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BUSINESS | Page 1

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Qatar reaffirms support for Palestinian statehood

Arab-Islamic ministerial meeting on Palestine in Madrid

QNA/Reuters
Madrid

Qatar yesterday participated in the meeting of the Arab-Islamic Ministerial Committee tasked with international efforts to stop the war on Gaza and several European ministers and officials, with Spanish Prime Minister Dr Pedro Sanchez. The meeting, hosted in Madrid, was on Palestine and implementing the two-state solution.

Qatar was represented by HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Mohammed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaifi.

In his address to the meeting, HE Dr al-Khulaifi reaffirmed Qatar's steadfast and ongoing support for the Palestinian cause and the resilience of the Palestinian people, based on international legitimacy and the two-state solution to ensure the establishment of an independent Palestinian state along the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

He also emphasised that Qatar continues its efforts with international partners to reach a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, which would alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people, secure the release of detainees and prisoners, and pave the way for comprehensive peace and lasting stability in the region.

Reurtes adds: "We meet to make another push for the end of the war in Gaza, for a way out of the unending spiral of violence between the Palestinians, the Israelis... That way is clear. The implementation of the two-state solution is the only way," Spanish Foreign Minister Jose Manuel Albares told reporters.

Albares said there was "a clear willingness" among the participants, who notably do not include Israel, "to move on from words to actions and to make strides towards a clear schedule for the effective implementation" of a two-state solution, starting with Palestine joining the United Nations. **Page 5**

Gord tool to assess energy performance of buildings

By Joseph Varghese
Staff Reporter

Giving a fillip to Qatar's efforts at energy conservation and sustainability, the Gulf Organisation for Research and Development (Gord), based at Qatar Science and Technology Park, has developed a web-based simulation tool.

Energia Suite helps in assessing the energy performance of buildings, Gord founding chairman Dr Yousef Alhorh told *Gulf Times* in an exclusive interview.

Gord has been working to develop this tool for some time, and now it is set for the global launch, he said.

"As 40% of energy is consumed in building operations, reducing energy usage within buildings is crucial for lowering the carbon footprint,

whether locally or globally. There are many strategies and techniques to improve the energy efficiency of buildings. However, to assess the impact of such solutions, you need assessment tools," said Dr Alhorh.

"To bridge the gap, we have developed Energia Suite, a first of its kind in the region. This simulation tool can be used to assess energy-saving intervention strategies, products and solutions. It enables developers and project owners to assess in advance whether these solutions or products will effectively achieve the required energy saving," explained the official.

"The strength of this tool is that it can be used anywhere in the world. It can be used in more than 10,000 cities across the world, making it truly global. It is backed by extremely sophisticated calculation engine based on the energy use. **To Page 3**

Call for global action to stop genocidal war

Qatar has confirmed that the genocidal war being waged by Israeli forces on the Gaza Strip for over 11 months, which has recently expanded to include the occupied West Bank, poses a serious threat to regional and international peace and security, adding that the situation requires the international community and its relevant institutions to take urgent measures to stop it. This statement was made by HE the Secretary-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Ahmad bin Hassan al-Hammadi, who is also Qatar's Governor to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), during the current session of the IAEA Board of Governors in Vienna, addressing the situation in occupied Palestine. **Page 2**

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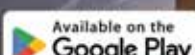
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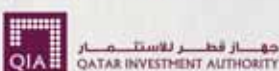
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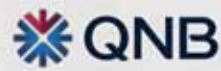
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Qatar calls on international community's action to stop Israel's onslaught on Gaza

QNA
Vienna

Qatar has confirmed that the genocidal war being waged by Israeli forces on the Gaza Strip for over 11 months, which has recently expanded to include the occupied West Bank, poses a serious threat to regional and international peace and security, adding that the situation requires the international community and its relevant institutions to take urgent measures to stop it.

This statement was made by HE the Secretary-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Ahmad bin Hassan al-Hammadi, who is also Qatar's Governor to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), during the current session of the IAEA Board of Governors in Vienna, addressing the situation in occupied Palestine.

Dr al-Hammadi referred to the statement made by the Israeli Minister of Heritage in November 2023 about the intention to use nuclear weapons to eliminate Gaza from



the face of the earth, and the statement by the Israeli Finance Minister in August 2024, calling for the use of starvation, a silent and comprehensive weapon, to eliminate 2mn civilians in Gaza.

In this regard, Dr al-Hammadi said that

these remarks are just examples of the urgent need for the international community to speak with one voice in rejecting these policies and practices that are dragging humanity back to the Dark Ages.

He continued that the international community had hoped for the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) issued on Jul 19, 2024, which confirmed the illegality of Israeli occupation and that Israel is pursuing a policy of oppressing the Palestinian people in the occupied territories.

It stated that Israel must immediately end its presence in the Palestinian territories and compensate for the damages caused. He added that the ICJ had affirmed that all states must cooperate with the UN to implement the necessary measures to ensure the end of the illegal Israeli presence in the occupied Palestinian territories and fully realise the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination. HE the Secretary-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs emphasised that this advisory opinion from the principal judicial body of the UN places the responsibility on the UN General Assembly

and the Security Council to seek ways to end the illegal Israeli presence in the Palestinian territories and fully realise the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, including granting Palestine full membership in the UN. His Excellency added that it also places responsibility on other UN bodies and agencies, including the IAEA, to not recognise the illegal Israeli presence in the occupied Palestinian territories and to refrain from engaging with it in any way.

Dr al-Hammadi said that UN member states are called upon to contribute to the full realisation of the Palestinian people's right to self-determination and urged those countries that have not yet recognised the State of Palestine to do so without delay.

In conclusion, HE the Secretary-General emphasised that the disasters affecting humanity in recent decades, whether natural or man-made, have led the international community to the conviction that we are all in the same boat. And that for the survival and well-being of all, the rule of law in international relations must prevail without exceptions or double standards.

Qatar condemns Israeli occupation PM's storming of Palestinian Jordan Valley

Qatar condemned, in the strongest terms, the Israeli occupation prime minister's storming of the Palestinian Jordan Valley, considering it a dangerous escalation and an extension of provocative policies aimed at expanding settlements and a flagrant violation of international legitimacy resolutions, especially Security Council Resolution No. 2334.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs warned, in a statement, of the consequences of these ongoing attacks on the ongoing efforts to reach a ceasefire agreement in the Gaza Strip, and stressed the need for the international community to assume its responsibilities to compel the Israeli occupation authorities to stop their blatant violations of international humanitarian law and to compel them to respect international conventions.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs reiterated Qatar's firm position on the justice of the Palestinian cause and the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, including the establishment of their independent state on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital. **(QNA)**

Qatar affirms its commitment to protecting rights of the elderly

Qatar emphasised the significant importance it places in terms of taking care of the elderly, viewing the promotion and protection of their rights as a central and priority issue in national efforts aimed at enhancing and safeguarding human rights.

This came in a statement delivered by Second Secretary at the Human Rights Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Hamad Masoud Hamad al-Athbi during the interactive dialogue with the Independent Expert on the Enjoyment of All Human Rights by Older Persons, on the legal capacity and informed consent for older



persons, within the framework of the 57th session of the Human

Rights Council in Geneva. Al-Athbi noted that Qatar's ef-

forts to ensure the rights of the elderly are grounded in several constitutional and national legal provisions, alongside religious duties and cultural values that elevate the status of older persons, encouraging their respect and dignified treatment. He added that their rights are a key focus across national social, health, and economic policies and strategies.

He added that elderly individuals in Qatar enjoy great freedom and independence in choosing their living arrangements without institutional or societal barriers. They have access to all state services without restrictions and are given priority in service provi-

sion. Additionally, necessary assistance is provided to complete their transactions, including educational guidance tailored to their age and cognitive levels.

Al-Athbi also highlighted that the elderly in Qatar have the freedom to make decisions regarding their health, care, and financial affairs, and to fully participate in society. He emphasised that Qatar works to protect the legal capacity of older persons by implementing training and educational programmes that enhance their cognitive abilities, while also providing them with access to information through suitable means and methods. **(QNA)**

Qatar chairs GCC-Morocco joint cultural co-operation meeting

Qatar, as the current chair of the GCC, presided over the sixth meeting of the Joint Cultural Co-operation Working Group between the GCC states and Morocco, held in the Moroccan city of Tangier.

The meeting was chaired by Director of the Department of Culture and Arts at the Ministry of Culture Abdulrahman Abdullah al-Dulaimi and was attended by members of the GCC General Cultural Committee, along with representatives and members of the Moroccan Ministry of Culture. The meeting discussed the strategic partnership between the GCC countries and Morocco, as well as the co-ordination of positions in international cultural forums. Several topics related to enhancing joint cultural co-operation were also addressed, including the activation of the Memorandum of Understanding between the GCC and Morocco. **(QNA)**

GCC for strict penalties against violators of rights of older persons

GCC states acknowledged the report by the Independent Expert on the Human Rights of Older Persons, which addressed critical issues concerning the legal capacity of the elderly and how to ensure their rights.

This was highlighted in a statement delivered by HE Dr Hind Abdulrahman al-Muftah, who is Qa-

tar's Permanent Representative to the UN Office in Geneva, on behalf of the GCC, as the groups chair, during the interactive dialogue on the Independent Experts report as part of the 57th session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva.

In the statement, Dr al-Muftah emphasised the importance of ensuring more precise oversight and clearer, more comprehensive

standards to guarantee informed consent for older persons. She stressed the need to prevent erroneous conclusions about their incapacity, which could have severe implications for their financial and legal rights and further increase their vulnerability within healthcare frameworks.

The GCC states expressed regret over the examples cited in the

report that document the many forms of abuse faced by the elderly and reaffirmed their total rejection of all forms of exploitation and discrimination against them. They called for stricter penalties against perpetrators of such abuses and urged international cooperation to enhance the protection and safeguarding of this vulnerable group. The GCC states also noted

that all national or collective laws and legislation, including the GCC Human Rights Declaration, focus on protecting and ensuring the rights of older persons. They emphasised that this group is seen as a priority, with well-established rights under the law, in line with the customs and values of Gulf societies, which hold the elderly in high esteem. **(QNA)**

Shura highlights focus on developing national talent in Armenia conference

QNA
Yerevan

The Shura Council concluded its participation in the 10th World Conference of Young Parliamentarians, held over two days in Yerevan, the capital of Armenia. The conference, themed 'Avoiding Lost Generations: Preserving Education and Employment in All Circumstances', was organised by the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

Representing the Shura Council at the event was Mohammed bin Omar al-Mannai, member of the council. The conference centred on the vital role of parliamentarians in fostering education and employment opportunities for young people, especially in the face of global challenges such as conflicts, pandemics, and climate change.

During his address at the closing session, Mohammed bin Omar al-Mannai highlighted the Shura Council's focus on education, noting that the Council actively reviews and approves legislation



concerning the educational sector. He emphasised the Council's commitment to harnessing technology in education and aligning academic specialisations with labour market demands. He further reiterated the importance placed by the Shura Council on empowering national talents, ensuring their readiness to meet the evolv-

ing needs of the modern era and preparing them for future employment opportunities.

In this context, al-Mannai referenced the law on job localisation within the private sector, which seeks to bolster national competencies in this critical field. He noted that this legislation is part of broader national efforts aimed



at creating sustainable job opportunities for Qatari youth and increasing their participation in the private sector.

Al-Mannai also stressed that the law encourages companies to prioritise the employment of Qatari citizens, fostering a supportive work environment tailored to their abilities and the demands

of the market. This initiative, he said, is a significant step towards realising the goals of Qatar National Vision 2030.

He also pointed to the council's recent proposal on training and developing national talent, aimed at empowering Qatari youth in various professional sectors by enhancing training programmes

that raise their skills and enable them to integrate into the workforce effectively. On the margin of the conference, HE Mohammed bin Omar al-Mannai held bilateral meetings with several key figures, including President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, Tulia Akson; Speaker of the Armenian National Assembly, Elen Simonyan; Deputy Speaker of the Serbian Parliament, Edin Derlic; and Member of the Armenian National Assembly and Head of the Armenia-Qatar Parliamentary Friendship Group, Vahagn Aleksanyan. These meetings reviewed parliamentary co-operation and explored ways to strengthen these ties, along with a discussion of key issues raised during the conference.

Additionally, al-Mannai chaired the Gulf delegation at a meeting held on the sidelines of the conference with representatives of the Scandinavian and Nordic countries. The session focused on enhancing co-operation between the Gulf parliaments and their Scandinavian counterparts.

Gulf countries stress commitment to eradicating contemporary forms of slavery

The Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) states affirmed their firm commitment to eradicating contemporary forms of slavery, and acknowledged that forced or compulsory labour may amount to "contemporary forms of slavery."

The GCC states underscored their full commitment to suppressing these practices based on the provisions of the Forced Labour Convention No. 29 of 1930, and the Abolition of Forced Labour Convention No. 105 of 1957, to which all GCC member states have acceded.

This came in a statement delivered by HE the Permanent Representative of the State of Qatar to the UN Office in Geneva Dr Hind Abdulrahman al-Muftah, on behalf

of the GCC states, in the capacity of Qatar as head of the Gulf Group, in an interactive dialogue on the Report of the Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery, as part of the 57th session of the Human Rights Council. The GCC states underscored that their national guarantees are consistent with these obligations and that they are designed to ensure full compliance with international obligations. They reiterated that the effective implementation of these international principles must take into account the legal, economic and cultural contexts specific to each country, in order to ensure the achievement of the desired objectives while respecting national circumstances and capabilities. The GCC states said



that, while they are convinced that discussions of labour issues traditionally take place in specialised forums, they remain committed to discussing their intersection with human rights,

reaffirm their full commitment to protecting the rights of all individuals, including detainees, and continue to strengthen national legal frameworks to reflect this commitment. **(QNA)**

Qatar partakes in session on sustainable trade, entrepreneurship in Geneva

Qatar's Permanent Representative to the UN Office in Geneva, HE Dr Hind Abdulrahman al-Muftah, took part in a pivotal session organised by Qatar's Permanent Delegation, in collaboration with the State's Office to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and Hamad Bin Khalifa University. The session, titled "Sustainable Trade and Entrepreneurship: Pathways to Re-Globalisation," was held at the WTO headquarters in Geneva. In her address, HE Dr al-Muftah emphasised that sustainable trade is not merely an instrument for economic growth, but a pathway to deeper global cooperation, social development, and resilience. She highlighted that sustainable trade and entrepreneurship are key to tackling contemporary challenges such as climate change, economic inequalities, and the necessity for inclusive development.

HE Dr al-Muftah underscored the indispensable role of the WTO in offering a multilateral framework that integrates sustainability into global trade practices. She further noted that Qatar has long been a champion of these objectives, recognising the significance of international agreements and partnerships. Qatar takes pride in supporting global humanitarian efforts and promoting an innovative approach to sustainable development, as outlined in the Doha Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries.

Saudi Theatre Authority felicitates Qatari playwright

The Saudi Theatre and Performing Arts Authority honoured Qatari playwright Saleh al-Mannai and a number of GCC theatre stars, on the sidelines of the 14th session of the Gulf Co-operation Council National Theatre Groups Festival, which continues until September 17 in Riyadh.

This honour comes in appreciation of their contributions to enriching the GCC theatre movement, shaping its elite works, and inspiring generations to adopt a passion for theatre.

In this context, playwright Saleh al-Mannai said in a statement to Qatar News Agency (QNA): "This honour means a lot to me, especially since it was in Saudi Arabia

and at a festival held for the first time in the kingdom.

He added: "I dedicate this Qatari honour to all Qatari artists, as it is considered an encouragement to me and an appreciation for my long service in the theatre, and I consider myself lucky to be honoured at such a festival."

The kingdom is hosting the GCC Theatre Festival for the first time, with the efforts of the Theatre and Performing Arts Authority within the framework of its goals to enhance joint work, host major theatrical events regionally and internationally, and push theatrical production and creative efforts in it to new dimensions.

The GCC Theatre Festival was



launched in Riyadh on September 10 with the participation of the State of Qatar, where the delegation of Qatar is headed by Director of the Theatre Affairs Center at the Ministry of Culture Abdulrahim

al-Siddiqi. The centre is participating with a special pavilion that includes theatrical publications, in addition to a screen that broadcasts a large number of Qatari plays over 50 years.

Qatar among top in cybersecurity index

The National Cybersecurity Agency (NCSA) announces that Qatar has achieved a major accomplishment in the Global Cybersecurity Index (GCI) 2024, as it was classified as a "model" country at the international level in cybersecurity.

According to the index issued by the International Telecommunication Union of the UN, Qatar was placed in this classification due to its excellence in the various pillars that represent cybersecurity obligations at the state level, namely: legal, technical, regulatory, capacity development, and co-operation.

Qatar obtained full scores in the five pillars, which reflects its strong commitment to enhancing cybersecurity at the local and international levels, as well as

its leading role in developing effective cybersecurity strategies. These results confirm the importance of the continuous efforts made by Qatar in providing a safe digital environment and enhancing international co-operation in confronting increasing cyber threats.

The Global Cybersecurity Index (GCI 2024) assesses national efforts through a new analysis that will contribute to a greater focus on each country's progress in terms of cybersecurity commitments and the resulting impacts. The report places 46 countries in Tier 1, the highest of five levels, and is designated for "model" countries that demonstrate strong commitment to all five pillars of cybersecurity. (QNA)

Qatari artist blends traditional, digital art

By Joey Aguilar
Staff Reporter

Qatari artist Noora al-Hardan is challenging conventional notions of art by seamlessly blending traditional mediums with cutting-edge digital techniques in her piece, "Lost and Found Again," at the Fire Station: Artist in Residence.

The artist's work, on view as part of the 'A House Overlooking the World' exhibition, explores the fascinating stories hidden within abandoned spaces, prompting viewers to see the familiar in a new light.

"An example like an abandoned hut, a pair of forgotten shoes, or a (discarded) blanket. For instance, here in my work, I currently have

a blanket that was thrown onto a car in a junkyard that I found, and I feel like for some reasons everyone had used an old blanket in their childhood," she told *Gulf Times*.

Al-Hardan said her artistic journey began with a fascination for photography. Inspired by abandoned places like junkyards and buildings slated for demolition, she captures the remnants of human existence through her lens.

"My art always starts with photography so I got interested in analogue photography at university. I took an analogue film class with Khalifa al-Obaidly (Fire Station: Artist in Residence director) and after this class, I fell in love with old film strips and developing.

Her work excels the boundaries of traditional art by incorporat-

ing spray paint, digital prints, and even old slide projectors. "I started as a traditional artist," she reveals. "But I was encouraged to explore new mediums. Digital art is more interactive and engaging for viewers. It's about finding the right balance and adding a fresh perspective."

About using a mix of digital and traditional art in communicating with her viewers, al-Hardan said such technique offer a unique visual experience for them, noting that people enjoy the combination since it is not something they see frequently.

"I want to compare both, this (old projector) isn't smooth as you can see, it's very loud and it doesn't move quickly, whereas the digital (projector) is very smooth. I feel like it's a nice contrast having

both," she pointed out.

About the growing popularity and interest in digital art in Qatar and the region, al-Hardan said: "I wouldn't say more popular but I feel like people, maybe my age, like the younger people, we are interested in the past. We love finding stuff that aren't familiar with us because we are very familiar with digital projectors but like this (old projector), it's an interesting thing."

Besides al-Hardan, 16 other artists are showcasing their unique pieces at the exhibition, which runs until December 31. Some of these include Shuaa al-Kuwari's (Qatar) Modern Portrait, Mohamed al-Emadi's (Qatar) Busnida Universe - Chapters 0-3, and Marco Bruno and Simone Carena's (Italy) MotoElastico, among others.

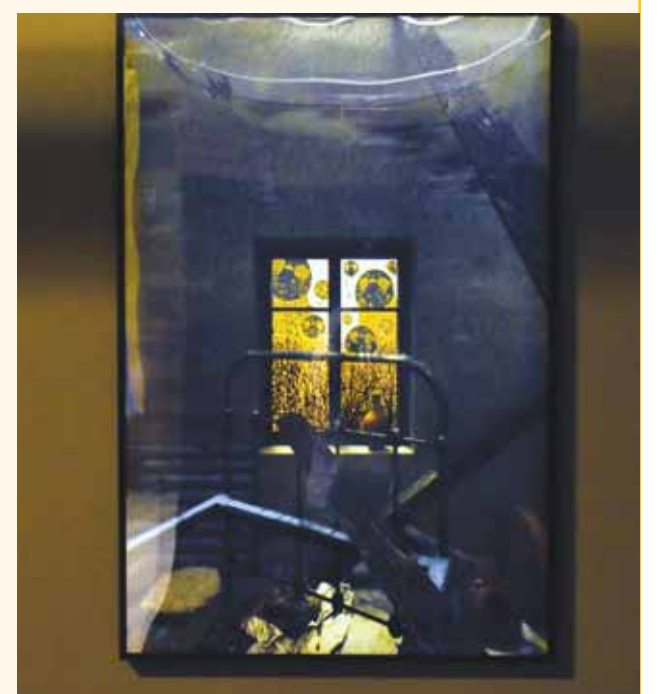


Noora al-Hardan showcases her unique work at the 'A House Overlooking the World' exhibition, on view until December 31 at Fire Station: Artist in Residence. PICTURE: Thajudheen

Art expo explores complex layers of urban identity



Titled 'A House Overlooking the World,' Fire Station: Artist in Residence's (AIR) latest exhibition features thought-provoking works from 17 artists. On view until December 31, the exhibition digs deeper into the complex layers of urban identity, exploring its social, cultural, and environmental aspects. The unique exhibition highlights the exceptional talent nurtured by Fire Station's AIR programme, presenting works by: Somaia Dorzadeh (Iran), Oleksandra Umanska (Ukraine), Charlotte Rodenberg (US), Marco Bruno and Simone Carena (Italy), Ann Mc Nally (Ireland), Alanoud Alghamdi (Saudi Arabia), Maryam AlTajer (Bahrain) and Hannah Fakhri, Abdulla AlSallat, Shuaa al-Kuwari, Noora al-Hardan, Aljaze AlNaimi, Zainab AlShibani, Aisha al-Abdulla, Mohammed AlEmadi and Alkhuzama Alharami (Qatar).



NHRC signs MoUs with National Service Academy, QCDC

The National Human Rights Committee (NHRC) signed two separate memorandums of understanding (MoUs) with the National Service Academy and the Qatar Career Development Center, a member of the Qatar Foundation for Education, Science, and Community Development. HE the Chairperson of the NHRC Maryam bint Abdullah al-Attiyah said that these MoUs are part of the committee's ongoing efforts to enhance local partnerships that support human rights across various levels and to promote the values of justice and equality within Qatari society. Al-Attiyah highlighted previous collaboration between the NHRC and the National Service Academy over the past two years, during which the NHRC provided a training package

covering lectures on human rights, their principles, standards, and key treaties, as well as human responsibilities.

The training package also introduced the permanent constitution of Qatar and its key general principles, outlining the responsibilities of individuals concerning human rights according to the constitution, the legal framework, and institutional mechanisms for their protection. It also touched on the national and non-governmental mechanisms responsible for implementation and monitoring, along with an introduction to sustainable development and Qatar's progress toward achieving its goals. President of the National Service Academy Lieutenant-General Hamad Ahmed al-Nuaimi emphasised that

the MoU formalises the co-operation between the two sides, which had previously seen the NHRC deliver human rights training to several batches of civil service students. He expressed the academy's commitment to spreading awareness and fostering a culture of human rights, both within the academy and in the broader community. Director of Qatar Career Development Center Abdullah al-Mansoori said that the MoU with the centre stems from the recommendations of the Second National Forum on Human Rights, focusing on empowering people with disabilities to join the workforce and leverage their capabilities. He noted that the agreement would be followed by a range of joint initiatives and programmes. (QNA)

Gord tool to assess energy performance of buildings

From Page 1

"The tool is very sound and well-founded in terms of scientific aspects and is based on ISO, ASHRAE, and European standards," he noted.

Energia Suite has a user-friendly interface so that people can just key in the building data related to the systems, materials and products. "The tool will then process this information to perform the needed calculation. Energia Suite does not require an energy expert to run it. This is the key difference between Energia Suite and other simulation tools, which require highly skilled energy professionals."

According to Dr Alhorr, Energia Suite can be used to assess energy patterns of complex high-rise buildings as well as smaller projects.

"Energia Suite is among our latest initiatives to support energy efficiency in the built environment. It is a global initiative for which we have received interest from different countries to test its viability. Soon, we will be launching this tool internationally," he added.



Dr Yusef Alhorr



Physiotherapy event held for parents of special needs children

The Indian Physiotherapy Forum Qatar (IPFQ) and Outreach Qatar (OQ) joined hands to organise an awareness programme for parents of children with special needs to commemorate 'World Physiotherapy Day - 2024' on September 8. IPFQ, a non-profit organisation of physiotherapists living and working in Qatar in both private and government healthcare facilities, is an associate organisation of the Indian Business and Professional Council under the aegis of the embassy of India. Outreach Qatar is an associate organisation of Indian Community Benevolent Fund (ICBF), also under the aegis of embassy of India, Qatar, supporting and catering to

children with special needs and their parents. The theme of World Physiotherapy Day - 2024 was 'Low back pain and the role of physiotherapy in its management'. The event was opened by OQ general secretary Sameer Moosa, followed by the inaugural address by president Avinash Gaikwad. Dr Sheena Maria John elaborated on the theme of the day and introduced the team of presenters and volunteers. Interactive sessions were conducted by paediatric physiotherapists Dr Nargis Prashanth Das, Dr Binoy Das Nalumakkal, and Dr Biju Nirmal Jacob. The activity focused on enriching



participants' knowledge in the role of exercises as a lifelong activity for healthy living and preventing low back pain. Parents shared their experiences,

discussed their concerns and participated by asking questions to get right guidance from the expert physiotherapists. The event concluded with a relaxation

breathing exercise lead by physiotherapist Dr Sejal Nariani. The combined efforts of the two organisations made the event meaningful by raising awareness

among parents of children with special needs on the importance of taking care of their back while caring for their children, a statement added.

PHRP-Q officials meet envoy



The Philippine embassy in Doha hosted a meeting on Thursday between the newly elected officers of the Philippine HR Practitioners-Qatar (PHRP-Q) and ambassador Lilibeth Pono. The delegation, led by PHRP-Q president Amie Andrada, comprised 12 officers, a statement said. Andrada emphasised the role PHRP-Q plays in advancing the careers of Filipino HR professionals in the country. She outlined the organisation's initiatives, which include fostering professional development, creating networking opportunities, and promoting best practices in human resources. Ambassador Pono stressed the significance of partnerships between the embassy and community organisations, underscoring such collaborations can help uplift and strengthen the Filipino workforce in Qatar. She highlighted the embassy's readiness to work alongside the PHRP-Q in achieving its goals, recognising its potential to create meaningful impact, the statement explained. The event culminated in an oath-taking ceremony, where ambassador Pono administered the oath of office to the newly elected officers of PHRP-Q.

Malarvadi competitions held



In connection with the Hijri month of Rabi' al-Awwal, which evokes memories of the Prophet (peace be upon him), Malarvadi children's Organisation Rayyan zone hosted competitions for children up to 13 years. The winners: Prophetic praise song - Sub junior: Fathima Haneen Arshad, Muhammed Ishaan Shameer, Minha Maryam; Junior - Aisha al-Hasani, Minha, Zeba Zerir Shafah. The Compassionate Prophet - speech - Junior: Minha, Ihsan Muhammed Minsu, Ismail Muhammed Minsu. Prophetic Stories - Kids: Ameer Hassan, Aasiya Al Hasani, Amina Niyas; Sub junior: Fathima Haneen Arshad, Lena Shafeeq, Ayisha Niyas. Colouring - Kids: Ala Zainab, Sara Nadeer, Aasiya Al Hasani; Buds: Nuha Ajmal, Hazim Hamdi, Mehza Shajid. Prizes were distributed to the winners by Center for Indian Community Rayyan zone vice president Subul Abdul Azeez, secretary Abdul Jaleel M M, Women India Rayyan zonal secretary Sainab Abdul Jaleel, Rafeeq Thangal, Shameer Manali, Mohammed Nisar and Malarvadi office-bearers Shabana Shafi, Faseela Shibli, Dana Muhiyudheen, Sameena Asif, Jasmin Haris, Hana Salahudheen, Ruby Kalam, Saleena Babu and Faseela Nayeem.

DPS MIS hosts academic awards ceremony



DPS Modern Indian School organised an 'Academic Award Ceremony' to honour 180 students for their achievements in the CBSE Class X Board Examination 2023-24. Director Gopi Varadhan, the chief guest, congratulated the achievers. Principal Asna Nafees highlighted the school's 14-year legacy of excellence in grades X and XII CBSE Board Examinations. The occasion also marked the release of *Cyber Security: Our Future Ahead*, a book authored by Shreyas Jain, a grade XI student. The publication aims to educate readers about potential cyber threats and promote safer online practices.

Doha student is literacy envoy

DPS Modern Indian School grade XI student, Krishnapravan Ramesh, has been selected as a World Literacy Foundation Youth Ambassador for 2024. He will focus on promoting educational initiatives and raising community awareness about the importance of reading and writing to boost literacy rates. This achievement reflects his passion for education and leadership and highlights the school's commitment to nurturing responsible, socially conscious young leaders who positively impact their communities and beyond, a statement said. Principal Asna Nafees congratulated him and wished him success in all his efforts to create a meaningful difference in the society.



KEF Toastmasters' open house held



KEF Toastmasters conducted an open house. Acting sergeant-at-arms Yahkoob K kicked off the meeting. President Remi Raji shared his journey with Toastmasters. Najla Azad introduced the theme 'Try It,' emphasising the importance of exploring new paths and embracing fresh opportunities. Past district director Rajesh V C, delivered a keynote on 'Finding Your Passion.' Area director Nivedita Ketkar was present. Raghavan Menon was the general evaluator. Mohamed Iskandar delivered an ice breaker speech about his cross-cultural experiences. Evaluator Sandeep Pandey offered feedback. The role players were Leena Ollachery (timer), Lazim Siddique (grammarians), Shabir Hameed (ah-counter), and Ajinas Arangatt (listener). There were nine guests and five new members joining on the spot.

Doha student in global chess event

DPS Modern Indian School student Syed Abdul Khader secured eighth position in world rankings in the Under-12 category at the inaugural FIDE World Cup for youngsters, in June in Batumi, Georgia. He was selected by the Indian Chess Federation to represent the country in the event that saw the world's top young chess talents, competing in the U-8, U-10, and U-12 categories. Khader also clinched fourth place in his group. Principal Asna Nafees congratulated him.



Karnataka Sangha Qatar celebrates Teacher's Day



Karnataka Sangha Qatar (KSQ) feted 25 member teachers at its maiden Teacher's Day celebrations. The event coincided with the forum's silver jubilee. In India, Teacher's Day commemorates the birth anniversary of the first vice-president and second president,

Dr Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, a distinguished scholar and teacher. Kannada teachers who voluntarily conduct KSQ's weekend language classes were also felicitated. Indian Cultural Centre (ICC) president A P Manikantan was the chief guest and

Brilliant Indian International School principal Asha Shiju, the guest of honour. The tone for the event was set by children performing the Guru Vandana song, directed by Anil Bhasagi and Sushma Harish.

KSQ president Ravi Shetty in his welcome address narrated a Sanskrit quote about the importance of teachers in everybody's life. As a contribution to the ICC literature club, KSQ officials handed over a collection of Kannada books to Manikantan and vice-president

Subramanya Hebbagelu. The forum also bid farewell to management committee member (2022-2023) Sanjana Jeevan who is returning to India for good. Bhuvana Suraj was the master of ceremony. Bhavana Naveen proposed a vote of thanks.



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian in Basra



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian reacts as he meets with community members, academic figures, sheikhs and officials during his visit, in Basra, Iraq, yesterday.

Spain hosts conference on two-state solution to Israeli-Palestinian conflict

AFP
Madrid

Ministers from Muslim and European countries along with the European Union's foreign affairs chief gathered yesterday in Madrid to discuss how to advance a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. "Together, we want to identify the concrete actions that will enable us to make progress towards this objective," Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez wrote on social network X.

"The international community must take a decisive step towards a just and lasting peace in the Middle East," the Socialist premier added. Sanchez welcomed participants at his official residence before the start of the meeting at the foreign ministry in central Madrid, hosted by his top diplomat Jose Manuel Albares.

In attendance were Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Mustafa and the foreign ministers of Egypt, Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Türkiye – all members of the Arab-Islamic Contact Group for Gaza – as well as the heads of the Arab League and the Organisation of Islamic Co-operation.

The European Union was represented by its foreign affairs chief Josep Borrell as well as the foreign ministers of Ireland, Norway and Slovenia in addition to Spain. "The implementation of the two-state solution is the only way to ensure a just and last-



Spain's Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez walks, in front of Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Mustafa, Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan al-Saud and Spain's Foreign Minister Jose Manuel Albares, on the day of a meeting with at Moncloa Palace in Madrid, Spain.

ing peace in the region through the peaceful and secure coexistence of the state of Palestine and the state of Israel," Albares told a news conference.

Asked about Israel's absence from the meeting, he said the country had not been invited because it belonged "neither to the group of Europeans nor to the Arab-Islamic contact group" but stressed he would be "delighted" if Israel took part in discussions on the two-state solution. Calls for the solution have grown since the outbreak of the war in Gaza.

Israel has launched an offensive that has killed at least 41,118 people in Gaza, according to the

health ministry in the Hamas-run territory. The UN rights office says most of the dead are women and children. Sanchez has been one of the staunchest critics in Europe of Israel's Gaza offensive since the start of the conflict.

Under his watch, Spain on May 28 along with Ireland and Norway formally recognised a Palestinian state comprising the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Earlier this month he announced that the first "bilateral summit between Spain and Palestine" would be held before the end of the year. He said he expected "several collaboration agreements between the two states" to be signed.

Comoros president wounded in knife attack: presidency

AFP
Moroni

Comoros President Azali Assoumani was slightly wounded in a knife attack yesterday, the presidency said, adding that the attacker had been arrested. "The President of the Republic Azali Assoumani was slightly wounded by a knife while attending the funeral" of a well-known religious leader, it said in a statement.

"His injuries are not serious, and he has returned home. The attacker is in the hands of the security services," it added.

Government spokeswoman Fatima Ahamadael told AFP that the attack happened in Salimani-It-sandra, an area on the outskirts of the capital Moroni. "Thank God, his life is not in danger," she said, declining to give further details. Witnesses told AFP that the attacker was a 22-year-old with no criminal history, who had joined

the army in 2022. He was dressed in a boubou, and was in the room with the religious leader's body, as mourners were paying respects, they said.

The knife injured the president's hand, but the attacker was stopped by another mourner, the witnesses said. A source close to the presidency, speaking on condition of anonymity, said: "The president has received appropriate care. He is out of danger." A second source, also speaking on condition of anonymity, told AFP that the attacker was a young "active-duty gendarme".

No other details were immediately available. After the attack, the neighbourhood remained tense, with gendarmes on the scene. Residents hurried home, sometimes pausing to whisper in small groups on the streets. Azali, 65, a former military ruler who came to power in a coup in 1999, was re-elected president in January after a disputed vote that was followed by two days of deadly

protests. He has been accused of growing authoritarianism.

In August, he granted new powers to his son, in a move that critics said was a step towards consolidating the family's rule over the small African island nation. Nour El Fath Azali, who is Azali's eldest son, was appointed secretary-general of Comoros in July. With his new powers, he must approve all decrees issued by ministers and governors. Critics said that elevates his role to that of de facto prime minister. In January, President Azali won a vote which his opponents said was marred by fraud. Court challenges to the election were dismissed. One person was killed and several others injured in the violence that erupted in the aftermath of the election in the country of some 870,000 people.

His arch-rival, former president Ahmed Abdallah Sambi, is serving a life sentence for high treason for allegedly selling passports.

Tanzania police ban opposition protest

Tanzanian police said yesterday they were banning the main opposition party from holding a protest against killings and abductions of its members. The Chadema party had called a mass rally in the commercial capital Dar es Salaam on September 23 unless recent disappearances were investigated and missing members "brought back alive or dead".

But police spokesperson David Misime told reporters that "the Chadema protests are banned" and warned the party that "police will deal with anyone who violates this order". There had been hopes

Tanzania was entering a period of democratic freedom under President Samia Suluhu Hassan after she reversed restrictions on opposition parties and the media put in place by her predecessor John Magufuli.

But recent crackdowns, including the mass arrest of Chadema leaders and supporters ahead of a planned rally last month, have raised fears of renewed repression. Chadema accuses the authorities of "killings and abductions", including of Ali Mohamed Kibao, a member of its national secretariat, who was found dead at the weekend after being beaten

and doused with acid, according to the party. Chadema spokesman John Mrema told AFP the party would go ahead with the protest. "The police spokesperson is not authorised to ban protests," he said. "It seems the police are worried due to the fact they are also suspects?"

Emmanuel Nchimbi, secretary-general of the ruling Chama Cha Mapinduzi (Revolution Party), blamed the abductions on "a gang" and urged Chadema not to protest. "The killers want to divide us as a nation... Chadema should not fall into the trap," he said. — AFP

Polio vaccination drive in Gaza a 'massive success': WHO

AFP
Geneva

The WHO chief hailed yesterday the success of the first phase of a giant polio vaccination campaign in war-ravaged Gaza after more than 560,000 children received a first dose. "This is a massive success amidst a tragic daily reality of life across the Gaza Strip," Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said on X, formerly Twitter.

Disease has spread with Gaza lying in ruins and the majority of its 2.4mn residents forced to flee their homes due to Israel's military assault – often taking refuge in cramped and unsanitary conditions. After the first confirmed

polio case in 25 years, a massive vaccination effort began on September 1 targeting at least 90% of children under 10, aided by localised "humanitarian pauses" in fighting.

The first phase of the campaign, which first brought vaccines to children in central Gaza, then the south, and finally to the hardest-to reach north of the territory, wrapped up Thursday. A fresh campaign to provide a needed second dose is due to begin in about four weeks in Gaza, besieged for over 11 months.

"We admire all the health teams, who conducted this complex operation," Tedros said, also voicing gratitude to the families for turning out in droves to get their children vaccinated against polio. Polio-

virus, most often spread through sewage and contaminated water, is highly infectious. It can cause deformities and paralysis, and is potentially fatal. It mainly affects children under the age of five.

WHO has hailed that area-specific humanitarian pauses were respected, allowing the campaign to go ahead, and has urged a broader halt in fighting to help establish humanitarian corridors and the delivery of desperately-needed throughout the war-torn territory. "Imagine what could be achieved with a ceasefire!" Tedros said. Israel's onslaught has killed at least 41,118 people in Gaza, according to the territory's health ministry. The UN human rights office says most of the dead have been women or children.

UNRWA says staffer killed in Israeli West Bank raid

AFP
Jerusalem

The UN agency for Palestinian refugees said yesterday one of its employees was killed this week during an Israeli raid in the occupied West Bank, the first such death in more than a decade.

The agency, known as UNRWA, said the employee was "shot and killed on the roof of his home by a sniper", and that it was "the first time an UNRWA staff member has been killed in the West Bank in more than 10 years".

The incident took place in the Faraa refugee camp in the northern West Bank, the statement said. It identified the slain employee as

Sufyan Jaber Abed Jawwad, who "worked as a sanitation labourer" in the camp and "is survived by his wife and five children".

The Israeli military did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the UNRWA statement about its staffer.

In late August, the military launched a large-scale operation in the north of the West Bank that has killed dozens and is ongoing.

On September 4, Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant said the military would use its "full strength", and that he had ordered the military to carry out air strikes "wherever necessary" in order to "avoid endangering soldiers". The operation in the Faraa camp this week "comes as the West Bank is experiencing unprecedented levels of violence, plac-

ing communities at risk", UNRWA said in its statement.

UNRWA has said at least 220 members of the agency's staff have been killed in the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza. That includes six it said were killed in a strike Wednesday on a school-turned-shelter in central Gaza, the highest death toll among its team in a single incident. UNRWA, which co-ordinates nearly all aid into Gaza, has been in crisis since Israel accused a dozen of its 30,000 employees of being involved in the October 7 attacks that sparked the war.

The UN immediately fired the implicated staff members, and a probe found some "neutrality related issues" but stressed Israel had not provided evidence for its main allegations.

Congo coup verdict



Major Freddy Ehume, the president of the Kinshasa Gombe Garrison Military Tribunal, reads the verdict to defendants accused of a failed coup attempt at Ndolo prison in Kinshasa yesterday. Three Americans were among 37 people sentenced to death on September 13, 2024 in the Democratic Republic of Congo over what the army says was a coup attempt. Death sentences were also handed down to a Belgian, Briton and Canadian, all naturalised Congolese.



Boeing staff strike after rejecting contract

AFP
Seattle

Thousands of Boeing factory workers in the United States walked off the job yesterday after voting overwhelmingly to reject a contract with the embattled aviation giant, its first strike in 16 years.

Union leaders called for the strike to start just after midnight yesterday, hours after hourly workers in the Seattle region in the Pacific Northwest spurned the tentative contract with a vote of 94.6% and to strike with 96%.

A strike will shutter two major plane assembly plants for the 737 MAX and 777 in the Puget Sound region and sidelines some 33,000 workers, further delaying the financially stressed company's turnaround efforts.

"Our members spoke loud and clear tonight," said Jon Holden, president of the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAM) District 751, after the vote. "We strike at midnight."

Shares of Boeing fell yesterday as the company's chief financial officer warned the stoppage threatens to "jeopardise" a recovery if it drags out.

Picketers were out in front of the Renton plant - where Boeing's flagship 737 MAX aircraft is produced - in the early hours of yesterday, holding signs reading "On strike against Boeing", according to Bloomberg.

Thursday's vote was a decisive rejection of a deal that line workers said was far less generous than depicted by Boeing executives, marking the latest show of defiance by unions following earlier strikes in the auto, entertainment and other industries.

Led by new chief executive Kelly Ortberg, Boeing had hoped a 25% wage hike over four years and a commitment to invest in the Puget Sound region would be enough.

However, rank-and-file workers reacted with fury to the

agreement, which was initially backed by IAM leadership.

Workers had sought a 40% wage hike and critics have said the 25% figure is inflated because the new deal also eliminates an annual company bonus.

Other points of contention include the deal's failure to restore a pension, as well as Boeing's pledge to build its next plane in the Seattle region, which critics said offers no promises beyond the four-year contract.

"They're talking about a 25% increase and it's not," said Paul Janousek, an electrician in Everett who voted to strike.

Janousek, 55, who has worked at Boeing for 13 years, figures his raise is only about 9% after Boeing dropped the annual bonus.

Boeing chief financial officer Brian West said yesterday that the company had put "our best foot forward" and felt confident in the deal after it was endorsed by IAM leadership.

However, Boeing leadership quickly understood that the offer "didn't meet the mark and was not acceptable" to the rank-and-file, West said at a financial conference.

"We want to get back to the table and we want to reach an agreement that's good for our people, their families, our community," West said.

West declined to comment on the incremental impact to Boeing profits of enhancing the deal, and said it was too soon to know how the strike would affect the company's free cash flow for 2024 or 2025.

The IAM's most recent stoppage, in 2008, lasted 57 days.

According to analysts at TD Cowen, a 50-day strike would deprive Boeing of \$3-3.5bn in cash flow and would have a \$5.5bn impact on revenue.

Boeing has been under renewed scrutiny since a January incident in which a fuselage panel blew out of an Alaska Airlines Boeing 737 MAX plane mid-flight, necessitating an emergency landing.

Brazil Supreme Court lifts Starlink, X account blockage after \$3mn transfer

Brazil's Supreme Court Justice Alexandre de Moraes has decided to lift blockages previously imposed on Starlink and X accounts after ordering the transfer of 18.35mn reais (\$3.31mn) from the accounts to the country's national coffers.

According to a court statement yesterday, the lift was ordered because the amount transferred to Brazil's coffers reached the total X owed the country in fines, which had been imposed amid a feud between billionaire Elon Musk and Moraes. Musk controls both X and Starlink. - Reuters

South America surpasses record for forest fires

Reuters
Sao Paulo

South America is being ravaged by fire from Brazil's Amazon rainforest through the world's largest wetlands to dry forests in Bolivia, breaking a previous record for the number of blazes seen in a year up to September 11.

Satellite data analysed by Brazil's space research agency Inpe has registered 346,112 fire hotspots so far this year in all 13 countries of South America, topping the earlier 2007 record of 345,322 hotspots in a data series that goes back to 1998.

A Reuters photographer travelling in the heart of Brazil's Amazon this week witnessed massive fires burning in vegetation along roadways, blackening the landscape and leaving trees like burned matchsticks.

Smoke billowing from the Brazilian fires has darkened the skies above cities like Sao Paulo, feeding into a corridor of wildfire smoke seen from space stretching diagonally across the continent from Colombia in the northwest to Uruguay in the southeast.

Brazil and Bolivia have dispatched thousands of firefighters to attempt to control the blazes, but remain mostly at the mercy of extreme weather fuelling the fires.

Scientists say that while most fires are set by humans, the recent hot and dry conditions being driven by climate change are helping the fires spread more quickly.

South America has been hit by a series of heatwaves since last year.

"We never had winter," said Karla Longo, an air quality researcher at Inpe, of the weather in Sao Paulo in recent months. "It's absurd."

Despite still being winter in the Southern Hemisphere, high temperatures in Sao Paulo have held at more than 32° Celsius (90° Fahr-



This picture taken earlier this week shows a drone view of smoke rising from a forest fire in the Amazon in an area of the Trans-Amazonian Highway BR230 in Labrea, Amazonas state, Brazil. - Reuters

enheit) since last Saturday.

Hundreds of people marched in Bolivia's highland, political capital La Paz to demand action against the fires, holding banners and placards saying "Bolivia in flames" and "For cleaner air stop burning".

"Please realise what is really happening in the country, we have lost millions of hectares," said Fernanda Negron, an animal rights activist in the protest. "Millions of animals have been burned to death."

In Brazil, a drought that began last year has become the worst on record, according to national disaster monitoring agency Cemaden.

"In general, the 2023-2024 drought is the most intense, long-lasting in some regions and extensive in recent history, at least in the data since 1950," said Ana Paula Cunha, a

drought researcher with Cemaden.

The greatest number of fires this month is in Brazil and Bolivia, followed by Peru, Argentina and Paraguay, according to Inpe data.

Unusually intense fires that hit Venezuela, Guyana and Colombia earlier in the year contributed to the record but have largely subsided.

Fire from deforestation in the Amazon create particularly intense smoke because of the density of the vegetation burning, Longo said. "The sensation you get flying next to one of these plumes is like that of an atomic mushroom cloud," said Longo of Inpe.

Roughly 9mn sq km (3.5mn sq miles) of South America have been covered in smoke at times, more than half of the continent, she said.

Sao Paulo, the most populous city in the Western Hemisphere, earlier this week had the worst air quality globally, higher than famous pollution hotspots like China and India, according to website IQAir.com.

Bolivia's capital of La Paz was similarly blanketed in smoke.

Exposure to the smoke will drive up the number of people seeking hospital treatment for respiratory issues and may cause thousands of premature deaths, Longo said.

Inhaling wildfire smoke contributes to an average 12,000 early deaths a year in South America, according to a 2023 study in the academic journal *Environmental Research: Health*.

September is typically the peak month for fires in South America.

It's unclear whether the continent will continue to have high numbers of fires this year.

While rain is forecast next week for Brazil's centre south, where Sao Paulo is located, drought conditions are expected to continue through October in Brazil's northern Amazon region and centre-west agricultural region.

Strike at Argentina's flagship airline hits 30,000 passengers

A strike by pilots and crew demanding salary increases in inflation-hit Argentina affected more than 30,000 passengers yesterday, according to the Aerolíneas Argentinas airline and unions.

As workers walked off the job for the second time this month, President Javier Milei was preparing to sign a decree declaring the aviation sector an "essential service" to guarantee a minimum level of service during such strikes, his spokesman said.

The 24-hour strike led to the cancellation of 319 flights, mainly impacting domestic and regional travellers, but also hundreds of passengers heading to the United States and Europe.

Costa Rican engineer Alex Rodriguez, 53, was stranded while on his way to visit one of South

America's top tourist attractions, the breathtaking Iguazu Falls on the border between Argentina and Brazil.

"We had planned the holiday a long time ago, about three months ago. We came from very far away, it was expensive and then everything fell through," he told AFP.

The general secretary of the Association of Aeronautical Personnel (APA), Juan Pablo Brey, said the purchasing power of aviation staff had fallen 40% since Milei took office in December.

Since taking office in December, Milei has applied a drastic austerity programme in a bid to rein in chronic inflation and decades of government overspending.

However, annual inflation still stands at 236.7% and the economic slowdown sparked

by the budget cuts has hit Argentines' pockets hard.

Brey told a local radio station that cabin crew earned 729,000 pesos (\$730 at the official exchange rate) and ground crew members 500,000 pesos - half what they could make at some low-cost companies.

Aerolíneas Argentinas said the strike was "untimely, abusive and out of context, promoted by union leaders in an irresponsible manner".

Milei's spokesman Manuel Adorni said that those striking would be "fined and sanctioned".

Milei had tried to privatise Aerolíneas Argentinas as part of his sweeping economic reforms, but was forced to remove the company from the list of those to be privatised to get his measures through parliament earlier this year. - AFP

Ohio town's schools evacuated amid Trump anti-immigrant drive

AFP/Reuters
Springfield/Washington

Schools were evacuated yesterday for a second day in a row in the small Ohio town of Springfield, according to local media, amid anti-Haitian-immigrant drive, spurred by Donald Trump and his Republican Party.

Springfield's authorities closed a middle school and evacuated two elementary schools, the local *Springfield News-Sun* newspaper and other media reported.

The disruptions - which come after similar evacuations on Thursday in reaction to a bomb threat - followed an unspecified warning from the Springfield police department, the reports said.

The head of the local Haitian community centre, Viles Dorsainvil, told AFP that the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) was also investigating threatening phone calls to the organisation.

The Ohio town has been suddenly thrust into the national spotlight after a conspiracy theory spread on social media that the large community of Haitian immigrants has been stealing and eating the predominately white population's pets.

President Joe Biden intervened yesterday, saying at the White House that Trump "has to stop" inflaming tensions, and "there's no

place in America for this".

The bizarre story took off last week with a post on social media site X claiming that "ducks and pets are disappearing".

It was then quickly amplified by Republican politicians, X's billionaire owner Elon Musk, and Trump himself - including during his nationally televised debate on Tuesday with Democratic candidate Kamala Harris.

Trump, the Republican White House candidate, is seizing on the fake story to fuel his campaign message that the United States faces an "invasion" of illegal immigrants, whom he characterises as violent criminals and escapees from "insane asylums".

On Thursday, Trump said that locals in Springfield faced "20,000 illegals" who were "destroying their entire way of life".

"Nobody knows where they come from. I'm angry about young American girls being (sexually assaulted) and murdered by savage criminal aliens," Trump added.

Biden, speaking at a black excellence brunch at the White House, said that there is a "proud Haitian American community that's under attack in our country right now, it's simply wrong".

"This has to stop, what he's doing, it has to stop," the president said of Trump.

Trump's vice-presidential pick, Ohio Senator JD Vance, posted on



A man carries an AI-generated image of Trump carrying cats away from Haitian immigrants, a reference to falsehoods spread about Springfield, Ohio, during a campaign rally for Trump at the Tucson Music Hall in Tucson, Arizona. - AFP

X yesterday that Springfield has seen "a massive rise in communicable diseases, rent prices, car insurance rates, and crime. This is what happens when you drop 20,000 people into a small community".

Yesterday Trump promised mass deportations, shortly after Biden called for attacks on that community to stop.

"We will do large deportations in Springfield, Ohio," Trump said at a news conference at his golf resort in Los Angeles.

Springfield officials say they have received no credible reports of anybody eating household animals.

Karen Graves, a city spokesperson, said she was not aware of re-

cent hate crimes targeting Haitian residents but that some had been victims of "crimes of opportunity", such as property theft.

The Haitian community in Springfield is part of an influx taking advantage of Biden's pathway for migrants fleeing countries, like the Caribbean nation of Haiti, that are in upheaval.

The Ohio town had seen years of falling population and economic decline as manufacturing industries moved away.

The arrival of an estimated 20,000 Haitians has been credited with reviving the local economy, but has also put severe strains on public services in a town that the 2020 census found previously had a population of 58,000.

Pope criticises Harris, Trump

Pope Francis has criticised both former US president Donald Trump over his plan to deport millions of immigrants and Vice-President Kamala Harris over her stance supporting abortion rights.

Asked about the US presidential election on his flight back to Rome from Singapore, the Pope said that not welcoming migrants is a "grave" sin, and likened having an abortion to an "assassination".

He said US Catholics would have to "choose the lesser evil" when they vote in November, without elaborating.

Francis was speaking in a press conference with journalists after a demanding 12-day tour across Southeast Asia and Oceania.

Although the Pope did not use Trump and Harris's names, he referred specifically to their policies and their genders.

Despite criticising both candidates, he said Catholics should vote.

"Not voting is ugly," the 87-year-old Pontiff said. "It is not good. You must vote."

"You must choose the lesser evil," he said. "Who is the lesser evil? That lady, or that gentleman? I don't know. Everyone, in conscience, (has to) think and do this."

American Catholics, numbering roughly 52mn nationwide, are often seen as crucial swing voters.

In some battleground states, including Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, more than 20% of adults are Catholic.

Francis, leader of about 1.4bn Catholics globally, is usually careful about weighing in on national political elections.

However, he frequently criticises abortion, which is forbidden by Catholic teaching, in sharp terms.

He has also previously criticised Trump's anti-immigrant rhetoric.

During the 2016 election, he said Trump was "not Christian" in his views.

Yesterday Francis said both candidates' policies are "against life".

"Whether it is the one who is chasing away migrants, or the one who that kills children," said the Pope. "Both are against life."

Trump has promised to crack down on illegal immigration and deport millions of immigrants already in the US if elected to a second term as president.

He has also refused to rule out building detention camps for undocumented immigrants.

Harris has promised to sign any legislation passed by Congress to restore national protections for abortion access, which were struck down by the Supreme Court in its 2022 Dobbs decision.

The two candidates sparred over both issues on Tuesday in their first debate together.

Most polls show a tight race, with Harris leading slightly.

The Pope called immigration "a right", citing Bible passages that call orphans, widows and foreigners three kinds of people that society must care for.

"Not giving welcome to migrants is a sin," said the Pope. "It is grave."

Francis said abortion "is killing a human being".

"It is an assassination," he said. "On these things we must speak clearly. No 'but' or 'however'".

Balancing political priorities has become a subject of discussion among the US bishops, who have issued a similar election guidance each presidential cycle since 2007-08, with some updates.

Their latest version, released in November last year, states that the "threat of abortion" is a "preeminent priority" for Catholics. - Reuters

Former Peru president Fujimori dies at 86

Peru's former president Alberto Fujimori, who spent 16 years in prison for crimes against humanity, died on Wednesday at the age of 86 in Lima. "After a long battle with cancer, our father, Alberto Fujimori, has just departed to meet the Lord," his children Keiko, Hiro, Sachie and Kenji Fujimori wrote on the social media platform X.

Fujimori, the son of Japanese immigrants, was the little-known chancellor of a farming university when elected to office in 1990.

He slew the hyperinflation that had thrown millions of Peruvians out of work, privatised dozens of state-run companies, and slashed trade tariffs, setting the foundations for Peru to become, for a while, one of Latin America's most stable economies.

However, many Peruvians saw Fujimori as an autocrat after he used military tanks to shut down Congress in 1992.

A slew of corruption scandals during his 10-year administration also turned public opinion against him. - AFP/Reuters

Silk Road Samarkand unveils Waterland Aqua Park

By Kamran Rehmat
Samarkand

Silk Road Samarkand, Central Asia's largest tourist complex, has unveiled its latest attraction – Waterland, a sprawling family-friendly aqua park designed to offer an exhilarating experience for visitors of all ages.

Inaugurated recently by Rustam Kobilov, the deputy governor of the Samarkand region for tourism, culture, cultural heritage and mass communications, the park promises to be a highlight for locals and tourists.

Covering 11,536sq m, Water-

land features 18 water slides and various attractions.

It includes a food court and a children's play area, ensuring a full day of fun for families.

Admission is free for guests staying at any of the eight hotels within the complex, while local families can access the park at discounted rates, with free entry for children under six and half-price tickets for those aged 7-16.

Silk Road Samarkand spans 260 hectares on the outskirts of Samarkand, a city dating back to 800 BCE.

The resort, built around the Republican Rowing Canal, opened two

years ago and has quickly become a major tourism hub.

It boasts eight luxury hotels with nearly 1,200 rooms, as well as an international congress centre, a 4,000sq m expo centre, sports arenas, and parks.

Visitors can choose from over 30 dining options, including restaurants and cafes, making it a destination for both leisure and business travellers.

The resort continues to grow in its second year, adding new facilities and services.

Hilton Hotels & Resorts has rebranded three of its hotels at the complex:

Hilton Samarkand Regency, Hilton Garden Inn Samarkand Afrosiyob, and Hilton Garden Inn Samarkand Sogd.

Additional international hotel groups are expected to establish a presence in the future.

Other recent additions to Silk Road Samarkand include:

- * New dining options, from casual cafes to formal restaurants, along with banqueting spaces for up to 500 guests.
- * Craft workshops and shops, offering traditional handmade items like ceramics, jewellery, and oriental sweets produced by a local family business.
- * The Qur'an Museum, housing Qur'an manuscripts and significant Islamic literature from around the world.
- * A 300m karting track, available to enthusiasts aged 14 and over.
- * Expanded playgrounds, with new rides



located near the Amphitheatre area for younger visitors.

Silk Road Samarkand has already hosted over two dozen international events.

Notable gatherings include the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) annual meeting, a round of the World Triathlon Championship Series, and the General Assembly of the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO).

This summer, the Federation Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA) held its 120th Anniversary Conference at the complex, further elevating the resort's global profile.

Silk Road Samarkand is part of Uzbekistan's larger tourism strat-

egy, with the country expecting 10mn tourists by 2024.

Projects like this are designed to preserve Samarkand's cultural heritage while enhancing its modern tourism infrastructure.

A key component of this strategy is the newly upgraded Samarkand International Airport, now connected to numerous international flights across Central and Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and Europe, making the region more accessible to global travellers.

Silk Road Samarkand is poised to become a premier destination, blending modern attractions with the deep cultural history of Samarkand.



Russia expels British diplomats

Reuters/AFP
Moscow/Washington

Russia's FSB security service said yesterday that it had revoked the accreditation of six British diplomats in Moscow after accusing them of spying and sabotage work, signalling the Kremlin's anger at what it sees as London's vital role in helping Ukraine.

Britain described the accusations as "completely baseless", saying that it was a tit-for-tat action after the UK expelled the Russian defence attaché and removed diplomatic status from several Russian properties in May.

Russia announced the expulsions hours before talks in Washington between British Prime Minister Keir Starmer and US President Joe Biden, a crucial step towards winning the go-ahead for Kyiv to use long-range missiles against targets in Russia.

Starmer told UK media travelling with him that "Russia started this conflict. Russia illegally invaded Ukraine. Russia can end this conflict straight away".

Washington and London see Iran's delivery of ballistic missiles to Russia to use against Ukraine, announced by Washington this week, as a dramatic escalation and it had sped up talks on Ukraine's long-range missile use, three Western sources said. Russia and Iran have denied any such deliveries.

The FSB, the main successor agency to the Soviet KGB, said that it had documents showing that a British foreign office department in London responsible for Eastern Europe and Central Asia was co-ordinating what it called "the escalation of the political and military situation" and was tasked with ensuring Russia's strategic defeat in its war against Ukraine.

"The facts revealed give grounds to consider the activities of British diplomats sent to Moscow by the directorate as threatening the security of the Russian Federation," the FSB said in a statement.

"On the basis of documents provided by the Federal Security Service of Russia and as a response to the numerous unfriendly steps taken by London, the ministry of foreign affairs of Russia, in cooperation with the agencies concerned, has terminated the accreditation of six members of the political department of the British embassy in Moscow in whose actions signs of spying and sabotage were found," it said.

Britain said Russian accusations against its diplomats were baseless.

"The Russian authorities revoked the diplomatic accreditation of six UK diplomats in Russia last month, following action taken by the UK government in response

Russia launched 8,060 Iran-developed drones during war: Kyiv

Ukraine's foreign ministry said yesterday that Russia had launched 8,060 Iran-developed Shahed drones at Ukraine since it began its full-scale invasion 2-1/2 years ago.

"The partnership between Russia and Iran has resulted in lost homes and lost lives," the foreign ministry said on X.

Kyiv first accused Iran of supplying Shahed kamikaze drones to Russia in autumn 2022, with Moscow's troops subsequently using them extensively for regular long-range attacks.

The *Wall Street Journal* reported in May this year that Moscow was also actively producing Shahed

type drones by Iranian technology at a plant in the Tartarstan Republic.

Until now, Iranian military support for Moscow has been most visible in the supply of those drones, which carry a smaller payload and are easier to shoot down because they travel at a fraction of the speed of ballistic missiles.

On Tuesday, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Russia received ballistic missiles from Iran and would likely use it within weeks, a charge Iran has denied.

The Kremlin said reports of Russia receiving the missiles were baseless. - Reuters

Ukraine secures return of 49 from Russia in prisoner exchange

Ukraine has secured the release of 49 people from Russian captivity in the latest exchange of prisoners with Moscow, President Volodymyr Zelensky said yesterday.

The latest swap since Russia's invasion in 2022 was mediated by the UAE, a spokesperson for Ukraine's military intelligence agency said.

"Another return of our people – something we always wait for and work tirelessly to achieve ... We must bring home every single one of our people, both military and civilian," Zelensky said on X, announcing the 56th such swap with Russia.

Zelensky's chief of staff, Andriy Yermak, said on the Telegram messaging app the Ukrainians released included seven civilians as well as personnel from the armed forces, national guard, police and the border guard service.

Ukraine did not say how many Russians had been released. Moscow is yet to comment on the swap.

Kyiv and Moscow have frequently exchanged prisoners since Russia's full-scale invasion, and yesterday's swap was the second since Ukraine began a cross-border incursion into Russia's Kursk region in early August. - Reuters

to Russian state directed activity across Europe and in the UK," a British Foreign Office spokesperson said in a statement. "We are unapologetic about protecting our national interests."

Russia's move to expel British diplomats ratchets up tensions between Moscow and London, hours before Starmer lands in Washington to advance talks on getting the green light from Biden for Kyiv to use Britain's Storm Shadow missiles, which have a range of more than 250km, inside Russia.

Sources say the meeting is another step in talks to allow Ukraine to use Western long-range missiles against targets in Russia, something Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has been

demanding for months. A Western source said a decision could be made at the United Nations General Assembly which starts on September 24.

White House spokesperson John Kirby downplayed the possibility of a change in US policy.

"There is no change to our view on the provision of long-range strike capabilities for Ukraine to use inside of Russia," White House national security spokesman John Kirby told reporters yesterday.

"I would not expect any major announcement in that regard," from discussions between Biden and Starmer, he said.

The *New York Times*, citing European officials, reported that the United States looks set to approve

the use by Ukraine of long-range missiles against targets in Russia on the condition that the weapons were not those provided by the United States.

The six UK diplomats were named on Russian state TV, which also showed photographs of them.

Surveillance footage of them was also released to Russian media, including covert video surveillance of a British diplomat meeting someone.

"The English did not take our hints about the need to stop this practice (of carrying out intelligence activities inside Russia), so we decided to expel these six to begin with," an FSB employee whose identity was hidden told the *Rossiya-24* state TV channel.

Infighting rattles Russia's exiled opposition

Splits in Russia's opposition in exile have widened sharply, shifting their focus from political activism to infighting after allies of late opposition leader Alexei Navalny accused another opposition figure of ordering attacks on their activists.

The scandal undermines already troubled efforts to forge a united front against the Kremlin, risks damaging the opposition's credibility in the eyes of supporters and the West, and pits the two most high-profile opposition groupings against one another setting up a potentially protracted standoff.

The two opposition movements – one run by allies of the late Navalny and the other run

by Kremlin critic Mikhail Khodorkovsky – have been involved in public disputes before, but their latest disagreement is the most potent yet, with the Navalny camp publicly accusing Leonid Nevzlin, an Israel-based tycoon and Khodorkovsky ally, of ordering assaults on senior Navalny aides Leonid Volkov and Ivan Zhdanov and on the wife of an Argentina-based activist.

In the most serious incident, Volkov was attacked outside his house in Vilnius, Lithuania in March this year, a month after Navalny died in an Arctic prison, by a hammer-wielding assailant.

A Belarusian man suspected of organising

the attack and the two Polish suspected assailants have since been detained.

In a nearly one-hour long video investigation published on Navalny's YouTube channel on Thursday, his team alleged that the assault and two others had been ordered not by the Russian state, but by Nevzlin.

Both Nevzlin and Khodorkovsky, who himself spent a decade in Russian prisons on what the West said were politically-motivated charges, dismissed the claims as groundless. With Navalny dead, the opposition has been left without a clear leader.

His widow, Yulia Navalnaya, has vowed to continue his work and has pushed for Presi-

dent Vladimir Putin to leave the Kremlin while senior Navalny aides continue to investigate the circumstances of her husband's death.

"This is a really serious blow against the (anti-Kremlin) protest movement," Ivan Zhdanov, one of the Navalny activists who was attacked, said in an online discussion on the subject.

"It's hard to think of how he (Nevzlin) could have done anything more serious," he said. "Every time in future when there's an attack, people will wonder if Putin, Russian intelligence, or some opposition figure is behind it." - Agencis

Italy busts ring trafficking retro video games, seize 12,000 consoles

Reuters/AFP
Milan/Rome

Italian tax police said yesterday that they have seized counterfeit Chinese copies of vintage game consoles and video games from the 1980s and 1990s worth almost €50mn (\$55.5mn).

New versions of video games and gaming consoles popular decades ago have recently

been re-released in a phenomenon known as "retrogaming".

The Guardia di Finanza tax and customs police in the northwestern city of Turin said in a statement that they had seized around 12,000 gaming consoles in several provinces across Italy starting from late 2023.

The consoles were "all from China", the police statement said.

"Around 12,000 consoles on which more than 47mn pirated video games were ille-

gally stored were seized, for an estimated value of more than €47.5mn," Alessandro Langella, head of the economic crime unit for Turin's financial police, told AFP.

The figure includes the value of the consoles and hundreds of licences for the pirated programs.

The games included those in the *Mario Bros*, *Street Fighter* and *Star Wars* series, and the consoles imitated Nintendo, Sega and Atari franchises in particular.

The consoles, which did not meet European technical and safety standards, were imported from China to be sold in specialised stores or online, on sites such as Amazon, which helped the police with their investigation.

Nine people, all Italian nationals, have been placed under investigation for various crimes connected to fraudulent trading and copyright infringement, while the seized video games were all destroyed.

14 killed in attack in Afghanistan

Fourteen people were killed and six others injured in an attack by unknown armed individuals in central Afghanistan, the Taliban administration said yesterday.

The Islamic State militant group claimed responsibility for Thursday's attack in Daykundi province but has not provided evidence.

Most people in that area are Shia Muslims and it was considered one of the safest provinces.

A source said that the victims had gathered to welcome pilgrims returning from Karbala in Iraq, a Shia holy site.

"While we share our deep sorrow with the innocent victims of the incident, we are also making serious efforts to search for the corrupt perpetrators of this act and bring them to justice," Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid said in a statement.

Islamic State-Khorasan, a local affiliate of the Middle East-based Islamic State, has waged an insurgency against the Taliban, whom they see as their enemies.

Attacks in Afghanistan have declined markedly since the Taliban ended their insurgency when they seized power in 2021, but a number of armed groups, including the regional Islamic State-Khorasan, remain a threat. - Reuters/AFP

Pakistani cop kills man in custody

A Pakistani policeman shot dead a man on Thursday who was taken into custody over blasphemy allegations, police officials said.

The man, a Muslim, was arrested on Wednesday in Quetta, the provincial capital of southwestern Balochistan province, after a video of him went viral and a case was filed against him.

A mob of around 200 young people later attacked the police station where he was being held, forcing the authorities to move him to another station.

"An on-duty policeman attacked him inside the lockup and shot him dead," the head of Balochistan police Moazzam Jah Ansari told AFP. "We have arrested him and registered a murder case against him."

Muhammad Baloch, a senior local police official, also confirmed the details.

The officer, who he did not name, had accessed a police station where the deceased was being held by pretending that he was a relative before opening fire on him. - AFP/Reuters



TRAGEDY

Six people killed in Bangladesh landslides

At least six people, including three Rohingya refugees, died and several others were injured yesterday after heavy rains triggered landslides in southeastern Bangladesh, officials said. The landslides took place in two separate places in the border district of Cox's Bazar, including the Rohingya camps, after three days of intense late monsoon rains, said an official overseeing refugee affairs. Three others were killed in Cox's Bazar town, where heavy rainfall has caused widespread waterlogging. The Cox's Bazar weather office recorded 378mm of rainfall from 6am Thursday to 6am yesterday, marking the highest rainfall of the monsoon season so far.

ALERT

Japan scrambles jets as Russia aircraft circle country

Japan scrambled fighter jets after Russian aircraft flew around the archipelago for the first time in five years, Tokyo said yesterday. From Thursday morning to afternoon, the Russian Tu-142 aircraft flew from the sea between Japan and South Korea towards the southern Okinawa region, according to a defence ministry statement. They then travelled north over the Pacific Ocean and finished their journey off the northern island of Hokkaido, it added. The planes did not enter Japanese airspace but flew over an area subject to a territorial dispute between Japan and Russia, a ministry official said yesterday.

DEFENCE

Taiwan hopes delayed F-16s start arriving by year-end

Taiwan's defence ministry said yesterday it was aiming for delivery of the first new F-16V fighter jets by the end of this year, blaming "acute fluctuations" in the international situation for delays in the island receiving them. The US in 2019 approved an \$8bn sale of Lockheed Martin F-16 fighter jets to Taiwan, a deal that would take the island's F-16 fleet to more than 200 jets, the largest in Asia, to strengthen its defences in the face of a stepped up threat from China. Taiwan has been converting 141 F-16A/B jets into the F-16V type and has ordered 66 new F-16Vs, which have advanced avionics, weapons and radar systems.

DECISION

South Korea military pulls Chinese-made CCTV cameras

South Korea's military yesterday said it had pulled down more than a thousand surveillance cameras, including some near the border with the North, after discovering they were made in China. Around 1,300 CCTVs installed in military bases, including along the heavily fortified border, were removed, a military official said. During a routine check, it was discovered the equipment was made in China, but supplied by a Korean company. The issue was "identified in the process of jointly diagnosing foreign equipment for the first half of this year to identify security vulnerabilities of foreign equipment introduced into the military," the ministry of national defence said.

N Korea shows first photos of banned uranium enrichment site

Reuters
Seoul

North Korea for the first time yesterday showed images of the centrifuges that produce fuel for its nuclear bombs, as leader Kim Jong-un visited a uranium enrichment facility and called for more weapons-grade material to boost the arsenal.

The state media report on Kim's visit to the Nuclear Weapons Institute and a production base for weapon-grade nuclear materials was accompanied by the first photos of the centrifuges, providing a rare look inside North Korea's nuclear programme, which is banned under multiple United Nations Security Council resolutions.

The photos showed Kim walking between long rows of metal centrifuges, the machines that enrich uranium. The report did not make clear when the visit occurred nor the facility's location.

Kim urged workers to produce more materials for tactical nuclear weapons, saying the country's nuclear arsenal is vital for confronting threats from the US and its allies.

The weapons are needed for "self-defence and the capability for a preemptive attack," he said.

The North Korean leader said "anti-DPRK nuclear threats" from the "US imperialists-led vassal forces" have crossed the red-line, according to the report.

South Korea condemned North Korea's unveiling of its uranium enrichment facility and will never accept Pyongyang's possession of nuclear weapons, the South's unification ministry said.

North Korea is believed to have several sites for enriching uranium. Analysts say commercial satellite imagery has shown construction in recent years at the main Yongbyon Nuclear Scientific Research Centre, including its uranium enrichment plant, suggesting possible expansion.

Uranium is a radioactive element that exists naturally. To make nuclear fuel, raw uranium undergoes processes that result in a material with an increased concentration of the isotope uranium-235.

International Atomic Energy Agency chief Rafael Grossi said on Monday that the UN nuclear watchdog had observed activity consistent with the operation of a reactor and the reported centrifuge enrichment facility at Yongbyon.

Kim stressed the need to boost the number of centrifuges so as to "exponentially increase" North Korea's nuclear arsenal, and ex-

pand the use of a new type of centrifuge to strengthen the production of weapon-grade nuclear materials.

The centrifuges seen in the photos appear smaller and shorter than the types previously believed to be used by North Korea, suggesting it had developed its own centrifuges to enhance separation capabilities, said Lee Sang-kyu, a nuclear engineering expert at South Korea's Korea Institute for Defence Analysis.

The photos also confirmed that the North is using a cascade system where large numbers of centrifuges are interconnected to achieve highly enriched uranium, he added.

The new type of centrifuge shows North Korea is advancing its fuel cycle capabilities, said Ankit Panda of the US-based Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

"Kim also appears to suggest that North Korean tactical nuclear weapons designs may primarily rely on uranium for their cores," he said.

This is notable because North Korea is more able to scale up its highly enriched uranium stockpiles, Panda said, compared to the more complicated process for plutonium.

Fin whale tasting event in Japan



Guests taste raw meat from a fin whale at the exhibition and business meeting of domestically produced fin whales hosted by Japan's whaling company Kyodo Senpaku at Tokyo's Toyosu market yesterday. Bite-size bits of fin whale were available to sniff and taste yesterday as Japan's whaling industry seeks to rekindle appetite for a protein source that has largely fallen out of favour.

China, Russia chide West at security forum in Beijing

Reuters
Beijing

Chinese and Russian defence officials took swipes at the West at a military diplomacy forum in Beijing yesterday, with China courting the Global South and Russia saying the US was shifting military conflicts to the Asia-Pacific.

Chinese Defence Minister Dong Jun told the annual Xiangshan Forum that Beijing would enhance military ties with its

neighbours and with developing countries in particular. "Major countries must take the lead in safeguarding global security, abandon a zero-sum mindset and refrain from bullying the small and the weak," Dong said in a veiled criticism of the US, which he did not name.

Dong made his remarks to representatives from 90 countries and international organisations at the three-day forum, which ends today.

Russian deputy defence minister Alexander Fomin said during

the forum that the US was trying to contain China and Russia while preparing for war in Asia by creating new security blocs.

"Russia and China support the creation of a just, multipolar world order based on equality and mutual respect," he said.

"In order to create conditions to force Russia into negotiations based on Kyiv's formulas, Nato countries plan to send troops to Ukraine," he added. "This is a dangerous game which can lead to a direct conflict of nuclear powers."

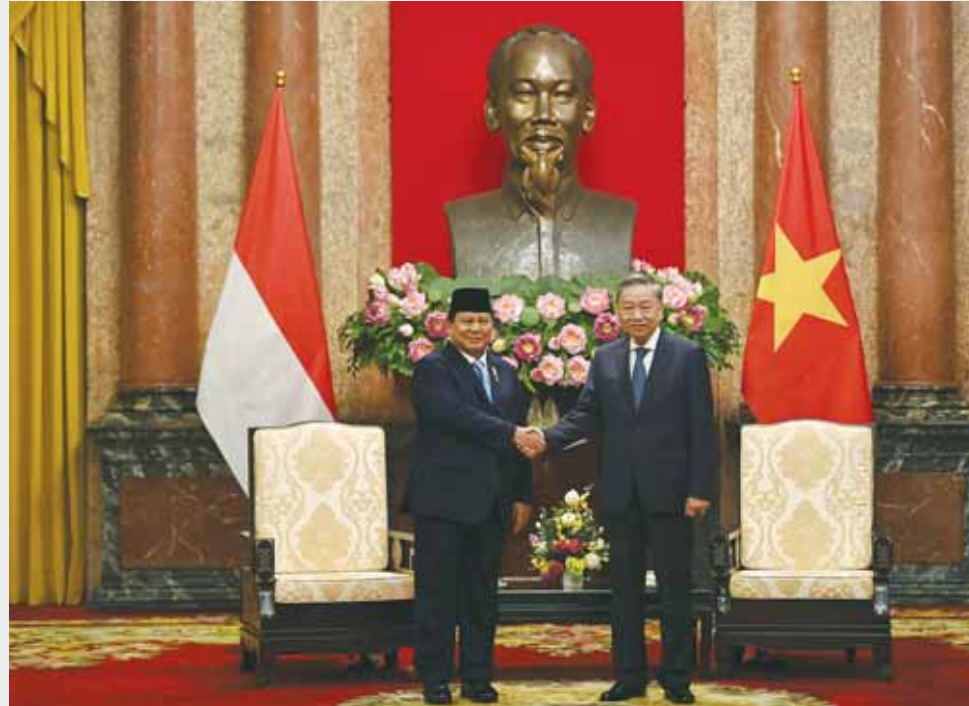
Photographer snaps threatened bird feared lost

A hawk-eyed photographer has thrilled scientists by snapping a threatened bird of prey in Papua New Guinea, more than five decades since it was last officially documented, the World Wildlife Fund said yesterday. The New Britain Goshawk is only found on Papua New Guinea's New Britain island and is considered threatened, though information about its status is sparse.

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature estimates there are between 2,500 and 10,000 mature individuals in the wild, but the bird's elusive nature makes details hard to confirm.

In fact, the bird is so unusual that Fiji-based photographer Tom Vieras didn't even realise what he captured until later. "It was such a great surprise to hear that this photo seems to be the first-ever of this 'lost species,'" he said.

Indonesia's president-elect visits Vietnam



Vietnam's President To Lam (right) shakes hands with Indonesia's Defence Minister and president-elect Prabowo Subianto during their meeting at the Presidential Palace in Hanoi yesterday.

China approves plan to raise retirement age

Reuters
Hong Kong

China's top legislative body has approved a proposal to raise the country's retirement age, the official Xinhua news agency said yesterday, accelerating an overhaul of decades-old laws to tackle the economic pressure of a shrinking workforce.

China's retirement ages are currently amongst the lowest globally. Reform is urgent with life expectancy in China having risen to 78 years as of 2021 from about 44 years in 1960 and projected to exceed 80 years by 2050.

The retirement age will be raised for men to 63 years old from 60, while for women in white collar work it would be raised to 58 years from 55. For women in blue collar work it will be adjusted to 55 from 50. The changes are

set to come into force on January 1, 2025. Having people work for longer would ease pressure on pension budgets with many Chinese provinces already reeling from large deficits. But delaying pension payouts and requiring older workers to stay at their jobs longer may not be welcomed by all of them. Hundreds of thousands of people took to social media after Xinhua reported that China's top lawmakers discussed the topic on September 10, with many expressing concern there would be more job seekers chasing too few openings.

By raising the retirement age, the government can increase the labour force participation rate, helping to mitigate the adverse effects of population ageing, said Xiujuan Peng, senior research fellow at the Centre of Policy Studies at Victoria University in Australia.

Myanmar battles Yagi floods, Vietnam begins clear-up

AFP
Pinyinana, Myanmar

Hundreds of villagers in Myanmar waded or swam through chin-high waters, fleeing severe floods around the remote capital Naypyidaw yesterday, while Vietnam began clearing up after deadly Typhoon Yagi.

People in parts of Vietnam, Laos, Thailand and Myanmar have been battling floods and landslides in the wake of Typhoon Yagi, which dumped a colossal deluge of rain when it hit the region last weekend.

The overall death toll across the four countries stands at nearly 300,

including 233 in Vietnam, but with many people missing it is expected to rise.

More than 235,000 people have been forced from their homes in Myanmar, the junta said yesterday, piling further misery on the country hit by conflict since the military seized power in 2021.

Authorities were investigating unconfirmed reports that dozens of migrant workers were missing following landslides in a gold mining area in central Mandalay region, junta spokesman Zaw Min Tun said.

The junta gave a death toll yesterday of 33, while earlier in the day the country's fire department said rescuers had recovered 36 bodies.

One resident of Sin Thay village near the capital Naypyidaw said he and his two children had spent the previous night sheltering in a tree to avoid the surging floodwaters.

"The water reached the village very suddenly at night, there was no time to run," he told said.

"We didn't get rescued until later. If they had come 30 minutes later, my family would be dead."

Some villagers dragged makeshift rafts behind them carrying their possessions, while others led livestock to higher ground.

"This is the very first time I have experienced such a flood," another man said near the village.

"We didn't have time to pre-

pare. It was a very scary experience."

State media said flooding in the area around the capital had caused landslides and destroyed electricity towers, buildings, roads, bridges and houses.

In the Mandalay region, one group of villagers rode elephants to reach dry land, in footage posted on social media.

In the Vietnamese capital Hanoi, residents equipped with shovels, brushes and hoses were out clearing up debris and mud after the waters that had submerged parts of the city receded – and the sun came out for the first time in days.

The Red River through Hanoi

reached its highest level in 20 years this week, as the rain brought by Yagi funnelled out towards the sea.

"This was the highest flooding I've ever seen, it was more than a metre on our first floor," Nguyen Lan Huong, 40, said.

"The water started to recede Thursday afternoon so we began cleaning up bit by bit. But it will take days for our family to fully recover, and even weeks for the community here I think."

A total of 130,000 people have been evacuated in northern Vietnam since Yagi hit on Saturday – and many have not yet been able to return home – while more than 135,000 homes have been damaged

according to the authorities.

In the deadliest single incident, a landslide wiped out a village in mountainous Lao Cai province, killing 48 people.

But in a rare piece of good news, eight people missing in the landslide and feared dead have returned safe. Some had been staying with relatives while others managed to escape in time.

Northern Thailand was also badly affected, with one district on the Myanmar border reporting its worst floods in 80 years.

Officials said yesterday a fatality in a landslide in Chiang Rai province had taken the toll in the kingdom to 10.

Rohingya refugees in India strike over 'prolonged' detention

Reuters
Guwahati, India

More than 100 Rohingya Muslims from Myanmar including women and children have been on hunger strike to protest at their indefinite detention at a camp in northeastern India, authorities said.

More than 1mn Rohingya refugees fled to countries including Bangladesh and India after a military-led crackdown in Myanmar in 2017. They have little hope of returning home, where they are largely denied citizenship and basic rights.

The protesters include about 103 Rohingya Muslims and 30 Christian Chin refugees, also from

Myanmar, and many have refugee cards issued by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), said a Rohingya who is in touch with the protesters in Matia Transit Camp in Assam state.

The camp is India's largest detention centre for undocumented migrants who enter India illegally. "Many of them have finished

their terms, but are still stuck in detention. They are not criminals, they fled persecution," the person said, adding that 36 Rohingya protesters possessed UNHCR cards.

"The jail conditions are not good, relatives cannot even visit... they just want to be free and shift somewhere where life is better," the person added.

The protesters want to be hand-

ed over to UNHCR and resettled in a third country, the person said, adding that they have written letters to the Assam government seeking their intervention in the last few months.

"They are demanding they be released," said Ravi Kota, Assam's most senior bureaucrat, adding that the state government has sent prison and interior ministry offi-

cial to the camp to "understand their issues" and submit a report.

"Not all were detained under a single court order, so we are trying to find out what are these orders, what are the charges, and what the legal status is," he said.

Reuters was not immediately able to establish for how long the refugees were initially ordered to stay in the camp.

Sebi chief denies impropriety allegations

Reuters
Mumbai

The head of India's market regulator yesterday said she had complied with all disclosure guidelines issued by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi), rejecting allegations levelled by the country's main opposition party and a US short seller about a conflict of interest.

"Madhabi has complied with all the disclosure and recusal guidelines of Sebi, and in fact, maintained a proactive continuing recusal list with Sebi over and above the requirements under the guidelines," Madhabi Puri Buch said in what she called a personal statement.

Buch has faced criticism from US short seller Hindenburg Research and India's opposition political parties about alleged conflicts of interest in investigations related to the Adani Group and other corporate entities. The wrangle is a rare instance of the head of a top Indian regulator facing pressure to resign over alleged wrongdoing.

In a report in August, Hindenburg, a forensic financial research firm, alleged that Buch had previous investments in a fund which was part of a network of funds used by Vinod Adani, brother of billionaire Gautam Adani.

Sebi is currently investigating alleged regulatory violations by the Adani Group, and Hindenburg said Buch's previous investments left her less than objective in steering those investigations.

Buch, in a previous statement, denied this. Hindenburg's report was followed by a series of allega-

tions by India's opposition Congress Party which is demanding an investigation and Buch's resignation from Sebi, which oversees listed companies and domestic and foreign investors.

"The allegations made are false, incorrect, malicious and motivated," Buch and her husband Dhaval Buch said in the statement.

In particular, Buch said, she has not dealt with any regulatory matters related to her former employer ICICI Bank.

The Congress party alleged that Buch had a conflict of interest in dealings with ICICI, where she worked until 2011. The bank denied this in a statement.

The Congress said that Buch continued to earn an income from ICICI Bank through employee stock options (ESOPs) when it was being investigated by the regulator for market infractions.

"Sebi's guidelines permit board members, including the chairperson, to hold and transact in ESOPs," Buch's statement said.

Buch's statement also denied allegations made by the Congress about a conflict of interest with the Mahindra Group and Dr Reddy's due to consulting fees given by these groups to Dhaval Buch.

Madhabi Buch recused herself from matters related to these companies, the statement said.

The consulting fees were earned through two entities, Agora Partners and Agora Advisory, in which Madhabi Buch owns a 99% shareholding. These advisories had continued to earn revenue after Buch joined the regulator, taking on its second highest post, in 2017, Reuters had reported.

Onam celebrations in Chennai



Students prepare a floral decorative design 'Rangoli' during the celebrations to mark the annual harvest festival of 'Onam' at a school, in Chennai, India.

India's top court grants bail to Delhi Chief Minister Kejriwal

AFP
New Delhi

A top political opponent of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi was granted bail yesterday after months behind bars on accusations his party took kickbacks in exchange for liquor licences.

Arvind Kejriwal, chief minister of the capital Delhi and a key leader in an opposition alliance that battled Modi in national elections earlier this year, was first detained in March over the

long-running corruption probe. He is among several opposition leaders under investigation or facing criminal charges, with one of his colleagues describing his arrest at the time as a "political conspiracy" orchestrated by Modi's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

A two-judge bench of the Supreme Court ruled that Kejriwal's arrest was lawful but that he should be released from custody while contesting the charges against him.

"Prolonged incarceration amounts to unjust deprivation of liberty," Supreme Court justice Surya Kant said in a verdict.

Kejriwal was bailed on Rs1mn (\$11,900) bond on the conditions that he did not make public comment on the merits of the case against him, did not visit his office and refrained from signing official files. The politician had earlier been freed by the same court for several weeks to allow him to campaign in this year's general election, returning to custody once voting concluded.

His government was accused of graft when it implemented a policy to liberalise the sale of liquor in the capital three years ago, surrendering a lucrative government stake in the sector.

Stolen Banksy 'Girl with Balloon' painting found

One of British street artist Banksy's best-known paintings, 'Girl with Balloon', has been found after its theft from a London gallery last week with two men charged, police said yesterday. The work features a young girl reaching for a red heart-shaped balloon and there are several murals depicting the same image in London and elsewhere. The painting was the only item stolen on September 8, police said, adding it would be returned to the gallery. The two men, aged 47 and 53, were charged with burglary on Thursday and remain in police custody. They have already appeared in court where they were bailed, and will next appear before a judge on October 9. The 'Girl with Balloon' first appeared on the streets of London's Shoreditch neighbourhood in 2002. Banksy rose to fame for sharply ironic outdoor graffiti with political themes.

Harrogate Autumn Flower Show opens



A staff member manoeuvres a huge cabbage to be weighed in the giant vegetable competition on the first day of the Harrogate Autumn Flower Show held at Newby Hall country house, near Ripon, northern England, yesterday.

Manchester, Birmingham seek new UK railway

Reuters
Manchester, England

Britain's second and third cities yesterday published plans for a new railway to counter the blow of last year's government decision to gut much of the HS2 north-south high-speed rail project.

The authorities of Manchester and the West Midlands said a new line between Birmingham and Manchester would deliver 85% of the benefits of the planned-but-axed HS2 connection at 60%-75% of the cost.

It could expand the combined economies of the two cities by around £70bn (\$92bn) a year, their proposal paper said.

"If we fail to put in place a plan soon to fix rail capacity and connectivity between the North and the Midlands, the already-con-

gested West Coast Main Line and M6 (motorway) will become major barriers to economic growth," said Andy Burnham, mayor of Greater Manchester.

The Conservative prime minister at the time, Rishi Sunak, cancelled the northern leg of HS2 in October 2023, citing ballooning costs, and diverted funds into other transport projects such as road improvements.

Investors and infrastructure experts said the decision highlighted Britain's systemic failure to promote infrastructure investment. The truncated HS2 between London and Birmingham should open to passengers between 2029 and 2033.

While HS2 trains will continue north of Birmingham using the existing line - at lower speeds - they will replace some existing trains that carry more passengers.

Prince Harry turns 40, distanced from royals

AFP
London

An optimistic Prince Harry yesterday said he was "excited about 40" before he reaches the landmark birthday this weekend, but his positive outlook contrasts with negative opinion of him back home and strained family ties.

The younger son of King Charles III, now living in California with his American television actress wife Meghan and their two young children, reaches the milestone tomorrow.

The Duke and Duchess of Sus-

sex, Prince Archie, aged five, and three-year-old Princess Lilibet live in the celebrity enclave of Montecito, near Santa Barbara, on the US West Coast.

"I was anxious about 30, I'm excited about 40," he told the BBC in a statement, adding that becoming a father had given him a "fresh perspective on life".

"Being a dad is one of life's greatest joys and has only made me more driven and more committed to making this world a better place," he added.

Royal commentators, however, contrasted his positive outlook with his continued isolation from the royal family and reflected that

there was little chance that he could return to the fold.

Harry's ties with his family back home have been increasingly fraught since the couple quit royal life and moved to North America in early 2020.

First came an explosive US television interview in which the couple claimed that senior royals speculated about the colour of their unborn son's skin.

Meghan is of mixed heritage. Suggestions of racism prompted Harry's brother William, heir to the throne, to declare when asked that the royals were "very much not a racist family".

The brothers' grandmother, Queen Elizabeth II, also politely questioned Harry and Meghan's version of events.

"Recollections may vary," she said in a statement, promising to look into the matter.

A potentially decisive rupture came early last year with the publication of Harry's uncompromising and unfiltered autobiography *Spare*.

The book, which is set to be released in paperback in October, was seen as an all-out attack against the centuries-old institution of the royal family, which still plays a central role in British life.

It includes lengthy passages on Harry's strained relationship with

his "beloved brother" William, 42, whom he also describes as his "arch-nemesis", and their father.

Experts said they did not see any reconciliation on the horizon.

"His differences from other members of the royal family probably would have been settled by now if any agreement had ever been possible," said Mark Garnett, from the University of Lancaster in northwest England.

Harry told American TV network ABC in February that he was "sure" his father's cancer diagnosis could reunite the family, days after a brief visit to the king.

However, on another visit by the prince to London in May, father

and son were at separate events nearby but did not meet.

Harry, who has railed against media intrusion, even reportedly declined an invitation to stay at Buckingham Palace during his visit and instead stayed at a London hotel.

Relations between William and Harry, whose once-close bond was forged with the death of their mother Princess Diana in 1997, remain publicly frosty.

They were seen together at the late queen's funeral in September 2022 but have pointedly kept their distance at subsequent events, including at their father's coronation in May last year.



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GULF TIMES

March together, trade together

Donald Trump and Kamala Harris agree on little, except a disdain for free trade. Ahead of the 2024 US presidential election, Trump has threatened a 10% across-the-board tariff on imports, while Harris, whose policy positions remain murky, has indicated that she would follow in President Joe Biden's footsteps with "targeted and strategic tariffs." American politicians' free-trade enthusiasm of the 1980s and 1990s has vanished, and this scares other countries, which know that the US - despite its wobbles and foibles - remains the world's most attractive trading partner.

Of course, free-trade economists should try to buck the anti-trade wave with facts. But, given the widespread antipathy to globalisation, there is a more urgent question at hand: What principle should guide policy?

Countries whose armies march and drill together should trade together, too. Rather than slam the border shut haphazardly, the US must be able to distinguish good from bad actors on the world stage.

Since the 2008 financial crisis, trade as a share of US GDP has shrunk by about 10%. The blunt truth is that America, with its enormous internal market of 335m people, can weather trade wars and skirmishes better than most other countries. Over the last 15 years, US GDP has outpaced that of every G7 country, leaving even Chinese officials wondering where they have gone wrong.

The anti-globalisation narrative seems to treat all foreigners alike, imagining that they are all trying to steal jobs, swipe intellectual property, and take advantage of

Global trade increases national wealth, so perhaps Americans do not want certain countries to grow richer

loopholes. As a result, American trade warriors can get just as worked up over butter and maple syrup from Canada as bomb components from North Korea. But the US should be more open to trade with countries with which it maintains close military-to-military co-operation; it conducts dozens of joint training manoeuvres with the Canadian armed forces and, of course,

none with North Korea. Alongside Canada, countries such as Australia, the United Kingdom, Japan, and Germany should be at the top of the list.

When Biden took office, most pundits assumed that he would do the opposite of what his predecessor had done, including reversing the policies of Trump's US Trade Representative, Robert Lighthizer. Instead, Biden embraced Trump's trade restrictions but with a disregard for national security.

The Biden administration's border policy has increased antipathy toward trade. After all, many Americans figure, if the federal government did not notice nearly 1mn "got-away" (yes, that's the official term) migrants crossing the Southern border in 2023, how can it be trusted with 20mn uninspected containers of corrugated steel arriving on ships from who-knows-where?

Global trade increases national wealth, so perhaps Americans do not want certain countries to grow richer. Given that trade success can inflame as much as enrichen, a wealthier China may not be in the interest of the US at this time. China's threats to Taiwan, construction of artificial islands in the South China Sea, confrontations with Japan, and overt pledges to dominate the world economy harken back to Nikita Khrushchev's alleged warning, "We will bury you."

Whoever wins the White House in November must create a stronger link between national and economic security.

No one needs to be convinced that the world has grown more dangerous. On any given night, newscasts can show missiles launching from Lebanon, Crimea, or North Korea. But it is even more dangerous if US economic policy does not differentiate between enemy fire and friendly competition. Americans should trade with those who march in step with us on battlefields - and in defence of democracy. - Project Syndicate

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Will Swift's Harris endorsement influence the US election?

By Jarrett Renshaw and Heather Timmons
Reuters

Global pop star Taylor Swift's support for Kamala Harris may have boosted the Democratic vice-president's hopes of attracting young voters, but the question remains: Will the celebrity endorsement make a difference on Election Day? Locked in a tight White House race, both Harris and her rival, Republican former President Donald Trump are doing all they can to lure voters on Election Day Nov 5 and in early voting starting next week.

For his part, Trump dismissed Swift's Tuesday night endorsement of Harris, saying he was "not a Taylor fan." With voter registrations down among young people in a country where 18 is the voting age, the first challenge for either campaign may be getting them to register to vote at all.

Young voters played a decisive role in Democratic President Joe Biden's victory over the then-incumbent Trump in 2020. Biden captured about 61% of the vote to Trump's 36% of voters between the ages of 18 and 29, according to data from Tufts University.

A July 2024 analysis by Tufts University's youth civic engagement group, CIRCLE, found that voter registrations have dropped significantly since then in 36 states among those aged 18-29. Harris launched her campaign on July 21 after Biden withdrew.

"Registering youths remains a major task in the months ahead," the analysis said.

Enter Swift, an artist so successful she tied hip-hop star Beyonce's record of 30 lifetime awards at the MTV Video Music Awards on Wednesday night. A 2023 Morning Consult poll found that 55% of self-described Swift fans were Democrats and 45% were millennials aged 28 to 43.

"I'm voting for @kamalaharris because she fights for the rights and causes I believe need a warrior to champion them," Swift wrote on Tuesday to her 284m Instagram followers, urging them to register to vote and make their own choice.

Her post drew 10.4mn "likes." The vote.gov website received 405,999 visitors in the 24 hours after Swift shared a custom URL



Kamala Harris holds a campaign rally in Greensboro, North Carolina, on Thursday.

"I'm voting for @kamalaharris because she fights for the rights and causes I believe need a warrior to champion them," Taylor Swift wrote on Instagram.



with followers, a US government spokesperson said.

Harris aides say they would love for Swift to actively campaign, such as by appearing at a rally in her native Pennsylvania, a battleground state that could well decide the election.

But the campaign itself was not involved in Swift's decision to back Harris.

The vice-president's aides said they learned of Swift's support only when the entertainer, 34, posted it on Instagram minutes after the vice-president stepped off the debate stage in Philadelphia on Tuesday night.

What difference does a celebrity endorsement make? A 2008 Northwestern University report found Oprah Winfrey's endorsement added a million votes to Barack Obama's tally.

But a 2010 North Carolina State University report found celebrity endorsements by George Clooney

and Angelina Jolie did little to move the political needle.

Margaretha Bentley, a professor at Arizona State University whose class studies Swift's social importance, is unsure whether the pop singer will have an impact. She asked her students earlier this year whether a Swift endorsement would matter.

Some said they would follow Swift's lead and others said it would prompt them to do more research. "Some students told me they listen to celebrities when it comes to, like, what coffee they would drink, not politics," Bentley said.

A Swift fan at the VMA awards on Wednesday, Morgan Paris, said: "It's good that she said what she feels. And I mean, I feel like her politics and her music are two separate things, so you can't really combine them." Ashley Spillane wrote in a study published last month by Harvard's Kennedy School that non-profits found

"higher rates of online voter registration or poll worker sign-ups when a celebrity promotes these calls to action." "While some polling shows that people claim they aren't influenced by celebrity voices when it comes to politics, more rigorous evidence indicates that these voices are incredibly powerful," Spillane said.

The Harris campaign and their supporters are building on the endorsement, announcing pre-orders for its latest campaign wear: Swift fan-inspired friendship bracelets.

The progressive group MoveOn.org is selling Swift T-shirts that play on Swift's ongoing Eras concert tour. The shirt, reading "In My Voting Era," is the fastest selling item the group has sold this year, spokesperson Britt Jacovich said.

Voters of Tomorrow, which seeks to boost the youth vote, is teaming up with the informal group "Swifties for Harris" on a phone bank on Saturday to target college students in Georgia and Wisconsin, both battleground states like Pennsylvania.

Swift "is one of the most influential people of our generation, and we're definitely excited to see how we can take her message and turn that into more political action and get more people involved," said Jessica Siles, a spokesperson for Voters of Tomorrow. - Reuters



Plastic pollution endangers wildlife, damages ecosystems, and poses serious risks to human health.

By Jayati Ghosh
New Delhi

Saving the planet from plastics

There is no denying that plastics have delivered tremendous benefits over the past century, driving technological innovation, transforming healthcare, and fuelling global economic growth. But as we now know, this progress has come at great cost.

The adverse consequences of our overreliance on plastics are well-documented. From the extraction and transport of the fossil fuels required to produce them, through the manufacturing process, to their everyday use and disposal, each stage of plastics' life cycle implies pollution and environmental degradation.

Plastic pollution endangers wildlife, damages ecosystems, and poses serious risks to human health. Microplastics, along with the toxic chemicals they contain, are found in the air we breathe, the food we eat, and can be absorbed through the skin. As plastic waste accumulates in oceans, rivers, and lakes, harmful chemicals contaminate the soil, disrupting plant life.

While the full implications of nanoplastics for human health remain under-researched, it is clear that vulnerable groups - children, women, impoverished communities, and workers in plastic production, waste management, and recycling - bear the brunt of these hazards.

The current debate, particularly concerning single-use plastics, often centres on disposal, prompting calls for "circular economy" solutions like recycling. But there are no truly "safe plastics" and product labels claiming otherwise are misleading and obscure the damage caused by oil and gas extraction, which accounts for 99% of the world's plastic. The toxins released during fossil-fuel extraction are known to harm the skin, eyes, and the

respiratory, nervous, and gastrointestinal systems, as well as the liver and brain.

Plastic production is not only a direct threat to human health but also a major driver of climate change, accounting for roughly 3-8% of global greenhouse-gas (GHG) emissions. Yet, despite the existential dangers posed by the climate crisis, plastic production continues to surge. OECD estimates suggest that, if current trends persist, global plastic use - and the waste it generates - could nearly triple by 2060. Half of this waste is expected to end up in landfills, with less than 20% being recycled.

Even more alarmingly, recycled plastics are projected to account for just 12% of all plastic use in 2060, while plastic leakage to the environment is set to double, reaching 44mn tonnes annually, with devastating consequences for human health and natural ecosystems. If the industry's expansion plans are realised, plastic production could consume 31% of the planet's remaining carbon budget for limiting global warming to 1.5° Celsius.

This manufacturing surge is increasingly misaligned with projections of future demand. One study suggests that the global production of plastics like polypropylene may need to decrease by 18mn tonnes annually by 2030, owing to reduced demand from China and other countries. In fact, petrochemical companies are already grappling with a global glut - yet another example of market forces failing to deliver efficient or even sensible outcomes.

With corporations under growing pressure to reduce GHG emissions, doubling down on fossil-fuel-based plastic production seems not just reckless but also economically shortsighted. Still, a recent study by the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis found that even in the face of potential credit downgrades, the world's largest petrochemical companies are "making major

investments going in the wrong direction."

Given the stakes involved, it is clear that reducing plastic consumption alone will not be enough to protect human health, the environment, and the planet. As the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee on Plastic Pollution approaches its final meeting in Busan later this year, ongoing efforts to conclude a global treaty to end plastic pollution must confront the urgent need to curb production.

Regrettably, as with many international negotiations, resistance from powerful vested interests may block essential measures from making it into the final agreement. The committee's April meeting in Ottawa was a case in point, revealing deep divisions over key strategies. The most contentious issue was the proposal to cap global plastic production, which faced fierce opposition from plastic manufacturers, their host countries, and oil and gas producers. These interest groups favoured a narrower approach, focused on recycling. Some even argued that the treaty should cover only waste management.

To be sure, recycling is essential. But it cannot deliver the necessary reductions in plastic production and consumption, nor can it address the effects of plastic pollution on human health. Even in the best-case scenario, without broader measures to control production, pollution will continue to surge, causing severe health crises, exacerbating environmental degradation, and accelerating global warming.

Unsurprisingly, industry lobbies are pushing for a non-binding international plastic treaty without a clear legal mandate and enforceable commitments. Such treaties are bound to become little more than vague promises and quickly fade into irrelevance.

Curbing plastic use and production is crucial to facilitating the behavioural changes needed for humanity to adapt to new ecological realities. If industry lobbies succeed in weakening the plastics treaty by excluding production limits or making its provisions non-binding, they will undermine efforts to combat climate change.

As the climate crisis worsens, reducing plastic pollution has never been more urgent, which is why negotiations for a global treaty have gained so much momentum. But the negotiations deserve far more public attention and engagement. To ensure a more sustainable future, we should be pressuring our governments to commit to a binding international agreement that would limit and ultimately reduce plastic production and use. - Project Syndicate

• Jayati Ghosh, Professor of Economics at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, is a member of the Club of Rome's Transnational Economics Commission and Co-Chair of the Independent Commission for the Reform of International Corporate Taxation.

Confronting Africa's cost-of-living crisis

By Hippolyte Fofack
Washington, DC

The rising cost of living in Africa has triggered a wave of protests in recent months, underscoring the disproportionately higher economic and social costs of inflation on a continent with persistent widespread poverty and heightened vulnerability to global volatility. The world, it seems, is now living through a tale of two inflations.

Initially, the current inflation cycle – a product of pandemic supply shocks and escalating geopolitical tensions – affected developed and developing countries alike. But inflationary pressures have become less synchronous over time. While price growth has fallen sharply in advanced economies, it remains stubbornly high – and, in some cases, rising – in Africa. And even though inflation in many developed countries is trending down to central banks' 2% target, it has hit double digits in nearly one-third of African countries (a ratio that is even higher when excluding CFA franc countries, where the euro peg has contributed to monetary stability).

For example, the annualised inflation rate in Nigeria, one of Africa's largest economies, hit 34% – a 28-year high – in May, and is forecast to remain elevated in the second half of the year, largely owing to soaring food inflation, which accelerated to 40%. This stands to reduce household purchasing power and raise the risk of food insecurity even more, especially for Nigeria's growing rank of poverty-stricken and most vulnerable citizens. The country has the world's largest population living in poverty after India. Meanwhile, government reforms, including the sharp devaluation of the naira – which has lost 70% of its value against the dollar since June 2023 – to attract foreign investors, have only made matters worse for a country that relies heavily on imports of food and other essentials.



Anti-government demonstrations against bad governance and economic hardship in Lagos, Nigeria, early last month.

In August, protests against the resulting economic hardship spread across several large Nigerian cities. They followed weeks of riots in Kenya against the government's finance bill, which proposed tax hikes on basic goods such as oil, bread, and sanitary pads, even as millions were already struggling to make ends meet. Dozens of demonstrators in both countries were killed during official attempts to quell the uprisings.

Food-price inflation affects low-income households more than their high-income counterparts because they spend a greater portion of their budget on necessities. Consider that food costs account for 16% of consumer spending in advanced economies, but around 40% in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). This difference in the composition of spending explains the more regressive nature of inflation in SSA, which is home to 60% of the world's extreme poor, and why inflation there carries a

greater risk of political upheaval.

The lack of formal employment opportunities has also exacerbated Africa's cost-of-living crisis. To be sure, the wages of low-income workers with formal jobs are not keeping pace with price increases. But informal sector activities – a disguised form of unemployment and constraint on shared prosperity – account for roughly 85% of total employment on the continent, and these workers must also deal with income volatility and unexpected components of inflation, further tightening the squeeze on households.

Recent research assessing the distributional effects of the inflation cycle on households in the US found a phenomenon known as "inflation inequality": prices have risen more quickly for those at the bottom of the income distribution than for those at the top. The spread of protests across Africa suggests that a similar dynamic

is at work on the continent, where the disproportionately higher food prices caused by positive exchange-rate pass-throughs have dramatically increased the welfare costs of this inflation cycle.

Government policies have also heightened the cost-of-living crisis. Instead of supporting vulnerable groups through targeted interventions, African governments have indiscriminately raised taxes and cut spending to meet external liabilities. Interest payments on sovereign debt now consume around one-third of Kenya's revenue and more than two-thirds of Nigeria's. In both countries, procyclical fiscal policy and austerity measures have had a knock-on effect on prices, stoking inflation and worsening the cost-of-living crisis.

But in response to the protests, governments are reversing some of their procyclical policies or implementing complementary measures to mitigate their impact. Kenyan President William Ruto dismissed his entire cabinet and withdrew the controversial finance bill, which was expected to raise \$2.7bn in additional revenue to meet fiscal targets set by the International Monetary Fund. In Nigeria, the government has announced a 150-day suspension of import duties for certain foods to alleviate the pressure on struggling households.

Nonetheless, more must be done to close the gap between actual and potential growth and expand opportunities for young people. Africa is the world's most natural-resource-rich continent, yet Africans face bleak futures in countries that lack sufficient engineers and political will to transform these resources, create enough well-paying jobs, and expand prosperity. Africa's excessive reliance on imports as an alternative to expanding aggregate output has sustained external imbalances and hollowed out the jobs market, causing more people to fall into destitution.

To meet the aspirations of young

populations, African governments should rethink constraints on public spending and overcome the recurrent balance-of-payments crises that have long shaped economic policy across the continent. Increased investment in building a workforce that is fluent in emerging technologies is critical to spurring industrialisation.

This, in turn, would bolster Africa's manufacturing sector, which in other parts of the world has long served as a social escalator and growth accelerator, catalysing convergence with high-income countries. The transformation of African economies will also drive the development of regional value chains, bolster intra-African trade (and thus mitigate the region's exposure to global volatility), and build large national buffers to wean the region off debilitating aid dependency.

Africa's policymakers must not only invest in human capital to move their countries up the value ladder in a global economy where technology has become a key driver of growth. They must also strive to equalise access to opportunities and achieve shared prosperity to strengthen the concept of the nation-state and enhance national security. To quote Samora Machel, the first president of Mozambique, "For the nation to live, the tribe must die." For too long, a tribal approach to governance has undermined national development, perpetuating intergenerational poverty and exacerbating inflation inequality. – Project Syndicate

• Hippolyte Fofack, a former chief economist and director of research at the African Export-Import Bank, is a Parker fellow with the SDSN at Columbia University, a research associate at the Harvard University Center for African Studies, a distinguished fellow at the Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils, and a fellow at the African Academy of Sciences.

Resetting US-China economic relations

By Barry Eichengreen
Shanghai

The year 1979 was a pivotal one in Sino-American relations. On a historic visit to the US, Deng Xiaoping, China's paramount leader, met with President Jimmy Carter at the White House and attended the Round-Up Rodeo in Simonton, Texas, where he donned a ten-gallon hat and charmed the crowd. And, reflecting the rapid normalisation of bilateral relations over the course of the decade, the two countries signed the US-China Science and Technology Agreement, which provided a framework for regulating technology, exchanging scientists, scholars, and students, and developing joint projects.

Now, 45 years later, that historic agreement has been allowed to lapse, a casualty of an American presidential-election year and heightened US-China tensions. And this breakdown comes on top of US tariffs on imports from China, prohibitions on exports of advanced technologies to the country, and, most recently, the addition of 42 Chinese firms to a trade restriction list for supplying the Russian military. Economic relations between the US and China have never been worse.

The implications are profound, because several of the world's most pressing economic problems can be solved only with contributions from both countries. And, to address global challenges, active co-operation between the two economic powers is indispensable.

That said, there are at least a few faint glimmers of hope. US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan's trip to Beijing in August – the first by a national security adviser since 2016 – created the possibility of a constructive dialogue between President Joe Biden and President Xi Jinping. More consequentially, the next US administration may better appreciate the need for bilateral co-operation and take steps to rebuild it.

A starting point for rapprochement could be collaboration on the regulation of artificial intelligence. Absent such an agreement, a race to the bottom is inevitable, because both the US and China would shun regulations that risked leaving them behind in the development of this breakthrough technology. A rehabilitated US-China Science and Technology Agreement would be the obvious framework for negotiating an appropriate set of standards.

Second, there must be co-operation on the climate crisis, since only the largest countries, which are also the largest greenhouse-gas emitters, can lead the way. The Sunnylands Agreement negotiated late last year indicates awareness of this fact on both sides and suggests that there remains scope for the two countries to work together.

But progress also requires taking advantage of China's prowess in manufacturing green products. By making its subsidies regime more transparent, China could reassure the US that it is not dumping solar panels, windmills, and electric vehicles onto world markets. The US could then be induced to remove the tariffs that make importing China's green-technology products more expensive.

In fact, there is a bargain to be had on trade more generally. If China did more to boost domestic consumption of manufactured goods, the US would have less reason to worry about the bilateral trade imbalance and about China's surplus vis-à-vis the rest of the world. Rebalancing the Chinese economy in this way could then prompt a reduction in bilateral



tariffs and support efforts to revive the World Trade Organisation.

China and the US will also have to work together to reduce low-income countries' debt burden and help them to finance their green transitions. Similarly, they will have to agree on a regime to limit unhealthy competition in outer space. Their mutual interest in countering the production and trafficking of fentanyl and other narcotics is already obvious.

To be sure, there remain serious obstacles to co-operation: tensions over human rights, Taiwan, Ukraine, and China's failure to help broker a truce in the Middle East. For its part, China is angry about US trade and technology policies.

The hope is that the US and China can compartmentalise areas where the two countries have irreconcilable differences and those where they can co-operate, as the economist Fred Bergsten has suggested. Whether this proves possible remains to be seen.

A future Kamala Harris administration will highlight China's human-rights violations and privilege the complaints of American unions. And it seems unlikely that Trump in his second term would turn on a dime and embrace Xi in the manner he has embraced other strongmen, such as Vladimir Putin, Viktor Orbán, and Kim Jong-un.

This is not to say that US politics is the only obstacle to progress. Last week, on arriving in Shanghai for the Bund Summit, I was asked at the immigration booth whether I worked for the US government. To gain entry, I had to explain at some length that the State of California, for which I work at one remove, is not the federal government. The question – and the interrogation – did not leave me optimistic about the bilateral relationship. But who knows?

There are few certainties in world affairs. What we do know is that without much greater co-operation between the US and China, the world will be in dire straits. – Project Syndicate,

• Barry Eichengreen, Professor of Economics and Political Science at the University of California, Berkeley, is the author, most recently, of *In Defense of Public Debt* (Oxford University Press, 2021).

The improving economics and worsening geopolitics of clean energy

By Daniel Gros
Milan

According to the International Energy Agency, tripling renewable capacity by 2030, a goal set at last year's UN Climate Change Conference in Dubai, is now feasible, owing to dramatic cost reductions in clean-energy technologies. Specifically, the falling price of solar panels and batteries has rapidly improved the economics of climate mitigation.

Over the last 20 years, solar-panel prices have fallen whenever global capacity doubled, and the continued expansion of solar capacity, especially in China, stands to create further gains. By comparison, other renewable-energy technologies, such as wind turbines, do not benefit from the same advantages of scale because their many moving parts are more liable to break. As a result, the costs of wind power have decreased substantially but not to the same degree. It seems likely that ever-cheaper solar energy will be widely adopted as the renewable of choice.

Another important development is the falling cost of batteries. As with solar panels, battery prices in recent decades have declined by roughly 19% for every doubling of production. This trend must continue to produce cheaper electric vehicles (EVs) and to offset the intermittent nature of renewables. The combination of solar energy (which has a predictable daily cycle) and batteries, in particular, comes close to creating the ideal power source that is available when needed.

But the improving economics of renewables, while a positive and necessary development, does not mean that we will win the fight against climate change. Yes, a credible low-cost path to decarbonise energy systems and transport, which together account for 60% of emissions, now exists. Unfortunately, political obstacles to the rapid adoption of these clean-energy solutions have been emerging, both globally and locally.

In advanced economies, the biggest barriers to renewables arise at the local level: NIMBY ("not in my backyard") activism often prevents new wind-power installations and grid upgrades, which are crucial for integrating and transporting large amounts of renewable electricity. For example, Germany has so far failed to create a link between its offshore wind farms in the North Sea and the industrial South. The local opposition to new power lines was so vociferous that the connection, called SuedLink, is now being made with underground cables that increase the cost by a factor of five. Recognizing the problem of NIMBYism, the European Commission recently directed member states to accelerate permitting for renewable-energy projects.

But the greatest obstacle to decarbonisation is the rising tension between the West and China. A large, advanced economy like the European Union or the US, the argument goes, cannot allow a geopolitical rival to dominate future growth industries. This view has paved the way for green industrial policies on both sides of the Atlantic. But the costs of solar panels and batteries are rapidly declining precisely because they are mature technologies with increasingly commoditised products (which China excels at manufacturing at scale). These are not the industries of the future.

Another argument for the domestic production of renewables is to ensure energy security. But this is also wrong. Any disruption in the supply of solar panels would not interrupt the energy supply because the existing installed capacity would continue to generate electricity (at zero marginal cost). These tensions have been felt most acutely in the EV sector. The market share of EVs has stagnated at 8% in the US and roughly 15% in the EU, partly because they are more expensive – often by as much as \$20,000 – than internal combustion engine (ICE) cars. Subsidy schemes in the US and EU only partially offset the higher cost, whereas in China, EVs are close to price parity with ICE vehicles and their market share was more than 35% in 2023. Welcoming low-cost Chinese EVs could save Western consumers money, but both the US and the EU have imposed high tariffs on them.

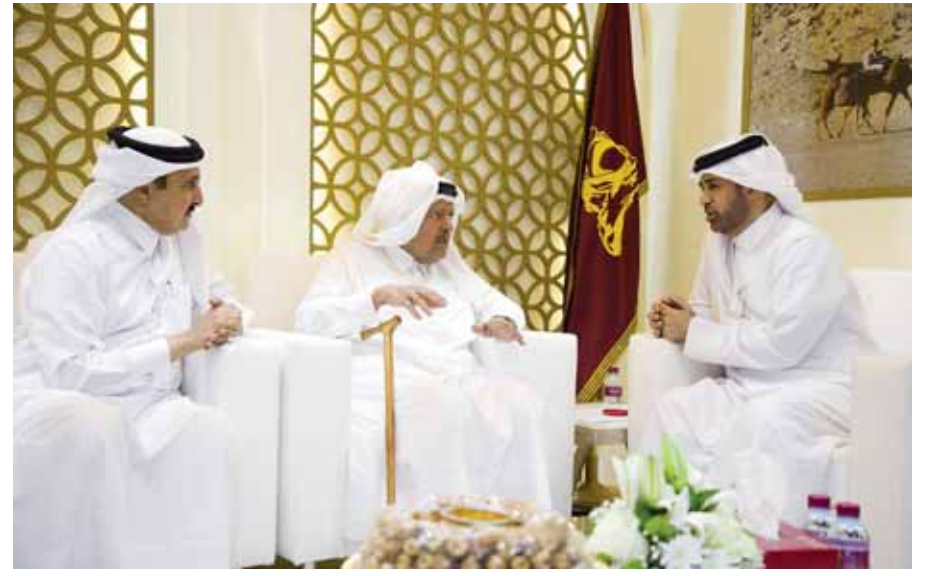
In addition to major industrial powers "protecting" themselves against cheap Chinese imports and thus increasing the cost of the green transition, geopolitics has also created obstacles to the implementation of renewables in the developing world.

China, with its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), should be well placed to support decarbonisation efforts in poorer countries. But that has not happened for two reasons. First, India is not taking part in the BRI and fiercely protects its industry, owing to its rivalry with China. This matters, because India is now the world's third-largest emitter, surpassing the EU in 2023, and also one of the fastest-growing economies. Second, the governments receiving Chinese credits under the BRI often prefer to spend them on prestigious infrastructure projects rather than on humble renewable installations.

Ongoing reductions in the cost of renewable energy are vastly improving the near-term potential to decarbonise large parts of the global economy. But politics is standing in the way of progress. – Project Syndicate

• Daniel Gros is Director of the Institute for European Policy-Making at Bocconi University.





HE Sheikh Faisal bin Qassim al-Thani and HE Sheikh Khalifa bin Jassim al-Thani with Katara general manager Prof. Khalid bin Ibrahim al-Sulaiti on the sidelines of S'hail 2024.

Left: Visitors to S'hail 2024 admiring the falcons on display. PICTURES: Shaji Kayamkulam and supplied



A falcon on show at S'hail 2024 flaps its wings.



Right: Noted academic and falconry specialist Dr Zubair bin Haider Meidamal at the event. He is currently working on a documentary on falconry.

S'hail 2024, concluding today, continues to lure enthusiasts



A young falconer is all smiles as he poses with a falcon at the event.

S'hail 2024, the eighth edition of Katara International Hunting and Falcons Exhibition, will conclude today after attracting thousands of visitors to the popular event where timeless falconry meets cutting-edge innovation.

The timing is from 10am to 10pm. In a fusion of tradition and modernity, S'hail 2024 showcases a trove of the latest innovations in falconry, hunting weaponry, and outdoor adventure gear.

Malika bint Mohammed al-Shraim, a member of the Supreme Organising Committee and director of marketing at Katara - the Cultural Village, said: "Each year, we strive to enhance its grandeur, and this year visitors will notice significant upgrades, from the exhibition's expanded scale and increased international participation to the diverse pavilions and new competitions."

S'hail 2024, she said, provides an excellent platform for Qatari businesses to showcase their products to both local audiences and global counterparts, fostering greater collaboration and exchange.

For the first time, the exhibition features a special competition for children aged 10-16, encouraging them to explore the world of hunting and falconry.

Talal al-Rweili, attending the event with his son for the first time, expressed his joy: "It's an extraordinary experience for my son to win a falcon at S'hail!"

"This exhibition is a wonderful way to introduce our children to our cherished traditions," he said. "It links them with the heritage of falconry, a cultural treasure we've upheld for generations."

Saeed al-Merri, another enthusiast of the S'hail exhibition, shared his satisfaction with his son's newfound interest in falconry ignited by the event.

"Winning this falcon is more than just a prize; it's an entryway to a journey of learning and valuing our traditions," he said. "I'm proud to see S'hail offer such enriching experiences for the younger generation."

Mohammed al-Nuaimi, whose son was also a winner, voiced similar feelings: "This exhibition beautifully merges our past with our future. I am thrilled to witness my son's excitement and see him develop a passion for falconry, a tradition I've always loved."

S'hail 2024 is featuring a significant number of companies specialising in traditional products and artifacts.

Dawaniya Al-Shamali Heritage Company showcased a diverse range of items, including meticulously crafted coffee pots, sugar bowls, and date trays.

Other heritage sector companies at the event include Nahatou Al-Jazeera, Jassim Al Linjawi, and Mashtaqa, displaying traditional hunting tools and artefacts.

The latest innovations in caravan and cabin design are on show.



A falcon spreads its wings at the event.



An enthusiast holds up a falcon at the exhibition.

Among the standout exhibitors was the Luxury Marine Company, known for its 12m caravan featuring a 3m wide swimming pool.

Company owner Ahmad al-Sada discussed the challenges faced during the six-month production process.

He noted that this caravan is the first of its kind in the Middle East, with locally sourced materials showcasing Qatar's dedication to quality and innovation.

Other exhibitors presented opulent 24m caravans with two bedrooms, a jacuzzi, and unique interior designs, priced over QR1mn.

Hamad al-Qahtani's company highlighted its extensive expertise in the industry, with locally developed caravans that have evolved to meet the increasing demand for high-quality products suited for desert adventures.

S'hail 2024 has also become a vibrant platform for artistic expression, with 26 artists painting live, inspired by the desert landscapes and Qatar's rich falconry tradition.

Dr Zubair bin Haider Meidamal, a noted academic and falconry specialist, expressed his admiration for S'hail 2024 and its efforts to preserve and celebrate this ancient tradition.

He is currently working on a 30-minute documentary titled *Falcons and Falconry in the Arabian Gulf*, which will be produced in both Arabic and English.

The film will explore falconry in the Middle East, focusing on falcon breeds, their global significance, and the marvels of these birds, including their feeding habits, molting process, and healthcare, a statement from Katara said.



The latest innovations in caravan and cabin design are on show.

Left: Craftsmen making falcon hoods at the exhibition.

Right: An artist at work at the event at Katara.



A swimming pool inside a caravan at the exhibition.



An interior view of an ultra-luxury caravan displayed at S'hail 2024.