



Insure your visitors
in 2 mins



Visit

qic.online

QIC

*Regulated by QCB

GULF TIMES



SATURDAY Vol. XXXV No. 13196

November 16, 2024
Jumada I 14, 1446 AH

www.gulf-times.com 2 Riyals

Published in
QATAR
since 1978



Introducing our new
Unlimited+ plans

UNLIMITED+
PLANS



HABARI REAL ESTATE
CR No: 17494B

READY TO OCCUPY CAMPS
Available @ Umm Birka & Industrial Area, Al Khor

+974 3030 0880 | +974 3341 9475

P.O. BOX 8081, 11, FLOOR BUILDING # 11, STREET 852, ZONE 74, AL KHOR, QATAR

Brand New Camp UMM BIRKA (47 ROOMS)

Brand New Camp UMM BIRKA (36 ROOMS)

Family فاميلر

HALF PAY BACK

PROMOTION PERIOD: 23/10/2024 - 14/12/2024

Spend **OR \$100** GET FREE SHOPPING VOUCHER Worth **OR \$50**

Offer on selected range of Fashion & Footwear

ROBSON

ROBLUX BY ROBSON PAINTS is the first high performance washable paints

The first product that obtained Qatar Quality Mark

www.npfqatar.com, Tel: 44601602

TAP to school with talabat up to 60% off

Available on selected items

Amwaj
BOTTLED DRINKING WATER

STAY COOL DRINK WATER

LOW SODIUM
EXTRA MINERALS ADDED

Available in
1500ml | 500ml | 330ml | 200ml

CALL NOW!
7794 9967 | 7061 5604
+974 30454443

Qatar reaffirms its political, diplomatic support for UNRWA

QNA
New York

Qatar has reaffirmed its steadfast support for the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), emphasising its commitment to international obligations, multilateral efforts, and its unwavering stance in supporting the Palestinian people, stressing that it would continue its political, diplomatic, and financial support for the agency, which is essential for addressing the urgent humanitarian needs of the Palestinian people.

This came in a statement delivered by Second Secretary at Qatar's Permanent Mission to the UN HE Sheikh Jassim bin Abdulaziz al-Thani, during the Fourth Committee of the UN General Assembly's discussion on Agenda Item 49 regarding UNRWA, held at the UN headquarters in New York.

He noted that UNRWA has, since its establishment, been providing essential services and critical needs to over 5mn Palestinian refugees across the occupied Palestinian territories, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. It serves as the backbone of humanitarian aid in Gaza. He em-



HE Sheikh Jassim bin Abdulaziz al-Thani

phasised that its existence and continued operations are intrinsically tied to ending the occupation and enabling the Palestinian people to exercise their right to self-determination.

He also highlighted Qatar's role as the first Arab country to sign a multi-year agreement with UNRWA in 2018 and one of its largest supporters, with the country's financial contributions to the agency amounted to over \$49mn in 2024.

He said that the besieged Palestinian people in Gaza continue to face catastrophic humanitarian conditions, with access to essential aid being obstructed, and food and medicine weaponised against them. He added that the prohibition of UNRWA's activities will result in severe humanitarian and political consequences, particularly depriving millions of Palestinians in Gaza

and the West Bank of essential services, undermining the legal status of the Palestinian refugee issue and their right to return to their homes and lands, as guaranteed by international law and relevant UN resolutions, notably General Assembly Resolution 194 and Security Council Resolution 237.

Qatar called on the General Assembly, as the body that mandated UNRWA, to fulfil its responsibility to prevent the agency's collapse. It also urged UN member states and the international community to act against the enforcement of legislation targeting UNRWA, emphasising that saving the agency equates to saving humanity, the purposes of the UN Charter, and multilateral efforts.

Qatar expressed its gratitude to UNRWA Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini and his team for their efforts in carrying out the agency's mandate under unprecedentedly challenging conditions. Qatar also conveyed its condolences for the loss of UNRWA staff, noting that at least 237 UNRWA employees have been killed since the beginning of the Israeli aggression, as part of a systematic targeting of aid workers, which has claimed the lives of 322 humanitarian workers to date.

Amir, Azerbaijan president discuss world developments



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani discussed with Azerbaijan President Ilham Aliyev bilateral relations, ways to enhance and develop them, and the most prominent regional and international developments. The

Amir also discussed, in a phone call he made yesterday with President Aliyev, the participation of Qatar in the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP29), currently being held in Baku. (QNA)

Gaza aid access 'at a low point', UN official says

Reuters/AFP
Geneva/Gaza City

Aid access in Gaza is at a low point with deliveries to parts of the besieged north of the enclave all but impossible, a UN humanitarian official said yesterday.

The remarks run counter to a US assessment earlier this week that Israel is not currently impeding humanitarian aid for the Gaza Strip, avoiding restrictions on US military aid.

"From our perspective, on all indicators you can possibly think of in a humanitarian response, all of them are going in the wrong direction," said Jens Laerke, spokesperson for the UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs, in response to a question at a Geneva press briefing about whether humanitarian access had improved.

"Access is at a low point. Chaos, suffering, despair, death, destruction, displacement are at a high point," he added.

Laerke voiced concern about north Gaza where residents have been ordered to head south as Israeli forces' more than month-long incursion continues. Israel says its operations there are designed to prevent Hamas fighters from regrouping.

"We have seen and been particularly concerned about the situation in the north of Gaza, which

is now effectively under siege and it is near impossible to deliver aid in there. So the operation is being stifled," Laerke said.

Meanwhile, looting of aid reaching Gaza has been made easier by Israel's army targeting the local police which would otherwise be able to prevent it, a group of non-governmental organisations said yesterday.

A report by the 29 NGOs, including Save the Children, Oxfam and Care, said that humanitarian aid entering the Palestinian territory had fallen to an all-time low, averaging 37 humanitarian trucks per day in October, and 69 in the first week of November.

This compared with an average of 500 a day before Oct 7, 2023.

The US last month warned Israel to improve the humanitarian conditions in Gaza or risk a cut to its military support.

A day before the deadline, the Israeli military said it opened the Kissufim crossing "as part of the effort and commitment to increase the volume and routes of aid" to Gaza.

But the UN agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA) and eight humanitarian groups said Israel was still not doing enough to get aid in.

The health ministry in Gaza said yesterday that at least 43,764 people have been killed in more than 13 months of Israeli aggression against the Palestinians.

Thousands join World Diabetes Day walkathon



Nearly 15,000 Qatar residents came together yesterday for the World Diabetes Day walkathon, at the 18th annual event organised by Qatar Diabetes Association at Aspire Park. The event was held under this year's slogan 'Diabetes and Well-being'. The aim was to spread awareness about diabetes and recognise people living with the condition in Qatar. PICTURE: Thajudheen Page 12

WISH report moots framework for tackling childhood obesity in Qatar

By Joseph Varghese
Staff Reporter

A research report by the World Innovation Summit for Innovation (WISH), the global health initiative of Qatar Foundation, provides a comprehensive plan to contain obesity in children in Qatar through a multi-sectoral approach.

Titled 'Childhood Obesity in Qatar National policy proposal through multisectoral approaches', the report, prepared by a team of leading officials and researchers in Qatar, highlights the challenges in containing childhood obesity and the need for joint efforts to counter it.

The report assumes more significance as the county recently launched an action plan to tackle obesity, diabetes and modifiable risk factors for cardiovascular diseases at WISH 2024, which concluded in Doha Thursday.

The policy report covers the mechanisms within the wider context of a recommended bespoke multisectoral model to address childhood obesity in Qatar. It also makes policy recommendations to guide the development of effective interventions that promote healthy behaviours and lifestyles.

The recommendations point to policy framework in areas such as: Food and nutrition; Health sector practices; Built environment; School settings; Family and com-

munity; and First 1,000 days of an infant.

Typically, prevention and promotion policies in the health sector cover four main mechanisms: Fiscal measures such as taxes and subsidies; Laws and regulations as well as community engagement and informative education campaigns.

Among the recommendations in Food and nutrition sector is the development of a framework for front-of-package labelling for Qatar that adopts a nutrient-specific warning system, and mandate its application. It also suggests to set guidelines to control and limit advertising of unhealthy food and beverages across all platforms targeting young children and adolescents.

The report recommends devel-



oping guidelines for food product placement in physical outlets and digital platforms, giving prominence to healthy options and limiting unhealthy food within children's reach.

Other recommendations are to continue communicating the updated Qatar National Dietary Guidelines and develop advocacy programmes; evaluate impact of existing excise tax policy in Qatar and explore its expansion based on recommendations from Ministry of Public Health and explore mechanisms to make healthy food more affordable, including fruits and vegetables.

Among the health sector practices the report looks at building on existing multistakeholder task forces and working groups

to support with evidence-based guideline development and 'good practice' obesity prevention, screening, and treatment. It also points to expanding obesity treatment services and enhance integration with primary health service providers among others.

Other major recommendations are to adopt and implement the Open Space Recreation and Sports Facilities Development Guidelines that encourage physical activity for everyone, irrespective of gender or ability; improve School Canteen Guidelines and promote their adoption by all schools and enhance screening for maternal obesity to identify women, and at-risk neonates, for education and close monitoring.

Al-Khulaifi meets Spanish official

HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Mohammed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaifi met yesterday with Spain's Secretary of State for Foreign and Global Affairs Diego Martinez Belio. Discussions during the meeting in Madrid dealt with the co-operation relations between the two countries and means to support and enhance them, as well as the latest developments in the region, especially in the Gaza Strip and Lebanon, in addition to a number of topics of common interest. Belio praised the efforts made by Qatar in resolving international disputes. **(QNA)**



Deputy Speaker discusses parliamentary co-operation in Moscow meetings

HE the Deputy Speaker of the Shura Council Dr Hamda bint Hassan al-Sulaiti held meetings with First Deputy Chairman of the State Duma Alexander Zhukov and Andrey Yatskin, who serves as First Deputy Chairman of the Federation Council of the Federal Assembly of Russia, on the sidelines of her participation in the Third International Forum Woman of the Third Millennium. During the meetings, the two sides discussed existing parliamentary co-operation between the two countries and discussed ways to enhance and develop it. They also addressed several topics on the forum's agenda. HE Dr al-Sulaiti also met with President of the International Women's Union Alfiya Amirova



to discuss several issues related to the role of legislative councils in addressing women's issues, enhancing their status, and supporting their participation in development and societal building. In a related context, she met

with Member of the Council for Financial, Industrial, and Investment Policies at the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Russia Elena Gennadievna. The meeting dealt with discussing topics of joint interest. **(QNA)**

'Cybersecurity crucial in protecting critical infrastructure'

By Peter Alagos
Business Reporter

An official from Msheireb Properties emphasised the crucial role of cybersecurity in protecting critical infrastructure at its inaugural outdoor cybersecurity conference held Thursday in Doha. Engineer Ahmed al-Korbi, senior ICT manager at Msheireb Properties, described Msheireb Downtown Doha as a "smart tech leader in Qatar", adding that hosting a first-ever outdoor cybersecurity conference underscores its "commitment to introducing technological innovation and digital safety among the community".



Engineer Ahmed al-Korbi, senior ICT manager at Msheireb Properties. **PICTURES:** Thajudheen

The conference, held in partnership with White Hat Desert (WHD), gathered more than 1,500 participants from across multiple sectors to Barahat Msheireb. The event featured 15 speakers, five specialised Cybersecurity Villages, and CTF 'Capture the Flag' competition to Barahat Msheireb, and representation from energy, banking, construction, healthcare, and broadcasting companies, setting a new benchmark for cybersecurity events in Qatar. "Through our sophisticated network of over 650,000 connected IoT devices and state-of-the-art Command and Control Centre, we understand firsthand the critical importance of cyber-

security in modern urban environments. This event demonstrates our dedication to sharing this knowledge with both industry professionals and the general public in Qatar," al-Khorbi noted in his opening speech.

The morning industry session delivered comprehensive insights across four key themes: 'Emerging Threats', 'Artificial Intelligence', 'Risk Management', and 'Cyber Strategy'.

The event featured five distinct cybersecurity villages, each offering specialised experiences. The 'Digital Forensics & Incident Response' village provided hands-on training with security experts, while the 'Application Security' section offered a fundamental understanding of secure devel-

opment practices. Participants engaged with offensive security methods in the 'Penetration Testing' area and explored malware analysis in the 'Reverse Engineering' section. The 'WHD Clinic' served as a community hub for networking, while the Qatar Scientific Club showcased innovative demonstrations in robotics and electronics.

The evening session transformed Barahat Msheireb into an interactive technology playground, featuring exciting competitions and demonstrations. Attendees witnessed 'Sumo Robot' battles and high-speed drone racing competitions. Gaming enthusiasts participated in an intense Fortnite tournament while aspiring technologists engaged in circuit board-building workshops. Live hacking demonstrations captured the audience's attention, providing real-world examples of cyber threats and defence mechanisms.

Al-Khorbi said: "The diversity of activities and depth of expertise shared today reflects our commitment to making cybersecurity accessible to everyone. From the technical discussions about AI-driven attacks and ransomware in the morning sessions to the engaging family activities in the evening, we've succeeded in creating a comprehensive platform for cybersecurity awareness and education."



The event featured 15 speakers, five specialised Cybersecurity Villages, and CTF 'Capture the Flag' competition to Barahat Msheireb, and representation from energy, banking, construction, healthcare, and broadcasting companies, setting a new benchmark for cybersecurity events in Qatar.

Philippine envoy highlights need for sustainable infrastructure

Philippine ambassador Lilibeth V Pono underlined the need for sustainable and resilient infrastructure during the recent inaugural conference of the Qatar Chapter of the Road Engineering Association of the Philippines in Doha. "Sustainable infrastructure means designing transportation systems that minimise their environmental impact and enhance energy efficiency," she said. "This involves incorporating innovative technologies, such as smart transportation systems, electric vehicle charging stations, and renewable energy sources, among others. By embracing these technologies, we can reduce carbon emissions, improve air quality, and mitigate the effects of climate change. "By designing and construct-



ing resilient infrastructure, we can minimise disruptions, reduce economic losses, and ensure the long-term viability of our transportation networks," the envoy added. Pono also

recognised the role of Filipino engineers, including road and transport engineers, in spurring development and progress in Qatar and the broader GCC region.

Qatar's pavilion in COP29 holds panel talk on adapting to climate change

QNA
Baku

Qatar's pavilion at the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP29), currently held in Baku, Azerbaijan, organised a seminar on Qatar's measures for climate change adaptation and resilience enhancement across key sectors of the country.

The multi-stakeholder seminar, which included participation from regional and international organisations, highlighted the sectoral strategies of the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change that have comprehensively strengthened Qatar's capacity for adaptation and resilience.

During the seminar, speakers addressed several critical areas, including urban resilience enhancement, water security in arid regions, protection of coastal ecosystems, nature-based solutions, climate-smart agriculture, and strategies to shield Qatar's hydrocarbon sector from climate impacts.

Maryam Kafoud, who serves as head of renewable energy technologies at Qatar General Electricity & Water Corporation (Kahramaa), showcased Qatar's efforts in bolstering climate resilience in the



energy sector. She discussed the primary environmental benefits of the objectives within Qatar's National Renewable Energy Strategy and how these goals contribute to national environmental sustainability.

Chair of the Adaptation Fund Board of the UN Lucas di Pietro presented key adaptation projects funded by the Adaptation Fund, along with the lessons learned that can be applied to other regions facing similar climate challenges. He also elaborated on the fund's unique approach to financing adaptation projects for impactful outcomes.

Dr Bingjian Yang, who serves as director of the department of environmental sociology studies and chief scientist at the Chinese research academy of environmental management, highlighted innovative strategies developed by the Chinese Academy of Environmental Research to assist China in adapting to climate change, particularly in regions most vulnerable to extreme weather. He also emphasized the academy's collaboration with international research institutions to enhance adaptation efforts in China and share best practices globally.

Al-Hammadi opens Qatar's embassy in Malaysia's administrative capital

HE the Secretary-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Ahmed bin Hassan al-Hammadi inaugurated the new premises of the Qatari embassy in Putrajaya, the administrative capital of Malaysia. The inauguration ceremony was attended by Malaysia's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Mohamad Alamin, as the guest of honour representing the Malaysian government. Other attendees included Minister of Agriculture and Food Security Mohamad Sabu, Minister of Higher Education Zambray Abdul Kadir, Minister of State for Religious Affairs Muhammad Naeem bin Mukhtar, President of the Senate Awang Beme Basah, senior officials from the Malaysian Ministry of Foreign Affairs; and several Arab and foreign ambassadors, business leaders, and media representatives. In his speech, HE the secretary-general praised the strong bilateral relations between Qatar and Malaysia in various fields, noting that the two countries are celebrating the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties. He said that Qatar looks forward to elevating bilateral relations to the level of a comprehensive partnership to achieve mutual interests. For his part, the Malaysian Deputy Foreign Minister congratulated Qatar on



the opening of the new embassy premises. He expressed hope that the embassy would serve as a centre for fruitful co-

operation, a symbol of ongoing partnership, and a testament to the strong ties between the two countries.

Qatar attends preparatory meet ahead of Disability Summit

Qatar, represented by a delegation from the Ministry of Social Development and Family, participated in the regional preparatory conference for the 2025 Global Disability Summit. The event was held in Amman, Jordan, and attended by ministers, officials, representatives of international organizations, relevant government agencies, civil society institutions, academics, experts, and activists concerned with the rights of persons with disabilities.

The conference aimed to exchange experiences and practices to improve the lives of persons with disabilities across all aspects of life and to support the formulation of effective and impactful commitments ahead of the Global Disability Summit, which will take place in Berlin next year. The summit is co-organised by Jordan, Germany, and the International Disability Alliance to promote advocacy and implementation of these commitments. Held over

two days, the conference featured multiple discussion sessions addressing key issues related to the rights of persons with disabilities, with the goal of presenting concrete commitments at the upcoming summit. Assistant Secretary-General and Head of the Social Affairs Sector at the Arab League Dr Haifa Abu Ghazaleh emphasized that the conference sends a humanitarian, educational, and informative message about the rights of persons with disabilities.

QU, National Service Academy forge tie-up



Qatar University (QU) and the National Service Academy (NSA) have signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to strengthen co-operation in the fields of education, research, and training. QU president Dr Omar al-Ansari and NSA president Major General Hamad bin Ahmed al-Nuaimi, signed the MoU in the presence of several officials from both institutions. The MoU reflects a shared commitment to exchanging expertise and enhancing institutional capabilities in alignment with mutual interests and to support comprehensive national development. Outlined are several objectives, including the exchange of expertise and information between the two institutions and organising joint conferences, workshops, and lectures to foster scientific and research collaboration and training courses aimed at improving individual competencies and developing the skills of the Qatari community. The MoU will facilitate the implementation of educational, training, and research programmes aimed at building the capabilities of Qatari youth and contributing to the spread of a culture of volunteerism, a statement added.

Civic minister meets Saudi counterpart



HE the Minister of Municipality Abdullah bin Hamad bin Abdullah al-Attiyah met with Minister of Municipalities and Housing of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, engineer Majid bin Abdullah al-Hoqail, on the sidelines of his participation in the Cityscape Riyadh international conference and exhibition. Discussions during the meeting dealt with aspects of co-operation between the two brotherly countries, and means to enhance them in various fields, especially in the field of municipalities, urban planning and smart cities. (QNA)



Arab-European workshop applauds Qatar's advances in green hydrogen

QNA
Cairo

An Arab-European workshop, organised by the Arab Academy for Science, Technology, and Maritime Transport in Alexandria, Egypt, commended Qatar's pioneering role in advancing green hydrogen technology. Held in collaboration with the European Union (EU) and the Transport and Tourism Department of the Arab League, the workshop focused on Qatar's achievements in green hydrogen as part of an integrated study on establishing a green hydrogen supply chain. Discussions included Qatar's development strategies in the sector and insights from international institutions and organisations.

President of the Arab Academy for Science, Technology, and Maritime Transport, Dr Ismail Abdel Ghaffar, told Qatar News Agency (QNA) that the workshop reviewed successful initiatives from across the Arab world. He highlighted Qatar's experience as a standout example, offering valuable lessons for a potential roadmap for Arab countries to excel in this critical field. Dr Abdel Ghaffar praised Qatar's comprehensive approach to building a green hydrogen supply chain, which aligns with the country's commitment to sustainable development goals.

Echoing this sentiment, Dr Sarah al-Jazzar, Dean of the College of International Transport and Logistics at the Academy, noted that the workshop aimed to explore green hydrogen supply opportunities from the Arab region to Europe. She emphasised that Qatar's advanced technological capabilities in producing, storing, and transporting green hydrogen



position it among the leaders in the field, enabling it to produce significant quantities at reduced costs. Qatar's expertise is a testament to its strategic shift toward diversifying investments beyond oil, with a strong emphasis on renewable energy, including solar power. The European Union, she added, recognised Qatar's achievements in this area.

The workshop featured presentations from the League of Arab States, the European Union, and the Arab Academy on building an integrated green hydrogen supply chain to support sustainable development and promote transport sector sustainability across Arab nations. The event also highlighted the green hydrogen projects

of other Arab countries, such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Mauritania, the UAE, Morocco, and Iraq.

Organised alongside the 37th session of the Council of Arab Transport Ministers and the 73rd session of the Councils Executive Office, the workshop aligns with the decision of the 22nd Joint Meeting of the Technical Committees for Transport, held in September 2024. It underscores the Arab League and Arab Academy's commitment to fostering innovative energy and climate solutions in collaboration with the European Union, with the aim of maximising clean energy resources and fostering a sustainable economic environment in the Arab world.

QNB joins global community to mark World Diabetes Day

On the World Diabetes Day marked on November 14, QNB Group joined iconic buildings and sites throughout the world and lit up its head office in Al Corniche and international branches in blue.

The initiative reflects the group's keenness to raise awareness of diabetes as part of its annual programmes to promote health practices in the communities in which it operates within its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) strategy, a statement said.

QNB senior executive vice-president of Group Communication Heba al-Tamimi said: "We are dedicated to supporting the local communities around our international network by fostering awareness and encouraging the adoption of a healthy lifestyle. It our duty to champion programmes that prevent this disease and improve the overall health of the population, aligning with Qatar National Vision 2030, Qatar's National Diabetes Strategy, and SDGs.

"It was a pleasure for QNB to actively join the global community in



this meaningful initiative, shedding light on this disease and sending a message of hope to all those living with diabetes in Qatar and around the world."

Established in 1991 by the International Diabetes Federation with support from the World Health Organisation, the World Diabetes Day marks the birthday of Frederick Banting who discovered insulin in 1922. The blue colour is taken from the blue circle which symbol-

ises the unity that is necessary to combat this disease. QNB Group is one of the leading financial institutions in the MEA region and among the most valuable banking brands in the regional market. Present in some 28 countries across Asia, Europe, and Africa, it offers tailored products and services supported by innovation and backed by a team of over 31,000 professionals dedicated to driving banking excellence worldwide, the statement added.

Justice ministry licenses new batch of real estate brokers

QNA
Doha

The Ministry of Justice has licensed 24 Qatari real estate brokers. The newly licensed brokers – individuals and companies – took the legal oath before the Ministry of Justice's Real Estate Brokers Affairs Committee.

The permit was granted after the applicants had completed the needed procedures under Law No 22 of 2017 regulating real estate brokerage work and passed a mandatory training course.

Licensing real estate agents is part of the Ministry of Justice's efforts to regulate the brokerage profession in a way that serves the national economy and develops the real estate market mechanisms.

Welcoming the new brokers, Assistant Undersecretary for Real Estate Registration and Documentation Affairs Saeed Abdullah al-Suwaidi highlighted the ministry's keenness to advance the real estate brokerage profession due to its direct impact on the national



development in line with the Qatar National Vision 2030 objectives.

Al-Suwaidi, who chairs the Real Estate Brokers Affairs Committee, stressed the need for customers to deal with licensed brokers to keep the rights of all parties preserved, warning of legal risks in case of non-compliance. There is a need to adopt real estate agents' contract templates in transactions to ensure the rights of dealers and brokers, he added, highlighting the benefits customers can obtain through licensed real estate brokers under the new real estate registration

law. To ensure the professional and legal requirements for agents to give an optimal performance, the Real Estate Brokerage Department holds mandatory training courses, in coordination with the Legal and Judicial Studies Center.

The Real Estate Brokerage Department, since the law went into effect, has implemented an integrated training and qualification plan, activated the executive procedures of the law, including organizing visits to real estate offices and nominating applicants to for authorized training courses.

Qatari aircraft carrying medical aid arrives in Kabul



A Qatari aircraft carrying medical aid and four ambulances, provided by the Qatar Fund for Development, touched down at Kabul Airport, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. The aid was received by Deputy Minister of Public Health in the Afghan Caretaker Government Mawlawi Bakht-ur-Rahman Sharafat and Acting Chargé d'Affaires at the Embassy of the State of Qatar to Afghanistan Dr Mirdef bin Ali Al Qashouti. This aid comes within the framework of Qatar's efforts and its firm commitment to providing support and standing by the brotherly Afghan people, and providing them with their urgent and necessary needs. (QNA)



Students at TNG Wakra Secondary participate in the Istisqa prayer.

TNG schools partake in Istisqa prayer



TNG Ain Khalid students in prayer.

In response to the call for the Istisqa (rain-seeking) prayer issued by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, The Next Generation School (TNG) participated in this important act of worship across its campuses.

The prayer was performed by students, staff, and faculty at TNG Ain Khalid, TNG Al Daayen, and TNG Wakra Pri-

mary & Secondary. In addition, EYFS students across the campuses were educated about the meaning and significance of the Istisqa prayer.

At TNG Ain Khalid, the prayer was led by Muhammad Umar Mohsin Wasim, a Year 5 student, house captain, and member of the Student Council.

At TNG Al Daayen, the

prayer was led by Islamic Studies teacher Jawed.

At TNG Wakra Primary and Secondary, the Islamic & Qur'an Department head Muazz guided students in understanding the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in performing the Istisqa prayer.

At TNG Wakra Secondary, the prayer was led by Arabic teacher Moadh Maalem.

PCC officials meet Indian envoy



Representatives of the Pravasi Co-ordination Committee (PCC), a forum of Indian expatriates, met ambassador Vipul at the embassy in Qatar to discuss key issues affecting the community, a statement said.

The PCC delegation was led by chairman Advocate Nizar Kocheri, general convener Mashood V C, co-ordinator Joppachan Thekkkuttu and IT wing chairman Zameel Abdul Wahid.

The primary focus of the meeting was the PCC's proposal for the installation of drug detection systems at major Indian

international airports. The PCC believes this measure can significantly reduce the risk of Indian travellers unknowingly carrying prohibited substances, thereby protecting them from the severe legal implications in the Gulf region.

Kocheri expressed the committee's deep concern regarding the rising number of cases where Indian nationals are detained on drug-related charges upon arrival in Gulf countries. He emphasised that, in many cases, individuals are unaware of the contents of their luggage or are inadequately informed about the

strict laws governing drug possession in the region.

Ambassador Vipul appreciated the PCC's proactive approach and the importance of the proposal. He assured the delegation that he would forward their recommendations to the relevant authorities in India and provide any support necessary to advocate for their implementation.

The PCC also highlighted its ongoing efforts to assist detained Indian expatriates by providing possible aid for their release and expressed gratitude to the envoy for his understanding and support, the statement added.

Leadership skills in focus at TEDx event in MES



Senior students of MES Indian School organised the second edition of TEDx on the topic, 'Comedy of Errors: Anatomy of a mistake'.

Academics director Ashraf Sharafudheen was the chief guest.

Leadership trainer Abdalla Hamdan spoke about the significance of leadership skills and the role they play in shaping a successful future. Social media influencer Dr Muhammed Aflaha Iqbal elaborated on the impact of social

media in modern society, providing guidance for responsible usage.

Link founder and high school student Abid Mobin Gharatkar shared his journey, inspiring fellow students to pursue their passions.

Debate Club secretary Onaissa Rashid stressed the importance of debate and critical thinking, highlighting how these skills foster informed perspectives and confidence.

Head scout Faizan Irfan Ahmed spoke on the values of scouting and community service, encouraging students to develop a sense of responsibility and service. Speaking at the closing ceremony, principal Dr Hameeda Kadar commended the efforts of the organising committee.

Mesis principal Prameela Kannan, MES senior vice-principal Shihabudheen and Off-Campus Division administrator Mam-madhan Mamabally were present.

MES starts afternoon session



MES Indian School started its afternoon session for the academic year 2024-2025 for the students enrolled in Classes KG to VII. The school recently got permission to operate the double shift system, with its afternoon session timings from 2pm-7pm. Addressing students at a special assembly, principal Dr Hameeda Kadar said additional teachers and support staff have been recruited and classroom, transport facility arranged.

Philippine heritage showcased at GPDNet event in Katara

The rich and vibrant culture and heritage of the Philippines were showcased by the embassy during the 10th anniversary celebration of the Global Public Diplomacy Network (GPDNet) at the Katara - the Cultural Village recently.

As an active member of this international network, the Philippines made significant contributions to GPDNet's "Cultural Festival".

These contributions included participation in the photo exhibition, coin and stamp display, and the Cultural Night of songs and dances.

During the Cultural Night on November 8, Qatar-based Filipino performers presented a showcase of Filipino culture, transporting them to the tropical landscapes of the Philippines.

The Maharikans Vocal Ensemble Philippines, students from Philippine School Doha and Philippine International School-Qatar, and the Banyuhay Dance Group Philippines delighted the



audience with their songs and dances. The performance highlighted the rich cultural tapestry of the different regions in the Philippines.

For the grand finale, a performance of "Pangalay sa Kawayan", a traditional dance on bamboo poles, elicited cheers

and applause from the audience.

The embassy congratulated Katara and GPDNet for providing a platform to enhance public appreciation of the diverse cultures present in Qatar and for fostering cultural understanding among both local and expatriate communities in the country.

Qamo celebrates fourth anniversary

Qamo Qatar Moms celebrated its 4th anniversary at an event titled Shagun 4.0.

Qamo, with around 6,000 members, is a chapter of Universe of Moms (Unimo), founded by Neha Kare Kanabar, and has over 600,000 members worldwide, a statement said.

Established by Deepa Jaiswal, Qamo aims to unite mothers in Qatar and foster a close-knit community built on love, mutual support, and respect.

Shagun 4.0 saw over 170 attendees and featured a range of activities, performances, games, raffles, prizes and giveaways.

In her address, Jaiswal stressed the importance of respecting differences, uplifting one another, and celebrating shared experi-



ences, highlighting how Qamo has grown from a small support group. The administration team, which also comprises Neha

Agarwal and Akansa Sabharwal, thanked all participants and supporters, including Beena, a statement added.

Doha-based OFW vies for Philippine congressional seat

By Peter Alagos
Business Reporter

A Doha-based Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW) is seeking to represent the 2.3mn OFWs globally in the Philippine House of Representatives.

Joseph Timothy Rivera, who has been working in Qatar's real estate sector, has been selected as the fourth nominee of the Advocates & Keepers Organisation of OFWs (AKO OFW) Inc. He will represent the organisation in the party-list system for the Philippines' national and local mid-term elections, scheduled for May 12, 2025.

Rivera took his oath at the Philippine embassy in Doha on

September 25, 2024, for the authentication of his Certificate of Nomination and Acceptance (Cona). This document was subsequently filed with the Commission on Elections (Comelec) on October 7, 2024, by Dr Celerino Umandap, the founding chairman and first nominee of the AKO OFW Party-list.

In a media statement, Rivera emphasised that his legislative agenda is deeply rooted in his decades of experience as a Filipino expatriate in Qatar. Rivera lauded Qatar's model for establishing economic zones designed to attract more foreign investment, which in turn generates more local jobs.

According to Rivera, his pro-

posed landmark bills are largely inspired by Qatar's highly effective social, political, civic, and economic policies, which he believes can help build a better Philippines.

Key proposals include the digitalisation of all financial transactions with and within the Philippine government, improved tax collection measures, a mandatory fail-proof National ID system, stricter regulations on communications, an emphasis on discipline with heightened fines for misdemeanours and felonies, stronger laws against financial crimes, the establishment of a modern socialised healthcare system, robust cybercrime legislation to combat misinformation and fake news, and a moral recovery programme



Joseph Timothy Rivera

that criminalises unjust vexation and the use of foul language, including in digital formats.

He also emphasised the importance of upgrading the salaries and wages of government officials and civil servants in the Philippines to meet world standards, similar

to those in the UK and Singapore. This, he believes, is a necessary step towards eliminating graft and corruption within the government.

"If given the opportunity, we will continue to advocate for priority legislation beyond anti-human trafficking and illegal recruitment. Our focus will also include expanding OFW hospitals and hospital wings, establishing housing schemes for OFWs, improving medical care for OFW dependents, enhancing reintegration initiatives for OFWs and former OFWs. This will cover skills training, scholarships for dependents, and no-collateral livelihood programmes," Rivera pointed out.

Rivera pledged to all Filipino expatriates in Qatar that he will

remain committed to assisting the Philippine government in providing essential support to Filipino migrant workers, and will also work to enhance AKO OFW's advocacies aimed at improving the lives and welfare of OFWs globally.

AKO OFW now has more than 186,000 active members worldwide with active chapters in almost every province in the Philippines and 44 overseas chapters, including Qatar, added Rivera, who also served as a consultant to the board and special adviser to the director general of the Philippine Economic Zone Authority (PEZA) for the Middle East. This earned him an award during the 'Galing Pinas Ecozone Investment Partnership Award 2021'.

Palestinian, Lebanese support gatherings



Yemenis hold placards and wave Lebanese and Palestinian flags during an anti-Israel demonstration in solidarity with Gaza and Lebanon in the Houthi-controlled capital Sanaa, yesterday.



People chant slogans and carry Palestinian flags during a protest in solidarity with Gaza in Algiers Square in the Libyan capital Tripoli, yesterday.

Iran backs Lebanon in ceasefire talks, seeks end to 'problems'

Reuters
Beirut

Iran backs any decision taken by Lebanon in talks to secure a ceasefire with Israel, a senior Iranian official said yesterday, signalling Tehran wants to see an end to a conflict that has dealt heavy blows to its Lebanese ally Hezbollah.

Israel launched air strikes in the Hezbollah-controlled southern suburbs of Beirut, flattening buildings for a fourth consecutive day. Israel has stepped up its bombardment of the area this week, an escalation that has coincided with signs of movement in US-led diplomacy towards a ceasefire.

Two senior Lebanese political sources told Reuters that the US ambassador to Lebanon had presented a draft ceasefire proposal to Lebanon's parliament speaker Nabih Berri the previous day. Berri is endorsed by Hezbollah to negotiate and met the senior Iranian official Ali Larijani yesterday.

Asked at a news conference whether he had come to Beirut to undermine the US truce plan, Larijani said: "We are not looking to sabotage anything. We are after a solution to the problems." "We support in all circumstances the Lebanese government. Those who are disrupting are Netanyahu and his people," Larijani added, referring to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Hezbollah was founded by Iran's Revolutionary Guards in 1982, and has been financed by Tehran.

A senior diplomat, speaking on condition of anonymity, assessed that more time was needed to get a ceasefire done but was hopeful it could be achieved.

The outgoing US administration appears keen to secure a ceasefire in Lebanon, even as efforts to end Israel's related war in the Gaza Strip appear totally adrift. World powers say a Lebanon



Senior adviser to Iran's supreme leader, Ali Larijani (left), meets with Lebanon's Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri in Beirut, yesterday.

non ceasefire must be based on UN Security Council Resolution 1701 which ended a previous 2006 war between Hezbollah and Israel. Its terms require Hezbollah to move weapons and fighters north of the Litani river, which runs some 20km north of the border.

Israel demands the freedom to act should Hezbollah violate any agreement, which Lebanon has rejected.

In a meeting with Larijani, Lebanon's caretaker Prime Minister Najib Mikati urged support for Lebanon's position on implementing 1701 and called this a priority, along with halting the "Israeli aggression", a statement from his office said.

Larijani stressed "that Iran supports any decision taken by the government, especially resolution 1701", the statement said.

Israel launched its ground and air offensive against Hezbollah in late September after almost a year of cross-border hostilities in parallel with the Gaza war. It says it aims to secure the return home of tens of thousands of Israelis, forced to evacuate from northern Israel under Hezbollah fire.

Israel's campaign has forced more than 1mn Lebanese to flee their homes, igniting a humanitarian crisis.

It has dealt Hezbollah serious

blows, killing its leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah and other commanders. Hezbollah has kept up rocket attacks into Israel and its fighters have been battling Israeli troops in the south.

Yesterday, Israeli air strikes flattened five more buildings in Beirut's southern suburbs known as Dahiyeh. One of them was located near one of Beirut's busiest traffic junctions, Tayouneh, in an area where Dahiyeh meets other parts of Beirut.

The sound of an incoming missile could be heard in footage showing the airstrike near Tayouneh. The targeted building turned into a cloud of rubble and debris which billowed into the adjacent Horsh Beirut, the city's main park.

The Israeli military said its fighter jets attacked munitions warehouses, a headquarters and other Hezbollah infrastructure. Ahead of the latest air strikes, the Israeli military issued a warning on social media identifying buildings. The European Union strongly condemned the killing of 12 paramedics in an Israeli strike near Baalbek in the Bekaa Valley on Thursday, EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said.

"Attacks on healthcare workers and facilities are a grave violation of international humanitarian law," he wrote on X.

Palestinians turn to local soda in boycott of Israel-linked goods

AFP
Salifit

In a red box factory that stands out among the drab hills of the West Bank, Chat Cola's employees race to quench Palestinians' thirst for local products since the Gaza war erupted last year.

With packaging reminiscent of Coca-Cola's iconic red and white aluminium cans, Chat Cola has tapped into Palestinians' desire to shun brands perceived as too supportive of Israel.

"The demand for (Chat Cola) increased since the war began because of the boycott," said owner Fahed Arar, at the factory in the occupied West Bank town of Salifit.

Julien, a restaurateur in the city of Ramallah further south, said he has stocked his classic red Coca-Cola branded fridge with the local alternative since the war began in October last year.

Supermarket manager Mahmud Sidr described how sales of Palestinian products surged over the past year.

"We noticed an increase in sales of Arab and Palestinian products that do not support (Israel)," he said.

Although it does not supply Israeli troops in Gaza with free goods — as some US fast food brands have been rumoured to — Coca-Cola is perceived as simply too American.

The US provides enormous military assistance to Israel, aid that has continued through the devastating military campaign in Gaza that Israel launched in response to Hamas' unprecedented storming of Israel in October 2023.

Coca-Cola did not respond to a request for comment, but it says the company does not support religion nor "any political causes, governments or nation states".

A manager of the National Beverage Company, the Palestinian firm bottling Coca-Cola in the Palestinian territories, told AFP the company had not noticed the



Chat Cola has tapped into Palestinians' desire to move away from companies perceived as too supportive of Israel.

return of many products from local stores. There was however a decline of up to 80% in the drink's sales to foreign-named chains, said the manager, speaking on condition of anonymity.

"The national boycott movement has had a big impact," Arar said. Ibrahim al-Qadi, head of the Palestinian economy ministry's consumer protection department, said that 300 tonnes of Israeli products were destroyed over the past three months after passing their sell-by date for want of buyers.

The Palestinian economy's dependence on Israeli products has made a broader boycott difficult and Chat Cola's popularity partly stems from being one of the few quality Palestinian alternatives.

"There's a willingness to boycott if the Palestinian producers can produce equivalently good quality and price," said the head of the Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute, Raja Khalidi.

Khalidi said the desire for Palestinian substitutes has grown sharply since the war in Gaza began, but is stifled by "an issue of production capacity which we lack". A boycott campaign has been more successful in neighbouring Arab states less dependent on Israeli goods.

In neighbouring Jordan, the franchisee of French retail gi-

ant Carrefour, Dubai-based conglomerate Majid Al Futtaim Group announced it was shutting down all its operations after activists called for a boycott.

'PALESTINIAN TASTE'

Chat Cola's Arar is proud of developing a quality Palestinian product. Staff at the company's Salifit factory wear sweaters emblazoned with the words "Palestinian taste" in Arabic and the Palestinian flag.

After opening the factory in 2019, Arar plans to open a new one in Jordan to meet international demand and avoid the complications of operating in the occupied West Bank. Although the plant still turns out thousands of cans of Chat, one production line has been shut down for more than a month.

Israeli authorities have held up a large shipment of raw materials at the Jordanian border, hitting output, Arar said, adding he can meet only 10-15% of demand for his product.

As Arar spoke, Israeli air defences intercepted a rocket likely launched from Lebanon, creating a small cloud in view of the plant. But with war have come opportunities. "There has never been the political support for buying local that there is now, so it's a good moment for other entrepreneurs to start up," economist Khalidi said.

Syrian media says second Israeli strike in two days hits Damascus

AFP
Beirut

Syrian state-run media said Israel struck the upscale Mazzeh district of Damascus yesterday, the second such attack in as many days to hit the neighbourhood home to embassies, security headquarters and UN offices.

Attacks blamed on or claimed by Israel have intensified in Syria, including in areas near the Lebanese border mainly targeting bastions of the Lebanese movement Hezbollah.

Israel went to war with the group — which is also allied with Syria — in September following nearly a year of cross-border hostilities sparked by the Gaza war.

"Israeli aggression targets the Mazzeh area in Damascus," the

official SANA news agency said yesterday, after reporting a deadly Israeli strike on the district a day earlier.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights war monitor said the strikes targeted a "military housing complex" in Mazzeh.

"Fire trucks and ambulances headed to the targeted site amid reports of casualties, with security services and regime forces completely cordoning off the targeted site," the Observatory said.

Israeli strikes on Thursday in and around Damascus killed 23 people, according to the Britain-based monitor, which has a network of sources inside Syria.

Thursday's strike on Mazzeh killed 13 people, including civilians and foreign-backed fighters, while an attack on the outskirts of Damascus killed 10 Palestinian Islamic Jihad fight-

ers, the monitor said.

Islamic Jihad has fought alongside Hamas against Israeli forces in Gaza and has been at war with Israel before.

Israeli authorities, who rarely comment on individual strikes in Syria, claimed responsibility for Thursday's, saying they targeted Islamic Jihad.

The attacks coincided with an official visit to Damascus on Thursday by Ali Larijani, a senior adviser to Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who met with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

Since September 23, Israel has escalated its bombing of Lebanon, later sending in ground troops following almost a year of limited exchanges of fire initiated by Hezbollah in support of its ally Hamas after the October 2023 storming that sparked the Gaza war.

IAEA chief visits two N-sites during Iran trip

Reuters
Dubai

The head of the UN nuclear watchdog visited two Iranian nuclear sites yesterday as part of a visit to Iran, ahead of an expected European diplomatic push over Tehran's atomic activities before Donald Trump's return to the White House.

During the visit, Iran's foreign minister told International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) chief Rafael Grossi that Tehran is willing to resolve outstanding disputes over its nuclear programme but won't succumb to pressure.

Grossi visited the Natanz nuclear plant and the Fordow enrichment site, which is dug into a mountain around 100km south of



This handout picture provided by the Atomic Energy Organisation of Iran yesterday, shows the organisation's spokesman Behrouz Kamalvandi (left) and Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Kazem Gharib Abadi (right), posing for a picture with the International Atomic Energy Agency chief Rafael Grossi (second left), in front of the gate of the Fordow nuclear enrichment plant, near the city of Qom.

the capital Tehran, state media reported, without giving details.

Relations between Tehran and the IAEA have soured over several long-standing issues including Iran barring the agency's uranium-enrichment experts from the

country and its failure to explain uranium traces found at undeclared sites.

"The ball is in the EU/E3 court," Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi wrote on X following talks in Tehran with Grossi on Thursday.



Cholera suspected as cause of mystery deaths in besieged Sudan town

Reuters
Cairo/Dubai

Dozens of escaped residents of the besieged town of Al-Hilaliya in Sudan's El Gezira state have tested positive for cholera, a medical source told Reuters, in a development that provides a likely explanation for the reported deaths of hundreds there.

While local activists say that more than 300 people have died, a group of Hilaliya residents in the diaspora provided to Reuters a list of more than 400 fatalities, a number they say is increasing by the hour.

The paramilitary Rapid Support Forces began a siege of the town, home to tens of thousands of locals and displaced people, on Oct 29 as part of a campaign of attacks in east Gezira in revenge for the defection of a top RSF commander to the army. At least 15 were killed by gunfire in the RSF raid that started the siege, according to activists.

As reports of mass fatalities trickled out, rumours swirled about the cause of the deaths and

whether RSF soldiers had intentionally poisoned people.

But an increasing number of those who have escaped from the town have tested positive for cholera, the medical source said.

Other medics from the town told Reuters that after the soldiers drove people from their homes, stealing money, cars, and livestock, most inhabitants sought refuge in the courtyards of three mosques.

The soldiers had also taken the solar panels and electrical wires used to extract groundwater, forcing at least some of the residents to rely on a shallow traditional well that had gone unused for decades and may have mixed with sewage, according to the medics and an eyewitness.

The medics and eyewitnesses asked for anonymity to avoid retribution by either side in the conflict.

The UN said earlier this week that there was a suspected cholera outbreak among people who escaped eastern Gezira, one of several across the country, but did not specify Hilaliya. The Shargenil Emergency Response Room said medics in Omda-

wanban Hospital had received at least 200 cholera cases from the region.

With the exact cause unknown, dozens in Hilaliya began falling ill with stomach pains, diarrhoea, and vomiting. The soldiers had looted the town's hospitals, clinics, and pharmacies, so only a few were able to take antibiotics and recover, one of the medics said.

The rest began to die.

Those who wanted to leave paid RSF soldiers large sums to be transported out of the state, eyewitnesses who arrived in the army-controlled town of Shendi said. Thousands remain.

"We escaped death by a miracle, so many around us were dying from this illness," said one 70-year-old man.

The Sudanese Ministry of Health and the Rapid Support Forces did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

The devastating war that broke out in April 2023 between the army and RSF has destroyed Sudan's infrastructure and spread disease, creating the world's largest hunger and displacement crises.



Community members watch as Senzo Mchunu, South African police minister, inspects outside the mineshaft where it is estimated that hundreds of illegal miners are believed to be hiding underground, after police cut off food and water as part of police operations against illegal miners, in Stilfontein, yesterday.

Families gather at SA mine shaft where hundreds are feared stuck underground

Reuters
Stilfontein

Desperate relatives of possibly hundreds of illegal miners stuck underground in a disused mine shaft in South Africa waited outside the site yesterday in the hope that their loved ones would emerge safely.

The miners are in a standoff with police, who have blocked their supplies of food and water to force them out and arrest them for illegally entering the abandoned mine in search of leftover gold — a common problem in South Africa.

More than 1,000 illegal miners have already resurfaced in recent weeks as the police have cracked down, and at least one dead body has been brought up. Hundreds are believed to be still underground.

It was unclear if those remaining in the mine in Stilfontein, North West province, were unwilling or unable to get out of the

shaft, which descends vertically for more than 2km (1.2 miles) underground. Police Minister Senzo Mchunu, who visited the site yesterday, said that authorities would work together to get them out. A cabinet minister had previously said the government would not send help because they were "criminals".

"We need a much quicker process because it is risky and dangerous for them to remain where they are," Mchunu told a news briefing.

Police and community members stood around the rocky entrance yesterday where a pulley had been set up to hoist men out. A community leader told local news outlet News24 on Thursday that the men were too weak to exit the mine.

"I'm here waiting for young people who are underground, who are dying," Zimbabwean national Roselina Nyuzeya told Reuters from behind the police barricade blocking access to the gaping hole.

A woman crying nearby was waiting for her husband, who had

been underground since April, Nyuzeya said. Illegal mining has plagued South Africa for decades through small-time pilfering and organised criminal networks. Many of those who do the risky work of breaking into old industrial mines are immigrants from neighbouring countries. They are referred to as zama-zamas — a local term that comes from the Zulu expression for "taking a chance".

Minister in the Presidency Khumbudzo Ntshavheni said on Wednesday the government would not send help for criminals but instead would "smoke them out".

Some community members held signs that read "Smoke ANC out" in response, referring to the governing African National Congress party.

"We are asking for help from the government to assist us so our children can come out of the mine. All we are asking for is their remains to come out," said Matsidiso Ramolla, a 41-year-old resident of Stilfontein.



File photo shows Sudanese people, displaced from Gezira state due to RSF violence, sitting under a tree in New Halfa, Kassala state.

UN mission hands over last camp to Mali authorities

AFP
Bamako

The former UN mission in Mali yesterday handed over its last camp to the junta-led authorities, who pushed the peacekeepers out of the crisis-racked country last year, an AFP journalist said.

The UN stabilisation mission (Minusma) had been in place since 2013 but ended on December 31 after Mali's military leaders ordered it to leave amid deteriorating relations.

It had previously maintained around 15,000 soldiers and police in the fragile and poor West African nation, which is in the grip of militant and separatist violence.

The UN flag was lowered on the 37-hectare (91-acre) camp

on the outskirts of the capital Bamako which served as Minusma's main operational base and home to its headquarters.

The camp "has played a crucial role in achieving the objectives of Minusma", said UN Under-Secretary-General Atul Khare at the ceremony.

Malian Foreign Minister Abdoulaye Diop reiterated the junta's grievances against the mission.

"The mission was not in a position to meet the pressing, existential expectations of the Malian people, who had placed so much hope in it," he said, but expressed gratitude towards the peacekeepers.

Diop criticised the mission for encouraging "the instrumentalisation of human rights issues by certain powers for political and destabilisation purposes".

Minusma was, in part, tasked with protecting civilians and human rights.

Its regular reporting of abuses committed by all actors, including Mali's armed forces, riled the junta, who seized power in back-to-back coups in 2020 and 2021.

The military rulers insisted the mission leave the country, leading the UN Security Council to terminate Minusma's mandate.

Under a so-called liquidation phase due to end on December 31, the last equipment will be handed over to the authorities or evacuated, and final contracts wrapped up.

More than 180 Minusma members were killed in attacks, mostly blamed on armed groups linked to Al Qaeda or the Islamic State group, making it the hardest-hit UN mission in recent years.

AFP
Soweto

The deaths of 23 children in Johannesburg this year from suspected food poisoning has ignited anger in South Africa against foreign nationals who run small corner shops known as spazas.

There is still police tape around a now-closed spaza shop in Soweto's Naledi area that allegedly sold snacks to six young children who died from poisoning in October.

The tragedy angered local residents who attacked and looted the spaza and hounded out the shopkeeper, reportedly an Ethiopian national. Even the person who was renting out the premises fled in fear.

While an autopsy revealed that a pesticide had caused the deaths, a link to the shop has not been officially established.

As similar cases were reported in other areas, the outcry mounted, leading authorities to launch raids on foreign-run spazas to check compliance with laws and regulations.

Several have been forced to shut and the shopkeepers — generally

SA president orders inspections, clean-up after child raticide deaths

South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa ordered yesterday a large-scale inspection of tuck shops and informal corner stores after the deaths from food poisoning of more than 20 children, some linked to an agricultural raticide, AFP reported.

In a televised evening address to the nation, Ramaphosa said shops implicated in deaths of the children would be closed immediately and local authorities had to clean up piles of garbage that were leading to rat infestations. There had been 890 reported incidents of food-borne illnesses since the start of September 2024, with at least 22 children killed in the past few weeks, he said. In a case that has caused a major outcry, six young children died in Johannesburg's Soweto last month after eating chips from an informal shop known as a spaza. Many spaza shops in South Africa are run by foreign nationals, including from Ethiopia and Pakistan, and the deaths prompted a xenophobic backlash.

from Ethiopia, India, Pakistan or Somali — have fled.

Six spazas were closed at Olivenhoutbosch outside the capital Pretoria last week for irregularities, municipal council official Sarah Mabotsa said.

"They're selling expired food, they're selling skin products, they're selling meat, everything is in one shop," she charged.

As the continent's most industrialised economy, South Africa is a prime destination for peo-

ple seeking work even though its own unemployment rate is around 32%.

The competition has triggered mistrust and even violence.

If authorities don't step in, a xenophobic vigilante group known as Operation Dudula — which means "push back" in Zulu — often does.

In Naledi, efforts by Dudula recently saw the foreign shopkeepers at six spazas replaced with South African nationals.

Seaweed farming brings hope to Kenyan villagers hit by climate change

Reuters
Kwale County

The people of Kenya's coastal village of Mwazaro used to earn their living mainly growing cassava and maize, until the ravages of drought forced them to try a new crop — seaweed.

They plant it on the beachfront and lay it out to dry inland, joining scores of other communities feeding a growing demand at home and abroad for associated products including soap, shampoo and seaweed powder, used in food.

Seaweed farming was first introduced in Kenya in 2008 and has expanded rapidly to cover 20 villages, David Mirera, a scientist at the Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute (KMFRI),



Shaagobo Mzaa, a seaweed farmer, holds the weed cuttings tied on a rope before planting at an open beach in the Indian Ocean within the Kibuyuni village in Kwale county, Kenya.

said. Higher temperatures, rising sea levels and poor rains have all played their part in the shift.

Along the coast in the village of Kibuyuni, investments in

seaweed farming have led to improvements in infrastructure and electricity, said Kassim Ramtu Bakari, who does marketing for the Seaweed Farmers' Co-oper-



Mwanasiti Mpulu, 44, and Tina Jasho, 40, sort harvested seaweed as it is spread on drying racks to get off moisture before being used to make cosmetic products, at the Kibuyuni seaweed collection centre in Kwale county, Kenya.

ative there, which employs more than 100 households. Tima Jasho, a mother of seven in Kibuyuni, said she was now able to pay her children's school fees and move

her family from a mud home to a brick house.

"If you grow seaweed, you don't have to depend on a man," she told Reuters. "I can earn my own mon-

ey." In 2022, the industry produced almost 100 tons of seaweed worth more than \$30,000, according to KMFRI data. Farmers export dry seaweed to China, France, the United States and other countries.

The global market for seaweed has tripled in size in the last two decades, according to a 2024 United Nations Report, growing from \$5bn in 2000 to \$17bn in 2021.

It is Tanzania's third largest export and employs over 26,000 farmers, said George Maina, a scientist at The Nature Conservancy, an environmental nonprofit which supports seaweed farmers in Kenya and Tanzania. Kenya has a long way to go before it becomes a global industry leader like its neighbour, Maina said.

"It's still lagging in terms of production," he said. "But it's a sector that is growing."

Trump picks North Dakota Governor Burgum for interior secretary

■ Burgum is a wealthy former software executive
■ Became Trump loyal supporter after he gave up on presidential nomination

Reuters
Palm Beach

President-elect Donald Trump said that North Dakota Governor Doug Burgum, a wealthy former software company executive, will be his pick for interior secretary.

"He's going to head the Department of Interior, and it's going to

be fantastic," a tuxedo-wearing Trump said at a gala at his Mar-a-Lago Florida retreat, adding that he would make an official announcement on Friday.

Burgum, 68, has portrayed himself as a traditional, business-minded conservative. He ran against Trump for the Republican presidential nomination before quitting and becoming a loyal Trump supporter, appearing at fundraisers and advocating for Trump on television.

At the gala, which featured tech billionaire Elon Musk, actor Sylvester Stallone and members of his incoming administration, Trump praised his latest cabinet picks and made some of his longest remarks since his presidential election victory speech.

"Nobody knew we were going to win it the way we won it," Trump said.



Governor Doug Burgum

He teased Musk about his ongoing post-election stay at Mar-a-Lago. Musk is involved in some of Trump's meetings at the ocean-front property. "I can't get him out of here. He just loves this place. And I like having him here," said

Trump. At the end of the event, Musk mounted the stage. "The public has given us a mandate that could not be more clear. The people have spoken, the people want change," he said.

Since his victory, Trump has

chosen several loyalists with little experience for key cabinet positions, stunning some allies and making clear that he is serious about reshaping - and in some cases testing - America's institutions.

The Interior Secretary will oversee policies guiding the use of 500m acres of federal and tribal land, a fifth of the nation's surface area. President Joe Biden made the agency central to his climate change agenda by boosting the permitting of offshore wind and solar energy projects and creating a program to lease lands for conservation in the same way they are for development.

Burgum is expected to be tasked with increasing oil, gas and mineral production on federal lands and waters. That job would likely involve ratcheting up new leasing in the Gulf of Mexico and on federal

lands in oil-producing states like Wyoming and New Mexico. Biden had pledged to stop new federal leasing for oil extraction but was prevented by the courts from doing so.

Interior leadership under Trump could scrap Biden's five-year offshore drilling plan, which had a historically low number of auctions scheduled, and step up acreage offered at Congressionally-mandated onshore sales. Drilling activity on federal lands and waters accounts for about a quarter of US oil production and 12% of gas production.

The number of drilling permits approved on federal lands fell 16% between fiscal 2020, the last year of Trump's first administration, and fiscal 2023, according to data from the US Bureau of Land Management. Acreage in new onshore leases slid 95%.

Power group on Capitol Hill



US Representative-elect Brandon Gill is applauded as he joins the newly-elected members of the US Congress to pose for a photo on the steps of the Capitol in Washington, US.

Cracks deepen in Canada's pro-immigration 'consensus'

AFP
Toronto

From the ground floor of a low-income apartment building in Toronto, Sultana Jahangir runs an organisation that helps South Asian women get established in Canada - a challenge she said is getting harder.

Polling and migration experts tell a consistent story: broad support for immigration that prevailed for decades in Canada has cracked following a three-year immigrant-fuelled population surge.

Jahangir's South Asian Women's Rights Organisation, which operates out of two apartments packed with desk chairs and tables, equips women with vocabulary for job interviews, basic computer training and other skills.

A social worker born in Bangladesh who came to Toronto in 2005 via the United States, Jahangir said settling in Canada was never easy - but things have "definitely" gotten worse. "You're seeing more fierce and negative competition between immigrants and more negative feelings towards people who may be new versus people who have been here for a long time," she said.

Daniel Bernhard, chief executive of the Institute for Canadian Citizenship, said while Canadians are turning against immigration, many still view immigrants who are already here positively. It's an important distinction, he argued, but one he fears is fragile. "The consensus for the last 30 years was rock solid," Bernhard told AFP.

In a 2019 Gallup poll that as-

sessed support for immigration in 145 countries, Canada ranked first, with 94 percent of respondents describing migrants moving to the country as a good thing. Five years later, a September survey from the Environics Institute found that "for the first time in a quarter century, a clear majority of Canadians say there is too much immigration."

"We're not at Brexit and 'Stop the boats' and 'Build the wall' but we're 10 years behind that," Bernhard said, referring to Britain and the United States. Canada may have so far avoided the inflammatory rhetoric and baseless claims about immigrants that partly drove Donald Trump's presidential campaign, but Bernhard argued "that tends to be the next step."

Canada is "waking up to the fact that, actually, we are just like everybody else," he added, referring to global anti-migrant sentiment. Immigration declined in 2020 as the Covid pandemic froze most international travel, but from 2021-2024 an unprecedented influx of some three million people brought Canada's population to 41 million.

From 2023-2024, the population rose 3.2 percent, the largest annual increase since 1957.

Last month, while announcing cuts to immigration targets for the coming three years, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau conceded the influx had strained resources. "We didn't get the balance quite right," he said, explaining Canada needed to slow population growth in order to boost key infrastructure and services.

Bernhard said he sympathized with Trudeau's attempt to re-

spond to changing public opinion but suggested that if the prime minister believed reducing immigration would help address challenges like hospital wait times and housing shortages "he should seek a second opinion."

Arguing "there's just too many people," is an easy way to distract from governance failures, he said.

Jahangir told AFP she was not opposed to the target cuts, citing ferocious competition for jobs and accommodation in Toronto, noting that she knows some women who rent beds by the half day.

"Those who are working night shift, they are taking the bed in the day shift. Those who are working day shift, they are taking the bed in the night shift," she explained.

But, like Bernhard, she said the government "should not blame the immigrant" for its own struggles in managing Canada's growth. Victoria Esses, a psychology professor at Ontario's Western University who specialises in public attitudes toward immigration and cultural diversity, also supports Trudeau's immigration cuts.

She voiced concern that persistent media coverage linking housing shortages and service gaps to overpopulation would further poison the environment for new immigrants, arguing that letting in less people, for now, might ease anxieties.

"Citizens like to feel they have control over immigration," she said. The cuts may be empowering to some in Canada by indicating the government is responding to their concerns, signalling that "we're scaling back a bit because we feel that people are worried," Esses said.

Trump promises to end wars with a 'strong military'

AFP
Palm Beach

US President-elect Donald Trump promised a "strong military," as he repeated his pledge to end the war between Russia and Ukraine. Trump, who campaigned on an "America First" foreign policy, has said previously that he wanted to strike a deal between Kyiv and Moscow, without giving details, and end bloodshed in the Middle East.

"We have to get back to a great country with low taxes and a strong military. We're going to fix our military, we did once and now we're going to have to do it again," he said at a gala organized by the America First Policy Institute at

his Mar-a-Lago resort in Palm Beach, Florida.

"We're going to work on the Middle East and we're going to work very hard on Russia and Ukraine. It's got to stop," Trump added.

He also criticised the "big chunk" of US spending on Afghanistan, from where American troops withdrew in 2021 after two decades of fighting an insurgency by the Taliban, which returned to power that year. Trump's re-election has the potential to upend the almost three-year conflict between Russia and Ukraine, throwing into question Washington's multibillion-dollar support for Kyiv, which is crucial to its defence.

The Republican said on the campaign trail that he could end

the fighting within hours and has indicated he would talk directly with Russian President Vladimir Putin. Trump has not said how he intends to strike a peace deal on Ukraine or what terms he would propose.

Trump has nominated Fox News host and National Guard veteran Pete Hegseth to lead the world's most powerful military as defence secretary, despite a slim CV. If confirmed by the Senate, Hegseth would command around 3.4m soldiers and civilians, and oversee an annual budget of about \$850bn.

The president-elect has entrusted Elon Musk, the world's richest man, with the task of proposing cuts of \$2tn from the federal government's \$7tn budget.

Trump's Texas border gains highlight Republican inroads

Reuters
Dallas

The United States' swing toward President-elect Donald Trump in last week's election was pronounced along its border with Mexico, particularly in southern Texas, where Republicans have gained a foothold in traditionally Democratic-voting counties.

Across border counties where nearly all of the ballots have been counted, the president-elect's share of the vote rose almost 10 percentage points from four years ago and was about 20 percentage points higher than in his first presidential campaign in 2016.

Republicans' successes along the southern border with Mexico, where many voters are Hispanic, reflect the party's gains with such voters across the country. It also reflects a focus on immigration, which a Reuters/Ipsos poll last week showed to be the top issue Americans want Trump to tackle in his first 100 days.

Nationally, counties where 40% or more of the citizen voting-age population is Hispanic all moved toward Trump, despite expectations from Democrats that his promises of mass deportation might alienate the demographic. In Cameron County, Texas, which is roughly 90% Hispanic and home to border city Brownsville, Trump

won by more than 5 points, a dramatic reversal from the Democratic ticket's nearly 10-point advantage in 2020 and a lead of over 30 points in 2016.

The county is part of Texas's 27th state Senate district, which Republicans flipped this month after redistricting made it more competitive. The district is "ground zero for the border crisis," said Adam Hinojosa, the district's state senator-elect, who, according to the Texas Tribune, will be the first Republican to represent any part of the Rio Grande Valley in the state Senate in 150 years.

US Representative Henry Cuellar, one of Texas' longest-serving Democrats in Congress - who won re-election in his southern Texas district by thinner margins than normal but who outperformed Trump and Vice-President Kamala Harris - said the Biden administration did not listen to his warnings at the beginning of President Joe Biden's administration about rising unauthorized border crossings.

Cuellar said Biden's broad asylum ban in June was effective but was "just too late" to change voters' perceptions about the border before the Nov 5 election. Missteps from national Democrats were echoed at the state level, Cuellar said. "Republicans were pumping a large amount of money into South Texas... And Democrats, the state party, with all due respect,

didn't spend any money down there. They put the money into large urban areas."

The Texas Democratic Party did not respond to a request for an interview with the party's chairman, Gilberto Hinojosa, who after the election announced his resignation effective in March. In a statement announcing his resignation, Hinojosa said the party during his leadership had created "significant and durable gains in our now-Democrat-led big urban counties and cities, as well as in the suburban outer rings."

Republicans' gains in border counties are "not something that happened overnight," said Joshua Blank, who manages polling and research at the University of Texas at Austin's Texas Politics Project.

"Republicans have been making concerted efforts, especially in the Rio Grande Valley, over the last three to five election cycles to try to identify more voters in these regions," said Blank.

One person leading these efforts was Wayne Hamilton, a long-time Republican political operative in Texas. Hamilton managed Texas Governor Greg Abbott's winning campaign in 2014, which drew attention after Abbott's margin of victory broke 20 points. Hamilton said Abbott tasked him in 2016 to drive turnout in southern Texas. His first task was recruiting candidates to run in races up and down the ballot.

Canada Post workers go on nationwide strike

About 55,000 Canada Post workers went on strike for the second time in six years on Friday after their union said it had failed to reach a pay deal with the postal operator in the run-up to the holiday season. Federal Labour Minister Steven MacKinnon, who has twice this year moved to end work disputes in other sectors, made clear he was not considering another intervention for the time being. The union is demanding wage increases in line with inflation, cost-of-living adjustment payments to be rolled into the basic wage rate, and safe working conditions. The union had issued a three-day strike notice earlier this week. "After a year of bargaining with little progress, postal workers made the difficult decision to strike," the Canadian Union of Postal Workers said in a statement. Separately, Canada

Post said operations would shut down during the strike. If the strike drags on, it could boost business for private rivals United Parcel Service and FedEx. In November 2018, the Liberal government pushed through back-to-work legislation to end a month-long strike by Canada Post employees. Earlier this week, the Liberal government ordered an end to disputes at Canada's two biggest ports and in August, it put an end to work stoppages at the two largest railway companies. "I'm not looking at any other solution other than negotiation right now," MacKinnon told reporters in Montreal when asked about the dispute. "We are going to continue to support the parties in any way we can and make sure that they are able to try and get a negotiated agreement." - Reuters

Tropical Storm Sara pounds Honduras with heavy rain

Tropical Storm Sara dumped heavy rains with the potential to cause disastrous flooding as it churned inland along the northeastern coast of Honduras. The US National Hurricane Center (NHC) said Sara would bring "life-threatening and potentially catastrophic flash flooding and mudslides" through the weekend. The Honduran emergency management agency (COPECO) has put four Caribbean departments - Islas de la Bahia, Atlantida, Colon and Gracias a Dios - on red alert for

72 hours, urging evacuations from danger zones. President Xiomara Castro said emergency services had been activated to deal with "damage already caused by the rains," warning that Sara's impacts "could become a catastrophic event." "Citizens should pay attention to instructions and move to safe shelters, away from rivers," she said on X. Heavy rainfall will cause life-threatening flash flooding and mudslides in Belize, El Salvador,

eastern Guatemala, western Nicaragua and the Mexican state of Quintana Roo, the NHC added. Alerts have also been issued in Panama and Costa Rica, which have both recorded several storm-related deaths in recent weeks. Sara will slowly move near the northern coast of Honduras over the next couple of days and bring isolated areas up to 76cm of rain, the NHC said. It is expected to approach Belize and Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula late this weekend, it added. - AFP



Taiwan president 'plans Hawaii visit on sensitive trip to Pacific'

Reuters
Washington/Taipei

Taiwan President Lai Ching-te is planning to stop in Hawaii and maybe Guam on a visit to Taipei's diplomatic allies in the Pacific in the coming weeks, sources said, a sensitive trip coming shortly after the US election.

Lai, who won election in January, has yet to travel overseas since taking office in May. China, which views Taiwan as its own territory, detests Lai as a "separatist" and routinely objects to any interaction between Taiwan's government and foreign officials.

Six sources briefed on the visit, speaking on condition of anonymity given the sensitivity of the matter, said Lai is planning a

stopover in Hawaii as part of an overseas trip starting in the coming weeks.

A stopover in the US territory of Guam was also being discussed, four of the sources said. Both Hawaii and Guam are home to major US military bases.

Two of the sources said that the stopovers would be part of Lai's visit to Taiwan's diplomatic allies in the Pacific.

The Pacific countries of Marshall Islands, Tuvalu and Palau are three of the 12 remaining states which maintain formal ties with Taipei. Reuters was unable to determine precisely which countries Lai would go to and dates of the visits.

Taiwan's presidential office said Lai "at present has no overseas trips planned", but if he does the government will announce it

at an appropriate time.

The US is Taiwan's most important international backer and arms supplier, despite the lack of formal diplomatic recognition.

"We refer you to the Taiwan authorities for the travel plans of high-level Taiwan officials. We have nothing further on this," a state department spokesperson said.

Lin Jian, a Chinese foreign

ministry spokesperson, told reporters in Beijing that the government's position has consistently been to oppose such transits and that China urges the US not to permit this for Lai.

Lai's trip will be taking place at the tail end of the administration of President Joe Biden, who has said US forces would defend Taiwan in the event of a Chinese invasion.

Landslide win for Lanka president's leftist coalition in snap elections

AFP
Colombo

Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake thanked voters yesterday for delivering his leftist coalition a landslide victory in snap parliamentary elections that repudiated establishment parties blamed for triggering an economic crisis.

Dissanayake, a self-avowed Marxist, swept September presidential elections on a promise to combat graft and recover stolen assets, two years after a slow-motion financial crash imposed widespread hardships on the island nation.

His decision to immediately call polls nearly 10 months ahead of schedule and secure parliamentary backing for his agenda was vindicated yesterday, with his National People's Power (NPP) coalition taking 159 seats in the 225-member assembly.

The result delivered the NPP a comfortable two-thirds majority that will allow it to push constitutional amendments, including for its proposed plan to scrap the presidency altogether and make the prime minister the head of government. "Thank you to all who voted for a renaissance," Dissanayake said in a brief statement on social media platform X.

The coalition won a monumental 61.5% of the vote while opposition leader Sajith Prema-

dasa's party was well behind with 17.6%.

In a sign of the magnitude of support for Dissanayake, his party won the most votes in the northern district of Jaffna, dominated by the island's minority Tamil community, for the first time since independence from Britain in 1948.

Voter turnout was estimated at under 70%, less than the 80% of eligible voters who cast a ballot in September's presidential polls.

Dissanayake, the 55-year-old son of a labourer, had been an MP for nearly 25 years and was briefly an agriculture minister but his NPP coalition held just three seats in the outgoing assembly.

He stormed to the presidency after successfully distancing himself from successive leaders blamed for steering the country to its 2022 economic crisis. The financial crash was the worst in Sri Lanka's history as an independent nation, sparking months-long shortages of food, fuel and essential medicines. The resulting public anger culminated in the storming of then-president Gotabaya Rajapaksa's compound, prompting his resignation and temporary exile.

Dissanayake's pledge to change a "corrupt" political culture has resonated with millions of Sri Lankans struggling to make ends meet following tax hikes and other austerity measures imposed to repair the nation's finances.



Residents wait for a ride after the local government implemented a preemptive evacuation in Legazpi, Albay, Philippines, yesterday.

Philippines braces for new storm after Typhoon Usagi wreaks havoc

Reuters
Manila

Philippines President Ferdinand Marcos Jr yesterday directed authorities to stock up on food and other supplies in advance as Typhoon Man-yi threatened to hit the capital region.

Marcos warned of potential storm surges that meteorologists estimate could reach up to 3m and told residents to seek safe shelter ahead of heavy rain in eastern provinces and Metro Manila over the weekend.

Man-yi, locally known as Pepito, is the sixth tropical cyclone to enter the typhoon-battered Philippines in a month.

"We have to do a little extra here. We are already in bad shape because of the saturation, the damage done to infrastructure, homes and other infrastructure," Marcos told a situation briefing.

"Watch out for the storm surge and continue what you are doing on the relief goods."

The National Capital Region (NCR), a dense urban sprawl of 16 cities and home to more than 13mn people, is at risk of flooding from heavy to intense rains starting tomorrow at noon, data from the state weather agency showed.

"NCR is in greatest danger here," Interior Secretary Juanito Victor Remulla told the briefing. "NCR is very vulnerable to flooding again."

Man-yi gained strength overnight in the western Pacific, with sustained winds of up to 150km per hour and gusts of up to 185kph. It is forecast to make landfall in the eastern Catanduanes province between today evening and tomorrow morning.

Another typhoon, Usagi, weakened sharply yesterday after bearing down on the Philippines' northern towns, blowing away houses in its path before heading towards Taiwan.

No casualties have yet been reported from

Usagi but thousands of families living in vulnerable communities have fled ahead of its arrival.

Rueli Rapsing, head of the Cagayan disaster relief office, said town officials are still checking the extent of the damage from the storm.

"There were more homes that were partially or totally blown after Marce (Typhoon Yinxing). Currently, we're moving around assessing the damage," Rapsing said yesterday.

Mandatory evacuations of vulnerable residents in coastal towns in Typhoon Man-yi's path will begin soon, the interior ministry said.

In October, Tropical Storm Trami and Typhoon Kong-rey brought heavy flooding and triggered landslides, killing 162 people with 22 still missing, according to government data.

Four storms churned in the western Pacific ocean at the same time this month, the first time it has happened since records began in 1951, the Japan Meteorological Agency said.

S Korean opposition leader handed suspended jail term

A South Korean court yesterday handed the country's opposition leader a suspended prison sentence for violating election laws - a ruling that may prevent him from running in the next presidential election. The Seoul Central District Court found Lee Jae-myung, the leader of the main opposition Democratic Party, guilty and handed him a suspended one-year jail term. The case concerns statements Lee made on the campaign trail, when he narrowly lost to incumbent President Yoon Suk-yeol in 2022. Prosecutors had asked for a two-year prison sentence, saying Lee made a false statement in a TV interview in December 2021 that made people think he did not know Kim Moon-ki, a key figure in a controversial development project. Kim had been found dead days earlier, although police found no evidence of foul play. Lee was also accused of lying during a parliamentary hearing in 2021.

Maori lawmakers protest bill



Maori lawmakers perform the Haka, a traditional ceremonial dance, disrupting parliament in a protest against a bill that aims to reinterpret a centuries-old document seen as New Zealand's founding treaty with its Indigenous people.

Philippines sent supplies to disputed shoal: China

Reuters
Beijing

China yesterday said the Philippines had sent supplies to a warship grounded on Second Thomas Shoal, a disputed atoll in the South China Sea.

In a separate statement, the Philippine Coast Guard said it had rotated personnel staffing the Sierra Madre and sent supplies to the vessel, which has been marooned there since 1999.

China's Coast Guard said the supply run had proceeded "with permission" to what it considers an "illegally" beached ship.

The Philippine Coast Guard had no immediate response to China's claim, which it has previously made, that it had allowed the mission to proceed.

China and the Philippines have traded barbs for months over manoeuvres at Second Thomas Shoal, an atoll within Manila's 200-nautical-mile Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in the South China Sea.

"It is hoped the Philippines will honour its commitments, work with China in the same direction, and jointly manage the maritime situation," Liu Dejun, a spokesman for China's Coast Guard said in a statement about Thursday's re-supply run by the Philippines.

China claims almost the entire South China Sea, despite overlapping claims by Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Vietnam.

It has rejected a 2016 ruling from the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague that said its claims had no legal basis.

N Korea leader orders 'mass production' of attack drones

AFP
Seoul

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un has ordered the "mass production" of attack drones, state media reported yesterday, as concerns mount over the country's deepening military co-operation with Russia.

Pyeongang first unveiled its attack drones in August, with experts saying the capability may be attributable to the country's budding alliance with Russia.

The nuclear-armed country has ratified a landmark defence pact with Moscow and is accused

of deploying thousands of troops to Russia to support its war in Ukraine, prompting South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol to warn about the potential transfer of sensitive Russian military technology to North Korea.

Kim on Thursday oversaw the tests of drones designed to hit both land and sea targets, produced by North Korea's Unmanned Aerial Technology Complex, the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said.

"He underscored the need to build a serial production system as early as possible and go into full-scale mass production," KCNA said.

The unmanned drones are designed to carry explosives and be

deliberately crashed into enemy targets, effectively acting as guided missiles.

Thursday's test saw the drones "precisely" hit targets after flying along predetermined paths, KCNA reported.

"The suicide attack drones to be used within different striking ranges are to perform a mission to precisely attack any enemy targets on the ground and in the sea," the agency said.

Kim said the drones were an "easy to use...component of striking power" due to their relatively low production cost and expansive range of applications, according to KCNA. He said the North had "recently at-

tached importance" to developing unmanned hardware systems and to integrating them with the country's overall military strategy.

Experts said the drones - in images released by state media in August - looked similar to the Israeli-made "HAROP" drone, Russian-made "Lancet-3" and Israeli "HERO 30".

North Korea may have acquired these technologies from Russia. In 2022, Pyongyang sent drones across the border that Seoul's military was unable to shoot down, saying they were too small.

This year, North Korea has been bombarding the South with trash-carrying balloons, in what it

calls retaliation for activists in the South floating anti-regime propaganda missives northwards.

The North has also accused Seoul of violating its sovereignty by flying drones over its capital Pyongyang to drop propaganda leaflets.

By mentioning the "production and practical deployment of various drones", North Korea may be hinting it could follow suit, Yang Moo-jin, president of the University of North Korean Studies in Seoul, said.

Pyeongang could be "suggesting the possibility of using balloons to disseminate leaflets to the South with such drones," Yang said.

"Considering the effectiveness

of drone attacks observed in the war in Ukraine, they could also be effectively utilised in the ongoing conflict there," he added.

South Korea launched a drone operation command last year to better address the growing threat.

In October, the North amended its constitution to define South Korea as a "hostile" state, an illustration of a sharp deterioration in ties since Kim in January declared Seoul his country's "principal enemy".

The North has continued to carry out UN sanctions-defying ballistic missile tests, and last month blew up its roads and railways linking it to the South.

DEFENCE

UK scrambles jets to monitor Russia plane over North Sea

UK jets were scrambled to monitor a Russian reconnaissance aircraft flying close to UK airspace, the defence minister said yesterday. Two Typhoons from RAF Lossiemouth in Scotland followed the Russian Bear-F aircraft as it flew over the North Sea on Thursday, the ministry said. "At no time was it able to enter UK sovereign airspace," it added. The Typhoons were supported by a Voyager refuelling aircraft. "Our adversaries should be in no doubt of our steadfast determination and formidable ability to protect the UK," said Armed Forces minister Luke Pollard. The Royal Navy also shadowed Russian military vessels passing through the Channel this week.

TREND

Irish PM's party holds six-point lead in first campaign poll

Irish Prime Minister Simon Harris' Fine Gael party holds a six-point lead over both its main coalition partner Fianna Fail and the main opposition party Sinn Fein, the first opinion poll of the general election campaign showed yesterday. Fine Gael led the Irish Times/Ipsos B&A poll on 25%, two points lower than the last Irish Times poll in September while fellow centre-right Fianna Fail remained on 19% alongside left wing Sinn Fein, whose support fell by one point. The main movers ahead of the November 29 election were Ireland's already large group of independent candidates, who rose four points to 20%.

REPORT

UK air traffic control 'needs to learn lessons of 2023 meltdown'

Britain's aviation regulator said the country's air traffic operator should review its contingency plans and notify airlines of possible disruption earlier, in its report on an air traffic meltdown in August 2023. The incident, caused by an IT failure, affected 700,000 passengers in the peak holiday season. The disruption was condemned by the government, travellers and airline bosses, who said it would cost them over £100mn (\$127mn) in refunds and compensation. "The report makes clear once again that airlines and passengers were severely let down by NATS due to its failure of resilience and lack of planning," easyJet chief executive Johan Lundgren said.

PROPOSAL

UK government plans mega pension funds

Britain plans to create mega pension funds, potentially boosting investment in the country by around £80bn in a move mirroring schemes in Australia and Canada, Finance Minister Rachel Reeves announced. Labour's "megafunds" plan could unlock the equivalent of \$104bn "for infrastructure projects and businesses of the future", the Treasury said in a statement. Labour, whose general election win in July resulted in party leader Keir Starmer becoming prime minister, aims to pool assets of 86 local government pension schemes in England and Wales. The Treasury added that together the schemes were on course to manage £500bn in assets by 2030.

Rebel attacks keep Kashmir on the boil

AFP
Srinagar, India

Ambushes, firefights and a market grenade blast: headline-grabbing attacks in Kashmir are designed to challenge New Delhi's bid to portray normality in the territory, Indian security officials say. "The attacks are not merely about killing, but also to set a narrative to counter the Indian narrative - that everything is fine," said the former head of India's Northern Command forces, retired general Deependra Singh Hooda.

Many attacks take place in forested mountains far from larger settlements.

But the huge military presence visible in sprawling camps and roadblocks - roughly one in every 25 people in Kashmir is an Indian soldier - serves as a constant reminder.

Many are frustrated by traffic jams caused by military orders that civilian cars stay at least 1,640 feet away from army vehicles.

Yet those who have long lived under the shadow of the grinding insurgency seemingly shrug off the threat.

When an attacker this month hurled a grenade at security forces in a busy market - killing a woman and wounding 11 civilians - shoppers returned within a couple of hours.

This month, thousands attended an army recruitment drive, even as soldiers battled gunmen in a nearby district.

Attacks appear dramatic, including a gun battle in downtown Srinagar in early November that police said killed a commander of the Lashkar-e-Taiba militant group.

Earlier this year, attacks in the Jammu area prompted the army to supply thousands of village defence guards with rifles.

But the death toll of 120 civilians, soldiers and rebels killed this year is, so far, similar in intensity to 2023, when 130 people died, according to the South Asia Terrorism Portal, a New Delhi-based monitoring group.

The Indian army says around 720 militants have been killed in the past five years.

Dead dolphin found on beach



Forest officials examine a carcass of an Indo-Pacific bottlenose dolphin washed ashore at the Marina beach in Chennai, India, yesterday.

Reliance asks India to review reach of Starlink, Amazon

Reuters
New Delhi

Billionaire Mukesh Ambani's Reliance has asked India's telecom regulator to review the potential reach of Elon Musk's Starlink and Amazon's Kuiper before awarding satellite spectrum amid concerns local players could suffer, a letter showed yesterday.

Reliance's letter, which is not public, is Ambani's last-ditch effort in an ongoing face-off with Musk over how India should grant spectrum for satellite services. While Reliance has called for an auction, India has sided with

Musk who - in line with global trends - wanted an administrative allocation.

In the letter, Reliance said it carried about 15bn gigabyte of data every month in India after spending about \$23bn on spectrum auctions over the years, but Starlink would target the same customers with a potential capacity of nearly 18bn gigabyte of data via its satellites with a likely much lower outlay.

Experts say auctions tend to mean higher initial investments which could have deterred foreign players in favour of Reliance.

"The authority should critically examine the capacities created by these mega...constellations such as Starlink and Kuiper," the letter dated November 15 said.

A senior government source at the telecom regulator said all feedback being received would be reviewed before making final recommendations, tentatively before the year end.

Starlink, Amazon and Reliance did not respond.

Starlink is seeking security clearance for a licence to offer satellite broadband services in India and will get a permit if it satisfies all conditions, the telecom minister said this week.

Ambani once gave data for free on his mobile plans, and Musk has adopted similarly aggressive tactics. In Kenya, Musk priced Starlink at \$10 per month, versus \$120 in the US, unsettling local telecom players.

Rare Roman gladiator knife from Hadrian's Wall goes on display

A 2,000-year-old Roman knife handle shaped like a gladiator that was discovered in northern England will go on public display for the first time, the charity English Heritage said yesterday.

Two divers found the well-preserved object in 1997 in the River Tyne at Corbridge near Hadrian's Wall, the 73-mile fortification built by the Romans to defend the northern limits of their empire. It was donated to English Heritage this year.

The copper alloy handle, part of a folding knife, was probably used as a souvenir, reflecting the celebrity status that gladiators enjoyed as they fought in arenas for the entertainment of the public, English Heritage said.

"This beautifully made knife handle is a testament to how pervasive this celebrity culture was, reaching all the way to Hadrian's Wall at the very edge of the Roman Empire," archaeologist Frances McIntosh said. Some two millennia later, the fascination has endured, highlighted by the Gladiator film sequel which released yesterday.



A woman from the English Heritage historic-sites charity displays a 2,000-year-old Roman knife handle, shaped like a gladiator that was discovered in 1997 in the River Tyne at Corbridge Roman Town, Northumberland, Britain, yesterday.

Schools empty as smog persists in Delhi

AFP
New Delhi

Residents in India's capital New Delhi again woke under a blanket of choking smog yesterday, a day after authorities closed primary schools and imposed measures aimed at alleviating the annual crisis.

Delhi and the surrounding metropolitan area, home to more than 30mn people, consistently tops world rankings for air pollution in winter.

The smog is blamed for thousands of premature deaths each year and is an annual source of misery for residents, with various piecemeal government initiatives failing to measurably address the problem. All primary schools were shut by government order on Thursday night with young pupils - particularly vulnerable to smog-

related ailments due to their age - instead moving to online lessons.

"I have an eight-year-old kid and he has been suffering from a cough the past couple of days," Delhi resident Satraj. "The government did the right thing by shutting schools." Thursday's edict also banned construction work, ordered drivers of older diesel-powered vehicles to stay off the streets and directed water trucks to spray roads in a bid to clear dust particles from the air.

Delhi's air quality nonetheless deteriorated to "hazardous" levels for the fourth consecutive day this week, according to monitoring firm IQAir. Levels of PM2.5 pollutants - dangerous cancer-causing micro-particles that enter the bloodstream through the lungs - were recorded more than 26 times above the WHO's recommended daily maximum yesterday.

UK economy slows, hitting govt growth plans

AFP
London

Britain's economy grew less than expected in the third quarter, official data showed yesterday, dealing a blow to the Labour government that has set its sights on growth expansion.

Gross domestic product (GDP) expanded 0.1% in the July-September period, a slowdown compared to 0.5% growth in the second quarter, the Office for National Statistics said.

The data covers the period of the Labour government's first few months in office and lead up to its

highly-anticipated maiden budget at the end of October.

The latest GDP figure lagged behind economist forecasts of 0.2% growth, with analysts partly attributing the slowdown to uncertainty ahead of the budget that included business tax rises and plans for higher state borrowing.

"Improving economic growth is at the heart of everything I am seeking to achieve, which is why I am not satisfied with these numbers," Finance Minister Rachel Reeves said in reaction to yesterday's data.

"At my budget, I took the difficult choices to fix the foundations and stabilise our public finances,"

she added. Reeves spoke after addressing business leaders in a keynote speech late Thursday in which she outlined plans to drive forward Britain's economy by creating mega pension funds and cutting red tape that would enable greater risk-taking in the financial sector.

She claimed measures to tighten regulation following the 2008 global financial crisis had "gone too far".

Reeves also used her speech to stress the need for "free and open" trade with the US under president-elect Donald Trump - and with the European Union.

However, she insisted Britain

would not reverse Brexit by re-entering the EU single market or customs union.

"Improving economic growth is at the heart of everything I am seeking to achieve, which is why I am not satisfied with these numbers"

Speaking alongside Reeves, Bank of England governor Andrew Bailey said Britain should "welcome opportunities to rebuild (EU) relations while respecting the decision of the British people" to exit the bloc in a 2016 referendum.

Bailey echoed analysis elsewhere by stating Brexit had impacted Britain economically.

"The changing trading relationship with the EU has weighed on the level of potential supply," he said.

"The impact on trade seems to be more in goods than services."

The EU yesterday forecast that the eurozone economy is expected to grow 1.3% next year from 0.8 in 2024.

Yesterday's UK data also showed that the country's economy shrank slightly in September.

Analysts attributed part of the third-quarter slowdown to worries about the impacts of the budget.

Lindsay James, strategist at

Quilter Investors, said the persistent "gloomy messaging" in the run up to the event caused "consumers and businesses to pause spending and await what pain was to come".

The budget set out to focus on long-term growth to meet Prime Minister Keir Starmer's pre-election pledge.

It was the first Labour budget in nearly 15 years, after the party's re-election in July that ended years of Conservative rule.

The government's first few months in power has coincided with a drop to UK inflation, resulting in the Bank of England cutting interest rates, in turn helping to ease cost-of-living pressures.



CHAIRMAN

Abdullah bin Khalifa al-Attiyah

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Faisal Abdulhameed al-Mudahka

Deputy Managing Editor

K T Chacko

Production Editor

Amjad Khan

- 📍 P.O.Box 2888, Doha, Qatar
- ✉ editor@gulf-times.com
- ☎ 44350478 (News),
- ☎ 44466404 (Sport),
- ☎ 44466636 (Home delivery)
- ☎ 44350474
- 📘 facebook.com/gulftimes
- 🐦 twitter.com/gulftimes_Qatar
- 📷 instagram.com/gulftimes
- 📺 youtube.com/GulftimesVideos



Qatar holds top spot on global humanitarian and relief map

QNA
Doha

Qatar holds a prominent position on the global humanitarian and relief map, having become one of the leading countries in this field. Its institutions are at the forefront of initiatives in regions affected by conflict, disasters, and crises across the globe.

To ensure the effectiveness of these efforts, Qatar has doubled its efforts and strengthened strategic partnerships with many countries. The country has launched more initiatives aimed at helping communities that are most vulnerable to risks, disasters, and poverty worldwide.

Development is a key component of Qatar National Vision 2030, which prioritises human, social, economic, and environmental development. Qatar has taken multiple approaches to enhance its international partnerships in this field, benefiting humanity through relief projects and improving the lives of millions across the world.

In this context, Qatar, along with the United Kingdom and France, launched an initiative for international development co-operation and humanitarian response, allocating \$50m through a joint fund to tackle the most urgent humanitarian and developmental challenges, reflecting a shared responsibility to respond to global crises.

Qatar has signed several agreements, memorandums of understanding, and letters of intent, including an MoU with Canada to enhance development co-operation. This partnership focuses on strengthening joint foreign aid policies, empowering youth, promoting women's economic and social roles, and reducing poverty to achieve sustainable development goals.

Under this memorandum, both countries will collaborate on activities in shared sectors, with a focus on education and aligning views on issues discussed at multilateral forums and events.

Qatar, through Education Above All Foundation, and Canada, through the Global Affairs Canada, have committed a joint \$95m to empower youth in over 60 developing countries.

Qatar and Canada will also collaborate on assisting conflict-affected populations in Sudan and Syria through humanitarian aid and joint projects for displaced people.

Both countries have affirmed their commitment to providing humanitarian assistance to Gaza in close collaboration with Jordan, as well as supporting Gaza residents evacuated to Qatar for medical treatment, particularly focusing on psychological and mental health support in partnership with the Qatar Red Crescent Society.

During the visit of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani to Sweden, several memorandums of understanding were signed to enhance co-operation between the two countries. These include memorandums of understanding on peace and reconciliation, humanitarian and development co-operation, and social development and family support.

Qatar and France also signed several agreements related to humanitarian and development co-operation, including an MoU on facilitating co-operation between the Qatar Fund for Development (QFFD) and the French Development Agency (AFD), as well as declarations of intent concerning development and humanitarian aid and emergency response.



Moreover, Qatar and Indonesia signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to provide scholarships for Afghan students to continue their education at Indonesian universities.

Qatar has been keen to co-operate with all international partners to ensure the continuous flow of humanitarian aid to Gaza and Lebanon, consistently emphasising the need for sustainable delivery of assistance.

In the context of growing international partnerships, Qatar's relations with France and the United Kingdom have yielded fruitful collaboration in providing humanitarian aid, particularly to Gaza and Lebanon.

Furthermore, Qatar's close co-operation with Türkiye has resulted in sending a ship loaded with more than 1,900 tonnes of humanitarian aid to the besieged Palestinian brothers in Gaza, which reflects a shared vision regarding the unprecedented humanitarian crisis in the region and the need for regional and international efforts to address it by all means.

In terms of humanitarian collaboration between Qatar and Italy, a joint effort to alleviate the suffering of Palestinian civilians in Gaza saw the arrival of the Italian ship "Vulcano" at the port of La Spezia, Italy, carrying a number of wounded individuals from Gaza for treatment in Italian hospitals.

The ship had sailed from the port of Al Arish in Egypt, carrying 60 Palestinians,

including 18 children wounded in the ongoing war in Gaza and 42 family members. The ship's medical team included six members of the Qatari armed forces. The ship had docked at the Egyptian port of Al Arish for nearly two months, functioning as a field hospital to provide medical services to injured Palestinians coming from Gaza.

The humanitarian medical co-operation between Qatar and France also stands as a leading example of humanitarian work and healthcare relief, as French Navy aircraft transported 124 injured individuals from Gaza, with 54 of them later transferred to Qatar for treatment.

Additionally, both countries co-operated in a joint operation to deliver ambulances, tents, and humanitarian supplies to Gaza, agreeing on the urgent need to increase the delivery and flow of humanitarian aid throughout Gaza and to continue their joint efforts in providing emergency assistance.

Qatar's international co-operation strategy supports the goal of advancing economic and social development in low-income countries, in line with the global objectives of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. This strategy supports the global partnership for development to eliminate poverty, reduce inequalities, and promote economic development and environmental sustainability. Many countries across all continents have benefited from Qatar's aid, which has reached more than 100 nations worldwide.

COP talks struggle in a year of climate stress, bickering

This year's UN climate summit is struggling to focus minds on the health of the planet, with turbulent geopolitics, a confrontational host and the re-election of US climate sceptic Donald Trump stealing the limelight. The annual conference that aims to produce global agreements to limit the warming which is tipping the world towards climate catastrophe is becoming a forum of frustration for negotiators seeking a finance deal in Baku.

"The UN climate and environmental negotiations are increasingly becoming a tragic spectacle," said Juan Carlos Monterrey, Special Representative for Climate of the Ministry of Environment of Panama.

Oil producer Azerbaijan, the host of this year's 29th Conference of the Parties, is tasked with the limited goal of rallying countries around a target for annual financial aid for developing nations facing the rising costs of climate change.

It is a mandate that pales in comparison with the agenda for next year's confab in Brazil's Amazon rainforest, where governments will chart a course for the next decade. But it is considered all-important for many countries ahead of Brazil's COP30 and achieving it requires diplomatic skill.

Azerbaijan President Ilham Aliyev berated the US and the European Union as climate hypocrites at the summit's opening, souring the mood for countries central to the finance goal.

"The UN climate and environmental negotiations are increasingly becoming a tragic spectacle"

He later branded France guilty of colonial "crimes", after which France's climate minister cancelled her trip to the venue.

Yesterday, midway through the two-week summit, a group of former leaders, climate experts and scientists published an open letter calling for the COP

process to be reformed, saying it "cannot deliver the change at exponential speed and scale, which is essential to ensure a safe climate landing for humanity." The COP29 presidency's lead negotiator acknowledged that the multilateral process was under pressure in Baku.

"We consider COP29 as a litmus test for the global climate architecture," Azerbaijan's Yalchin Rafiyev told reporters. The summit began on Monday with a dispute about the agenda, but the host nation did manage to get a deal done to endorse a global carbon market framework.

Many of the engines that drove past pacts have stuttered this year. There has been no bilateral US-China deal, like those that boosted past COP ambitions.

The European Union, another bullish voice on climate in the past, was also on the back foot in Baku following a surge in support back home for right-wing political parties.

Many of the biggest players in climate talks didn't even send their leaders this year, including the US, China, India and others.

While many business executives skipped this year, the fossil fuel industry showed up, with the heads of Exxon, BP, Total, and Saudi Aramco.

Trump's re-election led some countries to lower their expectations before the COP had convened.

"This COP was hamstrung from the beginning," said Jon Creyts, president of RMI, an energy transition think tank.

Trump has promised to withdraw the US from international climate co-operation, as he did during his 2017-21 term, and has called global warming a hoax.

Ahead of the Baku summit, EU Climate Chief Wopke Hoekstra said the EU would "do our utmost to make the COP into a success, even if it's only going to be a success of sorts".

AOSIS negotiator Michai Robertson said it would be harder for negotiations to bounce back if Trump quits the Paris Agreement again.

"We're in a different geopolitical context than we were the first time that they left. A lot of other countries are leaning right. There's...less sort of camaraderie amongst the international community to get things done," Robertson said. - Reuters

Trouble lurks beneath the surface of ocean conservation

By César Gaviria and Patti Harris
Bogota

The ocean is our greatest natural resource. It provides half the planet's oxygen, helps to feed half the world's people, and, as the world's largest carbon sink, is one of our best defences against climate change. But it is under attack like never before.

Sea surface temperatures are hotter than ever, which is killing marine life and fuelling stronger hurricanes. Many big-fish populations have been decimated. Half of all coral reefs - which serve as essential habitats for marine life and as vital coastal defences - have been destroyed. This sustained degradation of the ocean is threatening human life around the world. Stopping it is essential, and the good news is that a framework for doing so is already in place.

Two years ago, the world adopted the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, which set a target of protecting and conserving at least 30% of the world's land and ocean by 2030. Then, at the COP16 UN Biodiversity Conference in Cali, Colombia, last month, representatives from governments around the world took stock of the progress made so far. What stood out is that the host country is an example both of what is possible and of how much work remains to be done.

Over the past decade, Colombia has emerged as a global leader in conservation, and for good reason. Colombia is one of the world's most biodiverse countries, and, as one of only two South American countries with Pacific and Atlantic coastlines, its future is inextricably



Half of all coral reefs - which serve as essential habitats for marine life and as vital coastal defences - have been destroyed.

linked to the bodies of water that surround it. In 2022, the government announced that it had protected 30% of its ocean area, making Colombia the first country in the Western Hemisphere to do so - and prompting other Latin American countries to follow its lead.

A new report commissioned by Bloomberg Philanthropies through the Bloomberg Ocean Fund, and developed in partnership with other major marine-conservation organisations, shows that Latin America is now leading the way on global marine protection. Around 26% of the maritime area surrounding Latin America and the Caribbean is now under some form of marine conservation protection - higher than any other region in the world.

But this statistic only reflects the coverage of official marine protected areas. It does not tell us what is going on underwater. There, unfortunately, the data are

much less promising. Only 2.5% of the region's ocean, and a mere 1.5% of Colombia's maritime area, appears to be getting the level of protection necessary to conserve marine life.

The picture is even bleaker in the rest of the world. The United Kingdom, for example, designates 47% of its domestic waters (excluding Overseas Territories) as marine protected areas, but less than 1% have been assessed as effectively protected. Japan, meanwhile, has designated 7.3% of its domestic waters as marine protected areas, with 0% assessed as effectively protected.

The ocean can continue protecting and feeding the world only if governments deliver on their commitments to protect it. Recognising the need for an urgent change in course, the Bloomberg Ocean Fund report lays out a series of crucial next steps to help governments effectively protect 30% of their ocean areas by 2030.

But, as Mike Bloomberg likes to say: If you can't measure it, you can't manage it.

Increased data collection is therefore essential. With more actionable information at their disposal, countries can better track their progress, and key stakeholders - not least local coastal communities - can participate more fully in conservation efforts. For that, we need to get tools that have proven invaluable for fostering transparency and accountability, such as SkyTruth's 30x30 Progress Tracker, into more people's hands.

The report also urges wealthy countries to deliver on their promises. In 2022, Global North governments committed to increase funding for developing countries to at least \$20bn per year by 2025, and to \$30bn by 2030. However, little of this funding has been delivered. While the recently announced \$163m in new pledges from donor countries is welcome, such sums are a drop in the bucket. Far more funding is desperately needed to support conservation efforts across Latin America and other regions, especially in the Global South. And it should go without saying that promised financing should be delivered in a timely fashion.

With the COP16 negotiations now paused until a later date, the stakes for getting this right couldn't be higher. Billions of lives depend on urgent global action to protect the ocean. It is imperative that more countries move aggressively to adopt ambitious pledges - and the concrete policies and practices needed to fulfil them. - Project Syndicate

● César Gaviria, a former president of Colombia, is a board member of Oceana. Patti Harris is CEO of Bloomberg Philanthropies.

To Advertise
✉ gtadv@gulf-times.com

Display 44466621
Classified 44466609 44418811 44418811
✉ gtcad@gulf-times.com

Subscription
✉ circulation@gulf-times.com

DECISION

Austria to be cut off from Russian gas from today

Russia's Gazprom has told Austria that it is suspending gas deliveries from today, a gas flow monitoring platform reported yesterday, in a development that could signal the end of the last Russian gas supplies to Europe. In a notice published on the central European gas hub platform, Austrian oil and gas company OMV said it had been informed by Gazprom that the Russian gas producer would reduce its deliveries of natural gas to zero from 0500 GMT on November 16. Austria is one of the few European countries still dependent on Russian gas as much of the rest of the continent has reduced imports following Moscow's Ukraine invasion.

COMMENT

Putin 'looking into slow YouTube speeds issue'

The Kremlin said problems with slower speeds on YouTube in Russia were linked to Google's failure to comply with Russian law and that President Vladimir Putin was looking into the issue. Russian internet monitoring services have reported mass outages of the online video hosting service, which is owned by Google, in the last few months. Russia blames this on Google's failure to upgrade equipment, allegations disputed by the company and technology experts. A Kremlin spokesman said the question of improving speeds on YouTube, used by more than 50mn Russians every day, according to Mediascope, is not high on people's agendas.

FALLOUT

Croatian PM fires health minister suspected of graft

Croatia's premier sacked his health minister after the official was arrested on corruption allegations and named as a suspect in a separate EU graft probe. Croatia has long struggled to contain rampant corruption. "This morning, former (health) minister Vili Beros and two other individuals were arrested as part of an operation" by anti-corruption officials, Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic told a press conference shortly after announcing the minister had been fired. The announcement came as the European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO) in Zagreb said it had launched a probe into eight people, including Beros and the directors of two hospitals in the capital.

PEOPLE

Spanish leader defends handling of Valencia floods

The leader of Spain's Valencia region defended his handling of catastrophic floods that killed more than 200 people, saying yesterday he did everything possible in the face of a "monstrous avalanche of water that exceeded all weather forecasts". Addressing regional lawmakers, Carlos Mazón rejected calls to resign, although he said he would not evade responsibility and sought forgiveness over last month's disaster. "I am not going to deny failures, it is not possible to do so, nor would it be useful," Mazón, of the conservative People's Party, said. Mazón promised a public inquiry at the regional assembly into the national and regional governments' handling of the disaster.

10 people die in Spanish care home fire

AFP
Madrid

A fire killed 10 people yesterday in a home for the elderly and people with mental health issues in northeastern Spain, officials said.

A senior firefighter said a fire door had prevented the blaze from spreading, and one regional official praised the fast reaction of care home staff in evacuating residents.

A senior figure at the group running the home said the fire had probably been started by someone smoking.

Another two people were critically injured in the fire.

The fire, at the Jardines de Villafraanca residence in the town of Villafraanca de Ebro, broke out in the early hours of the morning, said the emergency services for the Aragon region on X.

There were 69 residents and two workers inside at the time, revising downward an early figure of 82 people inside.

Firefighters were able to quickly bring the fire under control. They blamed smoke inhalation for the deaths.

The fire had been concentrated in one room thanks to a security door, but smoke spread throughout the residence, Volga Ramirez Gamiz, the mayor of the town told reporters.

"There was a lot of smoke, outside too, you couldn't even breathe," she said, explaining that she had rushed to the home with her husband to help with the evacuations.

"We got everyone out who was alive before the fire brigade ar-

rived," she added. "Only the dead were left inside."

The 57 residents who survived and were uninjured were taken to another care home.

The facility was opened in 2008 as a home for the elderly, but recently had started taking in people with mental health problems.

Many of the residents had "mobility problems", which made it difficult to evacuate them quickly, said Gamiz.

All of the victims were residents of the facility, said head of the Aragon government, Jorge Azcon who declared a day of mourning.

"I think that the two workers at the residence heard the alarm and acted - I think they did an extraordinary job," he added.

Eduardo Sanchez, firefighter chief from the nearby city of Zaragoza, told reporters many of the residents "were in bed, unable to move. They were caught in the smoke".

But half of the building was spared the fire thanks to a fire door, he added.

Investigators are still looking at what might have caused the fire, but the director of the association running the residence, Paquita Morata, said "it was probably caused by someone smoking in a room."

Angel Victor Torres, minister in charge of co-operation with Spain's regions, suggested a lack of staff at the residence at the time of the blaze might have played a role in the death toll. It is important "that the residences have a different format, and undoubtedly these are issues that should also make us all think and reconsider," he told Spanish public television.

Protesters storm Abkhazia parliament over Russia deal



Protesters stormed the regional parliament in Abkhazia yesterday, forcing the government to halt an investment deal with Russia that some fear will spoil the breakaway Georgian region's natural beauty. The Black Sea separatist region is backed by Moscow but recognised as part of Georgia by most of the world. It has been thrust into turmoil over concerns that a proposed investment deal with Russia could see apartment complexes mushroom in a region famed for its natural beauty and beaches. Russian news agencies posted videos showing hundreds of demonstrators barging into the regional parliament on yesterday, where lawmakers had gathered to discuss ratifying the treaty. The state-run TASS news agency said protesters also took control of the presidential administration building, adjoining parliament.

Scholz urges Ukraine talks in first call with Putin since 2022

AFP
Berlin

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz yesterday urged Russian President Vladimir Putin to engage in peace talks with Ukraine, in the first call between the leaders in almost two years.

In the call, Scholz "condemned Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and called on President Putin to end it and withdraw troops", the chancellor's spokesman Steffen Hebestreit said.

The German leader "urged Russia to show willingness to negotiate with Ukraine with

the aim of achieving a just and lasting peace", Hebestreit added in a statement.

Scholz also stressed "Germany's unwavering determination to support Ukraine in its fight against Russian aggression for as long as necessary". The call comes at a crucial juncture in the war. Ukrainian troops are coming under pressure and the election of Donald Trump in the US has cast doubt over Washington's continued support for Kyiv.

The call between the two leaders was the first time they have been in contact since December 2022. The conversation lasted "for an hour", a German government source said.

Scholz "particularly condemned the Russian air strikes against civilian infrastructure

in Ukraine", said a government source.

"He made it clear that sending North Korean soldiers to Russia for combat missions against Ukraine would lead to a serious escalation and expansion of the conflict," the source added.

The Kremlin, in its readout of the conversation, said the two leaders had had a "frank exchange of views", adding that the call had been initiated by Germany.

"Possible agreements should take into account the security interests of the Russian Federation, proceed from the new territorial realities and, most importantly, address the root causes of the conflict," the Kremlin added.

Gunmen kill politician in Pakistan

Gunmen from the regional branch of the Islamic State group have killed a politician in northwest Pakistan, police said yesterday. "Jamaat-e-Islami Bajaur leader Sufi Hameed was leaving the mosque when two masked men on a motorcycle opened fire on him," senior police official Waqar Rafiq said. The official said the attackers escaped after shooting the politician in Bajaur district, near the border with Afghanistan where militants remain active. Islamic State Khorasan (IS-K) said its "soldiers shot an official of the political party", in a message on Telegram. IS-K has recently carried out several attacks against political parties, including a suicide bomb blast at a rally in Bajaur last year which killed at least 54 people including 23 children. "In this year alone, they have killed at least 39 people in targeted attacks and bomb explosions" in Bajaur, a security official said.

EU-Mercosur agreement opposed



A woman dressed as a cow holds a flag during a rally organised by the Confédération Paysanne du Lot et Garonne farmer union to protest against the EU-Mercosur agreement outside a Mercedes dealership in Le Passage, near Agen, France, yesterday. Demonstrations are being organised at the initiative of the departmental federations of farmer unions on November 18 and 19 in front of the prefectures or on the roundabouts called "roundabouts of Europe", the union organisations said. The protests were against the signing of a free trade agreement between the EU and the Mercosur countries.

Pakistan extends school closures in smog-hit cities

AFP
Lahore, Pakistan

Pakistan's most populated province of Punjab yesterday extended school closures in smog-hit major cities by a week, with thousands hospitalised as the country battles record air pollution.

The province, home to more than half of Pakistan's 240mn people, last week closed all schools until November 17 in major cities enveloped by smog.

Air quality in Lahore was deemed "hazardous", according to data by IQAir, with the concentration of deadly PM2.5 pollutants -- fine particulate matter in the air that causes most damage to health - around 30 times the level deemed acceptable by the World Health Organisation. "Schools will remain closed

for another week due to the hazardous air quality. Institutes including universities would switch to online classes to ensure the safety of students," Marriyum Aurangzeb, Punjab's environment minister, told a news conference.

Breathing the toxic air has catastrophic health consequences, with the WHO saying strokes, heart disease, lung cancer and respiratory diseases can be triggered by prolonged exposure. "More than 35,000 patients have been reported in the hospitals of Lahore due to smog-related health issues in almost a month," Aurangzeb said.

Children are often hardest hit, with Unicef noting that "prior to these record-breaking levels of air pollution, about 12% of deaths in children under five in Pakistan were due to air pollution".

Le Pen allies decry prosecutors' request for public office ban

Reuters
Paris

Allies of French far-right leader Marine Le Pen have accused the judiciary of a witch-hunt and undue meddling in democracy after prosecutors requested she face an obligatory five-year ban from public office if convicted of misusing European Union funds.

The prosecutors' move to seek a "provisional execution" on the public office ban - a tough, rarely used tool that means the ban would stand irrespective of any appeals - casts doubt on Le Pen's chances

of running in the 2027 presidential election.

Le Pen and co-accused members of her National Rally (RN) party deny using EU funds to pay party workers in France. They denounce the case as a politically motivated attempt to keep the RN from power.

"It's an attack on democracy," RN party chief Jordan Bardella wrote on X after the prosecutors made their request.

Their furious response echoes the frequent attacks by US president-elect Donald Trump against the US judicial system over the legal woes he has faced since his first term.

Judges and prosecutors around the world are wading into thorny political debates. While some applaud them for holding politicians to account, critics rail against mission creep by unelected despots in robes.

In Brazil, former Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro was banned from public office until 2030 for undermining faith in Brazil's electoral system. More recently, Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni reacted furiously to judges blocking migrants being shipped to Albania.

"Look at what's happening in the US, look at what's happening in Italy," said National Rally MEP Jean-Paul Garraud, a former judge

who joined the RN in 2018. "Clearly, France is not being spared."

Even some mainstream French politicians expressed concern. Gerald Darmanin, who was President Emmanuel Macron's interior minister until September, wrote on X that "it would be deeply shocking" if Le Pen were not allowed to stand in 2027.

The prosecutors' said they sought a "provisional execution" against Le Pen and her co-accused for repeated efforts to play for time in a probe that stretches back nearly a decade. An obligatory ban would prevent repeat offences, they argued.

In the event of a conviction,

judges may choose to reject the prosecutors' request.

Ludovic Priat, the president of the USM, the largest union representing French prosecutors and judges, said the decision to request a "provisional execution" was unusual.

"It's a decision that could be viewed as politicised," he said, adding that he believed prosecutors had used it "to say that what happened was not democratically acceptable."

It remains to be seen how Le Pen will now adapt her political strategy. Her years-long push to professionalise the RN, seeking to shed its reputation for racism stands in stark contrast to Trump's anti-

institutional movement.

Patrick Weil, a historian of the far right, doubted Le Pen would now adopt a more Trumpian strategy.

"I don't think she needs to go full MAGA," he said. "She can continue to say she is a victim of the elites."

Instead, Weil wondered whether Le Pen may now seek to topple the Barnier government, block any new government proposed by Macron, and try to force his swift resignation. "Le Pen may now have an incentive to bring Emmanuel Macron's time as president to an end already next year by teaming up with the left alliance," EuroIntelligence said in a note.



A view of the participants.



Children join a fitness activity on stage. PICTURES: Thajudheen

Thousands join World Diabetes Day walkathon

Nearly 15,000 Qatar residents came together yesterday to raise awareness about diabetes during the 18th annual walkathon organised by Qatar Diabetes Association (QDA) at Aspire Park.

The event marked World Diabetes Day, under this year's slogan 'Diabetes and Well-being'. The aim was to spread awareness about diabetes and recognise people living with diabetes in Qatar.

QDA executive director Dr Abdullah al-Hamaq said that in November, people worldwide participate in walkathons to mark World Diabetes Day. "Through the walkathon and other events during the day, we took important steps towards developing a wider understanding of diabetes."

The International Diabetes Federation (IDF) estimates that by 2021, about 10.5% of the adult population or 537mn people aged 20-79, live with diabetes, and nearly half of them are unaware of their condition. By 2045, the IDF predicts that one in eight adults or nearly 783mn people, will be living with diabetes, an increase of 46%.

"Therefore, our goal is to educate people and send the message that understanding diabetes is the first step toward managing and preventing it. Knowing the risks of developing diabetes or its complications, and what needs to be done, is essential for supporting prevention, early diagnosis, and timely treatment," Dr al-Hamaq added.

The events started at 2.30pm, and the walkathon began at 4pm,



The Qatar Armed Forces Band performed on the occasion.

with a large turnout of the public wearing blue T-shirts. Families, large groups of school students, and participants representing various organisations gathered to support the walk and take part in the health awareness activities.

The event offered platforms for health education on diabetes prevention, along with free blood glucose level screenings. Both children and adults enjoyed various sports activities, visited education tents, received diabetes screenings, and took part in the "Are You at Risk for Diabetes?" test, along with many other recreational activities.

In addition to setting up its own booths, QDA partnered with major health institutions in the

country, including Ministry of Public Health - Diabetes Section and Health Promotion, Hamad Medical Corporation, Primary Health Care Corporation, Qatar Cancer Society, Sidra Medicine, Heart Hospital, Qatar Biomedical Research Institute, Tobacco Control Center - HMC, Qatar Family and Community Medicine Society, Qatar Nursing Association, a number of private medical centres and many others.

Sports partners also participated in the walk, with the Qatar Sports for All Federation offering a variety of activities, including stretching exercises, archery, self-defence, and many other fun sports. The Qatar Women's Sports Committee entertained the audi-

ence with basketball and other sports, while the Qatar Chess Federation set up a large chessboard. Paris Saint-Germain Academy Qatar joined the event. Al-Rami Club offered a fun activity for attendees through a moving shooting field.

Before the walk, Dr al-Hamaq gave a speech, followed by the Qatar National Anthem and a performance by the Qatar Armed Forces Band. In his closing remarks, Dr al-Hamaq thanked all the partners and participants for their attendance and support, which played a significant role in the success of the walk. He urged everyone to prioritise the quality of life for people living with diabetes.



A view of the gathering at Aspire Park yesterday.



The day featured multiple activities involving all age groups.

Reckless motorist's vehicle shredded



The General Directorate of Traffic has seized and shredded an SUV after spotted a motorist driving it recklessly and performing stunts, posing imminent risks to his life, the lives of others and to private and public property, the Ministry of Interior (MoI), said in a X post. A judicial ruling was issued against him to confiscate the vehicle. The MoI reiterated it will not hesitate to take action against violators of the laws and regulations.

Grammy nomination for Qatar resident Gayathri

Qatar resident Gayathri Karunakar Menon has been nominated for the 2025 Grammy Awards as song writer/composer for her collaborative works in 'Telos', a 2024 album by Zedd (Anton Zaslavski).

Telos is one amongst the five contesting works for the 'Album of the Year' at the 67th Grammy Awards which will take place live at Crypto.com Arena in Los Angeles on February 2, broadcasting live on the CBS Television Network and streaming live and on demand on Paramount+.

The songs co-written by the Indian national, 'Out of time' and 'Tangerine rays' are available on streaming platforms Spotify and Apple Music. The nominations are in 'dance/electronic music' category.

Gayathri wrote Out of Time with Zedd, Ava Brignol and Bea Miller, and Tangerine Rays with Zedd, Bea Miller, Ellis Robert McKay Lawrie, and George Ku.



Gayathri Karunakar Menon

Zedd, a German music producer and DJ, gained fame with his 2012 single 'Clarity', featuring Foxes. The song became a massive hit, reaching the top 10

in several countries and earning him a Grammy Award for Best Dance Recording. He continued to release successful singles and albums.

Before the awards, final round voting will take place from December 12-January 3, 2025. The Recording Academy's voting members, composed of music creators, including artists, producers, songwriters, and engineers determine the Grammy winners across all categories revealed on Grammy night.

Brooklyn-based Gayathri had a Grammy nomination last year too, as a vocal collaborator in 'Shuruaat' album of Berkleean Indian Ensemble in the global music album category.

Gayathri was the first student to be registered at Birla Public School, Doha, from where she completed Grade X in 2015-2016, before moving on to Peepal Grove School in Andhra Pradesh, India.

She did her honours with Berklee College of Music, Boston. In 2020, Gayathri won the 'Songs for Social Change' contest conducted by Berklee, featuring 120 international music students.

"In 2022, Grammy award-winning record producer, songwriter, composer, and rapper Rodney Jerkins had signed Gayathri to an exclusive co-publishing deal as a song writer alongside universal music publishing group", her father and long-time Doha resident Karunakar Menon, a business manager, singer, and sports analyst, told Gulf Times.

Rodney Jerkins, AKA "Darkchild" is the producer of legendary singers like Michael Jackson and Whitney Houston.

Gayathri's mother Bindu Karunakar is an entrepreneur, drama artist, and cultural activist and sister Gauri Karunakar Menon is a Grade IX student at Peepal Grove School.

Environment ministry launches updated Air Quality Platform on its website

The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change has launched the updated version of the Air Quality Platform on its official website.

The new version offers enhanced data accuracy and a diverse range of information about air quality across all regions of the country. This update includes modifications that enable the display of all data according to the latest global standards, marking an important step toward establishing a national air quality monitoring network.

HE the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Abdulaziz

bin Ahmed bin Abdullah al-Mahmoud said that the focus on air quality aligns with the state's vision of protecting and preserving the local environment and its impact on public health, in line with Qatar National Vision 2030, which aims to build a healthy and prosperous society capable of managing the country's comprehensive development. He noted that the updated Air Quality Platform is part of the ministry's efforts toward achieving comprehensive and sustainable development, protecting and preserving all elements of the local environment as a national heritage to be safeguarded for

future generations, thereby ensuring the sustainability of national resources. Assistant Undersecretary for Environmental Affairs Abdulhadi Nasser al-Marri said that the launch of the platform's new version reflects national efforts to build a comprehensive air quality network. He added that, through this network, citizens can access air quality information across the country via a display screen available on the website. He noted that the platform presents monitoring results through colour-coded indicators, making it easier for the public to understand air quality levels in different areas. (QNA)