record and mark the Anthropocene."

The finding left her "disturbed" and "upset," said Santos, a professor at the Federal University of Parana, in southern Brazil.

She describes Trindade as "like paradise": a beautiful tropical island whose remoteness has made it a refuge for all sorts of species — sea birds, fish found only there, nearly extinct crabs, the green turtle.

The only human presence on the South Atlantic island is a small Brazilian military base and a scientific research center.

"It's marvelous," she said.

"So it was all the more horrifying to find something like this -- and on one of the most ecologically important beaches." She returned to the island late last year to collect more specimens and dig deeper into the phenomenon.

Continuing her research, she found similar rock-like plastic formations had previously been reported in places including Hawaii, Britain, Italy and Japan since 2014.

But Trindade island is the remotest place on the planet they have been found so far, she said.



"Plastic rocks" found at the Trindade Island, Espirito Santo state, Brazil that are part of a scientific research handled by scientists of the UFPR. (AFP)

## IN BRIEF

### Gwyneth Paltrow's trial over Utah ski collision begins

AP — PARK CITY: Gwyneth Paltrow's lawyer called the story of a retired optometrist who is suing her over a 2016 ski collision false yesterday during the trial's opening day in Utah.

Terry Sanderson claims that the actor-turned-lifestyle influencer was cruising down the slopes so recklessly that they violently collided, leaving him on the ground as she and her entourage continued their descent down Deer Valley Resort, a skiers-only mountain known for its groomed runs and posh clientele.

"Gwyneth Paltrow skied out of control," Sanderson's attorneys claim in the lawsuit, "knocking him down hard, knocking him out, and causing a brain injury, four broken ribs and other serious injuries. Paltrow got up, turned and skied away, leaving Sanderson stunned, lying in the snow, seriously injured." In a case that has lasted years, Sanderson is suing Paltrow for $300,000 - claiming that the accident in Park City was a result of negligence, and left him with physical injuries and emotional distress.

In opening arguments, both sides presented their clients as conservative skiers who were stunned when a skier above them crashed into them. Both characterized the other's version of events as implausible.

### Biden creates two national monuments, marine sanctuary

AP — WASHINGTON: President Joe Biden said yesterday he is establishing national monuments in Nevada and Texas and creating a marine sanctuary in US waters near the Pacific Remote Islands southwest of Hawaii. Biden called the conservation measures part of an effort to "protect the heart and soul of our national pride."

Speaking at a White House summit on conservation action, Biden said the new national monuments are among the "natural treasures" that "define our identity as a nation. They're a birthright we have to pass down to generation after generation."

"Our national wonders are literally the envy of the world," Biden said in a speech at the Interior Department.

"They've always been and always will be central to our heritage as a people and essential to our identity as a nation."

Biden designated Avi Kwa Ame, a desert mountain in southern Nevada that Native Americans consider sacred, as a national monument, along with the new Castner Range National Monument in El Paso, Texas.

He also moved to create a national marine sanctuary in US waters around the Pacific Remote Islands.




**WEATHER TODAY**

Moderate temperature daytime with some clouds and slight dust at places at times.

19°C Minimum

29°C Maximum

| DOHA | RUWAIS | ALKHOR | DUKHAN | MESAIEED | ABU SAMRA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 19 | 19 | 17 | 15 | 18 | 18 |
| 29 | 22 | 28 | 27 | 28 | 28 |

HIGH TIDE 5:00 - 17:00 LOW TIDE 23:00 - 12:00

## Trending in QATAR

On *The Peninsula* social media platforms



### Amir awards Hamad bin Khalifa Sash to former Prime Minister

The Amir His Highness Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani awarded His Excellency Sheikh Khalid bin Khalifa bin Abdulaziz Al Thani, the Hamad bin Khalifa Sash, in appreciation of his role in serving the country, when His Highness the Amir received him at the Amiri Diwan yesterday.

### Ramadan begins on Thursday in Qatar

The Crescent Sighting Committee at the Ministry of Endowments (Awqaf) and Islamic Affairs announced that Thursday, March 23, 2023, will be the first day of the holy month of Ramadan.




### Awqaf Ministry readies over 2,000 mosques for Ramadan

The Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs has readied over 2,000 mosques operating across the country for receiving worshippers during the holy month of Ramadan.



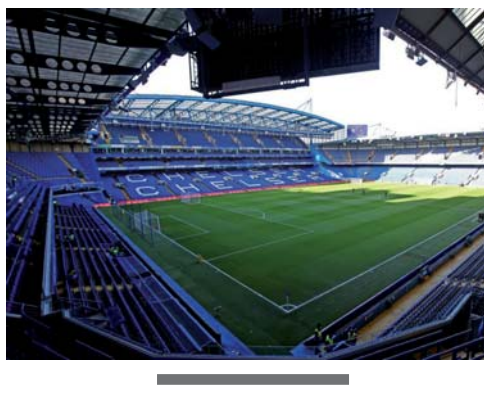
### Ministry of Public Health announces working hours during Ramadan

The Ministry of Public Health announced the working hours in each of the Medical Commission Department, birth registration offices, and the Department of Medical Relations and Treatment Abroad, during the holy month of Ramadan.



### Chelsea to host first ever Open Iftar at Stamford Bridge

English Premier League side Chelsea, through its foundation - Chelsea Foundation, will host an Open Iftar on March 26, at the side of the pitch at Stamford Bridge, in what will be a first for the club and a Premier League stadium, according to a recent statement on the club's website.



TECHNOLOGY

# Retouch and go: These tools help erase distractions in your photos

THE WASHINGTON POST

I have more than a few photos that are very nearly great, apart from poorly timed passersby or stray objects I didn't see the first time. Editing tools powered by algorithms and machine learning models have made scrubbing these things out of pictures almost shockingly easy. But here's the catch: these tools don't always produce picture-perfect results, so expect to see your fair share of blurry bits and surreal geometry.

There are a handful of options you could easily get started with, each with their own quirks. We've put together a list of a few you may want to try for yourself, and to really get a sense of how well they work, I ran a photo through each of them.

What do these tools do? These apps and services lean on machine learning models that "look" at the area around the space you've selected and - like ChatGPT does with words - take a stab at auto-filling that space with what they think is supposed to be there.

For the most part, these auto-retouching tools work best for small changes where they don't have to fill much space. A tiny boat in the background of the photo I used is a good example - every tool we tried scrubbed it out of existence convincingly.

It's hard to get convincing results when you try to erase bigger things, like the backpack in my photo. The more space these tools have to try to fill, the more likely they are to make a mistaken assumption about what should go there.

**Google Photos' Magic Eraser**

How much it costs: Free for Google Pixel owners, available as part of a Google One subscription for everyone else ($9.99/month minimum) Where can I use it? Android and iOS devices (with subscription) Magic Eraser used



to be a hallmark of Google's Pixel smartphones, but it's now available to owners of other smartphones - and yes, that includes iPhones. The catch? If you don't have a Pixel, this feature (which lives inside the Google Photos app) requires a monthly subscription.

Getting started is easy enough: find the photo you want to retouch, hit the "edit" button, and search for the Magic Eraser option under "Tools." The app will sometimes offer suggestions of things you may want to erase, which you can tap on to delete - if not, you can draw a circle around what you want to get rid of.

**Samsung's Object Eraser**

How much it costs: Free

Where can I use it? Most recent Samsung Android phones As it turns out, many Samsung's smartphones have an Object Eraser tool - you can find it by viewing a photo in Samsung's Gallery app, tapping the pencil-shaped edit button and looking for the Object Eraser option. (If you don't see it, try making sure your phone is running the latest software update.) And if you're one of the millions of people with a Samsung phone, it won't cost you a cent to try it out.

**PhotoRoom**

How much it costs: Free (or $9.99/month for premium features)

Where can I use it? iOS devices, Android devices and the web Since Apple's iOS doesn't come with any built-in retouching tools, you'll have to turn elsewhere.

PhotoRoom is one of the more popular options available for the platform. The feature seemed to work just as well on Android devices as it does on iPhones, too.

But there are a few caveats in mind. PhotoRoom has a version of its image removal feature on its website, but the edited images it spits out are of a lower resolution. And if you don't want to pay a monthly (or annual) fee to let some algorithms clean up your images in the mobile app, you'll have to live with a PhotoRoom watermark.

**CleanUpPhotos.com**

How much it costs: Free

Where can I use it? Any web browser

I'll be honest - some of my favorite results came from a website I've never heard of, built by two people as a side project.

Since it's a completely free service, it comes with some limitations. Like PhotoRoom, it produces images that are of a lower resolution than the original. To my eye, they're still sharp enough for a spot on my Instagram grid, but not everyone may agree.

HEALTH

## Superbug fungus cases rose dramatically during pandemic

AP - NEW YORK

US cases of a dangerous fungus tripled over just three years, and more than half of states have now reported it, according to a new study.

The COVID-19 pandemic likely drove part of the increase, researchers at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention wrote in the paper published Monday by Annals of Internal Medicine. Hospital workers were strained by coronavirus patients, and that likely shifted their focus away from disinfecting some other kinds of germs, they said.

The fungus, Candida auris, is a form of yeast that is usually not harmful to healthy people but can be a deadly risk to fragile hospital and nursing home patients. It spreads easily and can infect wounds, ears and the bloodstream. Some strains are so-called superbugs that are resistant to all three classes of antibiotic drugs used to treat fungal infections.

It was first identified in Japan in 2009 and has been seen in more and more countries. The first US case occurred in 2013, but it was not reported until 2016. That year, US health officials reported 53 cases.

The new study founds cases have continued to shoot up, rising to 476 in 2019, to 756 in 2020, and then to 1,471 in 2021. Doctors have also detected the fungus on the skin of thousands of other patients, making them a transmission risk to others.

Many of the first US cases were infections that had been imported from abroad, but now most infections are spread within the US, the authors noted.

## Ready for Ramadan



A beautiful view of the spiral-shaped Fanar building. Picture taken by *The Peninsula* reader Shafrin Karim.

# 'Shazam!' sequel tops N America box office but lacks magic

AGENCIES — LOS ANGELES

*Shazam! Fury of the Gods* topped the North American box office this weekend with an estimated $30.5m opening, but that represented a sharp dropoff from the original blockbuster and analysts called the result disappointing.

"This is a soft opening for a non-Marvel superhero follow-up, down substantially from *Shazam 1*," said industry analyst David A Gross. *Hollywood Reporter* called it "one of the worst starts for a major Hollywood superhero film." The original *Shazam!* enjoyed a $53.5m opening in April 2019, while the sequel, a DC Studios/New Line production distributed by Warner Bros. and starring Zachary Levi, Asher Angel, Adam Brody and Rachel Zegler, cost more than $110m to make and has had tepid reviews, according to Variety.

"This movie clearly was lighter than we thought it would be," said Jeff Goldstein, the head of domestic distribution for Warner Bros. "We know there's a rolling spring break over the next few weeks when kids are available, which is who it's targeted towards. We're hopeful that we can get a big multiple." Internationally, it grossed $35m from 77 overseas markets including China, bringing its total earnings to $65.5m.

The DC shop at Warner Bros has been going through a major recalibration for the past several months, with new bosses in James Gunn and Peter Safran forging a path ahead for the DC Universe that will officially kick off with a new *Superman* in 2025. *Shazam! 2* was one of several holdovers of the old regime, which includes *The Flash* coming in June and a new *Aquaman* in December.

Last weekend's top film, *Scream VI* from Paramount and Spyglass Media, slipped to second place, at $17.5m, industry watcher Exhibitor Relations reported Sunday. Melissa Barrera, Jenna Ortega and Skeet Ulrich star in the latest edition of the horror series.

Also slipping one spot to third was United Artists' boxing drama *Creed III*, with an estimated take of $15.4m for the Friday-through-Sunday period. First-time director Michael B Jordan also plays the title character, Adonis Creed.

Sci-fi thriller *65* from Sony and Columbia Pictures took fourth place, at $5.8m. Adam Driver plays a pilot whose spaceship crashes on an unknown planet, which turns out to be the Earth of 65 million years ago, when dinosaurs still ruled and an extinction-level asteroid was approaching.

And in fifth place was Marvel and Disney's *Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania*, at $4.1m. Paul Rudd and Evangeline Lilly star.

Rounding out the top 10 were: *Cocaine Bear* ($3.9m) *Jesus Revolution* ($3.5m) *Champions* ($3m) *Avatar: The Way of Water* ($1.9m) *Puss in Boots: The Last Wish* ($1.5m).