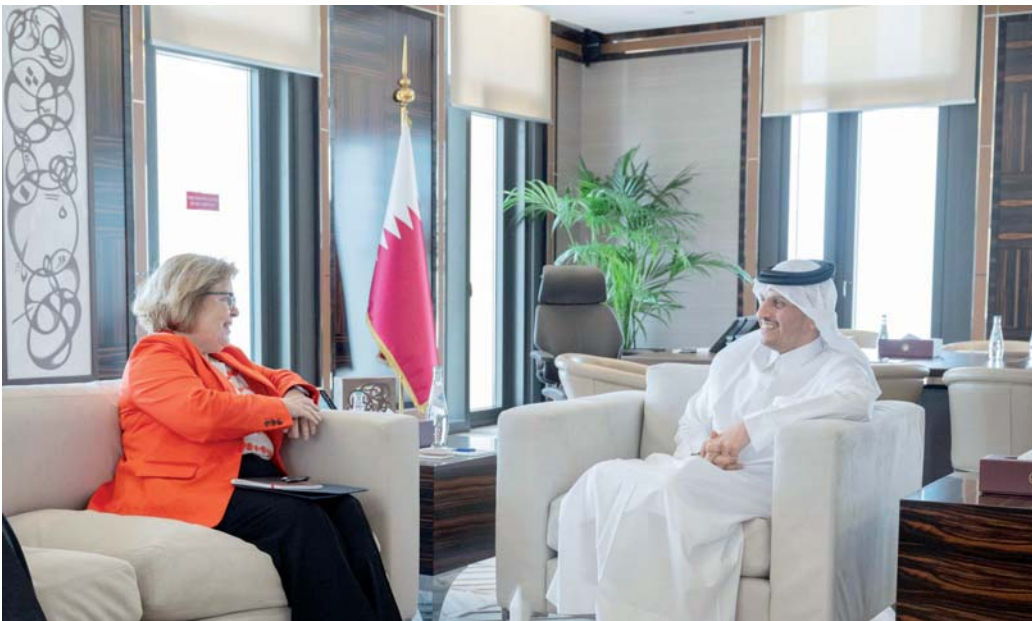




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Prime Minister, US official discuss developments of joint mediation efforts to end war on Gaza

Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs H E Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani met yesterday with US Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs H E Barbara Leaf, who is visiting the country. The meeting discussed the close strategic relations between the State of Qatar and the United States of America, and ways to support and strengthen them. It also discussed the latest developments in the Gaza Strip and the occupied Palestinian territories, along with developments of the joint mediation efforts to end the war on the Strip, in addition to a number of topics of mutual interest.

Qatar Foundation spearheads drive for sustainability with strategic initiatives

FAZEENA SALEEM  
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Qatar Foundation has emerged as a pivotal force in Qatar’s journey towards sustainability, leveraging a multifaceted approach encompassing education, research, and community development. At the forefront of this effort is the Qatar Foundation’s commitment to advancing sustainable practices through targeted initiatives and projects.

Dr. Veronica Bermudez, Senior Research Director of the Energy Center at Qatar Environment and Energy Research Institute (QEERI) in an interview with *The Peninsula* emphasised that key entities within Qatar Foundation, alongside other sustainable initiatives, play a pivotal role in spearheading Qatar’s sustainability efforts.

QEERI is part of Hamad Bin Khalifa University (HBKU), operating under the Qatar

*Qatar Foundation has a holistic approach to sustainability, integrating education, research, and community development, contributes to advancing Qatar’s sustainability goals and building a more sustainable future for the country.*

Foundation. In a recent development, Qatar Foundation has established the Technical Executive Committee comprising senior experts from various entities within the foundation.

“Qatar Foundation has a holistic approach to sustainability. Integrating education, research, and community development contributes to advancing Qatar’s sustainability goals and building a more sustainable future for the country,”

said Dr. Bermudez. “Qatar Foundation has set up a technical executive committee composed of a group of senior experts across the different entities in the foundation, that has set a target and associated timeline to achieve sustainable related targets at the Foundation level, that are aligned with country goals,” she said adding that the targets include reduction in energy consumption, increase of renewable energy adoption, and reduction of carbon footprint.

The committee reports on these targets to Qatar Foundation’s CEO office and the board.

“Qatar Foundation has implemented several major initiatives to promote sustainability across various sectors spearheading a range of initiatives aimed at promoting environmental consciousness, social responsibility, and sustainable living practices across various sectors. ➔P5

Qatar population at 2.85 million, up 85 percent since 2008

ARSALAN ALTAF  
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Qatar’s population has been steadily rising over the years, in step with the remarkable economic growth and infrastructural development the country has witnessed in recent decades.

Statistics by the National Planning Council (NPC) show the total population rising from 1,541,130 at the end of October 2008 to 2,857,822 by June 30, 2024 — an 85.4 percent increase. The highest population

recorded, according to NPC figures, was 3,128,983 in February 2024, followed by 3,119,589 in March 2024. The population stood at 3,098,866 in April and 3,080,804 in May this year.

As of June 2024, the male population stood at 2,070,164 — making up 72.4 percent of the total population. The total population recorded in June 2024 fell by 7.2 percent compared to May 2024. The slight decrease in June can be attributed to the start of summer vacation season when a significant number of

*As of June 2024, male population stood at 2,070,164 — making up 72.4 percent of the total population. The total population recorded in June 2024 fell by 7.2 percent compared to May 2024. The slight decrease in June can be attributed to the start of summer vacation season when a significant number of people travel abroad for holidays.*

people travel abroad for holidays.

These statistics represent the number of persons of all ages, Qataris and non-Qataris, within the boundaries of the State of Qatar as of June 30,

2024. It does not include Qatari nationals or residents who were outside the State boundaries on June 30, 2024.

Giving a breakdown of the population during April 2024, NPC statistics showed

25–64-year-olds make up 73.2 percent of the population, while those above 65 years were merely 1.4 percent. Those below 15 years made up 14.3 percent of the population, while the 15–24 age group constituted 11.1 percent of the country’s population.

The country saw 2,496 babies born in April 2024 and registered 221 deaths.

The rise in population comes even as the country registers an ever-increasing number of visitors for tourism, leisure and business purposes. ➔P2



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STORIES ON PAGE 16

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## Speaker of Shura Council meets Ambassadors of Palestine, Singapore

Speaker of the Shura Council H E Hassan bin Abdullah Al Ghanim met yesterday separately with Ambassador of the State of Palestine H E Munir Abdullah Ghannam (left) and Ambassador of the Republic of Singapore H E Wong Chow Ming. During the two meetings, they reviewed parliamentary relations between the State of Qatar and both the State of Palestine and the Republic of Singapore and ways to strengthen and develop them.

## Qatar, Bosnia and Herzegovina discuss cooperation

**SARAJEVO:** Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina H E Denis Becirovic received yesterday in Sarajevo Minister of State for International Cooperation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs H E Lolwah bint Rashid Al Khater.

The meeting dealt with discussing bilateral cooperation and ways to support and enhance them, and discussing developments in the Gaza Strip and the occupied Palestinian territories, especially developments in the joint mediation to end the war on the Strip, in addition to a number of topics of joint interest.

The Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina expressed his country's appreciation for the role of the State of Qatar and its efforts to achieve a ceasefire in Gaza, and stressed its keenness to strengthen joint bilateral cooperation, especially in the fields of economy,

tourism and culture.

During the interview, His Excellency praised the resounding success of the State of Qatar in hosting the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022.

For her part, the Minister of State for International Cooperation expressed thanks and appreciation to Bosnia and Herzegovina for its positions in support of the State of Qatar in international forums.

The meeting was attended by HE Ambassador of the State of Qatar to Bosnia and Herzegovina Meshal bin Ali Al Attiyah.

Meanwhile, Minister of State for International Cooperation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs H E Lolwah bint Rashid Al Khater also met in Sarajevo with Minister of Human Rights and Refugees of Bosnia and Herzegovina H E Dr. Sevlid Hortic.

Discussions during the meeting dealt with cooperation relations between the two countries and means to support and

enhance them, especially in the field of human rights, in addition to a number of issues of common interest.

During the meeting, the Minister of Human Rights and Refugees of Bosnia and Herzegovina expressed his country's aspiration to strengthen joint bilateral cooperation in all fields, especially in the education and development sectors, and praised the role of the State of Qatar and its efforts to achieve ceasefire in Gaza.

The Minister of State for International Cooperation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs received from the Minister of Human Rights and Refugees of Bosnia and Herzegovina the flower of Srebrenica medal, which expresses the desire to show solidarity.

Ambassador of the State of Qatar to Bosnia and Herzegovina H E Meshal bin Ali Al Attiyah attended the meeting. — *QNA*



Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina H E Denis Becirovic with Minister of State for International Cooperation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs H E Lolwah bint Rashid Al Khater during the meeting.

Qatar population at 2.85 million, up 85 percent since 2008

FROM PAGE 1

The total number of inbound visitors reached about 382,000 in April 2024, recording a monthly increase of 16.3 percent (compared to March 2024) and an annual increase of 17.9 percent (compared to April 2023).

The highest number of visitors was from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries at 42 percent, followed by 22.9 percent from countries in Asia and Oceania other than Arab and GCC states, 19.2 percent from Europe, 8 percent from Arab countries other than GCC, and 6.2 percent from Americas. As for visitors by type of port, the visitors via air made up the highest percentage with 55 percent of the total number of visitors, said the National Planning Council.

## MoSDF launches training course under financial awareness programme ‘Aazim’

THE PENINSULA

**DOHA:** The Ministry of Social Development and Family (MoSDF) in cooperation with Doha Institute for Graduate Studies has launched the first training course within its financial awareness programme “Aazim” (determined).

The course targeted new employees, those intend to get married and indebted people enabling them to spend wisely.

The two-day workshop was held at Excellence Centre for Training and Consulting of Doha Institute for Graduate Studies on July 9 and 10.

The financial awareness course in line with Qatar National Vision 2030 aims to achieve sustainable development and decent living for its people by educating participants (male and female) on how to save resources.

It also provides training on savings

policies and rationalising spending to achieve financial sustainability and spreading the culture of financial awareness in society in a very attractive way.

The first training course, presented by Head of the Training and Programme Development Department at the Centre of Excellence for Training and Consulting Dr. Mona Babeti, focused on financial awareness.

The course covered several topics, including a documentary film entitled: “Why don’t I spend well?” the concept and nature of correct spending, the financial age of a person, the skills of setting a personal budget, and strategies for prioritising monthly purchases, the successful equation: saving versus spending, the twelve skills for saving, and the eight skills for spending, practical training through a proven and successful way, and a realistic application (your white penny

for black day), a tour of the world of (indebted people got rich).

Head of the Training and Programme Development Department at the Centre of Excellence for Training and Consulting Dr. Mona Babeti thanked the Ministry of Social Development and Family for launching this project, which she described as wonderful.

She stressed financial awareness is one of the most important topics raised today in most developed countries to preserve resources that will achieve financial sustainability and ensure decent life in the society.

Babeti urged the three target groups — people in debt, those intend to get married, and new employees, in addition to university students — to practise the best financial policies for a happy life.

A social guidance consultant at the Ministry of Social Development and Family Hessa Al Dhiyab stressed the

value of preserving the family’s capabilities, which comes through wise spending and planning for household expenditures.

She added that everyone is required to have the necessary skills and knowledge about the best practices to achieve financial balance in life, and to work to help future generations to live within a rationalisation framework.

Following the directive of Minister of Social Development and Family H E Maryam bint Ali bin Nasser Al Misnad, financial awareness programme Aazim was launched with the support of Social and Sport Contribution Fund (DAAAM).

The programme aims at enhancing the awareness of Qatari families and youth about the importance of optimal planning, spending and saving, and avoiding debt for luxury.

This project comes within a comprehensive strategy through which the

Ministry seeks to encourage Qatari society to produce, away from irresponsible consumerism.

This is in addition to preparing future generations to rely on diverse sources of income that are compatible with global changes and preserve the capabilities of the family and society.

The Ministry of Social Development and Family through the Aazim programme seeks to build financial awareness based on lofty Islamic values in spending and to use integrated models and means to manage financial life, which has been greatly affected by global economic transformations.

The initiative aims at keeping young people and new families from unnecessary consumerism for luxury by building a conscious and sustainable society that guarantees future generations equal opportunities for prosperity and sustainability.

## Sidra Medicine signs MoU with Children’s National Hospital from Washington DC

THE PENINSULA

**DOHA:** Sidra Medicine, a member of Qatar Foundation, has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Children’s National Hospital from Washington DC to establish a nursing partnership and engagement programme.

The MoU will support Sidra Medicine’s journey towards nursing excellence and establishing itself as a magnet hospital through its Pathways to Excellence programme. It will also create opportunities to lead to the formation of Sidra Medicine and Children’s National Hospital as sister hospitals.

Dr. Iyabo Tinubu-Karch, Chief Executive Officer at Sidra Medicine, said, “Nursing plays a vital role in Sidra Medicine’s mission and vision to become a centre of excellence for learning and discovery. With over 1,200 nurses as a critical part of our care team across women’s and children’s services, we want to create opportunities and resources to help them excel in their fields. Our partnership with Children’s National Hospital will

be integral to creating stronger training and upskilling opportunities for our paediatric-focused nurses and supporting them in their career development paths.”

DeAnn Marshall, President of Children’s National Hospital Foundation and co-signatory of the MoU, said, “We are thrilled to partner with Sidra Medicine. This MoU represents a significant step forward in our relationship with the women’s and children’s hospital in our mission to provide high-quality healthcare services to patients worldwide. In partnering with Sidra Medicine, we aim to support their ever-growing need to train and educate the nurse leaders in the region.”

Judy Dawson-Jones, Chief Nursing Officer at Sidra Medicine, stated: “Our partnership with Children’s National is a significant achievement for Sidra Medicine as it will support our nurses with access to exceptional calibre of experience, and skills that will enhance patient experience and improve outcomes.”

## Qatar Calendar House astronomical team observes Milky Way, Andromeda Galaxy

MARIVIE ALABANZA  
THE PENINSULA

**DOHA:** The Qatar Calendar House (QCH) astronomical observation team and astrophotographers recently observed the Orion Arm of the Milky Way Galaxy from the Sudanthile region, south of Qatar.

The team also viewed the Andromeda Galaxy and witnessed numerous meteor showers and star constellations during their observation.

“On Thursday late night, the team travelled about 70 minutes from Doha to the Sudanthile area to witness the peak visibility of the galaxy,” Doha-based astrophotographer Ahmed Raslan told *The Peninsula*.

“My colleague Ali Abo Ras organised the event with the support of Dr. Bashir Marzouq, an astronomical expert at QCH who joined us during the observation,” he said.

Raslan shared that the team was able to observe the Orion Arm of the Milky Way, the galaxy’s centre, multiple meteor showers,

the Andromeda Galaxy, and summer star constellations. The event provided an opportunity for enthusiasts to gather and observe celestial phenomena under expert guidance. Participants enjoyed viewing celestial objects both with the naked eye and through astronomical instruments.

He added that such observation events are regularly organised in the country. “There are always monthly events either by QCH or other astronomy enthusiasts. QCH has its winter camp next to Sudanthile from September to April every year.”

Raslan noted that the current period offers optimal conditions for observing the Milky Way in the early morning sky. During summer, the galactic centre and parts of the Orion Arm can be seen from locations free of light pollution.

When asked about upcoming observation events, Raslan said, “Yes, we have another event at the end of this Hijri month, as the moon will not be shining, making the night dark enough for clear observation.”



Qatar Calendar House astronomical team and astrophotographers under the Milky Way. PIC: ALI ABO RAS







# Qatar harmonising growth with environmental preservation: Al Subaie

**QINGDAO, CHINA:** Qatar participated in the Green Development Forum of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which concluded yesterday in Qingdao, China, with a delegation headed by Minister of Environment and Climate Change H E Dr. Abdullah bin Abdulaziz bin Turki Al Subaie.

The Minister of Environment and Climate Change delivered Qatar's speech at the two-day forum, during which he emphasised the great importance that Qatar attaches to green development and harmonizing economic and social growth with the preservation of the environment and natural resources, which is reflected in the Qatar National Vision 2030, which is based on four basic pillars including "environmental development," which always seeks to achieve synergy between economic expansion and environmental preservation. He pointed to Qatar's recent launch of the

*Minister of Environment and Climate Change addresses Green Development Forum of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.*

third National Development Strategy (2024-2030), which serves as the main catalyst in advancing country's economic diversification while ensuring environmental sustainability.

He highlighted that ensuring energy security remains a fundamental global obstacle to development and that Qatar, as a leading global supplier of natural gas, enjoys a distinguished position that qualifies it to assume a major role in global green development and the transition towards a low-carbon future. Qatar also launched the National Renewable Energy Strategy, which aligns with its



Minister of Environment and Climate Change H E Dr. Abdullah bin Abdulaziz bin Turki Al Subaie meeting Minister of Ecology and Environment of China H E Huang Runqiu on the sidelines of the forum.

commitment to a greener and more prosperous future.

Dr. Al Subaie indicated that the issuance of Green Sukuk was recently announced, which is considered the first of its kind in the region and represents the entry of the State of Qatar into a new phase of financing environmentally friendly projects, and its focus on achieving a balance between human needs and preserving the environment. He noted Qatar's announcement of the ESG and Sustainability Strategy for the Financial Sector, which aims to enhance the efficiency of the financial system in supporting national sustainability goals.

On the sidelines of his participation in the forum, Dr. Abdullah bin Abdulaziz bin Turki Al Subaie met with a number of ministers and international officials, including Minister of State for Climate Change, Environment and Energy of the Republic of Maldives H E Mohamed Rasheed,

Minister of Ecology and Environment of the People's Republic of China H E Huang Runqiu, Deputy Minister of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of the Republic of Belarus H E Ivan Prykhodzka.

He also met separately with Secretary-General of the SCO H E Zhang Ming, Vice-President of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Head of Iran's Environmental Protection Organization H E Ali Salajegheh, Minister of Ecology, Environmental Protection and Climate Change of the Republic of Uzbekistan H E Aziz Abdulkhakimov, and Minister of Ecology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Kazakhstan H E Yerlan Nyssanbayev.

The meetings discussed a number of issues, most notably supporting joint efforts to address climate challenges, and enhancing cooperation between all parties to preserve the environment and biodiversity. — **QNA**

## Papa John's Pizza Academy Season 3 engages young chefs in pizza-making

THE PENINSULA

**DOHA:** Papa John's has announced the launch of the highly anticipated Papa John's Pizza Academy Season 3, an exciting initiative aimed at inspiring young chefs through hands-on pizza-making activities.

This unique programme encourages children to unleash their creativity, learn culinary skills, and have a blast in the kitchen. This season promises interactive pizza making workshops, a thrilling pizza making competition, and exciting prizes for participants.

Building on the success of previous seasons, Papa John's Pizza Academy Season 3 promises to deliver even more fun and educational experiences. Kids aged between 5 to 12 years are invited to participate in interactive workshops led by experienced Papa John's chefs. Through these workshops, children will learn the art of pizza making from kneading dough to choosing delicious toppings, all while gaining insights into the world of culinary arts.

The highlight of this season is the pizza making competition, where participants can record their pizza-making process and post their videos on social media tagging @papajohnsqatar for a chance to win exciting prizes. Whether it's the perfect dough toss or

the artful arrangement of toppings, creativity will be rewarded.

"We are thrilled to launch the third season of Papa John's Pizza Academy, designed to engage young pizza enthusiasts in a memorable culinary journey," said Joseph Joseph, General Manager at Papa John's. This season, participants not only get to enjoy the thrill of competition but also learn valuable culinary skills in a supportive and fun environment." Throughout the season, participants will have the opportunity to showcase their culinary talents and compete in friendly pizza-making challenges. Each workshop will be filled with laughter, learning, and of course, plenty of pizza tasting.

Key highlights of Papa John's Pizza Academy Season 3 that participants can look forward to are hands-on workshops where they'll learn pizza-making techniques. There will be a thrilling pizza-making competition where contestants can document their

process to compete for fantastic prizes. Registration is free and open to all kids. They can sign up online.

The event features chef-led demonstrations by experienced Papa John's chefs, creative challenges to spark imagination, and educational insights into ingredients and balanced nutrition. Several partners are involved in the event including Tawar Mall as the venue partner, Tanmiah as the Platinum Partner, Arabian Packaging as the Gold Sponsor, and Radio Mirchi as the Entertainment Partner — all sharing commitment to promoting culinary education and creativity. Participants also get the chance to sample the creations and enjoy delicious Papa John's pizzas.

Papa John's Pizza Academy Season 3 kicks off on July 5 at Tawar Mall, at 3:30pm at Papa John's store located at ground floor and it will continue every Friday between 3pm and 6pm at Tawar Mall.



Participants and officials at a Papa John's Pizza Academy event.



### President of Dutch Senate meets Qatar's Ambassador

President of the Senate of the Kingdom of the Netherlands H E Jan Anthonie Bruijn met Ambassador of the State of Qatar to the Netherlands, H E Dr. Mutlaq bin Majid Al Qahtani. During the meeting, the two sides discussed cooperation and relations between the two countries.

## New Safari Toastmasters Club executive committee announced

THE PENINSULA

**DOHA:** Safari Group has announced the new leadership team for the Safari Toastmasters Club.

The Executive Committee for the 2024-2025 term is a dedicated group of individuals who bring a wealth of experience, passion, and innovative ideas to the table, and they are expected to drive the club towards endless success.

Executive Committee members include Praveen Manjery Ramakrishnan as the president; Tijomon Chamakunnel Philipose as vice-president, education; Varun Balu Kannappassery Varish as vice-president, membership; Mohammad Asdullah Khan



Praveen Manjery Ramakrishnan  
President



Tijomon Chamakunnel Philipose  
Vice President of Education

as vice-president, public relations; Wilria Angeles Leoncio as secretary; Prasanth Chandrasekharan Nair as treasurer, Md Tuhinul Islam as sergeant at arms; and Biju Gangadharan as immediate past president.

The club's success is greatly supported by Shaheen Backer, Managing Director of Safari Group.

His commitment to the club extends beyond the workplace, recognising the significant value it adds to employees' development. Whether it's providing dedicated space for activities, allocating resources for meetings, or personally attending events, his support is key to maintaining the club's vibrant and successful atmosphere providing valuable outcomes for its members.

The recent ceremony was guided by Hafees Muhammed, Past Area 21 Director and current Division F club growth director.

Following the ceremonial gavel exchange, each new member of the executive committee was introduced, highlighting their qualifications and roles. This introduction helped members connect with their new leaders, encouraging a sense of unity and collective responsibility. As he took over the gavel, new president Praveen Manjery Ramakrishnan expressed his sincere thanks to Safari management for their ongoing support and for creating opportunities for the club's advancement.

In his role as immediate past president, Biju Gangadharan shared his experiences and provided valuable advice to support the club's future growth.

### TENDER NOTICE

Tenders are invited from qualified & reputed contractors for "Supply of Vehicle Lease for Marriott Laundry Operations 3 Years Contract".

### LAST DATE TO ISSUE TENDER DOCUMENTS

July 16, 2024, Tuesday at 17:00 hours

### TENDER CLOSING

Tender closing date: July 18, 2024, Thursday at 17:00 hours

### TENDER FEE

Tender fee: QR 200

### PARTICIPATION

For tender participation, remit the tender fee at the Front Office at the **Sharq Village & Spa Hotel**. Then contact below numbers to submit by email the tender fee payment receipt along with your expression of interest letter, copy of valid commercial registration, and computer card. Tender documents shall be issued to Tenderer's by email only after receiving the required documents.

Contact: 5009 4558 / 6659 5980



**QATAR FUEL ADDITIVES COMPANY LIMITED**  
**QAFAC**  
**TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT**

The Tender Committee of QAFAC invites qualified local suppliers to participate in the following Tender in accordance with QAFAC tendering procedures:

NO.	TENDER NO.	DESCRIPTION	COLLECTION FEE	TENDER BOND	BID CLOSING DATE
1.	QTC/060/24	Four (4) Years Call off Contract for Maintenance Services of Control Valves at QAFAC, Mesaieed	Qrs. 300/-	Qrs. 125,000/-	11 <sup>th</sup> August 2024

Interested companies are invited to collect the above tender documents as follows

- **Collection Date :** From **Wednesday, 10<sup>th</sup> July, 2024** (QAFAC working days from Sunday to Thursday only)
- **Collection Time :** 08:00 a.m. – 2:30 p.m.
- **Location :** The Gate, Bay Tower 2, 13<sup>th</sup> Floor, West Bay, QAFAC
- **Tender Fees :** As shown above, (**Non- refundable**) can be paid at QAFAC Doha Office
- **Validity :** Offers must be valid for 120 days from closing date.
- **Bid Bond :** Offers must include a Bid bond issued from a local bank and valid for 120 days from closing date.
- **Authorization :** Tenders will be issued to authorized company personnel with the following:
  1. Official authorization on Company Letter Head,
  2. Proper Identification,
  3. Copy of Company's Commercial Registration.
  4. Focal Point of Contact (Name, Telephone, Mobile & Email)
  5. Valid ICV Certificate (Mandatory)

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



# Al Attiyah Foundation, UDST partner to develop future energy, sustainability leaders



Chairman of the Al Attiyah Foundation, H E Abdullah bin Hamad Al Attiyah (left) and UDST President Dr. Salem Al Naemi signing the document.

## THE PENINSULA

**DOHA:** The Abdullah Bin Hamad Al Attiyah International Foundation for Energy and Sustainable Development and the University of Doha for Science and Technology (UDST) have embarked on a significant partnership by signing a memorandum of understanding. This collaboration signals the commitment of both organisations to the development of future energy and sustainability leaders. It aims to bolster research, education, and dialogue in the fields of energy, sustainability, and climate change, while fostering the enhancement of

constructive contribution to corporate social responsibility, in line with Qatar National Vision 2030. H E Abdullah bin Hamad Al Attiyah, Chairman of the Al Attiyah Foundation, and Dr. Salem Al Naemi, President of UDST, ratified the agreement during signing it lately. Al Attiyah expressed his satisfaction at the collaboration, stating: "I am delighted to formalise the cooperation agreement between the Al-Attiyah Foundation and UDST. This agreement underscores our firm belief in the significance of collaborative efforts and our confidence in the university to be a worthy partner in our shared vision to nurture the youth of

Qatar and develop future leaders in the areas of energy, climate change, and sustainability." He further emphasised, "this partnership will serve as a platform for launching joint research and studies, as well as exchange of information, knowledge and experiences." Dr. Salem Al Naemi, said: "As a national university, energy and sustainability are key pillars of our strategy, both in research and in educating a generation that is knowledgeable, skilled, and committed to achieving Qatar's National Vision. This MoU will facilitate knowledge exchange, establish a strong foundation for collaboration, and pave the way for significant achievements."

## QRDI Council announces Qatar-UK collaboration on AI

### THE PENINSULA

**DOHA:** Qatar Research, Development, and Innovation (QRDI) Council, in partnership with the British Embassy in Doha, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), and the AI Committee of the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (MCIT), has announced a call for project proposals under the Gulf Strategy Fund (GSF) 2024-2025, scoping project on Qatar-UK Collaboration on Artificial Intelligence (AI). Submissions are due by August 12, 2024.

Proposals should aim to identify and scope practical and ambitious ways to enhance Qatar-UK cooperation,

supporting both countries' respective AI and critical technologies strategies. Eng. Omar Al Ansari, QRDI Council's Secretary-General, said: "This initiative aims to advance bilateral cooperation in AI, leveraging both countries' combined expertise and initiatives like Qatar's Digital Vision 2030 and the UK's significant investments in AI research and development. Working on this project in partnership with MoFA and MCIT as well as British Embassy in Doha will be beneficial for strengthening the bilateral relationship between RDI communities in Qatar and the UK and facilitate the exchange of experience and knowledge to achieve our

common goals." The project is set to run from September 2024 to March 2025, with funds ranging from £50,000 to £80,000, led by the British Embassy in Doha and co-designed with QRDI Council, MoFA, and MCIT's AI Committee. Focusing on building and scaling AI ecosystems, as well as enhancing the bilateral relationships between Qatar and UK, the project aims to utilise local RDI talent in Qatar, by encouraging the awarded implementers to include Qatari graduates to support their professional development and analyse Qatar-UK collaboration opportunities to launch AI-enabled companies and integrate AI into existing enterprises.

## Qatar Foundation spearheads drive for sustainability with strategic initiatives

### FROM PAGE 1

"These key initiatives underscore the foundation's dedication to fostering a culture of sustainability and environmental stewardship within the country," said Dr. Bermudez.

"Education for Sustainable Development lies at the core of Qatar Foundation's sustainability agenda, with a focus on integrating sustainability principles into educational institutions and programmes. By educating students about environmental conservation, social responsibility, and sustainable practices, the foundation cultivates a generation of environmentally conscious individuals poised to drive sustainability efforts in Qatar," she added.

In line with its commitment to renewable energy, Qatar Foundation has embarked on solar energy projects to promote clean energy sources and reduce carbon emissions; green building practices feature prominently in Qatar Foundation's development projects, emphasising sustainable and energy-efficient building designs that minimise environmental impact and promote resource conservation; and sustainable transportation is another key focus area for Qatar Foundation, advocating for eco-friendly commuting options such as cycling, carpooling, and public transportation to reduce traffic congestion and air pollution on its campuses.

Qatar Foundation also actively engages in environmental awareness campaigns, workshops, and events to educate the community about sustainability issues, environmental conservation, and the significance of adopting eco-friendly practices in daily life. "Collectively, these initiatives underscore Qatar Foundation's unwavering commitment to advancing sustainability goals in Qatar and fostering a culture of environmental responsibility and stewardship. Through its multifaceted approach encompassing education, renewable energy, green building practices, sustainable transportation, and environmental awareness, the foundation paves the way for a more sustainable and environmentally conscious society in Qatar," said Dr. Bermudez.

She also emphasized that Qatar Foundation is an example of sustainability

leadership in Qatar, with several entities at the forefront of driving the nation's environmental objectives forward. QEERI is a pioneer in cutting-edge research related to environmental sustainability and renewable energy technologies. "Through its vital work, QEERI plays a significant role in developing sustainable solutions to environmental challenges, such as water scarcity, waste management, air pollution, coastal degradation and climate change impacts. Amid these environmental challenges, Qatar grapples with one of the highest per capita carbon footprints globally, primarily attributed to its heavy reliance on natural gas for energy production and industrial activities," said Dr. Bermudez.

She added, "R&D at QEERI solar energy projects, energy conservation programs, and emission reduction strategies are pivotal towards reducing Qatar's carbon footprint and align with global efforts to combat climate change." Other prominent initiatives by Qatar Foundation are the World Innovation Summit for Health (WISH), which advocates for sustainable healthcare

practices and policies; and Qatar Science & Technology Park (QSTP) which supports startups and companies focused on sustainable technologies, clean energy solutions, and environmental conservation efforts contributes significantly to driving sustainable economic growth in Qatar. "In addition to QEERI, WISH, and QSTP, Qatar Foundation's Education City campus hosts various research centers and institutions (like Earthna) dedicated to sustainability-related research areas. These centers focus on critical topics such as water security, urban development, environmental conservation, and renewable energy, generating valuable knowledge and innovative solutions to tackle Qatar's sustainability challenges effectively," said Dr. Bermudez.

"Through their commitment to research, innovation, and the implementation of sustainability initiatives, these entities are instrumental in paving the way for a more sustainable future in Qatar, in alignment with the country's broader sustainability objectives and aspirations," said Dr. Bermudez.

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## Dolphin Energy Limited

### Invitation to Tender

Tender Number	Description	Tender Bond	Deadline for Tender Submission, 12 Noon (Qatar Time) on
ITT-QC-PCU-1795	Warehouse Operations and Management Services	QAR 70,000	August 19, 2024
ITT-QC-OPU-1793	LTSA for Laboratory Support Services	QAR 50,000	August 19, 2024

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

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

How to Tender	Expression of Interest (EOI) Form and Scope of Services/Works can be downloaded from the company's website <a href="http://www.dolphinenergy.com/procurement">www.dolphinenergy.com/procurement</a>
	Interested companies must complete the EOI Form and submit to company's email address within two (2) working days from the publication date of this advertisement.  Following receipt of completed EOI Form, interested companies will receive a Request for Proposal (RFP) through Dolphin's SAP Ariba to tender.

## QatarEnergy LNG Tender Invitation



No.	TENDER NUMBER / DESCRIPTION	TENDER ISSUE PERIOD	TENDER FEE (QAR)	TENDER BOND (USD)	TENDER CLOSING DATE
1	LTC/C/SDC/6715/24 - DESIGN, SUPPLY AND INSTALLATION OF WELLHEADS & TREES (WHTs), RELATED SERVICES AND SPARE PARTS	09/07/2024 to 17/07/2024	0	250,000	30/07/2024

### Scope of Work:

Design, Supply and Installation of Wellheads and Trees (WHTs), related Services and supply of Spare Parts for Company's onshore and offshore wells for North Field West (NFW) project.

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

### Place for Tender Collection and Bid Submission:

ITT document for this tender will be available in QatarEnergy LNG website under Suppliers tab >Current Open Tenders. The bids shall be submitted through the QatarEnergy LNG online platform (SMART by GEP).

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



# Heavy battles in Gaza City on eve of new truce talks

**GAZA STRIP:** Israeli forces in war-ravaged Gaza City pushed on with a major offensive yesterday that has again displaced Palestinian.

Troops, tanks and fighter jets swooped on Gaza's biggest urban area on the eve of new contacts in Qatar aiming for an eventual hostage-prisoner exchange and a truce in the war raging into its 10th month.

CIA director William Burns and Israel's Mossad chief David Barnea are due to travel to Qatar today, after Burns held talks with Egypt's President Abdel Fattah Al Sisi in Cairo.

Hamas, whose October 7 attack triggered the war, has accused Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of deliberately escalating fighting in Gaza City and Rafah in the territory's south, to thwart an agreement.

The Islamist group's political chief Ismail Haniyeh said he had made "urgent contact" with mediators, warning that the "catastrophic consequences" of the latest battles could "reset the negotiation process to square one".

Hamas's armed wing, the Ezzedine Al Qassam Brigades,

*Hamas has accused Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of deliberately escalating fighting in Gaza City and Rafah in the territory's south, to thwart an agreement.*

described the fighting in Gaza City in recent days as "the most intense in months".

The fighters were fighting with rockets, mortars and explosives, it said.

After almost two weeks of battles in Gaza City's eastern Shujaiya district, Israeli forces have extended the fighting into the city's east, west and south.

Residents reported helicopter strikes, "explosions and numerous gun battles" in the city's southwest.

Israel's military said it was pursuing Palestinian fighters in Gaza City, six months after it said it had dismantled Hamas's "military framework" in the territory's north.

Aircraft struck the city as troops were engaged in "close-quarters combat", seizing

weapons and destroying tunnels, the military said, reporting "dozens" of militants killed.

The United Nations said tens of thousands of civilians have been affected by the surge in fighting since the first of three evacuation orders for Gaza City was declared on June 27.

Thousands were seen marching down dusty roads past bombed-out buildings, with mothers carrying babies and others packing belongings onto donkey carts.

The UN Human Rights Office said it was "appalled" at the way civilians, many of whom have been displaced multiple times, have been ordered to head to areas where "military operations are ongoing and where civilians continue to be killed and injured".

Gaza City residents have now been told to move south to Deir Al Balah, which the UN office said "is already seriously overcrowded" with displaced Palestinians.

The war started with Hamas's October 7 attack on southern Israel. The fighters seized 251 hostages, 116 of whom remain in Gaza, including 42 the military says are dead.



Palestinians collect water from a Unicef tanker in Deir Al Balah in the central Gaza Strip, yesterday, (AFP)

Israel responded with a military offensive that has killed at least 38,243 people in Gaza, also mostly civilians.

The toll includes at least 50 killed over the past 24 hours, said a ministry statement yesterday. Qatar and Egypt, supported by the United States, have been engaged in months of behind-the-scenes contacts to start truce talks and organise an exchange of hostages for Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails. Hamas has signalled that it would drop its insistence on a "complete" ceasefire— which Israel had repeatedly rejected — as a con-

dition for starting talks.

Netanyahu's has set out conditions for talks, including that "any deal will allow Israel to return and fight until all the goals of the war are achieved", including the destruction of Hamas.

As the Gaza war has raged on, Israel has also exchanged regular cross-border fire with Lebanon's Hezbollah, allies of Hamas, heightening fears of an all-out war.

Hezbollah yesterday released a video showing aerial surveillance footage it said was taken over intelligence and military positions in the

Israeli-annexed Syrian Golan Heights.

The release came after an Israeli strike killed a senior Hezbollah commander last week. The group's chief Hassan Nasrallah was expected to make a televised address Wednesday at an event commemorating the slain fighter.

Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz told Nasrallah on social media to "stop the threats and violence", and "withdraw" Hezbollah forces from the border area, in line with a 2006 UN Security Council resolution that ended their latest major war. — **AFP**

## UN experts say Gaza children dying in Israel's 'starvation campaign'

**GENEVA:** UN rights experts yesterday accused Israel of carrying out a "targeted starvation campaign" that has resulted in the deaths of children in Gaza.

"Israel's intentional and targeted starvation campaign against the Palestinian people is a form of genocidal violence and has resulted in famine across all of Gaza," 10 independent United Nations experts said in a statement.

The UN has not officially declared a famine in the Gaza Strip. But the experts, including the UN special rapporteur on the right to food Michael Fakhri, insisted there was no denying famine was under way.

"Thirty-four Palestinians have died from malnutrition since 7 October, the majority being children," said the experts, who are appointed by the UN Human Rights Council, but who do not speak on behalf of the United Nations.

The UN experts listed three children who had recently died "from malnutrition", after a number of others were said to have starved to death in northern Gaza earlier this year. Six-month-old Fayeze Ataya and 13-year-old Abdulqader Al Serhi had died on May 30 and June 1 at Gaza's Al Aqsa Hospital, while nine-year-old Ahmad Abu Reida died on June 3 in the tent sheltering his displaced family in Khan Yunis, they said.

"With the death of these children from starvation despite medical treatment in central Gaza, there is no doubt that famine has spread from northern Gaza into central and southern Gaza," they said.

The experts decried that the world had not done more to avert this disaster.

"When a two-month-old baby and 10-year-old Yazan Al Kafarneh died of hunger on February 24 and March 4 respectively, this confirmed that famine had struck northern Gaza," they said. "The whole world should have intervened earlier to stop Israel's genocidal starvation campaign and prevented these deaths."

"Inaction is complicity." — **AFP**

## Sudan army chief hosts Ethiopia PM

**PORT SUDAN:** Sudan's de facto leader Abdel Fattah Al Burhan, who has led the army in a war against paramilitaries for over a year yesterday hosted Ethiopian prime minister Abiy Ahmed.

Ahmed's visit to the Red Sea coastal town of Port Sudan — currently the seat of the army-aligned government — is the highest-level state visit since the war began between the army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces in April 2023.

"It is a testament to the depth of relations" between the two countries, Sudan's ruling Transitional Sovereignty Council said in a statement. In a closed-door meeting, Burhan briefed Ahmed on the "crimes and atrocities" committed by the RSF as part of the "terrorist militia's rebellion against the state and its institutions," his council said.

According to the Ethiopian premier's office, yesterday's meeting comes in the context of Ahmed's "commitment to finding sustainable solutions for Sudan's stability".

The visit comes as the African Union, which is headquartered in Addis Ababa, seeks to restart truce talks between Burhan and his former deputy, RSF commander Mohamed Hamdan Daglo.

Burhan's army camp has so far largely shunned East African mediation attempts, accusing



President of Sudan's Transitional Sovereignty Council General Abdel Fattah Al Burhan (right) welcomes Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed during an official visit in Port Sudan yesterday. (AFP)

regional leaders of siding with "the terrorist militia".

The meeting also comes two days after Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al Sisi — Ahmed's regional rival — hosted Sudanese civilian and political leaders, including key members of Burhan's government, for talks on ending the war.

Mediation efforts, including by the United States and Saudi Arabia, have repeatedly floundered while the rival generals vie for tactical advantage.

The conflict in the country of 48 million people has so far killed tens of thousands of people, with some estimates placing the death toll as high as 150,000, according to UN envoy to Sudan Tom Perriello.

It has also forced nearly 10 million people to flee both internally and across borders, decimated Sudan's already fragile infrastructure and healthcare system and pushed the impoverished country to the brink of famine. — **AFP**

## Liberia's President Boakai takes 40 percent pay cut

**MONROVIA:** Liberia's President Joseph Boakai will cut his salary by 40 percent, a move he says is aimed at "setting a precedent for responsible governance" in the West African country battling poverty and corruption.

Boakai was sworn in for a six-year term in January and has pledged to improve living conditions for Liberians, tackle widespread corruption and uphold the rule of law.

The president's voluntary pay cut reflects a "determination to lead by example in strengthening government accountability and demonstrating solidarity with the people of the nation", a statement from the presidency said.

Liberia is one of the poorest countries in the world, where more than half of the population lives in poverty, according to a 2023 World Bank report.

The country also ranks 145th out of 180 on Transparency International's 2023 Corruption Perceptions Index. — **AFP**

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## Stormy weather wreaks havoc in South Africa's Western Cape

**JOHANNESBURG:** Strong winds and heavy rains have damaged buildings and left thousands of people homeless in South Africa, authorities said, as weather services warned yesterday that more bad weather was coming.

The Cape Town region has been battered by several cold fronts over the past few days, with mountainous areas experiencing rare heavy snowfalls.

The Western Cape government said 82 schools were damaged, forcing five to remain closed on

yesterday. In some cases, wind gusts blew away roof sheeting.

Over the weekend, almost 4,000 people were left homeless as strong winds destroyed about 1,000 homes and other structures in the impoverished township of Khayelitsha.

Localised flooding, fallen trees, electricity outages and road closures were reported across the province, authorities said.

The South African Maritime Safety Authority (SAMSA) said 18 crew members of a cargo ship

were rescued on Monday after they were forced to abandon their vessel as it listing severely in the rough seas.

The seafarers, all Filipino nationals, were found in a life raft off South Africa's Atlantic coast and recovered by two nearby cargo vessels, it said.

The South African Weather Service (SAWS) said more "disruptive rain leading to flooding and possible mudslides" was expected to hit the province today and will continue tomorrow. — **AFP**

## Elephants trample Spanish tourist to death in South Africa

**CAPE TOWN:** Elephants trampled to death a Spanish tourist at a South African wildlife reserve after he left his vehicle and approached a herd to take photographs, police and local government authorities said yesterday.

The 43-year-old man was killed on Sunday at Pilanesberg National Park in North West province, about 180km from Johannesburg, police said.

The elephant herd included young calves. Wildlife experts often warn that elephants are especially protective of their young and can react aggressively to a perceived threat. Police said the man's fiancée and two other women, all from Johannesburg, were also in the vehicle and unharmed.

Piet Nel, acting chief conservation officer for the North West Parks and Tourism Board, said guests at Pilanesberg are told they are not allowed to leave their vehicles while driving through the park and must sign forms showing they understand the rules.

"In some cases, people are oblivious to the dangers in the parks," Nel said. "We must remember that you are entering a wild area." Elephants killed two American tourists this year in separate attacks in the southern African nation of Zambia. — **AP**

## E Guinea ex-minister held for calling leader 'demon' freed

**MALABO:** Former Equatorial Guinea justice minister Ruben Maye Nsue Mangué, imprisoned since August 2022 for calling the oil-rich country's authoritarian leader a "demon", has been released following a presidential amnesty.

Mangué, also a pastor, told **AFP** on Monday that he had to undergo a thorough health check but said he was doing well and had not been "tortured in prison".

"I am free," he told **AFP** over the telephone, following Friday's amnesty.

He had been arrested over an audio recording that went viral on WhatsApp for calling the central African's

nation's leader Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo a "demon... sequestering his people" while calling for a national dialogue.

"I did not receive a lawyer's visit, I did not go on trial, I was in preventive detention," Mangué said.

In November 2022, at the age of 80, Obiang won a sixth term with an official 94.9 percent of the vote, prompting the United States to voice "serious doubts" over the results.

Human rights groups regularly accuse him of widespread abuses including arbitrary detentions, disappearances and torture. — **AFP**







# Indonesian rescuers search for dozens buried by landslide

**JAKARTA:** Rescue workers dug through tonnes of mud and rubble yesterday as they searched for dozens of missing people after a landslide hit an unauthorised gold mining area on Indonesia’s Sulawesi island, killing at least 23 people.

More than 100 villagers were digging for grains of gold on Sunday in the remote and hilly village of Bone Bolango when tons of mud plunged down the surrounding hills and buried their makeshift camps, said Heriyanto, head of the provincial Search and Rescue Office.

Rescuers recovered more bodies yesterday in the devastated hamlet where the gold mine is located.

“Improved weather allowed us to recover more bodies,” said

*At least 23 people have been killed in the landslide.*

Heriyanto, who goes by a single name like many Indonesians.

According to his office, 66 villagers managed to escape from the landslide, 23 were pulled out alive by rescuers, including 18 with injuries, and 23 bodies were recovered, including three women and a 4-year-old boy. About 35 others were missing, it said.

National Disaster Management Agency spokesperson Abdul Muhari said torrential rains that have pounded the mountainous district since Saturday triggered the landslide and broke an embankment, causing floods up to the roofs of

houses in five villages in Bone Bolango, which is part of a mountainous district in Gorontalo province. Nearly 300 houses were affected and more than 1,000 people fled for safety.

Authorities deployed more than 200 rescuers, including police and military personnel, with heavy equipment to search for the dead and missing in a rescue operation that has been hampered by heavy rains, unstable soil, and rugged, forested terrain, said Afifuddin Ilahude, a local rescue official.

“With many missing and some remote areas still unreachable, the death toll is likely to rise,” Ilahude said, adding that sniffer dogs were being mobilized in the search.

Videos released by the



Members of a rescue team carry a survivor of the landslide at Tulabolo village in Bone Bolango Regency of the Gorontalo Province. (AFP)

National Search and Rescue Agency show rescue personnel using farm tools and their bare hands to pull a mud-caked body from the thick mud and placing it in a black bag to take away for burial. Monsoon rains cause frequent landslides and flash

floods in Indonesia, an archipelago nation of more than 17,000 islands where millions of people live in mountainous areas or near floodplains.

Informal mining operations are common in Indonesia. — **AP**

## Philippine fireworks disposal mishap injures 27

**MANILA:** A batch of suspect fireworks exploded accidentally during their disposal in the southern Philippines, injuring 27 people, most of them explosives experts, police said yesterday.

The blast happened on Monday as a team of police, coast guard, marine and fire personnel disposed of firecrackers retrieved from a nearby warehouse, where an explosion on June 29 killed five people and injured 38 others, in Zamboanga city on Mindanao island.

The fireworks were the third and final batch to be taken from the warehouse to an abandoned government-owned shooting range for a controlled explosion, regional police spokeswoman Lieutenant Colonel Helen Galvez told AFP by telephone.

They had been offloaded from a pick-up truck and were being doused with water when they ignited prematurely. “It was accidental,” Galvez said. “It was not intended to be a massive explosion.” Twenty members of the disposal team were injured, including six seriously. Seven civilians suffered minor injuries when the blast damaged a dozen houses and other buildings nearby, as well as four vehicles. — **AFP**

# Pakistan PM, UN refugee chief discuss situation of Afghan refugees

**ISLAMABAD:** The head of the UN refugee agency met the Pakistani Prime Minister yesterday to discuss the situation of Afghan refugees living in uncertainty since Islamabad began a crackdown against undocumented refugees last year. Pakistan has long hosted an estimated 1.7 million Afghans, most of whom fled during the 1979-1989 Soviet occupation.

More than half a million others escaped Afghanistan after the Taliban takeover in 2021, with thousands waiting in Pakistan for resettlement in the

United States and elsewhere. Since the clampdown started in November, an estimated 600,000 Afghans have returned home. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, who arrived in Pakistan on Sunday, spent two days meeting Afghan refugees. He posted on social media platform X: “I spent time with Afghan refugees whose resourcefulness is testimony to their strength — and to Pakistan’s long hospitality.” Grandi added that his visit aimed to “discuss how we can best support both amidst growing challenges.” Pakistan’s

Prime Minister Shabaz Sharif told the UN refugee agency head that Afghan refugees were treated with “exemplary respect and dignity” despite facing multiple challenges, according to a statement released by his office yesterday. Sharif also urged the international community to “recognize the burden being shouldered by Pakistan while hosting such a large refugee population and demonstrate collective responsibility.” The Prime Minister also asked for help from UNHCR to repatriate the refugees in “a safe and dignified” manner. Also Yesterday,

Grandi met with Asif Durrani, the country’s special representative for Afghanistan. Durrani wrote on X that the two sides “expressed readiness to find a durable solution to the Afghan refugee problem, including their repatriation”.

Pakistan had previously said the crackdown targeted those without valid documents regardless of nationality.

UN agencies have decried the forced expulsion of Afghans from Pakistan, saying it could lead to severe human rights violations — including the separation of families and depor-

tation of minors.

Since the crackdown, the neighbouring Taliban-led government said it set up a commission to deal with repatriated nationals and has criticised Islamabad’s actions.

Pakistan has also faced a surge in militant attacks on security forces and civilians alike, mostly blamed on Pakistani Taliban — a separate militant group — straining the ties between the two countries.

Yesterday, an army captain was killed in a shootout with militants in a district near the Afghan border. — **AP**

## Malaysia arrests ‘Ninja Turtle Gang’ members, seizes tortoises

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Malaysian authorities have arrested six members of an international crime ring known as the “Ninja Turtle Gang” and seized about 200 smuggled tortoises and turtles, a wildlife official said yesterday.

Abdul Kadir Abu Hashim, director-general of Malaysia’s wildlife and national parks department, said four Cambodians and two Malaysians were arrested during a July 2 raid on a house in Kuala Lumpur by police and wildlife officials. He said some 200 turtles and tortoises worth an estimated 246,394 ringgit (\$52,300) were rescued during the raid, the second seizure in Malaysia in less than a week. Many people across Asia believe that turtles and tortoises bring good luck and prosperity. Abdul Kadir said the six arrested belong to the Ninja Turtle Gang, an international crime ring involved in smuggling the reptiles.

Police and wildlife officials rescued 400 tortoises during an initial raid on June 29 that were meant for sale in Southeast Asia and were worth \$805,084 on the black market. Animals rescued in the latest raid included the critically endangered Chinese striped-necked turtle, which is also known as the golden thread turtle, Abdul Kadir said. Other species included the endangered black pond turtle, snapping turtle, sulcata tortoise, leopard tortoise and the red-footed tortoise found throughout South America and the Caribbean islands of Trinidad and Barbados.

“Initial investigations revealed that the reptiles were smuggled from abroad to meet the lucrative pet market.” Also discovered were three snakes, four soft-shell turtles, a skink and five frogs. The rescued animals were being kept in a Malaysian wildlife department quarantine centre. The reptiles are illegally brought into Malaysia by road or in suitcases by smugglers aboard commercial flights, Abdul Kadir said last week. Traffic, a wildlife NGO, has said that Southeast Asian countries “function as source, consumer and as entrepôts for wildlife originating from within the region as well as the rest of the world”. — **AFP**

# Six dead in Tokyo as Japan swelters in heatwave

**TOKYO:** Six people have died of heatstroke in Tokyo as Japan swelters under a rare rainy season heatwave, prompting authorities to issue a flurry of health warnings.

Over the weekend, the central Shizuoka region became the first in Japan to see the mercury reach 40 degrees Celsius this year, far surpassing the 35-degree threshold classified by weather officials as “extremely hot”.

Such severe heat in the middle of Japan’s rainy season is “rather rare”, caused in part by a strong South Pacific high-pressure system, a weather agency official told AFP.

Temperatures also hit record highs near 40 degrees Celsius on Monday at observation posts in Tokyo and in the southern Wakayama region, according to local media.

The past few days have seen authorities issue heatstroke alerts in much of the country, urging residents to avoid exercising outside and to use air conditioning.

The capital logged three deaths linked to heatstroke on Saturday and three more on



A family cools down under a mist shower during hot weather in central Tokyo yesterday. (AFP)

Monday, when the mercury hovered around 35 degrees Celsius at midday, according to the city’s medical examination office. “Without the AC on, I find it difficult to survive,” Tokyo resident Sumiko Yamamoto, 75, told AFP, adding she feels “it’s gotten drastically hotter” since last year.

“Through the advice given on TV, I try to stay hydrated as

much as possible. Because I’m old, I’m being careful not to collapse,” she said. Heatstroke is particularly deadly in Japan, which has the second-oldest population in the world after Monaco. Yamamoto’s age puts her in the demographic flagged by health experts as particularly vulnerable to heatstroke, along with infants and those living alone or who are too poor to

afford air conditioning.

The Japanese Association for Acute Medicine on Monday warned of the rising death toll from heat exhaustion nationwide, which grew from just a few hundred per year two decades ago to around 1,500 in 2022. The sheer number of fatalities suggests that heatstroke now poses a danger on par with that of “a major natural disaster”, the group said, warning against non-essential outings. Tokyo business executive Mikio Nakahara, 67, says the difference between Tokyo 50 years ago and now is stark.

“Tokyo wasn’t as hot as it is now,” he told AFP.

But these days, “I try to work remotely as much as possible so I don’t have to go outside.” With ever-hotter summers becoming the norm around the world, tourists like Ainhoa Sanchez, 29, aren’t too surprised by Tokyo’s temperatures. “So the plan is going sightseeing a little bit. Drinking a lot of liquids. Maybe when we get too hot, we can get into a shop, look around, chill a bit and then go back to the street,” she told AFP. — **AFP**

**WELLINGTON:** Papua New Guinea’s opposition leader urged the country’s premier yesterday to fire the petroleum minister who is stepping down from office as he faces alleged domestic assault charges in Australia.

Police in Australia said Saturday that a 58-year-old man was arrested and charged after a domestic dispute in Sydney after a 31-year-old woman known to him had injuries to her face following an altercation, the statement said. Australian authorities did not name Petroleum Minister Jimmy Maladina as the accused, but his identity was widely reported by news outlets in Papua New Guinea and Australia. Papua New Guinea Prime Minister James Marape said in a written statement Sunday that Maladina “offered to step aside” while he attended to a complaint “as it is heard in court in Australia,” without elaborating further on the incident. The premier added he would appoint an acting minister to fill in for the petroleum minister. Still, opposition leader Douglas Tomuriesa urged Marape to sack Maladina or request his outright resignation rather than allow him to step aside temporarily. — **AP**

## India floods swamp national park, killing six rhinos

**GUWAHATI:** Devastating floods in India’s northeast that have killed scores of people also swamped a national park drowning six threatened rhinos and other wildlife, government officials said yesterday.

Floods have begun to ease, Assam state Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said in a statement, noting the “water level of the Brahmaputra and its tributaries is below the danger level in most places”.

More than 1.8 million people have been affected across 3,000 villages, as well as 72 killed since mid-May, according to state disaster officials. Monsoon rains across South Asia from June to September offer respite from the summer heat and are crucial to replenishing water supplies, but also bring widespread death and destruction.

The intensity of rain and floods has increased in recent years, with experts saying climate change is exacerbating the problem.

As the waters recede, the impact on wildlife from the deluge is also being seen, including in Kaziranga National Park. “Floods have affected humans and animals alike,” Sarma said, adding officers had

been “working round the clock to aid everyone”.

On Monday, Sarma posted a video on social media of a stranded rhino calf, up to its chin in water, saying he had “instructed its immediate rescue”. Kaziranga is home to two-thirds of the world’s remaining one-horned rhinos, classified as vulnerable on the International Union for Conservation of Nature Red List.

The park has 2,413 rhinos, according to a 2018 count. Wildlife officers said six

rhinos as well as scores of deer had been killed in recent days.

“Although there is higher ground for the shelter of the animals, the animals suffer when the high floods affect the park,” said a senior park official, who was not authorised to speak to the media, confirming the animal deaths.

Kaziranga, a UNESCO world heritage site, is flooded almost every year, helping replenish water supplies and the ecological balance of the park. — **AFP**



A man pushes his bicycle loaded with vegetables during heavy rainfall in New Delhi yesterday. (AFP)

# Central Asian states hold ‘first’ war games without Russia or China

**ASTANA:** Central Asian countries yesterday held joint drills with land, naval and air forces, for the first time without regional powers Russia and China.

Kazakhstan is hosting four other ex-Soviet states for the drills, which a spokesman for Kazakhstan’s armed forces told AFP were “the first of their kind”.

“All the participants have arrived,” the spokesman said. The exercises are named Birlestik-2024, meaning alliance in Kazakh.

Taking place in the Caspian Sea, they will last until July 17 and involve around 4,000 troops with warships, aviation, artillery and tanks.

Taking part are four Central Asian republics — Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, while Turkmenistan is absent.

The Caucasus country of Azerbaijan is also participating, while Russia, traditionally dominant in the area,

is fighting in Ukraine.

Kyrgyzstan’s defence ministry said that during the drills, troops will “liberate an island captured by terrorists” and “carry out operations to ensure security at sea and to protect infrastructure”.

These countries regularly take part in drills with the two most influential major powers in this strategic region: with Russia as part of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation and with China as part of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, most recently in 2023 involving 1,500 troops.

After decades of strife, Central Asian countries have recently stepped up cooperation, as major powers have also paid more attention to a region that is rich in raw materials and an important trade route.

All the countries are part of a transport route between China and Europe that bypasses Russia, known as the “Middle Corridor”. — **AFP**



# Modi tells Putin at Kremlin ‘war cannot solve problems’

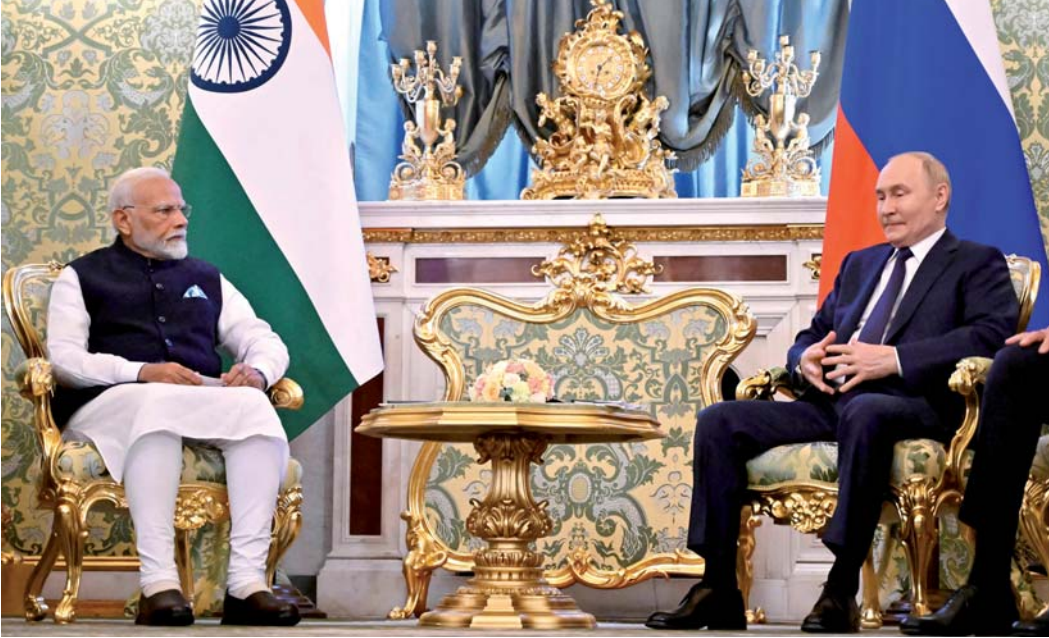
MOSCOW: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi yesterday told President Vladimir Putin that “war cannot solve problems” and urged peace on a trip to Moscow over two years into the Ukraine offensive.

On his first visit since Russia launched its campaign in Ukraine in February 2022, Modi said he and Putin had chatted on a range of issues, adding: “I was happy that on Ukraine, we could both express our views openly and in detail.” “When innocent children are murdered, one sees them die, the heart pains and that pain is unbearable,” Modi told Putin in comments in Hindi.

“I know that war cannot solve problems, solutions and peace talks can’t succeed among bombs, guns, and bullets,” the Indian leader added.

“And we need to find a way to peace through dialogue.” Putin thanked Modi for “the attention you pay to the most urgent problems” and said “you are trying to find some ways to solve the Ukrainian crisis, too, of course primarily by peaceful means”.

Modi landed in Moscow on Monday hours after Russia



Russian President Vladimir Putin meets with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the Kremlin in Moscow yesterday. (AFP)

launched a massive barrage across Ukraine that killed at least 38 people and heavily damaged a children’s hospital in Kyiv, sparking condemnation from governments in Europe and North America.

On Monday evening Modi was pictured hugging Putin at

the Russian president’s country residence, where the leaders spent several hours together, according to the Kremlin.

Such warm contact drew condemnation from Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.

He wrote on social media: “It

is a huge disappointment and a devastating blow to peace efforts to see the leader of the world’s largest democracy hug the world’s most bloody criminal in Moscow on such a day.” At the Kremlin, Putin hailed India and Russia’s “very long-standing friendship” and said they now

On his first visit since Russia launched its campaign in Ukraine in February 2022, Modi said he and Putin had chatted on a range of issues.

enjoy a “specially privileged, strategic partnership”.

Russia is a vital supplier of cut-price oil and weapons to India, but Moscow’s isolation from the West and growing ties with Beijing have impacted its partnership with New Delhi.

Modi is courting closer Western security ties after being returned to power last month as leader of the world’s most populous country.

Western powers have in recent years also cultivated stronger relations with India as a hedge against China and its growing influence across the Asia-Pacific, while pressuring New Delhi to distance itself from Russia.

The United States on Monday urged Modi to make clear in his talks with Putin that “any resolution to the conflict in Ukraine must... be one

that respects the UN Charter with respect to Ukraine’s territorial integrity”.

Modi last visited Russia in 2019 and hosted Putin in the Indian capital two years later, weeks before Russia began its offensive against Ukraine.

India has largely shied away from explicit condemnation of Russia ever since and abstained on United Nations resolutions targeting the Kremlin.

But Russia’s fight with Ukraine has also had a human cost for India.

New Delhi said in February it was pushing Moscow to return several of its citizens who had signed up for “support jobs” with the Russian military, following reports some had been killed after being forced to fight in Ukraine. Moscow’s relationship with China has also been a cause for concern.

Washington and the EU accuse China of selling components and equipment that have strengthened Russia’s military industry — allegations Beijing denies. China and India remain intense rivals competing for strategic influence across South Asia. — **AFP**

## UK resolves Rwanda asylum cases after govt drops policy

LONDON: Three asylum seekers who brought court action to block the UK’s attempt to send them to Rwanda had their cases resolved yesterday, after the incoming Labour government ditched the policy.

Prime Minister Keir Starmer announced on Saturday that the migrant deportation plan forged by the ousted Conservative government was “dead and buried”.

There had already been a spate of legal challenges to the scheme, with the UK Supreme Court in November last year ruling that it was illegal under international law as

Rwanda could not be considered a safe country for asylum seekers.

Government lawyer James Eadie told the High Court in London yesterday: “In relation to the three named claimants, these claimants’ cases will be fully disposed of and withdrawn subject to the (interior ministry) paying their costs.”

The Labour Party said before last Thursday’s general election that it would ditch the scheme, which the Tories said would deter huge numbers of migrants trying to get across the Channel to the UK on small boats from northern France.

Sixty-five people were brought ashore on Monday — the first under the new government — taking the total number of arrivals so far this year to 13,639, according to an AFP tally of official figures.

Rwanda, home to 13 million people in Africa’s Great Lakes region, claims to be one of the most stable countries on the continent and has drawn praise for its modern infrastructure. But rights groups accuse veteran President Paul Kagame of ruling in a climate of fear, stifling dissent and free speech.

A spokesman for his government

said Monday that “Rwanda takes note of the intention of the UK government to terminate the Migration and Economic Development Partnership Agreement”.

As part of the deal, the UK has already paid some £240m (\$307m) to Rwanda, with a further £50m scheduled to be sent at a later date.

In January, Kagame said the money was “only going to be used if those people will come. If they don’t come, we can return the money”.

However, he later specified there was “no obligation” to do so. — **AFP**

## Milan airport to be named after former premier Berlusconi

ROME: Milan airport is to be named after Italy’s scandal-dogged tycoon Silvio Berlusconi, a former three-time prime minister, despite protests yesterday from the Italian city’s centre-left mayor.

Deputy Prime Minister Matteo Salvini, who is also transport minister and head of the far-right League party, announced the name change Friday, just over a year after Berlusconi’s death.

“The final decision rests with the Minister of Transport and I am ready to sign it, with pride and emotion, in memory of my friend Silvio, great entrepreneur, great Milanese, and great Italian,” Salvini said.

Milan’s mayor Giuseppe Sala said yesterday the decision to change the name of Malpensa, one of the biggest airports in Italy, should not have been Salvini’s alone.

“Can a decision of this kind be made in 24 hours?” he was quoted by the AGI Italian news agency as saying. — **AP**

## Greek opposition slams six-day working week as ‘disgrace’

ATHENS: Greece’s main opposition party Syriza said yesterday that the recent introduction of a six-day working week for certain companies was a “disgrace”.

The measure was brought into force by the right-wing ruling New Democracy party in early July. Greece has been facing a shortage of skilled workers since the financial crisis of the late 2000s, which drove young people abroad in search of better prospects. But the policy has attracted domestic and international attention as it goes against the grain of many Western countries, where the four-day week is being debated to boost productivity. “Such things are unacceptable. The government must understand that this policy has consequences,” said Syriza spokesperson Voula Kehagia on private television channel Skai.

Kehagia added that it “shamed the country” by “ridiculing it abroad”. The six-day working week only applies to certain companies, including those that operate seven days a week, 24 hours a day. — **AFP**

## Slovak PM back at work two months after shooting

BRATISLAVA: Slovakia’s Prime Minister Robert Fico said he had returned to work yesterday, almost two months after a lone gunman had shot him four times on May 15.

The 59-year-old Fico was shot from close range after a government meeting in central Slovakia and underwent two lengthy surgeries in a nearby hospital.

The gunman, identified by Slovak media as 71-year-old poet Juraj Cintula and prosecuted on terrorism charges, is in custody awaiting trial.

Fico leads a three-party coalition of his centrist Smer-SD party, the centrist Hlas and the far-right SNS governing the EU and NATO member of 5.4 million people. Slovak media said the nationalist-leaning Fico, who is often criticised by the EU along with Hungarian counterpart Viktor Orban, came to yesterday’s cabinet meeting through a tunnel to avoid journalists.

“Dear progressive liberal media and opposition, I apologise for having survived but I’m back,” Fico said on Facebook, posting a picture of himself in his office. When Fico took office last autumn, Slovakia refused to continue military aid to Ukraine, facing a Russian invasion since February 2022. — **AFP**

## Strike call threatens Paris airports’ Olympics preparations

PARIS: A dispute between aviation workers and management at the French capital’s airports threatens to overshadow years of preparations and a 50m euro investment for visitors and athletes arriving for the Paris Olympics this month.

Unions at state-controlled ADP group, which runs the main Charles de Gaulle airport and its cross-town rival Orly, announced a one-day stoppage on July 17 to press for bigger Olympics bonuses and staff recruitment.

If it continues, the stand-off with management could impact the Games, with athletes set to start arriving en masse from July 18 and hundreds of thousands of ticket holders flying in ahead of the July 26 opening ceremony.

“The fact that we are forced to call for a strike is because of the obstinate refusal of management and in particular the CEO of the company,” unions said in a joint statement on Monday.

Along with train stations, Charles de Gaulle and Orly are set to be the main gateways into France for

foreign Olympics fans, as well as athletes and equipment.

The ability of ADP’s unions to mobilise workers next week is uncertain, however, with a previous stoppage called on May 19 having little effect on operations.

The country’s air traffic controllers, despite winning large pay increases last year, went on strike again on April 25, causing thousands of flight cancellations.

Charles de Gaulle and Orly will the first glimpse many foreign visitors and athletes have of the French capital when they arrive for the Games.

As a result, ADP has spent 50 million euros (\$54m) upgrading its infrastructure and French authorities are deploying extra resources to make the experience as smooth and safe as possible.

“We know that there are some days that will be really intense and we will maybe have 300,000 travellers in the same day at Charles de Gaulle,” Julien Gentile, director of border security forces at Paris’s airports, told reporters

## EU halts Georgia’s accession to the bloc, freezes financial aid

TBILISI: Georgia’s accession to the European Union has been halted, and some of the bloc’s financial support to the South Caucasus country has been frozen after the Georgian authorities adopted a new law that critics feared would curb democratic freedoms, the EU Ambassador in Georgia said yesterday.

According to Pawel

Herczynski, EU leaders made the decision to halt the process during the last summit of the European Council, and it came in the wake of the Georgian authorities adopting the law on “foreign influence” despite weeks of protests.

In addition, a total of 30 million euros (\$32.5 million) in financial support, earmarked for Georgia’s Defense

Ministry in 2024, has been frozen, Herczynski said at a news conference.

“This is only the first step, there will be other steps. Our direct support to the government of Georgia will be limited, and we will seek to redirect support from the government of Georgia to civil society and the media,” he said. — **AP**

## Bulgaria takes Gazprom to court over supplies

SOFIA: Bulgaria’s state-owned gas supplier Bulgargaz said yesterday it was taking Gazprom to court and seeking millions of euros in damages over the Russian company’s cut of supplies after its invasion of Ukraine.

Bulgaria, which was almost totally dependent on Russia for its gas, and Poland were the first EU countries that saw their

supplies halted after refusing to pay for the gas in rubles as demanded by Moscow in response to Western sanctions.

Two months ago Bulgargaz invited Gazprom to settle the dispute out of court. “As the Russian side did not take any action to resolve the issue out of court, Bulgargaz took the necessary steps to protect the company’s interests,” it said. — **AFP**



## Spanish bull fighting festival

Participants run during the “encierro” (bull-run) of the San Fermin festival in Pamplona, northern Spain, yesterday. (AFP)

## Italy’s state broadcaster criticised for French elections coverage

ROME: Questions over the impartiality of Italian state broadcaster RAI surfaced yesterday, after scarce coverage of France’s elections in which an alliance of left-leaning parties defeated the far-right.

A parliamentary supervisory committee for RAI, which is state-owned, has called for the broadcaster’s management to explain why only the group’s 24-hour news channel, Rainews24, followed the French election results Sunday.

The committee’s president Barbara Floridia said it was “completely inconceivable” that RAI on Sunday evening neglected coverage “precisely in the crucial hours of a global event followed by the media all over the world and which found widespread coverage on Italian

private TV.” On Sunday, France’s left-wing New Popular Front came in top in the second round of parliamentary elections, soundly beating Marine Le Pen’s far-right National Rally, which had long been expected to win an absolute majority in the National Assembly.

The accusation levelled at RAI comes amid ongoing criticism of the broadcaster, which the opposition’s Democratic Party has accused of being a “government megaphone” for the hard-right government of Georgia Meloni.

As a public broadcaster whose top management is chosen by politicians, the independence of RAI -- which has a primetime audience TV share of about 39 percent -- has always been an issue of debate.

But insiders say intruders have become more pronounced under Meloni, leader of the far-right Brothers of Italy party, with investigative reporters pushed aside, pro-government commentators promoted and programmes critical of government ministers cancelled or watered down.

RAI journalists held a 24-hour strike in May to defend freedom of the press, with the Usigrai union citing then “the suffocating control over journalistic work, with the attempt to reduce Rai to a megaphone for the government.” Floridia, a parliamentarian from the Five Star Movement, asked RAI President Roberto Sergio for an “urgent and detailed report” on its decisions on the evening of the French elections. — **AFP**



# Flood watch as Beryl sweeps across US

**HOUSTON:** A flood watch was in place yesterday across multiple US states as tropical depression Beryl lashes the country's south with heavy rain after killing at least four people in Texas.

The US National Hurricane Center (NHC) said Beryl could bring flash flooding "from the lower and mid Mississippi Valley to the Great Lakes" through Wednesday as it sweeps across swathes of the United States.

A tornado is also possible Tuesday across parts of the south, the NHC said in its latest advisory.

Beryl was downgraded Monday evening after hitting Texas as a Category 1 hurricane, causing millions to lose power amid scorching summer heat.

The sprawling city of Houston, home to 2.3 million people, was badly battered early Monday by hurricane-strength winds and flooding, with authorities announcing at least four deaths related to the storm.

Harris County Sheriff Ed Gonzalez said on X that a 53-year-old man and 74-year-old woman had died in separate incidents of trees falling on houses.

Later, Houston Mayor John Whitmire told a press conference that one person died after a lightning strike possibly ignited a fire, while a police department employee died in floodwaters on his way to work.

Some 2.6 million households in Texas were without electricity as of Monday evening, according to the poweroutage.us tracker, as temperatures were forecast to climb above 32 degrees Celsius over the next few days.

Rose Michalec, 51, told AFP that Beryl blew down fences in her south Houston neighborhood.

"For a Category 1 storm, it's quite a bit of damage... It's more than we expected," she said.

In downtown Houston, several areas were completely inundated, including the park where 76-year-old Floyd Robinson usually walks.

"I'm seeing more of this kind of damaging water, than I've ever seen before," the life-long Houston resident told AFP.

"This is just the beginning of July and for us to have a storm of this magnitude is very rare," he added.

Along the Texas coastline, AFP journalists saw several waterfront homes and buildings with their roofs torn off by the wind.

Several communities in the area had issued voluntary or mandatory evacuation orders ahead of the storm.

Meanwhile in the neighboring state of Louisiana, one death was announced by the Bossier Parish sheriff's office, also by a tree falling on a home.

The deaths on Monday raise



Homes are surrounded in floodwater after Hurricane Beryl swept through the area on July 08, 2024 in Surfside, Texas. (AFP)

the total toll from the storm -- which began its tear across the Caribbean as a powerful hurricane over a week ago -- to over a dozen.

Beryl first slammed Grenada and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines as a Category 4 storm, before plowing past the Cayman Islands and Jamaica, and at one point strengthening to a highest-level Category 5.

It hit Mexico as a Category 2 hurricane on Friday, flattening trees and lampposts and ripping

off roof tiles, although there were no reported deaths or injuries there.

Beryl is the first hurricane since NHC record-keeping began to reach the Category 4 level in June, and the earliest to hit the highest Category 5 in July.

It is also the earliest hurricane to make landfall in Texas in a decade, according to expert Michael Lowry.

It is extremely rare for such a powerful storm to form this

early in the Atlantic hurricane season, which runs from early June to late November.

Scientists say climate change likely plays a role in the rapid intensification of storms such as Beryl because there is more energy in a warmer ocean for them to feed on.

North Atlantic waters are between one to three degrees Celsius warmer than normal, according to the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. — **AFP**

## NATO signs \$700m Stinger missile contract to boost arms production

**WASHINGTON:** NATO has signed a nearly \$700m contract to have member countries produce more Stinger missiles, one of many steps the alliance is pressing at its summit in Washington to get each country to boost its own weapons production capabilities.

Outgoing NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg announced the contract yesterday at a Chamber of Commerce industry day focused on increasing NATO member countries' defense manufacturing capabilities to deter future attacks.

"There is no way to provide strong defense without a strong defense industry," Stoltenberg said.

The Stinger is a portable surface-to-air defense system that can be carried and fired by troops or mounted to a vehicle and used as short-range defense against aircraft. The Raytheon-produced system was one of the first weapons the US shipped to Ukraine following Russia's 2022 invasion.

The NATO summit is occurring against a backdrop of uncertainty: US political divisions delayed weapons for Ukraine for months and the upcoming presidential election is raising concern that US backing - with weapons and troops - in case of threats against member countries may not always be guaranteed.

Donald Trump, the presumptive Republican nominee, has boasted during campaign speeches that he'd encourage Russia to do as it wished with NATO members that do not meet their commitment to spend 2% of their gross domestic product on defense.

Out of 32 NATO members, 23 are expected to meet the 2% commitment this year, up from just six before Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Estonian Minister of Defense Hanno Pevkur told the Chamber that Russia is now spending an estimated 7 to 9 percent of its GDP on defense. Estonia is spending more than three percent of its GDP on defense but needs to do more to refill its stockpiles, Pevkur said.

National security adviser Jake Sullivan told the Chamber of Commerce that for the first time ever, the NATO countries will each pledge to make plans to strengthen their own industrial defense capacity. — **AP**

## Kenyan force in Haiti says 'no room for failure' against gangs

**PORT-AU-PRINCE:** The head of the Kenya-led multinational force tasked with curbing gang violence in Haiti said on Monday "there's no room for failure" and that the United Nations-backed police mission was committed to ensuring democratic elections in the Caribbean nation.

The nationally broadcast news conference was the first public comment from the Kenyan force, though the briefing did not take any questions from the media.

Still, major questions remain about the the Kenyan force, which arrived late last month in Haiti - months after powerful gangs seized control of most of the country's capital, Port-au-Prince, and caused the prime minister's resignation.

"We have a job that we are committed to do," Kenyan officer Godfrey Otunge said. "We intend to achieve this by working closely with Haitian authorities and local and international partners dedicated to a new



Godfrey Otunge, commander of the Kenyan police speaks during a press conference at the General Directorate of the Haitian Police on July 8, 2024. (AFP)

Haiti." The UN-backed mission, to which the United States has pledged over \$300m in support, has been questioned from the start. At home, Kenyan police have long been accused by watchdogs and witnesses of human rights abuses, including in recent protests.

Haiti's new Prime Minister Garry Conille has called the

history of foreign intervention in his country a "mixed bag" that has included human rights abuses and a "lack of respect for sovereignty and local culture." Some in Haiti, however, have welcomed the new mission with hope.

Kenya has pledged 1,000 police to the international police force - 200 initially arrived - and

Conille last week told the UN Security Council that the next contingent will be arriving "very soon." Later, they will be joined by police from the Bahamas, Bangladesh, Barbados, Benin, Chad and Jamaica. The force will total 2,500 personnel.

A transitional council appointed Conille as the new prime minister in May. US officials have urged him to prioritize establishing an electoral council as the country strives to rebuild its government. Conille is tasked with stabilizing the country in preparation for democratic elections in February 2026.

Otunge said the mission aims to "create security conditions conducive to holding free and fair elections." Haitian police chief Normil Rameau also addressed the nation, saying the UN-backed mission is focused on reclaiming all areas from gang control, reinstating police presence in regions lacking authority and assisting Haitians displaced by the gangs to return home. — **AP**

## Many US universities abandoning race-conscious scholarships worth millions

**IOWA:** Duke University recently discontinued a 45-year-old scholarship that covered tuition, currently about \$66,000 a year, and housing costs of some Black undergraduate students.

The University of Iowa has changed the selection criteria for its Advantage Iowa Award, which dispenses more than \$9m a year in financial help to first-year students from historically underrepresented groups. White students, who previously weren't eligible, can now apply.

Across the four-campus

University of Missouri system, officials are changing the eligibility rules for \$17.2m in institutional and donor-funded scholarships earmarked for students from certain racial or ethnic groups. Race will no longer be considered in scholarship applications.

In the year since the Supreme Court ruled colleges could no longer consider an applicant's race as a factor in admissions, a growing number of schools have also applied the principles underlying the ruling

to financial aid. Nearly 50 colleges and universities, mostly public institutions, have paused, ended or reconfigured hundreds of race-conscious scholarships worth millions of dollars to comply with the ruling, according to a tally. The awards identified are worth at least \$45m, but probably amount to much more.

Republican state leaders and conservative activists say race-conscious scholarships and grants disadvantage White students in the same ways

as race-conscious admissions policies. The court's ruling, which overturned the use of race in college admissions, didn't mention financial aid, but conservatives say universities should interpret it broadly to eliminate any race-based policies.

"The court gave us such a clear window into how it was thinking about race," said Kenji Yoshino, a law professor at New York University School of Law. "There isn't really a legal foot to stand on to fight for these

## Mercosur leaders slam Milei's absence from summit

**ASUNCION:** Argentina's President Javier Milei raised the ire Monday of his counterparts on South America's Mercosur bloc for snubbing their summit just one day after attending a far-right gathering in Brazil.

Brazil's leftist President Luis Inacio Lula da Silva, with whom ultra-liberal Milei has traded many barbs, told reporters at the Paraguay summit that Milei's absence was "a huge foolishness."

Milei, a self-declared "anarcho-capitalist" who has picked fights with numerous leftist leaders since taking office in December, recently described Lula as a "little lefty" with an "inflated ego." But at Monday's meeting, even fellow right-leaning leaders Luis Lacalle Pou of Uruguay and Santiago Pena of host nation Paraguay, lamented Milei's absence.

It was the first time new member Bolivia attended a Mercosur summit, at which Argentina was represented by Foreign Minister Diana Mondino.

And it came one week after Bolivia recalled its ambassador to Buenos Aires over Milei qualifying claims of a coup attempt against his counterpart Luis Arce, a Lula ally, as "fraudulent." On that same day, the Argentine presidency announced that due to "agenda issues," Milei would no longer attend the Mercosur summit.

Instead he travelled to Brazil, where he attended a CPAC conference of Latin American conservatives with Lula's far-right predecessor Jair Bolsonaro over the weekend.

Mondino used her address to the summit Monday to criticize an "excess" of trade regulations within the bloc, which she said were hampering Mercosur's export capabilities.

Uruguay has long been pushing for more flexibility to allow individual bloc members to enter into free trade agreements with third countries such as China.

Brazil has reaffirmed strong ties with China under Lula, but Milei had threatened to cut ties with China during his campaign, and Paraguay maintains diplomatic ties with Taiwan. — **AFP**

## Mexicans embrace the Force with lightsaber training

**MEXICO CITY:** It's not quite a galaxy far, far away, but about 20 people gather at dusk in a park in southern Mexico to practice fencing with glowing lightsabers — a sport inspired by the "Star Wars" saga.

Lightsaber duelling has grown in popularity in recent years, and France's fencing federation now recognizes it as an official sport, holding national championships.

In Mexico, the Jedi Knight Academy teaches fencing "with lightsabers in the style of the Jedi teachings", referring to the fictional guardians of peace and justice in the popular movie franchise created by legendary filmmaker George Lucas.

The academy offers a "playful sport with lightsabers, in a safe and fun way," Mauricio Rodriguez, an 18-year-old student, told AFP.

Both male and female

participants, some dressed in galaxy far, far away, were lured by their love of science fiction and the chance of a bit of exercise.

Fencing "with a lightsaber makes me feel like I'm a Jedi, but as a sport it's interesting," said 24-year-old engineering student Victor Aceves.

"Swords are striking in themselves, but doing it with a lightsaber gives it a more fantastic touch," Aceves added.

Students must follow steps in their training: from the apprentice "padawan" to "knight," "grand knight," and "master." "I came here because I had to exercise in some way. It's the only thing that caught my attention," said 33-year-old Marisol Rodriguez.

The Academy has spread to several states in Mexico and will on July 21 hold "a national tournament of lightsaber duels," open "to all enthusiasts,



Members of the Jedi Knight Academy hold light sabers during a group practice session at a park in Mexico City recently. (AFP)

from Padawans to Jedi masters." One of the Academy's founders, Ulises

Vazquez, told local media that he wants to transform the practice into a real sporting

discipline with the approval of the National Sports Commission (Conade). — **AFP**