The Peninsula
Local focus, Global vision

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BILATERAL RELATIONS

Qatar, Cuba to strengthen economic ties

QNA – DOHA

Amir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani held a session of official talks with President of the friendly Republic of Cuba H E Miguel Diaz-Canel, yesterday.

At the outset of the session, H H the Amir welcomed the Cuban President and the accompanying delegation, wishing them a pleasant stay and the relations between the two countries further development and growth in various fields, to meet the aspirations of the two friendly peoples.

His Highness also praised the level of Qatari-Cuban cooperation, especially in the sectors of economy, investment, trade exchange and medicine.

For his part, the Cuban President extended thanks to H H the Amir for the warm reception and generous hospitality. His Excellency voiced aspiration that the discussions with His Highness would contribute to strengthening cooperation and developing it to broader horizons.

During the session, aspects of developing joint cooperation between the two countries in various fields were discussed, in addition to exchanging views on key regional and international issues, especially developments in the situation in the Gaza Strip and the occupied Palestinian territories.

The two sides underlined calm, reaching a permanent ceasefire, protecting civilians, delivering humanitarian aid to the people of the Gaza Strip, and finding a solution to the Palestinian issue that guarantees the establishment of an independent Palestinian state, in accordance with international legitimacy resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative.

The session was attended by Chief of the Amiri Diwan H E Sheikh Saoud bin Abdulrahman Al Thani; Minister of Public Health H E Dr. Hanan Mohammed Al Kuwari; Minister of Commerce and Industry H E Sheikh Mohammed bin Hamad bin Qassim Al Thani; Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs H E Dr. Mohammed bin Abdulaziz Al Khulaifi and a number of Their Excellencies senior officials. ➔P2



Amir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani and President of Cuba H E Miguel Diaz-Canel during the reception ceremony.

تميم بن حمد
@TamimBinHamad

We are happy with the visit of our friend, Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel. Our expanded talks in Doha addressed mutual opportunities to strengthen our economic ties. We discussed the latest developments in the situation in Gaza, and we will work to increase coordination of our joint efforts in international forums to stop the Israeli aggression and achieve lasting peace for occupied Palestine.

Amir to meet Turkish President Erdogan today

QNA – DOHA

Amir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani will meet today at the Amiri Diwan President of the Republic of Turkiye H E Recep Tayyip Erdogan and the accompanying delegation.

H H the Amir, along with the Turkish President, will chair the ninth meeting of the Qatari-Turkish Supreme Strategic Committee.

The Turkish President will arrive today in Doha on an official visit to the country.

Amir issues directives to treat wounded, sponsor orphans from Gaza

QNA – DOHA

Amir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani directed yesterday the treatment of 1,500 wounded people and the sponsorship of 3,000 orphans from the brotherly Palestinian people from the Gaza Strip. ➔P2

GCC PREPARATORY MEETING

Qatar continues efforts for ceasefire in Gaza Strip: Prime Minister

SANAULLAH ATAULLAH
THE PENINSULA

Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs H E Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani has said that Qatar will continue its efforts with other countries to resume truce and reach a permanent ceasefire in Gaza Strip.

The Prime Minister chaired the Preparatory Meeting of 158th Session of the Ministerial Council for the 44th Session of GCC Supreme Council which was held yesterday in Doha.

In his opening speech, he said: "This preparatory ministerial session has many agenda of joint cooperation among the GCC countries, which we seek to accomplish and have the honour to submit to the 44th Session of GCC Supreme Council."



Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs H E Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani with Their Excellencies Foreign Ministers of GCC countries during the meeting of 158th Session of the Preparatory Ministerial Council for the 44th Session of GCC Supreme Council in Doha, yesterday.

The Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs chaired the meeting of 158th Session of the Preparatory Ministerial Council for the 44th Session of GCC Supreme Council which was held yesterday in Doha.

The Prime Minister said that this is in order to enhance cooperation among GCC countries in accordance with the directives of Their Majesties and Highnesses, the leaders of the GCC countries to achieve the interests and hopes of our peoples and countries and to enhance security and stability for our region and the world.

"Our meeting is being held at a time when we have witnessed with great sorrow the barbaric aggression and heinous crimes committed by the forces of the Israeli occupation authority against our Palestinian brothers in the Gaza Strip, by targeting civilians and infrastructure, and cutting off basic and vital services, in addition to the attempts to place the besieged Palestinian people between the hammer and anvil of genocide, ethnic cleansing and forced displacement, all of which are war crimes and crimes against humanity, the Prime Minister added.

Once again, he said, Qatar strongly condemns the crimes committed by the Israeli occupation forces, and demands an immediate, comprehensive and impartial international investigation into these crimes, especially the attacks that targeted civilian, relief and humanitarian facilities, and to ensure that the perpetrators are held accountable and do not escape punishment.

"Qatar has made great efforts to mediate in order to stop this war of revenge, and thanks to God, the joint Qatari mediation efforts with Egypt and the US, between Israel and the Hamas movement, succeeded in reaching a humanitarian truce agreement in Gaza Strip, and the exchange of women and children prisoners between the sides, and the truce allowed the entry of a larger number of humanitarian convoys and aid." ➔P2



Qatar evacuates 89 Palestinians from Gaza

Minister of State for International Cooperation H E Lulwa bint Rashid bin Mohammed Al Khater with evacuees from the Gaza Strip. Qatar evacuated yesterday 89 Palestinians holding Qatari residency from Gaza through the city of Al Arish, via a plane belonging to the Qatari Armed Forces, in coordination with Egypt. This step comes within the framework of Qatar's humanitarian efforts to protect civilians.

Expo 2022 Doha organises over 1,500 events, 250 workshops in two months

QNA – DOHA

The International Horticultural Expo 2023 Doha Qatar has hitherto organised over 1,500 events and over 250 workshops since its inauguration until now.

According to a statement issued by the organising committee of the Expo, the activities included a wide range of events and daily exhibitions which discuss a myriad of topics such as green technology, sustainability strategy, best practices in horticulture and sustainable agriculture. The Expo offers opportunities for all visitors regardless of their backgrounds, nationalities, or ages to explore rich contents that spur them to think about their role in a more sustainable future for the planet.

The number of Expo visitors reached over a million which is a testament to the global attraction the Expo 2023 Doha has garnered, along with the growing position of Qatar as a global hub to exchange cultures and innovation. The Expo is characterised a prominent destination in Qatar to capitalise on environmental, cultural, and recreational events, the statement said.

The International Horticultural Expo 2023 Doha Qatar received a huge turnout from students of public and private schools.

NEW RULES

Family resident and visit visa procedures revised

THE PENINSULA – DOHA

To streamline and simplify the entry process for residents' families intending to visit or reside in the country, the Ministry of Interior has revised certain regulations and procedures. This initiative aims to elevate the quality of services in alignment with the state's overarching approach.

Under the updated procedures, sponsoring families is subject upon the provisions in the employee's electronic work contract concerning salary and accommodation. Government and semi-government sector employees must secure family housing through their employer or maintain a salary not less than QR10,000, verified by an employment contract. For private sector employees, the profession should belong to technical or specialised fields (non-labour), with a salary not less than QR10,000, or QR6,000 along with family housing verified in the employment contract.

Moreover, in family sponsorship cases, children should not exceed 25 years of age, and daughters must be unmarried. It is also mandatory to provide health insurance covering the entire duration of their stay, effective from their date of entry into the country. Additionally, children within the mandatory education age bracket (6-18 years old) must be enrolled in licensed schools within the country or provide evidence of their education enrollment outside the country through the educational platform supervised by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education. ➔P2

Government and semi-government sector employees must secure family housing through their employer or maintain a salary not less than QR10,000, verified by an employment contract.

Private sector employees, the profession should belong to non-labour, with a salary not less than QR10,000, or QR6,000 along with family housing verified in the employment contract.

EDITORIAL ↘09

Efforts to end bloodshed

QATAR continues political and diplomatic efforts to communicate with all parties to reach a permanent ceasefire in the Gaza Strip.

BUSINESS ↘ 11

Application process for loan-based crowdfunding licences opens

IN LINE with the Financial Sector Strategy and the Fintech Strategy in the State of Qatar, and based on Qatar Central Bank's permanent endeavor to regulate and develop the financial sector in the country, and to stimulate innovation in the Fintech sector, QCB has officially started accepting applications for loan-based crowdfunding service providers.

SPORT ↘ 15

India edge Australia to seal T20 series 4-1

SHREYAS IYER smashed 53 and fast bowler Arshdeep Singh kept calm in a tense final over as India edged Australia by six runs to seal the Twenty20 series 4-1 yesterday.





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Amir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani and President of Cuba H E Miguel Diaz-Canel holding an official talks session yesterday; Amir and the Cuban President inspecting a guard of honour at Lusail Palace; and H H the Amir meeting members of the Cuban delegation.



Amir issues directives to treat wounded, sponsor orphans from Gaza

FROM PAGE 1

Qatar will be in charge of the transfer of the wounded and their companions, in coordination with Arab Republic of Egypt in preparation for their treatment in the designated hospitals.

This initiative comes as an extension of Qatar's steadfast support and ongoing efforts to alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip, especially amid their current tough humanitarian conditions.

Since the start of aggression in the Gaza Strip, Qatar has flown 36 planes carrying 1,203 tonnes of aid, including food, medical and shelter supplies, in addition to a field hospital and ambulances.

Sheikha Jawaher meets First Lady of Cuba

QNA – DOHA

Consort of H H the Amir, H H Sheikha Jawaher bint Hamad bin Suhaim Al Thani met First Lady of Cuba H E Lis Cuesta Peraza at the Pearl Palace yesterday.

During the meeting, they exchanged cordial talks on a host of topics of mutual interest.

Qatar, Cuba to strengthen ties

FROM PAGE 1

On the Cuban side, it was attended by Minister of Foreign Affairs H E Bruno Rodriguez Parrilla, Minister of Tourism

H E Juan Carlos Garcia Granda, First Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Health Dr. Tania Margarita Cruz Hernandez, Deputy Minister of Foreign Trade and Investment Deborah Rivas Saavedra, and a number of members of the accompanying official delegation.

H H the Amir and H E the Cuban President also held a bilateral meeting, during which they discussed a host of topics of mutual interest.

H H the Amir hosted a luncheon banquet in honour of the Cuban President and his accompanying delegation.

Upon arrival at Lusail Palace, H E President of the Republic of Cuba was accorded an official reception ceremony.

Qatar continues efforts for ceasefire in Gaza Strip: PM

FROM PAGE 1

He noted that Qatar will continue its efforts with all other countries for a permanent ceasefire.

The Prime Minister also praised the extensive tours and meetings undertaken by the foreign ministers of a number of sisterly Arab and Islamic countries - members of the ministerial committee assigned by the Riyadh summit - and their heading to the Security Council to demand that it assume its responsibilities towards stopping the war in Gaza, and forcing Israel to return to credible negotiations to achieve a just solution to the Palestinian issue in accordance with the resolutions of legitimacy and the Arab Peace Initiative through the two-state solution.

He said that the two-state which is accepted by the Palestinians and Arabs and agreed upon by the international community, which requires ending the occupation and establishing the Palestinian state on the 1967 borders.

The Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs noted that GCC is characterised by strategic importance and a distinguished position at the regional and international levels.

"We are all keen to strengthen this position by advancing cooperation, coordination and partnership to exemplary levels, especially in our current era of common challenges and opportunities," he added.

He said that GCC countries spare no effort in effective participation to address global and regional challenges such as Qatar's hosting of the Expo 2023 Doha. The Prime Minister said that this comes within the framework of contributing to the efforts aimed at preserving the environment, which constitutes a qualitative addition to the various initiatives adopted by Qatar to achieve a balance between developmental needs and the protection of its natural resources in line with Qatar National Vision 2030.

Speaking at the same event, Secretary General of GCC H E Jassem Mohamed Al Budaiwi said that the agenda of Preparatory Meeting of 158th Session of the Ministerial Council for the 44th Session of GCC Supreme Council listed several issues related to GCC countries and those related to the region and international community.

He said that these issues are needed the approval of Their Excellencies the Ministers to submit to the Supreme Council of GCC countries.

Family resident and visit visa procedures revised

FROM PAGE 1

This requirement is essential during the issuance or renewal of the residence permit.

Regarding family visits, the sponsoring resident's profession must belong to non-labour sectors, with a salary not less than QR5,000.

They should have family housing accredited by the relevant authorities. The visitor should be a relative within the permissible degrees of relation to the sponsoring resident, with no specific age restriction; however, it is mandatory to have health insurance covering the visitor's period of stay in Qatar. These updated procedures and regulations are now in effect.

All MoI visa and other services can be accessed through the Metrash2 app.





Deputy Amir and Saudi Minister of Energy discuss fraternal relations

Deputy Amir H H Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad Al Thani met in his Amiri Diwan office, Minister of Energy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, HRH Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, yesterday who called to greet His Highness, on the occasion of his visit to the country to attend the 17th Annual GPCA Forum, which is being held at the Qatar National Convention Center (QNCC). During the meeting, they discussed the strong fraternal relations between the two brotherly countries and ways to strengthen and develop them, in addition to several topics of mutual interest.

PM receives phone call from Blinken

QNA – DOHA

Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs H E Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al-Thani received yesterday a phone call from Secretary of State of the United States of America H E Antony Blinken.

During the call, they discussed the latest developments in the Gaza Strip and the occupied Palestinian territories, means of de-escalation, and ceasefire.

His Excellency confirmed that the State of Qatar is committed, with its mediation partners, to continue the efforts for the return of calm, stressing that the continued bombing of the Gaza Strip after the end of the pause complicates mediation efforts and exacerbates the humanitarian catastrophe in the Strip.

His Excellency expressed the State of Qatar's firm stance on condemning all forms of targeting civilians, and that killing civilian, especially women and children, and practicing the policy of collective punishment are unacceptable under any pretext.

His Excellency also underscored the necessity of opening humanitarian corridors to ensure that relief and aid reach the Palestinian brethren stranded under the bombing.

QRCS concludes GCC leadership training workshops

QNA – DOHA

The Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS) concluded the third edition of training workshops organized to qualify leaders and integrate them into the Red Crescent bodies and societies of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries.

The workshops took place at the Expo Doha 2023 convention center from December 1-3 and saw the participation of 30 male and female volunteers from Qatar and the other GCC countries. They discussed a wide range of topics regarding volunteer training.

The training workshops, which are part of a series of QRCS initiatives and forums, discussed the foundations and principles of international humanitarian law, its sources and its implementation oversight and preventive mechanisms. Moreover, the activities included an interactive workshop on humanitarian diplomacy, its methods, and its challenges.

Director of Volunteering and Local Development Sector at QRCS Hussain Aman Al Ali praised the volunteers for their efforts and indicated that the workshops provided training on leadership and communication skills in cooperation with the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies.

BILATERAL TIES

Cuba President's visit establishes new spheres of cooperation between Qatar and Cuba: Cuban Envoy

QNA – DOHA

Ambassador of Cuba to Qatar H E Alain Perez Torres affirmed the depth of the relationship between his country and the State of Qatar, describing the relations between Cuba and Qatar as excellent and cover the bilateral and multilateral fields.

In a statement to QNA, the Cuban Ambassador said that the main goal of the visit of Cuban President H E Miguel Diaz-Canel to Qatar is strengthen the bilateral ties and cooperation between the two countries, establishing new spheres of cooperation.

He explained that the two countries have a solid base in the close ties of friendship between the late Cuban President Fidel Castro and Father Amir H E Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani. The sympathy and chemistry achieved between both leaders were the bases for the development of the excellent relations of friendship and cooperation that exist today between the State of Qatar and Cuba, and both leaders gave a significant boost to the relations between our respective governments and peoples, he said.

He indicated that Qatar and Cuba share common principles and objectives in international relations, including the promotion of peace and friendly relations between countries, international cooperation in solving global problems, respect for the principle of sovereign equality of all States, the settlement of international disputes by peaceful means, non-interference in the internal affairs of countries and the defense of its sovereignty and its independence.

> Cuban Ambassador said that the main goal of the visit of Cuban President H E Miguel Diaz-Canel to Qatar is strengthen the bilateral ties and cooperation between the two countries, establishing new spheres of cooperation.

The Ambassador said that the government and people of Cuba highly appreciate the relations with the government and people of Qatar, adding, "We are grateful for the solidarity and cooperation received, particularly the support for our call to end the economic, commercial, and financial blockade against Cuba."

He considered the health sector to be one of the most prominent areas of cooperation between the two countries, as thousands of Cuban health workers have provided their medical services; indicating that the potential for development is still vast and therefore the authorities of both countries are working to consolidate and expand medical cooperation.

The Cuban Ambassador expected an increase in cooperation in new sectors after the Cuban President's visit to Doha, such as biotechnology, pharmaceuticals, tourism, investment, trade, culture, sports, and education.

"We believe that accelerated progress is possible; we are working to achieve concrete results. both governments are reviewing proposals for agreements that could be signed during our president's visit to Qatar," he added.

He mentioned the cultural activities and events carried out by the embassy in coordination with Qatari institutions such as the Museum of Islamic Art (MIA) and Katara Cultural Village, saying: "In this last Institution there is even a sculpture that commemorates the friendly relations between our countries and a mural by a Cuban plastic artist that was made prior to the Soccer World Cup."

First meeting of Qatari-Saudi Coordination Council Executive Committee holds in Doha



Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs H E Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani with Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia H H Prince Faisal bin Farhan bin Abdullah Al Saud in Doha yesterday.

QNA – DOHA

Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs H E Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia H H Prince Faisal bin Farhan bin Abdullah Al Saud co-chaired yesterday in Doha the first meeting of the Executive Committee of the Qatari-Saudi Coordination Council.

During the meeting, working groups of the council's General Secretariat presented their progress on preparatory work, in addition to the recent outcomes of subcommittees and their respective working groups. These outcomes include targets, initiatives, and memoranda of understanding that are to be signed during the upcoming Qatari-Saudi Coordination Council meeting.

The two Executive Committee directors praised the cooperation and coordination of the subcommittees and the working groups of the council's General Secretariat in both countries, which comes in preparation for the 7th meeting of the Council. Additionally, they stressed the importance of sustained bilateral coordination to fulfill the aspirations of both countries' leaderships and advance their peoples' interests.

Chairman of QMC meets Iran Ambassador



Chairman of Qatar Media Corporation (QMC) H E Sheikh Hamad bin Thamer Al Thani recently met Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the State of Qatar H E Ali Salehabadi. The two sides discussed media relations, cooperation, and means to support and develop them.

Cuba President visits Cuban Hospital in Dukhan area

QNA – DOHA

President of the Republic of Cuba H E Miguel Diaz-Canel Bermudez visited yesterday the Cuban Hospital in the Dukhan area. The hospital, officially opened in January 2012, is a joint project between the State of Qatar and the Republic of Cuba.

During his visit, the President toured the hospital, where over 500 Cuban medical staff, including doctors, nurses, and technicians, work in various fields such as rehabilitation, dentistry, medical laboratories, biomedicine, and radiology.

As part of the visit, the Cuban President met with several Cuban medical professionals, learning about their work and the comprehensive healthcare services provided by the hospital to the community in the surrounding areas.

He also received an explanation from Executive Director of the Cuban Hospital Hussein Al Ishaq about the hospital's departments and distinguished services, including common medical and surgical services such as cardiology, dentistry, dermatology, otolaryngology, emergency services for children and adults, and internal medicine.

The Cuban Hospital provides its services to residents of the western regions of the country, offering them most of the necessary healthcare services at the hospital instead of having to travel to Doha.

Qatar to host World Arabian Horse Championship outside France in 42 years

JOELYN BALUYUT
THE PENINSULA

The World Arabian Horse Championship (WAHC) is all set to take place from Thursday, December 7 to 9 at Old Doha Port. This will be the first time in 42 years that the country will be hosting outside France.

Cultural Village Foundation, Katara General Manager, Prof. Dr. Khalid bin Ibrahim Al Sulaiti in a press conference yesterday said hosting the championship will strengthen Qatar's status in the equestrian community and promotes interest in purebred Arabian horses.

He also underscored the event's significance as a qualitative leap in the world of equestrianism, symbolising a celebration of the Arabian horse.



Cultural Village Foundation, Katara General Manager, Prof. Dr. Khalid bin Ibrahim Al Sulaiti (third left), along with Zoom Arts & Events Manager, Naseem Elhousseini (left); Nasser Bin Khaled Managing Director, Sheikh Faisal bin Nawaf Al Thani (second left); Tournament Director, Bader Al Darwish (third right); Ahli Bank Deputy CEO Business Support, Services and HR, Mohamed Mousa Al Namla (second right); and Ali Bin Ali Marketing Manager, Nader Salameh (right) during the press conference at the Old Doha Port yesterday.

The partnership between Katara and the National Center of Agricultural Exhibitions and Agricole Competitions S.A (CENACA) paved the way for Qatar to host the WAHC not only in 2023 but also in 2025. Prof. Dr. Al Sulaiti stressed the objective of reinforcing the heritage of horses, highlighting the unique blend of maritime heritage and Qatar's developmental strides showcased at the charming Doha Old Port.

"The main objective is to reinforce the heritage of horses, that's the main idea behind hosting the WAHC. We will be hosting the event in 2023, and in 2025. Doha Old Port is a very nice place, it's a mixture of the maritime heritage plus the development that Qatar has been through," he told *The Peninsula* on the sidelines of the event.

This year's edition will feature 150 horses from 21 countries. Moreover, Prof. Dr. Al Sulaiti drew attention to the event's distinctive arena, framed against the backdrop of the Doha skyline, offering attendees a captivating view that seamlessly combines old cultural charm with modern development.

"Let the guests and visitors see both old culture and new development [of Qatar]," Dr Al Sulaiti added.

Meanwhile, Tournament Director Bader Al Darwish expressed confidence in the preparations at the Old Doha Port, assuring that the venue is primed for the six tournament categories. He noted the substantial international interest, with entries coming from various countries, affirming Qatar's growing prominence in global equestrian sports.

Al Darwish stressed that the event will be "exceptional" as it will be held for the first time in an Arab country. The WAHC's future editions are already charted, with the 2024 edition slated for Paris Porte De Versailles, the 2025 edition returning to the Old Doha Port, and the 2026 edition back in Paris.

CENACA, recognising Arabian Horses as the "Prince of the Desert," has further highlighted their beauty, adding an extra layer of significance to this prestigious championship. "The Arabian Horse belongs to all the peoples of the world. Throughout the ages and thanks to humanity's dedication, the Arabian horse has become a mystical legend, a victorious warrior, an epic steed and an elite progenitor."



Sheikha Moza meets First Lady of Cuba

Chairperson of Qatar Foundation and Education Above All Foundation H H Sheikha Moza bint Nasser meeting First Lady of Cuba H E Dr. Lis Cuesta Peraza yesterday. The meeting discussed avenues of collaboration in the fields of education and healthcare.

Ooredoo unveils innovative showcase at Expo 2023 Doha

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

Ooredoo Qatar, the nation's leading telecommunications provider, held an official opening of its booth at the Expo 2023 Doha, attended by Ooredoo Qatar's CEO, Sheikh Ali bin Jabor Al Thani, and the Secretary-General of the Horticultural Expo 2023 Doha, Eng Mohamed Ali Al Khouri.

The Ooredoo booth at Expo 2023 Doha presents an array of innovative solutions, such as the Ooredoo Smart Lighting system for street and landscape lighting, a smart system for efficient waste monitoring and collection, smart energy and water metering services, and a more optimised sewage system management solution. These cutting-edge systems, all connected via Ooredoo's NB-IoT network, showcase the company's commitment to efficiency, eco-friendliness, and sustainable urban infrastructure, reducing energy consumption and operational costs by using advanced sensors and real-time data analytics.

As a strategic partner of Expo 2023 Doha, Ooredoo is at the forefront of driving digital transformation and sustainable solutions in Qatar.

As a strategic partner of Expo 2023 Doha, Ooredoo is at the forefront of driving digital transformation and sustainable solutions in Qatar. The company's participation in this event demonstrates its role as a leader in providing cutting-edge technologies that support the nation's vision for a smarter, more efficient, and eco-conscious future. By integrating cutting-edge technology into crucial urban services, Ooredoo is not just upgrading systems; it is reinventing the way they function. Ooredoo invites visitors to the Expo to explore its innovative booth and engage with the array of smart solutions on offer.

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Education Minister inspects facilities for students with disabilities

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

Minister of Education and Higher Education H E Buthaina bint Ali Al Jabr Al Nuaimi visited the Department of Special Education at Hind Bint Amr Al Ansariya Preparatory School for Girls, coinciding with the International Day of Persons with Disabilities.

The visit aimed at to examine efforts made to integrate students with disabilities into education and to learn about the academic opportunities and options provided to them, as well as the activities and events they participate in.

During the visit, the Minister inspected the school and classroom environment for integration students and listened to a full explanation of the educational inclusion policy and how it is applied in the school, the levels of support for students according to their needs and individual differences, and other concerns related to the integration of students with disabilities in education.

The Minister also interacted with students with disabilities and discussed the challenges they face and their future professional aspirations. At the end of the visit, the Minister praised the efforts by the school for inclusive education, praising the role of the teaching and administrative staff in this regard.

She stressed the importance of enhancing communication with parents to ensure the integration of school and home efforts in a way that contributes to enriching the integration of students with disabilities in the educational system.

Qatar is keen to promote inclusiveness by continuously improving the services provided to members of society with disabilities.



Minister of Education and Higher Education H E Buthaina bint Ali Al Jabr Al Nuaimi interacts with students and teachers at the Department of Special Education, Hind Bint Amr Al Ansariya Preparatory School for Girls.

There are 70 government schools for students with disabilities across the country, where 3,626 students are enrolled.

The number of integration schools for disabled students reached 70 government schools at all academic levels (kindergarten, primary, preparatory, and secondary), covering all parts of the Qatar and teaching 3,626 students.

These schools provide quality educational services for students with autism spectrum disorder, intellectual disability, and other various disabilities.

QATAR SAND TREATMENT PLANT

(Totally owned by Qatar Industrial Manufacturing Co.)

PREQUALIFICATION ANNOUNCEMENT FOR RAW SAND LOADING & TRANSPORTION TENDER

QATAR SAND TREATMENT PLANT (Subsidiary of Qatar Industrial Manufacturing Co.) invites companies specialized in transportation activities in Qatar, to prequalify for the Public Tender no, QSTP/1/2023 for loading & transportation of raw sand materials from quarries locations in UMM BAB and IRKHIYA, during the year 2024.

The mandatory documents to be submitted for Prequalification are as follows:

1. Copy of valid commercial registration (CR) which indicates transportation is a major activity of the company.
2. List of vehicles & heavy equipment owned by the company, and/pr company owners, along with copy of insurance policy for all the listed vehicles/heavy equipment.
3. Undertaking that all the listed vehicles have/will be fixed with live tracking facility.
4. Performance history.

a. List ongoing and past similar nature (last five years), with the name of customer, contract duration, no. of vehicles and approximate contract value.
b. Copies of certificates, appreciation letters, recommendation letters from present/past customers, if available.

5. Company profile:

a. Organizational chart showing various departments, key personnel and number of employees in each department.
b. No. of heavy vehicles drivers (with valid driving license), directly employed by the company.
c. Details of the maintenance workshop/garage operated by company (location, total area, no. of technicians, supervisors, managers)
d. Copy of currently valid ISO or other accreditations, if available.
e. Financial statements of the company for the two years (2021 & 2022), audited by a certified external auditors).

The above mentioned documents must be submitted by hand in sealed envelopes, and dropped in tender box located at Qatar Sand Treatment Plant at Umm Bab Road, Phone no. 44029111, during official working hours from 7 a.m. to 2 p.m. (Saturday - Thursday). Prequalification submission will be accepted till 12 noon on 12/12/2023 (10 days from the dated of relesing the advertisement)

A limited numbers of companies that meet our prequalification criteria will be soon invited to participate in the closed tender. They will be able to collect tender documents upon payment of non-refundable tender fees.

With compliments of QSTP management.

INVITATION TO TENDER

Tender Reference	Description	Tender Fee (QAR)	Tender Bond Value (QAR)	Bid Closing Date
HBKU-RFQ-27	Dell Hardware Support Renewal for the Period of 30 April 2024 to 30 April 2026	1,000.00	100,000.00	2nd January 2024, 2:00 PM
QF-RFQ-302	Provision for Media Buying Services for QF Divisions and QF Entities on Call-off Basis for a Period of Three (3) Years with Option to Extend for One (1) more Year	1,000.00	100,000.00	4th January 2024, 2:00 PM

Qatar Foundation (QF) Procurement & Program Management Directorate is inviting companies to participate in the above listed public tenders. To receive the tender documents, please follow the below steps:

1) **Supplier Registration** It is mandatory to be registered as a supplier with QF in order to participate in the above tender(s). Only QF registered suppliers will be allowed to pay the tender fees online. Therefore, please visit QF website at https://www.qf.org.qa/supplier-registration to complete the Supplier Registration process.

   Tender Fee: Interested bidders can Sign in by visiting this link https://suppliers.qf.org.qa/abstract and pay the respective non-refundable and non-transferrable tender fee online.

   All Tender Fees are to be paid using credit cards only.

   Tender Fee Payment Dates: Payment of Tender Fee online will be from **4th** until **10th December 2023**.

2) All bidders, who are registered and have paid the required tender fees online to QF, will then be granted access to download the Tender Document.

3) Technical and commercial bids need to be submitted and attached online in QF Supplier Portal as per instructions provided in the "Supplier Portal" work instruction.

- The commercial bid must be valid for **180 days** from Bid Closing Date.
- The commercial bid must be accompanied by a bank guarantee (tender bond) issued by a local bank in Qatar and should be valid for **180 days** from the bid closing date (where applicable as per the Tender documents).
- The successful tenderer will be required to submit a performance bond as prescribed in each of the above tender documents.
- Qatar Foundation special qualifications, terms and conditions shall apply as stipulated in the tender document.

Note: All work instructions for Supplier registration and Supplier portal can be found in below link: https://www.qf.org.qa/supplier-registration

Campaign by Majid Al Futtaim's Carrefour Qatar raises over QR1m for people of Gaza

THE PENINSULA — DOHA



Majid Al Futtaim, which owns the exclusive rights to operate Carrefour in Qatar, has announced the success of its campaign held from October 17 to November 17, 2023, in raising more than one million Qatari riyals for the people of Gaza, Palestine.

The campaign was held in cooperation with the Education Above All Foundation (EAA), Carrefour Qatar's main strategic partner in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). During the campaign, customers donated QR608,000, which Carrefour Qatar matched at the end of the campaign, effectively reaching a total of QR1,216,000.

Laurent Hausknecht, Carrefour's Regional Director, Gulf, stated: "At Carrefour, we extend our deepest appreciation to each and every customer who participated in this campaign reinforcing our belief in the power of collective action to create meaningful and lasting change. We are and will remain dedicated to our communities and stand in solidarity with the Palestinian people."

The results are an extension to the larger campaign by Majid Al Futtaim, Our Hearts with Gaza, in which the company has donated a total of over $2m. The donated money from customers and Carrefour Qatar will provide essential relief to Palestinian civilians in Gaza through EAA Foundation's Al Fakhoora educational project in Gaza, Palestine.

MoFA Secretary General opens media centre for Gulf Summit

QNA — DOHA

Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs H E Dr. Ahmed bin Hassan Al Hammadi yesterday opened the media centre designated for the 44th session of the GCC Supreme Council in Doha, slated for Tuesday.

The centre comprises a pavilion for the GCC General Secretariat to introduce journalists and media professionals to the vision and goals of the Council, four fully equipped studios, and a professional space equipped with computers and high-speed internet, to facilitate media coverage of the session, in addition to a hall for seminars and dialogue sessions, and another for meetings.

Mandarin Oriental, Doha gets ISO 22000 certification for food safety management

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

Mandarin Oriental, Doha is delighted to be awarded for its health and safety standards in food and beverage.

The hotel is recognised for its high standards in food safety practices and has been awarded with the International Organization for Standardization — ISO 22000.

The safety and well-being of guests and colleagues has remained a top priority and addressed through Mandarin Oriental's group-wide Safe and Sound programme.

Established in 2000, this programme covers fire life, health and safety, security and environment for guests and colleagues. Detailed guidelines, continuously updated based on recognised international standards and best practices, ensure that a consistent approach is achieved in all Mandarin Oriental hotels. Mandarin Oriental, Doha has solidified its commitment towards food safety thus awarded with internationally certified standards. ISO 22000 is a Food Safety Management System which defines the standards of achieving uncompromising levels of food safety. Preventive measures and best practices in food safety are licensed with HACCP.



General Manager of Mandarin Oriental, Doha, Thomas Kinsperger (left) and another official with the ISO certification.

"We are privileged to receiving this recognition which highlights our commitment towards food safety for our colleagues and guests alike" said Thomas Kinsperger, General Manager of Mandarin Oriental, Doha.

"We remain alert to advice, from health experts and government authorities, adapting our best practices accordingly while delivering legendary service excellence which Mandarin Oriental, Doha is known for," he added.

Qatar, Djibouti discuss legal cooperation



Minister of Justice H E Masoud bin Mohammed Al Amri met Minister of Justice and Penal Affairs in charge of Human Rights of the Republic of Djibouti, H E Ali Hassan Bahdon, who is visiting the country. During the meeting, they discussed legal cooperation relations between the State of Qatar and the Republic of Djibouti, and ways to strengthen and develop them. Following the meeting, the Minister of Justice of Djibouti, along with his accompanying delegation, visited the Ministry of Justice's legal and service sectors.

Two Qatari planes arrive in Arish carrying 27 tonnes aid to Gaza

QNA — ARISH

Two Qatari Armed Forces planes arrived Sunday in the city of Arish in the Arab Republic of Egypt, carrying 27 tonnes of aid, including food supplies provided by the Qatar Fund for Development, the Qatar Red Crescent Society, Qatar Charity, and the Christian Churches Steering Committee, in preparation to be transported to Gaza, bringing the total number of planes to 37, with a total of 1,219 tonnes of aid.

This humanitarian aid is part of the State of Qatar's support for the Palestinian people and its full support for them during the current difficult humanitarian conditions.

The Christian Churches Steering Committee had submitted a request to the State of Qatar to deliver aid in solidarity with the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip, which is suffering from a severe shortage of basic necessities due to the ongoing war and difficulties in delivering assistance.

Minister of State for International Cooperation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs H E Lolwah bint Rashid Al Khater received the aid at Arish International Airport.

This humanitarian aid is part of the State of Qatar's support for the Palestinian people and its full support for them during the current difficult humanitarian conditions.

EXCHANGING IDEAS

QU kicksoff 3rd Congress on Engineering and Technology



Minister of Environment and Climate Change H E Sheikh Dr. Faleh bin Nasser bin Ahmed bin Ali Al Thani, President of QU Dr. Omar Al Ansari with other officials touring the exhibition.

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

The College of Engineering at Qatar University (QU) has launched the Third Global Congress on Engineering and Technology under the patronage of the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs H E Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani.

The congress will run until December 7 and encompasses the 15th Global Conference on Energy Applications, 15th Global Conference on Social Robotics, and the Global Conference on Resilience in Mobility and Logistics: Challenges and Opportunities.

In his opening speech, the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, H E Sheikh Dr. Faleh bin Nasser bin Ahmed bin Ali Al Thani, expressed pride in QU's organisation of the conference.

"As a leading academic institution in the region, Qatar University recognises the paramount importance of this congress for exchanging opinions and ideas. It serves as a testament to our commitment to innovation, collaboration, and the advancement of technology."

The minister acknowledged the challenges faced by the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, stressing the importance of preserving natural resources and cultivating an innovative culture for a more promising future. He said, "Our challenges, environmental, engineering, and technological, are not mere academic disciplines but integral parts of our lifestyle. Engineering and technology are revolutionising sustainable transportation methods through highly efficient electric and hybrid cars. Moreover, advancements in modern irrigation techniques contribute significantly to reducing harmful emissions and enhancing fuel efficiency."

President of QU, Dr. Omar Al Ansari, stated, "The timing of the Third Global Congress is optimal for discussing advancements in energy application fields, along with related developments ensuring sustainability and best practices to mitigate environmental impacts. This extends to advancements in other engineering fields like social robotics, resilience in mobility, and logistics."

Dean of the College of Engineering, Dr. Khalid Kamal Naji, commented, "The congress includes plenary sessions and keynote lectures covering various topics related to energy applications, social robotics, resilience in mobility, and logistics. We anticipate this congress will serve as a platform for technical information exchange, dissemination of high-quality research findings, and presentation of new policies."

GU-Q Global Energy Cultures Conference set to explore everyday energy experiences

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

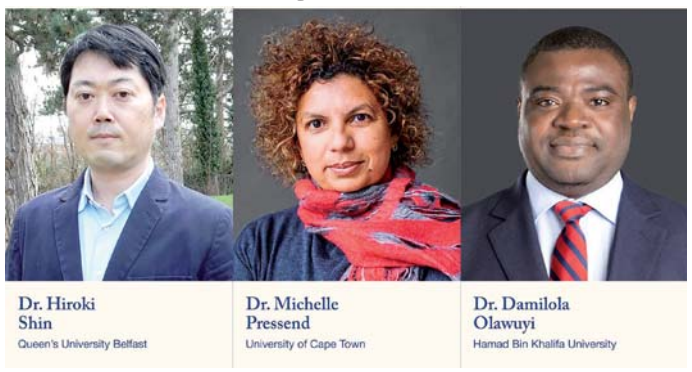
The Center for International and Regional Studies at Georgetown University in Qatar (GU-Q) is partnering with Msheireb Museums to host an international forum under the theme "Global Energy Cultures: How Energy Shapes Our Everyday Lives," from Dec 9-10.

As part of GU-Q's signature Hiwaraat Conference Series, which continues to amplify regional perspectives on today's pressing global challenges, the conference will explore the intricate relationship between energy and our cultures, as it explores pathways toward sustainable practices.

A dynamic fusion of academic and artistic exchanges, including compelling scholarly discussions, photography and art exhibitions, film screenings, and talks with artists will be open to the public at Msheireb Museums' four historic heritage houses in the heart of Msheireb Downtown Doha.

"Reliant on technology, commerce, and production, modern life would be unfeasible without a constant supply of energy in different forms. However, it is a misconception to confine energy to the economy and industry, disregarding its phenomenal implications for culture and society. Our next Hiwaraat conference, jointly organized with Msheireb Museums, explores the significance of energy in those contexts, bringing together not just scholars, but also practitioners and artists, to make academic research more accessible to the public," said the dean of GU-Q, Dr. Safwan Masri.





Acting General Manager of Msheireb Museums, Abdullah Al Naama, said: "At Msheireb Museums, our mission is to serve as a dynamic platform for free and open presentation of academic research to the public. We take pride in creating an atmosphere that encourages accessible engagement and meaningful dialogue on contemporary issues, offering a fresh perspective on crucial topics."

A panel titled "Heritage Spaces and Energy Futures" will feature Dr. Hafiz Ali Abdulla, Senior Director of Corporate Communications, Msheireb Properties, and Dr. Hiroki Shin, Queen's University Belfast. Dr. Shin's current research project examines the roles of cultural and heritage institutions in society's cultural adaptation to climate change.

A discussion titled "Decolonizing Energy: Palestine and Beyond" will feature Palestinian scientist and author Dr. Mazin Qumsiyeh, founder and director of the Palestine Natural History Museum in Bethlehem, West Bank, the first and only museum of its kind in Palestine.

"Architecture and Energy: A Dialogue with Practitioners" will feature insights from Ibrahim Jaidah, award-winning Qatari architect and author.

In other sessions, Zahra Babar, Associate Director of Research, CIRS, GU-Q, will chair "Work and Workers: Towards Energy Justice" while expert voices on the panel "Electrical Africa: Past, Present, Future" will include Dr. Damilola Olawuyi, UNESCO Chairholder on Environmental Law and Sustainable Development, Hamad Bin Khalifa University. Also on the panel is Dr. Michelle Pressend, lecturer in environmental sociology, at the University of Cape Town (UCT).

Safari's 10, 20, 30 promotion takes off

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

Safari, the premier hypermarket chain in the country, has officially launched its highly anticipated 10, 20, 30 promotion.

This promotion covers a wide array of products, including fruits, vegetables, fish, meat, bakery items, hot food, cosmetics, household essentials, ready-made garments, footwear, electronics, computer accessories, food grains, and over a thousand other daily-use items – all available at astonishingly affordable prices of just QR10, 20, or 30.

Safari outlets are featuring special discounts on a variety of products, making this promotion a shopper's delight. Some notable highlights include Sadia Frozen Chicken for QR10, Noorjahan Basmati Rice for QR20, Royalford Opalware Dinner Set (12 Pieces) for QR30, Tide Detergent Powder (1kg) for QR10, Philips 6.5-volt 4 LED Bulb for QR20, Soft Spin Trolley for QR30, and Mr. Light Pressure Cooker (3 liters) for only QR20. Additionally, a Heinz smartwatch is available for an unbeatable price of QR30.

The Safari Bakery and Hot Food section have curated a tempting selection of dishes, spanning Western, South Indian, North Indian, Arabic, and Chinese cuisines. The Daily Fresh Food section boasts items like Fresh Jams, Roumi Cheese, Baladi Feta Plain Cheese, Beef Mortadella, and Lemon Pickle, all available as part of the 10, 20, 30 promotion.

For those seeking frozen delights, the frozen section offers various juices, drinking water, chicken parts, nuggets, ice creams, milk, and milk products, all priced at QR10, 20, or 30.



Safari's 10, 20, 30 promotion covers a wide array of products.

The grocery section is well-stocked with snacks, while the household section showcases a variety of multi-purpose products. The cosmetics section features renowned brands such as Nivea, Vaseline, enchanteur, Dove, Sebamed, Pantene, Olay, Johnson & Johnson, along with perfumes, body sprays, make-up sets, soaps, face washes, body lotions, and an array of health and beauty care products, all available to Safari customers.

Stationery enthusiasts can explore a wide range of school and office supplies, including Faber Castle, moped school kits, and various stationary sets. The toys and sports sections offer an extensive collection of items priced at QR10, 20, or 30, surpassing expectations.

In the garments and ready-made section, Safari presents an impressive collection of menswear, ladies' churidar, churidar materials, ladies' denim jackets, kids wear, footwear, Le Dees bags, and an extensive range for newborns – all priced at just QR10, 20, or 30. Moreover, the Safari 10, 20, 30 promotion includes a diverse collection of winter dresses for kids and adults.

Electronics enthusiasts will be thrilled with the extensive offerings in this promotion. From emergency lights and trimmers to torches, calculators, headsets, and smartwatches – Safari provides a variety with significant price reductions across numerous electronic devices.

As an exciting bonus, Safari is offering customers the chance to win 6 kg of gold through the Safari Shop and Shine mega promotion. Participants can enter the draw by obtaining a raffle coupon with a purchase of just QR50 from any Safari outlet.

QatarEnergy LNG
Tender Invitation

قطر للطاقة QatarEnergy LNG

No.	TENDER NUMBER / DESCRIPTION	TENDER ISSUE PERIOD	TENDER FEE (QAR)	TENDER BOND (QAR)	TENDER CLOSING DATE
1	LTC/C/OFS/6410/23 PROVISION OF MARINE SURVEYOR AND CONSULTANCY SERVICES ON CALL-OFF BASIS	04/12/2023 to 11/12/2023	0	800,000	25/12/2023

Scope of Work:
Contractor shall provide qualified Marine Surveyors on call-off basis for performing marine related operations including but not limited to Rig/Barge movement supervision, Marine unit survey/inspection, ROV and Geophysical survey etc. Contractor must have certified Safety, Health and Environment Program in place that confirms to ISO 9001, ISO 14001, ISO 45001 standards. Duration of the Contract is Five (05) years, with an option to extend for another 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 QatarEnergy LNG website under Suppliers tab >Current Open Tenders. The bids shall be submitted through the QatarEnergy LNG online platform (SMART by GEP).

Note: Effective from 1st July 2023, bids received from Local Companies (established under the Laws of State of Qatar with local Commercial Registration) who are not in possession of an ICV score in the ICV portal by Bid Closing Date (or commercial bid submission date if separately mentioned/notified) will not be accepted. Local Company that have been established for less than 2 years and insurance companies are exempted from this requirement. For further details please visit ICV Digital Portal:- https://icv.qa/US

WAR ON GAZA

Death toll in Gaza from Israeli strikes tops 15,500

AGENCIES — GAZA

The death toll from Israeli strikes in the Gaza Strip has exceeded 15,500, while over 41,300 people have been injured, Gaza Health Ministry spokesman Ashraf Al Qudra said yesterday.

"The number of victims of the Israeli aggression against the Gaza Strip since October 7 has grown to 15,523 people, 41,316 others sustained injuries of varying severity," Al Qudra told a televised news conference.

At least 254 Palestinians have also been killed in the occupied West Bank since October 7, according to *Al Jazeera*. The Health Ministry in Gaza said Israel launched new airstrikes on various areas in the war-torn Gaza Strip yesterday, resulting in dozens killed and wounded.

UN agency says about 1.8 million people, roughly 75 percent of Gaza's population, have been internally displaced.

Rescue workers and medics told Xinhua news agency that Israeli airstrikes targeted a populated residential building belonging to the Abu Aita family in the Jabalia Camp in the northern Strip.

Thirty-seven people were killed and were transferred to the hospital over the past few hours.

Meanwhile, at least three people were killed and 20 others wounded in an Israeli bombardment targeting a house owned by the Abu Jiyab family in the Abu Eskandar area, north of Gaza City, according to medics.

Moreover, the Palestinian civil defence service said that several people were killed and wounded in homes destroyed by Israeli warplanes on Yafa Street, east of Gaza City.

Earlier in the day, the civil defence service spokesperson Mahmoud Basal reported that 84 dead were transported to Al Muamalat Hospital in Gaza due to Israeli airstrikes in the recent hours.

The government's Media Office Director Ismael Al Thawabteh told reporters yesterday that more than 700 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza during the last 24 hours.



A general view of destruction caused by Israeli bombing campaign in the Gaza Strip yesterday. (AFP)

During the week-long pause in fighting that ended on Friday, Hamas released 80 Israeli hostages in exchange for 240 Palestinian prisoners.

Twenty-five other captives, mostly Thais, were also freed under separate arrangements.

The United Nations humanitarian agency (OCHA) said at least 160 Palestinian fatalities were reported in two incidents in northern Gaza on Saturday: the bombing of a six-storey building in Jabalia refugee camp, and of an entire block in a Gaza City neighbourhood.

In a new estimate, OCHA said about 1.8 million people — roughly 75 percent of Gaza's population — are internally displaced, up from an earlier figure of 1.7 million.

"However, obtaining an accurate count is challenging," OCHA said in a report.

US says warship, commercial ships come under attack in Red Sea

AGENCIES — DUBAI/LONDON

An American warship and multiple commercial ships came under attack yesterday in the Red Sea, the Pentagon said, potentially marking a major escalation in a series of maritime attacks in the Mideast linked to the Israel-Hamas war.

"We're aware of reports regarding attacks on the USS Carney and commercial vessels in the Red Sea and will provide information as it becomes available," the Pentagon said.

The British military earlier said there had been a suspected drone attack and explosions in the Red Sea, without elaborating.

The Pentagon did not identify where it believed the fire came from. However, Yemen's Houthi rebels have been launching a series of attacks on vessels in the Red Sea, as well as launching drones and missiles targeting Israel as it wages war on the Gaza Strip.

A UK-owned ship passing through the Red Sea was reportedly hit by rocket fire, a UK-based maritime security group said yesterday, with another agency reporting possible drone activity in the area.

The unnamed Bahamas-flagged vessel was "struck by a rocket" while sailing south around 35 nautical miles off Yemen's western coast, maritime security firm Ambrey said, citing reports.

"The affected vessel was issuing distress calls relating to piracy/missile attack," the UK-based company added.

It noted reports that "an international naval asset in the vicinity of the incident" was likely proceeding to the ship's location.

The United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) agency, run by Britain's Royal Navy, said it had received "a report of Uncrewed Aerial Systems (UAS) activity including a potential explosion... originating from the direction of Yemen".

It advised vessels in the area to "exercise caution".

The reported incident comes after Huthi rebels seized an Israeli-linked cargo vessel, the Galaxy Leader, last month.

Palestinian leader calls on ICC to speed up Israeli war crimes trial

SPUTNIK —MOSCOW: Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas held a meeting with International Criminal Court (ICC) Prosecutor Karim Khan, during which he urged Khan to expedite the trial of Israeli soldiers, who reportedly committed war crimes against Palestinians, Palestinian news agency WAFA reported on Saturday.

Abbas informed Khan of the recent developments in Palestine, as well as the acts of genocide and ethnic cleansing carried out by Israel in Gaza and the West Bank, the news agency reported.

Houthis say will resume attacks on Israel after Gaza truce ends

SPUTNIK -CAIRO: Yemen's rebel Ansar Allah movement, also known as the Houthis, said yesterday that they would resume attacks on Israel after a week-long truce in the Gaza Strip collapsed.

"The spokesman of the [Houthi] armed forces Yahya Saree stressed that the armed forces will resume painful and crushing strikes against the Zionist entity [Israel] after it returned to aggression against the Gaza Strip," the movement said in a statement.

Saudi Arabia wins bid to host UNIDO 2025 conference

AGENCIES -VIENNA: Saudi Arabia won the bid to host the 21st session of the General Conference of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) in Riyadh in November 2025, Saudi Gazette reported.

The kingdom's victory was announced during the 20th session of the General Conference of UNIDO, held in the Austrian capital, Vienna, after a resolution was unanimously adopted by the organisation's 172 member states.

More than 1,500 people are expected to participate in the next conference scheduled to be held in the Saudi capital in 2025, including representatives of UNIDO member states, in addition to representatives of international organisations and the private sector.

East African regional force begins pull-out from DRC

AFP — GOMA, DR CONGO

The East African Community (EAC) regional force began its withdrawal from the Democratic Republic of Congo yesterday morning after Kinshasa deemed it ineffective and refused to renew its mandate.

The regional bloc first deployed troops in the violence-plagued region in November last year after the resurgence of the M23 rebel group. DRC authorities at the time invited the EAC to deploy its forces to free the areas taken by the rebels.

But the future of the deployment was thrown into doubt after DR Congo President Felix Tshisekedi accused the force of cohabiting with the rebels rather than forcing them to lay down arms.

Following a summit on 25 November, the EAC announced that the DRC "would not renew the mandate of the regional force beyond 8 December 2023".



Kenyan soldiers from the East African Community regional force (EAC-RF) prepare to leave the Democratic Republic of Congo, at Goma airport, yesterday. (AFP)

A first group of around 100 Kenyan soldiers from the regional force — which also includes Ugandan, Burundian and South Sudanese soldiers — left from Goma airport bound for Nairobi, according to a spokesman for the force on the ground who did not provide more detail on further withdrawals.

But fighting continues between the M23 group and the DRC army, supported by militia who call themselves "patriots".

On 24 October, a Kenyan soldier from the regional force was killed by shrapnel.

Numerous armed groups and other militias have been active for three decades in the east of the DRC, a legacy of the regional wars that broke out during the 1990s and 2000s.



Seven burned to death in South Africa 'mob' attack

AFP — JOHANNESBURG

Extra police patrolled one of South Africa's most violent townships yesterday after a "mob" tied up and burned to death seven men accused of a crime wave, police and residents said.

South Africa is afflicted by a steadily increasing murder rate, but community leaders say Diepsloot, a town of more than 350,000 people north of Johannesburg with high rates of killings and rape, has been abandoned by authorities.

Police said they had started a murder investigation after the charred bodies of the seven young men were found.

An alert over two "burned bodies" was raised late Friday night, police spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Mavela Masondo said.

Another five bodies were discovered in the early hours of Saturday in a nearby district of Diepsloot, he added. "Preliminary investigation suggests that in both incidents, the victims were assaulted and burned by the mob," Masondo said. The bodies of the five men, all aged about 20, were found on a pile of bricks on wasteland in the town.

"They were all chased, caught and tied before being killed, yes it was a 'necklace'," said one resident, referring to the use of tyres or rope put over the upper body of victims before they are set alight. "There are more police today and we hope they will stay because we need them," the resident added, speaking on condition of anonymity because of tensions in the township. "There have been a lot of robberies and people are angry." Masondo said no motive for the killings had been confirmed but commented that police "strongly condemn acts of vigilantism and the community taking the law into their own hands, as that constitutes a serious criminal offense."

Guinea-Bissau leader says Friday shootout was attempted coup

AP — BISSAU, GUINEA BISSAU

A shootout in Guinea-Bissau's capital on Friday was an attempted coup, President Umaro Sissoco Embalo said yesterday after a meeting with security forces, confirming fears over the latest threat to democracy in the increasingly volatile and coup-hit West Africa.

"They attempted a coup and failed to materialise their objective," Embalo said, after members of the National Guard command improperly released two ministers detained over alleged corruption, resulting in a shootout with the Presidential Palace Battalion.

During a visit to the National Guard command in Bissau, Embalo said Victor Tchongo, the head of the National Guard, has been dismissed and "will pay dearly" for the attempt to depose the president.

"You are all betrayed by your commander ... (and) this is why we advise you to distance yourself from politicians and do your service to the nation," he told officers.

The attempted coup is the second in West and Central Africa in a week after last week's failed coup in Sierra Leone. It further raises tensions in the region where coups have surged with eight military takeovers since 2020, including in Niger and Gabon this year.

West Africa's regional economic bloc of ECOWAS — to which Guinea-Bissau belongs — noted the incident with "deep concern" and expressed "full solidarity with the people and constitutional authority of Guinea-Bissau."

After returning from the United Nations' COP28 climate summit on Saturday night, Embalo suggested to reporters that Tchongo of the National Guard was not acting alone.

"Tchongo was ordered by someone," The Democrat, a local newspaper, quoted him as saying. "Tchongo is not crazy about blowing up the Judiciary Police cells and removing the minister of finance and the secretary of state. This is an attempted coup d'état and there will be serious consequences for everyone involved."

Guinea-Bissau has endured multiple coups since gaining independence from Portugal nearly five decades ago.

INDIA POLITICS

BJP wins key state polls, boosting reelection bid

BLOOMBERG — NEW DELHI

India's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party won three crucial state elections and unseated the opposition in two of them, strengthening Prime Minister Narendra Modi's bid for a third term in office.

The BJP retained power in Madhya Pradesh, a central state with 56 million voters, and wrested control of the state legislatures from its rival, the Indian National Congress, in Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh. The results from the Election Commission of India yesterday exceeded exit polls' predictions.

The Congress party was able to flip the southern Indian state of Telangana, where a regional party which had held power for two consecutive terms conceded defeat.

While the state elections aren't a proxy for 2024's national vote, the fact that the opposition lost fairly comprehensively will buoy the ruling party and Modi ahead of the general elections. The Congress party under Rahul Gandhi had tried to highlight issues like joblessness and caste discrimination in the hope it would resonate nationally in a few month's time.

> BJP leaders hailed the party's performance, especially in the key state of Madhya Pradesh.

"Prime Minister Modi remains exceptionally popular," said Shumita Deveshwar, chief India economist at GlobalData. TS Lombard. The state polls show "the mood of the nation lies in bringing him back to power for a third consecutive term," she said. A weaker performance by the BJP may have provided the opposition with some momentum, "but the outcome now signals that Modi's return to power is inevitable," Deveshwar said.

The results may give a boost to financial markets today, with investors betting that another term for Modi means policy continuity. Jefferies LLC said in October that India's stockmarket could drop 25% if the BJP faces a surprise defeat.

"In the whole world, the echo of these election results will be heard," Modi said while addressing party workers at the BJP headquarters in New Delhi yesterday evening. "These results will strengthen the world's faith in India's development, these results will give new faith to the world's investors."

While the BJP has already won majority of the seats in the three states and Congress in one, the final tally could be higher once the Election Commission finalizes the results. Counting in the state of Mizoram, where regional parties dominate, will be done today. Yesterday's results show that Modi's popularity in the populous Hindi-speaking states predominantly in the north remains intact. The Congress, meanwhile, made further inroads in southern India with a second successive win in seven months, after it won the state of Karnataka earlier this year.

BJP leaders hailed the party's performance, especially in the key state of Madhya Pradesh.



Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh and member of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Shivraj Singh Chouhan (left) is greeted by his supporters at his residence in Bhopal yesterday, following BJP's victory at the Madhya Pradesh assembly elections. (AFP)

"We had complete hope and faith," Ashwini Vaishnaw, a cabinet minister and senior BJP leader, told reporters yesterday. "Everyone knows that Modi is in the heart of Madhya Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh is in Modi's heart."

The Congress party will now need to regroup with other opposition groups to figure out how to fight Modi in the upcoming national elections. Opposition parties had pledged to form an alliance to unseat the BJP by setting aside their differences and projecting a united front.

Rahul Gandhi, leader of the Congress party, has positioned himself as Modi's main challenger, but apart from the wins in two southern states, his party has struggled to peel voters away from the BJP.

2,029 entries on day one of China's visa exemption for six countries

XINHUA — BEIJING

A total of 2,029 people from France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, and Malaysia entered China without a visa on Friday, marking the first day of China's visa exemption policy for ordinary passport holders from these countries.

Revealed by China's National Immigration Administration (NIA) on Saturday, the data showed that 1,113 Malaysian passport holders took advantage of the visa exemption, making Malaysia the country with the highest number of visa-exempt entries on that day among the six.

Meanwhile, French passport holders accounted for 227 visa-exempt entries, representing the largest day-on-day increase in arrivals from the six countries with a growth rate of about 52 percent.

Overall, the number of arrivals from these six countries increased by over 12 percent from the previous day.

Among China's efforts to promote personnel exchanges and cooperation with foreign countries, border control authorities have optimized their personnel deployment and strengthened on-site guidance to ensure efficient and smooth customs clearance at ports of entry, according to the NIA.

Over 135 Chinese militia vessels present within Whitson Reef: Philippines

SPUTNIK — MOSCOW

The Chinese Maritime Militia (CMM) has allegedly increased its presence within the Whitson Reef, which the Philippines refers to as the Julian Felipe Reef, in the South China Sea, with over 135 Chinese vessels currently observed in the area, the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) said yesterday.

On November 13, the PCG reported as many as 111 Chinese militia vessels allegedly spotted in the area. Following the development, Philippine National Security Adviser Gen. Eduardo Ano directed the PCG to carry out a maritime patrol to "challenge and document the presence of the CMM" within the reef.

"Yesterday [on December 2], the PCG Commandant, Coast Guard Admiral Ronnie Gil Gavan, deployed PCG vessels... to conduct patrols in the immediate vicinity of Julian Felipe Reef. No response was made to the radio challenges issued by the PCG to the CMM vessels which is now estimated to have grown to more than 135 vessels dispersed and scattered within Julian Felipe Reef," PCG officer Jay Tarriela said on X.

The territorial affiliation of a number of islands and reefs in the South China Sea has been the subject of disputes between China, Philippines and several other Asia-Pacific countries for decades.

Significant oil and gas reserves have been discovered on the continental shelf of those islands, including the Paracel Islands, Thitu Island, Scarborough Shoal and the Spratly Islands, with the Whitson Reef being their part.

The disputes also involve Vietnam, Brunei, Malaysia and Taiwan to some extent.

In July 2016, following a lawsuit filed by the Philippines, the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague ruled that China has no grounds for territorial claims in the South China Sea.

The court ruled that the islands are not disputed territory and do not constitute an exclusive economic zone, but Beijing refused to recognize or accept the ruling.

Indonesia's Marapi volcano erupts, spewing ash plumes and blanketing several villages with ash

AP — JAKARTA

Indonesia's Mount Marapi in West Sumatra province erupted yesterday, spewing white-and-gray ash plumes for more than 3,000m into the air, and hot ash clouds blew several miles to the north, according to Indonesia's Volcanology and Geological Hazard Mitigation Center.

There were no casualties, said Ahmad Rifandi, an official at the Marapi monitoring post, adding that villagers were advised to stay 3km from the crater's mouth and be aware of the danger of potential lava.

National Disaster Management Agency spokesperson, Abdul Muhari, said several villages were blanketed with falling ash, blocking out the sun in many areas. Authorities distributed face masks and urged residents to wear eyeglasses to protect them from volcanic ashes, he said.

Marapi's eruption alert level was maintained at the second-highest level, Abdul Muhari said, and confirmed that authorities have been closely monitoring the volcano after sensors picked up increasing activity in recent weeks.



Volcanic ash spews from Mount Marapi during an eruption as seen from Tanah Datar in West Sumatra yesterday. (AFP)

Japan's Meteorological Agency said yesterday it is currently assessing whether there is a possible tsunami in the country because of Marapi's volcanic activity.

In case a tsunami reaches Japanese coasts, the earliest possible swelling is expected in the Okinawa region at around 2100 JST (0900GMT), it said.

The nearly 2,900m mountain has been active since January when it erupted, generating dense ash-and-steam plumes that rose as high as 400m above the crater. No casualties were reported. Marapi is among more than 120 active volcanoes in Indonesia, which is prone to seismic upheaval due to its location on the Pacific "Ring of Fire," an arc of volcanoes and fault lines encircling the Pacific Basin.

RESCUE MISSION

Search for personnel continues after Japan's Osprey crash

AP — TOKYO

Japanese authorities handed over pieces of the wreckage from an US Air Force Osprey that crashed off southwestern Japan to the US military yesterday, as the search continued for seven missing servicemembers. The only body so far recovered has now been formally identified.

The wreckage had been collected by a ship from the regional coast guard headquarters and by fishers from the town of Yakushima since the CV-22 aircraft crashed into the water near the town on Wednesday during a training mission to Okinawa.

Japan Coast Guard 10th Regional Headquarters said the unidentified pieces of wreckage, which had been kept at the town hall, were handed over to the US military for further examination. Debris collected by the fishers had been picked up by the US military earlier yesterday, and that collected by the coast guard was also to be handed over later in the day.

The handover is procedure according to the Japan-US Status Forces Agreement, under which Japanese authorities are not given the right to seize or investigate US military property unless the US decides otherwise. That means it will be practically impossible for Japan to investigate the cause of the accident.



Recovered debris, believed to be part of wreckage from a crashed US Air Force CV-22B Osprey tilt-rotor aircraft, is seen after it was brought ashore at Yakushima-cho in Kagoshima prefecture on November 30, 2023. (AFP)

The agreement, known as SOFA, has in the past repeatedly made Japanese investigation difficult in criminal cases involving American service members on Okinawa and elsewhere, and has been criticized as unequal by rights activists and others, including Okinawa Gov. Denny Tamaki, who call for a revision.

The Air Force Special Operations Command formally identified the one confirmed victim as Air Force Staff Sgt. Jacob Galliher of Pittsfield, Massachusetts, on Saturday, after tributes had begun pouring in the day before. Galliher's family issued a statement Saturday saying it was in mourning and asking for privacy and prayers for his wife, two children and other family members.

"Jacob was an incredible son, brother, husband, father and friend to so many. His short life touched and made better the lives of hundreds, if not thousands in Pittsfield, in this region and everywhere he served," the family said. "Jacob lived to serve his family, his country and the people he loved." The US military said it was continuing to look for the rest of the crew.

> The Air Force Special Operations Command formally identified the one confirmed victim as Air Force Staff Sgt. Jacob Galliher of Pittsfield, Massachusetts, on Saturday.

"We want to assure our air commandos' families that our efforts will continue and include every possible capability at our disposal," said Rear Adm. Jeromy Williams, Pacific commander for the Special Operations Command.

US Ambassador to Japan Rahm Emanuel, in a statement yesterday, said "your heart and your spirit are torn when you see a young man with such promise lose his life in the service of a set of ideals."

IN BRIEF

Nine killed in bus attack in northern Pakistan

AFP—PESHAWAR: NINE people, including two off-duty army personnel, were killed when gunmen opened fire on a bus travelling through northern Pakistan, causing it to crash into an oncoming truck and catch fire, officials said yesterday.

The bus was attacked at around 6:30 pm local time (1330 GMT) on Saturday from both sides by at least five militants.

"Following the firing, the bus lost control and collided with an oncoming truck. Subsequently, both vehicles caught fire. Among the casualties are both drivers," said Arif Ahmed Khan, a senior government official for the district. He said eight people died at the scene while one person later died in hospital.

Two army troops who were taking leave were among those killed, while 25 others were wounded.

N Korea spy satellite operator to report findings to military

AFP—SEOUL: THE office operating North Korea's newly launched spy satellite will run as a military intelligence organisation, state media said yesterday.

Pyongyang successfully put a military spy satellite into orbit last month and has since claimed it was providing images of major US and South Korean military sites.

It has not yet disclosed any of the satellite imagery it claims to possess but warned on Saturday that any attack on its space asset would be considered a "declaration of war".

The official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said on Sunday that the newly formed reconnaissance satellite operation office had begun its mission on December 2 and would operate as "an independent military intelligence organization".

The office will report its acquired information to the reconnaissance bureau at the army and other major units, KCNA added.

Four killed in bomb attack on Catholic mass in Philippines

AFP—MANILA: AT least four people were killed and dozens wounded in a bomb attack on a Catholic mass in the insurgency-plagued southern Philippines yesterday, with President Ferdinand Marcos blaming "foreign terrorists".

The blast happened during a morning service at Mindanao State University's gymnasium in Marawi, the country's largest Muslim city, which was besieged by Islamist militant groups in 2017.

Police Lieutenant General Emmanuel Peralta said four people were killed and around 50 wounded in the blast from an improvised explosive device.

Other security officials said the bombing may have been a retaliatory attack for a series of military operations against Islamist militant groups in recent days.

Photos posted on the Lanao del Sur provincial government's Facebook page showed several overturned plastic chairs, shattered glass and debris around a black patch on the floor of the gymnasium.

CONFLICT

Kiev: Russian forces killed surrendering Ukrainian soldiers

AP — KIEV

Ukrainian officials yesterday launched an investigation into allegations that Russian forces killed surrendering Ukrainian soldiers, a war crime if confirmed, after grainy footage on social media appeared to show two uniformed men being shot at close range after emerging from a dugout.

The video shows the servicemen, one of them with his hands up, walking out at gunpoint and lying down on the ground before a group of Russian troops appears to open fire. It was not immediately possible to verify the video's authenticity or the circumstances in which it was filmed, and it was unclear when the incident took place.

The Ukrainian General Prosecutor's office yesterday launched a criminal investigation, hours after the Ukrainian military's press office said in an online statement that the footage is genuine.

"The video shows a group in Russian uniforms shooting, at point-blank range, two unarmed servicemen in the uniform of the Armed Forces of Ukraine who were surrendering," the prosecutor's office said in a *Telegram* update yesterday.

Kiev, its Western allies and international human rights organisations have repeatedly accused Moscow of breaching international humanitarian law since it launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The Kremlin denies these allegations. The video first appeared Saturday on DeepState, a popular Ukrainian Telegram channel covering the war. The post claimed the footage came from the front lines near Avdiivka, a Ukrainian holdout in the country's part-occupied east where there has been fierce fighting in recent weeks.

The General Prosecutor's Office yesterday said that the alleged killing took place in the Pokrovsk district, which includes Avdiivka and surrounding areas.

"It's clear from the video that the Ukrainian servicemen are taking the necessary steps that show they are surrendering," Ukraine's human rights chief, Dmytro Lubinets, said hours after the footage emerged on Saturday.

In a statement posted to Telegram, Lubinets described the incident as "yet another glaring example of Russia's violations of international humanitarian law." Oleksandr Shtupun, a spokesperson for the Ukrainian military grouping that is fighting near Avdiivka, was cited by Ukrainian media as saying the video was "glaring confirmation" of Moscow's disrespect for the laws of war.

In March, footage of a man exclaiming "Glory to Ukraine" before being gunned down in a wooded area sparked national outcry in Ukraine, as senior officials alleged that he was an unarmed prisoner of war killed by Russian soldiers.

Last summer, Kiev and Moscow also traded blame for a shelling attack on a prison in occupied eastern Ukraine that killed dozens of Ukrainian POWs. Both sides claimed the assault on the facility in Olenivka was aimed at covering up atrocities, with Ukrainian officials charging captive soldiers had been tortured and executed there. The UN's human rights chief in July rejected Moscow's claim that a rocket strike had caused the blast.

Last summer, Kiev and Moscow also traded blame for a shelling attack on a prison in occupied eastern Ukraine that killed dozens of Ukrainian POWs.

Also yesterday, Ukraine's energy ministry reported that close to 1,000 towns and villages suffered power outages that day, with hundreds of settlements in the west battered by wintry weather and others affected by ongoing fighting.

The Institute for the Study of War, a Washington-based think tank, late on Saturday assessed that military operations have slowed down all along the frontline in Ukraine due to poor weather, with mud bogging down tracked vehicles and making it hard for lighter equipment and infantry to advance.

Even so, Shtupun, of Ukraine's Tavria military command that oversees the stretch of frontline near Avdiivka, said in a separate statement yesterday that Russian infantry attacks had intensified in the area over the past day. In a Telegram post, he insisted Ukrainian troops were "holding firm" in Avdiivka and another nearby town.

Elsewhere, a 78-year-old civilian man died in Ukraine's southern Kherson region after Russian shells slammed into his garage, the Ukrainian local military administration reported.



Moscow covered with snow

Women prepare to pose for a photo in the snow-covered Red Square in Moscow, yesterday. (AFP)

Heavy snow in northern England causes havoc on highways and knocks out power

AP — AMBLESIDE

Heavy snow in northern England forced motorists to seek shelter or spend the night in their cars and knocked out power to more than 2,500 customers, officials said yesterday.

Trucks jackknifed in the snow, blocking highways, as drivers reported taking hours to complete short trips while others were forced to find a place to stay along their routes or in their vehicles.

"It really feels like you're walking through the Alps or some ski resort at the moment," Harrison Ward said in the Lake District community of Ambleside. "Once a few cars have stopped or crashed or been abandoned, then it all comes to a halt." Ant Brett said he had been stuck in his car for 19 hours since Saturday afternoon while driving from Essex to Cumbria, a journey that should have taken just over 5 hours.

"I was heading up to a family wedding – it's fair to say I didn't make it," he told the BBC. "I'm down to my last bit of water and having to ration it. I know the emergency services are busy but we've just been left here without help."

The Cumbria Fire & Rescue Service said it worked through the night to get drivers out of cars stuck in deep snow. Cumbria Police Superintendent Andy Wilkinson said the storm was more significant than forecast and people were urged yesterday not to travel to the county.

Wilkinson said highway workers were verbally abused by some drivers.

"We understand people's frustration during this time," Wilkinson said.

"However, agencies are working hard to improve the situation in Cumbria and are also facing the challenging road conditions when responding." Schools, churches and a scout hut were used to provide emergency shelter for stranded travellers. Over 2,500 people were without electricity in Cumbria, Electricity North West reported. It expected to restore power by late yesterday night.

The Met Office, the UK's meteorological agency, issued a weather warning for ice in parts of the Midlands, the north of England, much of north and central Wales and eastern Scotland from yesterday evening to noon today.

TRUCKERS' PROTEST

Ukraine and Poland open crossing to ease blockade

AFP — KIEV

Ukraine and Poland will open a border crossing for empty trucks today in a bid to ease a blockade by Polish hauliers, whose protests have paralysed traffic for weeks.

Polish truckers have been blocking major crossings with Ukraine since early November, demanding the reintroduction of entry permits for their Ukrainian competitors.

The Dolhobyczow-Ugryniv crossing, which currently serves cars and buses, will open to empty trucks travelling from Ukraine into Poland from today, Kiev's border service said. "The opening of Ugryniv is the first of a list of measures being implemented to unblock the border, reduce queues and increase the capacity of the Ukrainian-Polish border," it said.

Kiev said on Friday that the fallout from the Polish truckers' protest was "catastrophic" and that Ukrainian drivers stuck at the border were in a "dire" situation.

Huge queues have formed on both sides of the border, with many hauliers stuck in their vehicles for days in cold temperatures and with little food.

Warsaw said this week that it would carry out "stepped-up checks" on Ukrainian trucks travelling roads leading to the border in an effort to placate the protesting hauliers.

But protests have continued, and on Friday a major Slovakian truckers' union joined the protest, arguing that scrapping the permits for Ukraine put them at a disadvantage.

P IN BRIEF

Belarus leader Lukashenko visits China to meet counterpart Xi Jinping

AFP—MOSCOW: BELARUSIAN President Alexander Lukashenko, a staunch ally of Moscow, is visiting China to meet his counterpart Xi Jinping, the Belarusian presidency said.

Today, he will hold talks with Xi on issues including "trade, the economy, investment and international cooperation", the presidency announced yesterday. Belarusian state media reported later yesterday that Lukashenko's plane had landed in Beijing.

Lukashenko was last in China at the end of February and early March, a visit that was closely scrutinised following Russia's offensive in Ukraine. Belarus did not mention Russia's offensive in its statement on the visit.

China, a close partner of Moscow, has not publicly condemned Russia for its offensive, despite calls to do so by the United States, European countries and others. Belarus relies heavily on Russia for political and financial support, and was used as a launchpad for Moscow's assault against Ukraine in February 2022.

Germany seeks to cut contribution to EU fund for military aid to Kiev, say reports

SPUTNIK—MOSCOW: GERMANY is aiming to reduce its financial contribution to the European Peace Facility (EPF) that bankrolls military aid to Ukraine by discounting from the fund direct assistance it had previously provided, *The Telegraph* newspaper has reported, citing a confidential document from Berlin.

"Military support for Ukraine can be provided either through financial contributions to the Ukraine envelope in the EPF or as direct deliveries of military equipment to Ukraine," the paper was quoted as saying by the daily, adding that "in kind contributions" should be "fully credited against a member state's agreed contributions to the Ukraine envelope."

Germany provides a quarter of EPF funding, the newspaper added. Meanwhile, France wants the EPF to stop supplying Ukraine with weapons from member states' arsenals and focus on joint purchases from European arms manufacturers, the newspaper said, citing another document it had seen.

German tourist stabbed to death in Paris

AFP—PARIS: A person known to the French authorities as a radical with mental health troubles stabbed a German tourist to death and wounded two people in central Paris on Saturday before being arrested, officials said.

The attack took place close to the Eiffel Tower during a busy late weekend night and came with the country on its highest alert for attacks as tensions rise against the background of the war between Israel and Hamas.

"We will not give in to terrorism," Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne wrote on X, formerly Twitter, after the attack.



Convention of European Parliament leaders

Italian deputy Prime Minister Matteo Salvini (third right) stands on stage with German co-leader of far-right Alternative for Germany Tino Chrupalla (second right), member of the Austrian Freedom Party Harald Vilimsky (fourth right), Head of Czech far-right party Freedom and Direct Democracy Tomio Okamura (fifth right) after his speech during a convention of the European Parliament leaders of Identity and Democracy group, yesterday at the Fortezza da Basso in Florence. (AFP)

Flights resume at Munich after snow, trains still disrupted

AFP — MUNICH

Flights resumed at Munich airport yesterday, a day after they were suspended due to snowfall, but disruption to rail traffic in parts of southern Germany was set to continue.

Germany's second largest airport said on its website that flights resumed at 6am (0500 GMT) but added that some "disruption to air traffic" would continue and advised passengers to check with their carriers well in advance before travelling to the airport.

In total, 760 flights were affected, an airport spokesperson told *AFP* on Saturday. More than 40 centimetres of snow had fallen during the previous night, according to weather services, also paralysing rail traffic in the Bavarian capital and other parts of the region.

Munich's main train station was closed all Saturday, long-distance trains were halted and the city's public transport suspended.

Rail operator Deutsche Bahn said services were likely to resume gradually but there would be "huge disruption at least until Monday", particular on routes to Austria and Switzerland, as the weather had damaged infrastructure.

Former president Poroshenko barred from leaving Ukraine

AP — KIEV

Former President Petro Poroshenko was denied permission to leave Ukraine for a planned meeting with Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, Ukraine's security service said on Saturday.

Poroshenko announced Friday that he had been turned away at the border despite previously receiving permission from Parliament to leave the country. Under martial law, Ukrainian men between 18 and 60 years of age are not allowed to leave the country without special approval.

The 58-year-old, who lost his re-election bid in 2019 to current Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskiy, said that he had planned to meet with US House Speaker Mike Johnson, and a visit to the Polish parliament during his trip.

But security officials said that Poroshenko had also agreed to meet Orban, who has previously praised Russian President Vladimir Putin and refused to support Kiev's bid for EU accession. In a statement on social media, they said such talks would make Poroshenko a "tool in the hands of the Russian special services."

On Saturday evening, Orban's spokesman said that Hungary "does not wish to play any part in (President Zelenskiy's) internal political struggles," without confirming or denying that a meeting had been planned between Poroshenko and the Hungarian leader. Zoltan Kovacs made the remarks in a post on X, formerly known as Twitter.

Poroshenko, who called his experience at the border an "attack on unity", is yet to comment on the allegation that he planned to meet Orban.

As of late morning yesterday, there was no further comment from Ukrainian authorities regarding Poroshenko's planned trip. Ukraine's Parliament speaker yesterday accused Poroshenko's political party, the centre-right European Solidarity, of having made false claims in the past that its lawmakers were being systematically prevented from travelling abroad.

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CHAIRMAN
DR. KHALID BIN THANI AL THANI

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
DR. KHALID MUBARAK AL-SHAFI
editorinchief@pen.com.qa

MANAGING EDITOR
MOHAMMED OSMAN ALI
osman@pen.com.qa

EDITORIAL

Efforts to end bloodshed

QATAR continues political and diplomatic efforts to communicate with all parties to reach a permanent ceasefire in the Gaza Strip.

Since the beginning of the Israeli aggression in Gaza Strip on Oct 7, the country played a pivotal role in brokering a truce in Gaza which ended on Friday with resumption of hostilities.

World leaders repose trust in Qatar as a reliable mediator for conflict resolution. The country has become the centre of diplomatic efforts to end bloodshed and find a just solution to the Palestinian issue since the beginning of the war.

French President HE Emmanuel Macron who came to Doha to discuss Gaza ceasefire efforts met Amir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani on Saturday. H H the Amir stressed the importance of joint international efforts for a permanent ceasefire to protect civilians and deliver aid.

H H the Amir discussed the situation in Gaza and diplomatic efforts for a truce during a phone call from US Vice-President H E Kamala Harris. Harris thanked the Amir for his efforts for truce in Gaza and the delivery of aid.

Qatar expressed regret in a statement at the resumption of the hostilities. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that Qatar continues negotiations between Israel and Hamas for a humanitarian pause and delivery of aid.

The ministry said that the resumption of Israeli bombing has complicated the mediation efforts and exacerbated the humanitarian catastrophe in the enclave, and called on the global community to play its role in ending the war. The ministry reiterated its condemnation of targeting civilians, the policy of collective punishment and forced displacement of Gazzans.

In a latest episode of massacre of Palestinians, an Israeli air strike on a building killed over 100 in the Jabalia refugee camp in the northern Gaza Strip. Families and displaced people were taking shelter there.

Hundreds of Palestinians have been killed in Israeli air raids in the past 24 hours in Gaza as the Israeli army ordered more areas in and around the enclave's second-largest city of Khan Younis to evacuate. Director-General of the Government Media Office in Gaza said yesterday that more than 700 Palestinians have been killed since Israel resumed bombardment after a seven-day truce ended on Friday.

A total of 15,500 Palestinians have been killed in Israeli attacks in the Gaza Strip since October 7. The number of injured in the Palestinian enclave has surpassed 40,000, with 70 percent of them being children and women.

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

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OFFICE
TEL: 4455 7741 / 767
FAX: +974 4455 7758
MANAGING EDITOR
TEL: 4455 7769
DEPUTY MANAGING EDITOR
TEL: 4462 7505
LOCAL NEWS SECTION
TEL: 4455 7743
BUSINESS NEWS SECTION
TEL: 4462 7535
SPORT NEWS SECTION
TEL: 4455 7745
EDITORIAL SECTION
TEL: 4455 7636
ONLINE SECTION
TEL: 4462 7501 email: info@pen.com.qa
PUBLIC RELATIONS
TEL: 4455 7613 email: pr@pen.com.qa
MARKETING
TEL: 4455 7657 email: marketing@pen.com.qa

ADVERTISING
TEL: 4455 7837 / 857
FAX: 4455 7870, email: adv@pen.com.qa
CLASSIFIED
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SUBSCRIPTION & DISTRIBUTION
TEL: 66766718
WhatsApp: 66766718, email: info@tawseelqatar.com
www.thepeninsula.qa

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

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+974 66986188 / 55698797

Qatar, Cuba: Distinguished, upgraded relations beefed up by high-level shared visits

QNA



The visit is anticipated to contribute to elevating the volume of investments and trade exchange between the two countries to achieve the aspirations of the leaderships and people of the two nations.

Within the framework of the State of Qatars endeavors to beef up relations with various world countries and build strategic and outstanding partnerships in a variety of fields, comes the visit of President of the Republic of Cuba H E Miguel Diaz-Canel to the State of Qatar.

The visit of the Cuban President to Doha and the discussions that will be held during this visit are anticipated to support and reinforce ties between the two nations at all levels, especially in economy, trade and investment, in addition to opening broader horizons.

The visit is anticipated to contribute to elevating the volume of investments and trade exchange between the two countries to achieve the aspirations of the leaderships of the two nations and their friendly peoples to peace, security, and prosperity.

The Qatari-Cuban relationship is based on the solid bonds of friendship whose foundation was laid by the Father H H Amir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, and the Cuban late President Fidel Castro Ruz. In 1989, the establishment of the diplomatic relations at the ambassadorial level between the two nations was announced, and the Republic of Cuba opened its embassy in Doha in 1994, while the State of Qatar opened its embassy in Havana in 2001, as the first Gulf state to open an embassy there.

The Qatari-Cuban ties are described as solid and outstanding seeking further cooperation and progress in multiple fields. These ties were promoted through the shared visits between the two countries at the highest levels which had primarily focused on upgrading the economic and investment relationships, chief amongst which was the visit of the Amir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani to Cuba in 2015.

That visit strikingly gave the Qatari-Cuban relations a new momentum and elevated them to an outstanding stage during which a memorandum of understanding for investment in the Republic of Cuba was signed offering the State of Qatar the opportunity for a 5-year investment worth $2 billion to achieve the shared benefits between the two nations. The relations between Doha and Havana regulate array of agreements and memorandums of understanding.

The relations between the two sides are solid at the political level, as the two nations are determined to coordinate with each other in international venues and have points of commonality towards numerous matters of international agenda to support international security and peace. At the economic level, the two nations seek to further develop the economic ties more effectively in sectors that concern the two sides such as health, tourism, and investments.

In May 2018, the 2nd round of political consultations between the ministries of foreign affairs in the two countries was held in Havana, during which bilateral relations and ways to support and develop them were discussed, in addition to discussing a broad range of issues of common interest.

In March 2023, Qatar Chamber discussed trade and economic ties between the State of Qatar and Cuba, avenues to reinforce them and cooperation between the private sectors of the two nations in a variety of economic sectors, especially investment. This came during the meeting held between First Vice-Chairman of Qatar Chamber Mohamed bin Twar Al Kuwari, and Deputy Minister of Foreign Trade and Investment of the Republic of Cuba H E Deborah Rivas Saavedra.

Saavedra expressed her countrys welcome to the Qatari investments calling on the Qatari businessmen to invest in Cuba where investment opportunities in multiple sectors exist, along with an electronic platform that includes a variety of economic sectors and investment opportunities, to which Qatari businessmen can access and learn about the available opportunities in Cuba.

Tourism sector in Cuba emerges as a promising sector that offers the potential to establish shared projects between the two nations. The Cuban side showcased a list of 16 hotel, agricultural, industrial and oil projects to the Qatari side, as well as civil aviation in which Qatar can invest in.

The Qatari-Cuban cooperation relationship was culminated in the inauguration of the Cuban Hospital at Dukhan area in Qatar in 2012 which remained a model to be emulated in cooperation between nations. The Cuban media circles described the hospital as an "icon of cooperation in the region".

In the context of the good relations between Qatar and Latin American countries, the Global Public Diplomacy Network led by Katara Cultural Village Foundation concluded the promotional campaign for the "Qatari Public Diplomacy in Latin America" which was launched with the participation of a host of Their Excellencies ambassadors, diplomats, media professionals, sports and art icons in Latin American countries, alongside major press institutions, media, and TV channels.

The campaign had contributed to promoting the bilateral and historical relations between Qatar, Cuba, and Latin American countries, along with its role in beefing up close cooperation between the two sides in a variety of fields. The campaign earned positive and long-term reactions in Cuban media circles and a warm welcome from the Cuban people who were fervently upbeat about this initiative.

The campaign included broadcasting programs on the comprehensive renaissance the State of Qatar is witnessing, the achievements made in various venues, as well as the bilateral, historical and outstanding relations between Doha and Latin American countries, in addition to streaming professional movies that narrate the initiatives launched by the network, along with their role in reinforcing bilateral relations among the member states and establishing communications bridges between nations and communities worldwide.

The movies had a profound impact in promoting Qatars posture as an attractive and pioneering tourism, cultural and sports destination. The campaign accentuated the Qatar- led preparations to host the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022.

In October 2022, the Cultural Village Foundation-Katara inaugurated the mural titled Friends, Qatar and Cuba, created by Cuban artist Michel Lopez during which the embassies of Cuba and Haiti in Qatar offered the Qatar National Library a combination of books of two thought leaders in the two countries within the framework of enhancing intercultural dialogue promoted by Qatar National Library.

In December 2019, Ambassador of the State of Qatar to the Republic of Cuba during that time, H E Abdullah bin Mohammed Al Derbasti, participated in a ceremony held by the Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the occasion of issuance of postage stamp to mark the 30th anniversary of the establishment of the diplomatic relations between the State of Qatar and the Republic of Cuba.

Israel is using same tactics in Gaza that Al Assad employed in Syria

DAANISH FARUQI — AL JAZEERA

The Israeli campaign of dehumanisation to justify the starvation and bombing of civilians in Gaza bears an uncanny similarity to the one used in Syria.

As the humanitarian pause took effect in Gaza, footage of the massive destruction in the northern part of the enclave has started to trickle in.

Seeing these images of devastation, one cannot but think of Thomas Friedman's reference to what he calls the "Hama rules" in an article he published with The New York Times on October 14.

A neologism he coined many years ago, it refers to then-Syrian President Hafez al-Assad's violent razing of the city of Hama in 1982 that killed more than 20,000 Syrians. Friedman argues that brute force commands legitimacy in the Middle East. This idea is deeply problematic, but the scale of destruction in Gaza suggests that the Israeli government and the military have embraced it. Indeed, Israel's war on Gaza bears striking similarities to events in Syria. But we need not go as far back as the 1980s to find those parallels.

In 2011, when Hafez's son, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, faced a nationwide uprising against his rule, he unleashed a violent campaign against the protesters that soon turned into a civil war. The tactics of collective punishment he used, aided and abetted by the systematic dehumanisation of the opposition by some parts of Syrian society, are similar to what we are seeing in Gaza today.

In the earliest stages of the conflict, Israel justified a complete siege on Gaza, cutting off the supply of food, water, electricity and fuel, through systematic dehumanisation of its residents. Defence Minister Yoav Gallant called the Palestinians "human animals", while Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu spoke of a "struggle between the children of light and the children of darkness". Such language used by Israeli officials appeared to make the use of starvation as a weapon of war acceptable. This sentiment seeped into social media where videos appeared of Israelis rapaciously mocking the residents of Gaza under siege by indulging in clean water or lavish meals. Some stooped even lower, producing racist vignettes making fun of Palestinian victims of Israeli bombardment.

And as Israeli military targets came to include Gaza's hospitals and other civilian structures, the dehumanisation campaign of the Palestinian population also expanded. The official government narrative, maintained by Netanyahu and others, states that "terrorists had used hospitals as military bases". Accordingly, medical staff became "terrorist collaborators" while patients and families who had sought refuge in medical facilities were – willing "human shields". Their deaths – even in the eyes of Israeli doctors – were therefore justified. But what seems lost in the present moment is that this campaign of dehumanisation is not unique. Since 2011, al-Assad has relied on eerily similar strategies to justify nearly identical military sieges and attacks on civilian infrastructure in rebel-held territories. The 2015 siege on the town of Madaya near Damascus bears a striking resemblance to the current Israeli weaponisation of starvation in Gaza. As the al-Assad regime dismissed the local residents as "agents of terror", Syrians in government-controlled areas bought into the narrative. As the people of Madaya were reduced to subsisting on leaves, Syrian social media was filled with images and videos of detractors enjoying lavish meals and mocking their starvation. The Twitter hashtag "solidarity with the siege of Madaya" was flooded with culinary content to further brutalise an already brutalised population under siege. More than 420 people died in Madaya, including dozens of children, as a result of the blockade.

The al-Assad regime continued this policy of "starve or surrender" in multiple rebel-held territories, including Aleppo, Ghouta, and Daraya, without any meaningful response from the international community.

In parallel, the al-Assad regime also targeted civilian infrastructure as a war tactic, especially hospitals. According to the International Rescue Committee, only 64 percent of hospitals and 52 percent of primary healthcare centres remain operational in Syria as a result of attacks on healthcare facilities. The al-Assad regime has justified these offensives under the nebulous banner of "countering terrorism", claiming that 119 healthcare facilities were "taken over by terrorist groups". But many of these facilities were put on a deconflicting list, shared with Damascus, and as the UN has pointed out, it was running at least one of them. An investigation by Human Rights Watch has also challenged the Syrian regime's claims, pointing out they could not find any evidence of military equipment or personnel near the hospitals when they were targeted.

Israel is currently playing by al-Assad's rules of war, in large part because to date the Syrian leader has not been held to account for those war crimes, or the dehumanisation of his people that enabled them.

On the contrary, al-Assad has emerged from isolation by the international community, particularly after the February 2023 earthquakes in Syria. He has ridden the wave of normalisation by attending Arab League summits and has even been invited to the upcoming United Nations Climate Change Conference in Dubai.

Indeed, the victims of the Syrian regime's brutality have recognised the parallels with Gaza. Zina Najjar, a Syrian activist, posted on X that what is transpiring currently in the besieged enclave is analogous to the events of Madaya eight years ago. Recollecting the brutal siege, Najjar warns that "international failure and silence" in Syria is encouraging the same crimes in Gaza.

STATUS OF OIL-RICH ESSEQUIBO

Venezuela holds referendum over Essequibo land dispute

AFP — CARACAS

Venezuelans began voting yesterday in a referendum that the government hopes will strengthen its century-old claim to the oil-rich Essequibo territory controlled by neighboring Guyana.

"Essequibo is ours!" say posters plastered on walls lining the streets in Caracas, part of an intensive campaign by the government of President Nicolas Maduro, who is seeking re-election next year.

"Today we are voting as Venezuela in just one colour, one feeling. Our vote is for Venezuela to be respected," Maduro told reporters after he voted at a military base. Voting started at 6am (1000 GMT) and was to end at 6pm (2200 GMT), with results expected in the early hours of morning.

The Maduro government has said it is not seeking justification to invade or annex the territory, as some in Guyana, a former British colony, fear.

Maduro's government has sharpened its rhetoric and conducted military exercises in the area.

And regardless of the outcome of the vote by around 20 million eligible Venezuelans, little will change in the short term: The people of Essequibo are not voting, and the referendum is nonbinding.

But tensions have been rising since Guyana took bids in September for several offshore oil exploration blocks, and after a major new find was announced in October. Its petroleum reserves are similar to those of Kuwait, with the highest reserves per capita in the world.

Meanwhile, Maduro's government has sharpened its rhetoric and conducted military exercises in the area. And Brazil has strengthened its own troop presence near the border with Venezuela, saying it is concerned by the "climate of tension." Venezuela has claimed the huge territory for decades -- even as its 160,000sqkm represent more than two-thirds of Guyana, and its population of 125,000 is one-fifth Guyana's total.

Caracas contends that the Essequibo River to the east of the region is the natural border between the two countries, as declared in 1777 under Spanish rule, and that Britain wrongly appropriated Venezuelan lands in the 19th century.

Guyana, however, asserts that the border was set in the British colonial era and was confirmed in 1899 by a court of arbitration. It says the International Court of Justice (ICJ), the UN's top judicial body, has validated this finding.

Guyana has asked the ICJ to block the referendum, saying it amounts to a violation of international rights, but in vain. On Friday, the ICJ called on Caracas to take no action that would modify the disputed lands -- but it did not mention the referendum. And Caracas had vowed to go ahead regardless.

"We believe that justice, not force, should be the arbiter of international disputes," Guyanese President Irfaan Ali said Friday from the United Arab Emirates, where he was attending the COP28 international climate summit.

Ali met there with British Foreign Minister David Cameron to discuss the controversy.

Maduro, for his part, lashed out at Ali on Friday, calling him "reckless (and) insolent" and suggesting he was working for US energy giant ExxonMobil.

The referendum covers five questions, including proposals for the creation of a Venezuelan province to be called "Guyana Essequibo," giving the inhabitants Venezuelan citizenship, as well as a call to reject the ICJ's jurisdiction.

The Maduro government expects an overwhelmingly positive result, strengthening its claim. Opposition politicians, most of whom also support the claim, have generally been reticent about the referendum.



Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro accompanied by his wife Cilia Flores waving at a polling station during a referendum on Venezuelan sovereignty over the Essequibo region controlled by neighbouring Guyana, in Caracas, yesterday.

Third-party candidate leaves Mexico's presidential race

AP — MEXICO CITY

A third-party candidate announced on Saturday he is leaving Mexico's 2024 presidential race, practically ensuring the country's next president will be a woman.

Samuel García, the governor of the northern border state of Nuevo Leon, said Saturday he won't run for president in the June 2 elections. He had been polling below 10% in the race, and was given almost no chance of actually winning.

That leaves only the ruling Morena party and the opposition coalition's candidates, both of whom are women. While García's small Citizen's Movement party could yet nominate another male candidate, García's troubled exit suggests the party won't be able to find anyone of much stature to run.

Gov García's decision came after one of the wilder chapters in Mexican politics. On Friday, the border state across from Texas briefly saw two interim governors designated to replace García, who had asked for a six-month leave of absence to campaign for president.

Mexican law requires any official to resign or take a leave at least six months before running for office. With the presidential elections on June 2, that meant Friday was the last day for García to do so. But in view of the conflict, García had to drop his presidential bid to put his state in order.

García had appointed one of his Cabinet members to serve as interim governor, and he was supposed to take over the job on Friday. But the state congress, where García's party is a minority, has the formal right to name the interim governor and chose an assistant prosecutor who isn't linked to García's party.

Angered by that decision, protesters apparently linked to García broke through doors of the state legislature building, took over the floor of the state congress and launched a smoke bomb.

The standoff - which also featured riot police and armored vehicles posted outside the governor's office at one point Friday - led García to announce he was abandoning his leave of absence and resuming his job as governor.

"Ï have decided not to participate in the campaign for president," García wrote in a decree announcing his decision.

García's decision will almost certainly be a disappointment for President Andrés Manuel López Obrador. López Obrador had openly expressed sympathy for García, whose Citizen's Movement party has been a sometimes ally of the president's Morena party.

López Obrador claims his sympathy for García stemmed from supposed attempts to keep the governor from running, which the president said paralleled his own experience in 2005 and 2006, when a court briefly stripped him of his right to hold office. But critics say López Obrador was encouraging García's doomed candidacy - as Mexican ruling parties have done frequently in the past - as a way to split the opposition vote.

Contaminants being removed from Chicago lot where migrants will stay

AP — CHICAGO

High levels of mercury and other contaminants are being removed from a vacant Chicago lot where a tent camp housing 2,000 migrants is planned, a report from a consultant hired by the city said.

The *Chicago Tribune* reported that the nearly 800-page assessment by Terracon Consultants released Friday night said high levels of mercury and other chemicals were being removed from the Brighton Park lot where workers had already begun building the giant tents for incoming migrants this week.

The document is at the heart of roiling controversy over the site and in spite of a repeated vow from Johnson to keep the public informed.

Local residents have been protesting the project, saying it doesn't meet zoning requirements and that the soil at the site, which has a long history of industrial use, is toxic.

But Mayor Brandon Johnson's office said that it was confident in moving ahead with the camp, citing the soil's removal as well as the use of an "engineered barrier" along the site.

"With the limited soil removal and placement and maintenance of the barrier, the site is safe for temporary residential use," Johnson's office said in a statement. More than 23,000 asylum-seekers have been bused to Chicago from Texas since August of last year. Other Democratic-led cities are grappling with similar influxes, including Denver, Houston, Los Angeles and New York.

Trump, DeSantis grasp for last-minute Iowa support before caucus

BLOOMBERG — FLORIDA

Former President Donald Trump rallied his campaign volunteers for Iowa's Republican Party caucuses on Jan. 15, while Florida Governor Ron DeSantis made good on his pledge to visit all of the state's 99 counties.

With a little more than a month to go, front-runner Trump is stepping up his efforts in Iowa ahead of the first GOP nominating contest of 2024. DeSantis has plowed resources into Iowa in a bid to stymie Trump's momentum.

"If you would, work really hard, make sure you are working that night, bring as many people as you can to vote and do the caucus like nobody has ever done the caucus before," Trump told a rally in Ankeny, north of Des Moines, on Saturday. "We have to win."

He began with critiques of President Joe Biden, slamming the administration's immigration and energy policies as he seeks to focus on their expected rematch in next November's presidential election. DeSantis, who polls suggest is Trump's closest competitor in Iowa, seems to be dropping "like a very, very sick bird," he said. Several towns over, DeSantis touted his visit of 99 counties, a tradition associated with Republican Senator Chuck Grassley. Joined by prominent state evangelical leader Bob Vander Plaats and Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds, whose endorsements he earned in November, DeSantis offered to move the US Department of Agriculture to Iowa if elected.

"I can say as part of our effort to take power out of Washington, DC, and move agencies in other parts of the country, we will answer the call and what people suggested here in Iowa," DeSantis told supporters in Newton, Iowa. "You guys will have first dibs on the Department of Agriculture. We'll send it to Iowa and you guys take care of it." Vander Plaats defended his endorsement of DeSantis over Trump, who opted to skip two events held by the evangelical leader in the past few months.

Trump's advisers have stepped up involvement in state operations and he has increased visits to Iowa in recent months. When Trump is occupied with court appearances, his campaign has deployed volunteers to small-town parades, festivals and events across the state and is ramping up ad spending.



Republican presidential candidate Florida Governor Ron DeSantis during a campaign rally in Newton, Iowa, yesterday. (AFP)

Beyoncé's *Renaissance* is No 1 at box office with $21m debut

AP — LOS ANGELES

Beyoncé ruled the box office this weekend. Her concert picture, *Renaissance: A Film by Beyoncé*," opened in first place with $21m in North American ticket sales, according to estimates from AMC Theatres yesterday.

The post-Thanksgiving, early December box office is notoriously slow, but *Renaissance* defied the odds. Not accounting for inflation, it's the first time a film has opened over $20m on this weekend in 20 years (since *The Last Samurai*).

Beyoncé wrote, directed and produced "*Renaissance*," which is focused on the tour for her Grammy-winning album. It debuted in 2,539 theaters in the US and Canada, as well as 94 international territories, where it earned $6.4m from 2,621 theaters.

"On behalf of AMC Theatres Distribution and the entire theatrical industry, we thank Beyoncé for bringing this incredible film directly to her fans," said Elizabeth Frank, AMC Theatres executive vice president of worldwide programming, in a statement.

"To see it resonate with fans and with film critics on a weekend that many in the industry typically neglect is a testament to her immense talent, not just as a performer, but as a producer and director." Though *Renaissance* did not come close to matching the $92.8m debut of *Taylor Swift: The Eras Tour* in October, it's still a very good start for a concert film. No one expected *Renaissance* to match *The Eras Tour*, which is wrapping up its theatrical run soon with over $250m globally. Prior to Swift, the biggest concert film debuts (titles held by Miley Cyrus and Justin Bieber for their 2008 and 2011 films) had not surpassed the unadjusted sum of $32m.

The 39-city, 56-show *Renaissance* tour, which kicked off in Stockholm, Sweden in May and ended in Kansas City, Missouri in the fall, made over $500m and attracted over 2.7 million concert-goers. Swift's ongoing *Eras Tour*, with 151 dates, is expected to gross some $1.4bn.

Both Beyoncé and Swift chose to partner with AMC Theatres to distribute their films, as opposed to a traditional studio. Both superstars have been supportive of one another, making splashy appearances at the other's premieres. Both had previously released films on Netflix (*Miss Americana* and *Homecoming*). And both are reported to be receiving at least 50% of ticket sales.

Movie tickets to the show were more expensive than average, around $23.32 versus Swift's $20.78, according to data firm EntTelligence.

Critics and audiences gave *Renaissance* glowing reviews - it's sitting at 100% on Rotten Tomatoes and got a coveted A+ CinemaScore from opening weekend audiences who were polled.

IN BRIEF

Nine killed, 15 injured in armed attack on Peru's mine

SPUTNIK—MEXICO CITY: A group of armed men attacked a mine of the Poderosa mining company in Peru's La Libertad region, took hostages and detonated explosives, killing nine people and injuring 15 others, the Peruvian Interior Ministry said yesterday.

"A group of armed criminals raided the facilities of Minera Poderosa, located in the province of Pataz, La Libertad region, violently breaching the internal security of the company and taking four people as hostages. During this reprehensible act, the individuals entered the mine by using explosive devices, which unfortunately led to the death of nine people and the injury of 15 others," the ministry said on X.

After the alarm was sounded, police special forces and investigators were dispatched to the mine. The law enforcers detained seven attackers on the spot and confiscated the remaining weapons and ammunition, the ministry said.

According to local media, the attack was carried out by illegal miners, allegedly linked to Venezuelan criminal organization Aragua Train.

Peru boosts Machu Picchu access to 5,600 visitors a day

AFP—LIMA: PERU is sharply boosting access to its top attraction Machu Picchu, officials said Saturday, in an effort to revive tourism that has yet to rebound from the pandemic.

Access to the Inca citadel has been increased to 4,500 per day "and on very specific dates may be increased to 5,600" from January 1, a Culture Ministry statement said.

The site currently allows 3,600 to 3,800 visitors per day. Last September Peru temporarily closed three sectors of Machu Picchu due to the impact of the heavy volume of visitors at the site.

Machu Picchu, 130km from Cusco, was built in the 15th century at an altitude of 2,500m on orders from the Inca ruler Pachacutec.

It is considered a marvel of architecture and engineering and was declared a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1981.

Tourism is key to Peru's economy, with the country attracting about 4.5 million visitors prior to the Covid pandemic in 2020.

It's expected to finish this year with about half that, 2.2 million. Known as "the lost city of the Incas," Machu Picchu was stumbled upon in 1911 by the American explorer Hiram Bingham.

Man fatally stabbed four family members in New York

AP—NEW YORK CITY: A man killed four family members, including two children, at their Queens home in New York City and stabbed two police officers who then shot him dead yesterday morning, officials said.

The suspect was identified as Courtney Gordon, a 38-year-old Bronx resident who had been visiting family at their home in the Far Rockaway neighborhood, police said. He was sent to a local hospital where he was pronounced dead.

Among the victims were a 12-year old boy, a 44-year old woman, and a male in his 30s who were pronounced dead at the scene. An 11-year old girl was found in front of the house and transported to a hospital where she was later pronounced dead. Police said they were all suspected to have died from stab wounds. Their identities have not yet been released.

The two police officers, one stabbed in the neck and chest area, and another slashed in the head are expected to recover.

Another woman, 61, was injured in the attack. She is in critical condition after suffering from multiple stab wounds.

Police had received a call from a young woman who said her cousin was killing her family at about 5:10am yesterday morning, officials said a press briefing.