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GULF TIMES



SATURDAY Vol. XXXV No. 13126

September 7, 2024
Rabia 14, 1446 AH

www.gulf-times.com 2 Riyals

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SPORT | Page 1

Arshad qualifies for 800m final at Paris Paralympics

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Gord to produce carbonate-based plaster from waste

By Joseph Varghese
Staff Reporter

The Gulf Organisation for Research and Development (Gord), based at Qatar Science and Technology Park (QSTP), is planning for large-scale production of carbonate-based plaster from various waste materials. The pilot plant at QSTP is now under commissioning and the aim is to start production soon.

"At Gord, we have established this pilot plant for producing eco-friendly plasterboard of superior performance from carbon capture and mineralisation processes. The process uses sustainable methods that avoid the negative environmental impacts associated with traditional production," Dr Yousef Alhorr, founding chairman of Gord, told *Gulf Times* in an exclusive interview.

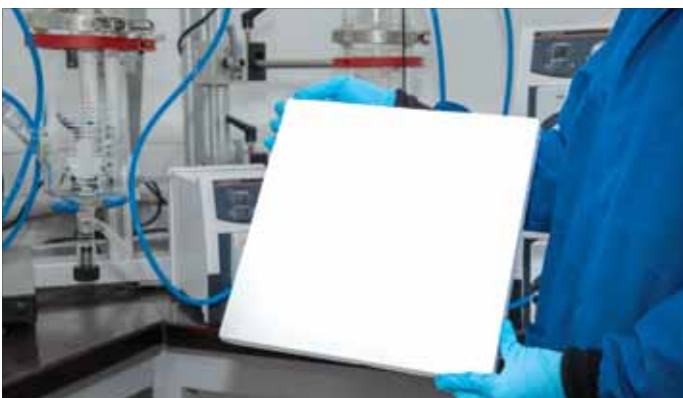
Gord is using the waste streams from different industries in Qatar for the project. "We have several desalination units in Qatar. We take their rejected brine, as well as the gas flue from different power and chemical industries. We utilise this flue gas, and we extract and sequester the CO2 emissions from it."

"Then all these are combined with the rejected brine. Thereafter we make use of magnesium, again from the rejected brine, to produce eco-friendly carbonate-based plaster, which is also safe for human health."

According to Dr Alhorr, the eco-friendly product has three times the compressive strength of normal plasterboard cement with 50% less density or weight. "So, it is lighter, higher in compressive strength, as well as eco-friendly because the raw



Dr Yousef Alhorr at the pilot plant.



A specimen of carbonate-based plaster.

material is derived from waste. We have filed for a patent for this process and technology," he noted.

The founding chairman said that Gord is planning to make the pilot plant as a demonstration facility for investors. He also pointed out that it is a Qatari-patented technology taking the country's efforts in research and innovation to higher levels.

"By demonstrating the production process on a smaller scale, we can show the technology's viability, allowing investors to see the material first hand and

understand its potential. Soon, we hope to commence full operations of the facility where we can produce larger quantity of this material," he highlighted.

"The plant at QSTP will help to educate the investors about the feasibility and viability of the product as well as its positive environmental impact. If all goes well, we will go for large-scale production to scale up it on industrial scale. As we produce more of this material, it will reach the market as a high quality Qatar product," added Dr Alhorr.

Qatar condemns Israel's killing of Turkish-American citizen in W Bank

Qatar has condemned the assassination of Turkish-American citizen Aysinur Ezgi Ece by Israeli occupation forces during a peaceful demonstration opposing illegal settlements in the town of Beita, south of Nablus in the West Bank.

In a statement yesterday, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs denounced the killing as part of a recurring pattern of violent crimes committed by the Israeli occupation against the Palestinian cause and human rights. The ministry further warned that the ongoing silence of the international community in the face of such grave violations

only emboldens the occupation to continue its atrocities.

The statement emphasised that the voices of free and just activists worldwide will not be silenced by the bullets of the treacherous occupation. Instead, they will continue to resound with truth, supporting the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, including the establishment of their independent state with full sovereignty on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital, and holding accountable all those responsible for the crimes and violations committed against them. (QNA) Page 3

Israeli strikes kill 27 in Gaza as polio vaccination resumes

Israeli military strikes killed at least 27 Palestinians across the Gaza Strip yesterday, medics said, as health officials resumed vaccination of tens of thousands more children in the enclave against polio.

In Nuseirat, one of the territory's eight historic refugee camps, an Israeli airstrike killed two women and two children, while eight other people were killed in two other airstrikes in Gaza City, the medics said. The rest were killed in subsequent strikes across the enclave, they added.

Meanwhile, Israeli forces battled Hamas-led fighters in the Zeitoun suburb of Gaza City, where residents said tanks have been operating for over a week, in eastern neighbourhoods of Khan Younis, and in Rafah, near the border with Egypt, where residents said Israeli forces blew up several houses.

Eleven months into the war, multiple rounds of diplomacy have so far failed to clinch a ceasefire deal to end the conflict and bring the release of Israeli and foreign hostages held in Gaza as well as many Palestinians jailed in Israel.

Nearly 90% of the Gaza ceasefire deal is agreed but critical issues remain where there are gaps, including the so-called Philadelphia corridor along Gaza's southern border with Egypt, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken told a press briefing. Israel has said it will not leave the corridor; Hamas says a deal isn't possible unless it does.

Meanwhile, residents of Khan Younis and displaced families from Rafah continued to crowd medical facilities, bringing their children to be vaccinated against polio. The campaign was launched after the discovery of a case of a one-year-old baby who was partially paralysed.

This was the first known case of the disease in Gaza — one of the

world's most densely populated places — in 25 years. It re-emerged as Gaza's health system has virtually collapsed and many hospitals have been knocked out of action due to the war.

The UN agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, said at least 160,000 children received the drops in southern areas of Gaza on Thursday where medical staffers began the second stage of the campaign, benefiting from an Israeli and Hamas agreement on limited pauses in the fighting.

"Since 1 September @UNRWA & partners have vaccinated nearly 355,000 children against #polio in #Gaza middle & southern areas," UNRWA said in a post on X.

"In the next few days we'll continue rolling out the polio vaccination campaign aiming to reach around 640,000 children under 10 with this critical vaccine," it added.

Juliette Touma, UNRWA's Director of Communications, hailed the campaign as very welcome progress. She said UNRWA was working with Unicef, the World Health Organisation and local health partners around the clock and in a race against time to vaccinate every child across the Gaza Strip.

"These temporary pauses do not however replace our calls for a ceasefire, it's long overdue. It's time to reach a deal that would bring respite for the people in Gaza, release all hostages and bring in a steady flow of commercial and humanitarian supplies into Gaza," Touma told Reuters.

The campaign will shift on Sunday to the northern Gaza Strip, which has been the focus of the major Israeli military offensive in the past 11 months. According to the World Health Organisation, a second round of vaccinations would be required four weeks after the first round. (Reuters)



A resident checks the damage in the yard of a house, following an Israeli military raid in the Jenin refugee camp, in the occupied West Bank yesterday. Page 3

Zelensky appeals for more weapons

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky made a fresh appeal yesterday for more weapons to counter the threat from advancing Russian forces in the east of the country and Moscow's devastating missile strikes. He pressed his nation's case to allies meeting at the US Ramstein Air Base in Germany, where Washington unveiled a new \$250mn in military aid for Ukraine, and later in the day at an international forum on the Italian Lakes. (AFP) Page 11

Super typhoon roars into China's Hainan

Asia's strongest storm this year, Super Typhoon Yagi, landed in China's Hainan yesterday, bringing violent gales and heavy rain that triggered widespread power outages, paralysing the tourist island province known as "China's Hawaii". Packing maximum sustained winds of 234km per hour (145mph) near its centre, Yagi registers as the world's second-most powerful tropical cyclone in 2024 so far, after the Category 5 Atlantic hurricane Beryl, and the most severe in the Pacific basin this year. (Reuters) Page 8

Kenya school dorm fire kills 17 boys

Seventeen boys were confirmed dead and 70 missing after a fire tore through a primary school dormitory in central Kenya, officials said yesterday, leaving distraught relatives desperate for news of their loved ones. The blaze at the Hillside Enderasha Academy in Nyeri county broke out around midnight, engulfing rooms where more than 150 boys were sleeping. (AFP) Page 6

NY judge delays Trump sentencing

The New York judge who presided over Donald Trump's hush money trial yesterday delayed sentencing until after November's US presidential election to "avoid any appearance" of impacting the vote. The Republican White House candidate had been scheduled to be sentenced on September 18. (AFP) Page 7

Qatar takes part in Gwangju Biennale



The 15th edition of the Gwangju Biennale in South Korea kicks off today, with distinguished Qatari participation. Qatar Museums organises the first pavilion for an Arab country, which includes an exhibition that explores the significance of rain in Qatari culture through art. On this occasion, Deputy Director for Museum Affairs at the National Museum of Qatar, Tania al-Majed said that Qatar's pavilion at the Gwangju Biennale features the Rain exhibition, which explores the significance of rain in Qatari culture and displays new artworks by seven Qatari artists and residents of Qatar. The pavilion runs until December 1. She explained that the exhibition consists of four different sections telling distinctive narratives through dazzling artworks done by Fatima Abbas, Farah al-Siddiqi, Sarah al-Nuaimi, Hind al-Saad, Guillaume Rosiere, Abdulrahman al-Muftah, and Nada al-Kharashi. Founded in 1995, the Gwangju Biennale is a contemporary art biennale. (QNA)



COMMUNITY
See Pages: 4 & 5

Minister of social development highlights Qatar's legacy in humanitarian work

QNA
Doha

HE the Minister of Social Development and Family and Chairperson of the Regulatory Authority for Charitable Activities (RACA) Maryam bint Ali bin Nasser al-Misnad affirmed that humanitarian work in Qatar represents a sustainable legacy. She called for encouraging involvement in charitable work and preserving the value of giving, a virtue the Qatari society has long been known for, extending its hand to do good.

This statement was made during a celebration organised by RACA in collaboration with the Workers Support and Insurance Fund on the occasion of the International Day of Charity. The event was attended by

representatives of diplomatic missions, community leaders, and individuals from the charity, humanitarian, and development sectors, including associations and relevant entities.

The event featured presentations highlighting the efforts of the Qatari charity sector across various fields, as well as RACA's role in supporting, encouraging, and protecting charitable work. Presentations were also made by the Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS), showcasing its efforts to support humanitarian work locally and internationally.

Director-General of RACA Ibrahim Abdullah al-Duhaimi praised the efforts of workers in the charity and humanitarian sectors in Qatar, noting that the qualitative development of these sectors is the result of



HE Maryam bint Ali bin Nasser al-Misnad

continuous work by various institutions in Qatar, which have raised the standards of charitable work from both regulatory and legislative perspectives, creating a conducive environment for humanitarian efforts. Meanwhile Executive Direc-

tor, Workers' Support and Insurance Fund Kholoud Saif al-Kubaisi lauded in her speech the national partnership between RACA and the Fund and its impact on supporting charitable and humanitarian work. She also emphasised the unlimited support that charity and humanitarian work receive in Qatar from the country's wise leadership.

Director of Licensing and Support at RACA Rashid al-Naimi for his part noted that celebrating the International Day of Charity, is an opportunity to recall the tireless efforts of workers in the charity and humanitarian sectors in Qatar in order to thank them for their efforts in providing relief.

Secretary-General of the National Human Rights Committee (NHRC) Sultan Hassan al-Jamali highlighted the power of charity

work in alleviating humanitarian crises and improving public services in housing, education, and child protection. He added that eradicating poverty is a global challenge essential for achieving sustainable development, stressing that celebrating the International Day of Charity is rooted in Qatar's heritage, which calls for aiding the distressed and helping those in need.

The NHRC Secretary-General also pointed to extensive efforts to create a regional and international environment supportive of charitable work, whether through developing international standards related to charity or adopting positions that support vulnerable groups' rights to food, shelter, health, and other rights. He referenced the outcomes of the International Conference on Food Justice

from a Human Rights Perspective, organised by NHRC in February, which saw significant participation from the international and regional communities.

In his presentation, Director of the Local Development and Volunteering Sector at QRCS Hussein Aman al-Ali provided a historical overview of Qatari charitable efforts, especially those of QRCS, emphasising the humanitarian principles, ethics, and noble behaviours that guide charitable work in Qatar. The event also included a panel discussion ON the future of Qatari charitable work. The event concluded with the Workers Support and Insurance Fund honouring the key contributors in the charity and humanitarian sectors, including RACA, NHRC, QRCS, and Qatar Charity.

Al-Muraikhi meets ambassador of Jordan



HE the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan bin Saad al-Muraikhi met with Jordan's ambassador to Qatar Zaid Mufleh al-Lawzi. The meeting discussed co-operation relations between the two countries and ways to support and enhance them. (QNA)

Qatar Charity signs 'Charity Partner' agreement with UDC

Qatar Charity (QC) has signed an agreement with United Development Company (UDC) to co-operate in humanitarian and community work. According to the agreement, UDC has become a Charity Partner (CP) and received the CP label as part of Qatar Charity's social responsibility programme.

This agreement highlights UDCs commitment to collaborating as a Charity Partner in Qatar Charity's programmes and activities. It also aligns with Qatar Charity's dedication to offering comprehensive support and aid to individuals and organizations, demonstrating its social responsibility on both international and local levels.

Under this agreement, UDC will enjoy numerous benefits granted by Qatar Charity to companies and commercial institutions that join the CP programme, in support of the community programs and humanitarian projects implemented by Qatar Charity for the targeted groups.

CEO's assistant for the Resources Development and Communication sector at Qatar Charity, Ahmad Yousef Fakhroo, expressed his delight at signing the CP agreement with UDC, which is aimed at aiding the needy and supporting community development.

He said, "It is a fortunate coincidence that the signing of this



agreement coincides with International Day of Charity, which aims to raise awareness about charitable work and provide a platform for charitable activities worldwide.

He also emphasised Qatar Charity's commitment to expanding community partnership and strengthening the principle of humanitarian collaboration to unite efforts in supporting vulnerable communities.

He encouraged all companies and institutions within Qatar to join this programme. United Development Company (UDC) stated that the signing of this agreement aligns with its corporate social responsibility strategy in Qatar, highlighting the importance of

recognising UDC, The Pearl Island, and Gewan Island as humanitarian partners. This partnership will support Qatar Charity's humanitarian initiatives and provide an active role for The Pearl and Gewan Island communities in Qatar's humanitarian efforts.

It is important to highlight that the CP label is awarded by Qatar Charity to companies, organisations, and institutions within strategic partnerships according to different conditions related to their social impact and positive influence on those served by Qatar Charity worldwide.

This 'CP' mark underscores these entities' commitment to their social responsibilities. (QNA)

Flexible hours system aimed at enhancing work-life balance: CGB

By Ayman Adly
Staff Reporter

The Civil Service and Government Development Bureau (CGB) has stressed that the Cabinet approval of the flexible and remote working schedule at government entities that will be implemented from September 24, would reflect positively on the work environment and would eventually enhance the productivity of government employees.

Through a number of posts on its official account, the CGB pointed out that this system would give bigger opportunities for employees to maintain effective balance between their family life and their jobs. Besides, it would give working mothers and the persons with special needs an excellent opportunity to accommodate for their particular needs without undermining their employment future or status.

The CGB pointed out the flexible work system will have seven working hours a day that start

from 7am until 2pm. However, the employee can come to work as early as 6:30am or as late as 8:30 and then complete the official seven working hours before the end of the work day.

This will not be applicable for the employees working in shifts or those working at certain entities where the application of the system cannot be implemented due to the nature of work or its requirements. Yaqub Saleh al-Ishaq, director of Civil Service Affairs at CGB, said that the CGB initiative to launch the flexible working hours system is there to create a positive work environment, especially for families and mothers.

He told Qatar TV that previously CGB gave Qatari mother employees the opportunity to benefit of this system during the school exams period and the system was very successful in its experimental phase based on the opinions of the government employees themselves through multiple questionnaires on the issue.

Further, this flexible working hours gives employees the opportunity to avoid reporting late

for their work while taking care of their families and personal affairs. He said that the new system, when officially launched, would be applicable for government employees from Qataris and non-Qataris alike.

For those allowed to work remotely, each employee could be allowed to work remotely from home for one week a year, but for Qatari female employees that have children less than 12 years old could be allowed to work remotely from home for one month a year. He said that this is the initial plan, but in future such regulations and rules would be amended according to the practical outcomes in future.

In the meantime, Abdulaziz bin Nasser bin Mubarak al-Khalifa. President of CGB, stressed that this new flexible work system is considered a significant step towards providing a flexible work environment for the employees that responds to the demands of professional and family life, and contribute to achieving institutional excellence.

PHCC set to launch back-to-school campaign

The Primary Health Care Corp (PHCC) will launch tomorrow, the 2024-25 back-to-school campaign coinciding the new academic year start in public schools, kindergartens, and Education Above All schools.

The PHCC said in a statement that the campaign themed student-centred healthcare aims to develop school health services according to the best standards by integrating the joint efforts of school nursing services providers and recipients, and create a

common communication environment between health services providers and recipients and their parents as essential partners in developing and updating school health services.

It pointed out that the campaign includes many different awareness-raising events, activities and training workshops that include distributing brochures, booklets, and messages directed to students and their parents to enhance awareness of the importance of healthcare centred around student health.

The statement voiced hopes that the campaign would have a positive impact on the largest possible segment of Qatari society, including students and parents, to achieve the campaigns desired goals, in addition to achieving more mutual co-operation. It added that the PHCC was on the cusp of transforming the conventional school clinics into smart ones that are electronically linked to the health records department at the health centres and are well-equipped with all the necessary equipment. (QNA)

Customs seizes banned pills at HIA



Hamad International Airport Customs Department has foiled an attempt to smuggle into the country the banned Lyrica pills, the General Authority of Customs posted on its official X account. The customs officers on duty suspected a carton with a water heater, in a passenger's luggage. Upon inspection, the banned pills were found hidden inside the heater. A total of 13,579 Lyrica pills were seized.

Fire inspectors graduate



The General Directorate of Civil Defence celebrated the graduation of the Certified Fire Inspector (CFI) Programme, organised by the Prevention Department in collaboration with the Police Officers Institute at the Police Academy. The course, from September 1 to 5, was attended by personnel from the General Directorate of Civil Defence and other entities. The programme aimed to qualify participants as certified inspectors by the International Fire Protection Association, according to a post by the Ministry of Interior on X. The graduation ceremony, held at the Civil Defence Officers' Club, was attended by Col Nayef Mohammed al-Mannai, director of the Police Officers Institute, and Maj Engineer Ghanim Salem al-Naimi, director of the Prevention Department, along with several officers.



Palestinian solidarity rally in Yemen



Protesters, mainly Houthi supporters, rally to show solidarity with Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, in Sanaa, Yemen, yesterday.



Displaced Gazans face dire conditions in hospital courtyard

Reuters
Gaza

Iqbal al-Zeidi has been going out to retrieve her family's belongings from the rubble of their home ever since it was destroyed by an Israeli airstrike on Gaza City almost a year ago.

Braving more bombardments, she said she has travelled up to the wrecked site, collected bed-sheets, clothes and blankets, and brought them back to their shelter – a torn tent in the courtyard of Al-Aqsa Hospital about 16km south in the city of Deir Al-Balah.

Other tents clustered nearby give little relief from the sweltering heat, and none from the attacks that have followed them to their new home.

On Thursday, four people died when an Israeli airstrike hit tents where other displaced families were living close to the same hospital, local medics said.

She is among the millions of Gazans who have been moving up and down the besieged and overcrowded enclave, escaping an attack in one location, only to face more attacks in their new place of refuge.

"Our house was a 120-square-metre apartment. Now we live in a tent just 4 metres by 4 metres," al-Zeidi said, visibly worn out by the heat.

"We left our house under bombing, with nothing – no papers, no certificates, nothing. We are completely erased." Conditions are dire across the territory with severe short-



Displaced woman Iqbal al-Zeidi stands in front of her tent which was torn by an Israeli strike, on the courtyard of Al-Aqsa Martyrs hospital, amid the Israel-Hamas conflict, in Deir Al-Balah in the central Gaza Strip.

ages of water, medicine and fuel. Few hospitals are functional.

The collapse in Gaza's health system has complicated a host of other unfolding disasters, from a hunger crisis to spreading disease. It has left those with chronic conditions unable to access basic care.

"My granddaughter has a heart condition, and we can't get treatment. I am sick myself, with high blood pressure and diabetes, but I can't find medication," al-Zeidi told Reuters. The conflict erupted in the

first week of October, when Palestinian Hamas group stormed southern Israel.

Israel responded with a military campaign that has killed more than 40,861 Palestinians, according to Gaza health authorities.

Near Al-Aqsa Hospital, al-Zeidi's eight-month-old grandson sat inside the tent while other family members looked for shade nearby.

"Another month will pass, and we will have been here for a year. We run after food, water, all amidst diseases," she said.

Troops shoot Turkish-American woman dead at West Bank protest: officials

Reuters
Ramallah

Israeli troops shot and killed a Turkish-American woman who had been taking part in a protest against settlement expansion in the Israeli-occupied West Bank yesterday, Palestinian and Turkish officials said.

The White House said it was deeply disturbed by the death of Aysenur Ezgi Eygi and called on Israel to investigate. Türkiye's foreign ministry said she was shot in the head, and placed blame on Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government for her death.

Palestinian officials described her as a 26-year-old activist from Seattle who held both US and Turkish citizenship.

Israel's military said its troops had fired toward a male "main instigator" who posed a threat by hurling rocks at soldiers.

The military was looking into reports that a female foreign national "was killed as a result of shots fired in the area. The details of the incident and the circumstances in which she was hit are under review." There was no immediate comment on the incident from Netanyahu's office.

Fouad Nafaa, head of Rafidia Hospital in Nablus, told Reuters that Eygi arrived there in critical condition, with a serious head injury.

"We tried to perform a resuscitation operation on her, but unfortunately she died," he said.

The Palestinian Authority's official news agency, Wafa, said the incident occurred during a regular protest march by activists in Beita, a village near Nablus that has seen repeated attacks on Palestinians by Jewish settlers.

'DEEPLY DISTURBED'
In a statement, Sean Savett, a spokesperson for the White House's National Security Coun-



Colleagues of Aysenur Ezgi Eygi, US-Turkish activist who died after reportedly being shot in the West Bank town of Beita, react on news of her death in a hospital in Nablus in the occupied West Bank, yesterday.

cil, said Washington was "deeply disturbed by the tragic death of an American citizen" in the West Bank yesterday.

"We have reached out to the Government of Israel to ask for more information and request an investigation into the incident," Savett said.

US Senator Chris Van Hollen said Eygi was the third American killed in the West Bank since October first week, when Hamas fighters stormed Israel.

"Biden Administration has not been doing enough to pursue justice and accountability on their behalf," Van Hollen, a Democrat, who sits on the Senate's Foreign Relations committee, said. "If the Netanyahu Government will not pursue justice for Americans, the US Department of Justice must." Türkiye's President Tayyip Erdogan condemned Eygi's death, saying in a post on social media that Türkiye "will continue to work in every platform to halt Israel's policy of occupation and genocide". Israel denies its actions in occupied Palestinian territories amount to genocide.

In a separate incident yesterday near Beita, in the village of Qaryut, a 13-year-old girl was killed by

Israeli gunfire, Palestinian health officials said, after settlers attacked the village.

Wafa quoted the girl's father as saying that she was in their home when it was hit by gunfire. The Israeli military said it was investigating, after its troops had fired in the air to disperse what it described as violent confrontations between dozens of settlers and Palestinians in the area.

A rise in violent attacks by Israeli settlers on Palestinians in the West Bank has stirred anger among Western allies of Israel, including the US, which has imposed sanctions on some Israelis involved in the settler movement.

Several weeks ago around 100 settlers attacked the village of Jit, in the northern West Bank, drawing worldwide condemnation and an Israeli government promise of swift action against anyone found guilty of violence.

Since the 1967 Middle East war, Israel has occupied the West Bank of the Jordan River, which Palestinians want as the core of an independent state. Israel has built settlements there that most countries deem illegal, which Israel disputes citing historical ties to the land.

Life returns to raided West Bank city as Israeli army withdraws

AFP
Jenin

The Israeli army withdrew from the city of Jenin and its refugee camp yesterday after a 10-day operation that left 36 dead across the occupied West Bank, witnesses said.

After days of destructive incursions by soldiers backed by armoured vehicles and bulldozers, residents who had earlier fled began returning to their homes in the camp, a bastion of Palestinian armed groups fighting against Israel, AFP journalists said.

On August 28, the army launched a military operation in several cities and towns of the northern West Bank, including Jenin.

Over the course of the operation in Jenin, Israeli forces killed 14 fighters, arrested 30 suspects, dismantled "approximately 30 explosives planted under roads" and conducted four aerial strikes, the statement said.

One Israeli soldier was killed in Jenin, where most of the Palestinian fatalities have occurred.

Hamas, whose October first week storming of southern Israel triggered the ongoing war



A person tries to walk among debris following an Israeli raid, in Jenin, in the occupied West Bank, yesterday.

in Gaza, and Palestinian Islamic Jihad have said at least 14 of the dead were fighters.

Aziz Taleb, a 48-year-old father of seven, returned to his family home of 20 years to find soldiers had raided it.

"Thank God (the children) left the day before. They went to stay with our neighbours here," he said as he surveyed the damage, glass crunching under his feet.

Imra Itisadeh, a 60-year-old

Jenin resident, returned to her house in the camp yesterday to find one of its walls partly collapsed and rubble on her car.

"At first, we didn't want to leave. Later, (the army) pressured us, and we had to leave our homes. I left with my husband" on foot, she said, adding that she suffers from high blood pressure and heart trouble. Two of Itisadeh's children remained in the house with their families and

soon ran low on nappies, milk and water. "It's very difficult, and we are suffering greatly in the camp," Itisadeh said.

Many homes in the Jenin camp were damaged or destroyed by army bulldozers and pavement was stripped from the roads.

Residents used bulldozers of their own to begin clearing the rubble yesterday after Israeli armoured vehicles left, AFP journalists reported.

The early trickle of returning residents soon turned into a flood, and soon children were playing in the streets.

Hundreds of camp residents attended funerals of those killed during the operation, carrying bodies in processions punctuated by chants and gunfire.

Israel has occupied the West Bank since 1967 and its forces regularly make incursions into Palestinian communities, but the latest raids as well as hawkish comments by Israeli officials signalled an escalation, residents said.

Since the war began in the first week of October, Israeli troops or settlers have killed at least 661 Palestinians in the West Bank, according to the Palestinian health ministry.

German FM says 'purely military approach' not the solution in Gaza

AFP
Tel Aviv

German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said yesterday that a military approach alone was not the solution to Israel's war against Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

"The past weekend has dramatically demonstrated that a purely military approach is no solution to the situation in Gaza," she told reporters after meeting with her Israeli counterpart Israel Katz in the coastal Israeli city of Tel Aviv.

More than 700,000 affected by South Sudan floods: UN

AFP
Nairobi

More than 700,000 people have been impacted by flooding across South Sudan, the UN's humanitarian agency said, warning the number affected was rising daily.

"Floods have caused extensive damage to homes, crops and critical infrastructure, disrupt-

Baerbock was referring to the recovery of six more dead hostages announced last Sunday. Their deaths have ramped up domestic pressure on Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to seal a deal with Hamas for a Gaza ceasefire and hostage exchange deal, though the two sides have traded blame over stalled talks this week.

Baerbock yesterday called for "a ceasefire now" and also spoke out against hawkish statements by Israeli officials about the West Bank, where the army on August 28 launched a raid in multiple cities that has left at least 36 dead.

ing education and health services and increasing the risk of disease outbreaks," said UN humanitarian agency OCHA in a situation report on Thursday.

It said that as of September 5 "flooding has affected more than 710,000 people across 30 of 78 counties". Since gaining independence in 2011, the world's newest nation has remained plagued by instability and violence, despite rich oil reserves.



Ayesha Parveen Abdul Ahad Amarah Raza Fatima Bilal
Fatima Saeed Haadiya Shahid Haaniya Shahid Hussain Bunyad
Kulsum Awal Maryam Naeem Mateen Ahmad Muhammad Anas

PSS excels in HSSC exams

Pak Shamaa School & College (PSS) bagged commendable results in HSSC-I & II examinations conducted by Federal Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education (FBISE), Islamabad.

The students scored 100% pass in HSSC-II and more than 85% in HSSC-I.

Principal Nabila Kaukab stated that in the pre-medical group Noor-al-Huda was first with 982 marks, Fatima Saeed second with 948 and Amarah Raza third with 943. Haaniya Shahid (876), Haadiya Shahid (812), Fatima Bilal (787), Kulsum Sher (783), Kulsum Awal (770) are among the other high achievers in the pre-medical group.

In pre-engineering group, Imtinan Shahid was first (817) and



Imtinan Shahid Noor-al-Huda Yusra Sameer
Afan Shahid second (807). Erum Faisal Khan and Eman Anees were first and second in the ICS group with 787 and 758 marks, respectively.
In HSSC-I, among the high achievers are Hussain Bunyad (473), Mateen Ahmad (467), Ab-

dul Ahad (465), Muhammad Anas (457), Ayesha Parveen (426), Yusra Sameer (417) and Maryam Naeem (410).

School president M A Shahid and principal congratulated the teachers, parents and students for the good results.

Indian school teachers attend session on enhancing educational quality

As a part of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programme, DPS Modern Indian School organised the second edition of Synergy 2.0 - Building Bridges, under the aegis of CBSE Gulf Sahodaya Qatar chapter for the Indian schools in Qatar.

This initiative, aimed at fostering collaboration and enhancing educational quality, was attended by 16 Indian schools in Qatar. Principal Asna Nafees welcomed the guests and emphasised the importance of CPD for educators and students. She highlighted Qatar's leadership in advancing education, innovation, and technology as key opportunities for schools to thrive. She also encouraged teachers to embrace the practice of learning, unlearning and relearning and staying attuned to educational developments to create a vibrant and more impactful experience.



Chief guest Yasir Nainar, president of DPS MIS, highlighted the school's 25-year legacy of academic excellence and innovation, and urged attendees to view the sessions from a student's perspective to positively impact future leaders by fostering an engaging and nurturing learning environment.

The event featured sessions led by heads of departments from various Indian schools. Aligned with India's National Education Policy 2020 and Qatar National Vision 2030, topics focused on compe-

tenency-based learning, experiential learning, project-based learning, critical and creative thinking, life skills, formative assessments, skill-based and inclusive education, technology integration, interdisciplinary methods, and student-centred strategies.

A session highlighted effective methodologies for teaching Qatar history. With around 13 sessions conducted, the event underscored the importance of cross-school collaboration in enhancing educational quality and professional growth.

CPD session on Malayalam held

Bijily Mohanakumar, co-ordinator, Department of Malayalam, MES Indian School, presented a session on 'Recent changes in Language,' at a continuing professional development session as a part of the Synergy 2.0 Building Bridges - CPD 2024-25 at DPS Modern Indian School. Heads of Malayalam departments from various Indian schools in Qatar attended. The primary objectives were to improve students' language skills, stimulate their interest in language learning, evolve teaching methods to adapt to changing times, increase the use of activity-oriented teaching, enhance pronunciation and reading habits and to incorporate technology into teaching.



A G Noorani remembered

The Center for Indian Community (CIC), Rayyan Zone, organised a commemoration event for the renowned lawyer, constitutional expert, author and columnist Abdul Ghafoor Majeed Noorani (A G Noorani), who recently passed away in Mumbai. President Sudheer T K presided and Mohammed Rafeeq Thangal gave a memorial speech. Other officials present were Subul Abdul Aziz, Abdul Jaleel M M, A T Abdul Salam and K Haris.



Indonesians take part in Saturday Leisure Walk

The Indonesian embassy in Doha, in collaboration with the Indonesian University Alumni Association Qatar chapter (Iluni Ui Qatar chapter), organised a Saturday Leisure Walk recently, attended by about 100 Indonesian university alumni and their families residing in Qatar.

The event was part of the celebrations marking the 79th Independence Day of Indonesia and also as a prelude to the BNI-UI Half Marathon 2024, taking place tomorrow (September 8) in Indonesia.

The Saturday Leisure Walk started with various physical activities, including a leisurely walk, jogging and cycling, followed by a gathering at Al Dafna Park. Participants enjoyed camaraderie while indulging in traditional Indonesian cuisine in scenic surroundings. Indonesian ambassador Ridwan Hassan attended the event and expressed his support for such initiatives that foster unity and harmony among Indonesians in Qatar.



Indonesian ambassador Ridwan Hassan at the Saturday Leisure Walk.

"Exercise is a simple and enjoyable activity that benefits not only physical health but also mental well-being. I hope everyone feels encouraged to engage in more physical activity and main-

tain a healthy lifestyle," he said.

Ivan Rismi Polontalo, head of the Information, Social, and Cultural Affairs Section at the Indonesian embassy, highlighted the significance of the event,



Around 100 Indonesian university alumni and their families joined the event.

saying: "Organising community sports activities regularly is essential. They strengthen the bonds of brotherhood and camaraderie among the Indonesian diaspora, while also serving as an opportunity to promote Indonesia to the international commu-

nity in Qatar."

Iluni Ui Qatar chapter chairman Sudirman R Nurhadi, said: "On behalf of Iluni Ui Qatar chapter, we extend our heartfelt congratulations on the 79th Independence Day of the Republic of Indonesia and our best

wishes for the successful organisation of the BNI-UI Half Marathon 2024. We also express our deepest gratitude to the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia in Doha, Qatar, for its continued support in helping us organise this community event."

Ipaq organises badminton tournament



The Indian Pharmacists Association Qatar (Ipaq) conducted a badminton tournament as part of the Ipaq Sports Fiesta 2024. Sathar and Akhil Surendran claimed the championship title, while Shanavas Badera and Shanavas Kozhikkal were runners-up and Shakeel and Jamal, were third. Indian Community Benevolent Forum advisory board chairman S A M Basheer inaugurated. In the women's single badminton tournament, Kairunnisa was the winner, Mubassira Majeed was second and Anisifa finished third. Jaffar, Shanawas Ponnoli, Abdul Rahiman Eriyal, Shanib, Shamnadh, Shanawas Kozhikkal, Hanif Peral, Sajeer, Ashraf Nellikkunnu, Amir Ali, Shanawas Bedira, Sulaiman Askar, Ahmad, Sameer K I, Saleem, Althaf, Nawas, Prasad and Shefin were the organisers.



Winners in the women's section of Ipaq badminton tournament.

Expat forum donates books to ICC library



Pravasi Welfare and Cultural Forum donated books to the new library at Indian Cultural Centre (ICC) in Doha. State president R Chandramohan handed over the books to ICC president A P Manikantan. Those present included ICC vice-president Subramanya Hebbagalu, general secretary Mohan Kumar, secretary Abraham Joseph, managing committee members

Arshad Ali, Sajeev Satyaseelan, Nandini Abbagouni, M V Sathyan, Gargiben Satya, Indian Community Benevolent Forum secretary Muhammad Kunhi, Pravasi Welfare vice-presidents Majeed Ali, Rasheed Ali, general secretaries Shafi Moozhikal, Ahmed Shafi, state committee members Muhammad Rafi, Rabih Zaman and Shuaib Abdur Rahman.

PISQ students shine in Cambridge exams

Pakistan International School Qatar (PISQ) has once again demonstrated its commitment to academic excellence, with the students of its Cambridge Branch achieving over 160 A* and

A grades in the 2023-24 Cambridge examination series. This remarkable accomplishment solidifies PISQ's standing as a leading institution known for its high academic standards, a state-

ment said. Principal Syed Asif Ali Shah expressed his heartfelt congratulations to the students, parents and teachers, acknowledging their collective efforts in achieving this milestone. "At PISQ, we

are dedicated to providing our students with the best possible learning environment, preparing them for a lifetime of success," he stated. Dr Muhemmed Aejaz, ambas-

sador of Pakistan to Qatar, along with deputy head of mission Syed Mustafa Rabbani, also shared their pride in this achievement. They praised the students for their hard work, recognised the unwaver-

ing commitment of the teachers, and extended their gratitude to the parents for entrusting PISQ with their children's academic and personal development, the statement said.



Bazm-e-Urdu Qatar hosts literary gathering



Bazm-e-Urdu Qatar (BUQ) held a programme that brought together poets, writers, and literature enthusiasts from the Urdu-speaking community in various walks of life. The programme started with a recitation from the Holy Qur'an by Isha Masoom Saifi. Dr Nadeem Jilani Danish from the Department of Paediatrics at Sidra Medicine, presided. Dr Shahabuddin, a scientist from Hamad Medical Corporation, was the chief guest. Urdu Qatar vice-president Athar Azmi and Dr Jawed Batish were the guests of honour. A highlight was the book launch of Dr Batish. The gather-

ing also welcomed two new poets, Masoom Saifi and Azhar Azmi, into the Bazm community. The formal poetry session or mushaira brought together members from almost all prominent Urdu organisations in Qatar, creating a unified celebration of the language and its literary traditions. Dr Danish, Dr Batish, Saifi, Athar Azmi, Azhar Azmi, Anmol Ittefaq, Raqim Azami, Rashid Alam Rashid, Azfar Gardezi, Ashfaq Deshmukh, Maqsood Anwar Maqsood, Zawwar Hussain Zaer, Asif Shafi, Mansoor Azami, Ejaz Haider, Ahmed Ashfaq, Nadeem Mahir and Aziz Nabeel presented their works. Each poet brought their distinct

voice to the gathering, showcasing the depth and diversity of Urdu poetry. The audience was treated to a range of poetic styles and themes, from traditional ghazals to modern free verse, reflecting the rich tapestry of Urdu literature. The lineup of poets, representing various professions and backgrounds, underscored the unifying power of Urdu poetry. It demonstrated how the love for literature transcends professional boundaries, bringing together individuals from fields as diverse as medicine, science and the arts. BUQ general secretary Ahmed Ashfaq and team ensured the success of the event.

ICC felicitates actress Meera Jasmine



Indian Cultural Centre (ICC), under the aegis of the Embassy of India, felicitated popular south Indian film actress Meera Jasmine in Doha recently. Community leaders and members were present.

ICC honours teachers



Indian Cultural Centre (ICC), under the aegis of the Embassy of India, hosted a felicitation ceremony on the eve of Teachers' Day to honour 46 long-serving teachers nominated by 17 CBSE schools in Qatar. Embassy's deputy chief of mission Sandeep Kumar appreciated teachers for their contribution and hoped their efforts would be acknowledged by the society in general. Various cultural programmes were presented. ICC's school activities head Shantanu Deshpande explained the concept of the occasion. General secretary Mohan Kumar, welcomed the audience. President A P Manikantan highlighted the contribution of teachers in the success of the students. Vice-president Subramanya Hebbagelu proposed a vote of thanks.

Division 'G' conducts workshop



Division 'G' of District 116 Toastmasters held a workshop titled, 'Next Level Toastmaster of the Day.' Led by Diana May Tangente, the event was a blend of social networking, interactive sessions and practical learning, a statement said. A team comprising Dennis, Leo, Fritz, Shwetha and Habeeb organised the event.

New club holds inaugural meeting



The Winners Toastmasters Club, a contest-based club under Division G in District 116, has officially chartered as the first club of the 2024-25 year. Under the leadership of division director Shoba Raj and area director Feroz, the club held its inaugural meeting on August 24. Vinod K Pushorom gave a keynote speech titled "Together We Can." A speech contest featured Ajmal, Fawad Kasu, Roshan, Pramod Shetty, Lufti Karkar, Manjusha Kale, Rajini Naren, Shayam and Yugal. The contest chairs were Feroz and Sujitha. Shwetha was the master of ceremonies.



Rights group welcomes release of Ethiopian opposition figures

AFP
Nairobi

Human Rights Watch yesterday welcomed the release of several Ethiopian opposition politicians from the restive Oromia region after four years behind bars. Those released belong to the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), which considers itself the mouthpiece of the Oromo people, who account for about a third of Ethiopia's 120m people

but have long complained of marginalisation.

The OLF renounced armed struggle in 2018, but says Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's government has closed many of its offices, hindered participation in elections and imprisoned several of its leaders. "We are pleased to share the news of the release on bail of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) leaders and officers who have been incarcerated since 2020," HRW said.

It named those released as Abdi

Raggasa, Michael Boran, Kenana Ayana, Lammii Beenya, Gada Oljirraa, Gada Gabisa and Dawit Abdataa. It did not provide further details on their release, and the government has not commented. "This development brings relief to their families, our organisation, and the broader Oromo community inside and in the diaspora," the OLF said in a separate statement.

It added that the individuals had been detained "for exercising their legitimate political rights"

and had "been acquitted (in) court several times". Laetitia Bader, deputy Africa director of HRW – which has campaigned for their release – welcomed the news.

"After ignoring multiple court orders calling for their release, Ethiopian authorities finally freed 7 Oromo opposition figures who were unjustly held without charge for the last four years," she posted on X. The United States Bureau of African Affairs also welcomed their release. "We remain ready to support negotiations aimed at

ending the violence and promoting durable peace for all Ethiopians," it said on X.

The men were among a clutch of opposition figures detained by the Ethiopian government in 2020, according to their party. HRW urged their release in July of last year. "Police authorities are making a mockery of Ethiopia's justice system through the prolonged and cruel detention without charge of the Oromo opposition politicians," Bader said at the time.

According to HRW, the men had

not been charged and a number of them had been moved between multiple locations, with their families unsure of their condition or whereabouts for weeks and sometimes months. When the OLF renounced armed struggle in 2018, the move prompted the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) to split from the party. Federal forces have been fighting OLA rebels in Oromia – Ethiopia's most populous region – ever since, and several attempts to strike a peace agreement have failed.

West Africa flooding displaces nearly 950,000 people: charity

AFP
Abidjan

Severe flooding in West Africa has displaced nearly 950,000 people and disrupted children's education at the start of the school year, international charity Save the Children said yesterday.

"Hundreds of thousands of children now displaced from their homes are facing disease, hunger from crop destruction, and disruption to their education, as schools have become crowded with fleeing families or damaged in the floods," the NGO said. Save the Children said around 950,000 people had been

displaced – 649,184 in Niger, 225,000 in Nigeria and 73,778 in Mali. Niger's government says more than 700,000 people have been left homeless and 273 people died since the rainy season started in June.

Neighbouring Nigeria has meanwhile seen 29 of its 36 states – mostly in the north – hit by rising waters of the River Niger and its major Benue tributary with the country listing 200 deaths, Save the Children said.

"According to Nigerian government data, over 115,265 hectares of farmland have also been damaged, in a country with already high rates of food insecurity," the NGO said. The agency said one in every six children

across Nigeria "faced hunger in June-August this year – a 25% increase on the same period last year" in Mali, whose government declared a state national disaster, more than half of those displaced are children, the NGO revealed. Save the Children said climate change was seeing cases of extreme weather and its consequences grow ever more serious and frequent, with Africa suffering disproportionately.

"These countries are already ravaged by conflict and insecurity, making it even harder to respond, said Vishna Shah-Little, regional advocacy, media and communications director for the agency in Western and Central Africa.

Congo president in Abu Dhabi



UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed al-Nahyan meeting with the President of the Democratic Republic of Congo Felix Tshisekedi at Al-Shati Palace yesterday.

Kenya school dorm fire kills at least 17 boys, 70 missing

AFP
Endarasha

At least 17 young boys were killed and 70 missing after a fire ripped through a primary school dormitory in central Kenya, officials said yesterday, leaving distraught relatives desperate for news of their loved ones.

The blaze at the Hillside Endarasha Academy in Nyeri county began around midnight, engulfing rooms where more than 150 boys were sleeping. "We still have 70 kids that are unaccounted – that does not mean they are perished or they are injured... the word is that they are unaccounted for," Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua told reporters at the scene, adding that 27 children were in hospital.

Police said earlier that 17 children had been confirmed dead. "The bodies recovered at the scene were burnt beyond recognition," national police spokesperson Resila Onyango told AFP. But Gachagua said the number of dead was not verified, urging relatives and members of the community to help in tracing the missing.

He described the scene as "gory" and said painstaking investigative work using DNA would be required to help identify the victims. The government said the dormitory housed boys between grades four to eight, meaning the victims were aged between nine and 12 or 13.

Tensions were rising among families gathered at the school for news, and many broke down into wailing and tears after officials took them to see the charred bodies in the destroyed dorm. "Please look for my kid. He can't be dead. I want my child," one woman said in distress as she left the school.

The cause of the inferno was not yet known but Kenya's National Gender and Equality Commission said initial reports indicated the dorm was "overcrowded, in violation of safety standards" and called

for an immediate inquiry. "We parents are in panic mode," said Timothy Kinuthia, who has been hunting for news of his 13-year-old boy. "We have been here since 5am and we have been told nothing."

AFP footage showed the blackened shell of the dormitory, with its corrugated iron roof completely collapsed. The destroyed building was sealed off by yellow police tape, with officers stationed at all access points.

The school, which reportedly catered to some 800 children, is located in a semi-rural area around 170km north of the capital Nairobi. An AFP journalist saw survivors wrapped in blue blankets against the cold, being loaded into school buses. Alice Wanjiku said she had come from Nairobi to search for her orphaned nephew. "We have not heard anything since morning. I will camp here until I find our baby. He is the joy of our family and I hope to find him."

Speaking at the scene, Interior Minister Kithure Kindiki said some of the pupils had ended up in neighbouring homes. "There are some children who are alive and well, but they are of course traumatised and they are in the hands of those who gave them refuge last night," said Kindiki.

President William Ruto, currently in Beijing for a China-Africa summit, expressed his condolences in a post on X. He instructed officials to "thoroughly investigate this horrific incident", and promised that those responsible will be "held to account".

The Kenyan Red Cross said it was on the ground assisting a multi-agency response team and providing psychosocial support. There have been numerous school fires in Kenya and across East Africa. In 2016, nine students were killed by a fire at a girls' high school in the sprawling slum neighbourhood of Kibera in Nairobi.

In 2001, 67 pupils were killed in an arson attack on their dormitory



This aerial view shows the destruction left on the Nyeri county's Hillside Endarasha Academy dorm room in Nyeri county after a fire broke out.



Parents of pupils at the Hillside Endarasha Academy.

at the Kyanguli Mixed Secondary School David Mutiso in Kenya's southern Machakos district. Two pupils were charged with murder, and the headmaster and deputy of the school were convicted of negligence.

In 1994, 40 school children were burned alive and 47 injured in a fire that ravaged the Shauritanga

Secondary School for Girls in the northern region of Kilimanjaro in Tanzania.

In 2022, a blaze ravaged a school for the blind in eastern Uganda. Eleven pupils died after they were trapped inside their shared bedroom because the building had been burglar-proofed, government ministers said at the time.



A woman is assisted as she reacts after visiting the burned dorm room at the Nyeri county's Hillside Endarasha Academy.

Guinea anti-junta protests leave two dead: organisers

Two people died in protests against Guinea's ruling junta, the organisers have said, as the government yesterday urged the courts to take action against the dissidents. The opposition alliance the Living Forces of Guinea (FVG) had called for a peaceful protest on Thursday to denounce the junta's crackdown on dissent and to demand a return to civilian rule by the end of the year.

It marked three years to the day since the military seized power in a coup. While the protest gathered little momentum, the FVG published a statement decrying the death of a 17-year-old boy, who they said had been shot by defence and security forces on Thursday. The opposition coalition also said a woman had met the same fate a day earlier. Guinea's opposition faces brutal repression by the military-led authorities, who banned all demonstrations in 2022 after taking power on September 5, 2021.

"Those who hide behind the concept of 'The Living Forces' are adopting a posture of systematic confrontation, with a well-known strategy of division and intimidation", government spokesman Ousmane Gaoual Diallo said in a statement published on X.

He accused the opponents of "intimidating" and "manipulating" young people, and urged the courts to be "inflexible" against acts of dissidence. "Those who choose to disrupt public order and follow the path of violence will have to answer for it", he said. —AFP

Ugandan athlete's killing revives painful memories for domestic violence survivor

Moureen Atieno Omolo was unable to sleep for days after hearing about the deadly attack on Ugandan Olympian Rebecca Cheptegei, whose former boyfriend doused her in petrol and set her ablaze on Sunday. Every time the now 36-year-old Kenyan closed her eyes, memories of her own nightmarish marriage came flooding back.

Cheptegei, 33, who competed in her first Olympic Games in Paris

last month, is the third elite sports-woman to be killed in Kenya since October 2021. Her death has cast a fresh spotlight on domestic violence in the East African nation.

"Rebecca's death brings into focus the scourge of violence that women around the world are subjected to, often from those they should trust most," United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Executive Director Natalia Kanem said on Friday. Globally, a woman is killed by someone

in her own family every 11 minutes, according to a 2023 UN Women study. Cheptegei's distraught father, Joseph Cheptegei, told Reuters that the family was still in shock. "We haven't gotten around to filing murder charges," he said.

The attacker, who also sustained burns and is in hospital, was his daughter's former boyfriend, he said, adding that the pair had split in February this year. On Friday, Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo said the French

capital would name a sports facility in honour of Cheptegei, who finished 44th in her Olympic marathon debut there last month.

Kenya has a grim record on violence against women. Nearly 34% of Kenyan girls and women aged 15-49 years have suffered physical violence, according to government data from 2022, with married women at particular risk. The 2022 survey found that 41% of married women had faced violence. A report by UN

Women and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime said that in 2022, African countries collectively recorded the largest number of killings of women, both in absolute terms and relative to the size of the continent's female population.

Orphaned in her teens, Omolo was married at the age of 15 to a man aged 22. The abuse began almost immediately, she told Reuters, eventually escalating to the point of him gouging out her left eye and slashing

her left hand with a machete in 2018. The attack and his threats to kill their three children led her to abandon the marriage and file a case against him. "I should have left him years ago when he first threatened me," she said. "He took away my self-confidence." Cheptegei's killing has prompted calls for stronger action against domestic violence. "We are failing our women," Zaima Kombo of Amnesty International Kenya said. —Reuters



Hunter Biden and his wife Melissa Cohen leave court after his guilty plea in his trial on tax evasion in Los Angeles. -AFP

Hunter Biden pleads guilty to charges of tax evasion

Joe Biden's son Hunter pleaded guilty in a tax evasion trial on Thursday, without reaching the deal he had sought with prosecutors, in a case that has been an embarrassment for the US president.

The 54-year-old admitted nine counts related to failing to pay \$1.4mn in taxes over the past decade, money that prosecutors said he splurged instead on luxury living, sex workers and a drug habit.

The pleas came on the day jury selection for a trial had been due to start, and hours after Biden had offered to plead guilty in the hope of striking a deal that might keep him out of prison.

However, no deal materialised and Biden made the pleas in open court.

Judge Mark Scarsi told Biden that he faces up to 17 years in prison and up to \$450,000 in penalties. He set sentencing for December 16.

A trial had been expected to rehash sordid details of a life that the defendant and his family - including the president - have long acknowledged had gone off the rails.

"I will not subject my family to more pain, more invasions of privacy and needless embarrassment," US media reported Biden saying in a statement. "Prosecutors were focused not on justice but on dehumanising me for my actions during my addiction."

Biden has already spent a chunk of 2024 in court, having been convicted in Delaware of lying about his drug use when he bought a gun - an act that is a felony.

He has yet to be sentenced for that crime, and could face up to 25 years imprisonment.

President Biden has the power to pardon his son, but has said he would not do so.

White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre told reporters on Thursday that his position had not changed.

"It is still very much a 'no,'" she said.

Lawyers for Biden have said he was only being brought before the court because of who he is.

"They want to slime him because that is the whole purpose," Biden's attorney Mark Geragos reportedly said during an August hearing in which he accused prosecutors of attempted character assassination.

Biden's defence team has argued that the non-payment of taxes was an oversight in a life wrought chaotic by a spiralling drug addiction and the trauma of losing his older brother, Beau, to a brain tumour in 2015.

Biden has paid the back taxes, as well as penalties levied by authorities, and had previously reached a plea deal that would have kept him out of jail.

That agreement fell apart at the last minute, and Biden is understood to have been trying to reach another since then.

That has been difficult for prosecutors, whose every move in this election year is being scrutinised by Republicans, who charge the defendant is being treated leniently because he is the president's son.

Hunter Biden has for years been a foil for his father's political opponents, who have sought - without producing evidence - to smear the family as a group of criminals who have gained wealth and power because of Joe Biden's career.

The elder Biden's withdrawal from the presidential race in favour of Kamala Harris has taken much of the zeal out of the Republican drive to make an example out of his son.

In his statement, Biden, who lives in Malibu, said his drug addiction was "not an excuse, but it is an explanation for some of my failures at issue in this case."

"I have been clean and sober for more than five years because I have had the love and support of my family," he said.

Biden's lawyer Abbe Lowell told reporters afterward that Biden might appeal his sentence. He did not answer when asked why Biden waited until the trial's opening day to plead guilty. -AFP/Reuters

US bat decline triggered pesticide surge, 1,300 baby deaths: study

By Issam Ahmed
AFP

A collapse in North America's bat population led to a surge in pesticide use by farmers as an alternative way to protect crops from insects - in turn triggering a rise in infant mortalities, a study revealed on Thursday.

The paper, published in *Science*, provides concrete evidence supporting predictions that global biodiversity decline will have severe consequences for humans.

"Ecologists have been warning us that we're losing species left and right ... and that will potentially have catastrophic impacts on humanity," author Eyal Frank, of the University of Chicago, told AFP.

"However, there was not a whole lot of empirical validation to those predictions

because it is very hard to go and manipulate an ecosystem at a very large spatial scale," added the environmental economist.

For his work, Frank took advantage of a "natural experiment" - the sudden emergence of a deadly bat disease - to quantify the benefits that bug-eating bats provide in pest control.

White-nose syndrome (WNS), caused by an invasive fungus, began spreading across the United States from New York in 2006 - killing bats by waking them during hibernation in winter, when they lack insects to feed on, and trying to stay warm saps their energy.

The loss of millions of bats shocked the ecosystem.

To investigate, Frank tracked the spread of WNS in the eastern US and compared insecticide use in affected counties versus unaffected ones.

He found a massive 31% increase in pesticide use where bat populations had declined.

Given the link between pesticides and poor health outcomes, Frank examined whether increased pesticide use correlated with higher infant mortality rates.

With more pesticides, the infant mortality rate rose by nearly 8%, translating to 1,334 additional infant deaths since the bat disease took hold - with contaminated water and air likely serving as pathways for the chemicals to enter humans.

Frank emphasised that the staggered spread of the wildlife disease supports his inference that the bat die-off directly caused the increase in infant mortality, rather than it merely being a coincidence that could be explained away by other rural hardships or factors, such as drug abuse or poverty.

Any other explanation would have to align with the same expansion path and timing of WNS.

"We need better data on the presence of pesticides in the environment," Frank said, adding that his findings also underscore the need to protect bats.

Vaccines are being developed against WNS, but bats are also being threatened by habitat loss, climate change and wind farms.

The new work adds to the body of evidence showing the cascading impacts of wildlife loss on ecosystems.

A recent study found that reintroducing wolves in Wisconsin reduced vehicle collisions with deer as wolves establish their patrols along highways.

In Central America, declines in amphibians and snakes have led to spikes in human malaria cases.

Judge accuses Trump lawyers of bid to prevent release of new evidence

Reuters
Washington

A US judge has accused Donald Trump's lawyers of trying to stop potentially damaging evidence of his effort to overturn his 2020 election loss from becoming public before the November 5 election, while acknowledging that the case would not go to trial before then.

US District Judge Tanya Chutkan also gave prosecutors what is likely their last chance to divulge evidence in the case before the election, ordering Special Counsel Jack Smith to respond by September 26 to a ruling from the US Supreme Court that former presidents have broad immunity from criminal prosecution.

Thomas Windom, a prosecutor in Smith's office, told Chutkan that prosecutors are prepared to reveal potentially new evidence in their filing to argue that their remaining case against Trump is not affected by the high court's ruling.

Republican former president Trump will face Democratic Vice-President Kamala Harris in the November election.

Trump, who did not attend the hearing, pleaded not guilty to four criminal charges accusing him of using false claims of voter fraud to undermine the election results and thwart certification of his loss to Democratic President Joe Biden.

A revised indictment obtained by Smith in August preserved the same four charges first brought last year, but dropped allegations that the Supreme Court found could not remain part of the case.

If Trump wins, he is likely to direct the Justice Department to drop the charges.

At Thursday's hearing, Chutkan opted not to set a trial date, noting that the immunity issue would likely wind up back before the Supreme Court.

Trump lawyer John Lauro urged Chutkan not to allow prosecutors to publicly air their evidence, arguing that it would be unfair to do so at a "sensitive time" ahead of the election.

His argument prompted a rebuke from Chutkan. "It strikes me that what you're trying to do is affect presentation of evidence in this case so as not to impinge on an election," Chutkan told Lauro, adding that she is "not concerned with the electoral schedule".

Lauro said Trump's defence should first move to throw out the charges based on an argument that the grand jury that brought the revised indictment against Trump last month heard evidence barred by the Supreme Court's ruling.

The case had been delayed for months while Trump pursued his immunity claim.

He has argued that the prosecution as well as other legal cases against him are politically motivated attempts to undermine his presidential campaign.

The Supreme Court ruled in a 6-3 decision in July that former presidents are presumed to be immune from criminal prosecution for actions taken as part of their official responsibilities as president.

The court directed Chutkan to comb through the indictment to determine if any other allegations are covered by immunity and must be tossed out.

Chutkan ordered Trump to respond to prosecutors' arguments by October 17.

She said she would determine later whether further proceedings are necessary.



New York judge delays Trump sentencing until after election

AFP/Reuters
New York

The New York judge who presided over Donald Trump's hush money trial has delayed sentencing until after November's US presidential election.

The Republican White House candidate had been scheduled to be sentenced on September 18 for falsifying business records during a scheme to silence an adult entertainment actress.

Instead, Judge Juan Merchan postponed it to November 26 - well past the November 5 election in which Trump faces Vice-President Kamala Harris.

Trump's lawyers had sought the delay.

Trump was convicted in May of 34 counts of doctoring business records to cover up hush money payments to the actress to stop her from publishing her account of an alleged encounter on the eve

of the 2016 election.

He was originally scheduled to be sentenced on July 11 but that was delayed after the Supreme Court ruled that a former US president has broad immunity from criminal prosecution.

Trump's lawyers had asked that his New York conviction be dismissed following the Supreme Court immunity ruling.

Merchan said he would rule on the dismissal motion on November 12 and delayed sentencing until after the election.

"This is not a decision this court makes lightly but it is the decision which in this court's view, best advances the interests of justice," he said.

Trump in theory faces up to four years in prison on each count.

However, the former president is considered more likely to receive probation.

The Supreme Court's 6-3 ruling, which related to a separate criminal case Trump faces, found

that presidents cannot be criminally prosecuted for their official acts, and that evidence of presidents' official actions cannot be used to help prove criminal cases involving unofficial actions.

Prosecutors argued their case involved Trump's personal conduct, not official acts, so there was no reason to overturn the verdict.

However, they took no position on Trump's request to delay sentencing, saying in an August 16 filing that they deferred to Merchan on the question.

The prosecutors said an appellate court could delay the sentencing anyway to give itself time to consider Trump's arguments, a move that they said would be "disruptive".

They also said Trump's court appearances required significant security and logistical planning and said there was a risk preparations could be made for his sentencing only to be called off.

Father and son charged in US school attack that left 4 dead

AFP
Washington

A 14-year-old boy accused of shooting four people dead at a US high school and his father, who allegedly bought him the gun for Christmas, appeared in court yesterday to face murder charges.

Lawyers for Colt Gray, a freshman at Apalachee High School in Winder, Georgia, and his father Colin Gray, 54, declined to seek bond and they were ordered to remain in custody.

Judge Currie Mingleddorf read out the charges and rights to the thin, dyed-blond-haired boy, who was dressed in a green shirt and khaki trousers, with shackles at the wrists and ankles.

Mingleddorf told the boy he faces four charges of felony murder punishable by death, before later correcting himself and saying that he would not be eligible for the death penalty because he is a juvenile.

The maximum penalty is life in prison without parole.

Gray is charged with shooting dead two fellow students, also aged 14, and two teachers at his high school on Wednesday.

Nine other people - most of them children - were wounded. Gray's father appeared before the same judge shortly afterward, dressed in a black and white striped prison uniform and rocking back and forth nervously at the defendant's table.

He faces involuntary manslaughter and second-degree murder charges.

Earlier this year, the parents of another teenage school shooter were convicted of manslaughter charges, but Colin Gray is believed to be the first parent to be charged with murder over a shooting carried out by their child.

His lawyer also declined to seek bond and he will remain behind bars for the time being.

Relatives of some of the victims of Wednesday's shooting were in the public gallery during the two defendants' brief court appearances.

According to US media reports, the elder Gray bought the gun used in the shooting, an AR-

15 style assault rifle, for his son as a gift last Christmas.

Georgia Bureau of Investigation director Chris Hosey said the father had "knowingly" allowed his troubled son to possess a weapon.

According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the sheriff's office in Jackson County had interviewed the then-13-year-old boy and his father in May 2023, after receiving several anonymous tips about online threats to commit a school shooting.

"The father stated he had hunting guns in the house, but the subject did not have unsupervised access to them," the FBI said in a statement, and his son "denied making the threats online".

"At that time, there was no probable cause for arrest or to take any additional law enforcement action on the local, state, or federal levels," it said.

School shootings are a shockingly regular occurrence in the United States, where guns outnumber people and regulations on purchasing even powerful military-style rifles are lax.

Parental responsibility in mass shootings has come increasingly under the spotlight in recent months.

"How could you have an assault rifle, a weapon in a house, not locked up and knowing your kid knows where it is?" President Joe Biden asked on Thursday. "You've got to hold parents accountable if they let their child have access to these guns."

In April, the parents of a teenager who killed four people in a Michigan school shooting were sentenced to 10-15 years in prison, in an unprecedented and closely watched case.

Jennifer and James Crumbley were the first parents of a school shooter convicted of involuntary manslaughter in the United States for the actions of their child.

Polls show a majority of voters favour stricter controls on the purchase of firearms, but the powerful National Rifle Association gun lobby is opposed to additional restrictions and lawmakers have repeatedly failed to act.

Panama deports 130 Indian migrants under deal with US

AFP
Veracruz

Panama has deported 130 Indian irregular migrants who had entered the country via the inhospitable Darien jungle, under a deal on repatriations signed with the US in July.

This was the first such expulsion outside of the Americas under the deal, and the fourth in total.

Washington pledged \$6mn for migrant repatriations from the Central American nation in the hopes of reducing irregular crossings at its own southern border.

Panama's director of migration, Roger Mojica, told reporters that the Indians were deported yesterday on a charter flight to New Delhi for "irregular migration".

At the same press conference, US Security Attaché for Central America Marlen Pineiro said that Washington is "very grateful to the government of Panama for all this support", adding that: "Irregular migration cannot continue."

The Darien Gap between Colombia and Panama has become a key corridor for migrants travelling overland from South America through Central America and Mexico to the United States.

Despite the dangers, including



Handcuffed migrants pose for a photo while being transported in a bus, before boarding a deportation flight bound for New Delhi, at Panama Pacifico Airport in Veracruz. -Reuters

attacks by criminal gangs, more than half a million undocumented migrants - mostly Venezuelans -

crossed the Darien last year.

Transit countries such as Panama and Mexico have come under

increased pressure from Washington to tackle the highly contentious migration issue in a US election year.

The July deal makes provision for a first phase of deporting migrants with a criminal record, but could see the repatriation of any person entering Panama through the notoriously dangerous and rugged Darien Gap region.

It was signed the same day that Panamanian President Jose Raul Mulino took office, after a campaign in which he pledged to crack down on Darien Gap crossings.

With yesterday's deportation, Panama has expelled 219 migrants in two weeks.



COMMENT

US, China 'narrowing' rift on climate finance: envoy

China and the US still have "some differences" on issues such as climate finance but have made progress in narrowing them during talks this week, US climate envoy John Podesta said in Beijing yesterday. "Notwithstanding some friction in our bilateral relationship, we can find places to collaborate for the good of our people and of our climate," Podesta told reporters after meetings with his Chinese counterpart Liu Zhenmin and the Chinese foreign minister, Wang Yi. Climate co-operation between the world's top two emitters of greenhouse gases has helped build consensus for global pacts such as the 2015 Paris Agreement.

PEOPLE

Vietnam death row tycoon faces new fraud charges

A Vietnamese property tycoon sentenced to death in a \$27bn fraud case will face a second trial for fraud and money laundering this month, state media said yesterday. Truong My Lan, chair of major developer Van Thinh Phat, was found guilty in April of swindling cash from Saigon Commercial Bank (SCB) over a decade in one of the biggest corruption cases in history. Lan and 33 accomplices will now face a one-month trial starting September 19 in Ho Chi Minh City on charges of fraud, "money laundering and illegal cross-border trafficking of cash", the city's legal newspaper quoted the municipal court as saying.

CRIME

Indonesia arrests seven over Pope 'terror threats'

Indonesia has arrested seven people for making "terror threats" online against Pope Francis during his visit to the country this week, police said. The 87-year-old pontiff made Southeast Asia's biggest economy the first stop of an arduous Asia-Pacific tour, delivering a message of religious unity to counter extremism and intolerance. The suspects were arrested in cities around Jakarta, and the provinces of West Sumatra and Bangka Belitung, Indonesia's elite counter-terrorism unit Densus 88 spokesman Aswin Siregar said. They are accused of posting statements and images online that threatened bomb attacks on the Pope's public meetings in Jakarta.

OFFBEAT

Petrol can saves Solomon Islands castaway

A shipwrecked Solomon Islander has survived a "full day and night" adrift in the South Pacific by clutching onto an emptied petrol can, police said yesterday. The Royal Solomon Islands Police Force said the 25-year-old and another man were travelling from the capital Honiara when they "experienced rough seas and as a result their boat sank". In dire straits, the man emptied a petrol can and used it as a float, surviving for a "full day and night at sea". He eventually washed up on an island more than 30kms from the capital. The skipper of the boat, a 54-year-old male, is still missing.

Super Typhoon Yagi slams into China's Hainan, disrupting lives of millions

Reuters
Hong Kong/Beijing

Asia's strongest storm this year, Super Typhoon Yagi, landed in China's Hainan yesterday, bringing violent gales and heavy rain that triggered power outages, paralysing the tourist island province known as "China's Hawaii".

Packing maximum sustained winds of 234km per hour near its centre, Yagi registers as the world's second-most powerful tropical cyclone in 2024 so far, after the Category 5 Atlantic hurricane Beryl, and the most severe in the Pacific basin this year.

After more than doubling in strength since killing 16 people in the northern Philippines earlier this week, Yagi slammed into the city of Wenchang in Hainan yesterday afternoon.

A little more than an hour after Yagi's arrival, Hainan saw power outages that affected 830,000 households in the province, the official news agency Xinhua said.

The provincial power supply department had put together a 7,000-member emergency team that would embark on repairs as soon as conditions permitted, Xinhua added.

By yesterday night, power to 260,000 households had been restored.

Ahead of Yagi's arrival, the island known for its sandy beaches

and glitzy hotels had cancelled flights and ferries, shuttered businesses, and told its population of more than 10mn to refrain from going out.

The typhoon had already shut schools, businesses and transport links in Hong Kong, Macau and Guangdong province as well as airports in Vietnam, which it is predicted to hit, along with Laos, over the weekend.

Yagi was expected to make a second landfall in the city of Xuwu in Guangdong later yesterday.

More than 574,500 people had been evacuated from areas at risk by noon, more than two-thirds of them from the Guangdong city of Zhanjiang.

In the financial hub of Hong Kong, the stock exchange was shuttered while schools remained closed.

Hong Kong's airport authority said operations had largely returned to normal after 50 flights were cancelled on Thursday, and the city of over 7mn people also lowered its typhoon warning by a notch after midday, as Yagi moved west towards Vietnam.

The world's longest sea crossing, the main bridge linking Hong Kong with Macau and Zhuhai in Guangdong, also reopened yesterday afternoon after being shut since Thursday.

However, intense rainbands associated with Yagi will still bring heavy squally showers to the territory. Neighbouring Shenzhen is-

sued the highest alert for rains.

Yagi is the most severe storm to land in Hainan since 2014, when Typhoon Rammasun slammed into the island province as a Category Five tropical cyclone. Rammasun killed 88 people in Hainan, Guangdong, Guangxi and Yunnan and caused economic losses of more than 44bn yuan (\$6.25bn).

"The typhoon has not been as severe as initially feared and has so far caused minimal damage as the typhoon made landfall in Hainan (and not Guangdong)," said Qizhao, a banana farmer at the village of Gaozhou, who was initially worried Yagi could destroy months of hard work.

He said villagers had been reinforcing their trees with poles to protect them from the wind.

Still, Qizhao was not letting his guard down until after the typhoon has passed.

Formed over the warm seas east of the Philippines and following a similar path to Rammasun, Yagi arrived in China as a Category Four typhoon, ushering in winds strong enough to overturn vehicles, uproot trees and severely damage roads, bridges and buildings.

Its landfall in Hainan is rare, as most typhoons landing on the duty-free island are classified as weak. From 1949 to 2023, 106 typhoons landed in Hainan but only nine were classified as super typhoons.

No fatalities have been reported so far in Hainan.



Thailand's Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra poses with her cabinet members at the Government House ahead of a royal oath-taking ceremony for her cabinet in Bangkok, Thailand, yesterday.

Thailand swears in Shinawatra heiress as youngest premier

AFP
Bangkok

Paetongtarn Shinawatra, the heiress of Thailand's most famous political dynasty, was sworn in as prime minister yesterday, capping a month of turmoil in which her predecessor was thrown out of office and the main opposition party dissolved.

Paetongtarn, the youngest daughter of controversial former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra, took the oath in a closed-door ceremony with King Maha Vajiralongkorn around 6.15pm (1115GMT), officially becoming Thailand's youngest prime minister.

The 38-year-old is the third member of the Shinawatra political dynasty to lead the coun-

try in the past 23 years, following her father and her aunt, Yingluck Shinawatra. The king congratulated her new cabinet, saying in a speech broadcast on television news: "I trust that you will perform your duties with excellence."

Paetongtarn replaces Srettha Thavisin, from her Pheu Thai party, after his shock dismissal in mid-August by the kingdom's Constitutional Court for appointing a cabinet minister with a criminal conviction.

She takes the helm of Southeast Asia's second-largest economy with growth and investment stagnating as political instability lingers.

Her 36-member cabinet includes eight women, a record, according to public broadcaster Thai PBS. Paetongtarn, a relative newcomer to politics, urged her party's enemies on Thursday

to give her a chance. "Please be kind to me, please don't throw any lawsuits on me, I am trying my best," she told reporters. A power struggle between Thaksin and the country's conservative royalist-military establishment has dominated Thai politics for decades.

Thaksin, a 75-year-old telcoms billionaire and one-time Manchester City owner, is loved by millions of poorer Thais for his social welfare policies in the early 2000s.

However, he has long been despised by elites who accuse him of corruption and wanting to smash Thailand's social order.

Parties linked to Thaksin finished first in every election from 2001 until last year but their governments were regularly upended by court orders and military coups.

Puffed up with pride: 10-year-old passes deadly fish test

A Japanese 10-year-old has become the youngest person authorised to prepare "fugu" pufferfish - a delicacy that can kill if its poisonous parts are not properly removed. Fifth grader Karin Tabira passed a test this summer that means she is now certified to slice and gut the fish for consumption. She recently used her new skills to serve a platter of paper-thin slices of fugu sashimi to the governor of southern Kumamoto region where she lives. "I was happy when the governor said 'oishi'," meaning delicious in Japanese, she said at an event where Takashi Kimura ate the dish. Tabira was among 60 people who passed the test in Yamaguchi region this summer, out of 93 people who tried. Clearing the hurdle was part of "a happy summer break", she said. Fugu is often served raw at high-end restaurants in Japan, where chefs must hold a licence proving they can safely slice around organs that contain a lethal poison.



Alice Guo answers questions during a press conference upon arrival in Pasay City, Metro Manila, Philippines, yesterday.

Deported ex-mayor arrives in Philippines

Reuters
Manila

Former Philippines mayor Alice Guo, accused of ties to Chinese criminal syndicates and laundering more than 100mn pesos (\$1.79mn), arrived in Manila early yesterday after being deported from Indonesia.

Guo, also known as Chinese national Guo Hua Ping, was arrested by Indonesian authorities on Wednesday after leaving the Philippines in July. She is wanted by the Philippine senate for refusing to appear before a congressional investigation into her alleged criminal ties.

Philippine law enforcement agencies, including the anti-money laundering council (AMLC), have filed several counts of money laundering against Guo and 35 others with the justice

department. Guo, who says she is a natural-born Philippine citizen, has denied the accusations, calling them malicious. She was deported from Indonesia for violating immigration laws, Jakarta's immigration office said on Thursday. The former mayor arrived in Manila on a private plane flanked by Philippine law enforcement authorities, including the country's Interior Minister, Benjamin Abalos Jr., who led her handover from Indonesian authorities in Jakarta on Thursday.

"I have received death threats and I am asking for the help (of Philippine authorities)," Guo told a press briefing shortly after her arrival in Manila.

Abalos committed to provide security for Guo, but urged her to disclose the truth. "Disclose all the names in order to serve justice and so all this ends. That is the only way we can help her," he said.

Kishida, Yoon call to sustain momentum in improved ties

Reuters
Seoul

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol yesterday called at a summit in Seoul to keep up the momentum behind an improvement in relations, which will be tested by imminent changes of leaders in Tokyo and Washington.

Kishida's final, whirlwind trip to his neighbour as prime minister came as the two leaders seek to seal their newfound partnership after orchestrating an about-face in ties, prodded by US President Joe Biden.

Relations between the two staunch US regional allies had sunk to their lowest level in decades amid acrimonious diplomatic and trade disputes over Japan's 1910-45 occupation of the Korean Peninsula.

Kishida emphasised the need to continue efforts to advance bilateral ties, once again expressing sympathy for Koreans who suffered during Japanese colonial rule.

"There is a lot of history ... but it is very important to inherit the efforts of our predecessors who overcame difficult times, and cooperate toward the future," Kishida told Yoon at the meeting.

"I've also said here in Seoul that

I feel heartbroken that so many people have had such difficult, sad experiences in such difficult circumstances," he added, referring to his earlier comments during a visit last year.

Yoon also called for sustaining the positive momentum of co-operation built by the leaders, saying next year could provide "a turning point" for the relationship to take a leap forward marking its 60th anniversary. "There are still difficult issues remaining in Korea-Japan relations. I hope that both sides will continue to work together with a forward-looking attitude so that we can continue to take steps toward a brighter future." The

two welcomed the signing of an agreement to facilitate the evacuation of each others' citizens from an emergency in a third country, which Kishida called a symbol of growing trust.

They also agreed to work together to simplify immigration procedures for travellers, and ensure that North Korea cannot utilise Russia's backing to stage more provocations, according to Yoon's deputy national security adviser, Kim Tae-hyo.

Kishida has announced he will step down this month and Japan's governing Liberal Democratic Party will hold elections on September 27 to choose his successor.

Yoon has made it a diplomatic priority to mend ties with Tokyo and improve security co-operation including with Washington to tackle North Korea's military threats, which led to a historic trilateral summit at Camp David last year.

Ahead of looming elections in Japan and the US, however, there is a lingering question whether the Asian neighbours can maintain the kind of genuine rapprochement that will put their historic woes behind with new leaders in place.

Kishida told Yoon that the importance of bilateral ties would not change regardless of who suc-

ceeded him and pledged to help maintain the momentum even after leaving office, Kim said.

Washington is confident Kishida's successor will be as committed to continuing the renewed alliance and that "all of these projects we've been working on together are going to continue at pace under new leadership" said Mira Rapp-Hooper, a senior official at the White House national security council.

"Both Prime Minister Kishida and President Yoon took on a great deal of personal risk and political risk to move forward the warming of their bilateral ties in ways that prior governments just hadn't been able to accomplish."

COMMODITIES

India 'considering' cut in petrol, diesel prices

India is considering cutting the prices of petrol and diesel, broadcaster India Today TV said yesterday, citing sources. The finance ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Global crude oil prices have recently fallen to their lowest levels in nine months, which has improved profit margins for oil marketing companies (OMCs). This development opens the door for potential savings to be passed on to consumers. The decline in oil prices has prompted discussions among key government officials. With assembly elections in Maharashtra and Haryana approaching, the government sees this as an opportunity to offer relief to the public.

MUSIC

English Teacher wins Mercury Prize for debut album

Rock band English Teacher won the Mercury Prize for its debut album *This Could Be Texas*, beating the likes of singer-songwriter Charli XCX and rapper Ghetts for the British music award. The four band members – singer Lily Fontaine, guitarist Lewis Whiting, bass player Nicholas Eden and drummer Douglas Frost – were visibly shocked as they stepped on stage at Abbey Road Studios in London to collect the prize. "We just thought we'd make a band," Fontaine told the audience, before she and her bandmates gave out their thanks. The Leeds group, which formed in 2020, released *This Could Be Texas* in April to critical acclaim.

CLAIM

UK proposes delay to EU fruit and vegetable checks

Britain is proposing to delay checks on fruit and vegetables imported from the European Union by a further six months to next July, according to an industry body. Eight years after it voted to leave the European Union, Britain is still in the process of bringing in all the physical checks required on imports. It launched a first phase of checks on meat, fish, cheese and other products in April. The next phase, which would include fruit and vegetables, has already been delayed until Jan. 31 2025, and according to industry body, the Fresh Produce Consortium, Britain's environment department Defra is proposing another extension until July 1 2025.

APPOINTMENT

Blair's former aide to lead talks on Chagos Islands

Britain yesterday appointed former prime minister Tony Blair's chief of staff to negotiate ownership of the Chagos Islands in the Indian Ocean, which are home to a major US military base, and which Mauritius is seeking to reclaim. Britain, which has controlled the region since 1814, detached the Chagos islands in 1965 from Mauritius – a former colony that became independent three years later – to create the British Indian Ocean Territory. Jonathan Powell has been appointed as Prime Minister Keir Starmer's special envoy to lead negotiations between Britain and Mauritius, which claims it was illegally stripped of the islands, over who has sovereignty of the territory.

India to extend sugar export ban to lift local supplies, ethanol production

Reuters
Mumbai

India plans to extend a ban on sugar exports for the second straight year as the world's biggest consumer of the sweetener grapples with the prospects of lower cane output, government sources said.

New Delhi also plans to raise the price at which oil companies buy ethanol from sugar mills as part of efforts to boost supplies of the biofuel, said the sources with direct knowledge of the matter. They did not wish to be identified as deliberations were not public.

India's absence from the world market would further squeeze global supplies, propping up benchmark prices in New York and London.

New Delhi plans to prohibit mills from exporting sugar when supplies from Brazil, the world's top producer and supplier of the sweetener, are expected to drop because of a drought in the South American nation.

"In the current crop scenario, there is no space for sugar exports," said one of the government sources.

"After fulfilling the local sugar demand, our next priority is ethanol blending, and we need much more cane to meet the ethanol blending targets."

Seeking to curb carbon emissions, India aims to increase the share of ethanol in gasoline to 20% by 2025-26, from 13%-14% now.

Indian sugar mills such as E.I.D.-Parry, Balrampur Chini Mills, Shree Renuka, Bajaj Hindusthan, and Dwarikesh Sugar have increased their ethanol production capacity in the last few years.

The government is also considering an increase in ethanol procurement price by more than 5% for the new marketing season beginning November, sources said.

Late last month, a government order said India would allow sugar mills to use cane juice or syrup to produce ethanol starting in November.

India's plans to extend a ban on sugar exports and raise domestic ethanol prices have not been previously reported. Both measures are likely to be announced later this month.

A government spokesman did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

India, also the world's biggest sugar producer after Brazil, banned mills from exporting the sweetener during the current season that began on October 1, 2023. That was the first sugar export curb time in seven years.

New Delhi allowed mills to export only 6.1mn metric tonnes of sugar during the last season, nearly half of the country's total shipment in 2021-22.

Sugar output during the next 2024-25 season is likely to fall to 32mn metric tonnes from this year's 34mn tonnes due to the adverse impact of last year's patchy rains in Maharashtra and Karnataka states, the sources said.

Onam festivities begin



People observe as a folk dancer performs during the festivities marking the start of the annual harvest festival of Onam in Kochi, India, yesterday.

Indian Olympic wrestlers Phogat, Punia join Congress

Reuters
New Delhi

Indian Olympic wrestlers Vinesh Phogat and Bajrang Punia joined the opposition Congress party yesterday, entering politics a year after protesting against the chief of the sport's governing body in India over alleged sexual harassment.

The move came weeks after Phogat's emotional return home last month from the Paris Olympics, where she failed to make weight for the women's 50kg freestyle final by 100 grams despite starving herself for a week.

It pushed the 30-year-old Asian Games gold medalist to announce her retirement from the

sport and led to an outpouring of support, with hundreds of teary-eyed fans and wrestlers taking her on a road-show to her village in northern India after she arrived in Delhi.

Their entry into politics also comes weeks before provincial elections in their home state of Haryana, where Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is seeking a third straight term in power.

"They have not only brought glory to the country in the sports field but have also fought a strong battle against injustice on the street," Congress general secretary K C Venugopal told reporters after inducting the wrestlers into the party in New Delhi.

"Our fight will continue and we will win, in court and in life," Phogat told reporters. "I am

proud to be with a party that stands with women and against any injustice."

"The hard work that we did during the protests and in support of farmers, soldiers and the youth, we will continue that hard work for our country," said Punia, 30, who won bronze in men's 65-kg wrestling at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. Phogat, Punia and fellow wrestler Sakshi Malik, also an Olympic bronze medalist, were the face of a months-long protest demanding criminal action against the then chief of the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh last year.

Singh, who was also a federal lawmaker from the BJP, was charged with sexual harassment and criminal intimidation based on a case filed by six female wrestlers in June last year.

Man jailed for setting fire to hotel housing refugees

A British man was yesterday jailed for nine years for arson at a hotel housing asylum seekers during anti-Muslim riots, by far the longest sentence imposed over recent widespread violent disorder. Thomas Birley, 27, pleaded guilty to arson with intent to endanger life after he stoked a fire in a bin by an entranceway to a hotel near Rotherham in northern England on August 4. Prosecutor Alisha Kaye said Birley added wood to an already-flaming industrial bin, which had been placed in front of a fire door of the hotel while staff and guests sheltered inside. Birley, who had also pleaded guilty to violent disorder and possessing an offensive weapon, was sentenced at Sheffield Crown Court by judge Jeremy Richardson, who said Birley's actions were "suffused with racism from beginning to end". The hotel was targeted by around 400 people during days of rioting involving violence, arson and looting as well as racist attacks, which followed the killings of three young girls in the northern English town of Southport on July 29.

Car racing festival begins in Goodwood



A motoring enthusiast attends the Goodwood Revival, a three-day historic car racing festival in Goodwood, near Chichester, southern Britain, yesterday.

Welsh opera singers vote for strike action

AFP
London

The chorus of the Welsh National Opera (WNO) have voted to take strike action in a dispute over jobs and pay, their union Equity said yesterday.

The union said chorus members were facing a 15% pay cut, and a reduction in contracted hours that threatened their full-time status.

Some 93% of members backed strike action on a 100% turnout.

"This ballot result is a resounding vote of no confidence in Welsh National Opera management and shows that chorus members will not take their disastrous cuts," said general secretary Paul Fleming.

"Our members are tired of being told to be resilient, and just get by," he added.

It follows a similar vote in July by the company's orchestra.

The Musicians' Union has accused management of planning

to make the orchestra part-time and cut pay by 15%.

WNO said in April that it was axing two weeks of its previously announced 2024-25 season due to reductions in its funding.

The opera company receives funding from both the arts councils of England and Wales.

The announcement sparked a protest letter signed by Welsh stars including actor Michael Sheen, bass-baritone Bryn Terfel and singer Katherine Jenkins which said the cuts would be "devastating".

In January, singers and musicians at the English National Opera (ENO) called off their own planned industrial action.

Members of the ENO chorus and orchestra had been due to walk out on February 1 over management's "fire and rehire" plan.

Under the proposals the chorus and orchestra could be made redundant and then re-employed for only six months a year.

England, Wales' bulging prisons house record number

Reuters
London

The prison population in England and Wales reached a record high yesterday, the government said, ahead of a planned expansion of the early release of prisoners this month aimed at tackling an overcrowding crisis.

Britain has western Europe's highest rate of incarceration, ac-

ording to the World Prison Brief database and faces a crisis after a new building programme failed to keep track with tougher sentencing laws that have fuelled a growing prison population.

Figures published by the ministry of justice showed the prison population was now at 88,521, up from 88,350 a week earlier.

That equates to nearly 150 prisoners per 100,000 in the population. Imprisonment rates are around 25% lower in France, Spain

and Italy and less than half in Germany and the Netherlands.

The US, however, has a far higher rate at 531 prisoners per 100,000.

Shortly after taking office in July, Britain's new Labour government said prisons could be full within weeks and early release was needed to prevent what Justice Minister Shabana Mahmood described as "a total breakdown of law and order".

Already many prisons are housing two inmates in cells built for one, and the body representing

prison governors has warned offenders would soon have to be held in police cells – constraining officers and disrupting the wider judicial system. "The new government inherited a justice system in crisis, with prisons on the point of collapse," a ministry of justice spokesperson said yesterday.

"It has been forced to introduce an early release programme to stop a crisis that would have overwhelmed the criminal justice system, meaning we would no longer

be able to lock up dangerous criminals and protect the public."

Over the summer, roughly 1,300 people were arrested and around 200 have so far been jailed after days of rioting which followed the killing of three young girls in the northern English town of Southport, adding to pressure on prisons.

Under the early release plan, which was approved by parliament and is due to come into force on September 10, most prisoners

will become eligible for release after serving 40% of their sentences behind bars, down from 50% currently.

The government has said roughly 5,500 offenders will be released between September and October.

Prisoners who are let out can be returned to jail if they reoffend or break other terms of their release, and those serving sentences for serious violent offences of four years or more are automatically excluded from the scheme.



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Kishida sends signal to successor with South Korea summit

When Japan's outgoing Prime Minister Fumio Kishida holds a final summit this week with South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol, he will be sending a signal of support not only to the neighbouring nation, but his would-be successors as well. Prodded by US President Joe Biden, the two leaders orchestrated an about-face in ties that had sunk to their lowest level in decades amid acrimonious diplomatic and trade disputes over Japan's occupation of Korea from 1910 to 1945.

But the strength of their new partnership is set to be tested by Kishida's imminent departure and the prospect of a shake-up in the White House with November's presidential election.

"Prime Minister Kishida may have to show that what he did with President Yoon is the right direction and he expects whoever succeeds him to follow the current direction of the Japan-Korea relationship," said Tetsuo Kotani, a senior fellow at the Japan Institute of International Affairs.

As Kishida's response to Yoon's overtures had spurred pushback from Japan's political right, his successor could face pressure from conservatives to take a harder line, Kotani added.

"There could always be some anxiety about the new prime minister..."

"We know that in the past, that when Japan and Korea have found their way to rapprochement, political change has sometimes contributed to setback, or set the conditions for setback," a senior US administration official said. "So while... our confidence is high in the future of our relationship

with Japan and all of our multilateral engagements, Kishida's step here is really important," added the official, who sought anonymity in discussing diplomatic matters.

While few major announcements are expected from the summit, officials said they saw Kishida's final visit to Seoul as crucial to US efforts to present a unified front against challenges from neighbouring North Korea and China.

Kishida's visit is not just a signal of support and thanks to Yoon, but also a message to the Japanese government and prime ministerial candidates that the partnership has to be a lasting part of Tokyo's foreign policy, the US official added.

Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party will hold elections on Sept 27 to choose Kishida's successor.

Last year US President Joe Biden invited Yoon and Kishida to Camp David where the three leaders committed to deepen military and economic co-operation.

They also delivered their strongest joint condemnation yet of "dangerous and aggressive behaviour" by China in the disputed busy waterway of the South China Sea.

The Camp David initiatives were explicitly designed to prompt long-term partnership so that "no one of us would have an incentive to pull away from that deeper co-operation if political change did happen," the US official said.

Yoon has said the partnership will remain effective in part because of the diplomatic pacts both sides had adopted.

"There could always be some anxiety about the new prime minister, especially given the personal synergy between the two leaders," said a senior South Korean government official who sought anonymity to discuss sensitive diplomatic matters.

"But the fundamentals of relations won't change, and Kishida's visit will reaffirm the significance of having good relations with Korea and could send a message to the incoming leader, whoever that might be."

Kishida made a "strong request" to see Yoon a final time before he leaves office, the South Korean official said.

The summit is expected to yield a memorandum of understanding on evacuating civilians from each other's countries during emergencies in third countries, he added.

The South Koreans hope for conciliatory comments from Kishida about Koreans forced to work for Japan during its occupation, but even without these the visit could help to keep "shuttle diplomacy" on track, he said.

Tokyo wants to broaden ties to reach a "more dynamic phase", a Japanese foreign ministry official told a briefing, without elaborating. — Reuters

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Thirsty data centres spring up in water-poor Mexican town

Drought-prone region attracts billion-dollar data centres

Companies, government tight-lipped on water usage

Locals struggle with rationing, unequal water access

By Diana Baptista and Fintan McDonnell
Colón, Mexico

A two-year long drought in the semi-desert municipality of Colón, in the central Mexican state of Querétaro, has left many struggling with dead crops and water rationing. But at the same time, the local government in Querétaro is giving incentives to companies to build data centres that generally use large amounts of water to cool their servers.

AI is also set to increase the amount of water data centres use as the power-intensive processors needed have greater cooling requirements than conventional servers.

"Querétaro is becoming the data centre valley," the state's Secretary for Sustainable Development, Marco del Prete, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

Querétaro's conservative governor, Mauricio Kuri, is leading the drive to attract data centres to Colón, which has drawn \$10bn of investment for new data centres from Microsoft, Google and Amazon.

Ana Valdivia, a lecturer in AI at Oxford University, said companies were "going to places that they feel are welcoming, first because maybe the governments are facilitating that with some incentive like tax benefits or land benefits".

Miguel Ángel Carapia, the head of Vórtice IT, a group that represents tech companies in the state, explained Querétaro was ideal for data centres because it was safe, near Mexico City and not prone to earthquakes or other natural disasters.

But both the companies building data centres in Colón and Querétaro's government declined requests for information about how much water they would use and what impact that would have on a population already suffering water shortages.

The arrival of data centres in other water-stressed Latin American countries, such as Uruguay and Chile, sparked protests.

There are also data centres operating in Mexico City and the state of Nuevo León, where



droughts have fuelled protests over water concessions that favour big companies over the parched population.

Microsoft said its data centres in Querétaro would use technology to reduce its use of water for cooling and would only consume water "less than 5% of the year".

A spokesperson for Amazon Web Services said it had chosen "an air-cooled data centre design, which will not require the ongoing use of cooling water in operations".

Google said it was partnering with environmentally responsible suppliers that would reduce its water consumption.

While some data centres have become more water efficient, they still add to the overall demand for the resource, said Arman Shehaby, a researcher at the Lawrence Berkeley National Lab, a US federally funded research centre in California.

Environmental activist Teresa Roldán said more data centres would deepen the water shortage and unequal distribution of water resources in the region.

"If there is no water for the population, much less will there be water for the companies," the activist said.

Fifty minutes away from Colón, La Salitrea is a community of some 400 small farmers and fishermen that depends on the tourists who come see two dams between the yellowed hills.

But for more than two years, the

Colón area has suffered drought. From April to July this year, the drought was officially classified as exceptional, the highest level of water scarcity.

The dams are now nearly empty and tourist numbers have also fallen. Water is so low in the dams that fish are not growing large enough to be caught in the fishermen's nets.

The drought is related to abnormal rainy seasons and deforestation for cattle ranching, said Ricardo Villarreal, who runs a reforestation project.

In the market, farmers sell the scarce produce that survived the heat and drought. Guadalupe Hernández grows blackberries on a small patch of land and gets water only every 15 days. Sometimes the water is stolen at night.

"I have lost 60% of my crop. With no crop, there's no money," said Hernández, 68, who sells blackberries to tourists.

Agripina Nieves, who runs a small restaurant by La Saledad dam, said her home only gets water every eight days.

Using plastic water jugs and containers, Nieves stores enough water to drink, wash dishes, clean floors and to use in the restrooms of both her house and restaurant.

"We had never had such water scarcity," she said. "What will poor people do without water?"

In 2020, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador announced a \$1.1bn investment by Microsoft in cloud

data centres. Three years later, Microsoft obtained a concession to extract 25mm litres a year from underground for just one of its two data centres units in Colón.

That equates to 24% of the water allocated to the municipality for public and urban use sourced from springs in the region, according to data by the National Water Commission (CONAGUA).

A spokesperson for CONAGUA said it had not granted new water concessions in Querétaro and that Microsoft had legally bought its concession from another owner.

Water for the data centre will come from the Valle de San Juan del Río aquifer, which already has a deficit of 56.8bn litres, a water commission analysis showed.

Asked about how much water was being allocated to the 20 data centres in the state, Del Prete said he does not "have the data because it is not in my power to request it", but equated their water consumption to what a restaurant uses in a month.

Apart from the Microsoft concession, water for other data centres, CONAGUA said, would come from state infrastructure, or concessions already granted to industrial parks in the region.

"There is no way of knowing how water is being distributed to those data centres. The only certainty is data centres are being privileged over the citizens' well-being," said Roldán. — Thomson Reuters Foundation

The European Green Deal is already benefiting consumers

By Agustín Reyna
Brussels

It has become something of a cliché to interpret the results of June's European Parliament elections as a rejection of the European Green Deal and the policies associated with it. It's also wrong: in her political guidelines for the next European Commission, President Ursula von der Leyen reaffirmed her commitment to the Green Deal, saying, "We must and will stay the course on all of our goals."

This is the right approach. Europeans want a more sustainable future, and the Green Deal is a necessary – and highly beneficial – first step. For example, the European Union's ban on sales of gasoline- and diesel-powered cars, which will come into force in 2035, is expected to deliver significant health benefits and could save hundreds of thousands of lives annually by improving air quality. Moreover, this deadline is likely to accelerate the adoption of electric vehicles (EVs).

While it has been argued that the 2035 deadline should be scrapped, doing so would fuel consumer uncertainty and undermine the green transition. Instead, the EU should focus on encouraging more consumers – with the right incentives and under competitive conditions – to choose EVs over internal combustion engines. This, in turn, would ensure that used EVs are available at affordable prices by the time the ban goes into effect.

Regrettably, misleading claims about the unpopularity of green policies have already led to the withdrawal of legislation aimed at halving pesticide use across the EU by 2030. Similarly, EU institutions have rolled back some of the climate-related requirements farmers must meet to receive subsidies under the bloc's Common Agricultural Policy. Slowing the EU's green transformation would harm consumers. In fact, contrary to conventional wisdom, surveys conducted by the European Consumer Organisation (BEUC) and the 44 independent consumer groups within our network show that Europeans are eager to embrace more sustainable lifestyles.

But, as BEUC's 2023 survey finds, while most European consumers want to reduce their environmental impact, they often feel lost in a maze of misleading green claims and labels, underscoring the need for reliable information sources. The survey revealed that most consumers believe that polluting companies should be banned



from making any green claims. Clearly, realising the Green Deal's full potential requires meeting consumer demand for genuinely sustainable products. Reversing course now would jeopardise this progress. While there is still much work to be done, we must recognise that the Green Deal is already benefiting European consumers. Two of its key components – the Right to Repair and Ecodesign for Sustainable Products – are intended to enhance product longevity and efficiency, thereby reducing costs for consumers.

This is especially important for low-income consumers as Europe continues to grapple with a persistent cost-of-living crisis. In 2022, as energy prices skyrocketed, consumer groups found that the most energy-efficient appliances could save households up to €2,450 (\$2,700) on their annual energy bills. Even in more "normal" times, with energy prices back to more reasonable levels, European households can save between €650 and €1,800 every year on their energy bills thanks to ecodesign and energy labelling. To mitigate high energy costs, the EU also adopted rules that protect those who cannot pay their bills from having their electricity or gas disconnected.

Likewise, well-crafted policies like the EU's tough auto-emissions standards have already improved air quality in towns and cities across the bloc, increased vehicle efficiency, and paved the way for clean-air zones.

But fostering a green, prosperous economy is a long-term project that requires additional legislation and the preservation of existing measures to guide consumers toward more sustainable choices. To promote sustainable and healthy food options, for example, policymakers must ensure that both domestic and imported goods meet the EU's product requirements and that free-trade agreements align with the standards and values embodied by the Green Deal.

Accelerating the shift to zero-carbon transportation is essential. In a market dominated

by large and heavy vehicles, the growing demand for smaller, more efficient, and affordable EVs among low- and middle-income consumers creates a unique opportunity for domestic manufacturers. To make these cars accessible to more people, improving the secondhand market should also be a priority. This can be done by setting binding EU-level zero-emissions-vehicles targets for large corporate fleets (which will hit the secondhand market much faster than privately-owned cars). In addition to getting clean cars on the road, European policymakers must develop a public-transport strategy that makes train travel within and between member states cheaper and more convenient.

Consumers also want – and deserve – the ability to invest their savings in ways that contribute to a greener future. So far, there are no minimum requirements to call an investment product "green" or "sustainable", leading to greenwashing. By introducing clear requirements into the EU's Sustainable Finance framework, policymakers could help consumers generate meaningful impact with their investments and thereby mobilise private capital to support decarbonisation.

The costs of decarbonising Europe's economy, though significant, pale in comparison to the cost of climate inaction. The EU is already struggling to compensate farmers for drought-related crop losses, rebuild infrastructure damaged by devastating floods, and combat annual wildfires ravaging southern regions.

To be sure, achieving a just green transition will necessitate public support for vulnerable populations as they adapt to a more sustainable economy. That said, many of the Green Deal policies already in place provide tangible economic and health benefits that directly address consumers' most pressing concerns.

Curbing Europe's ambition to achieve a truly sustainable transition would only serve entrenched interests intent on blocking necessary reforms. The notion that consumers are indifferent to environmental concerns, or that climate action prevents policymakers from addressing other issues, is deeply misguided. To facilitate the structural transformation needed to build a sustainable and prosperous future, the European Green Deal must be implemented and strengthened. — Project Syndicate

• Agustín Reyna is Director-General of the European Consumer Organisation (BEUC).

Paris mayor says Olympic rings to stay on Eiffel Tower 'until 2028'



This picture taken last month shows a French national flag fluttering on the Eiffel Tower behind the Olympic rings. - AFP

Paris's mayor said yesterday that she intends to keep the Olympic rings on the Eiffel Tower until at least 2028 despite criticism of the idea from some residents and lawmakers.

The logo of five interlocking rings was erected on the beloved monument before the July 28-August 11 Olympics in Paris and has become a popular backdrop for selfies by visitors.

Anne Hidalgo, the Socialist mayor in power since 2014, caused widespread surprise last weekend by saying she intended to retain the symbol.

"The proposal that I have made for the rings ... is a proposal that until 2028, until the Games in Los Angeles, we will leave the rings on the Eiffel Tower," she told reporters at a press conference. "Perhaps after 2028, they'll stay and maybe they won't. Let's see."

The idea has sparked criticism from many opposition Parisian lawmakers, residents as well as conservation groups.

The descendants of the tower's designer, Gustave Eiffel, issued a statement saying that it "does not seem appropriate to us that the Eiffel Tower, which has become the symbol of Paris and the whole of France since its construction 135 years ago, has the symbol of an outside organisation added to it".

Deputy mayor Pierre Rabadan confirmed to AFP on Tuesday that Hidalgo wanted to keep the rings permanently on the tower.

The Agitos logo for the Paralympic Games, which wrap up tomorrow, was placed on the Arc de Triomphe but will be moved to a location mid-way up the Champs-Élysées avenue, Hidalgo added.

Some critics have slammed the Eiffel Tower

announcement as a personal initiative taken without consulting the city's council, or the capital's residents more broadly.

"The mayor of Paris is not someone who lets opportunities slip by," Hidalgo told reporters. "When you're mayor you take decisions because you are legitimate to take them."

The rings belong to the International Olympic Committee (IOC) while the Eiffel Tower is the property of the city of Paris.

It is on a list of protected monuments which is likely to complicate the task of keeping the logo.

The current rings will have to be removed because they are too heavy to keep on the monument, with the IOC financing a technical study to design new, lighter versions that can be attached to an attraction known affectionately by Parisians as "the Iron Lady". - AFP

Zelensky pushes for promised weapons as Russia advances

AFP
Ramstein Air Base, Germany

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky made a fresh appeal yesterday for more weapons to counter the threat from advancing Russian forces in the east of the country and Moscow's devastating missile strikes.

He pressed his nation's case to allies meeting at the US Ramstein Air Base in Germany, where Washington unveiled a new \$250m in military aid for Ukraine.

"We need more weapons to drive Russian forces off our land," said Zelensky, who also met with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz.

The gathering came as Moscow's forces advance in the Donbas region, Russian President Vladimir Putin having declared on Thursday that capturing the eastern area was his "primary objective" in the conflict.

Zelensky urged Kyiv's supporters to follow through on previous commitments.

"The number of air defence systems that have not been delivered is significant," he said.

And he again called for restrictions to be lifted on the use of long-range Western weapons.

"We need to have this long-range capability, not only on the occupied territory of Ukraine, but also on the Russian territory," Zelensky said.

Asked about Zelensky's appeal, US defence chief Lloyd Austin said: "I don't believe that one specific capability is going to be decisive."

"It's not just one thing, it's a combination of capabilities and how you integrate those capabilities to achieve objectives," said Austin.

Later in the day Zelensky arrived in Cernobbio, northern Italy, for the European



Zelensky speaking during the European House - Ambrosetti Forum, an annual conference that gathers business and political leaders at the end of the summer, in Cernobbio, Italy. - Reuters

House-Ambrosetti forum on the banks of Lake Como.

He is due to hold talks with Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni there today.

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban - who upset his EU counterparts and Zelensky by meeting Putin in Moscow in July - is also attending the three-day economic forum.

Italy has strongly supported Ukraine and has sent weapons to help it defend itself against Russian forces, while insisting these must only be used on Ukrainian soil.

At the meeting in Germany, Austin said Washington's latest military aid package "will surge in more capabilities to meet Ukraine's evolving requirements".

The assistance will include ammunition

for HIMARS precision rocket launchers, artillery rounds, anti-tank and anti-air weapons, the US said.

The talks in Germany, with representatives from some 50 nations, focused on areas including bolstering Ukraine's air defences and encouraging allies to boost their defence industries.

Since the start of Russia's offensive in February 2022 when it failed to seize the Ukrainian capital Kyiv, Moscow has adapted its aims, concentrating instead on trying to conquer eastern Ukraine.

While Ukraine's surprise push into Russia's Kursk region last month caught Russian forces off-guard, Putin stressed that the move had failed to slow Moscow's advance.

Ukraine claimed yesterday to have recaptured a part of the eastern Ukrainian town of New York, in what would be the first success for Kyiv on this part of the front for months.

North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato) Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg, speaking in Oslo yesterday, said that Kyiv needed more military support and that the "quickest way to end this war is to provide weapons to Ukraine."

"Putin must realise that he cannot win on the battlefield, but must accept a just and lasting peace where Ukraine prevails as a sovereign and independent nation," he said.

The United States has been Ukraine's biggest backer during the conflict, providing military aid worth more than \$55bn (€50bn) since February 2022.

However, uncertainty looms over the future of that funding as a US election in November could see Ukraine-sceptic Donald Trump back in the White House.

Germany - Ukraine's second-biggest backer - has also come under pressure domestically over its aid for Kyiv, which has been at the centre of a protracted row over the 2025 budget.

German officials have repeatedly pushed back at criticism over a planned reduction in financial support next year.

After talks with Zelensky in Frankfurt yesterday, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz posted on X that "Germany is and will remain the strongest supporter of Ukraine in Europe".

German Defence Minister Boris Pistorius also announced on the sidelines of the meeting that his country would provide 12 artillery pieces valued at €150mn.

"I'm grateful to Germany, its government, and its people for all their support," Zelensky said in a social media post after meeting with Pistorius.

Passenger plane makes emergency landing in Turkiye after bomb threat

Reuters/AFP
Istanbul

A flight operated by Indian Vistara Airlines made an emergency landing yesterday around 4.30pm (1330 GMT) in Erzurum in eastern Turkiye after a piece of paper with "bomb on board" written on it was found in a lavatory, Turkish Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya said on X.

Two bomb disposal experts and one search dog were continuing to search the aircraft, Yerlikaya said, adding that 234 passengers and 13 crew members had been safely evacuated.

"Vistara flight UK 27 operating from Mumbai to Frankfurt has been diverted to Turkiye due to a security concern that was noted by our crew while onboard," a Vistara spokesperson told Reuters, confirming the aircraft had landed at Erzurum.

"As per protocol, the relevant authorities were immediately alerted and we are fully co-operating with the security agencies to complete the mandatory security checks," the Vistara spokesperson said.

The passengers were taken off the plane and searched individually before being allowed into the airport terminal and a bomb detection squad inspected the plane and its luggage hold, Erzurum Governor Mustafa Ciftci said.

Landings and take-offs at Erzurum Airport have been halted until 9pm local time due to the emergency, Transport Minister Abdulkadir Uraloglu wrote on X.

Aerial footage reveals Ukrainian border town in ruins

A Ukrainian border town caught in the crosshairs of a Russian offensive earlier this year has been devastated by fighting, aerial video published by the Ukrainian army showed.

Vovchansk in Ukraine's northeast Kharkiv region was home to some 17,000 people before Moscow's troops stormed across the border in May, triggering a battle that has lasted for months.

Aerial imagery published by Ukraine's Separate Presidential Brigade on Thursday showed rows of crumbling residential blocks charred by fire and piles of rubble blocking streets.

Some buildings had been flattened, with only their foundations visible.

"The town is almost completely de-

stroyed, with entire streets burning down from artillery and drone strikes," the army unit said in a Facebook post.

"For Ukraine, it is becoming another ghost town that the occupiers have levelled to the ground," it added.

Russian forces captured Vovchansk shortly after they invaded Ukraine in February 2022, but were pushed back across the border during a lightning Ukrainian counteroffensive six months later.

In May 2024, Russia launched a new offensive into the town as Moscow sought to create a buffer zone to protect Russians on the other side of the border from Ukrainian shelling.

Thousands of residents quickly fled, leaving just a handful of people behind. - AFP



This recent undated handout photograph, released by the Presidential Brigade of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, shows the ruins of the Ukrainian town of Vovchansk, in the Kharkiv region, located approximately 5km from the state border with the Russia. - AFP

Norway reports bluetongue outbreak

Reuters
Paris

Norway has reported an outbreak of bluetongue disease on a sheep farm in the southern part of the country, the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) said yesterday.

Bluetongue can be deadly for domestic ruminants such as sheep, cattle and goats.

A new variant of the disease has been circulating in northern Europe since late last year, leading to vaccination campaigns in affected countries like France.

The outbreak in Norway was the country's first since 2010, though the strain of the virus was not yet identified, the WOAH said in a note, citing information from the Norwegian authorities.

"Two affected sheep were killed for animal welfare reasons before disease confirmation. Samples were taken on those two animals and sent to be analysed to the Norwegian Veterinary Institute, who confirmed the disease," the WOAH said in the note.

The sick animals were part of a flock of 56 sheep, it said.

Summer of 2024 was world's hottest on record: EU monitor

The world is emerging from its warmest northern hemisphere summer since records began, the European Union's climate change monitoring service said yesterday, as global warming continues to intensify.

The boreal summer of June to August this year blew past last summer to become the world's warmest, the Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S) said in a monthly bulletin.

The exceptional heat increases the likelihood that 2024 will outrank 2023 as the planet's warmest on record.

"During the past three months of 2024, the globe has experienced the hottest June and August, the hottest day on record, and the hottest boreal summer on record," said C3S deputy director Samantha Burgess.

Unless countries urgently reduce their planet-heating emissions, extreme weather "will only become more intense", she said. Greenhouse gas emissions from burning fossil fuels are the main cause of climate change.

The planet's changed climate continued to fuel disasters this summer.

In Sudan, flooding from heavy rains last

month affected more than 300,000 people and brought cholera to the war-torn country.

Elsewhere, scientists confirmed climate change is driving a severe ongoing drought on the Italian islands of Sicily and Sardinia, and it intensified Typhoon Gaemi, which tore through the Philippines, Taiwan and China in July, leaving more than 100 dead.

Human-caused climate change and the El Nino natural weather phenomenon, which warms the surface waters in the eastern Pacific Ocean, both pushed temperatures to record highs earlier in the year.

Copernicus said below-average temperatures in the equatorial Pacific last month indicated a shift to La Nina, which is El Nino's cooler counterpart.

However, that didn't prevent unusually high global sea surface temperatures worldwide, with average temperatures in August hotter than in the same month of any other year except for 2023.

C3S's dataset goes back to 1940, which the scientists cross-checked with other data to confirm that this summer was the hottest since the 1850 pre-industrial period. - Reuters

Electric vehicles will account for up to half of auto sales by 2030, says BYD Pakistan

Up to 50% of all vehicles bought in Pakistan by 2030 will be electrified in some form in line with global targets, BYD Pakistan, a partnership between China's BYD and Pakistani car group Mega Motors, said.

Warren Buffett-backed Chinese electric vehicle giant BYD last month announced its entry into Pakistan, making the South Asian nation of 250mn people one of its newest markets.

The partnership has announced plans to open an assembly plant in early 2026, but will introduce vehicles for sale later this year, after launching three models in August.

"I see conversion to new energy vehicles NEV at up to 50%," Kamran Kamal, BYD's

spokesperson in Pakistan, told Reuters in an interview at his office on Thursday.

Kamal is also the chief executive of Hub Power, which owns Mega Motors.

The target is an ambitious one for Pakistan's auto sector, which has been largely dominated by Japanese automakers Toyota, Honda and Suzuki, with vehicle sales hitting a 15-year low in the fiscal year to June.

Recently South Korea's KIA has begun challenging for market share along with Chinese companies Changan and MG, all of whom offer hybrid vehicles.

BYD Pakistan is the first major new energy vehicle entrant in the Pakistani market.

Hybrid electric vehicle sales in Pakistan

have more than doubled in the past year.

While reaching 30% NEV adoption by 2030 is feasible, achieving 50% may be more challenging due to infrastructure hurdles, said Muhammad Abrar Polani, auto sector analyst at Arif Habib Limited.

Kamal said the challenge of charging infrastructure would be addressed by government plans to incentivise its construction.

Local media reported in August that standards for EV charging stations had been drafted by the power ministry, with the government considering offering them affordable electricity.

Kamal said that BYD Pakistan is collaborating with two oil marketing companies to establish a charging infrastructure net-

work and aims to establish 20-30 charging stations within the initial phases concurrent with the rollout of its cars.

BYD Pakistan will initially sell fully assembled vehicles, which are subject to higher import charges than vehicles shipped in parts and assembled locally.

"Our main focus is to have locally assembled cars on the roads as soon as possible," said Kamal, citing difficulties in importing and selling fully assembled units under Pakistan's current duty structure.

Kamran said that BYD Pakistan is deciding on the size of a new plant, but details about the investment and partnership with power utility HUBCO will be disclosed later. - Reuters



Kamran Kamal gestures during the interview in Karachi. - Reuters



Coasts and Borders Security celebrates graduations

The General Directorate of Coasts and Borders Security celebrated the graduation of the fourth 'Global Maritime Distress and Safety System' course, held at the Marine Training and Qualification Centre. The course held from September 1-5 was attended by officers and other ranks from the directorate and Saudi Arabia, according to a post on X by the Ministry of Interior. The directorate also celebrated the graduation of the sixth 'Joint Marine Pollution Prevention and Control' course, held at the same venue concurrently. The aim was to equip participants with essential skills for combating marine environmental pollution.



Diwani intermediate workshop.

Left: Ruq'ah: Calligraphy Workshop (intermediate).

Right: Board games at Geekend.

September - a month of creative exploration at MIA, Geekdom



Abdulla al-Mosallam at Geekdom.

Doha's pop culture scene is booming

By Joey Aguilar
Staff Reporter

Doha's pop culture scene is thriving, fuelled by a passionate community eager for more events, Geekdom founder Abdulla al-Mosallam told *Gulf Times*.

He cited the "overwhelming and amazing response" to Geekdom's initiatives, saying: "People are hungry for more pop culture events, constantly asking for more, and we're doing our best to satisfy that demand."

Al-Mosallam noted that Geekdom's commitment to fostering the community is evident in its diverse programming: "We're aiming to fill the calendar with different events and activities, not just limited to Geekend."

"We collaborate with various organisations to enhance the pop culture scene in Doha, providing a platform for people to have fun, creatives to flourish, and grow," he said.

The upcoming edition of Geekend, scheduled for September 12-14 at Geekdom's building at Lusail Boulevard, promises a thrilling weekend packed with entertainment, community engagement, and competitions.

Al-Mosallam highlighted the

vibrant manga (comics in the style that originated in Japan) scene in Doha, stressing there is so much manga talent in Doha that deserves recognition.

Geekdom's regular events at its building in Lusail Boulevard feature gaming tournaments, screenings, and interactive activities.

Beyond entertainment, the organisation plays a crucial role in supporting local creatives.

As Qatar's premier pop culture event, Geekend is not just a treat for gaming fanatics, al-Mosallam said, but also a platform for local talent to blossom and launch their businesses.

He pointed out that Geekdom's journey has been phenomenal, witnessing widespread acceptance and popularity from the community.

"People kept pushing and asking for more," he said.

In response, Geekdom has offered numerous workshops in collaboration with Qatar Development Bank and other stakeholders, helping creatives transition their passions into full-fledged businesses.

"We are incredibly proud of the participants in our workshops and Geekends, witnessing them evolve to the next level, representing themselves and Qatar in international events," al-Mosallam added.



Flowers of the Past workshop on September 22 at the MIA.



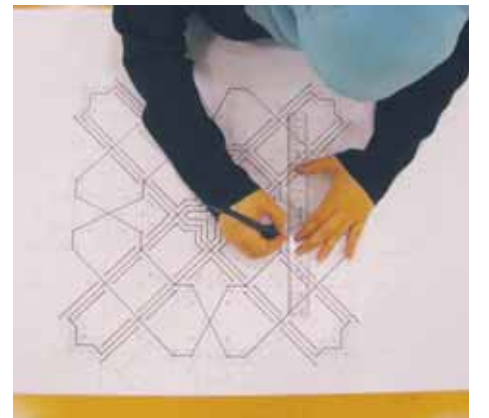
Clay workshop.



Geometry pattern painting workshop.



An array of art workshops for children this month.



Geometry for children workshop.

By Joey Aguilar
Staff Reporter

September is shaping up to be a month of creative exploration in Doha, with a diverse range of workshops and interactive activities being hosted by the Museum of Islamic Art (MIA) and Geekdom at Lusail Boulevard.

From the intricate world of calligraphy to the joy of board games, these offerings provide residents and visitors in Qatar, especially children, a chance to learn more and unleash their potential.

The MIA is offering a comprehensive range of calligraphy workshops throughout September, catering to both beginners and those looking to enhance their skills.

The Diwani Intermediate Workshop, be-

ing held today (September 7) and tomorrow (September 8), focuses on this important Arabic script and ideal for those who have already completed a beginner's course.

Tomorrow, Ruq'ah: Calligraphy Workshop (intermediate) explores this 19th-century script known for its clarity and simplicity.

Following closely, Naskh Calligraphy (beginners), starting on September 9, will introduce participants to this fundamental script used for copying the Qur'an.

Beyond calligraphy, the MIA is offering a variety of workshops for all ages.

Geometry Pattern Painting Workshop scheduled on September 9-10 provides an introduction to the concept of geometry in Islamic art, guiding participants through the process of creating and painting geometric patterns.

For younger audiences, An Artist's Adventure Workshop, also on September 9-10, combines storytelling with hands-on activities, introducing children to the world of art through various craft mediums.

The three-day Geekend event at Geekdom, taking place on September 12-14, promises a captivating experience for board game enthusiasts.

Guests can discover new games and enjoy the lively environment, with karaoke sessions adding to the vibrant atmosphere.

The MIA continues its focus on creativity with a Clay Workshop on September 15-17, where participants will learn the coiling technique to create various forms.

Geometry for Kids on September 22 will allow children to explore geometric shapes inspired by the MIA's collection.

The Flowers of the Past workshop, also on September 22, takes participants on a gallery tour, followed by a hands-on session where they can create their own unique vase designs inspired by the MIA's collection.

Besides the MIA, a number of museums and galleries such as Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art and National Museum of Qatar, in addition to the Fire Station: Artist in Residence, are also hosting several workshops this month.