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14 athletes to represent Qatar at Paris Olympics

● Mutaz Barshim and Shahad Mohamed to carry Qatari flag at the opening ceremony

Qatar will be represented by 14 male and female athletes at the 33rd edition of the Summer Olympic Games, scheduled to take place from July 26-August 11, in the French capital, Paris.

The athletes representing Qatar in the tournament belong to 5 national federations: athletics, swimming, shooting, beach volleyball, and weightlifting.

The Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC) unveiled the progress of Team Qatar yesterday at a press briefing attended by Mohamed Issa al-Fadala, Director of Sports Affairs Department at the QOC; Mohamed Saeed al-Misnad, Chef De Mission of Qatar delegation participating in the Olympics; and Abdulhadi al-Sahli, the Press Attaché for Qatar delegation.

Al-Misnad explained that the list of participants includes Mutaz Essa Barshim, Abdelrahman Samba, Aboubaker Abdulla, Bassem Hameeda, Ismail Dawoud, Ammar Ismail, Saif Mohamed, and Shahad Mohamed in athletics, Saeed Abu Sharb and Rashid Saleh al-Adba in shooting, Fares Ibrahim Hassouna in weightlifting, Cherif Younesse and Ahmed Tijan in beach volleyball, and Abdulaziz al-Obaidli in swimming.

He revealed that Mutaz Barshim and Shahad Mohamed will carry the Qatari flag at the



High jump legend Mutaz Barshim, hurdler Ismail Dawoud and sprinter Shahad Mohamed will represent Qatar athletics team in Paris Olympics.

opening ceremony, while the Qatari athletes will start arriving in Paris on July 19.

He said: "Team Qatar participation starts from the first day of the competitions, which is the 27th of July, and ends with the end of the tournament on the 10th of August, which will witness the final of the high jump, weightlifting, and men's beach volleyball. The competitions will span over 16 days during the event on an almost daily basis."

Team Qatar's Chef De Mission revealed that the Qatar Olympic Committee will host a reception ceremony on August 1 in the French capital on the

sidelines of the 2024 Olympics. He clarified that the reception ceremony will be presided over by HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, President of the Qatar Olympic Committee, in addition to HE Jassim bin Rashid al-Buainain, Secretary-General of the Qatar Olympic Committee, along with the presidents of participating sports federations and the athletes. The aim of the ceremony is to strengthen ties with the Olympic family and national Olympic committees, and to showcase Qatar's role as a leading global sports capital.

Al-Misnad said the qualified federations have commenced their preparations for the competitions, with most athletes currently stationed in Europe due to the proximity to the venue - Paris. "It should be noted that preparations actually began shortly after Tokyo 2020, especially for our Olympic champions who secured medals in that edition. We wish them the best of luck in achieving optimal results and winning medals in the upcoming competitions."

Abdulhadi al-Sahli, Team Qatar's Press Attaché, emphasised the commitment to provide comprehensive and detailed coverage of Qatar's delegation participation in the Paris 2024 Olympics to the Qatari sports community.

Al-Sahli continued: "We hope to replicate the success of the Tokyo 2020 Games, where Qatar achieved two gold medals through Mutaz Barshim in high jump and Fares Ibrahim in weightlifting, marking Qatar's first-ever gold medals in Olympic history. We aspire for our Olympic champions to achieve the same success in Paris."

Al-Fadala said at the beginning of his speech at the briefing: "We congratulate HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, President of the QOC, and HE Jassim Rashid al-Buainain, Secretary-General of the QOC, and the directors of departments at the QOC on the qualification of the athletes for the Paris 2024 Olympics."

Amir exchanges new Hijri year greetings with leaders of Arab, Islamic countries



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani exchanged cables of greetings with Their Majesties, Highnesses and Excellencies leaders of sisterly Arab and Islamic countries on the occasion of the new Hijri Year. His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani exchanged cables of greetings with Their Highnesses and Excellencies Crown Princes and Deputy Heads of sisterly Arab and Islamic countries on the occasion of the new Hijri Year. HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani exchanged cables of greetings with Their Excellencies heads of governments of sisterly Arab and Islamic countries on the occasion of the new Hijri Year. (QNA)

QCB launches cybersecurity awareness campaign

The Qatar Central Bank (QCB) - in association with Ministry of Interior, National Cyber Security Agency, and Qatar Financial Center Regulatory Authority - has launched a large-scale national campaign to raise awareness of information security under the slogan "Stay Aware". This is in line with Qatar's efforts to enhance awareness of cybersecurity risks and its vision towards building a cyber-resilient society. The campaign aims to build an information security culture within the society that can face challenges that accompany the accelerating technological revolution. It mainly seeks to spread awareness amongst the public on the importance of data privacy and dangers of financial fraud, highlighting cyber threats that may arise in light of the rapid technological and digital development. By identifying emerging and

The drive is in line with Qatar's efforts to enhance awareness of cybersecurity risks

critical risks in the digital landscape, the campaign identifies the main channels of cyber fraud, which include phone calls, social media, e-mails, SMS messages and URL links. The campaign also provides the public with best practices and practical strategies to avoid falling victim to such threats. The QCB, along its partners in this campaign, emphasise the vital role of the ongoing awareness efforts in building a safer electronic society capable of responding to such threats. The campaign aims to empower and protect individuals and institutions, establish a culture of electronic vigilance, and protect citizens from ever-changing cyber threats.

Left leads French election, far-right comes third

France was on course for a hung parliament yesterday's election, with a leftist alliance unexpectedly taking the top spot ahead of the far-right, in a major upset that was set to bar Marine Le Pen's National Rally (RN) from running the government. The result would mark a huge setback for the far-right, which opinion surveys ahead of the vote had projected would win comfortably, before the left and centrist alliances co-operated by pulling scores of candidates from three-way races to build a unified anti-RN vote. The RN was set to come third, according to pollsters' projections based on early results.

In his first reaction, its leader Jordan Bardella called the co-operation between anti-RN forces, known as the "republican front" a "disgraceful alliance" that he said would paralyse France.

The election will leave parliament divided in three big groups with hugely different platforms and no tradition at all of working together. The vote was also a humiliation for President Emmanuel Macron, who called the snap election after his ticket was trounced in European Parliament elections last month. The leftist alliance, which gathers the hard left, the Socialists and Greens, who have long been at odds with each other, was forecast to win between 172 and 215 seats out of 577, according to the pollsters' projections. These projections are usually reliable. Cries of joy and tears of relief broke out at the leftist alliance's gathering in Paris when the estimates were announced. At the Greens' headquarters activists screamed in joy, embracing each other. Page 11



QOC officials briefing the media about Team Qatar's progress yesterday.

Israeli strike on school kills four more Gazans

AFP
Gaza Strip

The civil defence agency in Hamas-run Gaza said a strike yesterday on a school sheltering displaced Palestinians killed at least four people, the second such Israeli attack in two days.

The civil defence agency said Ihab al-Ghusain, the Hamas government's deputy labour minister, was among those killed in the strike on the Holy Family school.

The strike came a day after a UN-run school in the central Nuseirat refugee camp was hit, in an attack that the Gaza health ministry said killed 16 people and drew condemnation from the United Nations.

Palestinian resistance movement Hamas has repeatedly denied Israeli accusations that its fighters were hiding in civilian infrastructure.

The vast majority of the Gaza

Strip's 2.4mn people have been displaced by the war, now in its 10th month, and many have taken shelter in UN-run schools across the besieged territory.

The UN agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, expressed outrage at the repeated attacks on its premises.

"Another day. Another month. Another school hit," UNRWA chief Philippe Lazzarini said on social media platform X.

UNRWA spokesperson Juliette Touma said that 190 - or more than half - of the agency's facilities in Gaza have been hit, "some more than once", since the war began on October 7. "When the war started we closed the schools and they became shelters," she said.

Up to Thursday, 194 UNRWA workers had been killed, Touma added.

There have been 450 "incidents" involving UNRWA buildings during the war, Touma said,



Palestinians, who fled the eastern part of Gaza City after they were ordered by Israeli army to evacuate their neighbourhoods, carry their belongings in Gaza City yesterday.

saying the damage is "unprecedented in the history of the UN".

"Any hits on UN facilities are shocking and there has been a blatant disregard for international humanitarian law in re-

gard to this conflict," she added.

Israel has carried out a military offensive that has killed at least 38,153 people in Gaza, also mostly civilians, according to data from the territory's health ministry.

Today's Gulf Times includes an 8-page special supplement on AIR CONDITIONING & REFRIGERATION



Qatar-Japan ties a friendship model, says ambassador

QNA
Tokyo

Qatar's ambassador in Tokyo Jaber bin Jarallah al-Marri has stressed that the relations between Qatar and Japan are a model of co-operation, friendship and common interests, noting that the leadership, government and people of Qatar attach special importance to the existing partnership with Japan.

This came in a speech delivered by al-Marri during a reception held by the Japan-Qatar Friendship Association (JQFA), on the occasion of assuming his duties as ambassador to Japan, and to welcome him as honorary chairman of the association.

The ambassador said that the agreement signed between the two countries last year to advance relations to a comprehensive strategic partnership, establishes closer co-operation in all areas of economic, cultural, artistic, scientific, defence, security and academic exchange.

For her part, Deputy Director General of the Middle Eastern and African Affairs Bureau at the Japanese Foreign Ministry Misako Takahashi noted the long history of friendship extending for more than half a century between the two countries. She expressed her country's pride in its partnership with Qatar, which culminated in high-level dialogues and bilateral summit meetings which were



held in July and December last year.

Takahashi also expressed her great appreciation for the proactive diplomatic efforts made by Qatar in the midst of the difficult situation in the region, noting that Japan will continue to work closely with Qatar in order to achieve stability in the region.

For his part, Chairman of the Japan-Qatar Friendship Association and Chairman of Chubu Electric Power Co Satoru Katsuno underlined the association's role in promoting economic and cultural exchanges and enhancing mutual understanding between the two countries.

He expressed his thanks for the generous material and moral support provided by Qatar immediately after the Great East Japan Earthquake in March 2011, including the additional supply of liquefied natural gas (LNG) and the donation of \$100mn, which significantly contributed to the reconstruction of the affected areas.

Seminar discusses short story collection—*Dana Sea*

By Tawfik Lamari
Staff Reporter

The Ministry of Culture organised a symposium titled "Between the Covers of a Book" to discuss the publication of *Bahr (sea) Al-Dana* by writer Mona al-Anbari. She explained during the seminar moderated by the writer and journalist Saleh Gharib, in the presence of a group of intellectuals, that the book *Bahr Al-Dana* is a collection of stories that includes ten short ones and a long story.

The heroine of each story being a woman who is sometimes the narrator or one of the characters at other times, in addition to the author's narration in the rest of the stories. She added: By the title of the book (*Bahr Al-Dana*), I meant the female life. The sea is life and Al-Dana is the female, a single girl or a woman (married, separated, widowed...), considering that life resembles the sea with its calm and strong waves, and the female resembles Al-Dana with her beauty and solidity. Noting that the stories reflect the reality of Gulf society in particular and Arab society in general. Al-Anbari



said: In this collection, she was keen to document the place and time of the stories' events, noting that she adopted the literary style and blended reality and imagination. She pointed out that the most im-

portant of these stories are in *Buh Al-Hajiya, A Sunshine of Hope, The Sword of Feelings, Bahr Al-Dana, Stone and Stones, Harsh Al-Nada*, and others, every story portrays a struggle and a challenge.

Summer club raises eco-awareness

The first edition of the Summer Environmental Club Programme 2024, launched by the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (MoECC) on June 30, is being attended by 20 boys and girls from different schools across the country.

The activities include a number of lectures and field visits. Rawda Youssef al-Suwaidi, programme general supervisor, stressed that the camp is part of the MoECC's vision to raise environmental awareness among all categories of society, especially the young people and school students.

Mohamed Rashid al-Merri



explained that ministry has made significant efforts in developing the local environment, both land and marine. Through this programme, the ministry aims to transfer this knowledge to young people.

Salma al-Kuwari, also from the ministry, said that the club would feature two workshops. One is about the 'Initiate and Do Not Neglect' initiative, which aims to protect the environment through converting food waste into

organic fertiliser and recycling old fabrics into useful household items.

The other workshop will highlight the importance of planting trees and its impact on addressing the climate change challenge.



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The Al Hamba Festival attracted a large number of visitors.

Sweet success for Pakistan mango festival

◆ Over 200,000kg of mangoes sold during 10-day Al Hamba Festival

The Al Hamba Festival concluded on Saturday at Souq Waqif with total sales of fresh mangoes and mango products reaching a record number, according to the organisers.

More than 200,000kg of Pakistani mangoes were sold during the exhibition, organised by the Pakistan embassy in Doha in collaboration with the Celebrations Organising Committee of the Private Engineering Office (PEO) from June 27-July 6.

In a press statement, Al Hamba Festival general supervisor Khalid Saif al-Suwaidi highlighted the success of the exhibition, noting the diversity of the visitors, which included residents and visitors from neighbouring GCC countries and other regions.

He said the event, held at the main tent located in the eastern



Khalid Saif al-Suwaidi



Various types of mangoes were showcased at the 10-day event.

square of Souq Waqif, provided a unique experience by acquiring the finest Pakistani mangoes – from Chaunsa to Anwar Ratal, Langra, Dusseri and Sindhri, among others – which were shipped daily via air freight.

Al-Suwaidi cited several partnerships established between local and Pakistani companies to offer their products at consumer-friendly prices. He added that the inspection of mango shipments for the exhibition is conducted at the customs outlet of Hamad International Airport in co-operation with the Ministry of Public Health, the Ministry

of Municipality and the General Authority of Customs. Priority is given to these shipments for entry, but they undergo strict inspection. Additionally, samples are taken daily by the Ministry of Municipality within the exhibition.

“We have had the best experiences with the first two editions of the exhibition for Indian and Pakistani mangoes, and we have taken the feedback into consideration. We promise you even better future editions, and we look forward to seeing you at the Local Dates Festival, which will be held later this month,” al-Suwaidi added.

Visit Qatar shines spotlight on hospitality, tourism offerings

By Joey Aguilar
Staff Reporter

Visit Qatar shines a spotlight on the country's rich hospitality and tourism offerings, aiming to attract more visitors from neighbouring countries and other regions this summer.

Through a series of engaging videos posted on its social media platforms, Visit Qatar is highlighting some of the top destinations and culinary delights that make Qatar a unique and vibrant travel destination.

One of the featured attractions is the popular Arabic dessert, Umm Ali, which has been a favourite at the Sheraton Grand Doha Resort and Convention Hotel for more than 17 years. Visit Qatar cites the dessert's enduring popularity, encouraging visitors to indulge in its sweet and delicious taste.

Salama restaurant at Al Maha Island is a new spot offering authentic Moroccan dishes with a sea-view dining experience coupled with exceptional service. Visit Qatar also features the Pan-Asian restaurant Novikov at St Regis, offering beachfront views and an elevated dining experience. Luxury dining is further demonstrated by Babel Qatar at The Pearl Island. The Lebanese restaurant offers an array of traditional and Mediterranean dishes.

The Shebestan Palace Restaurant is also in the spotlight, celebrated for serving Iranian cuisine for more than 20 years in the Al Sadd area of Doha.

Another unique property featured is the Chedi Katara Hotel & Resort at Katara – the Cultural Village. This luxurious property allows guests to enjoy sea views and soft sands. With a Mughal-inspired courtyard, the property is a short walk



Visit Qatar showcases the country's vibrant hospitality sector.



from Katara Beach and offers accommodations with an outdoor swimming pool, free private parking, a fitness centre and a garden.

Visit Qatar's recently launched summer 2024 campaign, 'Your Summer Starts Here,' features well-known Bahraini influencer and filmmaker Omar Farooq and renowned Qatari athlete Mutaz Barshim. The campaign highlights Qatar's curated summer offerings, showcasing visits

to some of the best malls in the world, Doha's pristine beaches, and Qatar's five-star restaurants.

In addition, Visit Qatar is showcasing the beauty of Old Souq Al Wakra, a popular tourist destination known for its charming alleys, seaside serenity, and a wide variety of restaurants serving traditional seafood. This place provides a perfect blend of cultural richness and natural beauty, making it a must-visit location for tourists.

Doha Bank launches Fawran payment service

Doha Bank has launched Fawran – request to pay service, through its online and mobile banking platforms. Fawran facilitates seamless and instantaneous transactions, meeting the fast-paced demands of modern banking.

The service allows the payee to initiate a payment request, which the payer must review and accept. Once accepted, the payer's bank promptly processes the requested credit transfer to the payee, ensuring a swift, secure, and delay-free transaction. “The launch of Fawran – request to pay proves Doha Bank's dedication to leading the way in digital banking innovation. We are proud to offer our customers an unmatched level of speed and security in their financial transactions, providing them with the convenience and efficiency of real-time payments,” said Sheikh Abdulrahman bin Fahad al-Thani, Doha Bank, Group chief executive officer.



OUR DEEPEST AND HEARTFELT CONDOLENCES on the sad demise of our Chairman



Bekal Mohammed Shali

May Allah bless the departed soul and give fortitude to the bereaved family to bear this irreparable loss

Bombay Silk Centre

Meetings with US diplomat, Australian officials



HE Special Envoy of the Minister of Foreign Affairs ambassador Faisal bin Abdullah al-Hanzab met with the charge d'affaires of the US embassy in Qatar, Natalie Baker. The meeting discussed the close strategic relations between Qatar and the United States and ways to support and strengthen them, in addition to a number of regional issues of common interest. HE al-Hanzab also met with Australian Special Representative on Afghanistan Amanda McGregor and Australian ambassador to Qatar Shane Flanagan. During the meeting, the two sides discussed bilateral relations and ways to support and develop them, in addition to the latest developments in Afghanistan. (QNA)



Amir congratulates governor-general of Solomon Islands

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani and His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani sent yesterday cables of congratulations to Governor-General of Solomon Islands Sir David Vunagi on the anniversary of his country's Independence Day. HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani also sent a similar cable of congratulations to Prime Minister Jeremiah Manele. (QNA)

Ministries of Awqaf, sports and youth launch young researcher award

The Ministry of Endowments (Awqaf) and Islamic Affairs together with the Ministry of Sports and Youth launched the outstanding young researcher award, in implementation of the Qatar National Youth Policy.

Dedicated to researchers and scholars with the aim of encouraging the youth to engage in research across all disciplines, the award is granted biennially, and focuses on research on pressing social issues.

The inaugural edition will address the theme of delayed marriage and its impact on Qatari youth.

The launch of the award was announced in a press conference attended by representatives from both ministries.

The Director of the Department of Research and Islamic Studies at the Ministry of Awqaf Sheikh Dr Ahmed bin Mohamed bin Ghanem al-Thani pointed out that the research topic's axes were set to be: the importance of marriage for the individual and society, Islamic teachings that promote early marriage, figures on the average age for marriage, determining the factors behind late marriage, in addition to the impact of late marriage on the youth, the family, society, and child-upbringing.

Moreover, they also include the role of early marriage on the family's stability, the role of intellectuals, civil society, the government, and the media in promoting early marriage, along with finding solutions to the factors delaying marriage.

Sheikh Dr Ahmed said that applicants must be Qatar-residents and aged 20-35



years, while their research projects must include all axes indicated, in addition to meeting all application requirements including attaching a copy of their ID card and CV with their application.

Moreover, the research project must have been specifically prepared for the award, meet research standards, be written in Arabic (with an English summary), and range from 100-150 pages in length, in an A4 page format, typed in Traditional Arabic font, size 16 for the body, font size 12 for footnotes. Moreover, they must be submitted in PDF and Word formats via e-mail or delivered to the Department of Research and Islamic Studies premises.

Research projects could be conducted by two or more individuals, however, winners of previous editions cannot participate unless four years have passed since they have won last. Furthermore, financial awards could be confiscated in the event of a research project found to be in violation of standards, in addition to the need for applicants to address all of the evaluators' feedback.

Director of planning, quality, and in-

novation at the Ministry of Sports and Youth, the award's total value exceeds QAR200,000, to be distributed among the top three winners: The first-place winner will receive QAR100,000, the second-place QAR75,000, and the third-place winner QAR50,000.

The application deadline is July 5, 2025, corresponding to Muharram 10, 1447 AH. (QNA)

Al-Romaihi said that this collaboration with the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs aims to strengthen community partnerships with state institutions and to highlight the Ministry's eagerness to promote innovation in social sciences, by supporting the youth's research projects on finding practical solutions to issues facing society and the youth more particularly.

Funded by the Ministry of Sports and Youth, the award's total value exceeds QAR200,000, to be distributed among the top three winners: The first-place winner will receive QAR100,000, the second-place QAR75,000, and the third-place winner QAR50,000.

The application deadline is July 5, 2025, corresponding to Muharram 10, 1447 AH. (QNA)

Awqaf holds summer camp for students

The introductory meeting for male and female secondary and university students attending the summer camp by the Human Resources department at the Ministry of Endowments (Awqaf) and Islamic Affairs started yesterday. The camp will last until August 1.

Dr Mohamed Khalifa al-Kubaisi, head of the Training and Administrative Development Department, said the fifth edition of the programme, held in a new format, is being attended by a total of 25 male and female students from the secondary and university levels. The objective is to train the students in some of the ministry's departments, imparting them with administrative and practical skills. The ministry is looking to accommodate some students from needy families who benefit from the Zakat Affairs Department's assistance from members of the Qatari community. This will help them occupy quality jobs in state ministries and institutions after graduating from university studies.



Training for labour inspectors

The Labour Inspection Department at the Ministry of Labour conducted yesterday a training session for its inspectors on the new services programme, which will be launched this month.

This training programme is part of the ministry's ongoing initiatives to improve inspectors' effectiveness and hone their skills and ability to identify risks in the work environment. The ministry is striving to improve its services and work environment as well enhancing the country's efforts to align with international labour standards, in accordance with the Third National Development Strategy 2024-2030 and Qatar National Vision 2030's goal of a modern and competitive labour market and achieving sustainable development. (QNA)

QU students get training at QNA

The field training programme for female students at Qatar University (QU)'s College of Arts and Sciences – Department of Media, Print Journalism Track concluded yesterday at the Qatar News Agency (QNA). The programme ran from June 4 until July 7 at the QNA's Data, Analysis & Documentation Department, and included theoretical and practical information in editing, publishing, as well as analysis and documentation, and reviewing the journalistic tools utilised in analysing and documenting news and daily bulletins, in addition to preparing reports and leveraging cutting-edge technologies in this regard. The students had the opportunity to review the QNA's operation mechanism in this critical field and engaged in preparing, analysing, and documenting numerous daily news through using professional programmes. Additionally, the training enabled them to upgrade their practical capabilities through their daily engagement with the work team to review the daily news and capitalise on QNA's journalistic expertise. The supervisors of the field training, Head of the Media Department at QU, Dr Wael Abdel Aal, Dr Mohamed al-Amin Musa, and Dr Abdulmatlib Sadeq, participated in the closing training session. (QNA)



QatarEnergy LNG Tender Invitation

No.	TENDER NUMBER / DESCRIPTION	TENDER ISSUE PERIOD	TENDER FEE (QAR)	TENDER BOND (QAR)	TENDER CLOSING DATE
1	LTC/C/MNT/6650/24 HIRE OF INDUSTRIAL PORTABLE AC UNITS ON CALL-OFF BASIS	07/07/2024 to 14/07/2024	0	600,000	19/08/2024

Scope of Work:

Provide portable industrial air conditioners with duct on call -off basis at all COMPANY'S assets (both onshore and offshore) in different locations in the State of Qatar for a period of 5+2 years tentatively from 1Q2025. The locations will be confined space works, temporary rest shelters, open pits, turbines etc.

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

Place for Tender Collection and Bid Submission :

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

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



PRE-QUALIFICATION FOR MANPOWER SERVICES

Qatar Electricity & Water Co. is seeking to hire outsourced Skilled and Semi-Skilled manpower to work at Ras Abu Fontas Power Station during the Outages and on call off basis.

Companies that provide manpower services to the leading firms in Qatar are invited to submit pre-qualification documents.

The pre-qualification documents must contain the following: -

- Commercial registration
- Related licenses and certificates
- Corporate Organization Chart
- Financial Statement for the last 3 years
- List of Clients for the last 5 years
- Details of Company's Health, Safety and Environmental Policy
- Company Profile

Required documents should be uploaded to

www.qewc.com/qewc/tenders

before 11:00 AM on 15.07.2024

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT US VIA EMAIL
amit.dave@qewc.com

Auction Announcement

ARPM Tender and Auction Committee announce the following Auction:

Auction Subject	Sale of (3) Ice-Plant Units located in Doha, Al-Wakra, and Al-Khor			
Launching Date	Closing Date	Auction Bond QR.	Auctions Documents Price QR.	Auction Method
08/07/2024	24/07/2024	3,000 (Qatari Riyals Three Thousand) (refundable subject to conditions)	100 (Qatari Riyals One Hundred only)	One Closed Envelope

Auction description

Auction purpose is for the following:

Sale of (3) Ice-Plant Units located in Doha, Al-Wakra, and Al-Khor
The awarding will be made to the highest bid among the applicants.

General Conditions:

1. Auction Documents / Conditions shall be obtained from Purchasing Department, ARPM Co., located on the 9th Floor, Al Rayyan Building, Old Salata, Zone 18, Al Muthaf Street, next to Al Bustan Hotel during working hours 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. (Fri. & Sat. Closed).
2. Auction Documents Fee (QR 100 – Qatari Riyals One Hundred only) - non-refundable, will be paid in cash in ARPM Co. Headquarter.
3. Site visit for the Units and its Location shall be according to the Auction Conditions and the attendance of the visit shall be limited to those who obtain the Auction documents and pay the prescribed fees as per Item 2 above.
4. To obtain Auction documents, the following documents are required:
Authorization letter from the bidding company in Arabic signed by the officially authorized manager and stamped with the company's seal - Copy of the establishment card - ID of the authorized person to receive the documents - Copy of the valid company's commercial registration - Company's classification certificate (if any).
5. The Bid must be submitted according to the Conditions stated in the bidding documents. The Bid shall be enclosed with an Auction Bond in the name of Al Rayyan Project Management Company (to be placed in separate envelope inside the Bid envelope) in the form of a payable cheque certified by one of the banks operating in the State of Qatar of only QR3,000 (Three Thousand Qatari Riyals only), and it will be returned back within 90 days from the closing date subject to the Terms & Conditions, noting that no bid shall be accepted unless it has been enclosed with Auction Bond document.
6. The bid (Price of the Ice Plant Units) shall be submitted in local currency (Qatari Riyal) and shall be valid for 90 days from the closing date of the bid and cannot be revoked within that period.
7. Deadline for accepting bids is 12:00 pm of the closing date (Wednesday 24/07/2024).
8. All forms attached to the Auction documents including the form of undertaking, shall be filled, completed and authorized as stated therein and returned with the other documents.
9. All necessary data for the company (contacts & follow-up) must be attached: Mobile - Phone - Fax - E-mail - company address of where the correspondence to be sent, clarifying the tasks of each individual (when purchasing Auction documents) and within the company bid.
10. For any queries related to documents and bidding, contact Al Rayyan Project Management Co. - Tel: 40341846 – 40341804, Fax: 40341899 – email: L.cabral@arpm.com.qa; m.aseef@arpm.com.qa
11. Deadline for accepting inquiries and requests 16/07/2024.
12. The extension of the closing date may be requested in case of necessity (with justifications), not less than (5) working days prior to the closing date for Tender and Auction committee decision.
13. In case the closing date is extended or any modifications are made during the announcement period, the company will be notified by fax or e-mail formally.

QU professor gets top Saudi award for environment management

Dr Abdullah al-Swidi, associate professor in the Management and Marketing Department at Qatar University (QU)'s College of Business and Economics, has been honoured with Saudi Arabia's Award for Environment Management in the Islamic world.

The award was presented at the 9th Islamic Conference of Environment Ministers in Jeddah for Dr al-Swidi's remarkable contributions in the category of Environmental Research and Practices.

The award is a collaborative initiative between Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Environment, Water, and Agriculture and the Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation.

Established in 2004 and awarded every two years, this award aims to foster and stimulate interest in joint environmental endeavours across the Islamic world.



Dr Abdullah al-Swidi with the award.

It also seeks to expose global experiences in environmental protection from an Islamic perspective, thereby recognising and encouraging the efforts of individuals and institutions dedicated to managing natural resources for the benefit of present and future generations, a statement from QU added.

QIB, Visa launch 'grand summer campaign'

Qatar Islamic Bank (QIB) has announced an exclusive offer for its existing and new Visa debit and credit cardholders giving them the opportunity to win four BMW iX40 electric vehicles.

Besides, the campaign also offers cash prizes totalling QR900,000 which will be awarded to 90 winners over a period of three months, running until September 30, 2024.

QIB is championing sustainability by promoting the use of electric vehicles, emphasising the importance of climate change awareness. Every international transaction of QR500 or more on a QIB Visa debit or credit card gives four entries and each domestic transaction of QR500 or more on Visa credit card will give one chance to win QR10,000 monthly. To qualify for the grand prizes, cardholders must spend a total of QR50,000 during the campaign period to get five chances to win one of the 4 BMW iX40, excluding cash withdrawals.

Each month, 30 individuals will be randomly selected to receive QR10,000, and four lucky cardholders will drive away in a brand-new BMW iX40 electric vehicle at the end of the campaign. QIB is also extending a welcome reward points to new



credit card applicants. To qualify, new cardholders must activate their credit cards and make a minimum purchase of QR500 within the first 30 days of card issuance. All customers meeting the criteria on the new QIB Visa credit will get the guaranteed reward points based on their chosen card tier: 2,500 points for Gold, 5,000 points for Platinum, 10,000 points for Signature, and 20,000 points for Infinite credit cards.

D Anand, QIB's general manager - Personal Banking Group, said: "At QIB, our commitment lies in enhancing customer experiences and championing a commitment towards a greener, more sustainable future." Shashank Singh, Visa's vice-president and general manager for Qatar and Kuwait, said it is delighted to partner with QIB for an exclusive offer in Qatar. Winners will be selected through a prize draw conducted by a representative from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and QIB officials.



The event was graced by officials from the Ministry of Municipality and LuLu Hypermarket.

Doha Municipality and LuLu Hypermarket lead 'Plastic Bag-Free Awareness Drive'

Doha Municipality, in collaboration with LuLu Hypermarket, D-Ring Road, conducted a 'Plastic Bag-Free Awareness Drive' recently to highlight the environmental impact of disposable plastic bags and to promote sustainable alternatives.

The event was part of the Ministry of Municipality's initiatives to educate the public about the regulations regarding plastic bag usage.

Ali Mohamed al-Qahtani, head of Health, Inspection and Monitoring Unit at Doha Municipality; Dr Asmaa Abu Baker; Dr Heba Abdul Hakim; and Dr Abeer Mohamed from the Food Control Section, and officials from LuLu Hypermarket, including Shanavas Padiyath, regional manager, attended the campaign.

The Ministry of Municipality encourages the use of environmentally friendly alternatives, such as multi-use plastic bags, biodegradable bags, and bags made of paper or woven cloth to achieve Qatar's strategic objectives of environmental conservation and optimal investment in waste recycling. As part of the campaign, LuLu Group distributed free reusable bags to the public and set up a booth showcasing eco-friendly products. The store was adorned with a tree cutout bearing reusable bags as its branches. Additionally, an awareness campaign for children, complete with attractive gifts, was organised to instil knowledge about the environmental risks posed by plastic.

Over the past two decades, LuLu Group has implemented various sustainability initiatives. As the



As part of the campaign, LuLu Group distributed free reusable bags to the public and set up a booth showcasing eco-friendly products.

recipient of the 'Sustainability Award 2019' at the Qatar Sustainability Summit, LuLu Group has been at the forefront of promoting environmentally friendly practices in its operations and across its 23 stores in Qatar. LuLu Group's ongoing efforts include conserving energy and water, reducing waste, and incorporating sustainable practices, resulting in sustainable operations certification for various outlets in Qatar.

LuLu Hypermarket has introduced and promoted reusable bags in all outlets, encouraging customers to reuse their shopping bags. Additionally, 19 stores have

implemented reverse vending machines to educate customers on the segregation and recycling of plastic bottles and cans.

To further reduce plastic packaging, LuLu Hypermarket has introduced refilling stations, kraft paper bags, and biodegradable packaging made from sugarcane pulp for in-house kitchen products. The use of food waste digesters efficiently manages food waste generated during operations.

An innovative food waste solution called 'ORCA,' which recycles food waste by breaking it down into water, carbohydrates, fats, and proteins for repurposing, is

currently being trialled at LuLu's Bin Mahmoud store.

LuLu Hypermarket in Qatar has become one of the first retailers in the Mena region to achieve sustainable operations certification under the Global Sustainability Assessment System from the Gulf Organisation for Research & Development. It has also installed a Building Management System to efficiently manage building ventilation and lighting.

As a responsible retailer, LuLu Hypermarket actively promotes 'Made in Qatar' products, ensuring an all-inclusive approach to supporting local industries.



Indian businessman Shali passes away

Longtime Qatar resident, prominent Indian businessman and community leader, Bekal Mohamed Shali (74), passed away in Doha yesterday.

He was undergoing treatment for certain illnesses for sometime. Based in Qatar for over 54

years, Shali founded prominent establishments, including Bombay Silk Centre and Lexus Tailoring. He has also been the chairman of several enterprises in Qatar. His burial took place yesterday at Abu Hamour. He is survived by his wife and a daughter.

HBKU's CIS dean meets Pope Francis

Dr Recep Senturk, dean of Hamad Bin Khalifa University's (HBKU) College of Islamic Studies (CIS), was recently welcomed in an audience with Pope Francis, the head of the Catholic Church, Bishop of Rome, and sovereign of the Vatican City State.

The audience provided Dr Senturk with an opportunity to present the Pope with a copy of *The Covenants of the Prophet Muhammad: Historical Legacy & Contemporary Human Rights*, a statement from HBKU said yesterday.

Written by Dr Ibrahim Mohamed Zain, Professor of Islamic Studies and Comparative Religion, CIS, and Ahmed El-Wakil, Researcher, CIS, the book highlights the significance of these covenants for contemporary Muslim-Christian relations. Dr Senturk stressed the need for continued relations and dialogue between Muslims and Christians concerning topics common to both religions and humanity at large.

The following day, Dr Senturk and Dr Zain delivered speeches at the Pontificio Istituto di Studi Arabi e d'Islamistica as part of the annual "Georgetown Lecture on Contemporary Islam." Dr Zain further summarised the findings of *The Covenants of the Prophet Muhammad*, while Dr Senturk delivered a speech titled "Humanity as a Ground for Uni-



Dr Recep Senturk, dean of HBKU's College of Islamic Studies, in an audience with Pope Francis. PICTURE: Vatican Media

versal Human Rights in Islam." Proceedings were moderated by Dr John Borelli, a historian of religions and theologian at Georgetown University, Washington DC.

Commenting on the audience, Dr Senturk said: "It was an honour to meet and converse with the Pope, as well as present him with Dr Zain's publication. Our meeting reflected that, despite conceptual differences, Islam and Christianity share an enduring commitment to universal human rights. For this rea-

son alone, open dialogue between both faiths remains essential and should not be defined by current global affairs."

HBKU's CIS provides a unique platform that contributes to critical intellectual debates on Islam in a global context, through its blended academic programmes, immersive learning experience, and distinguished research division, which includes several research centres and clusters, the statement added.

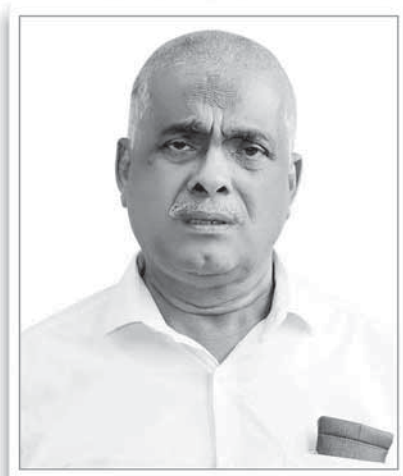
CONDOLENCES

Chairman, President, Principal,
Staff and Students of



Ideal Indian School
Doha - Qatar

express profound grief
at the sudden demise of



Mr. Sali Mohd. Bakel

Founder Member
Ideal Indian School

The Ideal Family deeply condole with the bereaved family at the irreparable loss and prays to Almighty God to grant peace and paradise to the departed soul.



DCICAI marks annual day with CA Run



The Doha Chapter of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (DCICAI) organised a unity run 'CA Run for Viksit Bharat' as part of ICAI's celebration of the 75th anniversary and commemoration of the annual CA Day. The event saw participation from members and their families.

'Bulldozed and shelled': Gaza's farming sector ravaged by war



An UN assessment found almost 60% of the agricultural land in Gaza has been damaged.

AFP
Gaza Strip

Tank tracks still fresh on his field in southern Gaza's coastal area of Al-Mawasi, Nedal Abu Jazar lamented the damage war has wrought on his trees and crops.

"Look at the destruction," the 39-year-old farmer told AFP, holding an uprooted tomato plant.

He pointed to his greenhouse's metal frame and its white plastic sheeting strewn across the plot, inside an area designated a humanitarian zone by the Israeli army.

"People were sitting peacefully on their farmland... and suddenly tanks arrived and fired at us, and then there were (air) strikes," Abu Jazar said the Israeli operation in late June destroyed about 40 dunams (10 acres) of land and killed five labourers.

His is not an isolated case. Across Gaza, 57% of agricultural land has been damaged since the war began, according to a joint assessment published in June by the UN's agriculture and satellite imagery agencies, FAO and UNOSAT.

The damage threatens Gaza's food sovereignty, Matieu Henry of the Food and Agriculture Organisation said, because 30% of the Palestinian territory's food consumption comes from agricultural land. "If almost 60% of the agricultural land has been damaged, this may have a significant impact in terms of food security and food supply." The Gaza Strip exported \$44.6mn worth of produce in 2022, mainly to the West

Bank and Israel, with strawberries and tomatoes representing 60% of the total, according to FAO data.

That number fell to zero after the October first week storming of southern Israel. Israel's retaliatory offensive has killed at least 38,098 people, also mostly civilians, according to figures from the Hamas-run territory's health ministry.

The damage assessment on the agricultural land comes as the UN's hunger monitoring system estimated in June that 96% of Gaza faces high levels of acute food insecurity.

Contacted by AFP, the Israeli army said it "does not intentionally harm agricultural land".

In a statement, it said Hamas "often operates from within orchards, fields and agricultural land".

NO WORK, NO INCOME
The impact is worse in the Palestinian territory's north, where 68% of agricultural land is damaged, although the southern area encompassing parts of Al-Mawasi has seen the most significant increase in recent months due to military operations.

UNOSAT's Lars Bromley said the damage is generally "due to the impact of activities such as heavy vehicle activity, bombing, shelling, and other conflict-related dynamics, which would be things like areas burning".

Near the southern city of Rafah, 34-year-old farmer Ibrahim Dheir feels helpless after the destruction of 20 dunams (five acres) of land he used to lease, and all his farming equipment with it.

"As soon as the Israeli bulldoz-

ers and tanks entered the area, they began bulldozing cultivated lands with various trees, including fruits, citrus, guava, as well as crops like spinach, molokhia (jute mallow), eggplant, squash, pumpkin and sunflower seedlings," he said, before listing more damage in a testimony of the area's past agricultural abundance.

Dheir, whose family exported its produce to the West Bank and Israel, now feels destitute.

"We used to depend on agriculture for our livelihood day by day, but now there's no work or income."

LASTING DAMAGE
Farmer Abu Mahmoud Za'arab also finds himself with "no source of income".

The 60-year-old owns 15 dunams (3.7 acres) of land on which crops and fruit trees used to grow. "The Israeli army passed through the land, completely wiping out all trees and crops," he said. "They bulldozed and shelled the land, turning it into barren pits."

The harm done to farmland in Gaza will last far beyond tank tracks and explosions, said Bromley of UNOSAT. "With modern weaponry, a certain percentage is always going to fail. Tank shells won't explode, artillery shells won't explode... so clearing that unexploded ordnance is a massive task," he said. It will require "probing every centimetre of the soil before you can allow the farmers back onto it". Despite the risks, Dheir wants to return to farming.

"We want the war to stop and things to return to how they were so we can farm and cultivate our lands again."

Iran's president-elect Pezeshkian to be sworn in next month

Iran's Masoud Pezeshkian will be sworn in before parliament in early August as the Islamic republic's ninth president, state media reported yesterday, AFP reported from Tehran. "The swearing-in ceremony of the president will be held on August 4 or 5," said the official IRNA news agency, quoting Mojtaba Yosefi, a member of parliament's presiding board. "The president will have 15 days to present his proposed ministers to the parliament for a vote of confidence." Iranian

presidents-elect are required to take an oath before parliament before officially taking office. The swearing-in ceremony takes place after the president-elect receives an official endorsement by the Islamic republic's supreme leader. Iran's president is not head of state, and the ultimate authority rests with the supreme leader — a post held by Ayatollah Ali Khamenei for the last 35 years. Pezeshkian won a runoff election against conservative Saeed Jalili.

Qatari artist Hassan al-Mulla displays works at Kuwait expo



Hassan al-Mulla

Artist Hassan al-Mulla participated in the first exhibition of the Danish Art Land Foundation, which was held in Kuwait titled "A Piece of Art."

More than 60 male and female artists from 15 countries participated in it, with more than 200 works of art. They varied in visions and artistic schools, from flat and three-dimensional works, figurative works, abstraction, ceramic and sculptural works, as well as other artistic works. A cultural art week was held to accompany the exhibition, which included a lecture, artistic workshops and also tourist trips to Kuwait's landmarks.

In statements to *Arrayah*, artist Hassan al-Mulla said that he participated in one work, through which he shed light on Qatar's organisation of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022. He pointed out that he used acrylic colours to paint it. Al-Mulla stressed the importance of being present in international artistic forums as a means of promot-



A view from the exhibition.

ing cultural dialogue and artistic exchange between countries. He explained that such exhibitions provide artists with an opportunity to exchange new ideas and techniques, which contributes to enriching and developing their artistic experience. He also stressed that his participation in the art exhibition in Kuwait comes within a series of international participations that aim to shed light on Qatari art and enhance its presence on the global scene.

Al-Mulla explained that participating artists presented artistic ideas that interact with life, through symbols and imagination, and moved in their works between several artistic styles. It included realistic, abstract, expressive, or even influential, according to ideas that depend primarily on the topics and elements that each artist would like to present separately,

so that the audience can enjoy and gain its endorsement.

On the other hand, al-Mulla is participating in the "Neighbors of the Sea" exhibition, which is currently being held at the artists' headquarters Fire Station, in partnership with the artist Wafiq Sultan.

The exhibition presents more than 30 mixed-media paintings that delve into a deep connection between the artists' inner worlds, their environments, their communities, and their heritage. Speaking about his participation, al-Mulla appreciated the experience of the artistic residency during three years, which enhanced his capabilities and gave him the opportunity to complete most of the works on display. He also noted that the themes of the paintings were inspired by local themes, Arab and international events, and human details.

Holy Ka'aba adorned with new 'Kiswa' cover

QNA
Makkah

The General Authority for the Care of the Affairs of the Grand Mosque and the Prophet's Mosque adorned yesterday the Holy Ka'aba with a new cover — "Kiswa" — as per the annual tradition.

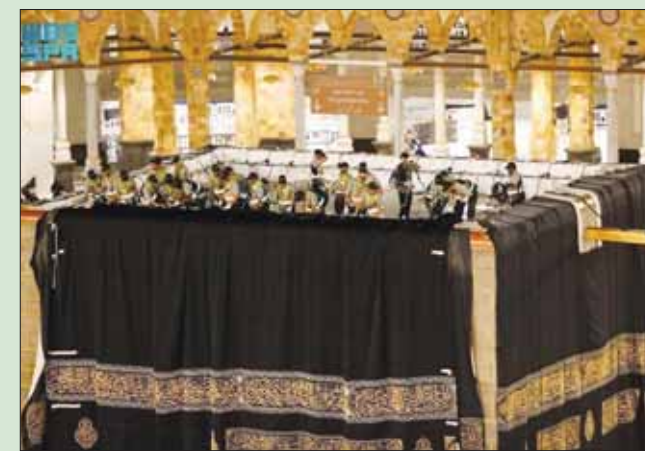
A team from the King Abdulaziz Complex for Holy Ka'aba Kiswa, consisting of 159 craftsmen, carried out the replacement. The team, distributed around the sides and roof of the Ka'aba according to their specialisations, began by dismantling the old Kiswa and installing the new one, and then fixing it at the corners and on the roof.

The Kiswa, weighing 1,350kg and standing 14m high, consists of four separate sides and a door curtain. Each side of the Ka'aba was individually raised to the top of the Ka'aba in preparation for unfolding it over the old covering.

The Kiswa uses about 1,000kg of raw silk, dyed black within the complex, 120kg of gold threads, and 100kg of silver threads. As for the Kiswa's belt, it consists of 16 pieces, along with seven pieces below the belt.



Workers replace the Kiswa (silk cloth covering the Holy Ka'aba) at the Grand Mosque in Makkah, Saudi Arabia, yesterday.



Hundreds gather for memorial concert after Kenya protests



People react during a concert in memory of people who were killed during a demonstration against the imposition of tax hikes by the government, in Nairobi, yesterday.

AFP
Nairobi

Hundreds of Kenyans gathered yesterday in the capital Nairobi for a memorial concert following deadly protests over tax hikes that saw the country's leader scrap a controversial finance bill.

The initially peaceful rallies mostly led by Gen-Z spiralled into violence that left 39 people

dead, rights groups have said, and saw President William Ruto reject the bill containing the hikes and promise spending cuts.

Yesterday people streamed into Nairobi's central Uhuru Park from around midday to listen to performers and commemorate those who had died.

Victor Waithaka, 29, told AFP he was attending to pay tribute to the "heroes who died during the protests on the rejected finance bill".

"This is our country, and we have the right to fight for our rights," he said. Large crowds called "Ruto must go", echoing demands made by protesters in previous weeks, and waved Kenyan flags as they danced to a medley of singers and performers. "The fight has just begun, the political awakening [is] just the beginning," prominent demonstrator Hanifa Adan said on the concert's sidelines.

Early yesterday morning some roads in the city were blocked by police officers.

The concert fell on so-called "Saba Saba" (Seven Seven) — the seventh day of the seventh month, marking the moment in 1990 that the opposition rose up to demand the return of multi-party democracy — and a day when demonstrations have previously taken place.

It follows Ruto's decision on Friday to announce budget cuts and increased borrowing, in an effort to cover the projected shortfall from scrapping the finance bill.

Tide high as Biden aims to ease party worries

Reuters
Harrisburg

An embattled US President Joe Biden faced escalating pressure from fellow Democrats worried about his candidacy yesterday, concerns he aimed to ease with campaign stops in the battleground state of Pennsylvania.

Biden, 81, has faced growing calls to end his reelection bid after a halting performance in a June 27 debate with Republican Donald Trump, 78, raised questions about his ability to do the job for another four years. He has vowed to stay in the race, dismissing calls for him to drop out as "nonsense" in a fundraising e-mail on Saturday.

Yesterday, the Democratic president received a warm welcome at a Black church in Philadelphia and later travelled to the state capital, Harrisburg, for an event with union members. Black voters are a critical part of Biden's base of support and recent public opinion polling has shown their support for him softening.

Democrats also suggested that Vice-President Kamala Harris, seen as the likeliest candidate to replace Biden in the November 5 election were he to bow out, could perform well.

The coming week is crucial,

Democratic Senator Chris Murphy said on CNN's *State of the Union*. He encouraged the president to try hold a town hall or news conference to convince voters he is "the old Joe Biden."

"The president needs to do more," Murphy said. "I do think the clock is ticking."

Democratic US Representative Adam Schiff said on NBC's *Meet the Press* that Biden needs to move swiftly to put concerns to rest.

He added that he believed Harris "could win overwhelmingly, but before we get into a decision about who else it should be, the president needs to make a decision about whether it's him."

House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries scheduled a meeting on Sunday with senior House Democrats to discuss the president's candidacy.

Asked in Harrisburg whether the Democratic Party was behind him, Biden told reporters "yes."

In Philadelphia, churchgoers at the Mt Airy Church gave Biden a rousing welcome, while Bishop Louis Felton praised him as "a man of vision and integrity."

The bishop, referring to Biden's Republican challenger without naming him, chided those who "make an issue of the president — that he is conditioned with stammering and not being able at certain times to bring forth words



US President Joe Biden delivers remarks at the Roxborough Democratic Co-ordinated Campaign Office during a campaign stop in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, yesterday. (Reuters)

— while another person lies fluidly and you never challenge his lies." Felton thundered. "Go, Joseph, you can make it." Biden addressed the congregation for a little more than six minutes, saying, "We must unite America again. That's what I'm going to do."

Carla Greene, a resident of Philadelphia, said she hoped Biden felt the support, adding, "we believe he is the man for the job."

In a Friday interview with ABC News, Biden said only the "Lord Almighty" could persuade him to drop out, dismissing the prospect

that Democratic leaders could join forces to try to talk him into standing down.

However, a Democratic National Committee member from Florida, Alan Clendenin, urged Biden to step aside yesterday.

"Joe Biden will be remembered by historians as one of the finest presidents in American history, but this election is about the next four years, not the last three and a half," Clendenin said.

The DNC has steadfastly supported Biden since his debate stumbles so any defections would suggest a further deepening of the

crisis. DNC Chair Jaime Harrison said yesterday that Biden remains the party's nominee. "The primary is over," he said.

Biden stopped at a local campaign headquarters after church, telling supporters there, "Pennsylvania is a critically important state."

Accompanying Biden, Democratic Senator John Fetterman belatedly, "There is only one person in the country that's ever kicked Trump in an election and that is your president."

Pennsylvania is one of the half dozen or so states alongside Wisconsin and Michigan that can swing Democratic or Republican and are expected to determine the outcome of what has been a tight race.

Yesterday's trip — Biden's 10th to Pennsylvania during the 2024 election campaign — is part of a July voter outreach blitz by the Democratic Party that includes a \$50mn media campaign aimed at events such as the Olympics and travel by the president, the first lady, Harris and her husband to multiple battleground states.

Pressure from Congress is expected to ramp up in the coming days as lawmakers return to Washington from a holiday recess, and donors mull their willingness to keep funding Biden's campaign.

Biden is also preparing to host

dozens of world leaders at a Nato summit in Washington this week and hold a rare solo news conference.

Five US lawmakers have called for Biden to end his reelection bid, including Representative Angie Craig of Minnesota, the first Democratic member of the House of Representatives from a battleground district, with others said to be poised to join in.

"Given what I saw and heard from the President during last week's debate in Atlanta, coupled with the lack of a forceful response from the President himself following that debate, I do not believe that the President can effectively campaign and win against Donald Trump," Craig, a top 2024 target of House Republican efforts, posted on X.

Two letters are circulating among House Democrats calling for Biden to step aside, House Democratic sources have said.

US Senator Mark Warner of Virginia invited fellow senators to a meeting today to discuss Biden's campaign.

Senator Bernie Sanders, 82, who has run for the Democratic nomination for president in the past, stood firmly in Biden's camp yesterday, saying Democrats' focus should be on policy.

"This is not a beauty contest," he said on CBS' *Face the Nation*.

Record temperatures scorch US West Coast

Reuters
Arizona

A widespread heat wave is expected to deliver a fresh batch of record temperatures along the US West Coast, as millions of Americans sweat through a heat dome that is also hovering over Arizona and Nevada.

About 36mn people — roughly 10% of the country — are under excessive heat warnings coming from the heat dome centred over California, the National Weather Service said yesterday. Fossil fuel-driven climate change is driving extreme heat waves across the world and will continue to deliver dangerous weather for decades to come, research shows.

High temperatures are forecast to meet or exceed daily high records in Washington state, Oregon, California, northern Ari-



Wildfires burn near the Placerville Airport in Placerville. Right: 'Hotshot' firefighters work to contain the Lake Fire burning in Los Padres National Forest with evacuation warnings in the area near Los Olivos, California. (Reuters, AFP)



zona and central Idaho.

In Death Valley National Park along the California-Nevada border, the NWS projects highs near 130 degrees Fahrenheit (54 degrees Celsius) through Friday. On Saturday, the thermometer reached 128 degrees Fahrenheit there, breaking a 17-year record, and reached 115 degrees Fahrenheit in Las Vegas, which tied a record that was set in 2007.

Temperatures are running as much as 20 degrees above normal

this time of year in places like Redding, a city in northern California that hit an all-time high of 119 degrees Fahrenheit on Saturday, NWS meteorologist Bryan Jackson said.

"We're expecting it to merely drift east through the early part of next week and basically persist through the week, so we've got a real expansive and extreme heat wave ongoing, and it's expected to continue this week," he said.

The NWS is also warning of in-

creased wildfire risks due to a mix of hot, dry and windy conditions. In Southern California, residents were ordered late Saturday to evacuate parts of Santa Barbara County where the Lake Fire has scorched more than 13,000 acres since Friday, according to Cal Fire. The wildfire is 0% contained as officials investigate the cause.

Another 36mn people are under heat advisories, while about 1mn people face excessive heat

watches, including eastern Oregon, northeastern Nevada and southwestern Idaho.

Heat warnings signify that conditions are imminent, which differ from heat watches that are issued when conditions are forecast in the coming days.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called for urgent action to avert "climate hell." Each of the past 12 months have ranked as the warmest on record in year-on-year comparisons across the

globe, according to the Copernicus Climate Change Service, European Union's climate change monitoring service, which links human activities like the combustion of fossil fuels to climate change-causing greenhouse gas emissions.

Last week, US President Joe Biden's administration proposed the first-ever safety standard intended to protect workers and communities from the impacts of extreme heat.

Hour of reckoning for Baldwin

A long-awaited showdown will take place this week in a historic Wild West frontier town, with both sides seeking justice for a fatal bullet fired from a six-shooter. But if Alec Baldwin's trial for manslaughter sounds like the plot of a Hollywood movie, the victims, the stakes and the tragic consequences are all too real.

In October 2021, on the New Mexico set of his low-budget Western *Rust*, a gun pointed by Baldwin discharged a live round, killing the film's cinematographer and wounding its director.

Such is Baldwin's A-list fame and the rarity of on-set deaths in the tightly controlled US film industry, the story quickly became a global sensation. It also polarised opinion, with sympathetic observers viewing Baldwin — an actor who did not know the prop gun contained a real bullet — as a victim, and others seeing the death as a result of his allegedly reckless behaviour.

Almost three years later, after multiple failed attempts by Baldwin's formidable New York legal team to have the case thrown out, those same arguments will be settled by a jury at a court case in Santa Fe starting tomorrow.

If found guilty, Baldwin faces a maximum 18 months in prison — the same term already being served by the film's armorer, who was convicted in the same courthouse earlier this year.

The death of Halyna Hutchins occurred during a rehearsal in a small chapel on the Bonanza Creek Ranch, 20 miles outside Santa Fe, on a sunny afternoon mid-way through the filming of *Rust*. Baldwin was practicing a scene in which his character, an ageing outlaw who has been cornered in the church by two marshals, draws his Colt gun. The actor says he did not pull the revolver's trigger and had been told that the gun was safe.

Live bullets are in any case banned from movie sets, and Baldwin has argued that it was not his responsibility as an actor to check.

Yet the gun did go off. And the trial of Hannah Gutierrez, the armorer who loaded the weapon, revealed many of the arguments that the prosecution will level



SCRUTINY: Alec Baldwin.

against Baldwin, who was also a producer on the movie.

At the time, Gutierrez's defence lawyers said Baldwin "violated some of the most basic gun safety rules you can ever learn," including never pointing a gun at a person unless you intend to fire it. "Alec Baldwin's conduct and his lack of gun safety inside that church on that day is something that he's going to have to answer for," said special prosecutor Kari Morrissey, in a rare moment of agreement between the two sides. "Not with you and not today. That'll be with another jury, on another day," Morrissey said.

That day has now arrived, with jury selection tomorrow and opening arguments expected the day after. That the matter is being heard in court at all is already a victory of sorts for prosecutors, who have fended off multiple attempts by Baldwin to have the case dismissed.

Among these, Baldwin's lawyers said damage to the gun caused by an FBI testing lab meant the actor could not get a fair trial. That is significant because the FBI found the gun could not have fired without its trigger being pulled — a conclusion that the defence say they were robbed of a chance to disprove.

Judge Mary Marlowe Sommer was not convinced and ordered the trial to proceed. Baldwin's team have also suggested that his status as a celebrity and liberal darling has provided incentives for prosecutors to pursue him with unusual tenacity.

Nato turns 75 with Ukraine and own future on the line

AFP
Washington

Nato's 75th anniversary summit was meant to showcase the triumph of a larger, stronger alliance. Instead, leaders are coming together in Washington in the shadow of setbacks in Ukraine and electoral headwinds on both sides of the Atlantic.

US President Joe Biden, fighting for his political life after a disastrous debate against Nato sceptic Donald Trump, will turn his attention away from campaigning to welcome leaders of the 32-nation transatlantic alliance for three days from tomorrow.

Biden has also invited the leaders of Australia, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea, a sign of Nato's growing role in Asia in the face of a rising China.

But the star of the summit is set to be Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, who is looking for firm signs of support although Nato will not be extending his country an invitation to join.

Founded in 1949 to provide collective defence against the Soviet Union, Nato returned in some ways to its original mission when allies rallied to Ukraine's defence after it was invaded by Russia in 2022.

Ukrainians heightened most of the West by repelling Russia in its push for a quick victory. But Moscow's troops have been grinding on, making advances in the east. A European official acknowledged the mood ahead of the Nato summit has become "gloomy" with Ukraine slipping on a fragile frontline.

"This summit will be very different from the initial plans because it is happening at a critical juncture for European security," the official said on condition of anonymity.

"Russia is today in a situation which is quite comfortable. They think they can



simply wait it out," he said.

Max Bergmann, director of the Europe, Russia and Eurasia programme at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said the summit comes at "the best of times, and the worst of times."

"The best of times, in the sense that the alliance knows what it's about — deterring Russia. Alliance members are spending more," he said.

"But it's also sort of the worst of times — obviously because of the war in Ukraine, challenges of ramping up European defence spending, concerns about the reliability of the United States."

Trump, who has voiced admiration in the past for Russian strongman Vladimir Putin, has long criticised Nato as an unfair burden on the United States, which spends far more than any other ally.

The 2024 Republican presidential candidate — whose first term was marked by an impeachment over his strong-arming of Zelensky — has insisted he can stop the war, with his advisors floating the possibility of conditioning future US assistance on Ukraine entering negotiations to surrender territory.

Trump has enjoyed a narrow lead against Biden in recent polls. Meanwhile France — where President Emmanuel Macron has mullied sending troops to Ukraine — is also facing a political shift with the strong gains in legislative elections by the far-right, which is historically close to Russia.

Those setbacks come as Putin recently hosted Viktor Orban, the Russia-friendly prime minister of Hungary, which currently holds the EU's rotating presidency.

The Nato summit is also expected to mark a diplomatic debut for a new leader — British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, after his Labour Party's landslide election victory.

Nato's outgoing secretary-general, Jens Stoltenberg, has led efforts to put the alliance itself, not the United States, in the lead in coordinating military assistance for Ukraine.

Stoltenberg also wants allies to commit to provide at least €40bn (\$43bn) per year in military aid to Ukraine, ensuring reliable and consistent support as Kyiv prepares for a long war against Russia.

Diplomats have dubbed such measures as "Trump-proofing" the alliance, although few believe that Nato or support for Ukraine could endure in the same way without the United States, which under Biden has approved \$175bn for Kyiv in military and other assistance.

The summit also comes on the heels of two more nations joining Nato — Finland and Sweden — which both overcame earlier reluctance to formally enter the alliance after witnessing the invasion of Ukraine, which had unsuccessfully sought membership.

Diplomats say that the United States is eager to stage a smooth, drama-free meeting and avoid the bitter recriminations at Nato's summit last year in Lithuania, where Zelensky failed to win firmer commitments for Ukraine to join the alliance.

Ukrainian officials acknowledge there is no chance of a change of heart in Washington. Biden and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz have led opposition to Ukrainian membership, believing that admitting a country already at war would be tantamount to Nato itself confronting nuclear-armed Russia.

Tokyo Governor Koike wins 3rd term: media

AFP
Tokyo

Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike declared victory in yesterday's vote to elect the leader of one of the world's most populous cities after Japanese media said exit polls showed her winning in a landslide.

Koike, 71, a former minister and television anchor, has been Tokyo governor since 2016 and immediately vowed to strengthen the Japanese capital's welfare, economy, and management of natural disasters.

Exit polls by public broadcaster NHK and other media after voting stations closed at 8pm showed Koike had shrugged off challenges from other candidates.

Among her most prominent challengers had been another woman running in Japan's male-dominated political sphere, the 56-year-old former opposition lawmaker, model and TV anchor Renho, who goes by one name.

"With Tokyoites' strong support, I was assigned to lead this great city Tokyo," Koike told her supporters after exit polls showed she had won her third term as governor of the megacity of 14mn people.

"Today Japan and Tokyo face various challenges", such as inflation and the low birth rate, Koike said.

"I have to upgrade efforts of Tokyo's reforms, and as I appealed in my election campaign, I will protect Tokyo residents' lives and livelihoods," she said.

Japan has never had a woman prime minister and a large majority of lawmakers are men, although Tokyo accounts for a 10th of the national population and a fifth of the economy.



Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike waves to supporters as she is set to be re-elected in the Tokyo governor election, in Tokyo. - Reuters

Left: A child playing with a balloon looks at campaign posters for the Tokyo gubernatorial election in Tokyo early yesterday. - AFP

While much of the campaigning attention centred on Koike and Renho, NHK's poll showed independent candidate Shinji Ishimaru, 41, the former mayor of Akiakata in western Japan, coming second.

Ishimaru had stressed his financial expertise as a former banker.

Japanese media said the Tokyo election would have some impact on national politics because the opposition bloc had supported Renho while Koike was backed

by an alliance led by Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), of which she was a former member.

The Japanese government's public support rate has been dwindling to around 20%, partly due to a political funds scandal revealed late last year, and Kishida will face the LDP leadership election later this year before a national vote due by late 2025.

The Tokyo vote comes after new government data showed the birth rate hit a

record low of 1.20 last year, with Tokyo's figure 0.99 – the first Japan region to fall below one.

Koike and her major rivals pledged to expand support for parenting, with the former promising subsidised epidurals.

"After having their first child, I hear people say they don't want to experience that pain again," Koike said during the election campaign, according to local media. "I want people to see childbirth and

raising children as a happiness, not a risk."

Vote counting started immediately after ballot boxes closed and the official result will be announced by early morning today.

A record 56 people were standing in the election, not all of them serious, with one dressing as "The Joker" and calling for polygamy to be legalised.

Others campaigned for more golf, poker or just to advertise their premises in Tokyo's red-light district.

Zarny, the Myanmar refugee turned Tokyo designer

By Eitienne Balmer
AFP

Having fled Myanmar for Japan with his parents as a child, Shibuya Zarny began his fashion career as a model in Tokyo and went on to make clothes for royalty.

"Fashion is an art that has enabled me to survive," the designer, whose label recently held a 10-year anniversary show in Bangkok, told AFP.

The runway looks featured nods to Southeast Asian design, from leaf and eye motifs to jewellery worn under colourful jackets by shirtless male models.

Zarny's parents came to Japan as political refugees in 1993 when he was eight.

As a teenager, dressing with style became a way for him to avoid being bullied.

His mother first taught him dressmaking, and before long Zarny, with his slim silhouette and intense stare, had been scouted as a model on a dance floor in the capital.

"At the time we had no Instagram," he recalled, so to see and be seen he would hang out at bars, arcades and novelty photo booths called *purikura*.

Zarny often went to Shibuya, the youthful district he later took as his first name.

"At that time Shibuya was really dangerous. There was a whole underground scene" with yakuza gangsters, he said.

As his career took flight, Zarny launched his eponymous label in 2011, a year before finally securing Japanese nationality.

The fledgling designer gifted 70 *longyi* – a traditional garment that ties at the waist – to Myanmar democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

She wore a lilac one to accept the Nobel Peace Prize in 2012, a moment which Zarny said "changed my life".

Alongside his catwalk endeavours over the following years, Zarny acted as a mediator between Japan and Myanmar.

He even accompanied Japan's Princess Yoko of Mikasa – dressed in a Zarny original – on a visit there in 2019.

Now, with Suu Kyi detained since Myanmar's 2021 coup, he is raising funds for others escaping his native country.

When the junta seized power, Zarny received a stream of messages asking for help.

"So many refugees from Myanmar came to Thailand, at the border," said the 39-year-old.



Myanmar-born fashion designer Shibuya Zarny speaking in an interview with AFP at his workshop in Tokyo. - AFP

He sprang into action, working with the United Nations refugee agency (UNHCR) and organising events in Tokyo.

"Myanmar people lost their pride, they are sad. So I want to show my fashion power, to give them confidence and a brave heart."

Zarny's professional connec-

tions in Myanmar were scattered – just one challenge he has faced in recent years.

The coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic put a stop to jet-set parties, decimating demand for his expensive clothes and eventually forcing him to abandon his showroom in Tokyo's high-end Omotesando district.

One of his top clients – politician Shinzo Abe, for whom he made suits – resigned as prime minister in 2020 and was shot dead two years later.

However, Zarny is no stranger to starting over and has branched out into interior design.

He also made a suit for the captain of the refugee Olympic team ahead of the upcoming Games in Paris, where he hopes to one day present a collection.

These days Zarny runs his studio from a compact apartment in northern Tokyo, where dozens of small paintings showing bucolic scenes of Myanmar adorn the walls.

"My grandfather, who was an art professor, made these watercolours for me when I was a child, because I was missing Myanmar," he said.

The recent show in Bangkok has generated demand from Thai customers, leading Zarny to reflect on his roots.

"I was always thinking: where am I from? Am I a Japanese designer, or something else?" he said.

"I realised finally 'I'm from Southeast Asia,'" Zarny said, adding that he wants to concentrate on this "original" source of inspiration.

Sri Lanka pilgrims flee as elephant runs amok

AFP
Colombo

A Hindu religious festival in Sri Lanka ended in chaos after an elephant in the procession panicked, with 13 people in the crowd injured as they fled, police said yesterday.

Video footage shared on social media showed one of the elephant's keepers trying to pull the agitated animal by its tail in a desperate attempt to control it, while screaming devotees lining the street rushed to escape.

The images show a parade of elephants covered in red, blue and gold robes from trunk to tail, in front of a large crowd while cymbals clanged.

Thirteen people were taken to hospital and treated for minor injuries in Kataragama, 280km (175 miles) south of the capital Colombo, a police spokesman said.

A spokesman for the state-run Kataragama hospital said yesterday, the day after the incident, that all the injured had been discharged.

Elephants are considered sacred in Sri Lanka, but animal cruelty laws are rarely enforced.

Animal rights groups have criticised the widespread use of elephants at temple ceremonies in Sri Lanka.

There have been instances when the animals have gone berserk at parades involving loud music and fireworks.

In August 2023, dozens of pilgrims jumped into a lake in the central city of Kandy to escape five agitated young elephants.

Several people were hurt and one woman was hospitalised.

In 2019, at least 17 people were injured when elephants ran amok at a temple festival in Colombo.

Official records show that there are about 200 domesticated elephants in the island nation, along with a wild population of around 7,500.

The government has banned the capture of wild elephants but dozens of calves have been stolen in recent years, often after their mothers were killed by their captors.

Sydney house fire kills three children, police suspect homicide

Reuters
Sydney

Three children, including a 10-month-old, were killed after fire ripped through a house in Sydney early yesterday in an incident that Australian police said they were treating as a homicide.

Emergency services were called to the property in Lalor Park, about 35km (20 miles) west of Sydney's city centre, around 1am, police said in a statement.

Two boys, aged two and four, were treated at the scene but died shortly after being taken to the hospital, while a 10-month-old girl was found dead after the fire was extinguished, police said.

A 28-year-old man, who frustrated police attempts to get into the property, was arrested and was being treated for fire-related injuries at the hospital, it said.

Homicide squad detectives have taken control of the investigation and are treating it as a "domestic-related homicide", said Homicide Squad Commander Detective Superintendent Danny Doherty.

"At this stage, it does appear the 28-year-old man is responsible for multiple deaths of young lives that have been tragically taken away," Doherty told a press conference.

Four other children, aged from six to 11, were in stable condition in hospital, as well as the mother of the children, a 29-year-old who was being treated for smoke inhalation, police said.

PNG minister charged with assault

Papua New Guinea (PNG)'s influential petroleum minister has been charged with assault following a "domestic dispute" near Sydney's famed Bondi Beach, Australian police said yesterday. Jimmy Maladina, a crucial player in ongoing international negotiations over a lucrative natural gas project, was arrested on Saturday morning. Police said they found a "31-year-old woman with facial injuries" after they were called to an address near Bondi, allegedly sustained in an "altercation" with Maladina. Maladina is listed to appear in a Sydney court on Thursday, court documents show, and has been charged with "assault occasioning actual bodily harm". The 58-year-old said in a statement that he is "committed to handling this situation with integrity and transparency". - AFP

Philippine and Japan ministers to sign landmark defence agreement today

The Philippines and Japan will sign a defence agreement today that will allow their military forces to visit each other's soil, the Philippine president's communications office said yesterday.

President Ferdinand Marcos Jr will witness the signing of the Philippines-Japan Reciprocal Access Agreement shortly after a courtesy call by Japanese Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa and Defence Minister Minoru Kihara, his office said.

Kamikawa and Kihara are in Manila for meetings with their Philippine counterparts today to discuss deepening co-operation on defence between two

key allies of the United States in Asia.

The Philippines has been bolstering ties with neighbours and other countries to counter what it describes as China's growing aggression in the South China Sea.

Japan, on the other hand, has faced off with China in the East China Sea over tiny, uninhabited islands that Beijing calls the Diaoyu and Tokyo calls the Senkaku.

Formal negotiations for a Reciprocal Access Agreement between the Philippines and Japan started in November. - Reuters

At the end of the day



A view of Sydney Harbour during sunset in Sydney. - Reuters

Blair lays out 'advice' to new leader

Former Labour prime minister Tony Blair made an early intervention in British politics yesterday after Keir Starmer's landslide election victory, urging him to have a "plan to control immigration".

Blair warned Starmer, who will visit Scotland on his second full day as prime minister, that the anti-immigration Reform UK Party also posed a challenge to Labour, not just the Conservative Party.

The Reform UK party, led by Brexit firebrand Nigel Farage, maximised the damage to the Conservatives at the election by splitting the right-wing vote.

It won five seats in the Westminster parliament and 14% of the vote, prompting Farage to warn that it will target Labour voters next.

In a piece headlined *My advice to Keir Starmer*, Blair wrote in the *Sunday Times* that "all over the Western world, traditional political parties are suffering disruption".

"Where the system allows new entrants to emerge, they are running riot everywhere. Look at France or Italy. We need a plan to control immigration. If we don't have rules, we get prejudices," he added.

Blair, the only Labour leader to lead his party to three consecutive election victories starting with his own landslide win in 1997, couched his "advice" in an article about harnessing the power of artificial intelligence (AI).

He said he believed digital ID technology offered the best solution to controlling irregular immigration, a key issue on the doorstep during the election campaign.

"We should move as the world is moving to digital ID. If not, new border controls will have to be highly effective," he wrote.

The government, however, ruled out the introduction of digital ID cards after Business Minister Jonathan Reynolds initially said new Home Secretary Yvette Cooper would be looking at "all sources of advice" on the issue.

Reynolds later rejected the introduction of ID cards saying: "We can rule that out, that's not something that's part of our plans."

Other suggestions from Blair included "a tough new approach to law and order" due to the fact that "at present criminal elements are modernising faster than law enforcement".

And he said the government should "avoid any vulnerability on 'wokeism'", warning against policies that many might regard as overly politically correct. - AFP

Starmer seeks 'reset' with UK nations

AFP
London

Newly elected Prime Minister Keir Starmer began yesterday a whistlestop tour of UK nations, promising an "immediate reset" of relations with the devolved governments of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Starmer was due to meet Scotland's First Minister and leader of the pro-separatist Scottish National Party (SNP) John Swinney in Edinburgh ahead of trips to Cardiff and Belfast expected today.

The meeting comes as the SNP was almost wiped out at last week's election which put Starmer's Labour Party in power by a landslide.

Labour, which crushed Rishi Sunak's ruling Conservatives at the polls, also overturned more than a decade of SNP domination in Scotland by capturing the majority of its 57 seats.

Swinney lamented a "very, very difficult and damaging" election result for his party.

He had set the party's sights on winning 29 seats as a mandate for reopening negotiations with the British government for another independence referendum, but it returned only nine MPs.

Under ex-premier Tony Blair, Labour was the architect of devolving power to the regions in the late 1990s with the setting up of parliaments or national assemblies in Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast.

However, under the Conservatives leaders in the three capitals complained that they were increasingly sidelined.

Starmer said disagreement could be turned into co-operation "and a genuine seat at the table" to deliver the UK-wide change he has promised.

"That begins today with an immediate reset of my government's approach to working with the first and deputy first ministers, because meaningful co-operation centred on respect will be key to delivering change across our United Kingdom," he said.

The devolved administrations have the power to set policy in a range of areas such as education and housing.

Responsibility for policy on matters such as national defence, international relations and the monarchy, however, are the sole preserve of the UK-wide Westminster parliament in London.

Swinney said that he is looking forward to discussions on shared priorities.

Those included "eradicating child poverty, growing the economy, prioritising net zero, and ensuring effective public services", he said in a statement.

The SNP has dominated in Scotland in the last three UK elections, peaking with the 2015 vote when it won 56 out of 59 seats.

However, the party has been in turmoil for months as voters tire of its 17 years in charge of the devolved Scottish parliament in Edinburgh.

Critics accuse the party of focusing on independence at the expense of key issues such as the cost-of-living crisis, education and health.

Support for the SNP has also slumped amid the party finances scandal that saw former SNP leader Nicola Sturgeon's husband, Peter Murrell, charged with embezzlement. Murrell is the party's former chief executive.

Sturgeon herself was arrested, but released without charge.

Starmer will make his debut on the international stage as leader when he flies to Washington next week for a North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato) summit.

Foreign Minister David Lammy mean-

while travelled to Berlin to meet his German counterpart Annalena Baerbock, in his first in-post trip.

The ministers discussed issues from boosting Nato's support for Ukraine to the situation in the Middle East, the German foreign ministry wrote on X, formerly Twitter.

"The United Kingdom is an indispensable part of Europe," the ministry wrote, adding that Germany is "working with the new UK government to see how the UK can move closer to the EU".

Earlier yesterday, as Starmer began his second full day at the helm, former three-time Labour prime minister Blair made an early intervention, urging him to have a "plan to control immigration" (see accompanying report on the left).

Blair warned Starmer that the anti-immigration Reform UK Party also posed a challenge to Labour, not just the Conservative Party.

"We need a plan to control immigration. If we don't have rules, we get prejudices," Blair wrote in the *Sunday Times*, advocating the introduction of digital ID.

Business Minister Jonathan Reynolds later ruled the idea out.

Welcome splash



A firefighter sprays water on devotees to help them cool off amid the heat as they take part yesterday in an annual event in Puri, India. - Reuters

Satellite images show toll of mines on Indonesia's forests

More than 700,000 hectares of forest in Indonesia have been cleared for mining since 2001, including large tracts of primary forest, a new analysis using satellite data has found.

The TreeMap, a conservation start-up, used high-resolution imagery from several satellites and two decades of data from the long-running Landsat programme to map mines and related infrastructure and track deforestation.

It estimates that mining - including pits, processing facilities, tailings areas and roads - resulted in the clearing of 721,000 hectares (7,210sq km) of forest between 2001 and 2023.

An estimated 150,000 hectares of that was primary forest, areas with high carbon stock and tall trees that include intact old growth, according to the analysis released this week.

The group's Nusantara Atlas shows the striking disappearance of forest cover in time-lapse sequences as mines and associated infrastructure are developed.

The mines were identified using a combination of "visual interpretation and machine learning", explained David Gaveau, founder of The TreeMap.

"Open-pit mines are easily identified ... by their concentric lines of benches cut into the pit sides for coal mines, or by their tendency to be located along river banks, for gold," he explained.

All types of mines also have distinctive "spectral signatures" - a measurement of energy - that are characteristic of bare land areas and are easily detectable, he added.

The group cross-referenced their findings with official maps of mining concessions, local media articles and non-governmental organisation (NGO) reports.

Using historical satellite images also allowed them to detect now-abandoned mines that have become overgrown.

The impact from coal mining was by far the largest, accounting for around half of all the deforestation tracked, followed by gold, tin and nickel.

And while the data showed a peak in deforestation in 2013, the problem has begun growing again in recent years.

By 2023, mining was linked to an annual loss of nearly 10,000 hectares of primary forest, Gaveau said.

Indonesia's environment ministry did not respond to a request for comment on the analysis.

The government's latest public figures, which are not broken down by cause, say that over 73,000 hectares of forest area was lost in 2021-22, with more than 104,000 hectares of total deforestation that year, including "non-forest area".

Deforestation linked to mining still falls far short of the forest loss caused by palm oil and wood plantations.

However, it is an area of growing concern, with Indonesia's reliance on coal increasing and the country looking to expand exploitation of its nickel reserves.

Indonesia has the world's largest reserves of highly sought-after nickel, a crucial component for the batteries used in electric vehicles.

A 2022 study found that 80% of global forest loss linked to mining occurred in just four countries: Indonesia, Brazil, Ghana and Suriname. - AFP

Bangladeshi protesters demand end to civil service job quotas

AFP
Dhaka

Thousands of Bangladeshi university students threw roadblocks across key highways yesterday, demanding the end of "discriminatory" quotas for coveted government jobs, including reserving posts for the children of the country's liberation heroes.

Students in almost all major universities took part, demanding a merit-based system for well-paid and massively oversubscribed civil service jobs.

"It's a do-or-die situation for us," protest co-ordinator Nahidul Islam told AFP, during marches at Dhaka University.

"Quotas are a discriminatory system," the 26-year-old added. "The system has to be reformed."

The current system reserves more than

half of posts, totalling hundreds of thousands of government jobs.

That includes 30% reserved for children of those who fought to win Bangladesh independence in 1971, 10% for women, and 10% set aside for specific districts.

Students said only those quotas supporting ethnic minorities and disabled people - 5% - should remain.

Critics say the system benefits children of pro-government groups, who back Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

Her father, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, was Bangladesh's founding leader.

Hasina, 76, won her fourth consecutive general election in January, in a vote without genuine opposition parties, with a widespread boycott and a major crackdown against her political opponents.

Critics accuse Bangladeshi courts of rubber-stamping decisions made by her government.

The system was initially abolished after weeks of student protests in 2018.

However, in June, Dhaka's High Court rolled that back, saying the cancellation had been invalid.

Hasina has condemned the protests, saying the matter had been settled by the court.

"Students are wasting their time," Hasina told female activists from her party yesterday, Bangladeshi newspapers reported. "After the court's verdict, there is no justification for the anti-quota movement."

Protests began earlier in July and have grown in size.

"We will bury the quota system," students chanted yesterday in Bangladesh's second city Chittagong, where hundreds of protesters marched.

In Dhaka, hundreds of students disrupted traffic for hours, police said.

At the elite Jahangirnagar University,

at least 500 students blocked the highway connecting the capital with southeastern Bangladesh "for two hours", local police chief AFM Shahed told AFP.

Bin Yamin Molla, a protest leader, said at least 30,000 students participated in the protests, although the number could not be verified.

Bangladesh was one of the world's poorest countries when it gained independence in 1971, but it has grown an average of more than six percent each year since 2009.

Hasina has presided over that breakneck economic growth, with per capita income in the country of 170mn people overtaking India in 2021.

However, much of that growth has been on the back of the mostly female factory workforce powering its garment export industry, and economists say there is an acute crisis of jobs for millions of university students.

Floods and landslides leave at least 14 dead in Nepal: police

AFP
Kathmandu

Lashing rains in Nepal causing flash floods and landslides have killed at least 14 people across the country, with disaster teams searching for nine missing, police said yesterday.

Flooding in neighbouring India, as well as in downstream Bangladesh, has also caused widespread damage and impacted millions.

"Police are working with other agencies and locals to find the missing," Nepalese police spokesman Dan Bahadur Karki said.

Those killed and missing are in multiple locations.

Monsoon rains from June to September bring widespread death and destruction every year across South Asia, but the numbers of fatal floods and landslides have increased in recent years.

Experts say climate change and increased road construction are exacerbating the problem.

Parts of Nepal have been receiving heavy rainfall since Thursday, prompting disaster authorities in the Himalayan nation to issue warnings of flash floods in multiple rivers.

There have been reports of in-



People wade through a flooded road along the bank of overflowing Bagmati River following heavy rains in Kathmandu. - Reuters

undation in several districts of lowland areas bordering India.

Last month 14 people were

killed in Nepal in ferocious storms that brought landslides, lightning and flooding.

Two soldiers, six suspected militants killed in separate gun battles in India

Two soldiers and six suspected militants were killed in two separate gun battles in Indian-administered Kashmir, police said yesterday.

Kashmir police inspector-general Vidhi Kumar Birdi told AFP that authorities in the disputed territory had "carried out two different operations" in villages in the Kulgam district.

Birdi said two members of the security forces had been killed, with clashes continuing in Modergram and Frisal Chinnigam villages.

"We have retrieved the bodies of two terrorists from Modergram, and four others from Frisal Chinnigam," said Birdi.

This is the latest incident in an uptick of attacks in the disputed territory.

India and Pakistan both claim Muslim-majority Kashmir in full and have fought three wars for control of the Himalayan region.

Rebel groups have waged an insurgency since 1989, demanding either independence for the territory or its merger with Pakistan.

The conflict has killed tens of thousands

of civilians, soldiers and rebels.

In June, nine Indian Hindu pilgrims were killed and dozens wounded when a gunman opened fire on a bus carrying them from a shrine in the southern Reasi area.

It was one of the deadliest attacks in years and the first on Hindu pilgrims in Kashmir since 2017, when gunmen killed seven people in another ambush on a bus. - AFP



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GULF TIMES

Parker Solar Probe nears sun in record-breaking approach

While the Gulf countries and many other parts of the world are experiencing one of the hottest summers ever, Nasa's Parker Solar Probe (PSP) completed its 20th close approach to the sun on June 30, matching its own distance record by coming about 7.26mm km from the solar surface. The close approach (known as perihelion) occurred with PSP moving 635,266km per hour around the sun, again matching its own record.

On July 2, the spacecraft checked in with mission operators at the Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Laboratory in Laurel, Maryland, US, (where the spacecraft was also designed and built), with a beacon tone indicating it was in good health and all systems were operating normally. PSP will fly around the sun at the same distance and speed one more time this year – on September 30 – before making the first of its three final planned closest approaches on December 24. At that point, with PSP's orbit shaped by the mission's final Venus gravity assist-flyby on November 6, the spacecraft will zoom just 6.1mm km from the solar surface, moving about 692,017km per hour, at its closest approach to the Sun.

On a mission to 'touch the Sun,' PSP became the first spacecraft to fly through the corona – the Sun's upper atmosphere – in 2021. With every orbit bringing it closer, the probe faces brutal heat and radiation to provide humanity with unprecedented observations, visiting the only star we can study up close. To perform its unprecedented investigations, the PSP and its instruments are protected from the Sun by a 4.5-inch-thick carbon-composite shield, which can withstand temperatures reaching nearly 1,377 Celsius.

It faces brutal heat and radiation to provide humanity with unprecedented observations

wind. It also makes critical contributions to forecasting changes in the space environment that affect life and technology on Earth. PSP will fly more than seven times closer to the Sun than any spacecraft. Over seven years, the spacecraft will complete 24 orbits around the Sun.

We live in the Sun's atmosphere and this mission will help scientists better understand the Sun's impact on Earth. Data from PSP will be key to understanding and, perhaps, forecasting space weather, which can change the orbits of satellites, shorten their lifetimes, or interfere with onboard electronics. The probe has four instrument suites designed to study magnetic fields, plasma, and energetic particles, and image the solar wind.

PSP was instrumental in observing the unusual and massive outburst from the Sun on April 17, 2021 when high-speed protons and electrons – called solar energetic particles (SEPs) – were hurled at velocities nearing the speed of light and striking several spacecraft across the inner solar system. In fact, it was the first time SEPs were observed by spacecraft at five different, well-separated locations between the Sun and Earth as well as by spacecraft orbiting Mars.

The mission is named for the late Dr Eugene N Parker, who pioneered our modern understanding of the Sun. As a young professor at the University of Chicago in the mid-1950s, Parker developed a mathematical theory that predicted the solar wind, the constant outflow of solar material from the Sun. Throughout his career, Parker revolutionised the field time and again, advancing ideas that addressed the fundamental questions about the workings of our Sun and stars throughout the universe. In 2018, Parker became the first person to witness the launch of a spacecraft bearing his name. He died March 15, 2022, at age 94.

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REYNOLD
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Midwife on frontline of climate change on Pakistan's islands

By Sabina Qazi
Baba Island

On a densely populated island off Pakistan's megacity of Karachi, a group of pregnant women wait in a punishing heatwave for the only midwife to arrive from the mainland.

Each week Neha Mankani comes by boat ambulance to Baba, an old fishing settlement and reportedly one of the world's most crowded islands with around 6,500 people crammed into 0.15sq km.

Climate change is swelling the surrounding seas and baking the land with rising temperatures. Until Mankani's ambulance launched last year, expectant mothers were marooned at the mercy of the elements.

At the gate of her island clinic waits 26-year-old Zainab Bibi, pregnant again after a second-trimester miscarriage last summer. "It was a very hot day, I was not feeling well," she recalled. It took her husband hours of haggling with boat owners before one agreed to ferry them to the mainland – but it was too late.

"By the time I delivered my baby in the hospital, she was already dead," she said.

Heatwaves are becoming hotter, longer and more frequent in Pakistan, one of the countries most vulnerable to extreme weather conditions resulting from climate change.

In May and June, a string of heatwaves have seen temperatures top 52C for days.

"Climate change doesn't affect everyone equally," 38-year-old Mankani told AFP during the 20-minute boat journey.

"Pregnant women and



Neha Mankani sits near the shoreline at Baba Island along the Karachi Harbour. (AFP)

newborns, postpartum women are definitely more affected," she said. "In the summer months, we see a real increase in low-birth weights, preterm births, and in pregnancy losses."

Women are at higher risk of stillbirth when exposed to temperatures above 90 percent of the normal range for their location, according to experts published in the *British Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology* last year.

"Before we didn't have the evidence, a lot of it was anecdotal," said Mankani. "But we've been seeing the impact of climate change for a while."

In Pakistan, 154 women die for every 100,000 live births – a high maternal mortality rate shaped by socioeconomic status, barriers to healthcare access and limited decision-making powers, especially among young women, according to the United Nations.

Mankani began her 16-year

career as a midwife in a Karachi hospital, where she worked at a high-risk ward, often treating women from the five islands dotted off the coast.

She founded the Mama Baby Fund in 2015 and set up the first clinics on the islands for expectant and new mothers. "Everyone opened their homes to us," she said.

The free 24/7 boat ambulance followed last year, crucially equipped to navigate rough seas in a region increasingly prone to flooding.

Sabira Rashid, 26, gave birth to a girl she named Eesha two months ago, following one stillbirth and a miscarriage at seven months – painful losses she blames on not reaching the hospital in time.

"At the dock, they make us wait because they don't want to ferry only two or three people. They told us to wait for more passengers, no matter what the emergency," she said.

Girls on the impoverished islands are often wed as young as 16, with marriage considered the source of security for women in an area where polluted water is killing off the fishing trade.

"Most of these girls don't know how to take care of themselves, they get severe infections from the dirty water they are constantly exposed to," said Shahida Sumaar, an assistant at the clinic, wiping the sweat from her face.

The 45-year-old said basic advice is offered to young mothers during heatwaves, such as using dry, clean towels to wrap their newborns in, washing their breasts before feeding and staying hydrated.

But with no access to running water and little electricity, warding off heat stress is a challenge for all the islanders.

Women are at particular risk, typically responsible for cooking over open flames in small rooms with no fans or proper ventilation.

Ayesha Mansoor, 30, has four children and lives on the fringes of Baba, with just four to five hours of electricity a day.

The path to her home is covered by a carpet of discarded plastic bags which disappear underwater when the tide is high.

"Only those who have solar can deal better with the heat. We can't afford it," she said, swatting away flies that settled on her baby.

Mariam Abubakar, an 18-year-old assistant at the clinic who has grown up on the island, hopes to become its first full-time midwife.

"I used to wonder why we women didn't have any facilities here, a clinic that could just cater to us," she said.

"When Neha opened her clinic, I saw a way that I could help the women of my community." – AFP

Panama deportations unlikely to be enough to curb Darien crossings

By Elida Moreno and Lizbeth Diaz
Panama City

An agreement between Panama and the United States to try to deter migrants from crossing the treacherous Darien jungle, by repatriating those that enter the Central American country illegally, is unlikely to succeed and could make journeys even more dangerous.

Analysts said the plan announced on Monday, in which Washington agreed to cover the cost of repatriating migrants, would struggle in the face of the vast numbers of people currently arriving in Panama.

And any success in bringing down the number of people crossing the Darien would likely only result in increases elsewhere, perhaps in even more dangerous conditions, they added.

Panama's presidency and the US State Department and Department of Homeland Security did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Last year a record 520,000 migrants crossed the Darien, a stretch of jungle that divides Panama and Colombia where people who trek on foot for days often face robbery, violence, human trafficking and sexual abuse.

In recent years, the majority of migrants have been from Venezuela and other South American countries, such as Ecuador, facing internal strife. There have also been increasing numbers from outside Latin America, including from China,

Afghanistan, and other countries.

Those passing through the Darien, authorities say, are mostly attempting to reach the United States. The record numbers have prompted Panamanian authorities to seek international help and harden their border security, though numbers have kept rising.

Immigration is a core election issue ahead of the November US presidential election, with President Joe Biden eager to show voters he can control illegal crossings at the southern US border.

He has pointed to a recent fall in apprehensions at the US-Mexico border as evidence his policies, including a broad asylum ban on migrants caught crossing illegally, are working.

It seems unlikely, however, that Panama could organise enough repatriation flights to make a difference.

"Even the equivalent of one plane per day (100-150 people) would mean that between 85% and 90% of immigrants would avoid deportation and could continue their journey," said Adam Isacson, of the Washington Office on Latin American Affairs think tank.

"And the chance of 'one plane per day' happening is super-slim. These flights are expensive... I wouldn't expect there to be enough funds to run more than two or three flights per week at the most," Isacson added.

Eric Jacobstein, Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, told reporters the US had allocated \$6mm to help with the programme.

Previous attempts by Panama have also failed. In September, the country announced new measures to reduce the number of people coming through the Darien, vowing to increase deportations and change visa rules for many nationalities.

But the measures appear to have had little impact.

It remains to be seen whether with a new president in office, Panama's latest deal with the US can have more concrete results. President Jose Raul Mulino announced the new deportation flights during his inauguration, suggesting they are a core part of his government's policy.

Guillermo Cochez, a former Panamanian ambassador to the Organisation of American States, said he was hopeful the new measures could work.

"I think it will have a positive impact," he said.

"These repatriations, which in principle will take 100 or 150 people, will discourage others (from crossing)," Cochez said.

Others noted, however, that even if it does help deter migrants from coming through the Darien, it is unlikely to have a long-term impact on how many people are reaching the southern border of the US.

"The new announcement... is not going to stop the migratory flow but, on the contrary, is going to take it to more dangerous routes," said Israel Ibarra, a migration expert at Mexico's College of the Northern Border research institute. – Reuters

Twist in the French election tale

■ Projections show left on course to defeat far-right in fragmented vote

AFP
Paris

A loose alliance of French left-wing parties thrown together for snap elections was on course yesterday to become the biggest parliamentary bloc and beat the far-right, according to shock projected results.

The New Popular Front (NFP) was formed last month after President Emmanuel Macron called snap elections, bringing together socialists, greens, communists and the hard-left into one camp.

Veteran presidential candidate Marine Le Pen's National Rally (RN) led the race after the June 30 first round, with opinion polls predicting that she would lead the biggest party in Parliament after yesterday's run-off.

But projections based on vote samples by four major polling agencies and seen by AFP, showed no group on course for an absolute majority, and the left-wing NFP ahead of both Macron's centrist Ensemble and Le Pen's eurosceptic, anti-immigration RN.

The left-wing group was predicted to take between 172 and 215 seats, the president's alliance on 150 to 180 and the National Rally — which had hoped for an absolute majority — in a surprise third place on 115 to 155 seats.

This marks a new high water mark for the far-right, but falls well short of a victory that would have been a rebuke for Macron, who called the snap election in what he said was bid to halt France's slide towards the political extremes.

Hard-left France Unbowed leader Jean-Luc Melenchon, giving his first reaction, called on French Prime Minister Gabriel Attal to resign and said the left-wing coalition was ready to govern. Macron will attend next week's landmark Nato summit in



CONTRASTING FORTUNES: French President Emmanuel Macron (left) leaves after voting in the second round of the early French parliamentary elections, at a polling station in Le Touquet-Paris-Plage yesterday. Right: Jordan Bardella, President of the French far-right Rassemblement National party, reacts on stage after partial results. (Reuters)

Washington a diminished but not defeated figure and France has been left without a stable ruling majority less than three weeks before Paris hosts the Olympics.

The election campaign, the shortest in French history, has been marked by a febrile national mood, threats and violence — including racist abuse — against dozens of candidates and canvassers.

Some 30,000 police have been deployed to keep order, and many voters expressed fears that rioting could erupt in some cities after the results were announced.

Turnout was nevertheless high, with left-wing and centrist candidates urging supporters to defend democratic values and the rule of law — while the far-right scented a chance to upend the established order.

By 5pm, according to interior ministry figures, some 61.4% of voters had turned out — the

most at this stage of a legislative race since 1981.

In the village of Rosheim, outside the eastern city of Strasbourg, an "anguished" 72-year-old Antoine Schrameck said he feared France would see "a turning point in the history of the republic".

And in Tourcoing, near the northeast city of Lille, 66-year-old retiree Laurence Abbad said she feared violence after the results are announced. "There's so much tension, people are going mad," she said.

An outright RN victory would have seen Macron forced into an uneasy cohabitation with prime minister Bardella for the remaining three years of his term. Even without that scenario, France is left with a hung parliament with a large eurosceptic, anti-immigration contingent. This would have weakened France's international standing and threaten Western unity in the face of Russia's inva-

sion of Ukraine.

EU officials, already learning to deal with far-right parties in power in Italy and The Netherlands and frustrated by Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orban, are watching France closely.

With the country on tenterhooks, last week saw more than 200 tactical-voting pacts between centre and left-wing candidates in seats to attempt to prevent the RN winning an absolute majority.

This has been hailed as a return of the anti-far right "Republican Front" first summoned when Le Pen's father Jean-Marie faced Jacques Chirac in the run-off of 2002 presidential elections.

The question for France now is if this last-ditch alliance of last resort can now support a stable government, dogged by a huge RN bloc in parliament led by Le Pen herself as she prepares a 2027 presidential bid.

If no coalition emerges Prime

Political leaders react to upset

Following are reactions to the upset results of France's parliamentary election yesterday. The country was on course for a hung parliament with the left-wing New Popular Front (NFP) coming first, ahead of President Emmanuel Macron's centrists and the far-right National Rally (RN), according to pollsters' projections based on early results from a sample of polling stations.

Jean-Luc Melenchon, hard-left France Unbowed Party

"The will of the people must be strictly respected. No arrangement would be acceptable. The defeat of the president and his coalition is clearly confirmed. The president must accept his defeat. "The prime minister must go. The president must invite the New Popular Front to govern."

Jordan Bardella, far-right National Rally Party

"I say tonight with gravity that depriving millions of French people of the possibility of seeing their ideas brought to power will never be a viable destiny for France.

"Tonight, by deliberately trying to paralyse our institutions, Emmanuel Macron has not simply pushed the country towards uncertainty and instability, he has deprived the French people of any response to their day-to-day difficulties for many months to come. "In the midst of a purchasing power crisis, with insecurity and disorder hitting the country hard, France is deprived of a majority, of a government to act, and therefore of a clear course to turn France around."

Gerald Darmanin, Interior Minister, key figure in Macron's centrist camp

"I note that today, no-one can say they have won this legislative election, especially not Mister Melenchon."

Raphael Glucksmann, Socialist Party

"We're ahead, but we're in a divided parliament ... so we're going to have to act like grown-ups.

"We're going to have to talk, to discuss, to engage in dialogue ... The balance of power has shifted in parliament ... and there's going to be a fundamental change of political culture."

Olivier Faure, Socialist Party

"We have to do our utmost to reunite the country. The RN had made the choice of dividing French citizens from one another. We have to restore the country on a clear basis and the New Popular Front must take the lead in this new chapter of our history."

Minister Gabriel Attal could try to lead a minority government as, under French rules, the president cannot dissolve parliament again and call a fresh poll for 12 months. "France is on the cusp of a seis-

mic political shift," said analysts at the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), warning of "legislative gridlock" that would weaken "France's voice on the European and international stage".

6 injured in Spanish bull running

Six people were hurt yesterday in Spain's traditional annual San Fermin bull running festival, with one participant gored and five suffering bruising, local government sources said. A 37-year-old Spanish man emerged from his goring with slight injuries, officials said.

The curtain went up on nine days of festivities on Saturday as thousands of revellers dressed in white clothes and red scarves filled the city's main square for the "chupinazo" — the firecracker which launches an event dating back to medieval times. The run became world famous after being immortalised by US writer Ernest Hemingway in his novel *The Sun Also Rises* in 1926. The festivities include concerts, religious processions and copious amounts of wine. Each day at 8am hundreds of attendees launch themselves into a dangerous 850m race, seeking to outrun — or at least



A reveller sprints as a wild cow runs at the San Fermin festival in Pamplona yesterday. (Reuters)

avoid — six heavy fighting bulls through the city centre's narrow streets. During the intense "running of the bulls", which lasts less than three minutes, the runners try to get as close as possible to the animals in their sprint to the Pamplona bullring, where bullfights are held in the afternoon.

This year's edition saw the day of San Fermin fall on a Sunday,

allowing a stronger turnout than when the saint's day falls on a weekday. Anyone aged 18 or above may participate. Dozens of people are injured each year, although most are injuries resulting from falls or being stomped by animals. To date, 16 deaths have also been recorded since 1911, the last coming in 2009.

Pope decries populists, warns democracy is in bad health

Reuters
Trieste

Pope Francis denounced populist politics and what he called "the dross of ideology" yesterday, warning that democracy was not in good shape in many parts of the world.

The 87-year-old Pope was in the northeastern city of Trieste for a flying visit, his fourth trip within Italy in just over two months as he prepares for a 12-day journey across Asia in September, the longest of his papacy.

Speaking at an annual Roman Catholic convention on social affairs, Francis said many people felt excluded from democracy, with the poor and the weak left to fend for themselves.

"It is evident that democracy is not in good health in today's world," he said, denouncing polarisation and partisanship. "Ideologies are seductive. Some

people compare them to the Pied Piper of Hamelin. They seduce you, but they lead you to deny yourself," he said, referring to a fairy tale where a rat catcher uses his magic powers to steal away a town's children.

He said the "crisis of democracy" afflicted various nations, but did not give any specific examples.

The Pope was speaking on the day France holds a parliamentary run-off election, with the far-right National Rally (RN) expected to take the biggest share of the vote, a month after populist parties scored gains in European Union elections.

"Let us not be deceived by easy solutions. Let us instead be passionate about the common good," the Pope said yesterday, highlighting the damage caused by political "corruption and illegality".

The Pope, who himself rules as an absolute monarch in the tiny Vatican state, said it was impor-

tant to teach children the importance of democratic values, warning that "indifference is a cancer of democracy".

"I am concerned about the small number of people who went to vote. Why is it happening?" he asked.

Later, in a homily at an open-air Mass, the Pope denounced widespread complacency over social injustice.

"Why are we not scandalised in the face of rampant evil, life being humiliated, labour issues, the sufferings of migrants? Why do we remain apathetic and indifferent to the injustices of the world?" he said.

The half-day visit to Trieste followed similar trips to Venice and Verona in April and May, and an address to Group of Seven leaders in southern Italy in June — outings that have tested his stamina after repeated ailments over the past year that have sometimes forced him to curtail his workload.

'Not the end of the world', says data scientist on big issues

Humanity has made great strides in recent decades: air is cleaner; poverty, deforestation and childhood mortality have fallen; gasoline cars — and maybe coal — are on the way out. This optimistic take on the state of affairs may be startling to some, but not Hannah Ritchie, a Scottish data scientist whose first book lets the facts speak for themselves.

"We just are unaware of how bad the past was," Ritchie told AFP from Edinburgh.

"People are just unaware that at least half of kids died, that diseases were rife, that most people lived in poverty, that most of the world were hungry." Her book, *Not the End of the World*, presents an evidence-rich counterpoint to the view that everything is going in the wrong direction, and offers possible approaches to the burning challenges of our time. That also means climate change, a problem that Ritchie — who is lead researcher at the Our World in Data website based out of Oxford University — is careful not to understate.

"If you skew too far in one direction, I don't actually think you're telling the true story. We need to be clear-eyed about the problem in front of us," she said.

"That's actually not useful — to deny it, or downplay it, or not be serious about it. But at the same time, you also need to focus on solutions, so we actually drive progress forward."

Those solutions are not always obvious, Ritchie said, and focus can be misguided when it comes to choosing what personal action to take in aid of the planet.

Ritchie pointed to the tendency in rich countries to hype behaviours that have little real impact — such as recycling or ensuring televisions are not left on stand-by mode — while continuing to drive, fly and eat meat.

Assuming everything 'natural' is automatically good can also mask some inconvenient realities, she added. Huddling around a campfire can produce a sense of closeness to nature, but burning wood belches out smoke harmful to humans and the planet. "What looks sustainable is the natural cow in a green field eating grass. But actually, when you do the numbers on this, the meat substitute burger is vastly, vastly better on almost any environmental metric compared to the cows," she said.

An advocate of lab-grown meat, nuclear power and GMO, Ritchie does



Hannah Ritchie. Author of *Not the End of the World*.

not relish being contrarian on tackling environmental problems.

"I don't take delight in being provocative. I just care about the truth," she said.

Ritchie's data-driven conclusions can run counter to the conventional wisdom about how to save the planet. But they can be illuminating, identifying areas where resources might be better spent elsewhere.

For example, reducing the amount of plastic bags or bottles consumed in Europe might seem a good idea on paper.

But hardly any of the plastic in the sea originates from Europe, with most flowing from Asia, which does not have the same rigorous waste management schemes in place.

"If everyone in Europe stopped using plastics tomorrow the world's oceans would hardly notice the difference," Ritchie wrote in her book.

Palm oil — the sworn enemy of environmental defenders — is "an insanely productive plant" that generates far more oil per hectare of land than alternatives like soybean and coconut, she added.

"If we were to boycott palm oil and replace it with one of these alternatives, we would need far more farmland." Synthetic fertilisers — another target of environmental movements — were essential to grow the food that sustains half the world's population.

"The reality is that the world cannot go organic. Too many of us rely on fertilisers to survive," Ritchie wrote, adding that many countries could still reduce the amount of fertiliser they use. Ritchie said "zombie statistics" — bogus

facts or figures that get regurgitated over and over — have a lot to answer for.

Claims that the world's soils would be depleted after 60 more harvests had been repeated time and time again over the past decade despite lacking any reliable source, she said.

Her book returns often to food, not surprising when considering that what we eat, and how it is grown and transported, has a major impact on warming the planet.

Energy, which accounts for more than three-quarters of total greenhouse gas emissions, is in transition: electric cars, heat pumps, and solar energy are changing the game.

But the food system, which represents about a quarter, is far from igniting its own revolution and poses its own unique obstacles.

"For people, food is very identity-driven. It's very personal... And I think it's just much harder and much slower to change that," Ritchie said.

"I'm not that convinced that people move away from meat consumption to traditional plant based products. If you're looking for the large scale, rapid change that you need, people are not going to move to lentils and tofu."

HMC hosts international haematology conference

The National Centre for Cancer Care & Research (NCCCR) at Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC) hosted the 4th Qatar Annual International Haematology Conference recently.

Over two days, experts from around the globe gathered in Doha to engage in insightful discussions, share expertise, and collaborate on the future of haematology care in the region.

Conference chairman Prof Honar Cherif, chairman of Haematology at the NCCCR, said: "We featured an impressive array of keynote speakers who are pioneers in their respective areas, delivering insightful presentations on the latest advancements in haematology."

"Topics ranged from cutting-edge research in blood disorders and innovative treatment methodologies to groundbreaking developments in immune therapy, targeted therapy, and personalised medi-



Some of the conference participants.

cine," he explained. "The diverse sessions ensured a comprehensive exploration of both clinical and research aspects of haematology, catering to the interests of all attendees."

Conference co-chair Prof Mohamed Yassin, head of haematology at the NCCCR, said: "The scientific programme featured the latest updates, ongoing con-

troversies, and cutting-edge advancements in haematology, including acute and chronic leukaemia, myelodysplastic syndrome, myeloproliferative neoplasms, and lymphoma."

"The conference included 42 lectures from experts from Italy, Germany, the UK, France, Sweden, Spain, Egypt, the GCC, and Qatar," he said. "We also had ten sci-

entific posters showcasing a wide range of research projects, reflecting our haematology community's innovative spirit and dedication."

Conference co-chair Dr Anas Hamad, director of pharmacy at the NCCCR, noted: "The conference was the most significant haematology event ever held in Qatar and one of the largest in the GCC region.

More than 500 physicians, pharmacists, nurses, allied healthcare professionals, researchers, students, and pharmaceutical industry representatives attended the event."

"We also had an interactive exhibition area with 15 exhibitors showcasing the latest innovations in treating haematological malignancies," he added.

QF students in initiative to preserve marine life

Students from Qatar Academy Msheireb and Qatar Academy Al Wakra, both part of Qatar Foundation Pre-University Education, participated in an initiative organised by the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (MoECC) to release endangered baby hawksbill turtles at Fuwairit Beach.

The initiative was aimed at raising environmental awareness among school students and the Qatari community, emphasising the importance of conserving local biodiversity and educating future generations about the critical need to protect turtles from extinction.

Sharing her experience, Sarah Naveed, a seven-year-old student from Qatar Academy Msheireb, said: "We carried the turtles and put them in the ocean. We need to save the turtles from extinction. It's important to pro-

tect them because they help keep the ocean healthy."

Ahmed Jassim, a 12-year-old student at Qatar Academy Al Wakra, said: "Everyone should be aware of the devastating effects of throwing plastic waste in the ocean. I encourage all students to get involved in similar initiatives and play an active role in preserving the environment."

Aisha Ghani, an environment specialist at Qatar Foundation Health, Safety, and Environment, explained that the turtle hatching, and release initiative is a hands-on programme where students actively participate in releasing baby turtles into the sea.

"The primary goal of the initiative is to educate students about sea turtles - their life cycle, habitats, threats they face - conservation,

the importance of protecting wildlife, and the impact of pollution, particularly plastic pollution, on marine life," she said.

"Students gain firsthand knowledge about nature and wildlife, developing a sense of responsibility and care for the environment," Ghani added. "It's a unique and memorable experience that enriches their understanding and appreciation of the natural world."

Jassim Lari, head of the Marine Wildlife Development section at the MoECC, said: "Our main objective with this initiative is to protect, conserve, and develop the critically endangered hawksbill turtles. These sea turtles are crucial for the marine environment, not just locally but globally, as they are migratory animals that travel across borders, including the Arabian Gulf."



Some of the QF students who took part in the marine biodiversity preservation initiative.



Engineer Abdulla al-Naemi



Engineer Saeed al-Malki



Engineer Noora al-Muhammadi

Ashghal completes Package 1, main works of Package 5 in Al Ebb, Leabaib

The Public Works Authority (Ashghal) has completed Package 1 and main works of Package 5 of the Roads and Infrastructure Development Project in Al Ebb and Leabaib, it was announced yesterday.

Engineer Abdulla al-Naemi, head of the Northern Areas Section of the Roads Projects Department, said that Ashghal is implementing a plan to provide integrated infrastructure services and facilities and advanced road networks in Al Ebb and Leabaib.

"The plan includes five packages that will serve a total of 5,592 residential plots when completed," he said. "Package 1 as well as the main works of Package 5 have been completed, and works for packages 2, 3, and 4 are currently underway."

"Packages 1 and 5 serve a total of 1,910 residential plots for citizens' subdivisions and have achieved significant improvements in the area by providing advanced infrastructure services and an internal road network while linking it to the existing main road network," he continued.

"They also provide connectivity with public facilities in the area which contributes to enhancing traffic flow, allows citizens to build their houses, and keeps pace with the population growth in the area," al-Naemi added.

Engineer Saeed al-Malki, project engineer at the Northern Areas Projects Section of the Roads Projects Department, said that Package 1 serves about 1,123 residential plots.

"Works in this package included developing and constructing a 27km-long road network, 52km of pedestrian paths, providing traffic safety elements such as street lighting systems and poles, signboards, and road markings, in addition to providing 5,185 parking spaces," he said.

A 27km-long surface and groundwater drainage network, a 15km-long TSE (treated sewage effluent) network, and 24km-long sewage lines were also constructed and connected to the main sewage network to develop the area and eliminate the use of septic tanks.

Engineer Noora al-Muhammadi, project engineer at the Northern Areas Section of the Roads Projects Department, said that Package 5 serves



about 787 plots of citizens' subdivisions.

It included developing and constructing a 24km road network and 11km of pedestrian and bicycle paths, providing traffic safety elements such as street lighting poles, signboards and road markings in addition to providing 5,043 parking spaces.

The infrastructure development works included constructing 22.5km of surface and groundwater drainage network, 13km of treated water network and 21km of sewage lines.

Work is currently underway to complete the sewage connections to houses and landscaping works.

Among the challenges faced by the project team in the implementation of Packages 1 and 5 was the high groundwater level in the area which required finding solutions to drain the water before the commencement of construction work.

The rocky nature of the soil also caused delays in the completion of some excavation work.

Some excavations were carried out at a depth of about 30m below ground, which required elevating workers' safety procedures.

This was in addition to co-ordinating with many government entities to complete infrastructure development work.

About 80% of the materials used in the project were from local sources, including lighting poles and bulbs, drainage pipes, pre-cast manholes, electrical cables, directional boards and interlocks, a statement added.

Qmic hosts summer internship programme

The Qatar Mobility Innovations Centre (Qmic), based at the Qatar Science & Technology Park (QSTP), hosted interns from multiple universities in Qatar and in the region.

The Qmic welcomed a diverse group of more than 20 undergraduate students with various backgrounds, ranging from electrical engineering, computer science and engineering, business, and more.

By integrating the interns into the Qmic's projects, they were able to gain practical application of their academic knowledge to real-world challenges.

Omar al-Jaber, director for strategic partnerships and outreach at the Qmic, said: "Not only do the students get to apply their academic learnings into the real-world, but the Qmic also benefits from their

fresh perspectives and innovative ideas."

"It is a great way to prepare the next generation of talent, as they are playing a proactive role in developing the leaders who will shape Qatar's future," he said.

Dr Fethi Filali, director for technology and research at the Qmic, stated: "We are proud to host these talented interns who are working on cutting-edge projects in fields such as Applied Artificial Intelligence (AI), Generative AI, Co-operative & Automated Mobility, and smart embedded systems."

"Our focus on these technical aspects ensures that the students gain hands-on experience with the latest technologies, preparing them for future challenges and innovations in their careers," he said.

The students were able to make significant contributions that will be applied to real life projects at the Qmic.



The interns with Qmic officials.