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Doha Festival City

Amir receives credentials of UAE, Nigeria Ambassadors

Amir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani has received the credentials of two newly appointed ambassadors to the country during a ceremony at the Amiri Diwan in Doha. The credentials were presented yesterday morning by H E Saeed Abdullah Al Qamzi (pictured), Ambassador of the United Arab Emirates, and H E Dr Mahmood Yakubu, Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. H H the Amir welcomed the two diplomats and wished them success in carrying out their diplomatic duties. His Highness also expressed his hope for continued progress and prosperity in the bilateral relations between the State of Qatar and their respective countries. Meanwhile, the ambassadors conveyed to H H the Amir the greetings of their countries' leaders, along with their best wishes for the continued development and prosperity of the people of Qatar. An official reception ceremony was held for Their Excellencies the two ambassadors upon their arrival at the Amiri Diwan.



Qatar condemns bombing targeting cafe in Damascus

DOHA: The State of Qatar condemned the bombing that targeted a cafe in the vicinity of the Palace of Justice in Damascus, the Syrian Arab Republic, which led to deaths and injuries.

In a statement yesterday, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs reiterated the State of Qatar's firm stance against violence, terrorism, and criminal acts, regardless of the motives or reasons. The ministry voiced the State of Qatar's condolences to the families of the victims, and to the government and people of Syria, wishing the injured a speedy recovery. — QNA

QR800m residential endowment project to support community programmes

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs H E Ghanem bin Shaheen bin Ghanem Al Ghanim has said that Ministry's 2025-2030 Strategy is designed to strengthen Islamic values, modernise religious services, expand community outreach and support Qatar's sustainable development in line with Qatar National Vision 2030.

Speaking in an interview with Qatar TV yesterday, Al Ghanim said the strategy represents "a qualitative shift in institutional and religious work" and aims to reinforce the Ministry's contribution to national

development, promote moderation, preserve Islamic identity, and enhance institutional excellence.

Among the major projects under development is a residential endowment project valued at approximately QR800m, aimed at strengthening long-term returns to support charitable and community programmes.

He explained that the strategy focuses on developing an influential religious outreach system, strengthening the role of mosques as centres of worship and community education, advancing the waqf (endowment) and zakat system,

Ministry is committed to promoting the values of moderation, strengthening religious awareness and developing a contemporary religious discourse that addresses society's needs while preserving Islamic principles and national identity.

improving the quality of religious services, facilitating religious practices, and enhancing governance, digital transformation and operational efficiency.

Al Ghanim said the Ministry is committed to promoting the values of moderation, strengthening religious awareness and developing a contemporary religious discourse that addresses

society's needs while preserving Islamic principles and national identity.

The Minister said the Ministry continues to keep pace with Qatar's rapid urban growth by expanding mosque infrastructure nationwide. Between 30 and 40 new mosques are being constructed annually based on population growth and geographical distribution, with

particular focus on newly developed residential areas.

Highlighting the performance of the endowment sector, Al Ghanim said public engagement has continued to grow, reflecting Qatar's long-standing culture of generosity. During the first half of this year, contributions from new endowers increased by more than 200 percent, while cash endowments rose by 100 percent compared with the same period last year.

He said the General Directorate of Endowments has adopted a diversified investment strategy covering real estate, financial portfolios

and long-term deposits to generate sustainable returns while utilising digital technologies and artificial intelligence to improve investment management, governance and transparency.

The Minister also highlighted the Ministry's efforts to promote Quranic education through several national initiatives. He said the Sheikh Jassim bin Mohammed bin Thani Holy Quran Competition has become one of Qatar's leading religious initiatives, producing large numbers of accomplished memorizers from both citizens and residents while serving as a platform for discovering and nurturing Quranic talent. → P3

50 students score 100% in General Secondary Certificate exams

SANAULLAH ATAULLAH THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Minister of Education and Higher Education H E Lolwah bint Rashid bin Mohammed Al Khater has approved results of the General Secondary Certificate examinations for the 2025-2026 academic year during an official meeting held at the Ministry's headquarters in the presence of senior ministry officials.

The minister congratulated successful students and their parents, expressing pride in the results, which she described as the outcome of a full academic year of hard work and perseverance. She said the achievements reflected the combined efforts of the Ministry's various sectors, teachers, school administrators and the vital support provided by families in creating an environment that enabled students to succeed.

Speaking at a press conference following the approval of the results, Assistant Undersecretary for Educational Affairs Khalid Al Harqan announced that 16,486 students sat the General Secondary Certificate examinations.



Minister of Education and Higher Education H E Lolwah bint Rashid bin Mohammed Al Khater approves the results of the General Secondary Certificate examinations for the 2025-2026 academic year during an official meeting at the Ministry's headquarters, attended by senior ministry officials.

He said the Scientific Track recorded a 90.10% pass rate in day schools and 37.93% in adult education. The Arts and Humanities Track achieved pass rates of 82.24% in day schools and 52.10% in adult education, while the Technological Track registered an 80.14% success rate.

Among specialised institutions, the Qatar School for Science and Technology achieved a 100% pass rate, fol-

lowed by the Religious Secondary Institute with 97.87%.

Qatar Technical Secondary Schools recorded an 89.24% pass rate in the regular programme and 83.72% in adult education. Both the Qatar Banking Studies and Business Administration Secondary Schools and the Audio Education Complexes achieved 100% pass rates, while the Adult Education Parallel Track recorded a 41.80% success rate.

Al Harqan revealed that 50 students attained perfect scores of 100%, including 31 boys and 19 girls, with boys accounting for the larger share of top achievers. He noted that although no student in the Arts and Humanities Track achieved a perfect score, the highest mark reached 99.88%, while the highest score in the Technological Track was 99.99%, reflecting the high level of academic performance across both streams. → P2

CGB activates conflict of interest declaration service on Mawared system

VICTOR BOLORUNDURO THE PENINSULA

DOHA: In a significant step towards strengthening governance and public sector integrity, the Civil Service and Government Development Bureau (CGB) has activated a new service for declaring conflicts of interest through the Mawared Human Resources Information System.

The initiative, announced yesterday on CGB's social media accounts, reflects the Bureau's ongoing commitment to promoting principles of integrity, transparency, and professional compliance across government entities. Represented by the Mawared Centre, the CGB introduced the service to enable human resources managers and internal audit department directors to monitor compliance indicators and submitted declarations more effectively.

According to the Bureau, the new feature allows authorised officials to access electronic disclosures related to potential or actual conflicts

The initiative, reflects the Bureau's ongoing commitment to promoting principles of integrity, transparency, and professional compliance across government entities.

of interest by employees. This digital tool is expected to enhance institutional governance and elevate the level of professional commitment within state institutions.

The move aligns with Qatar's broader vision for modernising government operations and fostering a culture of accountability. By integrating the declaration process into the widely used Mawared system, the CGB aims to streamline procedures, reduce administrative burdens, and ensure timely oversight.

The Bureau continues to develop digital solutions that support the National Vision 2030. → P2

Kahramaa launches comprehensive Customer Satisfaction Survey 2026

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Qatar General Electricity and Water Corporation (Kahramaa) has announced the launch of a comprehensive Customer Satisfaction Survey for 2026, aimed at evaluating the quality of services provided across the State of Qatar.

This initiative reflects Kahramaa's ongoing commitment to placing the customers at the center of its decision-making process, with the goal of achieving and maintaining the highest standards of service excellence.

The Corporation emphasized the importance of this annual, broad-based survey as a key mechanism for capturing customer insights and feedback. It enables Kahramaa launches comprehensive Customer Satisfaction Survey 2026 to stay attuned to evolving customer expectations and to support its continuous efforts to enhance service quality and overall customer experience.

In addition, the survey provides valuable insights into customer perceptions, measures confidence in the services delivered, and helps identify

areas for improvement.

It also supports aligning service delivery with best international practices, ultimately strengthening customer satisfaction. The survey is scheduled to be conducted over an extended period from July to November 2026.

Kahramaa has collaborated with Nielsen Consultancy to design and implement the survey, with the firm authorized to conduct the survey on behalf of the Corporation. The survey covers all customer segments, including residential, commercial, corporate, and

bulk/industrial customers.

Furthermore, it seeks input from licensed electrical consultants and contractors who act on behalf of customers during building permit and service connection processes. This approach provides valuable insights into Kahramaa's performance and efficiency in these key areas.

Dheya Saad Al-Naimi, Director of the Planning and Quality Department, highlighted the importance of the Customer Satisfaction Survey as a key pillar in guiding the Corporation's strategies and projects. → P4

The Corporation emphasised the importance of this annual, broad-based survey as a key mechanism for capturing customer insights and feedback.



EDITORIAL

Strategy reinforces values

THE unveiling of the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs' 2025-2030 Strategy marks an important milestone in Qatar's continuing efforts to harmonise faith, national development and institutional excellence. At a time when societies around the world are grappling with rapid social, technological and demographic change, the strategy demonstrates that preserving religious values and embracing modernisation are not mutually exclusive objectives. Rather, they can advance together to serve the interests of the nation and its people.

As outlined by Minister of Endowments and Islamic Affairs Ghanem bin Shaheen bin Ghanem Al Ghanem, the strategy extends far beyond improving administrative performance. It presents a comprehensive vision for strengthening Islamic values, promoting moderation, enhancing religious awareness and reinforcing social cohesion, while contributing directly to the objectives of Qatar National Vision 2030. Such an approach reflects the understanding that sustainable development encompasses not only economic progress but also the moral, cultural and spiritual foundations upon which prosperous societies are built.

One of the strategy's defining strengths is its emphasis on institutional sustainability. The planned QR800 million residential waqf project is more than a major real estate investment; it is a forward-looking initiative designed to secure lasting financial resources for charitable, educational and religious programmes. By transforming endowment assets into productive investments capable of generating stable long-term returns, the Ministry is reinforcing one of Islam's most enduring traditions while adapting it to the demands of a modern economy. Equally significant is the strategy's commitment to strengthening the zakat system through greater transparency, improved governance and enhanced efficiency. Together, waqf and zakat represent two of the most powerful instruments for promoting social solidarity, assisting vulnerable members of society and narrowing social disparities.

The strategy's emphasis on digital transformation and institutional excellence also reflects the changing expectations of modern society. Efficient services, transparent governance and innovative delivery mechanisms have become essential components of effective public institutions. Applying these principles within the religious sector demonstrates the Ministry's determination to continually improve the quality and accessibility of its services. As Qatar advances towards the aspirations of Qatar National Vision 2030, the Ministry's 2025-2030 Strategy represents a timely and thoughtful framework for the future. Its success will ultimately be measured not only by new projects or improved services, but by its lasting contribution to stronger communities, sustainable charitable institutions and the preservation of the Islamic values that continue to shape the nation's identity. In that sense, the strategy is not simply a plan for the Ministry; it is an investment in Qatar's social and moral future.

Amir receives credentials of Ambassador of Nigeria



Amir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani receiving the credentials of newly appointed Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to Qatar H E Dr Mahmood Yakubu during a ceremony at the Amiri Diwan in Doha.

Al Muraikhi bids farewell to Malawi's Ambassador

DOHA: Minister of State for Foreign Affairs H E Sultan bin Saad Al Muraikhi met yesterday with Ambassador of the Republic of Malawi to the State of Qatar H E Roy Akajuwe Kachale, on the occasion of the end of his tenure.

Minister of State for Foreign Affairs thanked the Ambassador for his efforts in supporting and strengthening bilateral relations, wishing him success in his new duties. — QNA

'Summer Splash' welcomes more than 46,000 visitors

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Qatar Calendar's 'Summer Splash' at Meryal Waterpark Beach has successfully concluded its month-long run from June 1 to 30, 2026 attracting 46,059 visitors throughout the event.

Organised by Events & Entertainment Enterprises (E3) in partnership with Paramount and Spin Master, and produced by EventBox, the event brought Nickelodeon's PAW Patrol and SpongeBob SquarePants to life through immersive themed zones, and live stage performances offering families an unforgettable summer experience

Culture Minister attends opening of Heritage Museum in Syria

DAMASCUS: In the presence of Minister of Culture H E Sheikh Abdulrahman bin Hamad Al-Thani, Minister of Culture of the Syrian Arab Republic Mohammad Yassin Saleh opened private folk heritage museum in the city of Jayroud in the Damascus countryside, a step that reflects a shared commitment to preserving folk heritage, safeguarding cultural legacy, and ensuring its continued presence among future generations.

The museum's opening was attended by a number of officials and those interested in cultural affairs and heritage. The museum represents a valuable addition to the Syrian cultural landscape, housing a collection of artifacts that document aspects of social

and economic life, as well as the customs and traditions that have characterized the region for centuries.

The museum officials stressed that the project aims to revive cultural memory, preserve folklore, and enhance cultural awareness among all segments of society by displaying artifacts, tools, and heritage items that reflect the authenticity and diversity of the Syrian environment, contributing to visitors' understanding of the region's history and cultural legacy.

The museum houses a large collection of rare artifacts, antique household and agricultural tools, traditional costumes, and objects that document details of daily life in the past. — QNA



Minister of Culture H E Sheikh Abdulrahman bin Hamad Al-Thani and Minister of Culture of the Syrian Arab Republic Mohammad Yassin Saleh opening private folk heritage museum in the city of Jayroud in the Damascus countryside.

CGB activates conflict of interest declaration service on Mawared System

FROM PAGE 1

The Mawared system, a cornerstone of human resources management in the public sector, already facilitates various employee-related processes. The addition of the conflict of interest module further solidifies its role as a comprehensive platform for governance.

Officials familiar with the project highlighted that the service empowers HR and audit teams to review real-time data on declarations, helping identify and address

potential issues proactively. This proactive approach is anticipated to minimise risks associated with conflicts of interest, thereby safeguarding public trust and organisational integrity.

The announcement comes as part of a series of reforms aimed at digital transformation in government services. Qatar has made remarkable strides in e-governance, with several platforms launched in recent years to improve efficiency and transparency. The Mawared

enhancement is seen as a practical implementation of these efforts, particularly in the area of ethical standards and anti-corruption measures.

Experts in public administration have welcomed the development, noting that electronic declaration systems are best practices adopted by many advanced nations. In Qatar's context, such tools not only comply with international standards but also reflect the country's dedication to excellence in public service delivery.

The CGB emphasised that the service will contribute to raising awareness among government employees about the importance of disclosing any potential conflicts. Regular monitoring and reporting mechanisms will help maintain high ethical standards across ministries and other entities.

This initiative underscores Qatar's continuous efforts to modernise its administrative framework while upholding core values of honesty and public service.

50 students score 100% in General Secondary Certificate exams

FROM PAGE 1

He added that the highest-performing student at the Religious Secondary Institute scored 98.57%, while top students across the various tracks posted exceptionally high marks, demonstrating the quality of academic achievement this year.

Highlighting the overall academic performance, Al Harqan said 10,898 students obtained 70% or higher, making them eligible to apply for universities and higher education institutions both within Qatar and abroad.

He described the improvement in student achievement compared with previous years as a positive indicator of the continued development of Qatar's education system and the effectiveness of ongoing educational

reforms.

He also said that 3,501 students who were unsuccessful in the examinations would have another opportunity to improve their results in the second round of examinations. He encouraged them to make the most of the coming weeks to prepare well and wished them success in overcoming their setbacks.

Concluding his remarks, Al Harqan congratulated all successful students and wished them continued success in their university studies or future careers, whether pursuing higher education in Qatar or abroad or joining the labour market.

Director of the Student Assessment Department Ibrahim Abdullah Al Muhannadi reviewed the governance framework for the examination marking, grade recording, and



Assistant Undersecretary for Educational Affairs Khalid Al Harqan (center) with other officials during a press conference.

verification processes. He stressed that all procedures were carried out in accordance with the highest standards

of quality, discipline, and transparency, ensuring that every student received a fair result that accurately reflects their

true academic performance.

He also announced that students will be able to obtain their certificates electronically through the Maaref portal on the Ministry's website starting from Sunday, July 5, 2026, enabling them to access their examination results and certificates easily and conveniently.

Director of the Ministry's Public Relations and Communications Department Maryam Abdullah Al Muhannadi, also congratulated the successful students and expressed confidence in their future achievements. She encouraged graduates to continue their educational journey with confidence and excellence, stressing that their knowledge and skills would contribute to Qatar's continued development while helping them fulfil their personal ambitions and aspirations.

Visit Qatar opens registration for inaugural IRONMAN 70.3 Doha 2027

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Visit Qatar has announced the launch of registration for the inaugural edition of IRONMAN 70.3 Doha, set to take place at Old Doha Port from March 18 to 20, 2027.

The international triathlon marks another major addition to Qatar's international sporting calendar, further reinforcing the country's position as a leading destination for sports tourism and large-scale global events.

Visit Qatar is inviting athletes, endurance sports enthusiasts, and fitness communities from Qatar and around the world to secure their place at the starting line of one of the region's most anticipated sporting events.

The early registration phase offers preferential rates for a limited number of entries, providing participants with an



exclusive opportunity to be part of the inaugural edition of the international

triathlon.

Set against the backdrop of Doha's waterfront and iconic skyline, IRONMAN 70.3 Doha will deliver a race experience that combines sporting excellence with Qatar's distinctive destination offering. Participants will begin with a 1.9 km swim through the calm waters of Old Doha Port, followed by a 90 km cycling course, before concluding with a 21.1 km run featuring views of Doha's most prominent landmarks and attractions.

In addition to the main race on March 20, the event programme will also include the IRONKIDS race on March 19, creating a family-friendly sporting festival that caters to participants and visitors of all ages.

Participants can now register during the early access phase and explore full details related to race routes, participation guidelines through the following link: www.ironman.com/races/im703-doha.

MoM organises Wakra Beach clean-up drive to promote environmental awareness

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: The Ministry of Municipality (MoM), represented by the Public Cleanliness Department, organised a beach clean-up campaign at Wakra Beach as part of its annual community participation programme, reinforcing its commitment to environmental sustainability and community engagement.

The initiative aims to strengthen social responsibility by encouraging community participation in preserving public spaces while raising awareness about the importance of protecting the

environment. The campaign focused on promoting a culture of cleanliness and encouraging the public to help maintain the cleanliness of beaches and public facilities.

The Ministry said the initiative forms part of its ongoing efforts to instil environmentally responsible behaviour among community members and enhance awareness of the shared responsibility for protecting Qatar's natural and recreational areas.

Through such campaigns, the Ministry seeks to foster sustainable practices, support environmental conservation and improve the quality of life.



Deputy Prime Minister visits Amiri Guard Camp

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defense Affairs H E Sheikh Saoud bin Abdulrahman bin Hassan Al-Thani paid a visit to the Amiri Guard Camp "Barzan" yesterday, where he was received by Commander of the Amiri Guard H E Major General Mohammed bin Sultan Al Suwaidi. During a tour of the Amiri Guard Command building, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defense Affairs was briefed on the modern and advanced facilities and equipment of the various departments and units of the Amiri Guard that meet the highest military and security standards. His Excellency was accompanied during the visit by a number of senior officers from the Armed Forces.

QR800m residential endowment project to support community programmes

FROM PAGE 1

He added that the Qatar Mushaf project demonstrates the country's commitment to serving the Holy Quran through high-quality calligraphy, printing and publication, with editions distributed both locally and internationally.

Meanwhile, government and private Quran learning centres continue to operate under a comprehensive regulatory framework using structured curricula and modern teaching methods, including digital technologies, to meet increasing public demand.

Reviewing the 2026 Hajj season, Al Ghanim expressed appreciation to Amir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani for his continued support in ensuring the welfare of Qatari pilgrims.

He said the successful pilgrimage season was achieved through early planning, close coordination with Saudi authorities and comprehensive



Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs H E Ghanem bin Shaheen bin Ghanem Al Ghanim speaking during an interview.

services provided by the Qatari Hajj Mission, including travel arrangements, transportation, accommodation, healthcare, religious guidance and continuous field supervision.

The Ministry also maintained a comprehensive regulatory system for Hajj campaigns based on transparency, service quality and digital solutions, while incorporating pilgrims' feedback into future planning.

He highlighted the role of the Sheikh Abdullah bin Zaid Al Mahmoud Islamic Cultural Centre in introducing Islam to diverse communities and fostering intercultural understanding through programmes that build bridges between cultures and reflect Qatar's commitment to dialogue and peace.

Digital transformation, the Minister said, remains one of the Ministry's highest priorities.

Qatar renews condemnation of terrorism, reiterates commitment to strategy countering it

NEW YORK: The State of Qatar reaffirmed its condemnation of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, regardless of its perpetrators or motives, describing it as a serious threat to international peace and security, sustainable development, human rights, and the rule of law.

The State of Qatar also reiterated its commitment to the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and to implementing its four pillars in a comprehensive and balanced manner, as well as to relevant resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly and the United Nations Security Council, and to applicable international and regional conventions.

The statement was delivered by Permanent Representative of

Qatar to the United Nations H E Sheikha Alya Ahmed bin Saif Al-Thani, before the General Assembly during the ninth review of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy at UN Headquarters in New York City.

She noted that the State of Qatar believes preventing terrorism requires addressing the conditions that contribute to its spread, including conflicts, foreign occupation, hate speech, and human rights violations, which terrorist groups exploit for recruitment and incitement. She added that the State of Qatar continues to support initiatives that empower young people, promote education, and foster dialogue and mutual understanding.

She also emphasised the State of Qatar's view that promoting tolerance and respect for



Permanent Representative of Qatar to the United Nations H E Sheikha Alya Ahmed bin Saif Al-Thani speaking during the session at UN headquarters in New York.

religious values is essential to countering violent extremist rhetoric.

She stressed that terrorism should not be associated with

any religion, nationality, civilization, culture, or ethnic group, and underscored the need to confront terrorist threats driven by intolerance,

racism, xenophobia, and Islamophobia.

She said that the State of Qatar has strengthened its strategic partnership with the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism and was among the first countries to contribute to the office following its establishment. Since 2019, Qatar has provided an annual grant of \$15 million, which has been renewed through 2026. She added that Qatar's total contributions now exceed \$141 million, equivalent to nearly one-third of the total contributions to the Counter-Terrorism Trust Fund, which makes the State of Qatar the office's largest donor.

She further noted that the State of Qatar supports the office's leadership,

coordination, capacity-building, and technical assistance efforts through major global programmes implemented in line with the priorities of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy review. These programmes include countering terrorist travel, protecting vulnerable targets, and securing major sporting events.

She also highlighted that Doha has hosted the International Hub on Behavioural Insights to Counter Terrorism, one of the office's principal programme offices outside its headquarters, since 2020. She conveyed Qatar's welcome for the Office of Counter-Terrorism's continued efforts to fulfill its mandate in cooperation with the entities of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact. — QNA

Qatar participates in meeting of GCC Ministers of Agriculture and Food Security

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: The State of Qatar participated in the Extraordinary Meeting of Their Excellencies the Members of the Ministerial Committee for Agricultural Cooperation and Food Security of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), held yesterday via video-conference. The State of Qatar was represented by a delegation headed by Undersecretary of the Ministry of Municipality H E Eng. Ali bin Mohammed Al Ali.

The meeting discussed ways to enhance Gulf integration in strategic sectors in light of the decisions of the 19th Consultative Meeting of Their Majesties and Highnesses, the Leaders of the GCC Member States. It also reviewed measures aimed at strengthening strategic food reserves, ensuring the smooth flow of supply chains, and facilitating the movement of food commodities among member states, thereby contributing to the enhancement of Gulf food security.



Undersecretary of the Ministry of Municipality H E Eng. Ali bin Mohammed Al Ali and other officials participating in the meeting.

In his address during the meeting, the Undersecretary emphasised that regional and international developments require stronger coordination and integration among GCC countries. He noted that food security has become a fundamental pillar of security and stability, adding that recent global developments and experiences

have underscored the importance of unifying efforts and enhancing preparedness to address various challenges.

His Excellency further stated that the meeting represents a new step toward establishing a more integrated, resilient, and sustainable Gulf food security system, one that supports the aspirations of GCC member states.

Doha Municipality launches summer awareness event

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: The Ministry of Municipality, represented by Doha Municipality, has organised an educational and recreational event for children at the Old Souq in Tawar Mall to coincide with the start of the summer vacation, aiming to make productive use of children's free time through interactive activities that combine learning with entertainment.

The initiative is designed to encourage children to participate in engaging programmes that nurture creativity while promoting positive values and responsible behaviour. Through a variety of interactive activities, the event focuses on raising awareness about the importance of public cleanliness and recycling in an enjoyable and age-appropriate environment.

The Ministry said the programme seeks to instil environmental responsibility among young participants by

introducing them to sustainable practices in a fun and practical way. The activities also aim to develop children's creative skills and inspire them to adopt environmentally friendly habits in their daily lives.

The summer event reflects the Ministry's broader efforts to strengthen community partnerships and expand public awareness initiatives targeting different segments of society. By engaging children during the school holiday, the Ministry aims to foster a culture of environmental responsibility from an early age while encouraging families to take part in community-focused activities.

The initiative forms part of the Ministry of Municipality's ongoing awareness campaigns that promote sustainability, environmental protection and civic responsibility, while providing children with meaningful opportunities to learn through play during the summer break.

Police Academy celebrates Police of Tomorrow graduation

DOHA: The Police Academy celebrated the graduation of the first and second groups of the 7th edition of the Police of Tomorrow programme for summer 2026, comprising 600 students.

The ceremony was attended by Legal Advisor to H E the Minister of Interior and General Supervisor of the Police Academy H E Dr. Abdullah Yusuf Al Mal; Vice President of the Police Academy and Director of the Police College Colonel Dr. Fahad Saeed Al Subaie; along with a number of officers from the Ministry of Interior and the students' parents.

The ceremony featured presentations showcasing the skills the students acquired during the programme, which aims to deepen national identity, instill values of loyalty and belonging, and promote a sense of responsibility and community service. — QNA

UDST achieves university-wide ISO 9001:2015 certification

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: University of Doha for Science and Technology (UDST) has announced that it has achieved ISO 9001:2015 certification for its institution-wide Quality Management System (QMS), a globally recognised standard for quality management.

The certification reflects UDST's commitment to excellence, effectiveness, and continuous improvement of its operations and service delivery across the certified scope of higher education, applied research, professional training, and support services.

Awarded following a comprehensive audit conducted by Bureau Veritas Certification, a globally recognised certification body

accredited by the United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS), the university-wide ISO 9001:2015 certification recognises UDST's effective quality management system and its ability to consistently and systematically meet stakeholder expectations while maintaining internationally recognised standards across all of its academic and administrative functions.

Dr. Salem Al-Naemi, President of UDST, said: "Achieving ISO 9001:2015 certification is a significant milestone for the University and a testament to the dedication of our faculty, staff, and leadership team. This accomplishment reinforces our commitment to delivering an exceptional educational experience, advancing impactful research, and providing high-quality

services that support the needs of our students, industry partners, and the wider community. It also reflects our ongoing pursuit of excellence and continuous improvement in everything we do."

ISO 9001:2015 is the world's most widely recognised quality management standard and is awarded to organisations that demonstrate strong governance, effective processes, customer focus, and a culture of continuous improvement. The certification confirms that UDST has established robust systems and procedures that support operational efficiency, accountability, and consistent service delivery.

As Qatar's national applied university, UDST remains committed to aligning its practices

with international standards and contributing to the goals of Qatar National Vision 2030 through high-quality education, applied research, innovation, and workforce development. The certification further strengthens the University's position as a leading institution dedicated to preparing graduates with the knowledge and skills needed to thrive in a rapidly evolving global economy.

This achievement reflects the collective efforts of the University community to embed a culture of quality, accountability, and continuous improvement across all areas of the institution, supporting UDST's long-term strategic objectives and commitment to excellence.

Qatar Calendar officially opens fourth edition of Qatar Toy Festival



Visitors visiting the toy show at DECC.

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Under the Theme "More to Imagine, A Whole World of Fun," Qatar Calendar has officially opened the fourth edition of the Qatar Toy Festival at the Doha Exhibition and Convention Centre (DECC), welcoming families and visitors to experience a month of entertainment, creativity and interactive family experiences.

Spanning more than 22,000 square metres across four halls, the festival features seven zones catering to different age groups. Running until July 31, 2026, the festival offers a packed programme with more than 66 globally recognised entertainment brands, 33 activity corners, and 14 live shows daily.



Minister of Environment meets EU Ambassador

Minister of Environment and Climate Change H E Dr. Abdullah bin Abdulaziz bin Turki Al Subaie met yesterday with Ambassador of the European Union to the State of Qatar H E Cristian Tudor. During the meeting, they discussed ways to enhance cooperation between the two sides as well as a number of topics of common interest.

Kahramaa launches comprehensive Customer Satisfaction Survey 2026

FROM PAGE 1

She reaffirmed Kahramaa's commitment to continuously enhancing its services and delivering a seamless, high-quality experience that aligns with the State of Qatar's dynamic development and its regional and global leadership in public services.

Al-Naimi added, "In

designing this survey, we have focused on establishing a comprehensive assessment framework to measure satisfaction levels across all key services provided by Kahramaa, through multiple service channels, including customer service centers, call centers, and digital channels. This approach enables us to gain a holistic understanding of our

performance in meeting customer expectations and delivering services of the highest standard."

As a leading government service provider at both the regional and global levels, Kahramaa has established a corporate management model that serves as a benchmark for effective governance within Qatar's public sector.

Ministry of Justice unveils upgraded official website



Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs H E Ibrahim bin Ali Al Mohammadi launching an upgraded version of official website of the Ministry of Justice.

DOHA: The Ministry of Justice yesterday launched an upgraded version of its official website as part of efforts to advance digital transformation and support the objectives of Qatar's Digital Agenda 2030.

The Ministry said the redesigned website serves as a unified digital platform providing easier access to its services, as well as legal and legislative resources, including the Permanent Constitution of the State of Qatar, the Official Gazette, legislation across various sectors, real estate publications, and electronic services offered to individuals,

government entities, and the private sector.

The platform also features new interactive sections for multimedia content and open data, enabling users to access official announcements and updates through a single portal, while enhancing transparency and improving access to information.

The new website offers a more streamlined and user-friendly interface, with simplified navigation and dedicated channels for communicating with the public and the Ministry's senior leadership. It also includes a comprehensive

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section providing quick and clear guidance on services and procedures, helping improve legal awareness, reduce processing time, and facilitate access to information.

According to the Ministry, the upgraded website is designed to improve access to legal and real estate services, enhance the quality of judicial services, strengthen Qatar's legal ecosystem, support the country's investment environment, and meet growing demand for integrated and efficient digital services. — QNA

Mozambique speaker visits Imam Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab Mosque

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: The Speaker of the Parliament of the Republic of Mozambique H E Margarida Adamugi Talapa, visited the Imam Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab Mosque as part of the "Mosque Visits" programme organised by the Sheikh Abdullah bin Zaid Al Mahmoud Islamic Cultural Centre of the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs to promote Islamic culture and Qatari identity.

The visit took place during the Speaker's official visit to Qatar and was attended by Ambassador of the Republic of Mozambique to the State of Qatar H E Isac Mamudo Massamby, as well as Assistant Director of the Islamic Cultural Centre Sultan bin Saad Al Badr.

The "Mosque Visits" programme is one of the centre's key initiatives aimed at introducing official delegations and international visitors to the role of mosques in Islamic society while



Speaker of the Parliament of the Republic of Mozambique H E Margarida Adamugi Talapa with other officials visiting the mosque.

highlighting Qatar's efforts to foster cultural dialogue and showcase the country's Islamic heritage.

The initiative forms part of the Ministry's broader strategy to strengthen intercultural engagement and promote

the values of tolerance, coexistence and mutual understanding. Through guided visits, participants learn about the role of mosques not only as places of worship but also as centres of spiritual, social and cultural life.

During the tour, the Mozambican parliamentary speaker was introduced to the architectural features of the Imam Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab Mosque, which reflects traditional Qatari architectural design and harmonises with the local environment. She also visited the mosque's prayer hall and library and received an overview of its religious, educational and community activities that support the promotion of Islamic values.

The Speaker expressed interest in learning more about the mosque's educational and social programmes and discussed its role in serving the community, reflecting her appreciation for the contribution of such institutions to society.

At the conclusion of the visit, Talapa praised the organisation of the programme by the Sheikh Abdullah bin Zaid Al Mahmoud Islamic Cultural Centre and commended its efforts to introduce Islamic culture and promote a deeper understanding of Islam and its civilisational values among non-Muslims.

Ambassador Massamby also expressed his appreciation for the initiative, highlighting its role in strengthening cooperation, friendship and mutual understanding between peoples.

The Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs said the visit reflects the continuing efforts of the Sheikh Abdullah bin Zaid Al Mahmoud Islamic Cultural Centre to reinforce Qatar's position as a hub for cultural dialogue and international engagement, in line with the country's vision of promoting coexistence and building bridges of understanding between cultures.

Pakistan Fruit Festival begins at 15 almeera outlets

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: The Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, in partnership with Al Meera Consumer Goods Company, is hosting the Pakistan Fruit Festival from July 2 to 8 across 15 almeera stores in Doha.

Held during the peak summer harvest season, the festival celebrates Pakistan's rich agricultural heritage by showcasing a wide selection of premium seasonal fruits. Customers across Qatar have the opportunity to enjoy fresh, high-quality produce while benefiting from the convenience, quality, and value that define the almeera shopping experience.

The festival was officially inaugurated at almeera Mansoura Branch by Ambassador of Pakistan to the State of Qatar H E Muhammad Aamer in the presence of almeera's executive management, reflecting the strong and growing relationship between Pakistan and Qatar, particularly in the areas of trade, food security, and cul-

tural exchange.

The opening ceremony marked the launch of the week-long festival, highlighting Pakistan's position as a trusted supplier of premium agricultural products while supporting Qatar's commitment to providing diverse and nutritious food choices.

As one of Qatar's leading national retailers, almeera continues to connect communities across the country with quality products, greater choice, and a convenient shopping experience. Through this initiative, customers and families can enjoy easier access to premium Pakistani seasonal fruits during the summer harvest.

The festival features dedicated displays and themed decorations across fifteen participating almeera branches, including Hazm Al Markhiya, Hyatt Plaza, Mansoura, Ain Khaled, Bin Omran, Rawdat Eqdeem, Leabaib 1, Azghawa, Khalifa South, Jeryan Junaihat, Wakra South, Thumama 2, Airport Hypermarket, Thakira, and

Umm Ghuwailina, creating a vibrant and engaging shopping atmosphere throughout the festival.

Visitors can discover a carefully curated selection of Pakistan's finest seasonal fruits, with a particular focus on the country's internationally renowned mangoes. Featured varieties include Sindhri, Chaunsa, Dussehri, Langra, Anwar Ratol, Fajri, and Sunera, alongside peaches, apricots, and Java plums. Celebrated for their exceptional flavour, aroma, and quality, these fruits represent the very best of Pakistan's summer harvest.

Designed as a family-focused summer initiative, the festival also promotes healthy eating during the school holiday period.

Through fruit tasting activities and educational content provided by the Embassy of Pakistan, families are encouraged to incorporate more fresh fruit into their daily diets while introducing children to Pakistan's rich agricultural traditions.



Ambassador of Pakistan to Qatar H E Muhammad Aamer during the launch of Pakistan Fruit Festival at almeera.

The Pakistan Fruit Festival reflects the shared commitment of almeera and the Embassy of Pakistan to strengthen cultural exchange, promote healthy lifestyles, and enhance community engagement in Qatar. By bringing the

flavours of Pakistan closer to customers across the country, the festival reinforces almeera's commitment to serving communities with quality products, greater choice, and memorable shopping experiences every day.

Qatar Airways launches Port Sudan flights, enhancing Africa network

THE PENINSULA

PORT SUDAN: Qatar Airways yesterday touched down in Port Sudan for the first time, reinforcing its commitment to Africa and providing seamless connectivity across its global network.

The airline's three flights a week service will provide passengers travelling to, and from, Sudan with convenient connections through Hamad International Airport, the airline's award-winning hub in Doha, to more than 160 destinations worldwide.

Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the State of Qatar to the Republic of Sudan,



H E Mohammed Ibrahim Tajer Al Sada and Ambassador of the Republic of Sudan to the State of Qatar, H E Badreddine Abdullah Mohammed Ahmed joined Qatar Airways' inaugural flight to Port Sudan departing from Hamad International Airport

Qatar Airways' launch of operations to Port Sudan attests to the airline's commitment to Africa. It has served the continent since 1994, when it first operated flights to Khartoum International Airport, making Sudan its first African destination.

The Port Sudan service will be operated by a Qatar Airways' Airbus A320 aircraft, equipped with 12 Business Class and 120 Economy Class seats.

The launch brings the current number of Qatar Airways destinations in Africa to 27. Every week, the airline flies nearly 125,000 seats, across more than 190 flights, to the continent.

Flights depart every Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday on the following schedule (all times are local): Doha (DOH) to Port Sudan (PZU) – Flight QR1319: Departure 09:00; Arrival 11:00; and Port Sudan (PZU) to Doha (DOH) – Flight QR1320: Departure 12:25; Arrival 16:20.

QU extends admission application deadline for 2026-2027

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Qatar University's (QU) has announced an extension of the application deadline for prospective students seeking admission for the 2026-2027 academic year. Applications will now be accepted until July 5, 2026.

The extension reflects the University's commitment to providing prospective students with additional time to complete their applications and fulfill the required admission criteria within the specified timeframe, enabling a greater number of students to benefit from the educational opportunities offered by the University.

QU encourages all applicants and prospective students to complete their applications through the online admissions portal and review the admission requirements and criteria available on the University's official website. For more information about the admission process and the updated application deadlines, please visit the Admissions page on the official QU website.



Al Muraikhi receives credentials of Maldives' Ambassador

Minister of State for Foreign Affairs H E Sultan bin Saad Al Muraikhi received yesterday a copy of the credentials of Ambassador of the Republic of Maldives to the State of Qatar H E Adam Shareef Umar. Minister of State for Foreign Affairs wished the Ambassador success in his duties, emphasizing his utmost support to enhance bilateral relations and foster closer cooperation in various fields.

Celebrating 250 years of American history

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: As Americans prepare to celebrate the 250th anniversary of US independence on July 4, 2026, audiences in Qatar and around the world have been invited to explore the history, values, and landmarks that define the United States.

Among the most recognisable are the presidential monuments in Washington, DC, which honour leaders whose legacies continue to shape America's national story, said a statement issued by US embassy in Doha yesterday.

In the heart of the nation's capital are grand monuments dedicated to former presidents, but none are as iconic as the Washington Monument, the Jefferson Memorial or the Lincoln Memorial.

The Washington Monument, located in the centre of the National Mall, honours America's first president, George Washington (1789-1797). The 169-metre obelisk references the prosperous civilisations of ancient Egypt and Rome. Despite his roles

as a founding father and a successful Revolutionary War general, Washington had a quiet demeanour and air of stoicism. He never lived in the White House — as it was under construction at the time of his presidency — but instead lived with his wife Martha and her children from an earlier marriage at Mount Vernon, 22km outside of the city in Virginia.

The Jefferson Memorial, located on the Tidal Basin on the National Mall and built in the Palladian style of Italian Renaissance architecture, was completed in 1943.

It reflects Jefferson's belief in Renaissance ideals of balance and unity — which he strove to apply to both art and politics. Jefferson designed his home estate, Monticello, in Charlottesville, Virginia, in a similar style. Jefferson was America's third president and a founding father who



Washington Monument

worked to secure international diplomacy abroad while expanding the United States westward. He became the first secretary of state in 1789.

The Lincoln Memorial, on the National Mall at the end of the reflecting pool, houses a giant statue of President Abraham Lincoln (1861-1865). The 5.8-metre seated figure looks out at the nation's capital, with the Washington Monument and Jefferson Memorial in its line of sight. Lincoln guided the nation through the Civil War and signed the 13th Amendment, which emancipated enslaved people. He was a tall man, around two meters, and spoke softly despite his towering presence. The monument reflects his larger-than-life presence and legacy and is among the most popular US monuments — an estimated 7 million tourists visit each year.

ISC organises success celebration for International Day of Yoga 2026

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: The Indian Sports Centre (ISC) organised a success celebration to mark the successful conduct of this year's International Day of Yoga (IDY 2026) in Qatar.

Inaugurating the event at ICC Ashoka Hall, Ambassador of India to Qatar H E Vipul, expressed his sincere gratitude to the Indian community in Qatar for their wholehearted support in making the International Day of Yoga 2026 celebrations a grand success.

The main IDY 2026 event was held at the University of Doha for Science &

Technology (UDST) Cricket Ground.

The function was presided over by ISC President E P Abdurahiman. During the ceremony, the Ambassador felicitated the sponsors, organisers and volunteers who played a key role in the successful planning and execution of the International Day of Yoga 2026 celebrations.

Among those present were Deputy Chief of Mission Sandeep Kumar, First Secretary and ISC Coordinating Officer Harish Pandey, Second Secretary Bindu N.



Nair, ICBF President Shanavas Bava, General Secretary Deepak Shetty, ICC Vice President Shantanu Deshpande, ICC General Secretary Abraham K. Joseph, IBPC Vice President Abdul Sathar, Organizing Committee Chairman P.N. Babu Rajan, General Convener Nihad Ali, and ISC Advisory Council Member Subramanya Hebbagelu.

ISC Vice President Sitendu Pal, Treasurer

Deepak Chukkala, Secretary Basheer Thuvarikkal and Management Committee members Abdul Azeem, Chandrashekar Angadi, Somaraju Kedarasetty and others lead the event.

The celebration was attended by members of various apex bodies, representatives of affiliated organizations, organizing committee members, sponsors and volunteers.

The event commenced with a welcome address by ISC Joint Secretary Kavitha Mahendran, while Nivedita Mehta, In-charge of the Yoga Programme, proposed the vote of thanks.

Syrian top diplomat reassures Lebanese leaders on Beirut visit

BEIRUT: Syrian Foreign Minister Asaad Al-Shaibani told Lebanon's president yesterday that Damascus had no intention of intervening militarily in his country, despite US pressure to do so, according to the Lebanese presidency.

Shaibani, who also invited President Joseph Aoun to Syria, is visiting Beirut, where he met parliament speaker Nabih Berri, a Hezbollah ally, for the first time. US President Donald Trump has repeatedly said that Syria could "take care of Hezbollah", criticising Israel's strategy in its war with the Iran-backed militant group.

But Syrian President Ahmed

Al-Sharaa, who came to power in December 2024 after leading a coalition that toppled longtime ruler Bashar Al-Assad, has stated that he has no intention of intervening or reopening old wounds. Shaibani told Aoun he wanted "to clear up the confusion sparked by reports of a potential Syrian military intervention in Lebanon", adding that "Syria had no intention of undertaking such a move", the presidency said in a statement.

Shaibani also extended to Aoun an invitation from Sharaa to visit Syria, which would be a first. After meeting Berri, Shaibani told reporters that he did not rule out the possibility

of a meeting with Hezbollah in the future. Shaibani had previously visited Lebanon in October — the first visit by a senior Syrian official since the Islamist coalition took power in Damascus, opening a new chapter in relations between the two countries.

Lebanese Prime Minister Nawaf Salam, for his part, travelled to Syria in May.

The new Syrian authorities are hostile to Hezbollah, which was allied with Assad, and have announced arrests of alleged cells affiliated with the group.

Since late 2024, Hezbollah's former Syrian supply routes have been cut and Damascus

authorities say several attempts to smuggle weapons to Lebanon have been foiled.

The Syrian army intervened in Lebanon during its civil war in 1976 and exercised tutelage over its neighbour for decades, where it was accused of numerous assassinations.

Shaibani's visit last year broke the deadlock over the issue of Syrian prisoners in Lebanon, a Damascus priority.

Around 2,000 Syrians, nearly a third of Lebanon's prison population, are held in the country's overcrowded jails. More than 250 prisoners were transferred to Syria following Shaibani's first visit. — AFP



Lebanon's President Joseph Aoun (right) meeting with Syria's Foreign Minister Asaad Al-Shaibani at the presidential palace in Baabda yesterday. (AFP)

UN aid workers warn against expansion of Israeli-controlled areas in Gaza

UNITED NATIONS: The expansion of Israeli-controlled areas in the Gaza Strip since the October 2025 ceasefire endangers civilians, UN humanitarian aid workers said on Wednesday.

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said its partners are calling for the protection of civilians in Gaza, including along the so-called Yellow Line marking the western limit of the Israeli armed forces' operational area.

The line marked by yellow-painted concrete blocks routinely edges westward, expanding the Israeli security area.

The team warned that the continued expansion of areas under Israeli control is intensifying risks to civilians and further constraining humanitarian efforts. The team said in the statement that human rights partners verified the killing of 196 people, including 18 women and 43 children, between October 10, 2025, and April 2026, in Israeli attacks reported near areas where Israeli forces were deployed. — XINHUA

Bomb blast at Damascus cafe kills six

DAMASCUS: A bomb blast at a cafe in Damascus yesterday killed six people and wounded 22, authorities said, in the latest challenge for Syria's Islamist leaders as they seek to stabilise the country after more than a decade of war.

The bombing — the deadliest since a suicide attack on a church last year — was not immediately claimed.

It took place near the capital's Palace of Justice, a key government building, sparking scenes of panic in the busy area.

An AFP correspondent saw ambulances weaving through traffic with their sirens blaring as they headed to the site, and

security forces cordoned off the area of the blast.

"The explosion that occurred in a cafe near the Palace of Justice in Damascus resulted from an explosive device planted in the location," state television said.

Nour Khayyat, 40, who owns a shop selling batteries for solar panels near the site, told AFP that "at about 3pm (1200 GMT), I heard a powerful blast and the storefront shook".

"People rushed to the cafe and called ambulances," he added. Mohammed Al-Dahabi, the owner of a glasses shop next to the targeted cafe, was trembling as he described the

explosion, telling AFP. "I felt strong pressure, and the whole place shook".

"I ran to the place and saw people lying on the floor with blood pooled around them everywhere," he added, saying the scenes recalled the bombings Damascus experienced during Syria's nearly 14-year civil war.

Arriving at the scene, Damascus governor Maher Eldibi said an investigation had been launched.

"Those responsible for this bloodshed will be punished," he said. "Each time the country sees a period of stability, malicious parties try to destabilise it." Since the toppling of longtime ruler Bashar Al-Assad in December of 2024, Syria's new authorities led by President Ahmed Al-Sharaa have sought to exercise full control, restore security and reunify the country.

Damascus has been the site of multiple attacks and incidents since the new authorities took over.

The deadliest came in June 2025, when an attack on a Damascus church killed 25 people. The suicide attack was later claimed by a militant group, while the authorities blamed it on the Islamic State group. — AFP



Syrian security forces and people gather at the site of an explosion at a cafe in the capital Damascus yesterday. (AFP)

Over 35,000 repatriated through South Africa border post

JOHANNESBURG: More than 35,000 individuals have been processed through voluntary repatriation and deportation operations at South Africa's Beitbridge Border Post in Limpopo Province since the government intensified migration enforcement measures in early June, authorities said yesterday.

Speaking during a media briefing at the border post, Acting Commissioner of the

Border Management Authority David Chilembe said, "Since we started here on the seventh, when the president announced the measures that we have to put in place with regard to migration issues, we have dealt with more than 35,000 people that we have repatriated and deported through this border post."

The majority of those processed were Zimbabwean and Malawian nationals, Chilembe

said, adding that on Wednesday alone, authorities handled about 2,400 people, including around 1,700 Malawians and 700 Zimbabweans.

The intensified repatriation drive follows months of growing public protests over illegal migration, which began in April and culminated in a nationwide demonstration on Tuesday, with thousands of migrants, particularly from Malawi, gathering at a temporary repatriation

center in Durban before the government relocated operations to a new facility in Limpopo's Musina, near the Beitbridge border crossing with Zimbabwe.

Home Affairs Minister Leon Schreiber said on Wednesday that authorities had processed 525 government-arranged buses transporting migrants, mainly to neighboring countries, including Malawi and Zimbabwe. — XINHUA



World in brief

Zambia extends fuel tax relief for another 90 days

LUSAKA: Zambia has extended the suspension of excise duty on petrol and diesel for another 90 days to cushion consumers from higher global oil prices driven by the conflict in the Middle East.

Thabo Kawana, permanent secretary at the Ministry of Information and Media, said during a press briefing late Wednesday that the government has also extended the zero-rating of value-added tax on petrol and diesel from July 1 to Sept. 30.

"This measure is intended to continue cushioning citizens and businesses from elevated fuel costs, stabilize pump prices and mitigate the impact of the ongoing crisis in the Middle East on global oil prices and supplies," he said. Kawana reaffirmed the government's commitment to implementing targeted interventions to protect livelihoods, support economic and macroeconomic stability, and safeguard energy security. — XINHUA

DR Congo's Ebola death toll exceeds 400

KINSHASA: The official death toll in an Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo now exceeds more than 400, according to official figures released yesterday.

The highly infectious disease has claimed 438 lives among the 1,406 people confirmed infected — a fatality rate of just over 31 percent — since the outbreak was declared on May 15, the National Institute of Public Health (INSP) said in its latest report. A first case was also recently reported in the major northeastern city of Kisangani, nearly 600km from the epicentre of the crisis. A test on the body of a 24-year-old pregnant woman was positive for Ebola, the INSP said.

"The deceased's body was secretly transported by motorcycle to Kisangani" from the health zone of Nia Nia in Ituri, the health authorities said. Kisangani is a city of 1.5 million residents and the capital of Tshopo province. The body of a deceased Ebola victim remains highly infectious and in many cases the virus has been transmitted during burial rites. — AFP

Three jailed for life for murder of British botanists

JOHANNESBURG: A South African court sentenced three people to life in jail yesterday for the 2018 murders of a British botanist couple kidnapped while collecting seeds in a protected forest. Rachel and Rodney Saunders, aged 64 and 73, were kidnapped in the Ngoye Forest 150 kilometres (93 miles) north of the Indian Ocean city of Durban, prosecutors said. Their decomposing bodies were found days later in a river. Sayefudeen Aslam Del Vecchio, 46, his wife Fatima Patel, 36, and Malawian national Musa Jackson, 43, were convicted of the murders last month. They were also found guilty of stealing the couple's vehicle, camping equipment and a credit card which was used to make purchases totalling more than 700,000 rand (\$43,000). A Durban court sentenced them to two terms of life imprisonment with concurrent jail time for kidnapping, robbery and theft, the prosecuting authority said in a statement. — AFP

India, Japan vow closer work on critical minerals

NEW DELHI: India and Japan will work more closely on critical minerals to boost “resilience” in their supply chains, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said yesterday, as the two huge Asian economies look to cut dependence on top exporter China.

Both India and Japan depend on imports for many such minerals, used in everything from electric vehicles, solar panels and smartphones to jet engines and guided missiles.

They have been seeking new suppliers, including the United States and other countries, as China’s dominance may leave them vulnerable to changes in their ties with Beijing.

“We have agreed to strengthen supply chain resilience in strategic sectors such as semiconductors, quantum technologies, and critical minerals,” India’s Modi said after talks with his Japanese counterpart Sanae Takaichi in New Delhi.

Japan and India are members of the Quad security alliance along with the United States and Australia, a group



Japan's Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi and India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi issue joint press statements after their meeting at the Hyderabad House in New Delhi yesterday. (AFP)

seen as a counterweight to China’s expanding presence in the Indian Ocean and wider Asia-Pacific region.

Takaichi said both Japan and India were facing challenges such as “weaponisation of the economy and non-

market policies and practices”.

“We need to urgently build resilience in our critical minerals supply chains,” she said in her speech.

China on Monday imposed export controls on 20 Japanese companies, adding them to a growing blacklist in a months-long row with Tokyo.

Beijing said that these companies “have participated in enhancing Japan’s military capabilities”.

Tokyo has called the move “unacceptable and deeply regrettable” and demanded its reversal.

A joint statement by India and Japan yesterday expressed “grave concerns” over non-market actions and warned, “arbitrary export restrictions”, particularly on critical minerals, could disrupt supply chains. In a sign of camaraderie between the two leaders, Modi referred to Takaichi as his “little sister” and the Japanese premier responded by calling him “elder brother”.

Japanese and Indian businesses concluded investment deals worth \$12.3bn, the two sides said.

They form part of a Japanese pledge to pour \$68bn into India over 10 years.

Modi said the countries had also agreed to co-develop a naval radio antenna project aimed at boosting maritime surveillance. New Delhi is particularly keen for Tokyo’s greater involvement with its capital and technology to aid its push towards building a domestic military hardware industry. India’s Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri said that Asia’s second- and third-largest economies identified economic security and energy resilience as key pillars of the bilateral ties.

Earlier, Takaichi received a red-carpet welcome at the presidential palace in Delhi, where troops marched past in an honour guard parade.

Trade between the two nations in 2025-26 topped \$27 billion, according to official figures from India.

Tokyo is also backing India’s high-speed railway project with a major loan, and has supported key urban infrastructure and metro rail projects in several cities. — **AFP**

Trial of potential Ebola treatments begins in DR Congo, says WHO

GENEVA: The trial of two potential treatments for the Bundibugyo species of Ebola behind the deadly outbreak in the DR Congo began in the country yesterday, the World Health Organisation said.

There are no approved vaccines or treatments for the rare strain which has been spreading in the northeastern provinces of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

There have been 1,406 confirmed cases and 438 confirmed deaths in the DRC, while 208 people have recovered from the virus, according to figures from the WHO.

“Today, the clinical trial of two therapeutics began, with the enrolment of the first

patient,” with the trial evaluating the monoclonal antibody MBP134 and the antiviral drug remdesivir, alone and in combination, WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told reporters.

He said the study was being conducted by the DRC’s National Institute for Biomedical Research, backed up by partners including the WHO.

“Patients who enroll in the trial will receive comprehensive supportive care and close follow-up,” Tedros insisted.

“We are also working to ensure they have access to the two drugs should they prove safe and efficacious in the trial.” — **AFP**

Inter-communal clashes kill 48 in Nigeria: Intel report

KANO: Intercommunal violence in western central Nigeria killed at least 48 people on Wednesday, a security report seen by AFP said yesterday.

The report, prepared for the United Nations, said “herder militia” armed with machetes raided farmers from the Kamuku ethnic group in the town of Tegna in Niger state, “killing at least 42 people”, prompting a reprisal that killed six herders working in a plantation.

Niger state is already reeling from deadly violence as well as kidnapping-for-ransom and cattle rustling gangs called bandits.

A local community leader Abdullahi Alhassan told AFP that herders from the Fulani ethnic group invaded the

area, attacking residents with machetes and burning others alive in their homes.

“The raid was reprisals for the killing last month of the herders’ patriarch they blamed on vigilantes from Kamuku farmers,” Alhassan said.

Kamuku farmers launched retaliatory attacks on three herding settlements around Tegna, also burning homes and killing at least two herders, Alhassan said.

Last month Kamuku farmers killed Muhammad Shehu, a respected community leader among the herders, over the sharing of money donated to the community by a politician, the security report said.

The killing of the herders’ leader led to “a cycle of communal rifts between the two

communities”, it said.

Niger, known for its huge gold deposits and considered to be a food basket, has been terrorised by bandits and jihadists who carry out deadly raids and displacing agrarian communities.

A month into the annual rainy season which runs between June and September, a huge number of farmers have failed to access their lands due to attacks by bandits and jihadists who impose hefty levies on farmers in exchange for permission to work their farms.

International aid agencies have warned that displacement of communities across the north and centre poses risk to Nigeria’s food security.

In its latest advisory yesterday, the United Nations

World Food Programme (WFP) warned that Nigeria’s food security is “worsening faster than previously anticipated.”

WFP said more than 17 million people are experiencing “crisis, emergency, or catastrophic levels” of hunger in northern Nigeria.

Illegal mining, from which jihadists and bandits benefit, partly drives the violence in some regions of Nigeria, according to officials.

Nigeria’s northwestern and central regions regularly see deadly violence over land and water exploitation between farming and herding communities, which has worsened in recent years because of population pressure and climate change. — **AFP**

Indonesia to deploy 800,000 digital panels in nationwide school programme

JAKARTA: The Indonesian government will accelerate school digitalisation by installing 800,000 interactive flat panels in schools across the country this year, the country’s Primary and Secondary Education Minister Abdul Mu’ti said yesterday.

Mu’ti said the programme is part of the government’s accelerated school revitalisation and digitalisation efforts aimed at improving education quality and creating a more modern learning environment.

The ministry previously distributed 288,865 interactive flat panels to schools across Indonesia in 2025 as the initial phase of the programme.

In addition to expanding digital infrastructure, the government will provide training for teachers to ensure the new learning technology is used effectively in the classroom, Mu’ti said. — **AFP**

Ugandan president backs single East African visa for 2027

KAMPALA: Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni has endorsed a proposal to introduce a single East African entry visa for the 2027 Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON), which Uganda will co-host with Kenya and Tanzania.

Museveni, according to a State House statement issued yesterday, directed officials to begin consultations with their counterparts in Kenya and Tanzania to advance the proposal ahead of the tournament.

The proposed visa would allow football fans, tourists, match officials and participating teams to travel freely across the three host countries for up to four months without requiring separate entry permits.

“This is common sense. I support it” Museveni said during a meeting with Uganda’s AFCON local organising committee. — **XINHUA**

WHO says Marburg virus case detected in Uganda

GENEVA: The World Health Organisation (WHO) has confirmed a case of Marburg virus disease in Uganda’s western Kyegegwa District, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus announced during his opening remarks at the WHO media briefing yesterday.

The case was identified through enhanced disease surveillance for Ebola, according to WHO. Ugandan health authorities notified WHO of the confirmed case on June 30. No new Ebola cases have been reported

in the country since June 21.

Health authorities have informed WHO that they are monitoring all identified contacts of the Marburg case, but so far none have shown symptoms. WHO is supporting investigations to determine the source of exposure, assess the public health risk, and support community engagement. According to the WHO website, Marburg virus disease (MVD), formerly known as Marburg haemorrhagic fever, is a severe, often fatal illness in humans. The average MVD case fatality rate is around 50 percent.

Case fatality rates have varied from 24 percent to 88 percent in past outbreaks.

Early supportive care with rehydration, and symptomatic treatment improves survival. There are currently no approved vaccines or antiviral treatments for MVD, but a range of vaccines and drug therapies are under development.

The WHO said it continues to work with the Ugandan authorities to contain any potential spread and will provide further updates as the situation evolves. — **XINHUA**

India asks Meta to hold WhatsApp username rollout over fraud fears

NEW DELHI: India has asked Meta to hold off launching its username feature on WhatsApp in the world’s most populous country, citing concerns over fraud and impersonation, media reports said yesterday.

The move comes as authorities in India grapple with a spike in cybercrime, with scammers exploiting low digital safety awareness among millions of Internet users.

WhatsApp, owned by US tech giant Meta, said Monday that users worldwide would be able to connect via unique usernames instead of sharing their phone numbers, an upcoming feature it said was designed to enhance privacy.

India, WhatsApp’s largest market with more than half a billion users, voiced concerns Wednesday that the change could make it easier for fraudsters to target victims.

In a letter to Meta, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology said the feature could lead to an increase in online fraud, phishing, digital arrest scams and impersonation attacks, the Indian Express newspaper reported.

“There is a possibility that bad actors may claim usernames and message other users while pretending to be someone they are not.” — **AFP**

China launches new marine satellite

China successfully launched the Haiyang-2E marine satellite aboard a Long March-4B rocket from the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre yesterday. The satellite was sent into orbit to support marine observation and monitoring missions. (XINHUA)



Japan deploys bear cameras in mountains as attacks surge

TOKYO: Japan has begun installing hundreds of cameras in its northern mountains as part of a nationwide survey of the bear population following a surge in maulings, an official told AFP yesterday.

Bears have killed at least five people since April 1, all in the northern region of Tohoku, after a record 13 fatal attacks across the country in the last fiscal year, according to the environment ministry.

The animals have grown in numbers in recent years, a trend scientists attribute in part to a declining number of people living in rural areas.

Residents in Tohoku live in constant fear, with national media providing daily coverage of bear sightings at shopping arcades, parks and schools.

To draw up an effective response, authorities plan to use more than 800 cameras to monitor the animals, initially targeting six major bear populations in Tohoku before

expanding the survey across the country over the next four years, environment ministry official Yu Takahashi told AFP.

Jars of honey mixed with wine placed at about human-head height are meant to attract the bears. The cameras will then capture each animal’s unique white chest marks as it stands on its hind legs to sniff the sweet tonic.

“Until now, local governments surveyed bear populations in their jurisdictions at various times and using various methods,” Takahashi said.

“Our plan is to conduct a more accurate survey by focusing on population groups,” he said. In recent months there has been a jump in sightings after the bears emerged from hibernation, and more bears have been straying into urban areas.

This week, authorities said they were investigating a possible sixth fatality after a man’s body with bite marks was found in a mountainous area in Tohoku.

Algerians vote for new parliament with turnout in focus

ALGIERS: Algerians headed to the polls yesterday to vote for a new parliament in an election shadowed by fears of low turnout among the 25-million-strong electorate.

Polling stations, which opened at 8:00 am local time (0700 GMT) and were due to close at 7:00 pm, were nearly empty in the capital Algiers as of early afternoon, an AFP journalist reported.

But images broadcast on national television showed people queuing up to cast their ballots in some parts of the country, including in the northwestern province of El Aricha. “We came to fulfill our duty, hoping for something good. That’s all I have to say,” Djammel Bouakkaz, a 74-year-old retiree, told AFP at a polling station in Algiers.

Voter turnout had reached 11 percent nationwide as of mid-afternoon, and nearly 10 percent among those registered to cast ballots overseas, state TV reported, citing the election authority. The last parliamentary vote in 2021 saw a

historic low turnout, while this year’s is taking place amid controversy over the government’s disqualification of roughly a third of would-be candidates.

Some hopefuls have said they were blocked from competing for major constituencies, including Algiers.

The ruling National Liberation Movement (FLN) was widely expected to still dominate the 407-seat National People’s Assembly, whose members are elected for five-year terms.

President Abdelmajid Tebboune said the election was proceeding as expected, the state-run APS agency reported.

Prime Minister Said Sayoud declined to comment on turnout but urged citizens to take part, according to news website TSA. “I call upon Algerian men and women to turn out in large numbers to vote,” Sayoud was quoted as saying.

Algeria had seen record low turnout of 23 percent in the 2021 poll the first since a major pro-democracy protest movement swept through the country in 2019. — **AFP**



A robotic wolf-shaped deterrent device is pictured outside a convenience store at a rural area in Kiryu city yesterday where bear sightings have been increasing. (AFP)

First US hypersonic weapon programme faces further delay: GAO

WASHINGTON: The US's first hypersonic weapon, already at least two years late for deployment in the field, is facing delays yet again - this time over unresolved production issues, according to congressional auditors.

That conclusion is part of yesterday's release of the Government Accountability Office's (GAO) annual assessment of major weapons systems - a \$2.4tn portfolio of the Pentagon's costliest 104 programmes, including the Long-Range

Hypersonic Weapon.

Programme officials told the GAO that the Army "will not field its first LRHW battery, including missiles, until at least the second quarter of fiscal year 2026," or by March 30. That date is "over two years later than its initial goal and nine months later than our last assessment," according to the report.

The report outlines the latest struggles for the US in developing a homegrown hypersonic weapon, having spent more

than \$12bn since 2018 while still lagging China and Russia in deployment.

The missiles are capable of flying faster than five times the speed of sound and are far more difficult to intercept than slower missiles. Russia has reported using hypersonic missiles as part of its invasion of Ukraine.

The top US army official overseeing the programme said March 17 the service was "very close" to fielding the landmark weapon. The initial battery is set to include four launchers and

eight missiles.

"We are so close to that first battery being fully equipped with all of its capabilities that I don't want to spoil the surprise when we actually get there, but we're within a few weeks," Lt. Gen. Frank Lozano, the Army's top missile programmes official, told an industry conference at the time.

The Army is working with Lockheed Martin Corp. to ramp up production of hypersonic missiles that are "incredibly complex" with some assembly

done by hand, Lozano said.

"Some of the problems discovered during earlier flight tests created a production bottleneck" with the Army and Navy, who are providing technology, pausing production "until the missile was successfully tested," GAO said.

"Officials stated that the contractor has continued to experience issues at its facility," and the program "worked with a third-party consultant to identify challenges and make recommendations to increase

the rate of missile production."

Lockheed Martin and a unit of Leidos Holdings Inc. are the prime contractors of the program. GAO didn't make clear which contractor was having the production issues. The House defense appropriations subcommittee in its passage last month of the fiscal 2027 defense bill, signaled its concern when it cut \$182m from the Army's \$301m request for additional missiles, citing "testing delays." — *THE WASHINGTON POST*

Portugal, Spain inaugurate new cross-border electricity link

LISBON: Portugal and Spain yesterday inaugurated a new high-voltage electricity interconnection, representing an investment of €70m (\$79.8m) on the Portuguese side. The move aimed to boost cross-border power exchanges between the two countries and facilitate the integration of renewable energy.

The link forms part of a new electrical axis between the Minho region of northern Portugal and Galicia in northwestern Spain, connecting the two networks via the substations of Ponte de Lima, Fontefria and Beariz through a double 400-kilovolt overhead line spanning about 90 kilometers, of which 72 are on Portuguese territory. — *XINHUA*

Russia strikes 153 Ukrainian military targets: Defence Ministry

MOSCOW: The Russian Armed Forces have struck Ukrainian transport infrastructure, long-range drone launch sites and other military targets in 153 locations, the Russian Defense Ministry said yesterday.

The strikes were carried out using operational-tactical aviation, strike drones, missile forces, and artillery, the ministry said.

Russia's air defense systems shot down 11 guided aerial bombs and 631 fixed-wing drones. Forces of the Black Sea Fleet also destroyed an unmanned Ukrainian surface vessel in the northeastern Black Sea, according to the ministry. — *XINHUA*

WHO chief says cruise ship-linked hantavirus outbreak 'over'

GENEVA: The World Health Organization (WHO) yesterday declared the hantavirus outbreak linked to the cruise ship MV Hondius officially over, following the completion of quarantine for the final contact and no new cases reported for more than five weeks.

"Today, the final contact of a person exposed to hantavirus on the cruise ship MV Hondius completed their quarantine period, tested negative and returned home. No further cases have been reported since May 25. We are therefore very pleased to say that WHO considers the outbreak of hantavirus over," said WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus during his opening remarks at the media briefing yesterday. — *XINHUA*

Albanian clashes as protest over Trump-linked resort boils over

TIRANA: Violent clashes erupted between police and demonstrators outside Albania's parliament yesterday, as protests sparked by a resort development linked to US President Donald Trump's family threatened to escalate.

Protests began in late May against the planned construction of a luxury hotel linked to Trump's daughter Ivanka and her husband Jared Kushner in a nature reserve in Zverec, on Albania's southwestern coast.

For the second time this week, crowds gathered outside parliament to confront lawmakers and block entry to the building.

Lines of riot police pushed them back, leading to clashes and arrests, according to AFP journalists at the scene.

Police used tear gas, pepper spray and water cannon to break up the crowd, and some protesters tried to push through lines of officers.

According to the police 15 officers were injured in the clashes and received hospital treatment, while four remained hospitalised.

Twenty five demonstrators were



Demonstrators on the sidelines of a protest against a controversial luxury resort development linked to US President near a protected natural area, outside the parliament, in Tirana, yesterday. (AFP)

detained, the police said. Two demonstrators suffered injuries and received treatment in hospital, said the health ministry.

People were also seen smashing the windows of an empty police car in a nearby street as the crowd was pushed away from the area.

On Tuesday, six people were arrested when demonstrators threw eggs at lawmakers' cars.

The violence is a marked contrast to the overwhelmingly peaceful daily gatherings that have drawn thousands on to the streets since the movement began. — *AFP*

Ukrainian state ordered Nord Stream sabotage: German prosecutors

BERLIN: German prosecutors said yesterday that the Ukrainian state ordered a 2022 bomb attack on the Nord Stream gas pipelines, complicating relations between Kyiv and its key military backer Berlin.

The sabotage, never claimed by any actor, destroyed three of the four Baltic seafloor pipelines of the major energy link from Russia to Germany and released huge amounts of methane into the atmosphere.

The Ukrainian government has always denied ordering the destruction of the pipelines, which had in earlier times allowed Russia to earn billions through gas sales to Germany and beyond.

News broke Wednesday that German prosecutors had now levelled charges against the Ukrainian suspect Serhii Kuznetsov, who is alleged to have led a team of divers in the high-

stakes operation.

He was arrested while on holiday in Italy last summer and extradited to Germany in November.

In a statement Thursday detailing the charges, including the alleged war crime of targeting civilian infrastructure, German prosecutors said that he was "an officer in the Ukrainian army" and that he and other military personnel had acted "on the orders of state authorities in Ukraine". Following Russia's February 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine, "he and other members of the military... developed a plan to destroy" the pipelines in order to deprive Russia of gas revenues, they said.

The case is awkward for Germany and Ukraine at a time when Germany, Europe's leading economy, has emerged as the biggest military backer of Ukraine in its war against Russia. — *AFP*

Poland to seek extradition of former Justice Minister from US

WARSAW: A Warsaw court has upheld criminal charges against Poland's former justice minister, opening up the potential for his extradition from the United States, prosecutors confirmed to AFP yesterday.

Zbigniew Ziobro — who served as justice minister and public prosecutor general between 2015 and 2023 under the conservative-nationalist Law and Justice (PiS) government — faces up to 25 years in prison in Poland if convicted.

The charges include abuse of power, leading an organised criminal enterprise and using funds meant for crime victims to buy Israeli Pegasus spyware, allegedly to monitor political opponents.

The latest court decision "makes it possible to initiate extradition proceedings", Anna Ptaszek, a spokeswoman for the national prosecutor's office, told AFP. — *AFP*

Leftist candidate challenges Fujimori's win in Peru

LIMA: The defeated leftist candidate in Peru's presidential election, Roberto Sanchez, said on Wednesday he will appeal the win of his right-wing rival Keiko Fujimori with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

Sanchez alleges fraud in votes cast by Peruvians living abroad and filed an appeal two days after the election, according to a statement from his party, Together for Peru.

Peru's electoral authority said this week that Fujimori was elected with 50.13 percent of the vote in the June 7 runoff, compared to Sanchez's 49.86

percent. A previous request from Sanchez to annul the overseas votes was rejected by the National Jury of Elections, which deemed his claims unfounded.

The leftist candidate cast doubt on overseas votes because there was a "change of rules in the middle of the electoral process, preventing the digitalization in the runoff of the tally sheets for votes cast abroad" at Peru's consulates, the statement said. The National Jury of Elections is expected to officially proclaim 51-year-old Fujimori as president-elect this week, before she takes office July 28 to replace Jose Maria Balcazar. — *AFP*

Russia says drones dropped red paint on embassy in Sweden

STOCKHOLM: Russia's embassy in Stockholm said yesterday it had been the victim of an overnight drone attack that dropped a mock-up of an improvised explosive device and red paint on its premises.

Stockholm police told AFP they were investigating "vandalism at an embassy" in the capital but could not confirm which country's mission it was.

"The investigation is classified," Stockholm police spokesman Daniel Wikdahl said.

The Russian embassy posted photographs on its Facebook page of drones lying on the ground, one of which appeared to have an object strapped to it that was connected to wires, while the other was covered in red

paint. A third photo showed a container of red paint.

"This ... is not just a provocation, but an obvious attempt to intimidate the Russian mission staff," the embassy wrote.

It said Swedish authorities were investigating more than 10 similar incidents at the embassy but have "in the past two years not led to any results".

Wikdahl said police had been investigating incidents at embassies but could not identify which countries' missions were concerned.

He said Swedish police had recently started a new unit to investigate incidents at embassies, which he said had become "more common" and were "complex" to investigate. — *AFP*

UK PM says 'deeply sorry' for decades of forced adoptions

LONDON: British Prime Minister Keir Starmer formally apologised yesterday for the forced adoption of an estimated 185,000 babies born to unmarried mothers in England and Wales between 1949 and 1976, calling it "a stain on our history".

The scandal saw the mothers, including many who were teenagers, coerced into giving up their children, with social, institutional and family pressures used to persuade them that adoption was their only option.

"We are deeply and profoundly sorry to the mothers who were told they were unfit, who were prevented from caring for the children they desperately wanted ... and who have carried this loss for decades," Starmer told parliament.

"The shame is not yours. The shame was never yours. The

shame is ours," he insisted.

The premier paid tribute to survivors who had campaigned for the apology and the "extraordinary courage with which they have shared their harrowing testimonies and fought for the truth and time again".

The expression of regret comes four years after a parliamentary committee recommended an official apology.

Australia's government issued a landmark apology in 2013 for forced adoptions and Ireland's did so in 2021.

"What happened to them — and to tens of thousands of mothers, children and families — should never have happened," Starmer told UK lawmakers after meeting a group of survivors at his Downing Street office.

"It is a stain on our history. Mothers, many young, vulnerable and without support



Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer (centre) speaking as he makes a statement on historic forced adoption in parliament in central London, yesterday. (AFP)

were coerced, bullied or misled into feeling that they had no choice but to have their children taken away from them."

He said the removal of the children had been systemic.

The practice, he said, was "embedded within systems across local authorities, across voluntary and faith-based institutions, and in health and social care services". — *AFP*

Rescuers dig out Venezuelan man eight days after quakes

CATIA LA MAR: Hundreds of rescuers in Venezuela cheered and embraced yesterday after pulling a 43-year-old man alive from the ruins of a collapsed building eight days after deadly twin earthquakes, AFP journalists witnessed.

With the official death toll nearing 2,300 and huge numbers of people still missing, the rescue of security guard Hernan Gil after so long under the rubble was greeted as a miracle.

Gil was brought out on a stretcher after a painstaking operation to extract him from the collapsed seven-story building where he worked in Catia La Mar, a coastal area almost entirely razed to the ground in the June 24 catastrophe.

"This is truly a miracle," Gil's wife Gusbimar Gonzalez told AFP as rescuers worked to rescue him.

Teams from seven countries

— Venezuela, Chile, the United States, Portugal, Costa Rica, El Salvador, and Mexico — worked around the clock over three days to reach Gil.

They provided him with more than ten litres of water to keep him hydrated via a hose and installed a tube to provide him with oxygen.

During the final phase of the operation, about thirty people worked in the building's parking area to clear away debris, while two rescuers dug a three-meter tunnel. "It wasn't easy to reach the exact spot where the victim was located," Cristian Vera, the leader of the Chilean rescue team told AFP.

However, while there have been a few astounding rescues — a three-year-old boy was found Tuesday six days after the quake — hope has faded of finding many more survivors. — *AFP*

Chile and Uruguay Presidents discuss how to fight drug cartels

MONTEVIDEO: The presidents of Chile and Uruguay huddled Wednesday to discuss how to fight organized crime, a problem that right-wing populists campaigned on in their sweep to power across Latin America.

President Jose Antonio Kast of Chile and Yamandu Orsi of Uruguay conferred for an hour a day after attending a summit of the regional trading bloc called Mercosur, in neighboring Paraguay.

Kast expressed hope that both Uruguay and Paraguay will soon join Chile in signing a crime-fighting agreement to tackle powerful drug trafficking cartels which send huge amounts of cocaine from South America to the United States and Europe.

"Organized crime can be removed from one country but it needs the same rules in all nations to be able to do away with this scourge," Kast said in a joint statement with Orsi. — *AFP*