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# GULF TIMES



SATURDAY Vol. XXXV No. 13168

October 19, 2024  
Rabia II 16, 1446 AH

www.gulf-times.com 2 Riyals

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Muslim worshippers perform the weekly Friday prayers in a tent enclosure by destroyed buildings in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday.

## Hamas mourns Sinwar, vows no hostage release until war ends

AFP  
Jerusalem

Hamas vowed yesterday it would not release the Israeli hostages it seized on October 7 until the Gaza war ends, as it mourned the death of its leader Yahya Sinwar.

The Palestine Liberation Organisation also expressed its condolences over the "martyrdom of the great national leader Yahya Sinwar".

The killing of Sinwar had raised hopes of a turning point in the war, including for families of the Israeli hostages and Gazans enduring a dire humanitarian crisis.

However as Hamas official Khalil al-Hayya mourned Sinwar in a video statement yesterday, he reiterated the Palestinian group's position that no hostages would be released "unless the aggression against our people in Gaza stops".

And Israeli forces pumelled Gaza with air strikes yesterday, with rescuers recovering the bodies of three Palestinian children from the rubble of their home in the north of the territory, according to Gaza's civil defence agency.

"We always thought that when this moment arrived the war would end and our lives would return to normal," Jemaa Abou Mendi, a 21-year-old Gaza resident, told AFP.

"But unfortunately, the reality on the ground is quite the opposite. The war has not stopped, and the killings continue unabated."

US President Joe Biden, whose government is Israel's top arms provider, said Sinwar's death was "an opportunity to seek a path to peace, a better future in Gaza without Hamas".

In a joint statement, Biden and the leaders of Germany, France and Britain emphasised "the immediate necessity to bring the hostages home to their families, for ending the war in Gaza, and ensure humanitarian aid reaches civilians".

Israel's campaign to crush Hamas and bring back the hostages has killed 42,500 people in Gaza,

### Hamas: Sinwar was martyred in clashes with occupation forces

Hamas announced yesterday that Yahya Sinwar was martyred in an armed clash with the Israeli occupation forces in the Tel Al Sultan neighbourhood in Rafah.

Khalil al-Hayya, a member of Hamas' political bureau, confirmed in a video speech yesterday that Sinwar was martyred in a clash with the occupation forces. He added that Hamas will continue its path until the establishment of a Palestinian state on all Palestinian land with Jerusalem as its capital. (QNA)

the majority civilians, according to data from the health ministry in the Hamas-run territory, figures which the UN considers reliable.

A "conservative" estimate puts the death toll among children in Gaza at over 14,100, said James Elder, spokesman of the UN children's agency Unicef.

For the 1mn children currently in the besieged territory, "Gaza is the real-world embodiment of hell on Earth," Elder said.

Criticism has been mounting over the civilian toll and lack of food and aid reaching Gaza, where the UN has warned of famine.

Israel is also fighting a war with Hezbollah in Lebanon. The two sides had exchanged rocket fire since October 7, with Israel sending ground troops across the Lebanese border last month.

Hezbollah said yesterday it fired a salvo of rockets at the Israeli city of Haifa and areas to its north.

It later said it launched "a swarm of explosives-laden drones" at an "air missile defence base" east of the central Israeli city of Hadera.

The UN peacekeeping force in Lebanon warned that the escalating war "is causing widespread destruction of towns and villages" in the country's south.

### Israel preventing entry of food to patients: hospital chief

Director of Al Awda Hospital in northern Gaza, Mohamed Saleha, confirmed that Israeli occupation forces continue to besiege hospitals in the north, preventing food and water from reaching patients and medical staff for the 14th consecutive day. He added that any movement in the area is being targeted.

In a statement to Qatar News Agency (QNA), Saleha said that dozens of injuries are still arriving at Al Awda Hospital and other operational hospitals in northern Gaza. He noted that medical teams are dealing with complex injuries despite the severe shortages of medicine, medical supplies, and fuel. He warned that the suffocating siege on the hospitals has left patients and medical teams without food, emphasising that they are facing a real disaster as the siege on Jabalia camp continues. Saleha appealed to the World Health Organisation, UN agencies, and all partners to urgently facilitate the delivery of medicines, medical supplies, and fuel to Al Awda Hospital, and to co-ordinate the entry of food for patients and medical staff. (QNA)

## States helping Israel's occupation may be 'complicit': UN experts

AFP  
Geneva

Countries enabling Israel's "unlawful occupation" of the Palestinian territories and assisting it despite warnings of war crimes and possible "genocide" in Gaza should be deemed "complicit", UN experts said yesterday.

"Israel's internationally wrongful acts give rise to state responsibility, not only for Israel, but for all states," said Navi Pillay, head of the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry.

The commission has published a new legal position paper spelling out specific actions required following a recent advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice (ICJ) declaring Israel's occupation since 1967 "unlawful".

It also examines the implications of last month's UN General Assembly vote demanding the occupation end within a year.

The three-person commission, established by the UN Human Rights Council in May 2021 to investigate alleged international law violations in Israel and the Palestinian territories, pointed first to Israel's obligations.

The UN General Assembly vote meant "Israel was under an international legal obligation to cease all new settlement activity and dismantle existing settlements as rapidly as possible".

"Israel must immediately put into place a comprehensive plan of action that will physically evacuate all settlers from occupied territory," it said.

It also demanded that Israel "return land, title and natural resources to the Palestinians who have been displaced since 1967".

Other countries also had a list of obligations to fulfil, according to the commission. Pillay, a former UN rights chief, said all countries are "obligated not to recognise territorial or sovereignty claims made by Israel over the occupied territories".

States are required to "distinguish in their dealings between Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory"; and no country should "recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel or place its diplomatic representatives to Israel in Jerusalem", she said.

States must also refrain from rendering "aid or assistance in maintaining the unlawful occupation", she said, adding that this included all "financial,

military and political aid or support".

The commission likewise insisted that all states must comply with their "obligations under the Genocide Convention" and follow the provisional measures ordered by the ICJ in a case brought by South Africa accusing Israel of committing genocide in Gaza.

"States may be complicit in failing to prevent genocide if they do not act in compliance with the court orders, and directly aid or assist in the commission of genocide," it warned.

The commission stressed that the UN also needed to do more to ensure Israel complies with its obligations under international law.

It decried that the Security Council in particular had repeatedly failed to act due to the veto power wielded by one of its five permanent members, implicitly referring to the US, Israel's main ally.

"The commission is of the view that, when peremptory norms of international law are violated, the permanent members of the Security Council should not be allowed to exercise their veto as this is contrary to the obligation to uphold peremptory norms of international law," it said.

## WISH 2024 to highlight impact of conflicts on healthcare

By Joseph Varghese  
Staff Reporter

The upcoming World Innovation Summit for Health (WISH) 2024 will highlight the impact of conflict on healthcare under the theme 'Humanising Health: Conflict, Equity, and Resilience'.

Taking place on November 13-14, the summit will focus on how wars have a massive and direct impact on families, besides the destruction of infrastructure, degradation of education and healthcare systems among others.

WISH, a member of Qatar Foundation (QF), in collaboration with



Maha El Akoum



Dr Sharifa al-Emadi

the WHO is developing a report on protecting health in armed conflict. The report, according to an article on QF website will present the most recent trends in attacks against healthcare facilities and workers with a focus on the scale, nature, and distribution of these attacks.

It will propose mechanisms for the protection of healthcare in armed conflict, looking at existing legal frameworks such as International Human Rights Law, and accountability measures including the criminal prosecution of atrocity crimes, and UN accountability mechanisms. The report will also provide pol-

icy recommendations for the prevention, mitigation and accountability of these crimes from a global, regional, and national perspective.

Maha El Akoum, acting director of research and content at WISH, said: "This year's alarming rise in attacks against healthcare workers and facilities underscores the pressing need for a transformative response to safeguard health in conflict zones. Health workers, who are at the centre of our health systems, are disproportionately affected by violence, often working under perilous conditions with overwhelming workloads and scarce resources, all while worrying about the safety of their own families." **To Page 2**

### Rain expected today



Thundery rain associated with strong wind is expected today in Qatar, both inshore and offshore, the Met office said. Rain, ranging from light to thundery, was observed in some areas of Qatar yesterday. Yesterday's minimum and maximum temperatures were in the 23-29C and 33-38C range, respectively. The minimum and maximum temperature forecast for today are in the 23-29C and 32-36C range, respectively. Picture shows a scene around sunset time yesterday from Old Doha Port. **PICTURE:** Shaji Kayamkulam

COMMUNITY - See Pages: 4 & 5



# QU conference looks at family, moral values in light of digital revolution

**Q**atar University (QU), through the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) in collaboration with the Behavioural Healthcare Centre (BHC), hosted a conference titled 'Family and the Consolidation of Moral Values in Light of Technological Challenges'.

The event brought together academics and experts in technology, sociology, and behavioural sciences to discuss the growing impact of technology on family relationships and explore strategies for promoting ethical values amidst digital advancements.

CAS dean Dr Fatima al-Kubaisi and BHC director Rashid Mohammed al-Nuaimi spoke on the occasion.

They addressed the importance of strengthening family cohesion in light of the technological pressures faced by contemporary societies, emphasising the vital role that educational and research institutions play in steering discussions toward sustainable solutions.

Dr al-Kubaisi noted that while technology provides valuable services for societal development, it has also brought forth new values and standards that frequently conflict with cultural norms, sig-



A panel discussion during the conference.

nificantly affecting family bonds and relationships. She concluded by encouraging researchers in the social and human sciences to concentrate on examining the effects of technological media on our moral values, with the goal of identifying these impacts and finding ways to positively influence them while addressing any threats to these values.

Al-Nuaimi emphasised that the forum seeks solutions to protect moral values in society amid the challenges posed by technology and modern communication. He noted that traditional education is no longer the only source of knowledge for adolescents, with new values emerging from

digital information that may not align with established standards. The forum featured several sessions that addressed the impact of technology on family relationships and strategies to mitigate negative effects.

One session focused on the negative impact of digital pressures on family connections, emphasising technology's influence on family cohesion and values of care and participation.

Another session explored the challenges that modern technology poses for contemporary families, discussing how to align family values with rapid changes and develop behavioural guidelines to strengthen family ties.



## Qatar partakes in council of Arab environmental ministers in Jeddah

**QNA**  
Jeddah

**H**E the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Dr Abdullah bin Abdulaziz bin Turki al-Subaie, participated in the opening session of the 35th session of the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for Environmental Affairs, which was held in Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

HE Dr al-Subaie stressed in a speech that holding this session represents a strong push to support the path of environmental co-operation among Arab countries in facing environmental

challenges intertwined with various development sectors, noting that unifying efforts and visions towards these challenges constitutes the basic pillar to ensure environmental sustainability in line with international requirements.

He praised the Arab countries' efforts in hosting and organizing international environmental conferences and events, and adopting regional and global initiatives related to this field, stressing the effective role played by these countries in supporting efforts to protect the environment and promote sustainable development at the regional and global levels.

During the meeting, HE the minister presented the recent

achievements of the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change including the launch of the air quality platform, which allows members of society to monitor the level of air quality in various regions of the country according to the highest national and international standards, accurately and easily.

He pointed out that the ministry launched last May the aerial environmental monitoring system using autogyro aircraft, which feature advanced technological techniques that contribute to enhancing the state's efforts to preserve biodiversity and protect the marine and terrestrial environment.



## Qatar chairs meeting of GCC ambassadors with UNODC executive director in Vienna



Qatar yesterday presided over a meeting of GCC countries' ambassadors accredited to the UN Office in Vienna with the Executive Director of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), at the headquarters of the GCC Permanent Mission. Chaired by Qatar's ambassador and its Permanent Representative to the UN Office and International Organisations in Vienna Jassim Yacoub al-Hammadi, the meeting discussed co-operation relations between the GCC countries and the UN Office in Vienna, and emphasised the importance of holding periodic meetings between officials from both sides. The meeting also discussed ways to activate the memorandum of understanding signed between the GCC General Secretariat and the UNODC, and considered holding workshops at the headquarters of the GCC Permanent Mission to be managed by experts from the UN Office, and ways to benefit from the training programmes provided by the office. **(QNA)**

## WISH 2024 to highlight impact of conflicts on healthcare

From Page 1

"As families bear the brunt of these crises, psychologically and socially, it is imperative that we mobilise governments, UN agencies, and civil society to protect not only medical services but also the very fabric of family life. Together, we can forge a future where health and safety are recognised as fundamental rights for every individual and family, even in the most challenging environments," noted, El Akoum.

While a study by Doha Interna-

tional Family Institute (Difi) titled 'Wars, Conflicts, and Their Impacts on Arab Families' highlights that despite the current situation in Palestine, Yemen, Syria, Lebanon, and other Arab countries, the Arab family continues to exemplify values of compassion and solidarity, and provides care for children and the elderly.

"During peaceful times, every individual in the family has their role and responsibilities clearly defined," Dr Sharifa al-Emadi, executive director of Difi, says. "However, in times of war, when

educational and healthcare facilities are attacked and families are directly targeted, the weight of the responsibilities of parents in providing protection and care for their children or the elderly becomes enormous and extremely difficult."

Dr al-Emadi says that researchers have noted that during the war on Gaza, with entire families being wiped out and their members martyred, many children find themselves alone, leading to the emergence of the phenomenon of these children being taken in by families with no blood relation to them.

## MSDF hosts symposium as part of Qatar-Morocco 2024 Year of Culture

**T**he Ministry of Social Development and Family (MSDF)'s Family Empowerment Department organised a symposium as part of the activities of the Qatar-Morocco 2024 Year of Culture. Entitled family and the culture of a nation, the event was held in co-operation with the Qatar Museums' Years of Culture initiative, the Social and Sport Contribution Fund (DAAM), and the Moroccan embassy in Doha.

In attendance were Assistant Undersecretary for Family Affairs Sheikhha Sheikha bint Jassim al-Thani, Moroccan embassy diplomats and several Qatari and Moroccan families. The speakers

discussed the impact of cultural and social heritage on the family and its role in developing productive projects.

The speakers shed light on the productive projects of entrepreneurs from Qatar and Morocco, and how culture and traditions contributed to their development and continuity.

The seminar also included a presentation of the participants' experiences and the extent to which they benefited from the cultural and social heritage in the family to develop their businesses, which strengthens community ties and contributes to local economic growth. Also highlighted were the

services provided by the Family Counseling Center (Wifaq), which include guidance and counselling in developmental, social and psychological fields, in addition to family reform services, parental care, community awareness, remote consultations, tests and measurements.

The symposiasts stressed the importance of preserving cultural heritage for its role in empowering family projects. In addition to the socio-cultural dialogue, an accompanying exhibition was organized featuring productions of Qatari and Moroccan projects participating in the "From the Homeland" initiative. **(QNA)**

## 'Qatar Reads' donates books to Moroccan library

**QNA**  
Rabat

**T**he Qatar Reads Initiative of the Qatar National Library (QNL) has delivered a number of books to the Moroccan National Library, as part of its participation in the activities of the Qatar-Morocco 2024 Year of Culture in the capital Rabat, and within the cultural years initiative of Qatar Museums, to strengthen ties, encourage dialogue, and deepen understanding between countries and peoples.

The initiative organised, as part of the Family Reading Programme, a session in which children gathered around the narrator at the National Library of the Kingdom of Morocco as he told them the story of "Hayy ibn Yaqzan" inspired by the novel by Ibn Tufayl, written by Qatari writer Asma al-Kuwari, illustrated by Maliha Ahmadi, and translated by Dr Safar Haji Safar, using the Japanese art of (Kami Shibai), which is a form of narration using a group of illustrated panels.

This book was published as part of the "One Book, One Community" campaign for the year 2023 in co-operation with (Qatar Reads) and the Ministry of Culture.

The Qatari embassy in Rabat also hosted a similar event during which a number of Qatari and Moroccan children were hosted, where they were honoured with a number of gifts and books.

The family reading programme of the "Qatar Reads" initiative targets children between the ages of 3 and 13, to encourage them to love books and develop their home libraries.

Regarding the event, Fatima al-Maliki, Director of the "Qatar Reads" programme, said in statements that this cultural event, which will continue until next December in a number of Moroccan cities, seeks to connect the family with books and encourage the reading community, noting that it coincides with the distribution of a thousand reading packages about Morocco to children in Qatar, and the presentation of the book "Mary in Morocco" directed at children, whose idea revolves around enabling children to discover new places and ideas about Morocco in a distinctive narrative style.

In turn, Dr Mohamed al-Tawil, Head of Programming and Technical Interventions at the Book Directorate of the Moroccan Ministry of Culture, Youth and Communication, confirmed that the "Qatar Reads" initiative

programme included distributing book packages, in addition to visits for children to media libraries and a group of libraries in the Rabat-Salé-Kenitra region, in order to spread reading among them, pointing out that this event also witnesses the organisation of several artistic activities, including plays and visual art shows related to the style of storytelling and illustrated narration.

For her part, Nada Ali Bahzad, the main official responsible for programme development at the Qatar National Library (QNL), noted the co-operation with the Moroccan National Library, and the pursuit of achieving common goals by instilling a love of reading in the youth, and enhancing the role of reading in the exchange of cultures and creativity among children.

The cultural year (Qatar-Morocco 2024) is being developed in co-operation with a number of leading institutions in Qatar, within the organising committee of the Years of Cultural initiative with its partners from the Kingdom of Morocco, and with the assistance of the Ministry of Youth, Culture and Communication in Morocco, the embassy of Qatar in Rabat, and the embassy of the Kingdom of Morocco in Doha.

## Commercial Bank promotes ongoing awareness for breast cancer month in Qatar

Commercial Bank has placed breast cancer awareness month at the forefront of its priorities, passionately launching an extensive internal campaign every year that aims to educate the community on the importance of early detection and healthy living.

This event reinforced the idea that awareness is just the beginning; empowering to take action, to educate, and to support one another in the journeys. It also ensures that this cause remains in the spotlight, fostering a culture of openness and support that encourages early detection and comprehensive care for all.

"This year's theme is rooted in the importance of awareness and early detection. We launched our 'Show your care, be aware' campaign and partnered with Qatar Cancer Society, The View Hospital, Naseem Medical Center, and Turkish Hospital to highlight the importance of a healthy lifestyle and early detection as methods of breast cancer prevention," said Rana Salatt, EGM and chief internal audit officer at Commercial Bank.

Early detection is crucial as it significantly increases the chances of successful treatment and can lead to better outcomes for patients, she said, adding "this is our commitment to nurturing a thriving workplace while empowering our community with unwavering care and compassion. Commercial Bank's efforts demonstrated the indispensable role it plays throughout this month."

Maneera al-Kuwari, deputy head of Government Relations at Commercial Bank, said adopting a human-centric approach to breast cancer awareness is vital for nurturing authentic connec-



tions within the community.

"By prioritising empathy and understanding, we not only acknowledge the challenges faced by those impacted by this disease but also celebrate the remarkable resilience and strength of survivors and their families. This approach paves the way for open conversations, inviting individuals to share their powerful stories and experiences," she added.

During the event, representatives from View Hospital emphasised the psychological aspects of living with breast cancer, shedding light on the mental health challenges patients often face and offering strategies to overcome them.

"When a brave survivor from the Qatar Cancer Society shared her journey, the room was filled with a sense of hope. The expressions on everyone's faces reflected relief and inspiration – reminding us that survival is possible, hope is necessary, and together, we can continue to fight and uplift one another in this journey," according to al-Kuwari.

Manal al-Ali, Legal Admin Manager at Commercial Bank, said: "It is truly inspiring to see the Bank play a vital role in an

issue that concerns every single woman around the world. We stand united under one cause; raise our voices for a shared purpose. Each year, Commercial Bank goes above and beyond to join this important movement, and this year, our focus is on awareness first and foremost."

"By amplifying awareness, breaking the silence, and driving action, we reaffirm that every voice matters and every story counts. Together, we can create a stronger impact and foster meaningful change in our communities. Our dedication to fostering dialogue around breast cancer, specifically the mental health challenges that come with it, is essential in helping women feel seen and heard," she said.

Alanoud al-Nuimi, acting senior manager, AML/CFT Governance at Commercial Bank, said: "In our unwavering commitment to solidarity and care, we proudly presented our staff with vouchers from Naseem Medical Clinic during breast cancer awareness month. This initiative reflects our steadfast belief in the power of community and compassion. By providing access to essen-



tial health services, we not only support the well-being of our team but also foster a culture of awareness and proactive health management."

"Together, we stand united in the fight against breast cancer, empowering each other with the resources needed to promote health and hope. Let us continue to inspire one another, reminding ourselves that every small act of kindness contributes to a brighter, healthier future for all," said al-Nuimi.

Alanoud al-Emadi, manager, Sponsorship and Events at Commercial Bank, said: "Corporate social responsibility is

not just a strategy for us; it's a mission that runs deep within our values, shaping who we are and what we stand for. As we mark breast cancer awareness month, we recognise the importance of this cause – a cause that calls for all of us to raise our voices, not only in October but throughout the year."

"Together, we offer hope and stand strong, carrying this mission forward in our hearts every day," she said, adding "this year, we recognised the importance of integrating our fitness initiatives with this cause. Engaging in fitness activities serves as a powerful reminder that strength

comes in many forms – both physical and emotional. It allows us to channel our energy into positive action, transforming our commitment into a tangible experience that uplifts us."

Highlighting that its dedicated gym trainers, Joanna and Joseph, led a powerful three-minute seated exercise and stretch workout, reinforcing that health, fitness and well-being are fundamental to lives; she said their insightful discussion on the importance of exercise in

preventing cancer highlighted how even brief moments of movement can empower us and foster resilience.

## UN says Israeli settlers cut down olive trees in 'war-like' West Bank campaign



Mourners bid farewell to 60-year-old Palestinian woman, Hanan Salameh, who was shot by Israeli forces during olive harvest, according to Palestinian health ministry, in the village of Faqqua, during her funeral near Jenin, in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, on Thursday.

Reuters  
Geneva

The UN humanitarian office accused Israel yesterday of using "war-like" tactics against Palestinians in the occupied West Bank, citing killings by soldiers and attacks on Palestinian olive groves by Israeli settlers.

This month so far, OCHA said it had received reports that settlers have carried out 32 attacks against Palestinians and their property, including on farmers. It added there were initial reports Israeli forces killed a woman who was harvesting olives near the West Bank city of Jenin on Thursday.

"It is, frankly, very concerning that it's not only attacks on people, but it's attacks on their olive groves as well," OCHA spokesperson Jens Laerke said at a Geneva press briefing. "The olive harvest is an economic lifeline for tens of thousands of Palestinian families in the West Bank." Israel's military said it had

launched an investigation into the reported attack in Jenin and the commanding officer there at the time has been suspended pending the checks.

It said, as with every year, it was working to secure the area to let people get on with the harvest. "The harvest season was planned and co-ordinated with all relevant parties, and IDF forces are providing security in the designated areas," it added.

Violence has surged across the West Bank since the start of the Hamas-Israel war in Gaza. Hundreds of Palestinians – including armed fighters, stone-throwing youths and civilian bystanders – have been killed in clashes with Israeli security forces.

Dozens of Israelis have been killed in Palestinian street attacks over the past year.

The OCHA report said around 600 mainly olive trees have been burnt, vandalised or stolen by settlers since the start of the harvest. It included a picture of a Palestinian man

standing next to an olive tree stump with its branches sawn off. "Israeli forces have been using lethal, war-like tactics in the West Bank, raising serious concerns over excessive use of force and deepening people's humanitarian needs," Laerke said. Earlier this month, the UN World Food Programme said that violence and the spillover effect of the Gaza war had nearly doubled the number of people facing food insecurity in the West Bank to 600,000 people since early 2023.

A group of Western states including France, Britain and Germany issued a joint statement on Oct 14 saying olive-picking had become "dangerous" due to settler violence and calling on Israel to allow Palestinians to join the harvest.

Settler violence is a source of growing concern among Israel's Western allies. A number of countries, including the US, have imposed sanctions on violent settlers and urged Israel to do more to stop the violence.

## Houthis mourn killing of Hamas leader Sinwar

AFP  
Sanaa

Yemen's Houthi rebels said yesterday they mourned Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar following his killing by the Israeli military in Gaza.

"My sincere condolences and great blessings to the Hamas movement and the dear Palestinian people for the great leader Yahya Sinwar receiving the medal of martyrdom," a spokesman for the rebel group wrote on X.

"Gaza and the Palestinian cause are destined for victory, no matter how great the sacrifices," Houthi spokesman Mohammed Abdul-salam added.

Palestinian group Hamas yesterday confirmed its leader's death saying they "mourn the great leader, the martyred brother, Yahya Sinwar, Abu Ibrahim".

Since November, the Houthis have targeted Red Sea shipping with drones and missiles, saying it was in solidarity with Palestinians in the Gaza war which was sparked by Hamas's October first week storming of Israel last year.

In the streets of the Yemeni capital Sanaa – which has been under Houthi control since 2014 – Palestinian, Lebanese and Hezbollah flags were raised dur-



A billboard depicting Hamas' slain leader Yahya Sinwar with the Arabic slogan "If Sinwar departs from the battlefields, Palestine will birth a thousand Sinwars", during a rally in Yemen's Houthi-controlled capital Sanaa, yesterday.

ing a demonstration.

Houthi fighters stood in ranks by their vehicles, while pictures of Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah, who was killed in an Israeli strike on Beirut's southern suburbs last month, were raised behind them.

The Houthis are fighting Israel as part of Iran's "Axis of Resistance", which includes Hamas, Lebanon's Hezbollah and several Iraqi groups.

"We must not surrender or lose our morale or our spirits, or be defeated," Yemeni Hussein Fatira said at the demonstration.

"The martyrdom of the leaders, whether Sinwar or Nasrallah, only increases our resolve," he added.

Footage broadcast by the Houthi-run Al-Masirah TV showed the streets of Sanaa filled with thousands of demonstrators yesterday afternoon.

Sanaa resident Mutahhar al-Khatib said that Sinwar's death "was shocking news for all of us, but if Sinwar is martyred, there will be 10 more in his place".

"The resistance will continue indefinitely, until the Zionist entity is eliminated," he added.

## Italian PM says 'unacceptable' to target UN peacekeepers in Lebanon

AFP  
Beirut

Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni yesterday slammed attacks on UN peacekeepers as "unacceptable" after the UN force accused Israeli troops of firing at their positions in south Lebanon.

Meloni, the first head of state or government to visit Lebanon since an escalation between Israel and Hezbollah started last month, demanded the protection of the UN force, which includes Italian peacekeepers.

"I consider targeting UN force unacceptable, and I ask once again that all parties strive to ensure at all times that the safety of each of these soldiers is guaranteed," Meloni said during a press

conference with her Lebanese counterpart Najib Mikati.

Italy has around 1,000 troops as part of the UN's peacekeeping force in Lebanon which has come under repeated fire in the Israeli-Hezbollah war in recent days.

Five peacekeepers were injured in a series of incidents last week, with the latest seeing the UN force accuse Israeli troops of breaking through a gate and entering one of their positions.

Unifil on Sunday asked for explanations from the Israeli army over what they said were "shocking violations" against their force, including forced entry.

"I am convinced that Unifil must be strengthened. Only by strengthening Unifil while maintaining its impartiality, will we be able to turn the page" on the war, Meloni said.

## Western nations urge Sudan warring sides to allow aid

Western countries including Britain, the US, France and Germany yesterday urged both sides in war-torn Sudan to let in "urgently required" aid to millions of people in dire need.

War has raged since April 2023 between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) under the country's de facto ruler Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), led by his former deputy Mohamed Hamdan Daglo. Both sides have been accused of war crimes, including targeting civilians and blocking humanitarian assistance. "The two sides' systematic obstruction of local and international humanitarian efforts is at the root of this famine," European and North American nations said in a joint statement.

# Outreach Qatar marks anniversary

■ Outreach Day celebrated; contributors to special needs community honoured



Outreach Qatar (OQ) celebrated Outreach Day, marking the anniversary of its first session for special needs children.

The event began with a lamp lighting by the chief guest, Indian embassy first secretary Eish Singhal and other guests.

Guest of honour, Bhavan's Public School principal Philip, shared his personal experiences, and spoke in depth about how the guidance given by Outreach has seen a visible change in the lives of the children, and reiterated his support to OQ.

Indian Cultural Centre president A P Manikantan recalled how he has been a part of OQ since inception and appreciated its activities.

Indian Community Benevolent Forum and Indian Sports Centre former president Nilan-shu Dey spoke how the changes



in children with special needs could lead to a difference in the entire community.

OQ advisory board chairman P N Baburajan recalled about the formation of the organisation and the plan to form Outreach Qatar Centre for Special Needs Children.

The event feted teachers/trainers, volunteers and support staff, whose dedication marked an enormously visible change in the lives of the OQ children and their families. It was emotional

to witness parents and others in tears, while the children spoke out their heart and confidently wished the gathering. The children gifted keychains to the teachers, trainers and volunteers.

OQ general secretary Sameer Moosa welcomed the audience and OQ president Avinash Gaikwad presided. Qatar Tamizhar Sangam president Manibharathi, and members of QTS committee, presented on stage a token of their support to the OQ president and committee.

## Session on early identification of developmental disabilities held



As many as 126 teachers from MES Indian School attended an orientation session on 'How to Identify & Support Children with Developmental Disabilities in School'. Conducted by the Qatar Institute for Speech & Hearing (Qish), the session reinforced the critical role of teachers such as how to identify students with difficulties, common problems teachers encounter in the classroom, why self-regulation is important, types of self-regulation, emotional deregulation associated problems with poor sensory integration/regulation, what teachers can do, developmental norms for school readiness and classroom activities. Qish's clinical director/occupational therapist Sathish Chandra Segar and clinical psychologist Fathima Fujra were the resource persons. The school's Department of Guidance & Counselling co-ordinated the session.

# QU conducts session to bolster student relations

QU hosts 'Dialogue and Coffee'

As part of Qatar University (QU)'s efforts to strengthen communication between the Student Housing Management and resident students, the department organised a discussion session titled 'Dialogue and Coffee' with Kholoud al-Hammadi, director of Student Housing and Residential Life Department.

Dr Mohammad Shahin al-Kuwari, associate vice-president for Student Life and Services at QU; and Rashid Mubarak al-Naimi, head of Male Student Housing; attended the session, along with a number of students and housing officials.

The event aimed to strengthen connections between the administration and students through an interactive environment.

Al-Hammadi emphasised the importance of open forums in building trust and enhancing the relationship between the Student



Housing Department and the residents. She highlighted the vital role the administration plays in improving the quality of life within residential complexes and the challenges they face in ensuring a comfortable and safe living environment for everyone.

Dr al-Kuwari affirmed the importance of hearing students' voices. "While we care for all students, those residing in student housing hold a special place, as we consider them part of our

family. Their safety, comfort and well-being are priorities that we uphold to ensure their academic success and excellence. We promise to continuously work on improving and developing services, God willing."

Al-Naimi emphasised the role of the Housing Department in improving the residential experience for male students.

"In the Male Housing Department, we are committed to meeting the needs of students

and providing a living environment that aligns with their aspirations."

Hamda al-Hamad, acting head of Female Student Housing, also highlighted the importance of creating a supportive and comfortable environment for female students. "These sessions help us better understand the needs of female students and open the door for their feedback."

Student Emir Akyuz, assistant in representing the Student



Housing Department, spoke about the purpose of such sessions, saying: "Our goal is to address past inquiries and complaints from students and ensure necessary actions are taken. We also welcome new requests and concerns regarding the upcoming phase, focusing on serving students and addressing their issues effectively and transparently."

The session addressed several key topics, including policies

related to services and facilities, the importance of social and recreational activities to foster interaction among residents, and students' suggestions for improving certain aspects of the housing experience.

Many students expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to discuss their concerns directly with the administration, praising the responsiveness of al-Hammadi, al-Naimi, al-Hamad, and their team.

## Kefa Qatar celebrates Onam



Kizhuppillikara Expatriates Friends Association Qatar (Kefa) hosted Onam celebrations for its members and their families. The event titled 'Ponnonam 2024', began with a grand Onam lunch followed by a meeting. General Secretary Shajahan V A welcomed the gathering and president Hijas P I presided. Advisory board general convener Ajimon Adam inaugurated the function. Advisory board chairman Sidhik presented the panel for new office bearer and senior members Mansoor P M, Prakash, Ansari Iqbal, and Shajeer spoke. Finance secretary Sherin proposed a vote of thanks. Gifts were distributed to the participants in the cultural programmes. Performances by singers Assainar Amayur, Shafi Valiyakath, Shafi Kabeer and dancer Tanishka Rajesh were among the highlights.

## ISC's India Cup Open badminton tourney ends



The Indian Sports Centre (ISC) has concluded the India Cup Open Badminton Tournament, Season 2, which witnessed the participation of more than 500 contestants across 33 categories. Arjun Shinde won the men's singles category while Akshay and Shijas emerged as the winners in men's doubles. Anusree Shine won the Girls' U17 category. Pridhav Shyam Gopan won Boys' U17 category while Adam Noujas won the Juniors' U9 category. Noted Indian former badminton player Prakash Padukone, the guest of honour, hailed the participants for their dedication and skill, particularly highlighting the promising talent displayed by younger players. Indian ambassador Vipul expressed his pride in witnessing the growing enthusiasm for sports within the Indian community in Qatar. ISC president E P Abdul Rahman spoke.

## Qget organises box cricket tournament



The Government Engineering College Thrissur Alumni Association, Qatar chapter (Qget) organised a Box Cricket Tournament in which Qatar Redstorms clinched the men's and women's titles. Sunrays Doha were runners-up in both categories. Corniche Blues and Lusail Legends also delivered commendable performances. Sanaf P and Shereefa Razana were adjudged the best players in the men's and women's sections. The event also featured fun competitions for kids. Qget has over 300 members.



## BPS wins relay bronze in CBSE national athletic meet



Birla Public School (BPS) won the 4x100 relay bronze in the CBSE National Athletic Meet, marking the institution's first national athletic medal. The team comprised Abdullah Waheedy (X-J), Shriyansh Ranjan Pattanayak (X-I), Ashish Pappan Johnson (VIII-K) and Faiz Najeeb Haneefa (X-H). The eight-member BPS athletic team, coached by Noby C C, put up commendable performance across various events. Waheedy made it to the finals of the 100m and 200m sprints. The school management, along with principal and the senior leadership team have congratulated the team.

## MES conducts musical reality show amid anniversary celebrations

As a part of the 50th anniversary celebrations of MES Indian School, an inter-school musical reality show was organised in collaboration with Radio 98.6, over five days.

At the opening on September 19, social media influencer and singer Meghna Surendran was a special guest.

The first round featured performances in three categories: Pallavi - for melody, fast song, and semi-classical renditions.

Out of the 23 participants, 15 were selected to the next round. On the second day, the participants performed melodies, while the third day was dedicated to fast-paced numbers.

After the semi-classical performances, five participants were shortlisted for the grand finale on

October 10. Riyas R K, the winner of GCC Best Singer was the special guest for the grand finale.

Acclaimed personalities from the realm of music: Aishwarya Vaidyanathan, Manikanda Das and Arvind Kumar were the judges.

Vaishnavi from Birla Public School (BPS) was declared the title winner of the MES Golden Tunes Musical Reality Show winning 8gm of gold.

Pooja Santhosh, also from BPS, was the first runner-up winning 4gm of gold while Shrivya Woody of Doha Modern Indian School bagged the second runner-up position and won 2gm of gold. Samadrita Basu of DPS Monarch International School and Alvia Saji of MES Indian School secured fourth and fifth

positions, respectively, winning mementos and gifts.

Video messages and messages from celebrities Kaithapram Damodaran Namboothiri, M Jayachandran, Madhu Balakrishnan, Sithara Krishna Kumar, Kannur Shareef, and Najim Arshad were conveyed to the participants.

MES governing board officials Kashif Jaleel, Ahmed Isham, Usman A, Ashraf Sharafudheen P T, Fasalau P P, Ansar T K, Aneesh P A, Faisal Mayan, principals of expatriate schools, parents and students were present.

MES principal Dr Hameeda Kadar congratulated the winners and thanked the school management for hosting the event. Cultural co-ordinators Anvar K and Sumitha Abdul Nassar were the general conveners.



Members of the Department of Music Anwar V P, Kavitha G and Mallika Shaji co-ordinated the event. Head girl Sheza Fathima

and head prefect Aryan Unnikrishnan gave the introduction for the event. Steffi Varghese Mathew wel-

comed and Mohammed Salim proposed a vote of thanks. The event was also streamed live on YouTube.



## QU pharmacy college students excel at FIP World Congress in South Africa

Two Qatar University (QU) College of Pharmacy (CPH) students, Muneera Abdullah and Youmna al-Alami, have won second place in the recently held 82nd International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP) World Congress for Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences in Cape Town, South Africa.

At the event under the theme 'Innovating for the Future of Health Care,' they presented a poster on research titled 'A

Systematic Review of Teaching Competencies on Disaster Medicine and Preparedness among Students in Healthcare Colleges,' and conducted under the supervision of CPH dean Prof Mohammad Izham Mohammad Ibrahim.

The research poster shed light on the importance of teaching healthcare students to be fully prepared for disaster management during a critical time. Competing against 86 posters

between the Social and Administrative Pharmacy (SAPS) section, Muneera and Youmna stood out in both their presentation and the research itself, showcasing clarity, innovation and the potential impact of their work.

Reflecting on their experience, Youmna said: "Winning second place in the FIP congress as first-time participants is an invaluable accomplishment and a true reward after all the dedication and effort we poured into our research. This opportunity not only expanded our knowledge and experience but also opened countless new doors, broadening our intellectual horizons in ways we never imagined."

Muneera said: "This experience has not only enriched my education but also inspired me to continue and expand in my research. I am thankful to the College of Pharmacy for providing us this opportunity along with the skills and knowledge that distinguish us from others."

The FIP World Congress, known for gathering leading minds and emerging researchers in the field of pharmacy and pharmaceutical sciences, provides pharmacy professionals with the opportunity to share their research, network with professionals, and gain feedback from experts, a statement added.



## BPS student wins BWF bronze medal

Prakriti Bharath, a Grade 12 student and sports captain from Birla Public School Doha, won her first Senior BWF International Bronze Medal at the Egypt International held in Cairo. This is a significant milestone in Prakriti's athletic career as she transitions from junior to senior tournaments, a statement said. "We are incredibly proud of Prakriti's accomplishments," the principal said. The school management and senior leadership team have congratulated the student.



## NIS marks World Students' Day

Noble International School (NIS) celebrated World Students' Day to commemorate the birth anniversary of Dr A P J Abdul Kalam, renowned aerospace scientist and a former president of India. The day showcased the talents and enthusiasm of the students. In his message, principal Shibu Abdul Rasheed, emphasised the significance of the day by remembering the great services rendered by Dr Kalam to the nation and the world. He also highlighted the importance of education in shaping the future and encouraged students to strive for excellence. The programme was led by vice principals Jayamon Joy, Robin K Jose, Shihabudheen M, and heads of sections.





## Gabon to hold referendum on new constitution on November 16

AFP  
Libreville

Gabon will hold a referendum on November 16 on a proposed new constitution, a key step towards the return to a civilian regime which the military junta promised after a coup, the transitional government said. The August 2023 coup put an end to 55 years of rule by

the family of former president Ali Bongo Ondimba.

The draft new constitution includes abolishing the post of prime minister and imposing a seven-year presidential term, renewable once. The Council of Ministers on Thursday passed the bill, the last component of a transition initiated after the removal of Bongo, according to an official statement sent by Laurence Ndong, spokeswoman for the

government led by Brice Oligui Nguema.

"The Council of Ministers has expressed its satisfaction at the completion of the proposed new constitution," the statement said. "The next decisive step in the transition process will be the organisation of a constitutional referendum."

Lawmakers in early September met to form a "reasoned opinion" on a final text, drafted from

a thousand proposals collected during a national dialogue organised in April. Candidates for head of state would have to be the offspring of Gabonese-born parents, according to a version of the proposed document circulating online - a claim authorities in the oil-rich country have not denied. Neither the bill nor the 800 amendments proposed by the parliament have been made public.

The proposed text is notably

believed to define marriage as a union between a man and a woman and would also make military service compulsory, while confirming French as the country's official language.

On August 30, 2023, an hour after the official announcement of Bongo's election to a third term since 2009, a military junta proclaimed his rule was over, denouncing what they said was a rigged poll. The military dis-

solved the country's institutions and appointed 98 deputies and 70 senators to a transitional parliament.

Oligui has promised to restore civilian rule in Africa's third-richest country in terms of per-capita GDP but where one in three lives below the poverty line, according to the World Bank. He has not hidden his intention to win a presidential election slated for August 2025.

## Kenya parliament votes to back Ruto's nominated new deputy



Rigathi Gachagua

AFP  
Nairobi

Kenya's parliament yesterday unanimously voted to back the nomination of President William Ruto's pick to replace his deputy Rigathi Gachagua who was sacked in a historic impeachment. But in a further twist in the fast-moving political drama, almost immediately after the vote, a high court issued an injunction suspending the replacement process.

Ruto's nominee, Kithure Kindiki, a 52-year-old academic turned political heavyweight, had been among the front-runners floated by political analysts after the Senate voted to remove Gachagua late Thursday.

The impeachment of Ruto's 2022 election running mate has transfixed the East African country, generally regarded as a stable democracy in a turbulent region.

The high-stakes political drama continued apace on Friday as National Assembly speaker Moses Wetangula announced Ruto's choice of Kindiki in the morning. A few hours later, parliamentarians voted 236 in favour, with no abstention or votes opposed. "The vote is overwhelmingly 'yes' and so the nomination is hereby declared passed by the house," Wetangula said.

Kindiki - who has served as interior minister in Ruto's gov-

ernment for more than two years - now becomes deputy president elect but must still be formally appointed by the president and sworn in.

However, responding to a petition and application, and the petition by Gachagua's legal team a high court issued an injunction effectively suspending the process until October 24.

"Due to the issues raised in the petition and application, and the urgency demonstrated, a conservatory order is hereby issued staying implementation of the resolution by the Senate," the order read.

It follows the decision by the Senate upper house of parliament to push ahead with Gachagua's impeachment on Thursday - finding him guilty of five out of the 11 charges against him - despite the absence of the embattled 59-year-old due to ill health. He is the first deputy president to be impeached since the process was introduced in Kenya's revised 2010 constitution.

Gachagua failed to testify in his defence after being rushed to hospital in a Nairobi suburb, plunging the session into disarray. The Senate rejected an appeal by Gachagua's legal team to delay the hearings, prompting the lawyers to walk out in protest. Kenya's *The Standard* newspaper yesterday ran an image of Gachagua with the headline "Fired". "The night of long knives that sealed Gachagua's fate," *The Nation* wrote on its website.

His downfall is the culmination



A man reads a local daily, *The Nation*, headlined "Fired" following the impeachment by the Senate of former deputy president, Rigathi Gachagua, in Nairobi yesterday. Kenya's Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua was ousted from office on Thursday after being impeached in an unprecedented political saga that has gripped the nation. In a historic move, the Senate voted to impeach Gachagua on five of 11 charges, after a similar motion was overwhelmingly approved by the lower house National Assembly last week.

of a bitter falling out with Ruto, whom he helped win a closely fought election in 2022 by rallying support from the crucial Mount Kenya region.

The National Assembly, the lower house of parliament, had overwhelmingly also voted for impeachment in an October 8 vote. Gachagua was admitted to Karen Hospital with chest pains and will remain for tests and observation for 48 to 72 hours, chief cardiologist Dan Gikonyo told reporters on Thursday, describing his condition as stable.

Gachagua was found guilty on charges of "gross violation" of the constitution, including threatening judges and practising ethnically divisive politics, but cleared of others including corruption and money-laundering.

He has denied all the charges and no criminal proceedings have been launched against him. A powerful businessman from



Kithure Kindiki

Kenya's biggest tribe, the Kikuyu, Gachagua - also known as "Riggy G" - weathered previous corruption scandals to become deputy leader as Ruto's running mate in the 2022 poll.

But in recent weeks, he has complained of being sidelined by

the president, while also being accused of supporting youth-led anti-government protests that broke out in June. Ruto has not given any public comment on the impeachment, but Gachagua has said the process could not have gone ahead without his boss's blessing.

## Indian crows threaten native Kenyan birds

Reuters  
Mombasa

Kenyan farmer Danson Safari was forced to give up poultry rearing after losing hundreds of chickens to attacks from aggressive Indian house crows which are multiplying along the country's coast. The growing threat has prompted Kenyan authorities and conservation groups to turn to a chemical called starlicide to eliminate the pests while minimising harm to other birds.

The invasive species was originally brought to East Africa from the Indian subcontinent in 1891 and researchers estimate that they number almost 1m in Kenya today. The crows have dramatically reduced the populations of birds native to Kenya, said Kirao Lennox, research scientist at conservation group A Rocha Kenya.

"They are now preying on our indigenous species, targeting nests, eggs, chicks, and even adult birds," Lennox said. "Without natural predators to keep their numbers in check, they are overwhelming the ecosystem, leading to the decline of native species." Since being deployed, the starlicide has killed around 200 crows in a month in the coastal town of Watamu, said Eric Kinoti, a crow control officer at A Rocha Kenya.

Kinoti said the crows have also been seen along the road connecting the port city of Mombasa to Nairobi. He fears the crows could decimate biodiversity within Kenya's capital city, especially in Nairobi National Park, home to hundreds of bird species. "We don't want them to get to Nairobi," he said.

## Police action



South African Police Service (SAPS) members close a shop detaining suspected foreign nationals following looting and shut down of foreign owned shops by local residents in the township of Sharpville, south of Johannesburg yesterday.

## Death toll in Nigeria fuel tanker explosion rises to 170

A fuel tanker explosion in northern Nigeria has killed more than 170 people, with a further 70 receiving intensive care in hospital, police said yesterday. A blast tore through crowds who had rushed to collect fuel spilling from a crashed tanker in the town of Majiya in Jigawa state late on Tuesday. "At the Federal Medical Centers in Azare, Nguru, and Birnin Kudu, 70 people were receiving intensive care," said spokesman Deputy Superintendent of Police Lawan Shisu Adam in a statement, with

the death toll rising to 170. Other hospitals were also treating victims for injuries, he added.

The tragedy is the latest such accident in Nigeria at a time when petrol has become a precious commodity in Africa's most populous country, which is suffering its worst economic crisis in a generation. Many are struggling to get access to gasoline, as its price has spiked more than fivefold since President Bola Ahmed Tinubu took office in May 2023.

Inflation has been peaking at more than 30 percent for months, reaching an almost three-decade high of 34.19 percent in June, down to 32.7 percent in September. More than half - 56 percent - of Nigerians are living under the poverty line, up from 40 percent in 2018, according to a World Bank report published Thursday. At least 59 people died last month when a fuel tanker collided with a truck carrying passengers and cattle in northwestern Niger state.

- AFP

## Nigerians sacrifice cars as cost of living crisis worsens

AFP  
Lagos

Nigeria's economic crisis and soaring petrol prices forced Bolaji Emmanuel to give up his driver and his Honda Pilot utility vehicle, as he struggles with spiking living costs. Emmanuel is not alone. Many in Africa's most populous country are abandoning their cars as the costs strain disposable income.

The price of petrol has risen more than fivefold since President Bola Tinubu took office in May 2023.

"I parked it at my son's house. I use public transport now," Emmanuel, a 72-year-old retired health worker, told AFP. "It is not convenient, but it is what the economy demands."

Since coming to power, Tinubu has ended a costly fuel subsidy and freed up the naira currency, in reforms that government officials and analysts say will revive the economy and attract investors.

But in the short term, Nigeria has seen one of its worst crises in decades with inflation at a three-decade high.

A litre of petrol sold for around 195 naira just before Tinubu took office. The price rose to at least 998 naira (\$0.61) per litre in Lagos and 1,030 naira in the capital,

Abuja, at the beginning of October. It can go for as much as 1,300 naira elsewhere.

Inflation reached an almost three-decade high of 34.19 percent in June. It has since slowed to 32.7 percent in September. The slump in purchasing power is piling more hardship on locals, with more than 40 percent of the population living in poverty, according to the World Bank. That figure is expected to rise in 2024 and 2025, before it stabilises in 2026.

The Nigerian middle class, which made up about 20 percent of the population in 2020, now readily sacrifices the comfort of private cars for survival. Car dealers in Lagos and Abuja told AFP that they had seen more and more people trading their fuel-guzzling cars and sports utility vehicles (SUVs) for more efficient vehicles to cut costs.

"People are actually selling their big cars these days," Maji Abubakar, a car dealer in Abuja, told AFP. "The problem is that even if you put them on the market, there isn't much demand for them."

"It has been more than a year since I sold a car with an eight-cylinder engine, and the major reason is the price of petrol," he added. With fewer cars on the road, even the notorious Lagos traffic, known as "go-slow", has

thinned out.

Elijah Bello, a tech entrepreneur in the southern state of Ogun, has looked for a buyer for his Lexus RX 350 SUV for months. He has since bought a smaller, energy-saving Toyota Corolla to replace it. The trend, which began last year, "will intensify" and "we will see fewer cars on the roads", said Bunmi Bailey, head of research at SBM Intelligence risk consultancy.

Bello can fill his small car for 55,000 naira. "I can use it for two weeks for my normal home-to-work movement," he told AFP, while his larger car consumes 110,000 naira worth of petrol in just eight days.

The market for new cars has dropped by 10 to 14 percent in the last year, said Kunle Jayiesinmi, deputy director at the Lagos-based CFAO Group, which specialises in automobile distribution.

"An SUV that sold for 40-45m naira (\$24,000-27,000) about two years ago, for now, if you want to negotiate the price, you see that it is within the range of 95-100m (\$57,000-60,000)," Jayiesinmi told AFP. But unyielding inflation and high exchange rates are steering more middle-class people away from used Japanese- and American-brand cars, toward increasingly popular Chinese-made ones.

## Global coral bleaching event biggest on record, says US agency

A global coral bleaching event that began last year has quickly grown to the largest on record, according to a US agency, with the impacted reef area continuing to grow. From the beginning of 2023 through October 10, 2024, "roughly 77% of the world's reef area has experienced bleaching-level heat stress", Derek Manzello of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric

Administration (NOAA) told AFP yesterday. He said the ongoing bleaching event - the fourth since 1998 - had surpassed the previous record of 65.7% in half the time, and "is still increasing in size". Coral are marine invertebrates made up of individual animals called polyps. They have a symbiotic relationship with the algae that live inside their tissue

and provide their primary source of food, as well as their captivating colours. When the water is too warm - such as during heatwaves which have hit areas from Florida to Australia in the past year - coral expel their algae and turn white, an effect called "bleaching" that leaves them exposed to disease and at risk of dying off. The last record had been set during the third global bleaching event, which lasted

from 2014-2017 and followed previous events in 1998 and 2010. The NOAA's heat-stress monitoring is based on satellite measurements from 1985 to the present day. Manzello said that the NOAA had confirmed reports of mass coral bleaching from 74 countries or territories since February 2023. "This includes locations in the north-

ern and southern hemisphere of the Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian Oceans," he told AFP by e-mail. Roughly 850m people worldwide rely on coral reefs for food, jobs and to protect coastlines from storms and erosion, according to the nonprofit WWF. The ecosystems provide a haven for ocean life, with over a quarter of marine species calling them home. - AFP

# Cuba goes dark as power grid collapses

AFP/Reuters  
Havana

Cuba experienced a nationwide blackout yesterday after the island's main power plant failed, causing the communist country's electricity grid to collapse, the energy ministry said. "The system was left without power nationwide" after the unexpected shutdown of the Antonio Guterres power plant, Lazaro Guerra, the director-general of electricity at the ministry of energy and mines, told state television. When the thermolectric plant shut down, "the system collapsed", he said, adding that the government is working to restore service as soon as possible. Grid officials said they did not know how long it would take to re-establish service. On Thursday, Prime Minister Manuel Marrero announced that the island was in the throes of an "energy emergency", with severe supply shortages leaving some provinces without power for up to 20 hours. The government on Thursday

suspended all non-essential public sector activities in order to prioritise electricity supply to homes. Cuba gets its power from eight ageing thermal power plants, as well as seven floating plants leased from Turkish companies. Earlier yesterday the government closed schools and non-essential industry and sent most state workers home in a last-ditch effort to keep the lights on. However, shortly before midday, the Antonio Guterres power plant, the country's largest and most efficient, went offline. "There will be no rest until (power) is restored," Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel said on X. The crisis had already prompted officials to cancel all non-vital government services. Schools of all levels including universities, have been shuttered through tomorrow. Recreational and cultural activities, including nightspots, were also ordered closed. The government said only essential employees of the state-run food and healthcare industries should report to work yesterday. The crisis marks a new low on



A boy dives in the water as he spends a day out after classes were cancelled due to the lack of electricity, in Matanzas, Cuba, yesterday, during a nationwide blackout caused by a grid failure. - AFP

an island where life has become increasingly unbearable, with residents already suffering from shortages of food, fuel, water and medicine. Virtually all commerce in Havana was shut down at midday yesterday. The hum of privately-owned generators could be heard in some homes and restaurants, and many residents sat sweating on door-

steps with windows open as the sun broke through the clouds. On Thursday Prime Minister Manuel Marrero blamed ongoing rolling blackouts during the past several weeks on a perfect storm well-known to most Cubans - deteriorating infrastructure, fuel shortages and rising demand. "The fuel shortage is the biggest factor," Marrero said in a televised message that was garbled by tech-

nical difficulties and delayed several hours. Strong wind and heavy seas that began with Hurricane Milton last week have crippled the island's ability to deliver scarce fuel from boats offshore to its power plants, officials said. Cuba's government also has long blamed the US Cold War-era embargo, as well as a fresh round of sanctions under former president Donald Trump, for difficulties in acquiring fuel and spare parts to operate its oil-fired plants. The island's two largest power plants, Felton and the now-offline Antonio Guterres, are both under-producing, the government said, and require immediate maintenance, part of a four-year plan to revitalise Cuba's decrepit infrastructure. Cuba's fast-growing private businesses, which have contributed to increased demand on the island, will be charged higher rates for the energy they consume to compensate for shortfalls, Marrero said. While demand for electricity grows, fuel supply has all but dried up on an island that produces

comparatively little of its own. Cuba's largest oil supplier, Venezuela, has reduced shipments to the island to an average of 32,600 barrels per day (bpd) in the first nine months of the year, about half of the 60,000 bpd that were sent in the same period of 2023, according to vessel-monitoring data and internal shipping documents from Venezuela's state company PDVSA. PDVSA, whose refining infrastructure is also ailing, has this year tried to avoid a new wave of fuel scarcity at home, leaving smaller volumes available for export to allied countries like Cuba. Russia and Mexico, which in the past have sent fuel to Cuba, have also greatly reduced shipments to the island. The shortfalls have left Cuba to fend for itself on the far costlier spot market, at a time when its government is near bankrupt. Electricity officials said they nonetheless expect power generation to improve in the coming days as the weather allows fuel from prior deliveries to be distributed around the Caribbean's largest island.

## Harris, Trump descend on Michigan amid early voting

Reuters/AFP  
Washington

Democrat Kamala Harris and Republican Donald Trump are barreling through the battleground state of Michigan, where opinion polls show the US presidential candidates are essentially tied just 18 days before the November 5 election. Former president Trump is due to speak in Auburn Hills, a city in Oakland County, north of Detroit, which President Joe Biden won by a comfortable margin in 2020. He'll also return to Detroit - Michigan's largest city - for a rally, after saying on October 10 that the rest of the United States would turn into Detroit if Harris won. Vice-President Harris spoke in Grand Rapids, the heart of more conservative western Michigan, before heading east to Lansing and then Oakland County. The Midwestern state has about 8.4mn voters and would bring the winner 15 Electoral College votes out of the 270 needed to win, which in several scenarios would be a decisive number. Harris and Trump are battling fiercely for the state's Arab American, senior, union and working-class voters. Both have sharpened their attacks in recent days. Yesterday Trump falsely told the Fox & Friends programme that Harris is Marxist. The former president also re-



Harris speaking yesterday during a campaign rally at Riverside Park in Grand Rapids, Michigan. - Reuters

newed his attacks on her intelligence. "I don't think she knows where she is. She's a low-IQ person. She's not smart," he said. On Thursday Harris said that Trump was "gaslighting" the American public about the deadly attack by his loyalists on the US Capitol on January 6, 2021. Trump recently called the assault a "day of love". In Michigan and other crucial battleground states, either Harris or Trump holds a razor-thin margin over the other, according to public and internal campaign polls. That's worrying Democrats. Trump won Michigan by 11,000 votes in 2016.

In 2020, Biden beat Trump by 155,000 votes. Harris is shifting the strategy of her whirlwind campaign to win over more Republicans and men of all races. She's also enlisting popular former first lady Michelle Obama, who will campaign for the vice-president in Michigan on October 26. Nationally, Harris's edge has narrowed from a late September lead of seven percentage points over Trump to just three points, Reuters/Ipsos polling shows, with food and rent prices still worrying Americans and Trump amplifying fears related to migrants crossing the US-Mexico border with increasingly extreme rhetoric.



Trump gestures during his speech the 79th annual Alfred E Smith Memorial Foundation Dinner in New York City on Thursday evening. - Reuters

In pivotal battleground states, the election is already underway, with millions of Americans having already voted. As of early yesterday, 10.1mn votes had been cast - more than 3mn of them in the swing states expected to decide the election - according to nationwide state-reported data tracked by the University of Florida Election Lab. Georgia has been smashing records, while North Carolina is on track to match the pandemic-linked early voting surge of 2020, despite being hit hard by a hurricane. In the states that break the figures down by party affiliation, Democrats accounted for about half of the total while Republicans

- who have spent much of the Trump era casting aspersions over mail-in ballots - were responsible for less than a third. Having ceded the early-voting battlefield in 2016 and 2020, Trump has dialled back his criticisms this time around, and he too has been encouraging people to use the voting method they find most convenient. "Early mail-in voting in your state is now underway, and early in-person is underway. But I'll tell you what, I'm hearing very good things," Trump said in Georgia's capital Atlanta on Tuesday, having already encouraged Arizonans to go out and vote. More than 800,000 people have voted in Michigan.

## Florida officials barred from threatening TV stations over ads

A federal judge has blocked Florida officials from threatening television stations with prosecution for running advertisements supporting a pro-abortion rights measure in next month's election. Chief US District Judge Mark Walker in Tallahassee ruled on Thursday that the threats clearly violated the right to free speech under the First Amendment of the US Constitution. "To keep it simple for the state of Florida: it's the First Amendment, stupid," the judge wrote in his temporary order. The ruling came in response to a lawsuit by Floridians Protecting Freedom, the organisation backing the proposed amendment. Voters in Florida will decide in November on an amendment that would enshrine abortion rights in the state's constitution and overturn the state's six-week abortion ban. "This critical initial victory is a triumph for every Floridian who believes in democracy and the sanctity of the First Amendment," Lauren Brenzel, director of Yes on 4, the campaign for the abortion rights measure, said in a statement. Julia Friedland, spokesperson for Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, said in an e-mail that the ads are "unequivocally false and put the lives and health of pregnant women at risk" and that Florida's abortion law "always protects the life of a mother and includes exceptions for victims of rape, incest, and human trafficking". Florida's Department of Health sent letters earlier this month, shortly after broadcasters began running ads from the pro-amendment campaign telling viewers that Florida's current abortion ban prevents doctors from performing abortions necessary to save the life or health of the mothers. The department called that claim "categorically false" and said it endangered public health, and that stations continuing to run the ads could face criminal prosecution. Walker said that the state could not censor speech simply by declaring it false. "The State can continue to combat what it believes to be 'false advertising' by meeting plaintiff's speech with its own," the judge wrote. A hearing is set for October 29 to decide whether the order should be extended. The election is on November 5. - Reuters

## Top Texas court stays execution of autistic man in 'shaken baby' case

The Texas Supreme Court issued a last-minute stay of execution on Thursday to an autistic man whose murder conviction was based on what his lawyers say was a misdiagnosis of "shaken baby syndrome". Robert Roberson, 57, had been scheduled to die by lethal injection at the state penitentiary in Huntsville on Thursday for the February 2002 death of his two-year-old daughter, Nikki. However, the Texas Supreme Court temporarily stayed the execution following an appeal from Texas lawmakers who issued a subpoena to Roberson so he can testify before a House committee that is examining his conviction. "If the sentence is carried out, the witness obviously cannot appear," wrote Justice Evan Young. A bipartisan group of 86 Texas lawmakers has urged clemency for Roberson, citing "voluminous new scientific evidence" that casts doubt on his guilt, and the committee has subpoenaed him to testify on Monday. - AFP

## More evidence in election subversion case released

AFP  
Washington

The federal judge presiding over Donald Trump's election subversion case released a heavily redacted trove of evidence yesterday used by Special Counsel Jack Smith (pictured) to bring charges against the former US president. Hundreds of the 1,889 pages were blank, marked "sealed", and the bulk of the visible material - social media posts by Trump, transcripts and memos - had already been publicly disclosed previously. District Judge Tanya Chutkan rejected a request by Trump's lawyers to keep the documents under wraps until November 14 - nine days after the US presidential election in which Trump is once again the Republican candidate. In arguing against the release of the material, Trump's lawyers said it could present a "concerning appearance of election interference" and taint the jury pool. Chutkan said that while there is "undoubtedly a public interest in courts not inserting themselves into elections", withholding the documents could also be construed as election interference. "If the court withheld information that the public otherwise had a right to access



solely because of the potential political consequences of releasing it, that withholding could itself constitute - or appear to be - election interference," she said. "The court will therefore continue to keep political considerations out of its decision-making, rather than incorporating them as defendant requests," she said. The documents in question are a redacted appendix to a court filing by Smith earlier this month in the wake of the Supreme Court's ruling that a former president has broad immunity from prosecution for official acts conducted while in office. In the filing, Smith said that Trump launched a "private criminal effort" to subvert the 2020 election and should not be

shielded by presidential immunity. Trump, 78, had been scheduled to go on trial in March but the case was frozen while his lawyers argued that an ex-president should be immune from criminal prosecution. Chutkan has not set a new date for a trial, but it will not be held before the November 5 election between Trump and Democratic Vice-President Kamala Harris. If Trump wins the White House race, he is expected to have the charges against him dismissed. The former president is accused of conspiracy to defraud the United States and conspiracy to obstruct an official proceeding - the session of Congress that was violently attacked by Trump supporters on January 6, 2021. The former president is also accused of seeking to disenfranchise US voters with his false claims that he won the 2020 election. The case in Washington is just one of Trump's various legal problems as he seeks to regain the presidency. In May, he was convicted in New York of 34 counts of falsifying business records to cover up hush money payments made to an adult entertainment star. He also faces charges in Georgia related to efforts to overturn the 2020 election won by Democrat Joe Biden.





**POLITICS**

### Irish leaders to discuss election date next week

The leaders of Ireland's three coalition parties will discuss the date of the next general election on Monday, Green Party leader Roderic O'Gorman said. Prime Minister Harris must call the election by March but analysts have for weeks seen November as the most likely date, when voters will start to benefit from the 10.5bn euro (\$11.4bn) budget giveaway resulting from Europe's healthiest public finances. "I'll be meeting the coalition leaders on Monday. What I'll be saying to them is that I think we need to give clarity. I'll be saying my preference is for a November election, for November 29th," O'Gorman said.

**DECISION**

### UK's National Gallery bans liquids after art attacks

The National Gallery in London said it was banning liquids in a move to bolster security of its artworks after a spate of high-profile attacks by activists. Over the last two years, various liquids have been thrown at iconic paintings in the gallery on Trafalgar Square. The gallery said all liquids would be banned, except baby formula, expressed breast milk and prescription medicines. The attacks "have caused physical damage to the artworks, distress to visitors and staff alike, and disruption to our mission to ensure great art is available for everyone, everywhere to enjoy," it said.

**ELECTION**

### Oxford announces candidates to be next university chief

Britain's University of Oxford said 38 candidates are in the running to become its next chancellor but Pakistan's jailed ex-prime minister Imran Khan is not among them despite his party saying he had applied. The candidates are vying to succeed former Hong Kong governor Chris Patten, who left in June after 21 years. The ceremonial post has been occupied continuously since 1224. High-profile names to replace him include former Tory leader and foreign secretary William Hague, Labour party former EU trade commissioner Peter Mandelson and ex-attorney-general Dominic Grieve. Following two rounds of voting, the new chancellor will be announced late November.

**OPINION**

### Union warns of 'worrying trend' after BBC job cuts

A UK union representing media workers warned that the latest job cuts at the BBC were part of a "worrying trend" that risks harming its news output. The BBC revealed plans to axe at least 100 news roles as part of a raft of proposed changes. The BBC has been under growing financial pressure due to high inflation and increased costs, and a below-inflation licence fee settlement. "The BBC's need to make savings is clear, but this latest round of cuts follows a worrying trend towards reducing services that provide critical, in-depth analysis," Philippa Childs, head of the broadcasting union Bectu, said.

# Some of Canada's Sikhs feel threatened by India

Reuters  
Toronto

Twice since July 2022, Moninder Singh, spokesperson for a Sikh advocacy group in Canada's British Columbia province, has had police come to his door in the Vancouver suburb of Surrey.

Twice, Singh said, they warned him that he faced an imminent risk of assassination, though they did not say from whom.

These warnings prompted the 43-year-old Canadian to stay away from his home for months at a time - away from his wife and children, ages 15 and 11.

"India has gotten away with so much over the years and under Modi's regime, its impunity," Singh said, referring to Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. "They feel like they're just so powerful that no one's really going to hold them in check. And they probably have been correct over the past decade or so."

Singh's experience illustrates the threats that some members of Canada's Sikh community - the largest outside India's Sikh-majority Punjab state - are facing at a time of mounting tensions between the governments of India and Canada.

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the country's national police service, said this week it has communicated more than a dozen threats to people like Singh who are advocating for the creation of a Sikh homeland carved out of India.

Canada's Sikhs have been in the spotlight since Prime Minister Justin Trudeau last year accused India's government of involvement in the June 18, 2023, murder

of Hardeep Singh Nijjar, a Sikh separatist leader in Canada and Moninder Singh's friend, who was shot in Surrey.

India's government has denied involvement in the killing of Nijjar. India has accused Canada of providing a safe haven for Sikh separatists.

Canada said on Monday it expelled six Indian diplomats, linking them to Nijjar's murder and alleging a broader effort to target Indian dissidents in Canada through killings, extortion, use of organised crime and clandestine information-gathering.

India retaliated by ordering the expulsion of six Canadian diplomats and called the allegations preposterous and politically motivated.

Trudeau on Monday said Canada has found "clear and compelling evidence that agents of India's government have engaged in and continue to engage in activities that pose a significant threat to public safety."

Royal Canadian Mounted Police spokesperson Camille Boily-Lavoie said law enforcement agencies have a duty to warn people "who are subjects of a clear, serious and imminent threat of death or serious bodily harm." Boily-Lavoie declined to provide further details, citing the privacy and safety of those targeted.

The warnings left Singh shaken. "They don't tell you who, where - any of those types of things," said Singh, who serves as spokesperson for the activist group B C Gurdwaras Council. "They don't tell you what to do, really. They just kind of give you an idea that, 'Hey, we've told you now, now you should be warned and you should take precautions.'" Balpreet Singh, legal counsel

for the World Sikh Organisation of Canada advocacy group, said the Sikh community has "seen a rise in violence over the past few months in terms of the targeting of Sikh activists, in terms of extortions."

It was midnight on an August night when police came to the Brampton, Ontario, home ofINDERJEET SINGH GOSAL, an activist advocating for a Sikh homeland who took over some of Nijjar's work after his murder. Gosal was not home, but his wife was.

Gosal said the police asked his wife about his whereabouts and when he had last visited India. Gosal said when police were able to get him on the phone they told him: "We're here to let you know that there is a threat to your life."

"My family, they worry. But I know what I signed up for," Gosal said.

Ontario Provincial Police did not respond to a request for comment concerning Gosal.

Moninder Singh welcomed Canada's recent actions.

"The way they're dealing with it now, I think, is helpful to the community to build some confidence that these things can't just happen and people just walk away and everything returns to normal," he said.

He said the most recent warning he received from police is keeping him from taking his two children to school or attending events with them.

"You don't really want to be around people in general," Moninder Singh added.

These threats can change a community, he said, including how people interact with one another.

"You're constantly looking around you," he said, "wondering if somebody's coming this way or that way?"



A man arrives in an autorickshaw at the Canadian High Commission, in New Delhi, India.

# US charges Indian agent for alleged plot to kill separatist

AFP  
Washington

An Indian intelligence official has been indicted for his role in a foiled plot to kill a Sikh separatist leader in the US, the justice department said.

Vikash Yadav, 39, who remains at large, is charged with conspiracy to commit murder-for-hire and money laundering, the department said.

Yadav is the second Indian national to be charged in the US in the alleged plot to kill Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, a US and Canadian citizen who lives in New York.

Nikhil Gupta, 53, pleaded not guilty in June to involvement in the assassination plot after being extradited to the US from the Czech

Republic. Pannun is affiliated with a New York-based group called Sikhs for Justice that advocates for the secession of Punjab, a northern Indian state with a large Sikh population.

Pannun, in a statement on X, denounced the alleged assassination plot as a "blatant case of India's transnational terrorism" and a "threat to freedom of speech and democracy."

The justice department accused Yadav of directing the plot and said he recruited Gupta in May 2023 to hire a hitman to carry out the murder.

Gupta allegedly contacted an individual he believed to be a criminal associate to hire a hitman. The individual was in fact a confidential source working with the US Drug Enforcement Admin-

istration (DEA). "Yadav, an employee of the Indian government, used his position of authority and access to confidential information to direct the attempted assassination of an outspoken critic of the Indian government here on US soil," Anne Milgram, the DEA chief, said in a statement.

Attorney-General Merrick Garland said the justice department "will be relentless in holding accountable any person - regardless of their position or proximity to power - who seeks to harm and silence American citizens."

According to the Justice Department, Yadav was employed by the Indian government's Cabinet Secretariat, which houses the country's foreign intelligence service, the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW).

### UK gov't to raise more from inheritance tax

British Finance Minister Rachel Reeves will increase the amount of money raised from inheritance tax at her October 30 budget, the BBC reported yesterday without providing further details of what changes will be made to the measure. Reeves' first fiscal statement since Labour's July election victory will set out how she intends to fix a huge shortfall in the government's day-to-day budget while sticking to pledges not to raise the main taxes paid by what it calls 'working people'. A number of possible changes to inheritance tax exemptions and reliefs are under consideration, the BBC reported without citing named sources. When asked for comment on changes to inheritance tax, the finance ministry said it did "not comment on speculation around tax changes outside of fiscal events".

The tax is paid at a rate of 40% on the value of estates above a threshold of £325,000 - which has not changed since 2009.

### Professor honoured



Professor Philip Bobbitt poses for a picture with members of his family after being made a Knight Commander of the Order of the British Empire following an investiture ceremony at Buckingham Palace yesterday.

## Modi to attend Brics summit in Russia

AFP  
New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi will attend this month's Brics summit in Russia, New Delhi said yesterday, weeks after his friendly hug with President Vladimir Putin drew condemnation from Ukraine.

Modi's government has long-standing ties with Moscow that have persisted despite India's courtship of closer security partnerships with Washington and other Western allies.

The balancing act has seen New Delhi avoid condemning Russia's war in Ukraine and instead propose itself as an intermediary to broker a peaceful resolution to the ongoing conflict.

India's foreign ministry said Modi would be in Russia on October 22 and 23 for the summit, held in the city of Kazan along the Volga river.

Modi's visit is his second to Russia this year following an earlier trip to Moscow in July.

On arrival he warmly embraced Putin, a moment Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy slammed as a "devastating blow to peace".

His arrival in Moscow coincided with Russian strikes in Ukraine that killed more than three dozen people and heavily damaged a children's hospital in Kyiv, prompting a global outcry.

Modi visited Kyiv the following month where he called for peace, saying that "no problem should be solved on the battlefield".

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

The Ukraine war has forced India to look for other sources for arms instead of Russia, traditionally its biggest provider.

# Bandmates 'completely devastated' by Liam Payne's death

Reuters  
London

Liam Payne's One Direction bandmates said they were completely devastated by his death, with singer-songwriter Harry Styles taking to social media to say he would forever cherish the years they spent together.

Payne, who shot to global fame with boy band One Direction, died at the age of 31 after falling from a third-floor hotel room balcony in Buenos Aires on Wednesday, trig-

gering an outpouring of tributes from fans around the world.

A joint statement was signed by singers Harry Styles, Louis Tomlinson, Zayn Malik and Niall Horan.

"In time, and when everyone is able to, there will be more to say. But for now, we will take some time to grieve and process the loss of our brother, who we loved dearly," Payne's former bandmates said.

They also said that their thoughts were with the English singer's family, friends and fans, concluding: "We will miss him ter-

ribly. We love you Liam." In a separate statement posted on Instagram, Styles said Payne's greatest joy was making people happy.

"The years we spent together will forever remain among the most cherished years of my life," Styles said.

Malik also posted on Instagram about the late singer, along with a photo of them dozing off next to each other.

"I lost a brother when you left us and can't explain to you what I'd give just to give you a hug one last time," he wrote. Along with a

picture of Payne embracing him at a gig, Tomlinson wrote he was beyond lucky to have had Payne in his life.

"I'm really struggling with the idea of saying goodbye," he said. "I would have loved to share the stage with you again but it wasn't to be."

Other celebrities have paid tribute to Payne, with former footballer David Beckham describing him as a generous person and musician Ed Sheeran saying he was at loss for words and urging everyone to be kind.

Prosecutors in Buenos Aires said on Thursday an initial search suggested Payne's fall from the hotel balcony came after substance abuse.

Police earlier said they had found the room in "total disorder" in a search after his death, with various things smashed and medications scattered around.

Sharon Osbourne, former judge of TV talent show X Factor, where One Direction was formed, said on Instagram that the music industry had let Payne down.

"Where was this industry when

you needed them? You were just a kid when you entered one of the toughest industries in the world. Who was in your corner?" Osbourne questioned.

Auditions for "Britain's Got Talent" in Blackpool, England, were postponed on Thursday "due to the tragic passing of Liam Payne," Applause Store, the ticket provider for the show, said in an Instagram story.

Music mogul Simon Cowell, who signed One Direction to his label, is the creator of both X Factor and Britain's Got Talent.



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GULF TIMES

## The Brics still don't matter

This month, Russian President Vladimir Putin will host the 2024 Brics (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) summit. It will be the first annual meeting to include the four new members – Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates – that joined last year, and many other countries also reportedly will participate. South Africa joined in 2009. But what will come of it?

Putin undoubtedly will use this year's summit to signal to the world that he is not as isolated as Western governments want him to be. It is an ideal occasion for him and other leaders to promote a vision of a world that the US does not lead. But it is worth noting that two other countries that were expected to join the expanded Brics have not done so. After originally accepting the invitation, Argentina reversed course following Javier Milei's election as president in 2023; and Saudi Arabia still has not decided what it will do.

### The 2024 summit will surely include statements about creating an alternative to challenge the US dollar-based global monetary system

To be sure, there are photo ops. Brics+ leaders can stand alongside Putin and decry their countries' under-representation in many of the big global governance organisations. They do this every year, and it appears to be one of the only real achievements that comes out of each meeting.

Meanwhile, the Brics have done nothing to effect meaningful organisational or structural change within international institutions. In fact, they have done exactly the opposite. Owing to the evolving geopolitics around Ukraine and the rise of more nationalistic leaders in the West and within the Brics, international institutions have been rendered even less effective.

The fact is that truly global challenges cannot be addressed through narrow groupings like the Brics (or the G7 for the matter), and this will remain the case no matter how many members they add. What we really need is a rejuvenated G20, which proved highly effective in its earliest days, following the 2008 financial crisis. Despite being rather large (it includes all members of the G7 and the Brics), it best reflects today's world in all its complexities.

Moreover, it is not clear that the Brics had ever shared a purpose beyond symbolism. There are many areas where it could pursue collective action to benefit its members and the rest of the world. These include, but are not limited to, advocating freer trade among themselves (and others), and making stronger commitments to fight climate change and infectious diseases. True, the launch of the New Development Bank – which was originally called the Brics Bank – was a positive development; but the institution has never had a clear, powerful mandate linked to shared goals.

The 2024 summit will surely include plenty of lofty statements about creating an alternative to challenge the US dollar-based global monetary system. But until the key members – namely China – are serious about opening up their own capital accounts and financial markets, this is not going to happen.

Similarly, until the two most important members, China and India, can agree to co-operate on joint initiatives, the Brics will have almost no chance of delivering on its stated ambitions. For all these reasons, Brics+ will come to little. The hodge-podge of new members appear to have been selected not for any long-term strategic reasons, but because they can be cajoled. Even if they – along with Bangladesh, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines, Turkiye, South Korea, and Vietnam – did join, the result would be little more than larger summits. The G20 would still be the more appropriate and effective vehicle for multilateralism. – Project Syndicate

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# The promise and peril of water markets

By Eduardo Araral  
Singapore

In a landmark report, the Global Commission on the Economics of Water recently identified water markets as a fundamental solution to the world's escalating climate-driven water crisis. The logic is simple: When something is scarce, it becomes more valuable. By pricing water appropriately and creating markets to allocate water based on demand, we could promote more efficient use and incentivise conservation. Yet while the concept of water markets appears promising, Chile, Australia, the US, and other countries' experiences show that implementation can prove challenging.

Water markets have been heralded for their ability to allocate water more efficiently. When individuals or organisations are allowed to trade water rights, water is allocated to those who value it most. In Chile, one of the first countries to implement a national water market, agricultural producers can purchase water from other regions or industries that have a surplus. Owing to this flexibility, the system allows for high-value crops to flourish even during droughts.

By helping to reduce inefficient water use, Chile's water market boosted agricultural productivity over time. Between 1985 and 2018, water-intensive agriculture in the Atacama and Coquimbo regions grew significantly as water markets allowed for more flexible allocation to high-demand areas.

The same principle has been applied in Australia's Murray-Darling Basin, where farmers trade water rights to adapt to fluctuating water availability. As Bloomberg reports, the water trade in Australia is about AU\$4bn per year (\$2.7bn) and has made Australia the ninth-largest food exporter in the world. The same markets can also incentivise water conservation. California's Central Valley also allows agricultural water trading, enabling farmers to cope with periodic droughts by purchasing water from more resource-rich regions.

But Chile's experience also highlights the pitfalls of water markets. Far from being a panacea, Chile's water market has led to significant inequalities. Large agribusinesses have acquired substantial water rights, leaving smaller farmers and communities with little access. With wealthier players dominating the market, marginalised communities are priced out.



The Maule lake in the Andes mountain range, 300km south of Chile's capital Santiago.

Such outcomes raise serious equity concerns. Water is not just an economic commodity; it is a basic human right. A system that allows the wealthiest to buy up the most water risks undermining access for those who need it most. After water rights in northern Chile's Limari Valley were consolidated among a few large agricultural companies, smallholders lacked sufficient water during dry years. And similar trends have been observed in California, where a small proportion of water-rights holders control a significant amount of available water, disproportionately benefiting large-scale agriculture.

Moreover, water markets can lead to environmental degradation. In Chile, diverting water to agricultural use has at times compromised the ecological health of rivers and wetlands. In Australia, over-extraction of water has led to severe environmental consequences, including the collapse of river ecosystems and the depletion of surface water and groundwater resources, threatening biodiversity.

California has encountered similar challenges. Although water trading has helped balance supply and demand in some regions, it has also exposed deep inequities. The Central Valley's small-scale farmers struggle to compete with larger agribusinesses for water, while poorer urban communities face higher water prices. In times of drought, the market-driven system tends to favour those who can afford to pay, leaving behind the most vulnerable populations.

Speculative water hoarding is also a growing problem. In California, some entities have withheld water from the market, waiting for prices to rise, effectively turning water – a vital resource – into a financial asset. This has contributed to localised shortages and driven up prices in already water-stressed areas.

Beyond market failures, there are deeper issues of equity and justice to consider. Wealthier entities' ability to buy up rights means that water markets are prone to monopolisation. This has been a persistent issue in Chile, where large agribusinesses and mining companies corner the market, especially in drought-prone areas.

Another challenge is that water markets often clash with traditional or prior water rights, leading to legal and social conflicts. In Chile, prior rights holders, including indigenous communities, have suffered displacement as water rights have been commodified and sold off to larger entities. Such injustices raise fundamental questions about the ethics of commodifying a resource that many communities view as a public good.

More broadly, implementation of water markets is a fraught, complex process. Transboundary water conflicts – where water sources cross regional or national borders – are a growing concern. Markets that allow one region to trade away water that is needed downstream risk sparking conflict between jurisdictions. For example, the Colorado River Basin, shared by seven US states and Mexico,

has become a source of rising tensions as upstream water trading affects downstream users. Strong regulatory frameworks are essential to prevent such conflicts, but creating them requires significant political will and resources.

The promise of water markets lies in their potential to address scarcity by incentivising conservation and efficiency. But the risks they pose, especially to equity and environmental sustainability, cannot be ignored. Chile, Australia, and California provide valuable lessons on the limits of market-driven water management. Monopolisation, speculative hoarding, and environmental degradation are all significant risks when water is treated purely as a commodity.

The key is to devise a balanced approach. Water markets must be carefully regulated to ensure fair access, prevent market concentration, and protect ecosystems. Hybrid systems that combine market mechanisms with robust public oversight and community management could offer a more equitable and sustainable solution. Governments should also uphold the rights of vulnerable communities and recognise water as a public good, not just a tradable asset. – Project Syndicate

• Eduardo Araral is an associate professor, former vice-dean for research, and former co-director of the Institute of Water Policy at the National University of Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy.

## The case for press freedom just got stronger

By Katrin Kivi  
Tallinn

The argument for a free press has always been strong. When journalists can work unimpeded, they fulfil essential democratic functions: holding those in power to account, scrutinising government performance, and highlighting underreported stories and perspectives.

But press freedom is under threat like never before, and journalists around the world face increasingly complex and rapidly changing pressures that often are as much economic and technological as political. Democratic governments must therefore be steadfast in defending and promoting a free press at home and abroad. Two new reports make a compelling case for these efforts.

The first, published by the Media Freedom Coalition, a partnership of 51 countries spanning six continents, demonstrates the broader societal benefits of a free press. For example, media freedom is necessary for a properly functioning democracy and economy. This may seem obvious, because markets depend on a steady stream of reliable information about companies and their financial performance. But the evidence is even more robust: one study cited in the coalition's report found that companies in the media spotlight are less likely to window-dress their financial statements. Another shows that journalists are effective – sometimes more so than financial regulators – at spotting corporate fraud.

Another key area where independent media have demonstrated their enormous value is health. During the Covid-19 pandemic, high-quality news outlets played an indispensable role in disseminating accurate information and debunking misinformation about the virus. Moreover, media coverage can help give health issues that carry social stigma the attention they need to be placed on the public-policy agenda. For example, one study found that developing countries with a freer press were more likely to



have government leaders who were committed to curbing HIV/Aids.

Investigative journalists have long exposed environmental crimes as well, and continue to break major stories on climate change and related issues, such as air pollution and illegal fishing. The Media Freedom Coalition's report also highlights evidence showing that press freedom is positively correlated with more rapid adoption of renewable energy.

Media freedom is also a crucial element of security, as shown by a report published by the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in July. It illustrates, for example, the importance of an independent press both in exposing spurious claims that could mislead people into supporting a conflict, and in ensuring the peaceful resolution of disputes.

Of course, a free press is valuable in and of itself, given that freedom of expression is a fundamental human right that arguably underpins all others. After all, how can

governments uphold human rights when there is no one to investigate and expose violations? But the evidence presented by the Media Freedom Coalition (which Estonia co-chairs) and the OSCE can help policymakers and campaigners make an undeniable case for media freedom being essential to healthy and prosperous societies.

The Media Freedom Coalition is doing just that. The co-chairs, Estonia and Germany, along with colleagues in government, civil society, media, and the legal sector, and with multilateral organisations such as Unesco, work to develop interventions that support journalists at risk and promote policies that protect their right to report, as well as to build norms around emerging challenges such as transnational repression.

Diplomacy plays a vital role. As Estonia's ambassador at Large for Human Rights and Migration, I have seen how embassies are a valuable tool through which governments can promote media freedom. Diplomats are well-placed to advocate for a free press, both publicly and privately, and support host governments as they implement related reforms.

But effective diplomacy must be backed up with concrete action. This can take many forms, such as ramping up funding to support independent media, reforming domestic legislation to bolster press freedom, or providing emergency visas and safe refuge to reporters at risk – something that Estonia, which is ranked sixth on the latest World Press Freedom Index, is proud to do.

Repression of press freedom undermines human rights and prevents societies from reaching their full potential. But the case for protecting media freedom has never been stronger. It is now up to us – democratic states, including the members of the Media Freedom Coalition – to make this case more loudly than ever. – Project Syndicate

• Katrin Kivi is Estonia's ambassador at Large for Human Rights and Migration. Estonia is Co-Chair of the Media Freedom Coalition.





The MoECC's laboratory analyses of marine water quality in Khor Al Adaid play a crucial role in assessing the health of the marine ecosystem, detecting pollutants, and supporting sustainable environmental management.



## MoECC studies diverse ecosystems at Khor Al Adaid

The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (MoECC) has conducted a comprehensive environmental study of the Khor Al Adaid area, assessing its diverse ecosystems, including the inland sea resources and coastal sand dunes. The study involved examining field and physical readings of marine water quality parameters in the area, a statement from the MoECC said. Water and marine sediment samples were collected and sent to the environmental laboratory for relevant chemical and biological analyses. Preliminary findings revealed the presence of sea-grass meadows and several mangrove trees. Additionally, various types of marine animals associated with Khor Al Adaid were documented, along with schools of surface fish near the shore and a variety of coastal animals dominated by mollusks.

Traces of certain terrestrial animals and signs of bird activity were also observed. The MoECC is currently conducting precise laboratory analyses of marine water quality in Khor Al Adaid. These analyses play a crucial role in assessing the health of the marine ecosystem, detecting pollutants, and supporting sustainable environmental management. This contributes to preserving marine life and enhancing the ability of plants and animals to adapt to climate change impacts. Preliminary observations highlighted the need for an integrated management approach for the marine ecosystem and coastal sand dunes in Khor Al Adaid, due to the environmental interdependence between them, the MoECC statement added.



Somaya Ansari displays her handcrafted pieces at the QatArt Makers Market and Workshop.



Saleema Karalakath (right) incorporates Qatari-inspired and nature-inspired elements in her work. PICTURES: Joey Aguilar

## QatArt Makers Market flourishes, attracting international customers to unique crafts

By Joey Aguilar  
Staff Reporter

The QatArt Makers Market and Workshop at Katara - the Cultural Village is witnessing a surge in popularity, attracting attention from both local and international customers drawn to its unique handcrafted items, it is learnt.

The market, which opened its latest season yesterday, is proving to be a major draw for tourists seeking distinctive artistry and the chance to connect directly with the creators, according to QatArt Community Board member Somaya Ansari.

She told *Gulf Times* that the market is receiving repeat orders from customers as far away as the UK, Canada, and the US.

"Tourists really like this a lot, it's a very unique thing. They go back to their home countries and they give us orders," she said, noting that many of their members are showcasing new pieces.

Ansari noted that the market's location within the bustling Katara further enhances its appeal, enticing visitors from across the Gulf region and beyond.

She highlighted the advantage of this prime location, saying: "Katara is very special because it's already a hub for tourists. We get many visitors from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, and of course, locals and expatriates in Qatar."

"This provides them the opportunity to see and buy something they won't find anywhere else," Ansari added.

She stressed that the direct interaction between artisans and customers is a key element of QatArt's success.

"Our market is special because the people making the items are here themselves," she explained. "The consumer gets to meet the person behind the handmade craft, we can explain how (it was made)."

"We also hold events where we're sitting with our crafts, making them, so people can see and appreciate the time and skill in-

involved," Ansari said.

Jamila, a Filipino entrepreneur and beaded accessories designer, echoed Ansari's statement.

"QatArt has been attracting many customers, both locally and internationally, looking for unique handcrafted items," she said.

Jamila, whose bags and accessories are made with beads sourced from the Philippines, cited significant demand, particularly from those hailing from neighbouring GCC countries, and a surprising popularity of her children's items.

Saleema Karalakath, an architect, multidisciplinary designer, and concept artist, also underlined the global appeal of QatArt's diverse offerings.

"People are interested in mixed art, it's not just painting," she said, describing her intricate acrylic pouring and embroidery work, incorporating Qatari-inspired and nature-inspired elements.

"There has been a great response from customers from different countries, buying unique items from our stalls," she added.



Jamila showcases her items at QatArt Makers Market and Workshop.



An array of handcrafted items on display at QatArt Makers Market and Workshop.

