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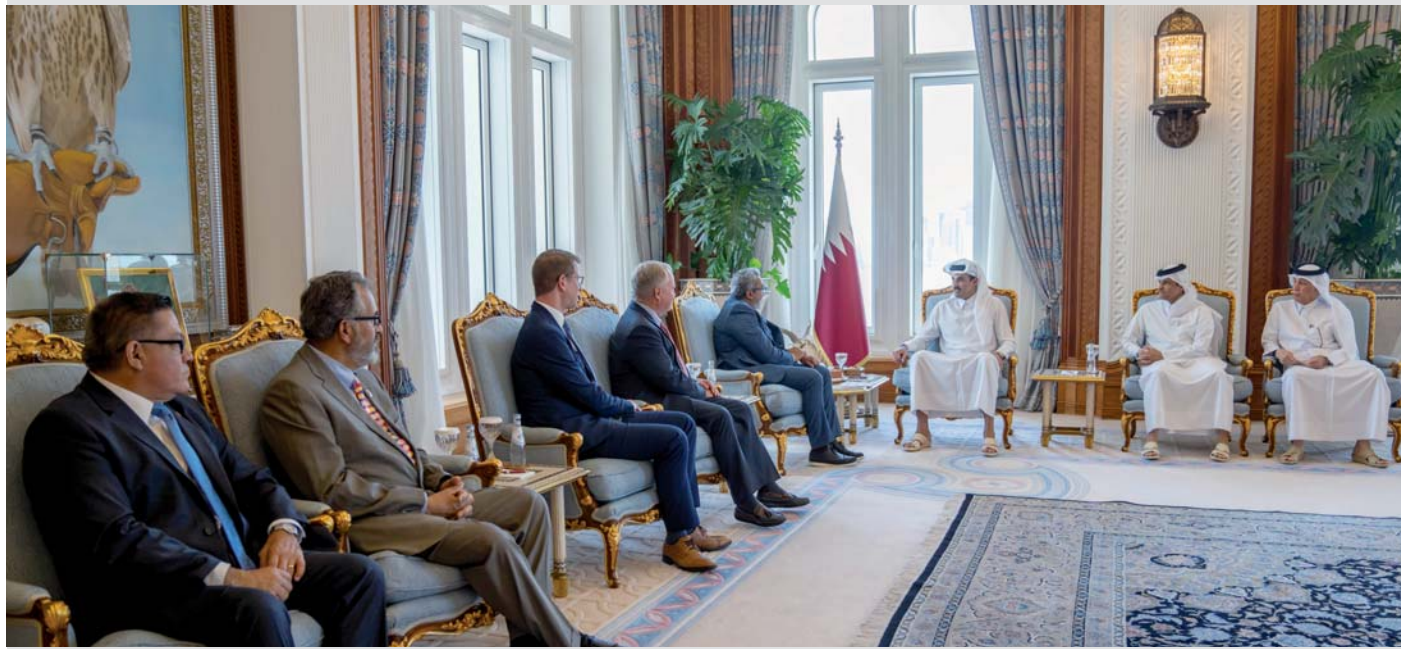
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DISCOVER INDIA



Amir meets US Congress members



Amir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani met at the Amiri Diwan yesterday with a number of Their Excellencies members of Congress of the United States of America, on the occasion of their visit to the country. His Highness met with Representative Salud Carbajal, Representative Dave Joyce, Representative Ami Bera, Representative Derek Kilmer, Representative Juan Vargas and Representative Lance Gooden. During the meeting, they discussed ties and strategic cooperation between the two countries in multiple fields, in addition to exchanging viewpoints on regional and global developments.

Qatar's travel and tourism sector to contribute QR90.8bn to economy in 2024

JOELYN BALUYUT
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: The World Travel & Tourism Council's (WTTC) 2024 Economic Impact Research (EIR) has forecast that the Qatar Travel and Tourism sector will contribute QR90.8bn to the country's economy, representing 11.3% of the total, and will provide more than 334,500 jobs across the country, which is 15.8% of the total workforce.

In 2023 the Gross domestic product (GDP) contribution of

the travel and tourism sector grew by 31% to reach a record-breaking QR81.2bn, representing 10.3% of Qatar's total economic output. This growth underscores the sector's significance to the national economy.

The sector also serves as an important source of employment, creating over 20,300 new jobs last year, bringing the total to nearly 286,000 nationwide.

"Spending by international travellers is expected to increase significantly this year,

with forecasts indicating a record spend of QR69.6bn this year, while domestic spending is projected to reach QR12bn," the report said.

WTTC President and CEO, Julia Simpson, said: "Qatar's Travel and Tourism sector is poised to break all records this year, highlighting its significance as a leading destination in the Middle East. The government's efforts and emphasis in collaboration will propel Qatar's Travel and Tourism growth, setting the stage to play a crucial

role in the national economic landscape, promising a future defined by prosperity and opportunity."

Qatar's tourism sector has witnessed robust growth in recent years. According to Qatar Tourism's latest data, from January to April this year, the number of international arrivals steadily increased, except for March.

In January, the country received 703,000 visitors, a 106% increase compared to last year. →P5

Electric buses help reduce 43 million kg carbon emissions

SANAULLAH ATAULLAH
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: A top official said that the Ministry of Transport's project to transition Qatar's public transport system to electric vehicles has reduced approximately 43 million kilograms of carbon emissions.

"The electric buses also have almost zeroed the noise pollution in a way that the manufacturers had to create an artificial bus sound to alert pedestrians that an electrified vehicle is headed in their direction," said Mowasalat (Karwa) Public Transport Director Ahmed Al Binali.

Speaking to Qatar Radio yesterday, he said that Mowasalat (Karwa) is operating over 900 electric buses across the country with an ambitious goal to convert all public transport vehicles into electric by 2030 following Qatar National Vision 2030.

"There are about 30 electric limousines and almost all Mowasalat (Karwa) taxis are hybrids powered by electricity and petrol. About 74 percent of the public transport fleet of the country has become electric. We are offering services for public transport across the country including Metro link services," said Al Binali.

He said that Mowasalat (Karwa) started using electric buses in 2022 for public transit

which helped reduce about 8 million kilogram carbon footprint. "More electric buses were added in 2023 which contributed to cutting carbon emission by 43 million kg," said Al Binali. He said that the figure shows the benefit of electric buses in preserving the environment as part of the sustainability goal of Qatar.

Speaking about autonomous vehicles, he said that Mowasalat (Karwa) tested autonomous bus three times in Doha. →P2



Mowasalat is operating over 900 electric buses across the country with an ambitious goal to convert all public transport vehicles into electric by 2030 following Qatar National Vision 2030.

Health Minister inaugurates Qatar National Blood Donation Center

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Minister for Public Health H E Dr. Hanan Mohamed Al Kuwari inaugurated the new Qatar National Blood Donation Center at Hamad Medical Corporation in the presence of Minister of State for Interior Affairs H E Sheikh Abdulaziz bin Faisal Al Thani and Chairman of the Board of Trustees of Sheikh Eid Charitable Foundation Dr. Mohammed Eid Al Thani yesterday.

During the event, it was revealed that two halls within the new facility will be named after H E Sheikh Eid bin Mohammad Al Thani in recognition of the support the Eid Charity provided to the new Center.

Following the inauguration ceremony, the attendees listened to presentations delivered by Hamad Nasser Al Khalifa,

The Qatar National Blood Donation Center will be the sole source for the provision of blood and blood components for all governmental and private hospitals in Qatar. The new Center will house 38 blood collection beds, an increase by more than triple the number of beds from the previous Blood Donor Center.

HMC's Chief of Health Facilities Development, and Dr. Einas Al Kuwari, Chairperson of HMC's Department of Laboratory Medicine and Pathology, about the features of the new building and the services it offers to the public.

H E Dr. Al Kuwari said the

opening of the Qatar National Blood Donation Center not only enhances the capability of HMC's Blood Donation Program, but also ensures a smoother and more comfortable experience for donors.

"Safe blood and blood products as well as their transfusion are a critical aspect of care in our healthcare system. They save lives and improve the health and quality of life for many patients every day," H E Dr. Al Kuwari said.

"The availability of an adequate and safe blood supply is crucial for various medical procedures, including surgeries, trauma care, and the treatment of chronic conditions such as cancer and blood disorders. Each blood donation serves as a powerful lifeline to many patients across our healthcare system," added H.E. Dr. Al Kuwari.

The Qatar National Blood



Minister for Public Health H E Dr. Hanan Mohamed Al Kuwari, Minister of State for Interior Affairs H E Sheikh Abdulaziz bin Faisal Al Thani with other dignitaries and officials touring the new Qatar National Blood Donation Center at Hamad Medical Corporation.

Donation Center will be the sole source for the provision of blood and blood components for all governmental and private hospitals in Qatar. The new Center will house 38 blood collection

beds, an increase by more than triple the number of beds from the previous Blood Donor Center.

The new Center offers Therapeutic Plasma Exchange

procedures for patients requiring plasma therapy and provides dedicated spaces for therapeutic phlebotomy, stem cell collection, and platelet apheresis. →P2

Promenade for people with visual impairment opens at Al Wakra beach

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: A sustainable marine promenade for people with visual impairments opened yesterday at Al Wakra Public Beach. The 500m-long walkway is equipped with signboards in Braille and is made of recycled materials considered the first of its kind in the region.

Director General of Al Wakra Municipality Eng Mohammed Hassan Al Nuaimi inaugurated the project. The opening ceremony was attended by Ambassadors of Belgium and France to Qatar, Assistant Undersecretary for Public Services Affairs at



the Ministry of Municipality Abdullah Ahmed Al Karani, Assistant Undersecretary for Family Affairs at the

Ministry of Social Development and Family Sheikhha Sheikhha bint Jassim bin Hamad Al Thani, and Chairman of the Board of Directors of Friends of Nature Dr. Saif Al Hajri.

Speaking at the event, Al Nuaimi said that the project comes within the framework of strengthening the institutional partnership with the private sector to serve all segments of society and meet their desired aspirations, including the category of people with visual impairment.

He said that the initiative also aims to improve the quality of life and contribute to the implementation of joint initiatives and projects that keep pace

with the highest standards of environmental sustainability and encourage environmentally friendly practices, in addition to contributing to the development and rehabilitation of beaches and their service facilities and providing the opportunity for visitors with special needs to practice walking, enjoyment and recreation.

Head of the Sustainability Projects Unit in Al Wakrah Municipality Eng Soha Mahmoud Tufiliyah said that the sustainable sea walkway represents the second phase of a project to develop a sustainable private beach that serves people with disabilities of all categories. →P2

Peninsula banking

Qatar's resilient banking sector positioned for continued growth

Included with today's edition is a special supplement

HBKU holds graduation ceremony for Class of 2024

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Speaker of the Shura Council H E Hassan bin Abdulla Al Ghanim, and Vice Chairperson and CEO of Qatar Foundation (QF) and Chairperson of HBKU Board of Trustees H E Sheikha Hind bint Hamad Al Thani witnessed graduation ceremony for Hamad Bin Khalifa University's Class of 2024 yesterday.

Ministers, officials, HBKU's senior leadership and deans of its six colleges, members of the university's staff and faculty, and the families and friends of the graduates also attended the graduation, held at the Qatar National Convention Centre.

HBKU awarded degrees to 247 students including 142 female and 105 male graduates — 61 of which were Qatari citizens.

HBKU President Dr. Ahmad M. Hasnah said: "The challenges ahead of you are great, yet the hope we have in you matches these challenges. Set ambitious goals and let your aspirations transcend personal achievements, for history only remembers those with altruistic hands and those whose influence goes beyond individual pursuits".

In their remarks, the keynote speaker, Dr. Ghassan Abu-Sittah, Rector of the University of Glasgow, said: "What



Speaker of the Shura Council H E Hassan bin Abdulla Al Ghanim (fourth right); Minister of Environment and Climate Change H E Dr. Abdullah bin Abdulaziz bin Turki Al Subaie (second right); Minister of Education and Higher Education H E Buthaina bint Ali Al Jabr Al Nuaimi (fifth right); Minister of Social Development and Family H E Maryam bint Ali bin Nasser Al Misnad (first right); Vice-Chairperson and CEO of Qatar Foundation and Chairperson of HBKU Board of Trustees, H E Sheikha Hind bint Hamad Al Thani (third right); and other dignitaries at the HBKU Class of 2024 graduation ceremony held yesterday.

we have learned from the war in Gaza is that in order to erase a people, you must first start with their universities. And to erase a nation, you must end the education process."

Speaking to his peers, the student speaker, Abdulrahman Al Shafi, a graduate from the Master of Public Policy programme, said: "We stand ready to embark on our new journey with determination and

ambition while striving to realize our aspirations and uplift our societies. With the theme of our graduation ceremony being "Education for Peace, Education for Humanity" we move forward today with the firm belief that education is the most potent catalyst for the change we seek in our world."

The graduates completed programs from the university's six colleges: the College of

Islamic Studies (CIS), College of Humanities and Social Sciences (CHSS), College of Science and Engineering (CSE), College of Law (CL), College of Health and Life Sciences (CHLS), and the College of Public Policy (CPP). Its 41 academic programmes span multiple disciplines aligning with five focus areas: Precision Health, Artificial Intelligence, Progressive Education, Sustainability, and Social

Progress.

This year's graduation ceremony also featured the HBKU Excellence Awards, which acknowledge remarkable achievements by HBKU faculty. H E Sheikha Hind bint Hamad Al Thani presented the awards onstage in three categories: the Research Excellence Award; the Teaching Excellence Award; and the Service Excellence Award.

Dr. Amine Bermak, Professor and Associate Dean, CSE, and Dr. Ahmet Aysan, Professor, CIS, were both named recipients of the Research Excellence Award. Dr. Georgios Dimitropoulos, Associate Professor and Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, CL, was honoured with the Teaching Excellence Award, and Dr. Evren Tok, Associate Dean of Community Engagement and Associate Professor, CPP, was presented with the Service Excellence Award.

Noting the importance of the Awards, Dr. Michael Benedik, Provost, HBKU, said: "Our award recipients embody the commitment all of our faculty have towards academic excellence in their scholarly work, dedication to our students and their intellectual development, and the significant impact our faculty have in enhancing the university, our local community and their academic disciplines. My heartfelt congratulations to each of this year's recipients."

Shura Council Speaker meets UK Ambassador

DOHA: Speaker of the Shura Council H E Hassan bin Abdulla Al Ghanim met Ambassador of the United Kingdom to Qatar H E Neerav Patel yesterday. During the meeting, they discussed ties between Qatar and UK in parliamentary field, and ways to strengthen them. — QNA

Health Minister opens blood donation center

FROM PAGE 1

Its advanced facilities will house nine male and three female medical interview/assessment rooms, 18 male and eight female donation beds, and 12 beds for platelet collection. The new Qatar National Blood Donation Center will enable the freezing of rare blood groups and rare phenotypes as well as red cell genotyping in the near future, said Dr. Einas Al Kuwari. "The shelf life of blood is 42 days from the date of collection, so having a regular source of blood donations is vital. One unit of blood donated may benefit at least three patients if used as separate blood components," Dr. Einas Al Kuwari added. "We thank regular blood donors for their contribution and look forward to welcoming them to this new state-of-the-art Center."



Transport Minister, German MP discuss cooperation

Minister of Transport H E Jassim Saif Ahmed Al Sulaiti met Member of the German Parliament (the Bundestag) H E Julia Klöckner yesterday. The meeting discussed aspects of cooperation between Qatar and Germany in transportation, and ways to develop and enhance them, particularly in terms of ecofriendly and self-driving mobility. German Ambassador to Qatar H E Lothar Freischlager also attended the meeting.

Prime Minister of Malaysia arrives on state visit



Prime Minister of Malaysia H E Anwar Ibrahim arrived in Doha yesterday on a state visit to the country. The Prime Minister and the accompanying delegation were welcomed upon arrival at Doha International Airport by Minister of State for Foreign Affairs H E Sultan bin Saad Al Muraikhi, Ambassador of Qatar to Malaysia H E Salah bin Mohammed Al Sorour, and Ambassador of Malaysia to Qatar H E Zamshari bin Shaharan.

QFFD explores ways to support Uzbekistan's historical religious and cultural facilities

TASHKENT: Director-General of Qatar Fund for Development (QFFD) H E Khalifa bin Jassim Al Kuwari discussed with Uzbek institutions ways of supporting and developing historical religious and cultural facilities in Uzbekistan.

A delegation from QFFD made a field visit to Uzbekistan, and visited a number of important Islamic sites in Tashkent, Samarkand and Bukhara.

During the three-day visit, the QFFD Director-General also met Executive Director of the Art and Culture Development Foundation of Uzbekistan H E Gayane Umerova, and General Manager of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture H E Luis Monreal. The meeting discussed aspects of joint cooperation between the two sides. The visit affirms strong relations between the two friendly countries, and reflects QFFD's interest in supporting the cultural development sector and preserving community heritage. — QNA

QRDI Council partners with QEF 2024 to deliver 'Innovation Day'

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: The Qatar Research, Development, and Innovation (QRDI) Council is partnering with Bloomberg Media and Media City Qatar as the Innovation Sponsor for the Qatar Economic Forum (QEF) 2024, being held from May 14 to 16, 2024.

On the event's third day, the QRDI Council will deliver the "Innovation Day," featuring various sessions and discussions dedicated to science, technology, and innovation.

In alignment with the Third Qatar National Development Strategy (NDS3), this year's joint efforts focus on innovation as a key element in equipping the country's new specialized economic clusters with



technology-based competitive advantages while addressing national challenges that demand innovative solutions. QRDI Council has extended invitations to a

broad spectrum of stakeholders within the RDI ecosystem to participate in the sessions and discussions.

On Innovation Day, several speakers from different sectors across the RDI ecosystem will gather to conduct discussions and breakout sessions on utilizing innovation, technology development, and RDI talent to reinforce stable economic growth for a better and more sustainable future.

This year, the fourth Qatar Economic Forum, powered by Bloomberg, is focusing on the main topics driving global conversations and spotlighting the region's rising prominence, where ambition converges with capital, key states are strategically deploying wealth to enhance their global influence, diversify economies, and gain international prominence.

Electric buses help reduce 43 million kg carbon emissions

FROM PAGE 1

"We tested an autonomous bus at Lusail Depot where some people were transported safely. Another test was made at Qatar Foundation for a week where we had very exciting experiences," said Al Binali. "We wish to have autonomous buses operating across the country."

To a question about localising technologies, he said that Mowasalat (Karwa) is coordinating with the Ministry of Transport on a weekly basis to implement the vision of the ministry and the country in this

regard and other projects.

Speaking about the expansion of Mowasalat (Karwa) fleet to meet the growing demand of the country, he said: "We are coordinating with a company in Oman for making buses. We are also working with a Chinese company to provide electric buses."

Regarding the economic benefit of electric buses, he said the electric buses powered by battery have low maintenance costs compared to diesel-powered buses.

He said that electric buses

cannot show economic benefit in the first year but after three or four years they save operation cost significantly due to low maintenance.

With a focus on sustainable mobility, Mowasalat (Karwa) has electrified a large portion of its bus fleet, ensuring zero emissions and minimal noise pollution.

The electric buses are fully customised to handle the demands of street and weather conditions in Qatar and are equipped with a 350 kWh lithium-ion battery, the latest and safest proven battery

technology in the automotive industry, with an average reach of more than 200km per full charge.

Strict compliance with the most comprehensive safety standards and a local inspection process ensures that the technical and operational aspects follow all regulations.

Mowasalat (Karwa) constantly pushes the agenda for digital solutions to improve operational efficiency, which is also a determining factor for cleaner transportation and a healthier environment for the community.

21st DJWE to take place in May 2025

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Qatar Tourism announced a significant change for the 2025 edition of the Doha Jewellery and Watches Exhibition (DJWE). Traditionally held in February, the next DJWE will take place from May 5 to 11, 2025.

Recognised as one of the most prestigious events in the world of luxury jewellery and watches, DJWE has been a highlight on the global calendar for industry professionals, collectors, and enthusiasts alike.

The decision to move the event to May is aimed at enhancing the overall experience for participants and ensuring the exhibition continues to set new standards of excellence. The rescheduling of DJWE 2025 to May will provide exhibitors with an extended timeframe to prepare their latest collections and innovations, while also allowing attendees more time to plan their participation in this premier event.

Registration for sheep meat subsidy for Eid Al Adha open

DOHA: Registration for a national initiative to encourage local production and subsidise sheep meat prices for this year's Eid Al Adha is open from May 9 to 30, according to a statement by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

Launched in collaboration with the Ministry of Municipality, the move is part of the keenness to encourage and support livestock breeders and farm owners with the aim of increasing local sheep production, and preserving

Qatar's commercial and economic environment.

The statement added that the initiative would create a balance between supply and demand, contributing to price stability in the markets and guarantees the rights of citizens to get meat at reasonable prices.

Breeders can register electronically or through government service centres nationwide and send their inquiries via the Ministry of Municipality's customer service contact centre. — QNA

Promenade for people with visual impairment opens at Al Wakra beach

FROM PAGE 1

She said that the project began in 2022 by establishing a special sea walkway that connects people with mobility disabilities and the elderly to the nearest point to the sea using environmentally friendly materials as per international specifications.

In April 2022, Al Wakra Municipality opened a sustainable sea promenade for people with disabilities and the elderly, 85m long and 2m wide, and equipped with

service facilities in accordance with high-quality sustainability standards.

The project succeeded in attracting many visitors from the elderly and people with disabilities, in addition to implementing many sustainability projects and initiatives that contributed to Al Wakra Municipality receiving the UNESCO Learning Cities Award for the year 2021, making Al Wakra the first Gulf city to win this title.



Prime Minister discusses cooperation with Malaysia, Maldives FMs

Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs H E Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani meeting with Minister of Foreign Affairs of Malaysia H E Mohamad Hasan at the Amiri Diwan yesterday. They discussed cooperation between the two countries and ways to strengthen them, in addition to the latest developments in the Gaza Strip and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. RIGHT: H E the Prime Minister meeting with Minister of Foreign Affairs of Maldives H E Moosa Zameer at the Amiri Diwan yesterday. The two sides discussed relations between the two countries and ways to support and develop them in various fields, in addition to several regional and international issues of mutual interest.

Minister of Interior meets US official

Minister of Interior and Commander of the Internal Security Force (Lekhwiya) H E Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani met yesterday with US Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Export Administration H E Thea Rozman Kendler. The meeting discussed a host of topics of mutual interest.



Al Khater meets Foreign Minister of Malaysia

DOHA: Minister of State for International Cooperation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs H E Lolwah bint Rashid Al Khater met yesterday in Doha with Minister of Foreign Affairs of Malaysia H E Mohamed Hassan.

The meeting touched on the bilateral cooperation between the two countries, particularly in the humanitarian and development fields. They also discussed the latest developments in the Gaza Strip and the occupied Palestinian territories, particularly ways to facilitate the entry of humanitarian aid. — QNA

MoFA spokesperson meets US Congress delegation

DOHA: Spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr. Majed Mohammed Al Ansari met yesterday with a delegation of senior members of Congress of the friendly United States of America. The two sides discussed the close strategic relations between Qatar and the United States, and the latest developments in the Gaza Strip, especially joint mediation efforts to end the war on the Strip. They also tackled Qatari mediation efforts on the Russian-Ukrainian crisis, Afghanistan, and Venezuela. — QNA

Doha Forum participates in UN Civil Society Conference in Nairobi

NAIROBI: The Doha Forum participated in the United Nations Civil Society Conference, which was held in Nairobi, Kenya, over two days.

In this context, Director General of the Doha Forum, Maha Al Kuwari, participated in a workshop entitled "Impact Coalition on AI &

Cyber-Tech Governance." The discussions focused specifically on artificial intelligence (AI) and cyber technology as tools for solving global and local problems.

They also highlighted the AI governance outcomes outlined in the Doha Forum's report titled "Future of International

Cooperation Report 2023." The discussions addressed various issues, including improving global governance of AI and cyber technologies to expand opportunities for countries to exploit the potential benefits of these powerful technologies while mitigating their risks and examining potential

challenges, threats, and opportunities.

In a statement, Maha Al Kuwari explained that the Doha Forum's 2023 report examined the effective use of AI and cyber technologies in solving global and regional problems, noting that these technologies can also pose serious challenges.

Al Kuwari highlighted the report's findings on three key principles: safety, sustainability, and inclusion, considering them essential necessities for all countries and organizations. She pointed out that in the context of potential partnerships among stakeholders, there is a need to establish a framework for global

collective action. The Doha Forum, which will take place from December 7-8, 2024, regularly participates in conferences and discussions worldwide throughout the year, culminating in its convening in Doha under the slogan of Diplomacy, Dialogue, and Diversity. — QNA

National Archives of Qatar organises seminar at DIBF

DOHA: As part of its participation in the 33rd Doha International Book Fair (DIBF), which continues until May 18, the National Archives of Qatar organized a seminar entitled "National Archives of Qatar: A Landmark in Preserving Documentary Heritage and National Identity" on the main stage of the exhibition.

In statements to Qatar News Agency (QNA), Secretary-General of the National Archives of Qatar, Ahmed Abdullah Ali Al Jibran Al Buainain, said that the National Archives of Qatar's participation in the Doha International Book Fair with a special pavilion and the organization of a seminar aims to introduce its role and educate individuals about the document, in addition to answer the public's inquiries and its prominent role in preserving heritage.

The seminar dealt with the National Archives of Qatar's tasks and competencies, its importance, and its role with the relevant authorities in the state, as its role now is not limited to historical matters.

Al Buainain added that the doors of the National Archives of Qatar will be opened to the public in the coming period to benefit from the services it provides.

He pointed out that the seminar dealt with the National Archives of Qatar's tasks and competencies, its importance, and its role with the relevant authorities in the state, as its role today is not limited to historical

matters, but it also has tasks in institutional documentation, as well as documenting private documents held by individuals.

For her part, Acting Director of the Public Relations and Communication Department at the National Archives of Qatar, Noura Al Qubaisi, said that this is the first participation of the National Archives of Qatar in the Doha International Book Fair, as it aims to introduce individuals and all segments of society to the role entrusted to it.

She added that one of the most important things that the National Archives of Qatar is keen to convey through its participation in the exhibition is to educate individuals about the document and the importance of preserving it. — QNA

Qatar Airways Group creates flagship Leadership Programme for national employees

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Qatar Airways Group has introduced a new leadership programme aimed at cultivating the next generation of National talent to build a pool of high-performing future business leaders.

A key focus of the programme is to enhance the leadership skills and capabilities of nationals, while solving real-life business problems, preparing them to work in executive positions across the business. The project is tailored to complement the Group's existing, highly successful Al Darb Qatarisation programme offering.

Expressing his enthusiasm for the initiative, Qatar Airways Group Chief Executive Officer, Engr. Badr Mohammed Al Meer, said: "Nurturing and developing National employees at all levels of the business is something which has been at the forefront of our talent development strategy for many years."

"Our Al Darb programme has already provided a solid and enduring platform that has made significant strides in this commitment, but we are con-



A key focus of the programme is to enhance the leadership skills and capabilities of nationals, while solving real-life business problems, preparing them to work in executive positions across the business.

stantly evaluating and identifying new and innovative ways to take these efforts to the next level. "The leadership programme will not only enable us foster greater support for top-performing National talent across the Group, it will also serve as a test case for similar initiatives among other employers throughout the State of Qatar."

FREE VEHICLE RECALL

وزارة التجارة والصناعة
Ministry of Commerce and Industry
دولة قطر - دولة قطر



Jeep Grand Cherokee

Manufacturing Year 2021- 2023

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We wish them continued success and progress

The Peninsula

Qatar's travel, tourism sector to contribute QR90.8bn to economy in 2024: Report

FROM PAGE 1

In February, 596,000 visitors, a 53% increase; in March, 329,000 visitors, a -24% decrease; and in April, 382,000 visitors, an 18% increase. The main point of entry for travellers is by air, followed by land and sea. Qatar aims to welcome six million tourists by 2030 and increase the sector's contribution to GDP from 7% to 12%. With the country surpassing four million visitors in 2023, exceeding annual visitor numbers from the past five years, these objectives seem well within reach.

Another factor that will contribute to the increase in travellers coming to Qatar this year is the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Grand Tours

Qatar aims to welcome six million tourists by 2030 and increase the sector's contribution to GDP from 7% to 12%.

visa. This multi-entry visa allows travellers to move freely among the six GCC countries: Qatar, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, and Bahrain.

Travellers will be able to seamlessly travel and will have the freedom to spend over 30 days in the countries included in the visa. The system is expected to be implemented by the end of the year, as government efforts continue to strengthen ties and prepare the financial infrastructure for the convenience of travellers.

Minister of Municipality meets mayors of US Cities

DOHA: Minister of Municipality H E Abdullah bin Hamad bin Abdullah Al Attiyah met a group of mayors from the US cities, who are going to participate in the Qatar Economic Forum 2024 (QEF) from May 14 to 16.

During the meeting, they discussed avenues of cooperation between the Ministry of Municipality (MME) and the US cities in areas of shared interest, particularly smart cities and upgrading infrastructure, municipal services, agriculture, food security and waste management.

The meeting brought together Mayor of Sterling Heights in Michigan, Michael C. Taylor; Mayor of the City of Boca Raton in Florida, Scott Singer; Mayor of Rochester Hills in Michigan, Bryan Barnett; Mayor of Albuquerque City in New Mexico, Tim Keller; and Mayor of Dearborn in Michigan, Abdullah Hammoud. — QNA



Minister of Municipality H E Abdullah bin Hamad bin Abdullah Al Attiyah with the mayors.



Minister of State meets Swiss Ambassador

Amir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani received a written message from President of the Swiss Confederation H E Viola Amherd, pertaining to bilateral relations. The message was received by Minister of State for Foreign Affairs H E Sultan bin Saad Al Muraikhi during his meeting with Ambassador of the Swiss Confederation to Qatar H E Florence Tinguely Mattli yesterday.

Msheireb Properties receives RoSPA Gold Award for Health and Safety Excellence

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Msheireb Properties announced its RoSPA Gold Award win for outstanding health and safety performance in the real estate sector, marking the second time the company has received this recognition following its 2018 win under the "Construction Sector" category.

The recent award highlights Msheireb Properties' continued commitment to maintaining the highest standards of health and safety practices across its operations.

The RoSPA (Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents) Health and Safety Awards, the UK's largest occupational health and safety awards programme, recognise organisations that demonstrate a strong commitment to health and safety management. Run by RoSPA, a non-profit organisation that has been in operation for more than 100



years, the awards programme is one of the most robust of its kind globally. Receiving the RoSPA Gold Award is a testament to Msheireb Properties' steadfast focus on prioritising the well-being of its employees, stakeholders, and the community.

Engr. Ali Al Kuwari, CEO of Msheireb Properties, expressed his gratitude for the recognition, saying: "We are honoured to receive the RoSPA Gold Award once again. The well-being of our employees, stakeholders, and the community remains our top priority, and this award signals the indelible importance of upholding the highest safety standards across our assets."

Engr. Faisal AlMalki, COO of Msheireb Properties, detailed strategies the company uses to maintain its safety record, particularly within its flagship project, Msheireb Downtown Doha.

"We have made use of the latest technology to ensure the safety of our people and our properties. One example is the newly installed Online Automated Permit Work System, which has been expanded to include events management safety helping reduce human error and streamline logistical operations. This system ensures broad and enhanced visibility and enforcement of safety standards throughout the district."

Msheireb Properties remains committed to its mission of transforming urban living, improving the overall quality of life, and instilling a culture of safety and well-being for all those who live, work, and visit its properties.

UDST launches seven new degree programmes

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: University of Doha for Science and Technology (UDST) announced the launch of seven new programmes that were created to address the market needs and contribute to economic growth in Qatar and the world.

The list of programmes includes a Master of Science in Process Safety launched at the College of Engineering and Technology. A Bachelor of Science in Nursing with three tracks at the College of Health Sciences. The first one admits students who are high school graduates, the second one admits registered nurses with a diploma to pursue their bachelor's degree and the third one is dedicated for licensed practical nurses who wish to pursue their Bachelor of Science in Nursing.

The College of Computing and Information Technology is offering a Master of Science in

Artificial Intelligence and Cognitive Cybersecurity in addition to a combined Arabic and English track in the Bachelor of Science in Digital Communication and Media Production. The College of Business is offering a Bachelor of Business Administration in Logistics and Supply Chain Management and a Master of Science in Digital Marketing and Entrepreneurship.

All new programmes are available for the Fall 2024 semester and are open for admission.

Dr. Saleem Al Naemi, President of UDST, said: "The University has launched its new programmes after a comprehensive field study that brings together specialists, leaders from the industry and the academic world to develop curricula and courses that prepare students not only for the current job market needs but also for future demands. We are also pleased to witness the

awareness that the new generation and their parents have about the importance of applied education. Our students learn in simulated environments and get the chance to experience the professional world through our partners' network as well. It is through a critical and integrative learning experience that UDST builds graduates with employable skills."

The university has highlighted the importance of these programmes in various aspects. The Master of Science in Process Safety programme was developed after a field study showed a significant demand for graduates and specialists in process safety, particularly following Qatar's largest expansion in its history for the production of liquefied natural gas. The programme addresses the need to build local capacity to manage these massive expansions.

Additionally, the Bachelor of Science in Nursing programme

was created in response to the substantial global and local demand for nurses, estimated at about 5.9 million worldwide. It contributes to providing more nurses and upgrading the skills of current nurses by enhancing their credentials from Practical Nurse to Registered Nurse and increasing their academic qualifications from diploma-prepared RN to Bachelor-prepared RN. The Master of Science in Artificial Intelligence and Cognitive Cybersecurity programme has been designed within the framework of Qatar Vision 2030. The country is adopting emerging technologies and extensive digital transformation initiatives through its national programmes, necessitating specialists in this field to address the workforce market gap in AI and enhance cybersecurity specialists' capabilities.

The Bachelor of Business Administration in Logistics and Supply Chain Management with a concentration in Marine



Logistics aims to produce specialists capable of addressing modern challenges in the broad logistics sector, including maritime logistics. It integrates core business administration principles such as HR, Marketing, Accounting, and Finance, with a particular focus on the maritime field.

The Master of Science in Digital Marketing and Entrepreneurship focuses on key business skills related to technology, business research, design thinking, and innovation.

It includes courses like Strategic Marketing Management, Digital Media, Entrepreneurial Marketing, Strategic Brand Management, and more.

And, the combined Arabic and English track in the Bachelor of Science in Digital Communication and Media Production is designed to respond to the needs of Qatar media market to attract more Qatari students and to equip graduates with the necessary skills to deploy the latest digital technologies in media production.

Session at DIBF discusses role of digital media in encouraging youth to read

DOHA: The Qatari Media Centre of the Ministry of Culture organised a panel of discussion on the role of digital media in encouraging youth to read at the cultural salon of the 33rd Doha International Book Fair (DIBF).

Journalist Dr. Abdullah Faraj, linguist Dr. Ahmed Al Janabi, and Assistant Professor of Broadcast and Digital Journalism at Qatar University Dr. Mohsen Al Afranji participated in the panel discussion.

Dr. Abdullah Faraj addressed the importance of reading in preparing new youth. He also discussed the reasons for decline in reading printed books in this era and its impact on the current generation. He said that the media, particularly digital media, can contribute to creating a reading generation, given its capabilities, as well as its widespread use by new generations.

Dr. Ahmed Al Janabi talked about the need for educators, intellectuals, and content makers to have many skills that can help

form the appropriate conditions to create a generation linked to reading. He pointed to the possibility of benefiting from digital development in directing young people toward reading despite the dominance of different types of content provided through those platforms.

Dr. Mohsen Al Afranji emphasised that the media, through the various means it provides, still has an influence on society and its leadership, indicating that the relationship between the media and reading is a complementary relationship, explaining how the media has contributed to shaping societies.

Al Afranji also discussed the characteristics of digital media that qualify it to play a major role in directing young people toward reading, urging publishing houses to take advantage of the characteristics of digital media to disseminate cognitive content.

On the other hand, as part of the activities accompanying the DIBF, a workshop on effective

communication skills was presented by trainer Manar Al Kahlot. The workshop focused on effective communication skills as an important skill at the present time and how essential it is for the individual to possess it, especially since there are some people who may face problems when communicating with others.

Manar Al Kahlot said that the current generations need to have these skills in light of the continuous developments that life is witnessing around us, especially at the technological level. She stressed that they are skills that do not stop at a certain age, but rather that people continue to acquire them for life, explaining that one of the important skills is training and development.

She added that the workshop focused on the different types of effective communication, including written communication and visual communication in particular, which are used and dealt with on a daily basis in our lives. — QNA

Two new members join Qatar Internet Exchange Point

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: The Qatar Internet Exchange Point (QIXP) has been joined by the Packet Clearing House (PCH) — which operates the world's first and largest Domain Name System content delivery network — and Zenlayer, the world's first hyperconnected cloud, alongside a group of entities representing service providers, academic institutions, and other local entities.

QIXP is a non-profit carrier-neutral Internet Exchange Point. It was established to develop the internet and digital infrastructure in Qatar. It enables internet service providers, digital content providers, academic institutions and both government and private entities to exchange local data and information over the internet within Qatar, instead of exchanging it outside the country. This improves the speed of access to this data and information by end users.



Ali Al Suwaidi, Director of the Technical Affairs Department at CRA

"We are pleased to welcome the two new members to QIXP, which will benefit all QIXP's members. Localizing data traffic to the members will contribute to improving the overall quality of the internet and ensure faster and more secure access to the hosted digital content," said Ali Al Suwaidi, Technical Affairs Department Director, Communications Regulatory Authority (CRA), and QIXP Steering Committee Chairman.

He added: "The QIXP contributes to providing

advanced infrastructural and informational frameworks, developing the Information and Communication Technology sector, and building a knowledge-based economy that contributes to diversifying the local economy. This supports the Qatar National Vision 2030 and the Third Qatar National Development Strategy, which include providing world-class telecom services and improving the quality of life for citizens and residents."

The QIXP Steering Committee was established by Cabinet Decision No. (24) of 2018.

It aims to leverage the country's existing infrastructure through which the Internet Service Providers' systems and the content delivery network exchange the internet traffic.

To achieve this, the committee has worked on renewing QIXP's infrastructure, expanding to three data centers in multiple geographical locations.

Gaza death toll tops 35,000 as Israel pushes deeper into Rafah

GAZA: The number of casualties due to the Israeli aggression on the Gaza enclave since October has risen to 35,034 martyrs and 78,755 wounded, Ministry of Health in Gaza reported yesterday.

The Ministry said the Israeli occupation soldiers committed eight massacres against families in the enclave during the past 24 hours, of whom 63 martyrs and 114 injured were whisked off to hospitals.

The Ministry of Health in Gaza urged the relatives of martyrs and those who went missing during the war on Gaza to complete their data to fulfil all data requirements through the Ministry's records.

Israeli forces pushed deeper into Gaza's southern city of Rafah yesterday.

Rafah is considered the last refuge in Gaza for more than a million civilians. Some 300,000 people have fled the city following evacuation orders from Israel.

Neighbouring Egypt issued its strongest objection yet to the Rafah offensive, saying it

intends to formally join South Africa's case at the International Court of Justice alleging Israel is committing genocide in Gaza. The foreign ministry statement cited "the worsening severity and scope of the Israeli attacks against Palestinian civilians."

"A full-scale offensive on Rafah cannot take place," United Nations human rights chief Volker Turk said in a statement, adding he cannot see how it can be reconciled with international humanitarian law.

Internationally mediated talks over a cease-fire and hostage release appeared to be at a standstill.

Palestinians reported heavy Israeli bombardment overnight in the urban Jabaliya refugee camp and other areas in northern Gaza, which has been largely isolated by Israeli forces for months. UN officials say there is a "full-blown famine" there. Residents said Israeli warplanes and artillery struck across the camp and the Zeitoun area east of Gaza City, where troops have battled militants for over a week. They

have called on tens of thousands of people to relocate to nearby areas.

First responders with the Palestinian Civil Defence said they were unable to respond to multiple calls for help from both areas, as well as from Rafah.

The UN agency for Palestinian refugees, the main provider of aid in Gaza, said 300,000 people have fled Rafah since the operation began there. Most are heading to the heavily damaged nearby city of Khan Younis or Mawasi, a coastal tent camp where some 450,000 people are already living in squalid conditions.

Israel has now evacuated the eastern third of Rafah, which had been sheltering some 1.3 million Palestinians, most of whom had fled fighting elsewhere. The UN has warned that a planned full-scale invasion would further cripple humanitarian operations and cause a surge in civilian deaths.

The main aid entry points near Rafah are already affected. Israeli troops have captured the Gaza side of the Rafah crossing, forcing it to shut down. Egypt has refused to coordinate with Israel on the delivery of aid through the crossing because of "the unacceptable Israeli escalation," the state-owned Al Qahera News channel reported.

A senior Egyptian official said Cairo has lodged protests with Israel, the US, and European governments. — **AGENCIES**



Amir of Kuwait, UN chief discuss Gaza developments

Amir of Kuwait H H Sheikh Meshal Al Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah met UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres in Kuwait yesterday. They discussed relations between Kuwait, the UN, and its various agencies, in addition to means of reinforcing cooperation between the two sides, endeavours to supporting international peace and security and coordinating development efforts and humanitarian initiatives. The Kuwait Amir and the UN chief examined latest updates on the situation in Gaza and the necessity to intensify efforts towards immediate ceasefire, as well as regional and international developments.

Jordan launches multinational war games

AMMAN: The Jordanian military announced yesterday the launch of the "Eager Lion" military exercise, with ground, naval and air forces from 33 countries represented including the US, France and Britain.

The drills, set to end on May 23, include anti-terrorism and air defence training, army spokesman Colonel Mustafa Al Hiyari told a news conference.

He said that "Eager Lion" is intended to help fight "terrorist organisations", and respond to

"the proliferation of drones, and biological, chemical and nuclear weapons of mass destruction" as well as major disasters.

Forces from "10 Arab and 22 foreign countries in addition to Jordan" are taking part, Hiyari said, aiming "to confront the emerging and cross-border threats of this era".

The exercise is "the largest" since the first "Eager Lion" edition in 2011 according to Hiyari. The spokesman said that "these drills have nothing to do

with regional developments".

He did not specify the number of troops participating. Some of the countries participating include Poland, Norway, Romania, Japan and Australia alongside several Arab states such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Morocco and Lebanon.

The previous "Eager Lion" exercise in September 2022 included some 2,200 Jordanian soldiers, 1,700 from the United States and a total of 400 more from 27 other countries. — **AFP**

Donors pledge over \$2bn for Gaza

KUWAIT CITY: A conference of international donors in Kuwait yesterday pledged over \$2bn to aid the devastated Gaza Strip.

The conference, organised by the International Islamic Charitable Organization (IICO) and the UN's humanitarian coordination agency OCHA, said the funds would be dispersed over two years, with the possibility of extension, in efforts to support life-saving humanitarian interventions in the Palestinian territory. — **AFP**

Prince Harry and Meghan end Nigeria tour with Lagos visit

LAGOS: Prince Harry and his wife Meghan wrapped up their three-day visit to Nigeria yesterday, arriving in the country's economic capital Lagos during a trip to promote his Invictus Games for wounded military veterans.

The Duke of Sussex arrived with his wife on Friday in Nigeria's capital Abuja where they visited a school event on mental health, in a trip that also saw the prince meet wounded Nigerian soldiers in the country's northwest.

On day three of the visit, Prince Harry and Meghan took part in a basketball event with

the Giants of Africa Foundation in Lagos, an organisation that helps youth through engagement in the sport.

The prince practised dribbling basketballs with children at the exhibition event for the foundation, which is run by former NBA player Masai Ujiri. "The power of sports can change lives, it brings people together and creates community and there are no barriers which is the most important thing," the prince said.

Harry, a former army captain who flew helicopters in Afghanistan, founded the Invictus Games 10 years ago to

help bring wounded veterans into sporting events to aid with their recuperation.

The couple later met with Lagos State governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu and were also set to take part in a Lagos fundraiser. "He has seen a lot and is still soaking in a whole lot," the governor said of the prince's experience of Nigeria.

On Friday afternoon, Meghan sat on an event for women in leadership with Nigerian-born World Trade Organization director Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, where the Duchess discussed her Nigerian heritage and being a role model

to women. "I want to start by saying thank you very much for just how gracious you've all been in welcoming my husband and I to this country," she said to applause, before adding, "my country". "It's been really eye-opening and humbling to be able to know more about my heritage and to be able to know, this is just the beginning of that discovery." In Abuja, the prince had also taken part in a seated volleyball match with Nigerian veterans, some of who were missing limbs from combat in the country's north where troops battle insurgents and heavily armed criminal gangs.

On the Duke's volleyball team was former Nigerian soldier Peacemaker Azuegbulam, who lost his leg in combat in the northeast, and became the first African to win gold at the Invictus Games in Germany last year.

Before Nigeria, Prince Harry was in London on Wednesday to mark the 10th anniversary of the games. His trips to the UK since he moved to the United States in 2020 always prompt fresh speculation over a potential reconciliation with his family. But he did not meet with his father King Charles on this trip. — **AFP**

Iraq arrests 40 suspects in operation against human, drug trafficking rings

BAGHDAD: Iraqi security forces have dismantled two international rings engaged in human and drug trafficking and arrested 40 foreigners across the country, Iraqi media reported on Saturday.

The Iraqi National Intelligence Service, in collaboration with the Interior Ministry, arrested 40 foreigners suspected of being involved in crimes of kidnapping, extortion, forgery, as well as human and drug trafficking, according to a statement from the Security Media Cell, a media outlet affiliated with the Iraqi Joint Operations Command.

Security forces arrested the suspects in Baghdad and several other Iraqi provinces based on intelligence reports, the statement read, without specifying the nationalities of the detainees and the exact locations of their operations, aside from mentioning Baghdad. The statement noted that the majority of the victims targeted by these two rings were foreigners residing in Iraq. — **XINHUA**

South Africa building collapse death toll rises to 19

JOHANNESBURG: The death toll from a building collapse in South Africa climbed to 19, municipal authorities said yesterday, with 33 people still unaccounted for, nearly a week after the structure came crashing down.

Rescue teams have been working tirelessly since an apartment block under construction in the southern city of George crumbled Monday afternoon while a crew of 81 were on site. Twenty-nine people have been rescued alive so far. On Saturday an unexpected survivor emerged after 116 hours from underneath the rubble of the collapsed building, municipal authorities said.

Provincial authorities described it as a "miracle" as they rushed against time with rescue efforts.

"The question of rescuing... and recovery is still mixed, people feel that they still need to go very slowly especially with what happened yesterday," police minister Bheki Cele told state broadcaster SABC during his visit to the site. — **AFP**

US army destroys UAS launched by Houthis

WASHINGTON: The US Central Command (CENTCOM) announced yesterday that US forces destroyed three uncrewed aerial systems (UAS) launched by Houthis in Yemen towards the Red Sea. "It was determined that these UAS presented an imminent threat to both

coalition forces and merchant vessels in the region," CENTCOM said.

"These actions are taken to protect freedom of navigation and make international waters safer and more secure for US, coalition, and merchant vessels," CENTCOM added. — **QNA**



Demonstrators chant slogans at a rally organised by the National Salvation Front opposition alliance in Tunisia yesterday. (AFP)

Three Tunisian commentators arrested over critical remarks: Lawyers

TUNIS: Tunisian authorities ordered yesterday the arrest of two political commentators over critical comments, a lawyer told AFP, a day after security forces stormed the bar association and took a third pundit into custody.

Sonia Dahmani, also a lawyer, was arrested late Saturday after criticising the state of Tunisia on television, her attorney Dalila Msaddek said in a Facebook post.

Msaddek said there was a "police attack" on the bar association headquarters in Tunis, with "lawyers assaulted and the abduction of colleague Sonia Dahmani to an unknown location". Also on Saturday, broadcaster Borhen Bssais and political commentator Mourad Zeghidi were arrested for making critical comments, lawyer Ghazi Mrabet told AFP.

Mrabet said the judiciary yesterday placed both under a "48-hour detention warrant and (they) will have to appear before an examining magistrate".

He said Zeghidi was being pursued "for a social media post in which he supported an arrested journalist", Mohamed Boughalleb. He was sentenced to six months in prison for

defaming a public official and over "statements made during television shows since February". Arrest warrants were issued for Bssais and Zeghidi for disseminating "false information... with the aim of defaming others or harming their reputation", Tunis court spokesperson Mohamed Zitouna told AFP.

Mrabet said Bssais was detained under Decree 54, which punishes the production and dissemination of "false news". The law, signed by President Kais Saied in September 2022, has been criticised by journalists and opposition figures who say it has been used to stifle dissent. Since it came into force, more than 60 journalists, lawyers and opposition figures have been prosecuted, according to the National Union of Tunisian Journalists.

Dahmani was also arrested under Decree 54, media reported, saying she was detained while seeking safety at the bar association.

The event was filmed live by news channel France 24, which said masked police forced it to stop broadcasting, had "torn the camera from its tripod" and briefly detained the cameraman. — **AFP**

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55486133 33535273

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

Ecosystem of education

A special feature of Qatar's development has been its investment in higher education and research. The country's leadership puts emphasis on building a knowledge economy and Qatar University and Qatar Foundation's Education City have been spearheading the higher education and research work in the country.

While QU serves as the country's primary institution of higher education, Qatar Foundation (QF) has created a unique, multidisciplinary ecosystem of education, housing branch campuses of seven of the world's top universities in its Education City apart from its flagship Hamad Bin Khalifa University.

Apart from higher education, the country has made a lot of progress at the school level education. A special feature of school education has been the focus on instilling Qatari identity and values in students' minds while equipping them with modern education of science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

Over 18,000 students have graduated from QF's schools and universities, with their educational experience nurturing their sense of moral commitment and social responsibility and equipping them to be drivers of positive change, and the QF Alumni Programme is open to all of them to join it.

With the aim of cultivating a global network of alumni connected by their shared journey at the QF, it is intended to provide them with the opportunity to help fellow alumni achieve their goals and retain their links to each other and Qatar, including encouraging new alumni to remain in Qatar and support the nation's development after they graduate.

The QF Alumni Office also advocates for policies that help graduates of QF's education ecosystem contribute to Qatar's journey, and builds relationships with public and private sector organizations.

H H Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, Chairperson of Qatar Foundation attended Qatar Foundation's Annual Alumni Forum, where a new award celebrating graduates of the organisation's unique education ecosystem was announced.

Hundreds of alumni of QF schools, international partner universities, and Hamad Bin Khalifa University came together at the Forum to reconnect, build networks of knowledge and support, share their stories and journeys, and air their views on topics related to their careers with key national stakeholders.

The QF Alumni Award will recognise the contributions and achievements of the QF graduates. The criteria for the award will be linked to each year's Annual Alumni Forum theme, and in 2024-25 it will honour and celebrate alumni who have contributed to society through their dedication to social responsibility and civic engagement across four categories.

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 AND MARKETING

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

email: marketing@pen.com.qa

ADVERTISING

TEL: 4455 7837 / 857

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

CLASSIFIED

TEL: 4455 7857 email: adv@pen.com.qa

SUBSCRIPTION & DISTRIBUTION

TEL: 66766718

WhatsApp: 66766718

email: info@tawseelqatar.com

www.thepeninsula.qa

All editorial related correspondences should be directed to Editor-in-Chief office.

e-mail: editorinchief@pen.com.qa

Post box: 3488, Doha - Qatar

Bridging continents: Malta, Qatar paving the way for peace and prosperity

AS we gradually advance towards the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Malta and the State of Qatar (1975-2025), one can safely say that we share an excellent and ever-growing relationship, marked by mutual respect and joint commitment to elevate it to new heights. Despite the geographical distance, our two nations have found common ground in various political, economic, and cultural endeavours. Our partnership has evolved over the years, fostering new opportunities and strong alliances with common ideals and goals.

Multilateral Action

Both countries, although limited in size, have demonstrated unwavering commitment to dialogue and engagement on regional and global issues on the international stage. Malta's role in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) reflects its commitment to international peace and security. Since the start of our tenure



Simon Pullicino, Ambassador of Malta to Qatar

as a non-permanent member in the UNSC in January 2023, Malta has leveraged its position within the UNSC to advocate for diplomatic solutions to current global conflicts, the promotion of human rights, and champion the interests of small island states. Through active participation in discussions and resolutions, which intensified during the Maltese Presidency of the UNSC throughout April 2024, Malta is amplifying the voices of marginalized nations and contributing to shaping the agenda on crucial issues such as climate change, migration, and disarmament.

As a non-permanent member of the UNSC, Malta continues to demonstrate its dedication to multilateralism and the principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter. To this end, Malta has supported the adoption of UN Resolutions 2712, 2720 and 2728 and continues to express its deep concern on the catastrophic humanitarian situation in Gaza while advocating for an immediate ceasefire, the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages and the unimpeded flow of humanitarian aid. Malta, and the European Union, continue to advocate for a two-state solution, with Israel and an independent, democratic, contiguous, sovereign, and viable State of Palestine, living side by side in peace and security and mutual recognition.

While chairing one of the UN Security Council debates in April (2024), the Hon. Dr. Ian Borg, Minister for Foreign and European Affairs and Trade of Malta stated that "the only solution for peace and security is the cessation of hostilities. By escalating conflicts, more innocent lives are lost. Let's work together for peaceful solutions".

In this complex time, the State of Qatar has continued to position itself as a pivotal mediator in regional and international conflicts, leveraging its diplomatic prowess and strategic position in the Middle East and beyond. We commend Qatar's role in resolving disputes through peaceful means and fostering dialogue as well as Qatar's efforts to prevent



Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs H E Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani shakes hands with Malta's Minister of Foreign and European Affairs and Trade Hon. Dr. Ian Borg, during the EU-GCC High Level Forum held in Luxembourg on April 22, 2024.

the outbreak of conflicts. Qatar's endeavours to build trust among conflicting parties continues to cement its position as a trusted partner and capable of working unstintingly towards this end. Also on the humanitarian front, Qatar has distinguished itself as a leader, providing vital supplies and medical assistance to several conflict zones, including of course Gaza.

On another front, in January 2024, Malta was elected as Chair of the Organisation of Security and Cooperation (OSCE) in Europe. In his introductory speech the Maltese Foreign Minister set forth Malta's vision to address the ongoing tensions in Europe adding that "it's all about people - it is paramount to work on improving, intensifying, and bridging our relations to overcome distrust for the good of all, and to build back confidence."

When it comes to the wider region, Malta continues to support engagement between the EU and the GCC. The latest High-level Forum between the two sides held in Luxembourg on 22 April 2024, focusing on Regional Cooperation and Security, chaired by His Excellency Sheikh Mohammed bin Jassim Al Thani, Prime Minister, and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar and by His Excellency Mr. Joseph Borrell, High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, clearly demonstrated the continued willingness of both sides to reinforce dialogue. As the High Representative indicated, "in times of turmoil and escalating tensions, peace and multilateralism are challenged in both our regions, and we need more than ever to work together to resolve the crises, to prevent escalation and support a safer, and more stable international environment".

Bilateral Ties

On the bilateral front, Qatar and Malta offer unique opportunities for economic growth, investment, and cultural exchanges. Qatar, with its robust economy, presents avenues for lucrative ventures in sectors such as energy, infrastructure, and tourism. As a

hub for international trade, connectivity and innovation, Qatar also provides a favourable environment for businesses seeking expansion in the Gulf region. Similarly, Malta, nestled in the very heart of the Mediterranean Sea, boasts a thriving economy driven by sectors such as finance, tourism, and maritime services. Malta's strategic location and European Union membership offer a gateway to the European market, attracting investors and entrepreneurs alike. Both nations also offer rich cultural experiences and a high quality of life, making us attractive destinations for individuals seeking new opportunities and experiences.

The opening of the Embassy of Malta in Qatar in 2021 and the State Visit by the President of the Republic of Malta, H.E. Dr. George Vella in June 2022 not only served to confirm the strong bonds of friendship between Malta and Qatar but also to facilitate new avenues of cooperation in the political, economic, commercial, cultural, scientific, and technical spheres for the mutual benefit of both peoples. Coupling this with various high-level delegations to Doha and Valletta, namely the first-ever session of Political Consultations between the two countries which took place in Valletta in January 2024, and the visits of several Maltese Ministers (Finance, Health, and Education) to Doha in the first quarter of 2024, underline the willingness of both sides to work together in a backdrop of mutual trust.

Looking Forward

In conclusion, the dynamic relationship between Malta and Qatar exemplifies the potential for collaboration and mutual benefit. As we continue to navigate the complexities and challenges of the modern world, Malta and Qatar serve as shining examples of how cooperation and diplomacy can transcend boundaries and create a brighter future for all. Let us spare no effort to ensure that the strong bonds of friendship between the two countries continue to thrive, underpinned by a commitment to consolidate progress both on a bilateral and global dimension.

The US and Israel are playing a dangerous game

DAOUD KUTTAB -- AL JAZEERA

ON May 5, the breaking news that Hamas had accepted a ceasefire deal spread like wildfire across Gaza, sending people to the streets celebrating. Their joy was short-lived, however, as Israel pressed forward with a deadly ground assault on Rafah.

After weeks of facing accusations from Israel and the US that its stance was impeding progress in ceasefire negotiations, Hamas made a strategic decision with which it effectively outmanoeuvred its enemy. The ball is now in Israel's court and by extension, the court of its main backer, the United States.

If a deal for a lasting ceasefire is not concluded, Israel will be exposed as the true spoiler of peace, and US as a dishonest broker.

There are already indications that the two are playing a game, trying to sell to the global public unconvincing narratives that Israel was not aware of the deal that was proposed to Hamas and that the US opposes an Israeli operation of Rafah.

Despite the appearance of public surprise and puzzlement by both, it may well be that they knew and expected what would happen next.

Israel has claimed that it is rejecting the deal because it was not aware of new provisions included in it, and yet there are reports that CIA chief Bill Burns who is involved in the negotiations has been briefing the Israeli side. And given President Joe Biden's "ironclad" support for Israel, it seems highly unlikely his administration would negotiate a deal that does not favour its ally's interests.

The US, for its part, has claimed that it staunchly opposes an Israeli ground offensive on Gaza. And yet, the operation has started and the response from the Biden administration has been to play it down, not to denounce it. US National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said that supposedly this was not the full invasion everyone expected, but a "limited" operation, thus indirectly indicating that the US was aware of

US reluctance to pressure Israel into accepting the ceasefire deal will have grave consequences, and not just for the Palestinians.

Israeli plans.

In this context, it is important to remember another "limited" operation that the US reportedly opposed, and which turned out to be not so "limited". At the start of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, then-Israeli Prime Minister Menahem Begin claimed the Israeli army would enter only 40km (25 miles) into Lebanese territory, to "eliminate" positions of Palestinian armed groups that had bombarded northern Israel.

Unsurprisingly, the Israeli troops did not stop at 40km and advanced all 110km (68 miles) to the capital Beirut and captured it. Trying to cover up its deceit, the Israeli government claimed the full-scale invasion was necessary due to the "situation on the ground" - a weak justification that even then-Secretary of State Alexander Haig repeated. The Israelis did not withdraw from Lebanon until 2000.

Throughout this Israeli war on Gaza, there hasn't been a warning publicly made by the US that Israel has heeded. It is indeed unclear to what extent such warnings are just optics of putting pressure on the Israeli government while continuing to support its every move. In this sense, one should take with a grain of salt reports that the Biden administration is holding off one shipment of weapons to Israel to pressure it into halting the full-scale invasion of Rafah.

Within the context of this supposedly "limited" operation, it is worrying the US is giving tacit approval for Israeli forces occupying the Palestinian side of the Rafah crossing with Egypt.

worried Cairo, which condemned the attack.

Egypt has repeatedly warned in the past that any presence of Israeli military troops on the Palestinian side of the Philadelphi Corridor is a violation of the Camp David Accords and Philadelphi protocol, according to which this area has to be demilitarized.

The Camp David Peace treaty between Israel and Egypt was brokered and guaranteed by the US in 1979. It was later amended with the Philadelphi protocol in 2005 after Israel withdrew from the Gaza Strip. Egypt has abided by the provisions of the deal, but now Israel appears not to be.

The Biden administration may be thinking it is successfully deflecting criticism by presenting the Israeli invasion of Rafah as "limited", but the occupation of the crossing in violation of a US-backed treaty sends a clear message that the US and Israel have no qualms about walking all over agreements they have signed.

This comes on top of Washington going out of its way to shield Israel from legal consequences for the atrocities it is committing in Gaza, thus undermining international law. US officials have called UN Security Council resolutions "not binding", condemned the International Court of Justice for recognising the situation in Gaza as a "plausible" genocide, and threatened the International Criminal Court with sanctions if it issues arrest warrants for Israeli officials.

As things stand now, Biden is headed towards losing the November election and leaving a dreadful legacy behind: overseeing a genocide in Gaza and undermining the international legal order to pave the way for more atrocities and more impunity.

It is still not too late to change course. Biden must apply real, decisive pressure on Israel to accept a permanent ceasefire deal with Hamas, fully withdraw from Gaza, lift the siege and allow for full humanitarian access and reconstruction to begin.

Daoud Kuttub is an award-winning Palestinian journalist.

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Flash floods, cold lava hit Indonesia's Sumatra island, 37 killed

TANAH DATAR: At least 37 people were killed and 16 more were missing in western Indonesia after flash floods and cold lava flow from one of the archipelago's most active volcanoes damaged homes, roads and mosques, officials said yesterday.

Hours of heavy rain caused flooding in Agam and Tanah Datar districts in West Sumatra province on Saturday evening, threatening thousands of people after the downpours swept ash and large rocks down Mount Marapi.

"I heard the thunder and the sound similar to boiling water. It was the sound of big rocks falling," housewife Rina Devina told AFP, adding that three of her neighbours were killed.

"It was pitch black, so I used my cellphone as a flashlight. The road was muddy, so I chanted 'God, have mercy!' over and over again," she said of her evacuation to a local official's office.

West Sumatra disaster agency said 16 people died in Agam district and 18 in Tanah Datar, with 18 people injured overall.

"We are also still searching for 16 other people," agency spokesman Ilham Wahab told AFP. He said the search effort involved local rescuers, police, soldiers and volunteers.

Hours of heavy rain caused flooding in Agam and Tanah Datar districts in West Sumatra province on Saturday evening, threatening thousands of people after the downpours swept ash and large rocks down Mount Marapi.

Abdul Malik, head of the search and rescue agency in provincial capital Padang, told reporters three more people had died but they were yet to be confirmed by other authorities. The flash floods and cold lava flow hit the two districts at around 10.30pm (1530 GMT) on Saturday, according to the Basarnas search and rescue agency.

Cold lava, also known as lahar, is volcanic material such as ash, sand and pebbles carried down a volcano's slopes by rain.

Abdul Muhari, spokesman for the national disaster mitigation agency, or BNPB, said in a statement that 84 homes, 16 bridges and two mosques were damaged in Tanah Datar, as were 20 hectares (49.4 acres) of rice fields.

About 370,000 people live in the district, where several

mosques and a public pool were also damaged, with large rocks and logs scattered on the ground, according to an AFP journalist at the scene.

In Lembah Anai, a popular tourist spot with a waterfall in Tanah Datar, a road connecting the cities of Padang and Bukittinggi was severely damaged and access for cars was cut off.

Aerial images seen by AFP of the district showed roads covered by mud, with roofs and a mosque's minarets jutting out of the sea of brown mud.

Ilham said yesterday that authorities were still receiving reports of missing people from relatives.

He said he could not give a figure for the number of people evacuated from the area because the search and rescue effort was still focused on the victims and the missing.

Two trucks had been swept away by the flooding and strong currents in a nearby river in Tanah Datar, the journalist said.

In Agam, which has a population of more than 500,000 people, dozens of homes and public facilities were damaged, the district's disaster agency chief Budi Perwira Negara told reporters.

He said 90 people had been evacuated to a school being used as a shelter.

Nine bodies, including those



An aerial view of a damaged area after flash floods and the flow of cold lava from a volcano in Tanah Datar, West Sumatra, yesterday. (AFP)

of a three-year-old and an eight-year-old, were identified yesterday, Malik said in an earlier statement.

Authorities sent a team of rescuers and rubber boats to look for the missing victims and to transport people to shelters.

The local government set up evacuation centres and emergency posts in several areas of Agam and Tanah Datar.

Indonesia is prone to

landslides and floods during the rainy season. At least 26 people were found dead in March after landslides and floods hit West Sumatra.

In 2022, about 24,000 people were evacuated and two children were killed in floods on Sumatra island, with environmental campaigners blaming deforestation caused by logging for worsening the disaster.

Trees act as natural defences

against floods, slowing the rate at which water runs down hills and into rivers.

Marapi is the most active volcano on the archipelago's Sumatra island.

It erupted in December and spewed an ash tower about 3,000 metres (9,800 feet) into the sky, taller than the volcano itself. At least 24 climbers, most of them university students, died in the eruption. — AFP

Canada arrests fourth Indian national in killing of Sikh activist

MONTREAL: A fourth Indian national was charged by Canadian authorities on Saturday in the 2023 killing of a separatist Sikh leader in Vancouver.

Amandeep Singh, 22, was already being held for unrelated gun charges before being charged with "first-degree murder and conspiracy to commit murder" in the slaying of Hardeep Singh Nijjar.

Three other Indian nationals were arrested this month.

The killing sparked a diplomatic row between Ottawa and New Delhi when Prime Minister Justin Trudeau linked Indian intelligence to the killing.

Nijjar — who immigrated to Canada in 1997 and became a citizen in 2015 — had advocated for a separate Sikh state, known as Khalistan, carved out of India.

He had been wanted by Indian authorities for alleged "terrorism" and conspiracy to commit murder — allegations he denied.

He was shot dead on June 18, 2023, by masked assailants in the parking lot of the Sikh temple he led in suburban Vancouver. Trudeau announced several months later that Canada had "credible allegations" connecting Indian intelligence to the slaying.

India dismissed the allegations as "absurd" and responded furiously, briefly curbing visas for Canadians and forcing Ottawa to withdraw diplomats.

In November, the US Justice Department charged an Indian citizen living in the Czech Republic with allegedly plotting a similar assassination attempt on American soil.

Prosecutors said in unsealed court documents that an Indian government official was also involved in the planning.

The shock allegations came after US President Joe Biden hosted Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi for a rare state visit, as Washington seeks closer

ties with India against China's growing influence.

US intelligence agencies have assessed that the plot on American soil was approved by India's top spy official at the time, Samant Goel, the Washington Post reported in April.

Canada is home to some 770,000 Sikhs, who make up about two percent of the country's population, with a vocal minority calling for an independent state of Khalistan. — AFP

'North Korea hackers stole data from S Korea court computers'

SEOUL: North Korean hackers stole sensitive data, including individuals' financial records, from a South Korean court computer network over two years, Seoul police said Saturday.

The nuclear-armed North is known to operate an army of thousands of hackers operating both inside the largely isolated country and apparently overseas, and has been blamed for several major cyberattacks in the past.

South Korean national police said the hackers pilfered 1,014 gigabytes of data from a court's computer system from January 2021 to February 2023, citing a joint investigation with the country's spy agency and prosecutors.

The hackers' malware transmitted stolen data, including South Koreans' marriage and personal debt records, to "four domestic and four overseas servers" before it was finally "detected by anti-virus software", the national police said in a statement.

The data breach was found to be the work of a North Korean hacking outfit after authorities compared the detected malicious programmes, server payment details and IP addresses with those identified in earlier hacking cases attributed to Pyongyang. Seoul authorities have retrieved and identified just 4.7 gigabytes of the stolen data, which stored 5,171 documents related to personal debt rehabilitation cases, including marriage certificates and statements about debt and reasons for insolvency, police said. — AFP

Thailand police seize one tonne of crystal meth

BANGKOK: Thai authorities intercepted a tonne of crystal methamphetamine in one of the kingdom's biggest ever single seizures of the illegal drug, police said yesterday.

The haul, with an estimated value of more than \$25m on the international market, was found when officers stopped a pickup truck in central Nakhon Nayok province on Friday.

Acting National Police Chief Kittharath Punpetch said police, military and local officials had been monitoring several smuggling gangs and learned of a plan to move a large amount of the drug, commonly known by the street name "ice". Kittharath told a news conference that 40 bags of the drug, weighing a tonne in total, were found in the truck. — AFP

China completes construction of gigantic space telescope

HOHHOT: China's first gigantic radio telescope dedicated to observing interplanetary scintillation phenomena passed its technical testing process on Friday.

The telescope, located in north China's Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, will be applied to monitor interplanetary space weather on a daily basis to provide high-quality data for both China's and international space weather forecasting.

"Monitoring interplanetary scintillation can be useful for the reconstruction of the three-dimensional structure of a large-scale solar wind, which is helpful in revealing the correlation between solar eruptive activities and geospace environment changes," said Yan Yihua, a researcher from the National Space Science Center (NSSC) of the Chinese Academy of Sciences. — XINHUA

Sherpa guide Kami Rita scales Mount Everest for 29th time, extending his own record again

Kami Rita reached the 8,849-metre peak at 7.25am local time yesterday along with other climbers, said Mingma Sherpa of the expedition organiser Seven Summits Treks. He was reported in good health and already on the way down to lower camps.

KATHMANDU: One of greatest climbing guides on Mount Everest has scaled the world's highest peak for the 29th time, extending his own record for most times to the summit, expedition organisers said yesterday.

Kami Rita reached the 8,849-meter (29,032-foot) peak at 7.25am local time yesterday along with other climbers, said Mingma Sherpa of the expedition organiser Seven Summits Treks.

He was reported in good health and already on the way down to lower camps.

Kami Rita had climbed Mount Everest twice last year, setting the record for most climbs on the first and adding to it less than a week later.

He and fellow Sherpa guide Pasang Dawa have been competing with each other for the title of most climbs of the world's highest peak. Pasang Dawa has 27 successful ascents of the mountain.



Nepal's mountaineer Kami Rita Sherpa poses along with his certificates in his rented room at Boudhanath Stupa area on the outskirts of Kathmandu on January 19, 2021. (AFP)

Kami Rita first climbed Everest in 1994 and has been making the trip nearly every year since.

He is one of many Sherpa guides whose expertise and skills are vital to the safety and success each year of foreign climbers who seek to stand on top of the mountain.

His father was among the first Sherpa guides. In addition to his Everest climbs, Kami Rita has scaled several other peaks that are among the world's highest, including K2, Cho Oyu, Manaslu and Lhotse.

Mingma Sherpa said the weather on the mountain was good and favorable for climbing to the summit.

The first set of climbers reached Everest's summit just a few days ago and there are hundreds more who will be attempting to get up the mountain this month.

Nepalese authorities have issued hundreds of climbing permits to foreign climbers. At least as many local Sherpa guides will be accompanying them during the climbing season. — AP

Rescuers struggle to reach Afghanistan flood-hit areas

SHEIKH JALAL: Emergency aid and rescue teams struggled yesterday to reach areas of northern Afghanistan hardest hit by flash floods that killed hundreds, AFP journalists saw.

Heavy rains caused flash flooding in several provinces in Afghanistan on Friday. Northern Baghlan was the worst impacted, with efforts to deliver aid hampered by destruction to roads and bridges wrought when the floods ripped through the province.

In Sheikh Jalal, about a two-hour drive from Burka, one of the most devastated areas, AFP journalists saw aid trucks full of food, military vehicles, rescue workers and local residents stuck where roads had been completely washed out.

The military was using heavy machinery to pave the way, as well as to free aid trucks stuck in the mud.

Mohammad Ali Aryanfar, part of a

team from the Turkish Hak Humanitarian Relief Association trying to deliver food to Burka, said they had been on the road since early morning yesterday but were blocked in Sheikh Jalal. "Our compatriots there (in Burka) need assistance and we pray that the road opens and we reach the area," he told AFP.

"People's houses have been destroyed and they don't have anything, they don't have shelters," he added.

The United Nations World Food Programme shared a photo on social media site X of WFP-stamped bags of flour strapped to donkeys' backs, saying it had to "resort to every alternative to get food to the survivors who lost everything" in Baghlan, as most of the affected areas were "inaccessible by trucks".

The Taliban government refugees ministry said yesterday that 315 people

had been killed and more than 1,600 people were injured in the flooding in Baghlan. More than 2,600 homes have been damaged or destroyed and 1,000 cattle killed, it added.

Farmland has also been swamped in the poverty-wracked nation where 80 percent of its more than 40 million people depend on agriculture to survive. WFP confirmed a toll of more than 300 dead in Baghlan to AFP on Saturday.

Taliban authorities and non-governmental groups warned that the death toll could rise.

About 600,000 people live in the five most severely impacted districts in Baghlan, according to NGO Save the Children.

So far this year, "nearly 13,000 people in Afghanistan have been impacted by disasters caused by extreme weather, including floods and



Afghan men clear debris and mud from a damaged house following a flash flood after a heavy rainfall in Laqiha village of Baghlan-i-Markazi district in Baghlan province on May 11, 2024. (AFP)

landslides", it said in a statement.

The country, ravaged by four decades of war, is one of the world's

poorest and, according to scientists, one of the worst prepared to face the consequences of global warming. — AFP

Thousands flee as Russia presses renewed assault

VILCHA: Thousands more civilians have fled Russia's renewed ground offensive in Ukraine's northeast that has targeted towns and villages with a barrage of artillery and mortar fire, officials said yesterday.

The intense battles have forced at least one Ukrainian unit to withdraw in the Kharkiv region, capitulating more land to Russian forces across less defended settlements in the so-called contested "gray zone" along the Russian border.

By yesterday afternoon, the town of Vovchansk, among the largest in the northeast with a prewar population of 17,000, emerged as a focal point in the battle.

Volodymyr Tymoshko, the head of the Kharkiv regional police, said Russian forces were in the outskirts of the town and approaching from three directions. "Infantry fighting is already taking place," he said. A Russian tank was spotted along a major road leading to the town, Tymoshko said, illustrating Moscow's confidence to deploy heavy weaponry.

An Associated Press team, positioned in a nearby village,

Analysts say the Russian push is designed to exploit ammunition shortages before promised Western supplies can reach the front line.

saw plumes of smoke rising from the town as Russian forces hurled shells. Evacuation teams worked non-stop throughout the day to take residents, most of whom were elderly, out of harm's way.

At least 4,000 civilians have fled the Kharkiv region since Friday, when Moscow's forces launched the operation, Gov Oleh Syniehubov said in a social media statement. Heavy fighting raged yesterday along the northeast front line, where Russian forces attacked 27 settlements in the past 24 hours, he said.

Analysts say the Russian push is designed to exploit ammunition shortages before promised Western supplies can reach the front line. Ukrainian soldiers said the Kremlin is using the usual Russian tactic

by launching a disproportionate amount of fire and infantry assaults to exhaust their troops and firepower.

By intensifying battles in what was previously a static patch of the front line, Russian forces threaten to pin Ukrainian forces in the northeast, while carrying out intense battles farther south where Moscow is also gaining ground.

It comes after Russia stepped up attacks in March targeting energy infrastructure and settlements, which analysts predicted were a concerted effort to shape conditions for an offensive.

Meanwhile, a 10-storey apartment block collapsed in the Russian city of Belgorod, near the border, killing at least six people and injuring 20. Russian authorities said the building collapsed following Ukrainian shelling. Ukraine has not commented on the incident.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that halting Russia's offensive in the northeast was a priority, and that Kyiv's troops were continuing counteroffensive operations in seven villages around



Oksana Velychko (centre), 45-year-old, who was evacuated with her children and relatives from the Vovchansk district gather after arriving at an evacuation point in the Kharkiv region, yesterday. (AFP)

the Kharkiv region.

"Disrupting the Russian offensive intentions is our number one task now. Whether we succeed in that task depends on every soldier, every sergeant, every officer," Zelenskyy said.

The Russian Defence Ministry said yesterday that its forces had captured four villages on the border along Ukraine's Kharkiv region, in addition to five villages reported to have been seized on Saturday. These areas were likely poorly

fortified due to the dynamic fighting and constant heavy shelling, easing a Russian advance.

Ukraine's leadership has not confirmed Moscow's gains. But Tymoshko said that Strilecha, Pylna and Borsivka were under Russian occupation, and it was from their direction they were bringing in infantry to stage attacks in other embattled villages of Hlyboke and Lukiantsi.

Russian tactics in Vovchansk

mirror those used in the battles for Bakhmut and Avdiivka in the Donetsk region, he said, in which heavy aerial attacks were accompanied by droves of infantry assaults.

"Now the Russians are simply wiping it (Vovchansk) off the face of the earth and advancing with the scorched earth method. That is, they first scorch a specific area and then the infantry comes in, and they always advance in this way," he said. — AP

Putin replaces defence minister Shoigu in major shake-up

MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin yesterday moved to replace defence minister Sergei Shoigu in a major shake-up to Russia's military leadership more than two years into its Ukraine offensive.

Putin proposed economist Andrey Belousov as Shoigu's replacement, according to a list of the ministerial nominations published by the Federation Council, Russia's upper house of parliament.

Putin simultaneously published decrees naming Shoigu as the new secretary of the Security Council, replacing long-standing Putin ally Nikolai Patrushev.

"Shoigu will continue to work in this sector (defence), which he knows well," state media quoted Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov as saying. — AFP

Georgia warns protesters of arrests if they block parliament

TBILISI: Georgia's government yesterday issued a warning to protesters that it would arrest anyone who blocked the parliament, ahead of an expected late-evening rally against a Russian-style "foreign agent" bill.

Demonstrations have gripped the tiny Caucasus country for weeks over a bill targeting NGOs, dubbed the "Russian law" as it mirrors repressive legislation used by the Kremlin to silence critics.

Protesters are due to gather outside parliament in Tbilisi late in the evening, with many planning to stay through the night.

"Group blocking of an object of special importance is punishable by up to four years in prison," Interior Minister Vakhtang Gomelauri said.

"We are going to use this article against lawbreakers without any exemption," he warned. — AFP

North Macedonia President stokes controversy at inauguration

SKOPJE: North Macedonia's first woman president was inaugurated yesterday, with the new nationalist leader angering Greece after a speech that did not acknowledge her country's new name.

The Balkan nation added "North" to its title in 2018 to end a long-running dispute with Greece, following an historic agreement. But Gordana Siljanovska-Davkova's party, the nationalist VMRO-DPMNE, opposed the accord and has refused to acknowledge the country's new name.

The right-wing party earned an easy victory in parliamentary

and presidential elections on Wednesday, with the ruling Social Democrats (SDSM) conceding defeat before any official results were announced.

Addressing lawmakers and assembled invited VIPs yesterday, Siljanovska-Davkova said she would "respect the constitution and the laws and shall protect the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of Macedonia".

"I declare I shall carry out the office of president of Macedonia in a conscientious and responsible manner," she added. The official written text of her address included the

official name North Macedonia, an AFP reporter saw.

Siljanovska-Davkova, who turned 71 on Saturday, was elected as president to a five-year mandate after securing a second-round poll victory with 65 percent of the vote.

She defeated Social Democratic outgoing head of state Stevo Pendarovski, who gathered 29 percent. The retired university professor vowed to be the president of "all citizens".

Skopje's 2018 Prespa Agreement with Athens to add the prefix North to its name ended decades of quarrelling with Greece, which was

opposed to its neighbour bearing the same name as that of one of its historic provinces.

The issue had seen Greece long oppose the country joining NATO — it did finally join the alliance in 2020 — and delay talks on its path to eventually becoming an EU member.

But Greece reacted angrily to the new president's speech, saying her choice of words was "a blatant violation" of their agreement. "Greece categorically declares that further progress in its bilateral relations with North Macedonia, and its European journey, depends on the full implementation of the Prespa

Agreement and above all, on the use of the constitutional name," the foreign ministry added.

Greece's ambassador to Skopje left the ceremony at the parliament in protest, according to local media reports. European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen and European Council chief Charles Michel both offered Siljanovska-Davkova congratulations. But von der Leyen added on X, formerly Twitter, that North Macedonia must keep to "the path of reforms and full respect for its binding agreements, including the Prespa Agreement", to continue its EU accession journey. — AFP

Spain: Socialists eye power grab as Catalonia votes

BARCELONA: Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez's Socialists are hoping to show Catalonia has moved past its independence fixation by winning yesterday's regional vote and defeating separatist leader Carles Puigdemont.

Polls opened at 9:00 am (0700 GMT), with voters casting their ballots to elect 135 lawmakers in the Catalan parliament in this wealthy northeastern region of some eight million people. Surveys suggest Sanchez's Socialists are set to win the most votes, ahead of Puigdemont's hardline separatist JxCat and its rival ERC, led by current regional leader Pere Aragonés.

Polls close at 8:00 pm with results due out several hours later.

"My sense today is that we are entering a new important stage in Catalonia," said Salvador Illa, head of the Catalan Socialist party on casting his ballot. On the streets, voters agreed the election would likely change the leadership of the region, which has been dominated by separatists for the past decade.

"I'm sure the Socialists will win and that will change the ruling majority. But I don't think the situation will change much really," said Xavier Cusi, 51, who works in banking.

And 31-year-old Ainhoa Matos, who works in the insurance industry, told AFP she hoped the outcome would give a greater voice to those who weren't pro-independence.

"The independence issue has calmed down a lot so people are less on edge," she said.

"People like me who are not



Supporters applaud as Catalonia's regional President Pere Aragonés gives a press conference after voting during Catalonia's regional elections in Pineda, yesterday. (AFP)

pro-independence have not had enough of a voice or representation so I hope that can change." — High-stakes election — For Sanchez, seizing Catalonia from the separatists would be a major victory in his efforts to turn the page on the crisis sparked by the secession bid.

It would also let him effectively restart his latest term in office, which began in November but has been soured by bitter right-wing opposition and a graft probe into his wife that almost prompted his resignation last month. Since becoming premier in 2018, some nine months after the October 2017 failed Catalan separatist bid, Sanchez has sought to "heal the wounds" caused by the unprece-

dent political crisis.

In 2021, he pardoned the separatists jailed over the secession bid.

And in November he began pushing an amnesty bill for those still wanted by the justice system in exchange for key separatist backing in parliament that let him secure a new four-year term in office.

The bill is in the Senate and due to become law in the coming weeks, allowing the return of Puigdemont, 61, the Catalan separatist leader who oversaw the independence bid then fled to Belgium to avoid prosecution.

The controversial measure has been adamantly opposed by the right and far-right. — AFP

Fire burns down shopping complex housing 1,400 outlets in Warsaw

WARSAW: A massive fire broke out yesterday morning in a vast shopping complex in the Polish capital that housed some 1,400 shops and service outlets and where many of the vendors were from Vietnam.

Huge plumes of black smoke could be seen rising over the vast area. The fire brigade said more than 80% of the Marywilska 44 shopping complex burned in the Bialoleka district of Warsaw, and that the roof fell in.

Police reported no injuries, but traders were in despair at the loss of their livelihoods. The Gazeta Wyborcza daily reported that some Vietnamese vendors wanted to enter to save their goods from the complex but were blocked by security guards. The Association of Vietnamese Entrepreneurs in Poland said the fire meant "great financial losses for merchants," calling it a "terrible tragedy for thousands of merchants and their families."

Chemical and environmental rescue specialists were among the large numbers of rescue officials who took part in the operation. Authorities sent a text message warning Warsaw residents about the fire and telling them to stay home with the windows closed.

Mirbud, an industrial construction company listed on the Warsaw Stock Exchange, owns the shopping center. Warsaw police said it had begun investigating the fire, which began at around 3:30 a.m. local time (5:30 GMT), but had not yet determined the cause.

The Warsaw city administration planned on Monday to discuss financial support for the small traders whose livelihoods were destroyed. Shopping centres and large shops are usually closed on Sunday due to a ban on trade imposed by the previous government, which had close ties to the Catholic church. However, small business owners are exempt from the ban, and many of the small shops at the center worked on Sundays. — AP

Lithuanians cast ballots in presidential election

VILNIUS: Lithuanians were casting votes in a presidential election yesterday at a time when Russian gains on the battlefield in Ukraine are fueling greater fears about Moscow's intentions, particularly in the strategically important Baltic region.

The popular incumbent, Gitanas Nausėda, is favoured to win another five-year term in office. But there are eight candidates running in all, making it difficult for him or any other candidate to muster the 50% of

the votes needed to win outright. In that case, a runoff will be held on May 26.

Polls opened at 7am and close 8pm (1700 GMT). Results were expected late Sunday night. Nausėda is a moderate conservative who turns 60 a week after yesterday's election. One of his main challengers is Ingrida Šimonytė, 49, the current prime minister and former finance minister, whom he beat in a runoff in 2019 with 66% of the votes. Another contender is Ignas Vėgėlė, a

populist lawyer who gained popularity during the COVID-19 pandemic opposing restrictions and vaccines.

A referendum was also on the ballot yesterday. It asks whether the constitution should be amended to allow dual citizenship for hundreds of thousands of Lithuanians living abroad.

Lithuanian citizens who adopt another nationality currently must give up their Lithuanian citizenship, which doesn't bode well for the Baltic

nation whose population has fallen from 3.5 million in 1990 to 2.8 million today.

For the first time, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe turned down an invitation by Lithuania to observe the election.

The Lithuanian government wanted to exclude monitors from Russia and Belarus, accusing the two nations — both members of the 57-member organization — of being threats to its political and electoral processes. — AP



Voters cast their ballots during the first round of Lithuania's presidential election in a polling station in Vilnius, yesterday. (AFP)

Wildfire in Canada's British Columbia forces thousands to evacuate

BRITISH COLUMBIA: Canadian authorities are urging all remaining residents in a town in British Columbia to leave immediately, despite improving weather conditions, after many were already evacuated due to a fast-growing wildfire.

The blaze, which started Friday, almost doubled in size the following day, reaching about 17sqkm (4,200 acres). BC Wildfire Service maps showed the fire burning just a few kilometers west of Fort Nelson's city limits.

Fort Nelson is located in the far northeastern corner of British Columbia, about 1,600km from Vancouver. Fort Nelson and the Fort Nelson Indian Reserve have a combined population of about 3,000.

In 2023, Canada witnessed a record number of wildfires that also caused choking smoke

in parts of the US and forced tens of thousands of people to evacuate across British Columbia.

Authorities in Alberta also issued an alert about a wildfire nearly 25km southwest of the oil sands city of Fort McMurray that could impact visibility on highways in some areas. No evacuation order has been given so far for the major Canadian oil city.

In 2016, more than 80,000 people evacuated from Fort McMurray, in the heart of Canada's oil sands, as a fire torched 1,600 homes and other buildings.

The high winds pushed smoke across Alberta on Saturday, putting the city of Edmonton under an air quality advisory with hazard levels rated at 10-plus - or "very high risk" - forecast.

Meteorologists are not anticipating rain and have



Smoke from wildfires burning in the Grande prairie forest area, 4km east of the town of Teepee Creek, in Alberta, Canada. (AFP)

advised people to stay indoors.

Online footage shared by locals from the Fort Nelson wildfire showed thick plumes of smoke rising high into the sky, with houses in the foreground. In some photos, haze seemed to cover wide areas.

The Northern Rockies

Regional Municipality and Fort Nelson First Nation issued a joint statement warning people choosing to stay that "emergency medical services are not available, nor are groceries or other amenities." The municipality mayor, Rob Fraser, said most of the

residents in and around Fort Nelson have been evacuated, adding that police were going door to door to ensure everyone got out. Health authorities said Fort Nelson General Hospital has been safely evacuated and closed until further notice. — **AP**

Blinken delivers strong public criticism of Israel

WILMINGTON: Secretary of State Antony Blinken yesterday delivered some of the Biden administration's strongest public criticism yet of Israel's conduct of the war in Gaza, saying Israeli tactics have meant "a horrible loss of life of innocent civilians" but failed to neutralize Hamas leaders and fighters and could drive a lasting insurgency.

In a pair of TV interviews, Blinken underscored that the United States believes Israeli forces should "get out of Gaza," but also is waiting to see credible plans from Israel for security and governance in the territory after the war.

Hamas has reemerged in parts of Gaza, Blinken said, and that "heavy action" by Israeli forces in the southern city of Rafah risks leaving America's closest Mideast ally "holding the bag on an enduring insurgency." He said the United States has worked with Arab countries and others for weeks on developing "credible plans for security, for governance, for rebuilding" in Gaza, but "we haven't seen that come from Israel. ... We need to see that, too."

Blinken also echoed for the first time publicly by a U.S. official the findings of a new Biden administration report to Congress on Friday that said Israel's use of US-provided weapons in Gaza likely violated international humanitarian law. The report also said wartime conditions prevented American officials from determining that for certain in specific airstrikes.

US and UN officials say Israeli restrictions on food shipments since Oct 7 have brought on full-fledged famine in northern Gaza. — **AP**

Strong earthquake strike wakes people on Mexico, Guatemala border

TAPACHULA: A strong earthquake shook the border of Mexico and Guatemala early yesterday, driving frightened residents into the streets.

The temblor struck just before 6am near the Mexican border town of Suchiate, where a river by the same name divides the two countries. The epicenter was just off the Pacific coast, 16km west-southwest of Brisas Barra de Suchiate where the river empties into the sea.

The earthquake had a preliminary magnitude of 6.4, according to the US Geological Survey and a depth of 75km. In Mexico, there were no immediate reports of damage, but more mountainous, remote parts of the border are prone to landslides.

Across the border Guatemala's national disaster prevention agency shared photos of small landslides onto highways in the Quetzaltenango region. — **AP**

Prosecutors seek 40-year sentence for man who attacked Paul Pelosi

CALIFORNIA: The Department of Justice is recommending a 40-year prison sentence for the man convicted of an October 2022 assault and attempted kidnapping after breaking into the home of Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif) and attacking her husband.

Federal prosecutors argue that the crimes constitute an act of terrorism under US law, in a sentencing memorandum submitted Friday.

David DePape broke into then-House Speaker Pelosi's home and attacked Paul Pelosi with a hammer in the

early-morning hours of October 28, 2022. DePape was searching for Nancy Pelosi, he told investigators later, but her husband was the only person inside their San Francisco home at the time, police said. Paul Pelosi, now 84, was hospitalized with a skull fracture and "serious injuries to his right arm and hands," according to the speaker's office.

At trial in November, DePape's attorney, federal public defender Jodi Linker, argued that DePape's actions were not in retaliation for Nancy Pelosi's work as House

speaker, but out of a QAnon-fueled desire to free children from the clutches of a corrupt elite class. Linker did not immediately respond to The Post's request for comment on the sentencing recommendation.

The government disagreed, during the trial and in the 20-page sentencing memo filed Friday. Prosecutors cited federal law, which includes in the definition of terrorism an offense "calculated to influence or affect the conduct of government by intimidation or coercion, or to retaliate against government conduct."

In statements after his arrest, the government notes, DePape, 43, of Richmond, California, said he intended to kidnap Nancy Pelosi and break her kneecaps to show other members of Congress that "lies and corruption had a price." Prosecutors argue in the memo that the court bears a responsibility to use DePape's sentence to deter others from committing political violence. The attack at the Pelosi home comes after a dramatic increase in threats against lawmakers and government officials in recent years. — **THE WASHINGTON POST**

Rivers rise again as rain batters flood-hit south Brazil

PORTO ALEGRE: River levels were rising again yesterday as strong rains lashed waterlogged southern Brazil, where flooding has killed more than 140 people and forced hundreds of thousands from their homes.

Residents of the state of Rio Grande do Sul were bracing for fresh misery from the new rains, after two weeks of downpours saw rivers burst their banks, swallowing up towns and parts

of the regional capital.

More than two million people have been affected by the deluge which experts link to climate change exacerbated by the El Nino weather phenomenon.

The levels of "practically all the major rivers in the state are tending to rise," state authorities said yesterday.

The new threat comes as rescue operations are still

underway, with some 130 people missing, while more than 538,000 were forced to leave their homes.

The probability of further flooding is "very high" in most regions of the state, according to the National Center for Monitoring and Warning for Natural Disasters (Cemaden).

The Guaiba, an estuary bordering state capital Porto Alegre, had on Saturday reached its

lowest level since May 3.

However, fresh rains have once again swollen the body of water, and levels are expected to again rise above five meters.

Its banks overflow at three meters. The Guaiba had reached historic levels of 5.3m on May 5 and 6.

Other already overflowing rivers in the region also saw water levels continue to rise.

The flooding of the Taquari

River has notably put the small town of Mucum on alert, where more than 40 people were killed by a devastating cyclone last September.

The town of Pelotas, south of Porto Alegre, "is facing a worsening situation" which "increases the probability of flooding", warned its mayor Paula Mascarenhas on Instagram, calling for the evacuation of at-risk areas. — **AFP**

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FAJR 3:26AM
SUNRISE 4:51AM
DHUHR 11:30AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

ASR 2:57PM
MAGHRIB 6:12PM
ISHA 7:42PM

Qatar Museums employees collaboratively created an artwork symbolising unity and creativity within the Qatar Museums family. Titled 1300 Inspirations, the artwork comprises 36 panels hand painted with acrylic colour.

WEATHER TODAY

Some clouds with haze.

26°C Minimum
35°C Maximum

Trending in QATAR



On The Peninsula social media platforms

K-Pop group MCND performs hit songs in Qatar amid Korean culture showcase

K-Pop boyband MCND captured the hearts of fans with an awe-striking performance at The Mall of Qatar.



Number of Palestinians detained since October 7 climbs to 8,680

The detention toll in cities and provinces of the West Bank and occupied Jerusalem since October 7 has risen to 8,680.



At least 27 killed in renewed clashes in Sudan's El-Fasher: UN

Clashes reignited between the Sudanese army and rival paramilitaries earlier this week in the key Darfur town of El-Fasher, the United Nations said yesterday, killing at least 27 people in one day.



34 dead in Indonesia floods, 16 missing

At least 34 people have died and 16 more were missing after flash floods and cold lava flow from a volcano hit western Indonesia, a local disaster official said yesterday.



James Anderson to end his record-breaking England test cricket career at Lord's in July

England fast bowler James Anderson will retire from test cricket after the match against the West Indies at Lord's in July.



Cultural diversity on display at Doha book fair

JOELYN BALUYUT
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Local press houses and embassies shine at the ongoing 33rd Doha International Book Fair (DIBF) at Doha Exhibition and Convention Centre, showcasing their country's culture, tradition, arts, scientific studies, among others through various publications. Among the participants, the Katara Publishing House, a cultural project established by the Cultural Village Foundation, Katara stands out. Offering a wide array of books in both English and Arabic, the booth reflects the diversity and cultural richness of the Gulf region.

A highlight at the Katara Publishing House is the children's book "Curious Desert Dwellers" authored by Qatar Philharmonic Orchestra (QPO) Violist Merve Kenet Bulun. The book, now in its second edition, aims to introduce young readers to classical music and its instruments. Bulun, also the Founder and Artistic Director of CineMoon Ensemble, a member of QPO told The Peninsula that she was inspired



Embassy of Japan booth at the DIBF.

to create educational materials for classical music after recognising a lack of such resources for children and young adults.

She said the book is "a story directly told from the desert, from a place which is not very well-known geographical part of the world. Story tellers in the book are the desert animals who are very curious for the knowledge. They want to learn and discover things in

their environment."

Other notable releases at the Katara Publishing House include "Kahraman" by Hamad Al Suliti, which explores minerals, their sources, shapes, forms, and uses, Katara's 12-volume Cultural Encyclopedia, Media in Qatar, Pearl Diving in Qatar, Fine Art in the country of Qatar, Qatar's traditional ships, to name some.

In addition to local press houses, several embassies have also showcased their cultural diversity at the 10-day book fair, which concludes on Saturday, May 18. Embassies from Indonesia, Korea, Japan, USA, Italy, among others, are participating in the event.

The Japanese Embassy, for instance, offers various activities for visitors, including Japanese calligraphy and origami. Skilled calligraphers are available to beautifully inscribe visitors' names in Japanese. Similarly, at the Korea booth, alongside the displayed books, visitors can explore traditional Korean clothing called Hanbok and traditional instruments.



The Curious Desert Dwellers by Merve Kenet Bulun, available at the Katara Publishing House at the ongoing DIBF.

Ambassador of Indonesia to Qatar, H E Ridwan Hassan, meanwhile stressed the importance of the event: "The fair has become our priority as we believe that books play an important role in building understanding and tolerance in society with different backgrounds."

The book fair is open daily from 9am to 10pm, except on Fridays, when it opens from 3pm to 10pm. Entry to the event is free of charge.

Dana Al Fardan to make history as first in the Gulf region to perform at Cannes

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Qatari Composer Dana Al Fardan is set to leave an indelible mark on the global stage as she prepares to grace the prestigious 77th Cannes Film Festival with her groundbreaking performance of "Indigo," solidifying her status as the first composer from the GCC to achieve this remarkable feat.

Representing Qatar with pride, Dana's appearance at the esteemed Trophee Chopard gala promises to be an unforgettable sensory experience, merging sound, colour, and introspection.

"Indigo" is more than a concert: it's an immersive experience. Rooted in neoclassical music and electronic elements, Dana's innovative composition interacts with colour, light, and electronics, guiding audiences on an introspective path towards enlightenment. Dana's vision for "Indigo" transcends conventional boundaries, offering a holistic exploration of art and emotion.

With an illustrious career already under her belt, Dana Al Fardan



continues to captivate audiences worldwide with her mesmerising compositions and groundbreaking collaborations.

Her recent triumph in Italy marked a pivotal moment, as her music took centre stage at the Politeama Garibaldi di Palermo in the play "Giacando con Orlando." Collaborating with Stefano Acorsi, stage director Federica Cellini and performed by the Symphonic Orchestra of Sicily under the baton of the

conductor Giovanni Pasini. Dana's compositions breathed new life into Ludovico Ariosto's epic poem "Orlando Furioso," captivating audiences with a fusion of contemporary soundscapes and classical storytelling.

Dana's creative journey continues with the release of "Falling," her latest single in collaboration with French producer Yaans. Available on all major streaming platforms, "Falling" showcases Dana's versatility as an artist, seamlessly blending electronic beats with her distinctive style. Embracing electronic music as an alternative dimension of

storytelling, Dana's exploration of diverse genres reflects her multifaceted talent and artistic vision.

Dana Al Fardan is also a pioneer, building bridges with her talent and creativity. Representing Qatar and the first GCC composer to perform at the official gala of the Cannes Film Festival, Dana's historic achievement serves as an inspiration to aspiring artists across the region, paving the way for future generations of talent.

Qatar Museums celebrates Year of Family 2024 with educational event

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Qatar Museums (QM) hosted an engaging event in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Development and Family titled "We Are QM Family" at Fire Station: Artist in Residence on the sidelines of its ongoing exhibition, Pipilotti Rist - Electric Idyll, which is on view until June 1.

Aligned with the Qatar Family Year 2024 and aimed to propagate the family's Code of Ethics, "We Are Family" forms part of the exhibition's educational programme, centred around the theme of family values and ethical commitment.

Sheikha Reem Al Thani, Acting Deputy CEO of Exhibitions, said: "Embarking on this inspiring journey of creativity and collaboration with our esteemed Qatar Museums family is a testament to our collective dedication to nurturing and promoting the arts in Qatar. It reinforces our shared values and exemplifies our deep commitment to enriching the fabric of Qatari society through cultural expression and engagement."

Qatar Museums employees collaboratively created an artwork symbolising unity and creativity within the Qatar Museums family. Titled 1300 Inspirations, the artwork comprises 36 panels hand painted with acrylic colour, which will be unveiled on International Family Day, May 15, at Fire Station.

The Qatar National Charter on Family Rights and Duties underscores the importance of family as the foundation of society, highlighting the interdependence between individuals and their families, and emphasising the role of conscious citizens in upholding societal values. Qatar Museums reflects these principles by fostering a familial atmosphere among its employees, aligning with the Charter's principles by promoting the development of creativity, innovation, and self-reliance within families, supporting QM's vision and mission by nurturing individual talents and ambitions.

The Head of the Events Team at the Ministry of Social Development and Family, Maetha Saif Al Khayarin, said: "Celebrating the Year of Family, the Ministry, in



"We Are Family" forms part of the exhibition's educational programme, centred around the theme of family values and ethical commitment.

collaboration with Qatar Museums, is participating in this occasion to emphasise on the pivotal role families play in strengthening family cohesion, advocating for the Family Charter, and fostering awareness through various activities and artistic endeavors addressing issues related to families and their cohesion. This is achieved by art being both a tool for creative expression and self-awareness."

The Fire Station is part of Qatar Museums' Creative Hub/Creative Cluster, which initiates and supports projects that create opportunities to build a strong and sustainable cultural infrastructure.

Khalifa Ahmad Al Obaidli, Director of Fire Station, added: "Fire Station is more than just a place for creating art, it's also a nurturing ground for a community of creativity. Our commitment to nurturing creativity and providing a supportive platform for artists from diverse backgrounds is at the core of our mission. Through our ongoing initiatives, we aim to create a lively community where art thrives, adding to Qatar's cultural diversity and extending its impact globally."

AI film festival gives glimpse of cinema's future

NEW YORK: With fantastical characters including mud people and giant grandmothers, an AI film festival is giving a glimpse of the storytelling made possible by the novel technology.

Nearly 3,000 short films were submitted to the festival organised by Runway AI, one of the leading start-ups in the field of AI-powered video generation.

The 10 films selected put the filmmakers' vivid imaginations on display, with their stories set in aesthetically stunning universes.

"There is a perception of ... AI-driven filmmaking and creation as having a very specific style," Runway co-founder and chief technology officer Anastasis Germanidis told AFP.

But each of the selected films "feels very different from the other one," he said Thursday at the festival's awards ceremony.

Movie making and animation having grown by leaps and bounds in the past 50 years, past feature films like "Inception," "The Matrix" and "Loving Vincent" come to mind when watching the AI shorts.

But the latest technology allows films to be made on a fraction of a typical movie budget, and by anyone with access to a computer and the software.

With just a prompt, Runway can transform a series of still images into a short video, or turn a photo into a painting.

In February, generative AI leader OpenAI launched its video creation software, dubbed Sora, while Google and Meta are developing their own versions, called Lumiere and Emu, respectively.

For his short that won an Honoree prize at the festival, Leo Cannone generated hundreds of images using the AI application Midjourney, then animated them with Runway, making countless edits along the way.

Current AI technology is still underdeveloped in some areas, particularly in providing multiple camera angles and creating flawless human-like speaking characters.

Runway co-founder Alejandro Matamala conceded the technology wasn't yet perfected. "If you want a photo-realistic character that is human... we are not as advanced to do that. But we are saying, there are more different types of ways to tell stories." — AFP