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Israel committed genocide in Gaza: HRW

AFP
Jerusalem

Israel yesterday faced accusations of committing "acts of genocide" in Gaza and exhibiting "signs of ethnic cleansing" in its military offensive in the Palestinian territory, charges the Israeli authorities denounced as "lies".

They are the latest in a series of accusations levelled against Israel during its 14-month war against Palestinian resistance movement Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

In a report focused specifically on water, New York-based Human Rights Watch (HRW) detailed what it called deliberate efforts by Israeli authorities "of a systematic nature" to deprive Gazans of water, which had "likely caused thousands of deaths... and will likely continue to cause deaths".

Israel's offensive since October 2023 has killed at least 45,129 people in Gaza, a majority of them civilians, according to figures from the Hamas-run territory's health ministry



A Palestinian child carries a water container in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday.

that the United Nations considers reliable.

COGAT, the Israeli defence ministry body responsible for civil affairs in the Palestinian territories, denied using water as a "weapon" and said that "three water lines from

Israel are active" in supplying water to Gaza.

In a separate report released yesterday, Doctors Without Borders (MSF) accused Israel of causing widespread devastation in Gaza and noted "signs of ethnic cleansing" in

the north of the Palestinian territory. Israel in early October began a major military operation in Gaza's north.

The HRW report detailed what the group said was the intentional damaging of water and sanitation infrastructure, as well as the blocking of fuel for generators.

The report concluded that in doing so, "Israeli authorities intentionally inflicted on the Palestinian population in Gaza 'conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part.'"

This, it said, amounted to the war crime of "extermination" and to "acts of genocide".

Under international law, proving genocide requires evidence of specific intent, which experts say is very difficult.

HRW pointed to a statement by then-defence minister Yoav Gallant as suggestive of Israel's intent. In October 2023, he declared a "complete siege" on Gaza and said: "No electricity, no food, no water, no gas - it's all closed."

**30 more killed
as ceasefire
talks continue**

Gaza's civil defence agency said a series of Israeli strikes yesterday killed at least 30 Palestinians. At least 13 people, including women and children, were killed when strikes hit two schools in eastern Gaza City. In a separate strike, another 13 people were killed when an Israeli warplane targeted a group of Palestinians filling water in Al-Shati refugee camp in western Gaza City. Amid the ongoing violence, the United States, Egypt, and Qatar are engaged in renewed negotiations to halt the war and secure the release of dozens of hostages still held in Gaza.

**65 arrested, 600
vehicles seized
for breaking rules**

Competent authorities at the Ministry of Interior have arrested a number of persons after they committed illegal practices and behaviours during the celebration of Qatar National Day at various locations. These acts included spraying foam and rubber bands at passers-by, indecent behaviour, climbing on the roofs of cars, and opening the doors of moving vehicles. Accordingly 65 violators belonging to different nationalities were arrested and referred to the Public Prosecution for the necessary legal procedures. In addition, 90 juveniles of different nationalities who violated the rules were arrested. Their guardians were summoned and the necessary pledges were taken from them not to repeat such acts. Legal measures were too taken against them. A Ministry of Interior statement said 600 vehicles were also seized after their drivers committed violations. Legal procedures are being completed against the violators.

**1.67mn travel on Doha
Metro, Lusail Tram
during Dec 11-18**

Qatar Railways Company (Qatar Rail) announced that Doha Metro and Lusail Tram networks recorded approximately 1.67mn passengers between December 11 and 18, 2024, including the FIFA Intercontinental Cup Qatar 2024 and National Day celebrations. The total number of Metro users during this period reached around 1.6mn, while the total number of Tram users was approximately 70,000. They relied on the Metro and Tram networks to access various event areas, tournament stadiums, and other key destinations connected to the networks. **Page 12**

**UN seeks World Court
opinion on 'aid'**

The United Nations General Assembly voted yesterday to ask the International Court of Justice for an opinion on Israel's obligations to facilitate aid to Palestinians that is delivered by states and international groups including the UN.

COMMUNITY
See Pages: 5 & 6

Villaggio Italia opens at Old Doha Port



Showcasing the vividness of Italian culture, tradition, cuisine and its position in innovation and agri-tech, the Villaggio Italia exhibition was opened at Old Doha Port yesterday. Open until Sunday (December 22), the exhibition, featuring Italian products is a part of the global tour of the historic sailing ship 'Amerigo Vespucci' which arrived in Doha to convey the message of peace and partnership and testify to the diplomatic relations between Qatar and Italy. **PICTURE:** Thajudheen. **Page 12**

US proud to call Qatar friend, says Blinken in QND message

QNA
Washington

US Secretary of State **Anthony Blinken** praised the prominent role played by Qatar in mediating regional conflicts, highlighting its tireless efforts to reunite families and build long-lasting peace.

Blinken said in a statement issued by the US State Department, "we are proud to call Qatar our friend and work alongside them in these endeavours".

The US Secretary of State congratulated Qatar and its people on the occasion of Qatar's National Day, stressing that this year witnessed the strengthening of bilateral relations between the two countries through the inclusion of the State of Qatar in the US Visa Waiver Programme. He noted that this step contributes to facilitating travel between the peoples of the two countries and strengthening the bonds of joint co-operation.

Blinken praised the development achieved by Qatar in the



fields of education, tourism, economy and culture, noting that the partnerships between Qatar and the United States contribute to enriching both countries and strengthening ties between the two peoples.

Qatar National Day, marked on December 18 every year, represents a cherished memory for Qataris since it celebrates the founding of the State of Qatar by Sheikh Jassim bin Mohammed bin Thani and embodies national pride and the connection and loyalty citizens feel toward their leaders.

Turkiye, Iran leaders call for Syria unity at Cairo summit

AFP
Cairo

The leaders of **Turkiye** and **Iran** called yesterday for unity in Syria at a summit of eight Muslim-majority countries after the ouster of Syria's president Bashar al-Assad.

Turkiye historically backed Assad's opponents, while Iran supported his rule.

The gathering of the D-8 Organisation for Economic Co-operation, also known as the Developing-8, was being held against a backdrop of regional turmoil including the conflict in Gaza, a fragile ceasefire in Lebanon and unrest in Syria.

In a speech at the summit, Turkish President **Recep Tayyip Erdogan**, called for reconciliation in Syria and the restoration of the country's "territorial integrity and unity".

He also voiced hope for "the establishment of a Syria free of terrorism", where "all religious sects

and ethnic groups live side by side in peace".

Iranian President **Masoud Pezeshkian** also called for "the participation of all (Syrian) groups in the future government... as well as respect for different beliefs and religions".

He added that "for more than 14 months, the Middle East region, in particular Gaza and southern Lebanon, and now... Syria, has been the target of massive attacks" by Israel.

"It is our religious, legal and human duty to prevent further harm" to those suffering in the conflict zones, he said.

Pezeshkian is the first Iranian president to visit Egypt since **Mahmoud Ahmadinejad** in 2013.

Relations between Egypt and Iran have been strained for decades, but diplomatic contacts have intensified since Cairo became a mediator in the war in Gaza.

Iran's Foreign Minister **Abbas Araghchi** visited Egypt in October, while his Egyptian counterpart **Badr Abdelatty** travelled to Tehran



Iranian President **Masoud Pezeshkian**, Egyptian President **Abdel Fattah al-Sisi**, Turkish President **Recep Tayyip Erdogan** pose with other leaders for a group photo during the D-8 summit in Cairo yesterday.

in July to attend Pezeshkian's inauguration.

Palestinian President **Mahmud Abbas**, speaking at a special session on Gaza and Lebanon, said the international community should adopt "a single standard of justice" and ensure Israel "is held accountable and punished for violations of international

law" in Gaza, Lebanon and Syria.

Abbas called for the adoption of a political plan he presented at a November summit in Riyadh, which includes a ceasefire, Israel's complete withdrawal from Gaza and full UN membership for Palestine.

Iran's president expressed support for any agreement backed by

all Palestinian factions. "The right to self-determination of the Palestinian people must be respected," said Pezeshkian.

He called on the international community to pressure Israel to implement a ceasefire in Gaza, end attacks on Lebanon and Syria and facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip.

Ashghal partners with FROMM.Lab to nurture design talent

The Public Works Authority (Ashghal) has taken the initiative in supporting local business collaboration by partnering with FROMM.Lab, a Qatari private sector platform dedicated to nurturing and discovering talent in the design field. This initiative aligns with Ashghal's commitment to developing its employees' skills and enhancing local creativity and entrepreneurship, a statement from FROMM.Lab said.

Held at the FROMM.Lab's headquarters in Msheireb, the workshop covered the fundamental principles of design across three categories: tables, lamps, or textiles, providing Ashghal employees with a hands-on opportunity to refine their creative skills.

Engineer Hessa al-Kaabi, an interior design engineer at Ashghal, emphasised the importance of collaborating with local companies like FROMM.Lab, which is part of the strategy to support the private sector in Qatar.

She added that the workshop was delivered with high-quality standards, and they look forward to more collaborative efforts aimed at sharing experiences and enhancing local skills in design.

Alia Rachid, founder and CEO of FROMM.Lab, stated: "This workshop allowed us to showcase the richness of Qatari heritage in design, integrating local cultural elements with modern design trends. Ashghal's commitment has been instrumental in supporting local



talents, and we look forward to further collaborations that can elevate design standards in Qatar."

Reem al-Marikhi, an architect from Ashghal who participated in the workshop, said: "I realised

through this workshop that there is always room for improvement and there is always a technical solution to every problem you may face when working on a design.

"This workshop allowed me to focus on fine details, not just on overall concept and to gain a new perspective through furniture design, which helps us as architects in our design journey."

Led by Dana Saeed, head of FROMM.Lab, and furniture designer Jamie Bowler, the two-day workshop offered participants a deep dive into design materials, production processes, and practical considerations like cost and time management.

It combined international design expertise with local perspec-

tives, offering a unique learning experience.

At the conclusion of the workshop, FROMM.Lab announced a competition for the participants, inviting them to take part in a design challenge to create a single product in one of three chosen categories: tables, lamps, or textiles. Winners may have the opportunity to collaborate with FROMM.Lab to produce their designs in local and international market, according to international quality standards.

This initiative aligns with FROMM.Lab's mission and FROMM.Luxury's commitment to supporting local designers and nurturing young talent toward international recognition, the statement added.

Civic Ministry lists achievements across various fronts in 2024

The Ministry of Municipality has showcased its many achievements in advancing comprehensive sustainability and innovative services during 2024, according to information posted on the official X account.

Highlighted were steps enhancing food security, digital transformation, and improving the quality of life and urban well-being, as part of achieving Qatar National Vision 2030.

Regarding the environment and sustainable development, the first Middle East and North Africa horticulture exhibition, Expo 2023 Doha, was concluded successfully in March 2024. As many as 840,000 trees were planted as part of the 10 Million Trees Initiative, in addition to the inauguration of seven new parks. The green space increased by 2.3% all over the country, amounting to a total of 18mn sq m.

The 10 Million Trees Initiative also won the award for the Best Sustainable Development Initiative in the Middle East. The world's longest air-conditioned outdoor pathway was inaugurated at Rawdat Al-Hamama Park. In partnership with the private sector, over 245,000 megawatt-hours of clean electricity were generated from waste. Besides, 51 plots of land in Al Afja area, 40km south of Doha, were allocated for recycling industries, more than 20,000 landfill waste removal permits were issued, and over 40,000 tonnes of compost were produced.

The Ministry also attained several global recognitions for the Qatari cities, including the Best Visual Work Award for the Digital Twin Project for Rainwater Measurement Stations in Sydney,



The green space increased by 2.3% all over the country, amounting to a total of 18mn sq m, during 2024.

Australia, and the "Leadership in Overall Experience" award as part of the Qatar Government Excellence Award. Doha won the Unesco's Learning Cities Award 2024, and the Shanghai Global Award for Sustainable Development in Cities.

The Ministry launched its 2024-2030 strategy and introduced 100 new electronic services as part of its digital transformation project. Umm Salal joined the Global Network of Learning Cities for Lifelong Learning, and the first phase of the Smart Cities Solutions Project was initiated. Measures were also taken to meet the needs of individuals with dis-

abilities in buildings, parks, and public facilities.

In agriculture and food security, the Qatar Food Security Strategy 2030 was launched, achieving notable results in self-sufficiency in local production. Farmers were given due support to improve the production quality and marketing. Organic farming areas doubled, amounting to a 100% increase, with 950 productive farms.

Vegetable marketing, in co-operation with Mahaseel, amounted to 26mn kg, in addition to 1.4mn heads of livestock including sheep, goats, camels, and cattle. Further, 1,237 farms benefited from agricultural machinery support programmes.

QND festivities at Darb Al Saai draw record 88,000 visitors

The Qatar National Day (QND) 2024 activities at Darb Al Saai permanent headquarters have garnered a record attendance of 88,646 visitors. Nationals and residents of all age groups are flocking to the cultural, heritage and artistic lineup of festivities and competitions organised by the Ministry of Culture. Among the key festivities running from December 10-21 in Umm Salal Mohammed area is the Qatari Ardha - a historic folk dance performed daily by the Al Waab Folk Arts Band. The activities also include a variety of plays, workshops and awareness-raising seminars. (QNA)

Qatar participates in 8th Arab Housing Conference in Algeria

Qatar, represented by the Ministry of Social Development and Family, participated in the 8th Arab Housing Conference, organized by Algeria's Ministry of Housing, Urban Planning and the City, in co-operation with the Council of Arab Ministers of Housing and Construction at the Arab League, on the sidelines of the 41st session of the Council of Arab Ministers of Housing, which kicked off Tuesday and ended yesterday.

Assistant Undersecretary for Social Development Affairs at the Ministry of Social Development and Family Fahd Mohammed al-Khayarin led Qatar's delegation at the conference.

Held under the theme "Sustainable Urbanism and Construction: Challenges and Promising Hopes," the conference discussed urban planning mechanisms to achieve resilient and safe cities capable of withstanding and sustainability, in addition to the importance



of green buildings, the use of environmentally friendly building materials, the best experiences that can achieve sustainable development and quality of life, and determining standards for decent housing to meet the needs of different segments of society and the role of governments, concerned parties, and the private sector in advancing housing, construction, and building policies.

The conference also discussed ways to anticipate the future and keep pace with technological developments in construction, de-

velopment, and sustainable urban development, in addition to evaluating the implementation of the urban agenda to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 11, through comprehensive urban planning.

The conference aimed to present common Arab visions to address current and future urban challenges in the Arab world, develop innovative solutions and effective mechanisms, and highlight pioneering experiences and projects in the field of smart and sustainable cities.

'Israel destroyed 75% of Gaza's health facilities'

QNA
Gaza

Director of Field Hospitals at the Ministry of Health in Gaza, Dr Marwan al-Hams, said that the health sector is being subjected to a systematic Israeli aggression through preventing the entry of medicines, besieging and targeting hospitals and medical staff.

In a statement to Qatar News Agency (QNA) al-Hams confirmed that the Israeli occupation forces aim to destroy what remains of the health infrastructure in Gaza, after destroying 75 per cent of it. He pointed to the ongoing aggression on Kamal Adwan Hospital in the northern Gaza Strip, and the killing and arrest of doctors and their families.

He explained that patients suffer greatly due to the lack of medicines, food and blankets for them, and the depletion of medicines for those with chronic diseases, which caused them serious complications and some of them lost their lives. The Director of Field Hospitals pointed out the increasing number of patients suffering from dehydration, malnutrition and death from hunger, in a precedent that doctors had not experienced before the genocidal war waged by the Israeli occupation forces on the Gaza Strip. He



stated that the deteriorating situation has reached a severe shortage in medical laboratory supplies and materials, and that the occupation is preventing the entry of devices for conducting medical

examinations after most of them have broken down. He called for the need to pressure the occupation to stop its war on Gaza, so that the health sector can provide services to Palestinian citizens.

QNA launches redesigned website, mobile application

QNA
Doha

In a significant stride reflecting its progressive evolution, Qatar News Agency (QNA) has launched a revamped website and mobile application, embodying a fresh, modern interface designed to fortify its digital presence and deliver cutting-edge media content leveraging the latest technological advancements.

The newly unveiled platform offers an intuitive browsing experience and aligns with the rapid pace of technological innovation. Equipped with an artificial intelligence-powered virtual assistant, the website ensures users can access precise and comprehensive information with remarkable speed and efficiency.



To enhance user engagement and facilitate seamless navigation, the updated website introduces dedicated sections for both local and international news. Notably, exclusive tabs have been allocated to cover the activities of His Highness the Amir, His Highness the Deputy Amir, HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, and HE the Speaker of the Shura Council.

Further enriching the user ex-

perience, the platform integrates live streaming links to local satellite channels and offers a suite of practical services, including real-time prayer timings, up-to-date weather forecasts, and details of prominent events and exhibitions hosted across the country.

This transformative initiative underscores QNA's commitment to embracing innovation and serving as a leading source of trusted news, both locally and globally.

IBPC celebrates Qatar National Day



The Indian Business and Professional Council (IBPC) celebrated Qatar National Day and announced its immediate and long-term plans at an event attended by representatives of affiliated organisations. President Thaha Mohammed spoke about the roadmap for growth, the upcoming events calendar, emphasised the significance of IBPC membership, and announced new membership offers. Mohammed noted that by paying the one-year membership fee, members will now get an extended membership duration of two years. A new category, affiliated membership has been introduced at a lower fee, offering limited benefits while still providing access to IBPC's broader platform and other opportunities. The event culminated in a festive cake-cutting ceremony to honour Qatar National Day, symbolising unity and shared purpose among the Indian professional community in Qatar.



Al Gannas ranks second in International Federation of Falconry and Racing Cup

The Qatari Society of Al Gannas ranked second place in the International Federation of Falconry and Racing Cup 2024, which was held yesterday in Dubai, UAE, with the participation of 22 teams from 20 countries.

The Qatari Society of Al Gannas team participating in the tournament consisted of Meteb al-Qahtani, Director of Qatari Society of Al Gannas Championships and Marmi Festival, as head of the delegation, Abdul Wahab bin Omair al-Nuaimi as deputy, and the falconers who are members of the team including Mohammed Ali al-Asiri, Mubarak Abdul Hadi bin Naifa, Mohammed Madi al-Hajri, Hamad Abdullah al-Arjani.

Meteb al-Qahtani expressed his happiness at achieving this result, explaining that the results were

based on the rule of collecting points for each of the four rounds in the race. The Director of Qatari Society of Al Gannas Championships and Marmi Festival said that the falconers team participated in the four rounds, where it obtained second place in the Pure Gyr Falcon category with 18 points, first place in the Shaheen Gyr Falcon category with 25 points, fourth place in the Qarmousha Gyr Falcon category with 12 points, and third place in the Taba Gyr Falcon category with 15 points, for a total of 70 points out of 100 points, noting that the teams ranking is determined by calculating the total points of the teams participation in each round according to the following: first place entitles the winner to 25 points, second place 18 points, third place 15 points,

fourth place 12 points, fifth place 10 points, sixth place 8 points, seventh place 6 points, eighth place 4 points, ninth place 2 points, and tenth place 1 point.

The Al Gannas team was formed from the best four falcons that qualified in the four categories in the Ras Laffan Falconry Championship and the Katara Falconry and Hunting Championship last year. The first place went to a team from the Emirates Falconry Federation from the UAE, and the third place went to the Popular Heritage Sports Committee from Bahrain. The meeting of the Board of Directors of the International Federation for Falconry and Racing was held on Wednesday, which approved extending its current term beyond the end of the Los Angeles 2028 Summer Olympics.



The federation's view was also approved to grant member states the right to host the third edition of the International Federation for Falconry and Racing Cup, scheduled to be held in December of next

year 2025, according to the standards and requirements that will be determined later. The Qatari Society of Al Gannas has a long history globally in organising international championships and festivals relat-

ed to falcons, the most important of which is the Qatar International Falconry and Hunting Festival (Marmi), and it is also a pioneer in setting the laws regulating this type of race. (QNA)

National Day represents launch of modern Qatari state by its founder

QNA
Doha

Vice-Chairman of the Central Municipal Council (CMC) Mubarak bin Feraish Mubarak al-Salem stressed that the anniversary of Qatar National Day carries deep connotations and great meanings for the Qatari people and everyone living on this land because it represents the starting point of the modern state at the hands of the founder Sheikh Jassim bin Mohammed bin Thani, who established sovereignty and independence and preserved the unity of the country in the face of challenges.

The CMC Vice-Chairman said that it is day to take pride in national identity and rooted history, and to renew pride in the journey of the wise leadership that has moved Qatar from its beginnings to horizons of progress and prosperity.

He added that this day also represents a symbol of national unity and cohesion among the Qatari people and reflects the State's commitment to its prosperous future through its ambitious vision that aims to develop various sectors, such as education, economy,



and sports. Qatar, inspired by the founder's approach, continued its journey towards strengthening national sovereignty and developing the economy through sound policies and efficient national institutions, al-Salem pointed out. He explained that Qatar National Vision 2030 contributed to diversifying the economy through developing sectors such as education, health, technology, and renewable energy, in addition to investing in infrastructure and strengthening national identity through education and culture, which contributed to building a generation capable of facing the challenges of the future.

At the international level, the vice-chairman highlighted that Qatar adopted wise diplomatic policies that have strengthened its position as a supporter of peace and stability. He also noted the

country's remarkable achievements, including the significant development in infrastructure, its success in hosting the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, and its continued support for scientific research and humanitarian aid to less developed countries, reflecting its commitment to sustainable development and strengthening its international standing.

Concluding his remarks to QNA, Vice-Chairman al-Salem said that this year's celebration coincides with Qatar entering a new phase of development and progress within the framework of the National Development Strategy (2024-2030), which aims to make comprehensive and sustainable development.

This strategy focuses on enhancing economic diversification away from dependence on oil developing sectors such as technology, education, renewable energy, infrastructure, and supporting innovation and entrepreneurship, in addition to enhancing the quality of healthcare and building human capital, with the aim of achieving economic and environmental sustainability and building an advanced society characterised by prosperity and global competitiveness.

QND renews determination of people to continue process of nation building

QNA
Doha

The President of the National Cyber Security Agency Eng Abdulrahman bin Ali al-Farahid al-Malki said that National Day is a dear occasion for all and draws inspiration of steadfastness, strength, and determination from Sheikh Jassim bin Mohammed bin Thani, founder of Qatar. It is an occasion to renew the determination to contribute to the progress, development and building of the nation.

He extended congratulations and greetings on this dear occasion to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, His Highness the Father Amir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani, the wise government, and the generous Qatari people.

Celebration of this year's National Day coincides with the State achieving a large number of accomplishments on all levels, both internal and external, which enhanced its position regionally and internationally, enabled it to occupy an advanced position in many global indicators, and made it a desirable and safe global destination for investment and tourism, HE al-Malki pointed out.

Regarding the achievements of the Agency and its future plans, he stressed that with its various sectors and departments, the Agency achieved many important local achievements aimed at enhancing security and stability in Qatar's cyberspace, noting that one of the most important of these achievements is the launch of the National Cyber Security Strategy 2024-2030, which was characterized by comprehensiveness and in line with the strategy of the State.

HE al-Malki stated that the Agency recently held the 11th edi-



tion of the National Cyber Drill, titled 'Zero-Day Survival', with the participation of about 170 vital entities in the country. The aim was to test the readiness of entities and measure their efficiency in confronting various cyber risks.

The Agency established the National Cyber Security Academy in order to enhance digital capabilities and safety and raise the level of cyber awareness among employees of government and private institutions.

The new version of the National Cyber Training Program was also launched, which provides cyber training and qualification services to various state institutions and entities and is an added value that the Agency contributes to in enhancing government efforts aimed at achieving the goals of Qatar National Vision 2030.

At the international and regional levels, HE al-Malki pointed out that the Agency was able to enhance Qatar's position on the global cyber map, as it obtained full membership in the Global Privacy Assembly, which represents international recognition of Qatar's growing role in promoting and protecting the rights of individuals in the digital environment. Qatar also achieved a major accomplishment in the Global Cybersecurity Index 2024, where it was classified as a model country at the international level in the field of cybersecurity.

He explained that the Agency worked on plans to protect and secure major events hosted by

Qatar, such as the Asian Cup, the Qatar Formula 1 Grand Prix, and Expo 2023, for the purposes of responding proactively and effectively to potential cyber threats and breaches.

As part of its role in enhancing and raising the level of international cooperation between the Agency and the relevant official organisations and bodies in other countries, he explained that the Agency has participated in many international forums specialised in the field of cybersecurity, and reviewed its role in protecting and securing cyberspace, and raising the readiness of various bodies, in addition to reviewing Qatar's pioneering experience in securing major events, most notably the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, in a number of these forums.

HE al-Malki pointed out the importance of Qatar hosting major global events in the field of cybersecurity, perhaps the most prominent of which is the hosting the International Common Criteria Conference (ICCC), which is being held for the first time in the Middle East and North Africa region. It is a prestigious annual event that brings together cybersecurity experts, government officials, industry professionals, researchers and academics to discuss and collaborate on cybersecurity standards, practices and technologies.

In addition, Qatar hosted the third meeting of the GCC Ministerial Committee for Cybersecurity, where the Gulf Cybersecurity Strategy and the platform for exchanging information and cyber threats between GCC countries were launched.

He stressed that the cadres and teams of the National Cyber Security Agency are working diligently around the clock to ensure the strengthening and securing of cyberspace in the country, based on the best international practices.

Syrian girls' right to schooling unrestricted, says new minister

Reuters
Damascus

Syria will remove all references to the former ruling Baath party from its educational system as of next week but will not otherwise change school curricula or restrict the rights of girls to learn, the country's new education minister said.

"Education is a red line for the Syrian people, more important than food and water," Nazir Mohammad al-Qadri said in an interview from his office in Damascus. "The right to education is not limited to one specific gender. ... There may be more girls in our schools than boys," he said.

The secular, pan-Arab nationalist Baath Party governed Syria since a 1963 coup d'etat, seeing education as an important tool for instilling life-long loyalty among the young to the country's authoritarian ruling system. President Bashar al-Assad was toppled on Dec 8 by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), a rebel group that some Syrians fear may seek to implement a conservative form of Islamist gov-

ernance. But Qadri's plans reflect their wider management approach and moderate messaging so far.

Syria has long been seen to have one of the Arab world's strongest education systems, a reputation that has largely survived 13 years of civil war. Qadri said religion - both Muslim and Christian - will continue to be taught as a subject in school. Primary schools will remain mixed between boys and girls, while secondary education will stay largely segregated, he said.

"After primary school, there were always schools for females and schools for males. We won't change that," said Qadri, who had taken to his ornately-furnished office so recently that he had not yet procured Syria's new green, white and black flag.

Syria's new rulers, who have long since disavowed their former Al Qaeda links, have said that all of Syria's minority groups including Kurds, Christians, Druze and Alawites will be treated equal as the new government focuses on rebuilding. They face a formidable challenge. Syria remains under tight Western sanctions.

Entire cities were levelled in 13 years of war that Qadri said had also left about half the country's 18,000 schools damaged or destroyed. But the rebels have moved into government fast, extending a hand to former state employees who have shown up to work in droves. Most of the new ministers are young - in their 30s or 40s - making 54-year-old Qadri among the oldest in government.

Born and raised in Damascus, he was imprisoned by the Assad regime in 2008 on what he said were spurious charges of inciting sectarian strife, preventing him from finishing his bachelor's degree.

He was released a decade later and fled to northern Idlib, then under the control of HTS, becoming education minister in its Salvation Government in 2022.

He is currently finishing his masters thesis in Arabic language. With the political and social contours of the new Syrian state still being drawn, Qadri said students would not be tested on their mandatory "nationalist studies" - previously a vehicle for teaching Baathism and Assad family history - this year.

Israel strikes port, energy targets in Yemen

Israel launched strikes against ports and energy infrastructure in Houthi-held parts of Yemen yesterday and threatened more attacks against the group, which has launched hundreds of missiles at Israel over the past year. As Israeli jets were in the air, the Israeli military said it intercepted a missile headed towards central Israel which destroyed a school building in Ramat Efal in the western part of Tel Aviv with what a military spokesperson described as falling shrapnel. The Houthis - who have launched attacks on international shipping near Yemen since November 2023, in solidarity with Palestinians in Israel's war with Hamas - said they had attacked Tel

Aviv overnight, launching two ballistic missiles and hitting "precise military targets".

The Israeli attack, involving 14 fighter jets and other aircraft, came in two waves, with a first series of strikes on the ports of Salif and Ras Issa and a second series hitting the capital Sanaa, military spokesperson Lieutenant Colonel Nadav Shoshani told reporters. "We made extensive preparations for these operations with efforts to refine our intelligence and to optimise the strikes," he said.

Al Masirah TV, the main television news outlet run by the Houthis, said the airstrikes killed nine people, seven in Salif and two in the Ras Issa oil facility, both in

the western province of Hodeidah.

Two sources at the port of Hodeidah told Reuters that an Israeli strike destroyed a tugboat, but the port has several others capable of towing ships to the dock.

In Sanaa, the strikes also targeted two central power stations south and north of the capital, Sanaa, which Al Masirah said had cut electricity to thousands of families.

An official from the Electricity Department in Sanaa told Reuters that airstrikes hit fuel depots at two power stations - one in Dhahban, north of the capital, and the other in Haiz, south of Sanaa. He said fires had been contained and electricity was expected to be restored within hours. -Reuters

Sheraton Grand Doha hosts QND celebration

The Sheraton Grand Doha Resort & Convention Hotel hosted Qatar National Day celebration. The programme began with a traditional cake-cutting ceremony featuring a design inspired by Qatar Tourism, showcasing Qatar's iconic landmarks and modern architecture.

Thousands of balloons cascaded from above. There were cultural performances and a selection of traditional local delicacies that celebrated the rich heritage and spirit of Qatari culture. The celebration continued across the hotel's dining venues - Al Hubara, Jamavar, and Atrium Lounge, where families gathered to enjoy feasts of locally inspired flavours.



"For over four decades, Sheraton Grand Doha has stood as an iconic beacon of Qatar's heritage and

hospitality, integral to the nation's growth and progress," a statement added.





Burkina Faso frees four French spies after Moroccan mediation

Reuters
Rabat

Four French nationals held in Burkina Faso for a year have been released following mediation from France and Morocco, resolving a diplomatic row over their detention. The head of France's foreign intelligence agency, the DGSE, has previously said that they were spies.

A spokesperson for the French military, which oversees the DGSE, and the DGSE did not re-

spond to a request for comment.

They had been held in Ouagadougou since December 2023.

The French presidency said in a statement that President Emmanuel Macron had on Wednesday thanked Morocco's King Mohammed for his mediation "which made possible the liberation of our four countrymen who had been held in Burkina Faso for a year".

Morocco's foreign ministry also praised King Mohammed and Burkina Faso's President Ibrahim Traore and said "this humanitarian act" was made pos-

sible due to the good relations between their countries.

Following three years of tensions between Paris and Rabat fuelled by immigration issues and the disputed territory of Western Sahara, France reconciled with Morocco, one of its former protectorates, in October following a series of moves.

Morocco maintains good ties with Burkina Faso and other military-ruled Sahel states, promising them access to global trade through the Atlantic. But France's ties with its former colonies in West and Central

Africa, including Burkina Faso, remain strained. Ouagadougou has expelled French troops and diplomats, ordered France's defence attache and ambassador to leave, and suspended some French media.

Burkina Faso, run by a military junta that seized power in a coup in 2022, has drawn criticism from international rights groups for cracking down on freedom of speech and intimidating critics as it tries to contain a security crisis caused by militants tied to Al Qaeda and Islamic State (IS).

35 children killed, 6 injured in Nigeria fair stampede: police

A stampede at a school fair in the southwestern Nigerian city of Ibadan has left 35 children dead and seriously injured six others, police said yesterday. "Eight persons have since been arrested for their various involvements" in the incident, which took place on Wednesday in Nigeria's third largest city, Oyo State Police Command spokesperson Adewale Osifeso said in a statement.

Among those detained was the main sponsor of the event at the Basorun Islamic High School, which was organised by the Wings Foundation and Agidigbo FM radio. The Homicide Section of the State Criminal Investigation Department has opened a probe, he added. Oyo State Governor Seyi Makinde had shared his condolences on X Wednesday. "Our hearts remain with the families and loved ones impacted by this tragedy. May the souls of the departed rest in peace," Makinde said. "We sympathise with the parents whose joy has suddenly been turned to mourning due to these deaths," he added. — AFP

Locals shout out grievances as French president visits Mayotte

AFP
Mamoudzou

Distraught and angry inhabitants of Mayotte shouted out their grievances to French President Emmanuel Macron yesterday, five days after the Indian Ocean archipelago was devastated by a cyclone. High on their list was the lack of water and food, and the fear of looting.

Macron, visiting the French overseas territory to assess the destruction wrought by Cyclone Chido, said he would extend the trip by a day, so he could inspect remote areas. And he has declared a national day of mourning for Mayotte on Monday.

Emergency teams were still working at full pace, searching for survivors and supplying desperately needed aid. "Mister President, nobody feels safe here," one woman told Macron during his visit to the Mamoudzou hospital centre. "People are fighting over water."

And as Macron talked with hospital workers, one staff member said under her breath: "Two more days and we won't be able to feed the patients anymore. I'm disgusted." One man in the group called the president's attention to looting, saying thieves could easily enter houses that had had their roofs blown off, despite the nightly curfew. "Mister President, we fear that this is becoming like Haiti," a reference to the poverty-stricken, crime-ridden Caribbean country that has been in a state of emergency since March. Macron listened to the accounts, touching the arm of a woman in tears to comfort her. "I will do everything in my power so you have water, food and electricity," he said. His promises were met with a mixed reception, ranging from hope to incredulity. Macron later vowed to "rebuild" Mayotte.

He would step up the fight against illegal immigration "while at the same time rebuilding schools, rebuilding homes, rebuilding the hospital, and so

on", he told reporters. "Don't let anybody say that the government threw in the towel."

Macron's visit came after Paris declared "exceptional natural disaster" measures for Mayotte late Wednesday. Located near Madagascar off the coast of southeastern Africa, Mayotte is France's poorest region. Macron's plane carried some 20 doctors, nurses and civil security personnel on board, as well as four tonnes of food and sanitary supplies.

"Don't leave too soon," airport security official Assan Halo pleaded with the president as he arrived. "We have nothing left." Some bystanders jeered the presidential convoy as it passed a petrol station where cars were lined up in a long queue hoping to get fuel. "It's crazy," said one Mayotte policeman asking not to be named. "You get the feeling the government completely underestimated the disaster's scale."

A preliminary toll from France's interior ministry shows that 31 people have been confirmed killed, 45 seriously hurt, and more than 1,370 suffering lighter injuries. But officials say that, realistically, a final death toll of hundreds or even thousands is likely. "The tragedy of Mayotte is probably the worst natural disaster in the past several centuries of French history," Prime Minister Francois Bayrou said.

France said yesterday it had activated the European Union's Civil Protection Mechanism, a pooled response by EU members and others to disasters. In response to widespread shortages, the government issued a decree freezing the prices of consumer goods in the archipelago at their pre-cyclone levels.

Meteorologists say Cyclone Chido, which hit Mayotte on Saturday, was the latest in a string of storms worldwide fuelled by climate change. An estimated one-third of Mayotte's population lived in shantytowns whose flimsy, sheet metal-roofed homes offered scant protection from the storm.

At Mamoudzou hospital centre, windows were blown out and doors



France's President Emmanuel Macron speaks with rescuers and firefighters during his visit at the kavano district in Mamoudzou, on the French Indian Ocean territory of Mayotte, yesterday.

ripped off from hinges, but most of the medics had taken to sleeping at their battered workplace on Wednesday as Chido had swept their homes away. Staff soldiered on despite the hospital being out of action, with electricians racing to restore a maternity ward, France's largest with around 10,000 births a year.

Much of Mayotte's population is Muslim, religious tradition dictates that bodies be buried rapidly, so some may never be identified. "There are open-air mass graves. No emergency services," said Estelle Youssouffa, a National Assembly deputy for Mayotte. "Nobody is coming to get the bodies."

And one man in the crowd told Macron: "In the shantytowns, people bury the bodies in shallow graves." "Yes, but where?" asked the president. "Where?"

Assessing the toll is further complicated by illegal immigration into Mayotte, especially from the Comoros islands to the north,



A drone view shows damaged houses in the aftermath of Cyclone Chido, in Kahani, Mayotte.

which means that much of the population is unregistered. While Mayotte officially has 320,000 inhabitants, the authorities esti-

mate the actual figure is between 100,000 and 200,000 higher when taking into account undocumented migrants.

Ghana's president-elect names anti-graft team to recover funds

AFP
Accra

Ghana's president-elect John Mahama appointed an anti-corruption task force, part of his campaign vow to tackle graft and reclaim misappropriated state funds, his team said. The five-member group will strive to recover all public funds embezzled in recent years and proceeds of corruption in the West African country.

The officials will "hold persons responsible for such corruption accountable", said Felix Kwakye Ofosu, spokesperson for Mahama's transition team. Former president Mahama, who is Ghana's main opposition figure and who tried twice before to win back the country top post, will be sworn in on January 7. The leader of the National Democratic Congress (NDC) party defeated Vice-President Mahamudu Bawumia, who represented the ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP), in elections earlier this month.

Mahama during his campaign said unchecked procurement processes are a major source of corruption, and vowed to make anti-corruption a key pillar of his mandate. The work group is made up of lawmaker Samuel Okudzeto

Ablakwa, former Auditor General Daniel Domelevo, retired police chief Nathaniel Kofi Boakye, legal expert Martin Kpebu, and investigative journalist Raymond Archer, Mahama's team said. Emmanuel Wilson Junior, an anti-graft advocate and lawyer with the organisation Crusaders Against Corruption, hailed the initiative and urged the incoming administration to act swiftly. "This is a step in the right direction. Ghanaians are tired of corruption being swept under the carpet. We expect this team to be proactive and ensure real accountability," Wilson told AFP.

The announcement comes amid mounting public frustration over corruption scandals under outgoing President Nana Akufo-Addo's administration, including the \$190mn Power Distribution Services deal, which critics described as financially questionable. Several civil society groups and opposition supporters protested outside the finance ministry, accusing the government of "gross financial mismanagement"; as the country scrambles to recover from one of the worst economic crises in its history. Corruption allegations also plagued Mahama's previous tenure as president, although no charges were formally filed against him.

Ivory Coast wants bigger share of its mining boom

AFP
Abidjan

Ivory Coast's mining industry is booming, driven by foreign investment and the discovery of new deposits, but the country now wants a bigger slice of the pie for its own businesses. Huge deposits of natural resources - including oil, gas and gold - have pushed the economy of the world's biggest cocoa producer in a new direction.

Three discoveries of oil and gas have been made since 2021 and gold production last year was four times higher than a decade earlier. The West African country's bedrock also contains iron, diamonds, nickel, manganese, bauxite, copper and newly discovered reserves of coltan - a precious ore used to make electronic devices. Ivory Coast has offered attractive conditions to bring in foreign investors. Now, a revision of the mining code due in the coming weeks will target homegrown investment.

Current laws introduced in 2014 "facilitated the arrival of many investors" by extending permits and creating a land register for greater transparency, director general of mines Seydou Coulibaly said.

Few details about what will be in the revised mining code are known. But it is expected to focus on local businesses and communities, Coulibaly added, in order to boost the national economy.

Mining Minister Mamadou Sangafowa Coulibaly has urged



Employees work at a gold mine located approximately 200km northwest of the port city of Abidjan.

experts drawing up the text to include measures to "ensure fairness in the distribution of the wealth, once the discovery has been made".

"The new code will be more attractive and the means are being put in place to ensure that operations also benefit Ivorians, particularly by involving national banks, without discouraging international investors," said specialist Cedric Sehe, who heads mining promotion firm CAMP2E.

It comes at a time when the military juntas in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger are taking steps to reclaim mining resources from foreign companies operating in the Sahelian countries. In Ivory Coast over the last 10 years, discoveries of hydrocarbons and minerals have multiplied, production has grown

and resources have diversified. The number of mining permits has roughly tripled to 29, while exploration permits have increased from 140 to 189.

Gold production shot up from 13 to 51 tonnes between 2012 and 2023. The mining sector now accounts for four percent of Ivory Coast's gross domestic product, compared to just 1.5% a decade ago, according to the Professional Association of Miners of Ivory Coast (GPMCI).

Likewise, tax revenue from mining has ballooned to 250bn CFA francs (\$399,500, 381mn euros) - a 20-fold increase over the same period.

Total investment in Ivorian mines was estimated to be more than 500bn CFA francs last year.

UN peacekeepers guard Congolese farmers working their fields

Reuters
Dhendro

Under a scorching sun in Democratic Republic of Congo, many of the farmers tending to their fields in the troubled eastern region are guarded by United Nations peacekeepers. The UN mission has fallen under increasing scrutiny over the years as the eastern conflict between rebel groups, self-defence forces and other militias has raged.

But in this corner of Djugu territory in the village of Dhendro, farmers are unequivocal in their support for the UN force known by the acronym MONUSCO. The farmers, many displaced from their homes by the conflict, shelter in camps near the UN bases. "I came here because of the presence of MONUSCO. It's thanks to their presence that I'm going to the field; otherwise I'm afraid," 23-year-old Lokana Heritier, who left his village to live closer to the blue helmets, told Reuters. MONUSCO has been deployed in Congo since 2010, when it took over from an earlier UN operation to secure the troubled eastern region that borders Rwanda. The operation to guard farmers who grow corn, beans, potatoes and manioc is known as "Secure Harvest" and it aims to allow them to work freely during the harvesting season and provide protection from militia groups who steal produce and kill people.

"The main objective is to secure the farmers in their farmland when they are working. We believe this is directly linked to the protection of civilians that MONUSCO is mandated for," Brigadier General Monzurul Alam told Reuters. Last year, the UN Security Council approved the end of the mission at the request of President Felix Tshisekedi. The 13,500-strong force had faced attacks and protests over perceptions that it had failed to secure the population.

Congo's government reversed course in July and asked MONUSCO to remain in Ituri and North Kivu provinces until conditions were met for the force's departure, without providing further details.

Ivorian authorities already sought to "promote and develop" local extractive companies under a 2022 law. However, it only applied to oil and gas activities. Under the legislation, Ivorian firms should already get priority in public tenders and certain activities must be carried out only by them.

They include "slickline" operations, where a cable is used to lower tools into oil wells, said Erus Djimo from Ivorian company Hydrodrill, which operates two oil and gas sites. Speaking at the International Extractive and Energy Resources Exhibition in the main city, Abidjan, last month, he said the technique required technology "within the reach of local companies".

The exhibition organised by the government was a first, and brought together local businesses and foreign heavyweights such as Italian giant Eni and Canada's Endeavour Mining. The 2022 law encouraged oil and gas industry companies "to recruit and employ Ivorian nationals as a matter of priority" and train local workers.

Sangafowa Coulibaly, the mining minister, in May also announced the creation of a digital platform dedicated to the local sector to ease administrative procedures including licence applications and renewals and provide access for hydrocarbons tenders. Local business manager Faustin N'Dri N'Guessan welcomed the shift towards helping Ivorian companies reap bigger profits.



Honey time

A honeybee explores the innards of a water lily in a Doha home garden. Honeybees are important pollinators for flowers, fruits, and vegetables. **PICTURE:** Gulf Times news editor Bonnie James (Instagram: the.explorer7).

Signing ceremony held for third campus of DPS-MIS

DPS-Modern Indian School celebrated a milestone with a grand signing ceremony for its upcoming third campus, DPS-Millennium International School. The agreement was formally signed by the new partners – Sheikh Talal bin Khalifa bin Khalid al-Abdulrahman al-Thani, DPS-MIS chief

patron Mohamed bin Hamam al-Abdulla, president Yasir Nainar, and Apparel Group country head Sunil Thakkar. DPS-MIS patron Aisha bint Hamam, vice-president George Thomas, directors Rocky Fernandez, Gopi Varadhan and Harish Kanjani and principal Asna Nafees were present. Speaking on the occasion, Nainar emphasised

how the new campus will embody the dreams and aspirations of every stakeholder. The new campus, expected to open its doors in April 2026, is envisioned as a hub of holistic learning, equipped with state-of-the-art learning facilities to nurture innovation, creativity and success, a statement added.



TWA cricket league season ends



Telangana Welfare Association (TWA) Cricket League season four was won by Prof Jayashankar Team after the final match with Carlson. Sports and youth activities secretary Mohammed Taha said 10 teams participated in the tournament held for the

Telugu community. President Mohammed Abdul Rauf congratulated the teams. Advisory committee member (sports) Mohammed Shoeb thanked Deepak Shetty, Deepak Chkkala, Ziad Usman, Hareesh Reddy, Venkappa Bhagavathula, Mohammed

Sayeed, Radhika Yemula, Imthiaz. TWA vice-president Ramesh Pitla and sports and tournament organisers Syed Bakhar, Mohammed Taha, Mohammed Salauddin, Mohammed Iqbal, Atif, Nagaraju and others worked for the success of the season, a statement added.

Academic fiesta at DPS-MIS

DPS Modern Indian School celebrated its academic fiesta, Melange 2.0: Heritage to Hi-Tech, for Grades I-V. Directors Rocky Fernandes and Gopi Varadhan, inaugurated the event, while principal Asna Nafees emphasised the

importance of balancing heritage with innovation. The seamless fusion of tradition and modernity was showcased, bringing together students, teachers, and parents for a day of creativity, innovation, and hands-on learning experiences.





COMMUNITY



Cultural fervour marks BPS festivities



Birla Public School celebrated Qatar National Day and World Arabic Day with great enthusiasm and cultural fervour.

The Department of Arabic & Islamic Studies, the Department of Art, and the KG Section together organised the celebration.

The event, which drew the active participation of students and parents alike, was a vibrant display of Qatar's rich cultural heritage and the significance of the Arabic language.

The celebration began with a formal inauguration ceremony, marking the start of a day filled with activities that

highlighted Qatar's traditions and the importance of Arabic in connecting the people of the region.

Students showcased their talents and creativity through captivating cultural performances that blended traditional music, and dance encapsulating the essence of Qatar's history and cultural pride.

The performances were followed by exhibition, where attendees had the opportunity to explore various aspects of Qatari and Arabic traditions, from ancient practices to modern cultural expressions.

The event also featured engaging activities such as

Henna drawing and face painting with local symbols and exhibits of local food items, dresses, and games. Additionally, a portable Majlis was set up allowing students and parents to experience and embrace traditional art forms.

One of the highlights of the day was a magnificent parade, where students proudly reflected Qatar's heritage and patriotism, marching with banners and national symbols, showcasing unity and national pride.

The event concluded with an inspiring message by the school principal, who reiterated the importance of nur-

ture cultural awareness and national pride among students, as well as fostering a sense of belonging to their country.

The head of the Arabic Department also emphasised on the pride we take in being a part of this great nation.

He stressed on the value of preserving the Arabic language and promoting it as an essential part of Qatari identity.

The celebration served as a beautiful reminder of Qatar's rich heritage, cultural diversity, and the shared responsibility of promoting these values for future generations, a statement added.



Variety of activities organised at IIS

Ideal Indian School celebrated Qatar National Day in a grand manner, featuring a variety of activities that highlighted its deep-rooted connection to the nation.

In his keynote address, principal Shaik Shamim Saheb extended heartfelt congratulations to the rulers and the people of Qatar on the occasion of National Day. He commended the vision of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, His Highness the Father Amir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani and the government for building a modern and advanced country to meet the aspirations and hopes of the people with further development, progress and prosperity.

He added that National Day celebrations unite the school in fostering Qatari pride and national identity among students.

The event featured an array of colourful performances by students from the Kindergarten,

Junior, Girls' and Boys' sections, showcasing the rich cultural heritage of Qatar.

The programme began with a prayer by Zaid Khalid, followed by the National Anthem of Qatar performed by the school choir.

Speeches expressing love for Qatar were delivered in Arabic by Khalid Zoban and in English by Venika Anil.

Boys' Section's assistant cultural secretary Ihsan Mohammed, welcomed the gathering, while Girls' Section's assistant cultural secretary Nakshatra, proposed a vote of thanks. The event was hosted by Aseel Elfatih and Rishi Balan.

A highlight of the celebration was a grand procession within the school premises, featuring hundreds of students who were dressed in the traditional Qatari attire and showcased their love, respect, and solidarity for their host country in a vibrant display of unity and cultural pride.



Grand ceremony at Swiss International School, Qatar

The Swiss International School, Qatar hosted a grand ceremony to celebrate Qatar's National Day, bringing together students, teachers, and families to honour the nation's rich heritage and shared values.

The programme was prepared by students and staff from the Arabic Department. The celebration began

with a recitation of the Holy Qur'an by Ibrahim, followed by a flag salute performed by the Qatar History students from Grades 1-5, symbolising pride and unity. Highlighting Qatar's poetic tradition, Abdallah captivated the audience with a moving recital about love for the homeland. Maqbola delivered an evocative Qatari poem.

The traditional Sword Dance (Al Ardah) performed by students, embodied the strength and pride of the Qatari spirit. Continuing the poetic journey, Dalal and Aisha presented a duet, celebrating the values of Qatar.

The event concluded with Al Feerj performance, portraying the charm of a traditional Qatari neighbourhood

and showcasing the importance of community and belonging.

In her closing remarks, the master of ceremonies expressed gratitude to everyone who contributed to the event.

She emphasised the significance of unity, pride, and tradition in shaping Qatar's identity.



SETBACK

Duterte hit by third impeachment complaint

Philippine Catholic priests have filed an impeachment complaint against Vice-President Sara Duterte, the third bid to oust her following an explosive feud with President Ferdinand Marcos. The 46-year-old was tipped to succeed her father Rodrigo Duterte in 2022 elections but stepped aside to back Marcos, and later ran for vice-president on his ticket. But their alliance has publicly imploded. Last month, she claimed she had ordered someone to kill Marcos if she was slain. The complaint accused her of "anomalous disbursements" of millions of dollars as vice-president and when she headed the education ministry as well as plotting Marcos' assassination.

RESCUE

Lanka navy rushes to help 100 Rohingya refugees adrift at sea

Sri Lanka's navy yesterday said it was heading to aid a group of around 100 Rohingya refugees from war-torn Myanmar adrift in a fishing trawler off the Indian Ocean island. Fisherman spotted the drifting trawler off Sri Lanka's northern coast at Mullivaikkal at dawn yesterday, the navy said. While unusual, it is not the first boat to head to Sri Lanka - some 1,750kms across open seas southwest of Myanmar. The Sri Lankan navy rescued more than 100 Rohingya refugees in distress on a boat off their shores in December 2022. Hundreds of thousands of Rohingya fled Myanmar for neighbouring Bangladesh in 2017 during a crackdown by the military

OFFBEAT

Farmer blames summer heat for 200kg spring onion theft

A Japanese court yesterday convicted a man who stole more than 200kgs of spring onions from a rival farmer after record summer heat ruined his own crops, local media reported. As he stood trial last month, the 28-year-old former farmer reportedly blamed the hot summer for his lacklustre harvest. But the Kyoto District Court called the theft of produce worth around 200,000 yen (\$1,300) in August and September "malicious", local broadcaster Kansai TV said. The court found "no extenuating circumstances" in his decision to "steal from a competitor and make up for lost revenue caused by unfavourable weather conditions", Kansai TV said.

VERDICT

UK court hikes sentences of two murderers

A UK appeals court yesterday increased the sentences of two boys believed to be Britain's youngest knife murderers. The pair, now 13, were convicted in June of killing a stranger in a machete attack when they were aged just 12. They were later handed life sentences for the killing of Shawn Seesahai, 18, with the minimum period before they could be considered for parole set at eight-and-a-half years. But the Court of Appeal ruled that the sentences had been "unduly lenient" and should be increased to 10 years. The two boys cannot be identified legally because they are minors.

Adani pressed by Bangladesh govt to reopen power deal

Reuters
Dhaka

Bangladesh's interim government has accused energy supplier Adani Power of breaching a multi-billion-dollar agreement by withholding tax benefits that a power plant central to the deal received from New Delhi, according to documents seen by Reuters.

In 2017, the Indian company controlled by billionaire Gautam Adani signed an agreement with Bangladesh to provide power from its coal-fired plant in eastern India.

Dhaka has said it hopes to renegotiate the deal, which was awarded by then-prime minister Sheikh Hasina without a tender process and costs Bangladesh far more than its other coal power deals, according to Bangladesh power agency documents and letters between the two parties, as well as interviews with six Bangladesh officials.

Dhaka has been behind on payments to Adani Power since supply started in July 2023. It owes several hundred million dollars for energy that has already been supplied, though the two sides dispute the exact size of the bill.

Bangladesh's de facto power minister Muhammad Fouzul Kabir Khan said the country now had enough domestic capacity to cope without the Adani supply, though not all domestic power generators were operational.

Nobel peace prize laureate Muhammad Yunus took power in August after a student-led revolution ousted Hasina, who critics accuse of stifling democracy and mismanag-

ing the economy. She ran Bangladesh for most of the last two decades and was a close ally of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The Bangladesh power contract came with an additional implementation agreement that addressed the transfer of tax benefits. Bangladesh plans to reopen the 25-year deal, and it hopes to use the fallout from US prosecutors' November indictment of Adani and seven other executives for their alleged role in a \$265mn bribery scheme to press for a resolution. Adani Power has not been accused of wrongdoing in Bangladesh. A company spokesperson said in response to questions that it had upheld all contractual obligations and had no indication Dhaka was reviewing the contract.

The company did not answer questions about the tax benefits and other issues raised by Bangladesh.

Adani Group has called the US allegations "baseless." Adani Power's Godda plant runs off imported coal and was built to serve Bangladesh.

The company said the Bangladesh deal helped further Indian foreign policy objectives and Delhi in 2019 declared the plant part of a special economic zone. It enjoys incentives such as exemptions on income tax and other levies.

The power supplier was required to inform Bangladesh swiftly of changes in the plant's tax status and to pass on the "benefit of a tax exemption" from India's government, according to the contract and implementation agreement signed on November 5, 2017 between Adani Power and the state-run Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB).

But Adani Power did not do so, according to letters sent by BPDB on September 17, 2024 and October 22, 2024 that urged it to remit the benefits.

The agreements and letters are not public.

Two BPDB officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorised to talk to the media, said they did not receive responses.

BPDB estimates savings of roughly 0.35 cents per unit of power if the benefit was passed on, the officials said. The Godda plant supplied 8.16bn units in the year to June 30, 2024, according to an undated Bangladesh government summary of power purchases, suggesting potential savings of about \$28.6mn.

Power Minister Khan said the savings would be a key part of future discussions with Adani Power.

Bangladesh in November scrapped a 2010 law that allowed Hasina to award some energy deals without a competitive bidding process. The absence of tenders is unusual, said Tim Buckley, director of Australia's Climate Energy Finance think-tank, adding that auctions ensure "the best price possible."

In September, Yunus's government appointed a panel of experts to examine major energy deals signed by Hasina. A Bangladesh court has separately ordered a probe of the Adani deal.

Another panel asked to study the economy said in a white paper submitted to Yunus on December 1 that the US charges against Adani meant Bangladesh should "scrutinise" the power deal, which it described as "negotiated hastily."

Five terrorists killed in Kashmir



Indian security personnel stand guard along a street in Srinagar yesterday. Security forces in Kashmir yesterday killed five terrorists in clashes, the army said, the latest outbreak of violence in the region.

Suspect held as 11 die in Hanoi cafe blaze

Reuters
Hanoi

Police in Vietnam have arrested a man suspected of starting a blaze that killed 11 following an argument with staff in a Hanoi cafe, authorities said yesterday, while two of the seven pulled from the flames were admitted to hospital.

In a statement, police said the man had confessed to using gasoline to set fire on the ground floor of the three-storey cafe, where people were also singing karaoke-

style. The suspect is in his early 50s, said the state-run *Tien Phong* newspaper, adding that one witness reported hearing an explosion.

"The fire blocked all the exits," another witness told the paper. "The smell of gasoline was strong."

The suspect had gone to the karaoke bar to drink before arguing with staff, sources said. He then allegedly bought petrol and poured it close to an area with many motorbikes, which burst into flames.

It took about 40 minutes to

rein in the fire, reported just after 11pm, police added, with two of the seven rescued admitted to hospital.

Images in an online newspaper, *VnExpress*, showed firemen working to douse the flames, while the bodies of several victims were carried away.

"I noticed a column of smoke from afar," it cited a witness as saying. "I was so frightened that I had to urge my grandchild to go downstairs."

"The flames were so fierce. We saw the fire... but there was nothing else we could do."

India opposition move to impeach vice-president rejected

A move by Indian opposition parties to impeach Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar for allegedly performing his job in a partisan manner was rejected, parliament said yesterday. The vice-president, India's second highest constitutional office, acts as the chair of the upper house of parliament, known as the Rajya Sabha, and opposition parties have accused Dhankhar of being partisan in his role. Sansad Television, parliament's TV channel, said the opposition's notice has been dismissed. Harivansh Narayan Singh, deputy chairman of parliament's upper house, said the notice to impeach Dhankhar was "severely flawed" and aimed at demeaning the constitutional office of vice-president. The winter session of parliament has been disrupted several times with government and opposition parties accusing each other of not allowing legislative business by creating political controversies.



Indian defence personnel carry out rescue operation after an accident off the coast of Mumbai.

Divers, helicopters search for boat crash survivors

Reuters
Mumbai

Helicopters and divers scoured the waters off India's financial capital of Mumbai yesterday in a search for survivors of a freak boat accident that killed at least 13 people a day earlier, three navy personnel among them, officials said.

A naval speedboat lost control and collided with a privately owned vessel taking tourists to the nearby Elephanta caves, famed for their rock art. The ferry capsized as a result, but 114 people were rescued.

Of the 114 rescued, 97 were stable, four in critical condition and 13 dead, the municipal corporation said on messaging app WhatsApp.

Navy and coast guard vessels joined in to search the harbour for at least two people still believed to be missing, an adult and a child, said

a naval officer, who sought anonymity as he was not authorised to speak to the media. The officer said the accident happened during the trial of a new type of engine for the speedboat. "It appears that the engine got stuck at maximum throttle but we will know better once the inquiry is completed," the officer said.

A naval spokesperson did not immediately respond, when asked for comment on the remarks.

Television channels showed a speedboat with at least five on board crashing into the passenger vessel. Water started gushing into the privately-owned Neelkamal as soon as it was rammed, witnesses said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi offered condolences to the bereaved, offering relief payments of Rs200,000 (\$2,400) to the next of kin, and Rs50,000 (\$600) for each of the injured.

"The boat mishap in Mumbai is saddening," he added in a post on X.

UK water bills to rise by 36% to help fix broken sector

Reuters
London

Britain's water regulator said it would allow bills to rise by just over a third in the next five years to fund a higher level of investment than originally planned, with the aim of fixing the country's broken water sector.

The average increase of 36% before inflation, equivalent to a £31 (\$39.18) a year increase over five years, compares to the 44% average requested by companies and the 21% the regulator had proposed in July.

The pumping of raw sewage

into rivers and seas has become a major scandal in Britain, with privatised water companies accused of prioritising dividends over investment, leaving the infrastructure to degrade.

The sector has blamed the regulator for wanting to keep bills low and the industry, saddled with tens of billions of pounds of debt, is now under pressure to fund an overhaul of pipes and treatment plants.

Environmental groups, however, have questioned whether the companies can be trusted to spend the extra money to stop sewage spills after repeated failures over the years.

Thames Water, the country's biggest supplier, is at risk of nationalisation.

Owat, the regulator, said yesterday the bill increases would lead to a £104bn (\$131bn) upgrade to cut sewage spills.

It said a claw back mechanism would mean any money not spent on investment would be returned to customers.

Under the final plan, none of the companies will receive bill rises as high as they had asked for.

Thames Water, which had argued for a 53% increase, will be allowed to hike bills by 35%. Southern Water which had demanded the highest increase, at

83%, will increase bills by 53%. It remains to be seen whether the rise is enough to help boost stricken Thames Water's chances of survival, which depends on it attracting over £3bn of new equity.

Thames said it will "take time to review the determination in detail before making its response", while another operator, Pennon, said it was also reviewing the implications.

Should any of the water companies oppose Owat's final determination they have until February 18 to appeal to the competition regulator.

Shares in Britain's listed water

rose in reaction to what Barclays described as a positive development for the sector. Severn Trent was up 1.7%, Pennon was 1.8% higher while United Utilities was up 1%.

Showing its tough approach, Owat said in a separate statement it would fine Thames £18mn after it paid two dividends to its parent company in 2023 and 2024, a breach of obligations to link such payments to performance.

But the bill rises will anger consumers, coming after several years of a cost of living crisis when households have had to contend with surging prices in energy and food.

Owat chief executive David Black called for a "transformation" in the culture of the companies.

"Customers will rightly expect them (the companies) to show they can deliver significant improvement over time to justify the increase in bills," he said.

"We will monitor and hold companies to account on their investment programmes and improvements."

Highlighting the perilous state of the sector, thousands of Southern Water customers in Hampshire were without water yesterday after a fault at a supply works.



Govt shutdown looms as Trump, Musk kill stopgap funding deal

Reuters
Washington

US lawmakers had less than two days yesterday to avert a partial government shutdown after President-elect Donald Trump rejected a bipartisan deal and demanded lawmakers address the nation's debt ceiling before he takes office next month.

Trump's fellow Republicans huddled behind closed doors on Capitol Hill to craft a fallback plan that could win his approval and also muster enough support to pass the Republican-controlled House of Representatives and the Democratic-majority Senate.

Democratic President Joe Biden also would have to sign it into law to keep the government funded past midnight today (0500 GMT tomorrow).

Republican lawmakers provided few details as they emerged from House Speaker Mike Johnson's office.

"The situation is still fluid," Representative Tom Emmer, the chamber's No. 3 Republican, told reporters.

Without action from Congress, the US government will begin a partial shutdown tomorrow that would interrupt funding for everything from air travel to law enforcement in the days leading up to the December 25 Christmas holiday and cut off paychecks for more than 2mn federal workers.

Many government operations, such as Social Security retirement payments, would continue.

The last government shutdown took place in December 2018 and January 2019 during Trump's first White House term.

Republican Representative Nancy Mace said that Congress should keep the government closed until Trump takes office if they cannot reach a deal.

"Let's reset (on) January 20th. It's not the scary shutdown the lying media tells you it is," she said on social media.

Trump and his ally Elon Musk, the world's richest person, effectively torpedoed the spending deal



A reflection of the US Capitol in Washington is pictured after US President-elect Donald Trump called on lawmakers to reject a stopgap bill to keep the government funded beyond this week, raising the likelihood of a partial shutdown. (Reuters)

on Wednesday by blasting it as a wasteful giveaway to Democrats and threatening to mount primary election challenges to Republicans who vote for it.

Trump is calling on Congress to pass a stripped-down bill that would tie up loose ends before he takes office next month by extending the government's borrowing authority – a politically difficult task – and extending government funding.

Trump told NBC News yesterday that Congress should abolish limits on government debt entirely.

That would end the periodic debt showdowns that have pushed the country to the brink of default, but expose lawmakers to charges of fiscal irresponsibility.

At \$36tn, the federal debt now exceeds the nation's GDP and could grow dramatically under Trump's watch.

He is pushing tax cuts that could reduce revenues by \$8tn over 10 years, which would drive the debt higher without offsetting spending cuts, and he has vowed not to reduce retirement and health benefits for seniors that are projected to grow dramatically in the years to come.

Democrats have shown little interest in revising their deal to satisfy Trump and Musk, the Tesla

boss who has vowed to cut \$2tn from the \$6.2tn federal budget.

"It is dangerous for House Republicans to have folded to the demands of the richest man on the planet, who nobody elected," Democratic Representative Rosa DeLauro said in a statement. "Republicans own whatever comes next."

The bipartisan bill would have funded government agencies at current levels and provide \$100bn for disaster relief and \$10bn in farm aid.

It included a wide range of unrelated provisions, such as a pay raise for lawmakers and a crackdown on hidden hotel fees.

The unrest also threatened to topple Johnson, a mild-mannered Louisiana who was thrust unexpectedly into the speaker's office last year after the party's right flank voted out then-Speaker Kevin McCarthy over a government funding bill.

Johnson has repeatedly had to turn to Democrats for help in passing legislation when he has been unable to deliver the votes from his own party.

Several Republicans said they would not vote for him as speaker when Congress returns in January, potentially setting up another tumultuous leadership battle in the weeks before Trump takes office.

Trudeau has 'full support of cabinet'

Reuters
Ottawa

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, who is mulling his future amid a major political crisis, has the full support of his cabinet to stay on, new Finance Minister Dominic LeBlanc said yesterday.

Trudeau's minority Liberal government was plunged into crisis this week after Chrystia Freeland, the previous finance minister, resigned amid a policy clash over spending and wrote a letter condemning his governing style.

Around 15 Liberal legislators are openly calling on Trudeau to quit amid polls showing the party is set to be crushed in an election that must be held by October next year.

Asked whether Trudeau had the full confidence of the cabinet to stay on as prime minister, LeBlanc replied "Yes".

He was speaking at an event in Atlantic Canada. Justice Minister Arif Virani though did not answer directly yesterday when pressed repeatedly by reporters about whether Trudeau should go.

"Decisions will be made in Ottawa by the actors that are involved," he said in Toronto.

LeBlanc is also acting as public safety minister and a number of other ministers are temporarily working in more than one role as a result of recent departures.

Trudeau will shuffle his cabinet today, domestic media reported.

Trudeau met unhappy legislators on Monday after

Freeland quit and LeBlanc reiterated that the prime minister would be reflecting on what he had heard.

The leadership crisis comes at a time when Canada is bracing for the new US administration of President-elect Donald Trump to go through with a promise to impose 25% tariffs on all Canadian imports, which would plunge the economy into recession.

Leaders of the 10 provinces, who stress the need for a united Canadian response, are complaining about what they see as chaos in Ottawa.

"I'm confident that the government will remain focused on the work that Canadians want us to focus on," said LeBlanc. "Canadians would understandably, I think, be impatient with a government that looks at itself all the time. We shouldn't be looking inward."

Freeland rejected Trudeau's offer of a role as chief co-ordinator of relations with the United States.

Flavio Volpe, president of the Canadian Automotive Parts Manufacturers' Association, said someone had to be in charge of the US file and that person could not be Trudeau.

"We need a quarterback – I don't know who that is. It's a very important question needs to be answered within the next few weeks," he told the Canadian Broadcasting Corp.

Virani noted that Canada had successfully negotiated the trilateral trade pact it has with Mexico and the United States in 2017 and 2018 after Trump came to power with a threat to tear up the deal.

"So this should give Canadians confidence that we are equal to the task and we can do this once again," he said.

American Airlines settles race discrimination case

American Airlines has agreed to settle a race discrimination lawsuit by three black men who were temporarily removed from a flight at the insistence of white flight attendants, according to a court filing yesterday.

The terms of the agreement were not disclosed, but lawyers for the men said the settlement includes "a commitment by American to take action to prevent discrimination in the future".

The plaintiffs had claimed that they and five other black men were removed from a New York-bound flight out of Phoenix, Arizona, in January for about an hour after white flight attendants complained about a passenger with offensive body odour, in a lawsuit filed in Brooklyn federal court in May.

None of the men ordered off the plane had an odour, the plaintiffs said in the lawsuit.

They called the incident "traumatic, upsetting, scary, humiliating, and degrading".

The men accused the airline of violating a Civil War-era law banning race discrimination in contracts.

American Airlines did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

When the lawsuit was filed, the airline said it takes discrimination claims seriously and was investigating the matter.

Lawyers for the three men who sued said American had fired the flight attendants involved in the incident and expressed a commitment to "delivering a positive experience to customers who choose to fly with the company".

In 2017, the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP) urged black travellers not to fly American, citing what it said was a series of racially-based incidents.

The civil rights organisation withdrew its advisory the following year after the airline agreed to update its policies and train employees on implicit bias. (Reuters)

Georgia appeals court boots prosecutor from Trump case

Georgia appeals court has ruled that Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis must be disqualified from prosecuting President-elect Donald Trump and several of his allies for attempting to interfere in the 2020 election in the US state.

The ruling throws into doubt the future of the case, which includes Trump and 14 allies.

The appeals court in Atlanta, in a 2-1 ruling, found that a romantic relationship between Willis and a former top deputy, Nathan Wade, created "a significant appearance of impropriety".

"While we recognise that an appearance of impropriety generally is not enough to support disqualification, this is the rare case in which disqualification is mandated and no other remedy will suffice to restore public confidence in the integrity of these proceedings," the court wrote in its opinion.

The case was one of four criminal prosecutions that Trump faced in the years since his 2020 presidential re-election loss.

Just one – a New York case over a hush money payment to an adult entertainment star during his 2016 campaign – went to trial.

He was found guilty in that case but has not yet been sentenced.

Trump criticised all four cases as politically motivated attempts to keep him from returning to power.

The Georgia court did not require that the case be tossed out, but its decision will require a new state prosecutor to take over in order for it to continue.

Steve Sadow, Trump's lead lawyer in the case, called it "a well-reasoned and just decision".

The case was already expected to be at least paused against Trump when he returns to the White House on January 20.

He has said it should be dismissed in its entirety.

"The American People have demanded an immediate end to the political weaponisation of our justice system," a Trump spokesperson said in a statement reacting to the ruling.

Trump has publicly discussed using the federal government, including the Justice Department, to investigate his political rivals when he returns to power. (Reuters)

Suspect in health CEO killing moved to New York

The man accused of gunning down a US insurance executive was transferred to New York yesterday to face murder charges, two weeks after the killing unleashed a wave of public anger over the country's healthcare system.

After initially fighting the extradition, Luigi Mangione, 26, appeared in court in the Pennsylvania town of Hollidaysburg and agreed to be sent to New York, where the killing took place.

Among the charges facing the Ivy League graduate in New York is one count of murder in the second degree as "an act of terrorism".

Highlighting the intense media attention the case has garnered, multiple television networks covered his trip from Pennsylvania to New York live.

Dressed in an orange prison jumpsuit and appearing calm, Mangione left the courthouse in a black SUV, escorted by several police vehicles.

After being flown by plane to an airport outside New York City, he boarded a helicopter to Manhattan, where television footage showed over a dozen officers, some in tactical gear, waiting to retrieve him.

Mangione was arrested in Altoona, Pennsylvania, on December 9, five days after UnitedHealthcare chief Brian Thompson was shot dead on a Manhattan street.

Thompson's murder brought into focus widespread public anger against the US healthcare system and many social media users have since lionised Mangione.

Mangione made two brief court appearances in Pennsylvania yesterday, according to US media.

He waived a preliminary hearing on firearms and forgery charges and then agreed to be sent back to New York.

Outside the courthouse several protesters rallied in Mangione's defence, holding posters that read "Free Luigi" and "Health insurance practices terrorise people!" (AFP)

Lula returns to regular duties after head surgery

AFP
Brasilia

Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva returned to Brasilia yesterday and his regular duties, after getting the go-ahead from his doctors following emergency head surgery, officials said.

"He is already in Brasilia, in the Alvorada (presidential residence), with no public agenda for the moment," a presidential spokesperson said.

The 79-year-old president had been convalescing in Sao Paulo, where he had surgery last week to stop intracranial bleeding that was putting pressure on his brain.

Earlier yesterday he was seen leaving the Hospital Sirio-Libanes in Sao Paulo wearing a brimmed hat and giving a thumbs-up after getting his doctors' all-clear to take plane trips.

He made no comment to media as he left.

A final medical check-up at the facility "was extremely satisfactory – he is well", Lula's doctor, Roberto Kalil, told journalists at the hospital.

"Quite simply, the haematoma no longer exists," he said.

The doctor added that Lula had been instructed to avoid physical exercise but "obviously he will be able to do normal activities



– his cognition is perfect; he can work".

Another of Lula's doctors, Ana Helena Germoglio, said that Lula went directly from the hospital to Brasilia, where he would spend Christmas.

Another medical check-up was arranged for the end of December.

Lula had his emergency surgery – which involved drilling through his skull – on December 10, after coming down with a headache a day earlier that a scan identified as bleeding in intracranial membranes.

The haemorrhage was linked to a bad fall he suffered on October 19, when he slipped

in a bathroom in his presidential residence in Brasilia.

After a follow-up procedure in the hospital on December 12 to prevent blood flow to the area, Lula posted an online video showing him walking through a corridor with Kalil.

On Sunday, Lula was discharged to continue his convalescence in his private Sao Paulo home, pending yesterday's final medical authorisation to travel.

Even with the all-clear, Lula's health has been the subject of concern over years.

He had successful treatment in 2011 for throat cancer, and a hip replacement operation last year.

In the weeks following his October fall, which required stitches to his head, the president skipped planned overseas trips.

However, from mid-November he resumed his active schedule, hosting leaders of the G20 grouping in Rio and attending a regional summit in Uruguay.

The succession of problems has cast a shadow over the possibility of Lula running for re-election in Brazil's next presidential polls, in 2026.

Once back in Brasilia, Lula was to participate in a ministerial meeting today.

The president's health scare and recovery comes as his government seeks congressional approval of budget changes that have created unease in the market.

Amazon workers in US strike days before Christmas

AFP/Reuters
New York

Thousands of workers at Amazon facilities across the United States went on strike yesterday, the Teamsters Union said, halting work at the height of the busy holiday gift-giving season.

The union, which says it represents some 10,000 workers at the massive online retailer's facilities around the country, called the action the "largest strike against Amazon in US history".

Workers will picket at facilities in New York, Atlanta, southern California, San Francisco and Illinois, with other Amazon Teamsters "prepared to join them", the union said in a statement.

"The nationwide action follows

Amazon's repeated refusal to follow the law and bargain with the thousands of Amazon workers who organised with the Teamsters," it said.

Less than a week before the Christmas holiday, the strike threatens a disruption of deliveries of Amazon orders as Americans rush to send last-minute gifts.

"If your package is delayed during the holidays, you can blame Amazon's insatiable greed," Teamsters boss Sean O'Brien said in the statement. "We gave Amazon a clear deadline to come to the table and do right by our members. They ignored it."

Workers at a New York facility became the first Amazon employees to unionise in April 2022, with several other sites since following suit.



Originally an independent union, the Amazon workers voted in June to affiliate with the Teamsters.

Amazon has sought to block the unionisation efforts, with legal

proceedings still ongoing.

The company, however, said it does not expect any effect on its operations during one of the busiest times of the year.

The Teamsters have "inten-

tionally misled the public" and "threatened, intimidated and attempted to coerce" employees and third-party drivers to join them, an Amazon spokesperson said yesterday.

Observers said Amazon was unlikely to come to the table to bargain as that could open the door to more union actions.

It employs more than 800,000 people at its US warehouses and has more than 600 fulfilment centres, delivery stations and same-day facilities in the country.

The Teamsters represents only a tiny fraction of the 1.5mn employees at Amazon, the nation's second largest private employer after Walmart.

The union has some 1.3mn members nationwide in sectors ranging from freight delivery to cafeteria employees.

Ukraine needs European, US security guarantees: Zelensky

Reuters/AFP
Brussels

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has urged European countries to provide guarantees to protect Ukraine after the war with Russia ends but said these would not be enough without support from the United States under Donald Trump.

While the fighting triggered by Russia's 2022 invasion goes on with no end in sight, Western and Ukrainian officials have begun discussing post-war scenarios, prompted in part by President-elect Trump's pledge to bring the conflict to a swift conclusion.

Addressing a summit of European Union leaders, Zelensky welcomed French President Emmanuel Macron's proposal to deploy troops to Ukraine following an eventual ceasefire.

He told the leaders it was "crucial for Europe to make a significant contribution to security guarantees".

"We support France's initiative for a military contingent in Ukraine as part of these guarantees and call on other partners to join this effort, it will help bring the war to an end," he told the closed-door meeting, according to a text posted on his website.

However, he said, the French initiative needed to be fleshed out.

"If we are talking about a contingent, we need to be specific - how many, what they will do if there is aggression from Russia," Zelensky said.



Zelensky is seen during his press conference following the European Council meeting at the EU headquarters in Brussels. (AFP)

"The main thing is that this is not some artificial story, we need effective mechanisms."

He said that Ukraine would ultimately need more protection through membership of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato) military alliance.

Nato has said Ukraine will join its ranks one day but it has not set a date or issued an invitation.

In the meantime, Zelensky said, Ukraine could have separate guarantees from European nations and the United States.

"It is impossible to discuss this only with European leaders, because for us, the real guar-

antees in any case - today or in the future - are Nato," he told reporters.

"On the way to Nato, we want security guarantees while we are not in Nato. And we can discuss such guarantees separately with both the US and Europe," he said.

Whether Trump would be prepared to offer such guarantees is an open question.

Trump has repeatedly called for a swift end to the nearly three-year-old war.

On Monday he said that Zelensky should be ready to reach a peace deal with Russian President Vladimir Putin, though he did not say whether this meant Kyiv ceding territory to Moscow as part of a negotiated settlement.

Kyiv is desperate for more air defences and weapons as its flagging forces lose ground across the frontline to Russia.

Russian forces occupy nearly a fifth of Ukrainian territory and are making steady advances in the east of the country.

EU leaders aimed to use yesterday's summit to send a clear signal to Trump about their continued support for Ukraine and stress that any peace deal must involve Ukraine and respect its territorial integrity.

"The European Council ... underlines the principle that no initiative regarding Ukraine be taken without Ukraine," said an official declaration issued by the summit.

Zelensky said any end to fighting would have to be durable.

"We cannot live with a frozen conflict in our territory," he told reporters.



Putin is seen during his annual end-of-year press conference in Moscow. (AFP)

Putin says Russia is ready to compromise with Trump on Ukraine

Reuters/AFP
Moscow

Russian President Vladimir Putin said yesterday that he is ready to compromise over Ukraine in possible talks with US President-elect Donald Trump on ending the war and had no conditions for starting talks with the Ukrainian authorities.

Trump, a self-styled master of brokering agreements and author of the 1987 book *Trump: the Art of the Deal*, has vowed to swiftly end the conflict, but has not yet given any details on how he might achieve that.

Putin, fielding questions on state TV during his annual question and answer session with Russians, told a reporter for a US news channel that he is ready to meet Trump, whom he said he had not spoken to for years.

"I don't know when I'm going to see him. He isn't saying anything about it. I haven't talked to him in more than four years. I am ready for it, of course. Any time," Putin said.

"If we ever have a meeting with President-elect Trump, I am sure we'll have a lot to talk about," he said, adding that Russia was ready for "negotiations and compromises".

Asked what he might be able to offer Trump, Putin dismissed an assertion that Russia was in a weak position, saying that Russia had got much stronger since he ordered troops into Ukraine in 2022.

"We have always said that we are ready for negotiations and compromises," Putin said, after saying that Russian forces, advancing across the entire front, were moving towards achieving their primary goals in Ukraine.

"Soon, those Ukrainians who want to fight will run out, in my opinion, soon there will be no one left who wants to fight," he said. "We are ready, but the other side needs to be ready for both negotiations and compromises."

Reuters reported last month that Putin was open to discussing a Ukraine ceasefire deal with Trump, but ruled out making any major territorial concessions and insisted Kyiv abandon its ambitions to join the North

Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato).

Putin said yesterday that Russia had no conditions to start talks with Ukraine and is ready to negotiate with anyone, including President Volodymyr Zelensky.

However, he said any deal could only be signed with Ukraine's legitimate authorities, which for now the Kremlin considered to be only the Ukrainian parliament.

Zelensky, whose term was due to expire earlier this year but has been extended due to martial law, would need to be re-elected for Moscow to consider him a legitimate signatory to any deal to ensure it was legally watertight, said Putin.

Putin dismissed the idea of agreeing a temporary truce with Kyiv, saying that only a long-lasting peace deal would suffice.

Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine has left tens of thousands of dead, displaced millions and triggered the biggest crisis in relations between Moscow and the West since the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis.

Russia, which casts the conflict as a defensive special military operation designed to stop dangerous Nato expansion to the east, controls around a fifth of Ukraine and has taken several thousand square kilometres of territory this year.

Putin appeared to repeat his threat to strike Kyiv with Russia's new hypersonic ballistic missile, dubbed Oreshnik.

Asked by a military journalist if the weapon had any flaws, Putin suggested a "hi-tech duel" between the West and Russia to test his claims that it is impervious to air defences.

"Let them set some target to be hit, let's say in Kyiv. They will concentrate there all their air defences. And we will launch an Oreshnik strike there and see what happens," Putin proposed.

Asked if he would do anything differently if he could go back to February 2022, when he launched the Ukraine offensive, Putin said he only regretted doing it earlier.

"Knowing what is happening now, I would think that such a decision ... should have been taken earlier," he said.

Pakistan slams fresh US sanctions as 'biased'

Pakistan's government said yesterday that US sanctions imposed on state-owned and private companies over its long-range ballistic missile programme were "biased" and had "dangerous implications" for regional stability.

The United States announced on Wednesday that four Pakistan companies would be hit by the measures "in light of the continuing proliferation threat of Pakistan's long-range missile development".

The South Asian nation became one of the few countries to openly possess nuclear weapons in 1998, more than two decades after its neighbour India announced its atomic capabilities.

Pakistan has refused to sign the Non-Proliferation Treaty, a global agreement to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and weapons technology.

Pakistan's foreign ministry said yesterday that the US sanctions were "unfortunate and biased" and have "dangerous implications for strategic stability of our region and beyond".

It accused the United States of waiving the licensing requirements for advanced military technology in other countries.

"Such double standards and discriminatory practices not only undermine the credibility of non-proliferation regimes but also endanger regional and international peace and security," it said.

The United States said the executive order "targets proliferators of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery".

A US State Department factsheet said the Islamabad-based, state-owned National Development Complex (NDC) has sought to obtain components for the country's long-range ballistic-missile programme and missile-testing equipment.

It said the NDC "is responsible for the development of Pakistan's ballistic missiles" including the Shaheen family of missiles.

The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists research organisation says that the Shaheen series of missiles is nuclear-capable.

Pakistan conducted its first nuclear-weapons test in 1998, becoming the seventh country to do so.

The Bulletin estimates Pakistan's arsenal at about 170 warheads.

The other entities slapped with sanctions were Affiliates International, Akhtar and Sons Private Limited and Rockside Enterprise, all located in Karachi, the factsheet said. (AFP/Reuters)

Greece returns ancient coins to Turkiye

AFP
Athens

Greece returned yesterday a hoard of over 1,000 stolen ancient coins to Turkiye in the first repatriation of its kind between the neighbours.

The move came a few months after Turkiye publicly supported Greece in its long quest to reclaim the Parthenon Marbles from the British Museum in London.

Greek Culture Minister Lina Mendoni said the hoard of 1,055 silver coins had been seized by Greek customs guards on the border with Turkiye in 2019.

"These coins had been illegally imported," Mendoni said at a ceremony at the Numismatic Museum, which specialises in currency and medal collections, in Athens.

Greeks are "particularly sensitive" to repatriation issues, she said. "All illegally exported antiquities from whichever country should return to their country of origin," Mendoni added.

Turkish Culture Minister Mehmet Nuri Ersoy said the operation was the first repatriation from Greece.

Greek and Turkish experts determined that the coins were part of a stock hidden in Asia Minor between the late 5th and early 4th century BCE, she added.

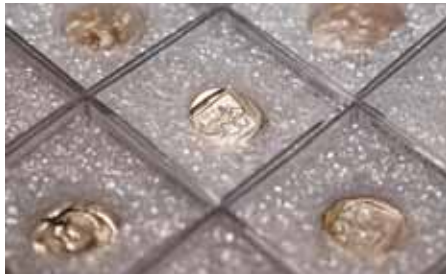
While research is ongoing, it is possible the hoard was secreted in modern-day Turkiye during the Persian Wars expeditions of Athenian general Cimon, a veteran of the 480 BCE Battle of Salamis, she added.

Most of the cache were tetradrachms - ancient large silver coins - originally minted in Athens and used broadly in the eastern Mediterranean, said Museum Numismatologist Vassiliki Stefanaki, a coinage expert.

Stamped with the image of an



These photographs show some of the stolen ancient coins that Greece returned to Turkiye in the first repatriation of its kind between the historic rivals and neighbours, at the Numismatic Museum in Athens. (AFP)



owl, the Athenian relics were also used locally to pay tribute to the Persian Empire, and Persian governors used them to reward their troops, she said.

Other coins came from Cyprus, the islands of Aegina and Milos, from Asia Minor cities founded by Greek settlers, the Iron Age kingdom of Lydia, and Phoenicia in modern-day Lebanon, officials said.

Yesterday Mendoni also thanked Turkiye for supporting Greece's campaign to secure the return of the Parthenon Marbles from London.

The British Museum has long maintained that the Marbles were removed from the Acropolis in Athens by royal decree granted to Lord Elgin, the British ambassador to the Ottoman Empire.

However, in June, Zeynep Boz,

the head of the Turkish Culture Ministry's anti-smuggling committee, told a Unesco meeting in Paris that no such document had been found in Ottoman archives.

Her statement was "decisive" in favour of Greece's position, Mendoni said.

Ersoy, through a translator, said that Turkiye wanted "with all its heart" to see the Marbles return to Athens.

"The Greek people should have them, they belong to them," he said.

Boz, who attended yesterday's ceremony in Athens, told AFP that the timing of the coins' return by Greece was not related to her report in June.

The five-year delay was caused by the time required by the Greek justice system to authorise the coins' repatriation, she said.

German MPs vote to safeguard top court from 'extremists'

German lawmakers approved measures yesterday to protect the country's constitutional court from possible future attempts by extremist parties to limit its independence.

MPs took the step at a time the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party is polling at second place ahead of February 23 elections.

Under the new rules, the total number of judges at the top court is set at 16 - comprising two panels of eight - who will serve 12-year terms and retire at 68.

To cement that structure, a two-thirds majority will now be needed in both houses of parliament to push through any changes.

Lawmakers cited the threat posed by the AfD and controversial judicial reforms in Poland and Hungary as reasons to try to future-proof the court's independence. (AFP)

At least 52 killed, 68 injured in bus accidents on Afghanistan highway

AFP/Reuters
Kabul

Two bus accidents on a highway through central Afghanistan killed at least 52 people and injured 68, a provincial official said yesterday.

The accidents happened in Ghazni province on the same highway between the capital Kabul and southern Kandahar city late on Wednesday, provincial head of information and culture Hamidullah Nisar said on X, without specifying how many people were killed and injured in each accident.

"There is a possibility the numbers could rise," he told reporters outside a hospital in Ghazni city where victims had been sent, adding that one of the accidents involved a fuel tanker and the other a cargo truck.

He noted that some of the injured were in a "critical condition" and had been sent to Kabul for treatment.

"Among the injured and dead

were children, women and elderly people," he added.

One bus collided with a fuel tanker near Shahbaz village in central Ghazni while the other hit a truck in the eastern district of Andar, Nisar said.

Chief government spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid posted on X that the authorities had "great regret" over the accidents and that an investigation would be launched.

Teams worked to clear debris at the sites into the morning, with hunks of metal and broken glass strewn across the area in Andar along with the clothes and meals of bus passengers, a journalist saw.

One of the injured in the accident in Shahbaz, Khadim, said he was jolted awake by the noise of the accident but then lost consciousness.

When he came to and pulled himself from the wreck he "saw there were many people under the vehicle and on the ground around us, there was crying and blood everywhere".

The two destroyed buses were transported to a lot in Ghazni city, their crushed and twisted frames and seats splattered with blood.

The vehicles "were badly damaged" and the bus had been "bashed around" said Rahim, who was at the site in Shahbaz not long after the accident.

"We were gathering the stuff from the site, there were human legs, I buried them there, it was a very intense accident," he told AFP.

Traffic accidents are common in Afghanistan, due in part to poor roads after decades of conflict, dangerous driving on highways and a lack of regulation.

In March, more than 20 people were killed and 38 injured when a bus collided with a fuel tanker and burst into flames in southern Helmand province.

Another serious accident involving a fuel tanker took place in December 2022, when the vehicle overturned and caught fire in Afghanistan's high-altitude Salang Pass, killing 31 people.

Portugal, Spain and France bust contaminated seafood ring

A European operation has spared revellers a potential food poisoning nightmare before Christmas, seizing 30 tonnes of molluscs illegally fished in polluted waters and arresting 62 suspects, authorities said yesterday.

Law enforcement in Portugal, France and Spain seized the molluscs and six tonnes of glass eels worth up to €10mn (\$10.4mn) on the seafood market, Europol said.

The delicacies can fetch up to €25 per kilo (2.2 pounds), but poaching gangs exploited Asian workers by paying them just €1 per kilo of molluscs

fished in contaminated Portuguese waters. This made the case the first proven crime in the European Union combining environmental offences and human trafficking for labour exploitation, Europol added in a statement.

The gangs mainly fished Japanese clams, especially popular during the Christmas season on the Iberian Peninsula, and falsified the documentation to present them as fit for consumption.

The operation, co-ordinated by Europol, involved the Civil Guard, French gendarmes and Portugal's National Republican Guard. (AFP)



CHAIRMAN

Abdullah bin Khalifa al-Attiyah

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Faisal Abdulhameed al-Mudahka

Deputy Managing Editor

K T Chacko

- ✉ P.O.Box 2888, Doha, Qatar
- ✉ editor@gulf-times.com
- ☎ 44350478 (News),
- ☎ 44466404 (Sport),
- ☎ 44466636 (Home delivery)
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The high cost of short-lived martial law in South Korea

When South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol abruptly declared martial law late on December 3, claiming that it was necessary to enable him to eliminate “anti-state” forces, street protests erupted almost immediately. By the time dawn broke, the National Assembly had unanimously passed a resolution to rescind Yoon’s declaration. Yoon has since been impeached, and the constitutional court has initiated trial proceedings. But many still do not understand why Yoon declared martial law in the first place.

Economists and financial policymakers reckon Yoon was frustrated by his inability to pass legislation since the general election in April, in which his People Power Party (PPP) lost its parliamentary majority by a large margin. A former prosecutor, Yoon is not particularly politically savvy, and the give-and-take of democratic politics was apparently too much for him to bear.

Whatever the impetus, Yoon’s declaration turned out to be political suicide. To be sure, the opposition’s first impeachment attempt failed, because the PPP’s representatives – at least eight of whom would have needed to vote in favour of impeaching Yoon – walked out of the Assembly. But public protests continued to rage, and opinion surveys confirmed the public’s overwhelmingly negative view of Yoon’s behaviour. So, when a second impeachment vote was held, on December 14, the PPP stayed put. Ultimately, the motion passed, 204-85.

Many people inside and outside South Korea think that Yoon’s impeachment is a sign that the country’s democracy is working, despite the president’s attempt to upend it. Walking through the streets of Seoul, business as usual seems to be the order of the day.

By the time the impeachment drama is over, the country will be facing a different world

Even financial markets have remained rather calm, including during the ten days of political uncertainty that followed Yoon’s attempt to impose martial law. On the day after the short-lived declaration, the KOSPI, a representative stock-price index, fell 2%, from 2,500 to 2,464, and continued to decline, reaching 2,361 on December 9. But the index

has since recovered most of its losses, rising to 2,495 on December 13. Similarly, while the ten-year bond yield fell slightly, it has remained stable overall.

Likewise, the won depreciated from 1,413 per US dollar on December 4 to 1,435 on December 13. But the won was depreciating well before Yoon’s declaration of martial law: on November 27, the dollar exchange rate was 1,391. Weak fundamentals, not political uncertainty, appear to be driving the trend.

South Korea owes the stability of its financial markets largely to a competent, bipartisan economic team, led by Rhee Chang-yong, the governor of the Bank of Korea, and Choi Sang-mok, the economy and finance minister. Rhee and Choi have sent the right messages and introduced effective policy measures, such as providing liquidity to the market.

But this does not mean that South Korea is in the clear. The Constitutional Court now has six months to decide whether to uphold the impeachment and remove Yoon from office permanently, or overturn it and reinstate him. There is precedent for both outcomes. The Court overturned President Roh Moo-hyun’s 2004 impeachment, but sustained that of Park Geun-hye in 2016.

Notably, the Court took just three months to reach its decision on Park, suggesting that Yoon’s fate might be decided as early as March (and as late as June). If the Court sustains the impeachment, a presidential election must be held within 60 days, implying a date sometime between May and August. In the meantime, Prime Minister Han Duck-soo will carry out the president’s duties.

But the prime minister, even in his capacity as acting president, does not have the same authority as an elected president, at home or abroad. As a result, the impeachment process will create something of a political vacuum, which will undermine South Korea’s ability to respond to the changes in US policies expected after President-elect Donald Trump’s inauguration in January. South Korea could face new tariffs, for example, or demands that it cover a much larger share of the cost of supporting US military presence in the country. Trump’s apparent affinity for Russian President Vladimir Putin, who has arranged for North Korean troops to fight alongside Russia in Ukraine, is also cause for concern.

So, while Yoon’s declaration of martial law was short-lived, its political impact will be long-lasting. By the time the impeachment drama is over, South Korea will be facing a different world – and the world could be facing a new reality on the Korean Peninsula.

– Project Syndicate

Immigrants fret over Trump mass deportation plans

By Ted Hesson, Ben Kellerman and Kristina Cooke
Washington

President-elect Donald Trump plans to launch a mass deportation operation targeting millions of immigrants living in the US illegally and with temporary protections once he takes office on January 20, a challenging initiative that could split apart families and affect US businesses.

There were roughly 11mn immigrants in the US illegally or with a temporary status at the start of 2022, a figure that some analysts say has increased to 13-14mn. Those with temporary protections are not immediately deportable and many live in “sanctuary” states that limit co-operation with federal immigration enforcement.

Where do immigrants without legal status live?

California was the state with the most immigrants in the US illegally with some 2.2 million in 2022, according to estimates by the Center for Migration Studies of New York, a nonpartisan think tank.

Texas was close behind with 1.8mn, followed by Florida (936,000), New York (672,000), New Jersey (495,000) and Illinois (429,000).

California, New York, New Jersey and Illinois – all Democratic strongholds – are among 11 states with “sanctuary” laws or policies that limit co-operation with federal immigration enforcement, according to the Immigrant Legal Resource Center.

Some 44% of immigrants in the US illegally lived in sanctuary states in 2022, according to the centre’s estimate. That figure does not include those in sanctuary cities and counties in places without a state-wide law, such as New Mexico.

Most of the immigrants taken into custody by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) are caught illegally crossing the border or are referred from state and local prisons and jails.

Law enforcement in sanctuary states typically refuse to alert ICE when they detain or release an immigrant eligible for deportation.

Where do immigrants without legal status come from?

Nearly half of the immigrants in the US illegally in 2022 came from Mexico, amounting to 4.8mn of 11mn overall, according to a US Department of Homeland Security report.

Other top countries were Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras.

Since January 2022, some 2mn immigrants from Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua and Venezuela were either caught crossing illegally or allowed to enter via Biden-era humanitarian programmes, according to DHS statistics. Trump intends to end the Biden entry programmes, including one for migrants with US sponsors and another that allows migrants in Mexico to use an app to enter through a legal border crossing.

Where do immigrants in the US illegally work?

The vast majority of the immigrants in the US illegally in 2022 were prime working age, according to the DHS report. About 8.7mn of the 11mn were ages 18-54. Farm groups have



Most of the immigrants taken into custody by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) are caught illegally crossing the border or are referred from state and local prisons and jails.

urged Trump to spare their workers from his promised mass deportations, arguing their removal would upend the US food supply chain.

Think tanks and the US government have varying estimates for the number of agricultural workers that live in the US illegally. The Center for Migration Studies of New York found the total number to be 283,000 in 2022, with about half in California. US government estimates suggest the nationwide total could be closer to 1mn.

How many Americans live in ‘mixed-status households’?

The immigration advocacy group FWD.us projected there could be as many as 14.5mn immigrants without legal status or with temporary protections by January 2025, up from the 11mn in 2022. Of those, 10.1mn live with a US citizen or permanent resident, what’s known as a “mixed-status household.”

The figure suggests that a large-scale deportation initiative would likely split up families and could affect millions of US citizens and permanent residents.

At least 5.1mn US citizen children live with an immigrant parent who lacks legal status, according to a FWD.us analysis of government data.

Those families could face the prospect of relocating to another country together or be separated.

How long have immigrants who lack legal status lived in the US?

Some 54% of immigrants in the US illegally had lived in the country for more than 10 years as of 2022, according to the report by Center for Migration Studies of New York.

About 25% had been in the country for less than five years.

How many immigrants in the US now lack legal status?

DHS, the Center for Migration Studies of New York and other think tanks have used US Census data and other figures to estimate that there were about 11mn immigrants in the US in 2022 who either lacked legal immigration status

or had temporary humanitarian protections. DHS enforcement and entry statistics suggest that at least 5mn more immigrants entered the US without legal status or with a temporary humanitarian status since then.

However, some of those immigrants have since been deported, voluntarily left, obtained legal status or died over the same period. An up-to-date estimate that factors in all of these outcomes is not available.

Are people with temporary protections counted in these estimates?

Yes, the estimates of immigrants in the US illegally typically include people who have temporary humanitarian protections, meaning they would not be immediately deportable.

The protections include 1.1mn people covered by Temporary Protected Status (TPS) as of September 30. TPS grants deportation relief and access to work permits to people already in the US if their home countries are deemed unsafe due to armed conflict, natural disasters, or other extraordinary circumstances. The designations last six- to 18-months but can be renewed indefinitely. Trump sought to end most TPS enrolment during his 2017-2021 presidency but was blocked by federal courts.

He is expected to try to end most TPS enrolment as the protections expire, but the process would face litigation.

Thousands more have a similar status known as Deferred Enforced Departure (DED) that Trump could also try to roll back.

Another 535,000 people have deportation relief and work permits through the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) programme for “Dreamer” immigrants brought to the US illegally as children. Trump tried to end the DACA programme during his first term but was rebuffed by the Supreme Court. Trump is expected to again try to end DACA although he said in a recent interview that he would be open to a deal to protect “Dreamers.”

The state of Texas is currently leading a lawsuit against the programme that could make its way back to the Supreme Court during Trump’s presidency. – Reuters

The energy transition that failed

By Richard Haass and Carolyn Kissane
New York

Ideas, and the words we use to frame them, matter. For example, as the Cold War wound down, “the end of history” suggested that the disintegration of Soviet communism would leave liberal democracy and market economies unchallengeable. That idea took hold among Western policymakers, leading them to believe they could afford to relax. Three decades later, “the end of history,” and the policies that followed from it, appears woefully misguided.

Today, it is “energy transition” that has gained a hold over policymakers. While the term suggests the necessity of shifting from fossil fuels to renewables – a seemingly compelling idea that aligns with climate goals and technological innovation – it inaccurately describes what is happening (and will happen) and has led some governments to adopt costly, counterproductive policies. And it has pitted goals that should be complementary – addressing climate change and promoting energy security – against each other.

To be clear, energy transitions – a move away from one form of energy to another – have occurred throughout history, coinciding with economic changes that created demand for the new energy source. After the Industrial Revolution began, the steam engine, the internal combustion engine, and the rise of manufacturing economies impelled societies to shift from wood to coal and later to oil and gas.

Support for a transition away from fossil fuels reflects concerns about the actual and predicted costs of climate change and the evidence linking the warming of Earth’s atmosphere and oceans with the release of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases (especially methane) emitted by burning coal, oil, and natural gas. The goal of the transition is to achieve “net zero” emissions (ideally by 2050) by phasing out fossil fuels and replacing them with renewables, including solar, wind, and nuclear power.

This is not occurring. Nor is “de-fossilisation.” Fossil fuels – oil, gas, and coal – still supply over 80% of global energy. Since 2013, global oil and gas consumption has risen by 14%, owing to a 25% increase in developing economies. Coal

consumption remains indispensable in powering China, India, and other developing countries, and reached record highs in 2023. Renewables, while growing rapidly, are not displacing hydrocarbons, at least for now.

The reason is straightforward: energy demand is increasing at an annual rate of 2-3%, and technological advances like hydraulic fracturing (fracking) have made hydrocarbons cheaper and more abundant. The United States, already the world’s biggest oil producer, will produce even more during Donald Trump’s coming presidency, and growing populations and economies in the Global South will sustain robust demand.

Emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence, electrified transport, and hyperscale data centres, are also driving energy demand – which renewables alone cannot reliably meet, reinforcing the role of fossil fuels. Fossil fuels likewise remain indispensable for energy-intensive industries like aviation, shipping, and heavy manufacturing. Renewables, while effective for electricity generation, struggle to meet these sectors’ needs.

Regulatory considerations and politics have also contributed to foiling the energy transition by slowing the permitting process for both nuclear power and wind. And many countries have not overhauled their tax systems to steer consumers and businesses away from fossil fuels.

With the factors undermining the energy transition unlikely to disappear anytime soon, one option is to ignore the evidence and press ahead. This seems to be the preferred approach of many who gather at the annual United Nations climate-change conferences. In Dubai in late 2023, attendees issued a final agreement (signed by close to 200 governments) explicitly calling for “transitioning away from fossil fuels in energy systems, in a just, orderly, and equitable manner, accelerating action in this critical decade.”

Europe has committed to do just that, setting ambitious targets for renewable energy and pricing carbon at levels that made energy and doing business more expensive. The European Green Deal, intended to decouple economic growth from resource use and make Europe the world’s first carbon-neutral continent by 2050, instead contributed to a fall in growth. The lack of investment in energy also left much of the continent dangerously dependent on

Russian gas. In short, the premature embrace of the energy transition weakened economic performance and energy security alike.

As Thomas Kuhn famously argued in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, dominant intellectual frameworks persist until their limitations become undeniable, paving the way for a new paradigm. The “energy transition” has reached that point. Its absence from the final draft of this year’s global climate conference in Baku is telling. A new paradigm is needed: energy coexistence.

Such a paradigm would accept that energy consumption will continue to rise for the foreseeable future, with fossil fuels and renewables both playing a larger role. It is a question not of either/or, but rather both/and – all of the above and more of all – in order to achieve increased security, resilience, and affordability.

The paradigm of energy coexistence requires targeted investments and policy reforms. Modernising energy grids to accommodate diverse energy sources and increase efficiency is critical, as is scaling carbon-capture and storage technologies to mitigate emissions. Encouraging the development of renewables through fostering public-private partnerships and easing site restrictions would help. Switching from coal, which causes the highest emissions, to lower-emission gas and renewables should be a high priority as well.

Some will object that energy coexistence is a rejection of much-needed policies to address climate change. But addressing climate change cannot come at the cost of energy sufficiency or security. Nor will it, given the politics.

Building necessary support for tackling climate change is more likely to succeed if the policies are not viewed as hostile to all fossil fuels. A transition from the energy transition would be a good first step. – Project Syndicate

• Richard Haass, President Emeritus of the Council on Foreign Relations, is a senior counsellor at Centerview Partners and a Distinguished University Scholar at New York University.
• Carolyn Kissane is Associate Dean and Clinical Professor at the New York University School of Professional Studies Center for Global Affairs and Founding Director of the Energy, Climate, and Sustainability Lab at NYU.

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Etiquette related to debt and loaning

Many social problems result from loans because many people overlook the etiquette which Islam legislated for the debtor and the creditor, and should the debtors and the creditors adhere to such etiquettes, then many problems would be solved.

Some of these etiquette regarding the creditor are to delay the debtor who is unable to pay on due time and to drop the debt from the needy. On the other hand, the debtor should rush and repay the loan as soon as he is able to and not to procrastinate repayment. In this article we will address what is related to the creditor and matters pertaining to the debtor.

The Creditor:

Giving respite to the debtor: When the time of repayment is due, then the one who was kind to his brother and loaned him some money should remember the Saying of Allah (which means): "And if someone is in hardship, then [let there be] postponement until [a time of] ease. But if you give [from your right as] charity, then it is better for you, if you only knew." [Qur'an 2: 280].

In this verse, Allah enjoins patience and tolerance for the one who is poor and cannot repay on time and that the creditor should postpone the deadline. This command came to change the old practice during pre-Islamic era where the creditor used to say to the debtor: "Either you pay or I start calculating interest on the loan". Also, the verse comes directly after the verses addressing the issue of *Riba* (i.e. interest and usury) in which Allah Says (what means): "O you who have believed, fear Allah and give up what remains [due to you] of interest, if you should be believers. And if you do not, then be informed of a war [against you] from Allah and His Messenger. But if you repent, you may have your principal - [thus] you do no wrong, nor are you wronged." [Qur'an 2: 278-279]. Allah did not specify the type of war He would wage against those who deal with *Riba*; whether it is in the form of afflicting them with diseases, making them suffer famine and poverty or a military war.

Jabir, may Allah be pleased with him, reported that the Messenger of Allah, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, said: "May Allah show mercy to a man who adopts a kind attitude when he sells, buys and demands for the repayment of loans." [Al-Bukhari] This person deserved the mercy of Allah because he dealt with people kindly and postponed the one who could not repay him and whenever asked for his money, he demanded it gently with kind words as not to hurt the feelings of the debtor.

These Prophetic narrations deeply affected the Companions, may Allah be pleased with them, and they acted upon them. 'Abdullah Ibn Abu Qatadah, may Allah be pleased with them, reported: "My father (i.e. Abu Qatadah) went to a man who was indebted to him, so the debtor hid from him. Later, Abu Qatadah saw the



debtor and requested his money but the later informed him that he could not repay him because he did not possess the money and that his financial situation was very worse. Upon hearing this, Abu Qatadah asked the man saying: 'Are you really in a tight situation?' The man responded with the affirmative. Thereupon my father said: I heard the Messenger of Allah, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, saying: "He who likes Allah to deliver him from the calamities of the Day of Resurrection, let him either give respite to a debtor or grant him remission (of loans) in straitened circumstances." Then he cried" [Muslim]

In another narration, he, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, said: "He who gives respite to someone who is in straitened circumstances, or grants him remission, Allah will shelter him in the shade of His Throne, on the Day of Resurrection, when there will be no shade except His shade." [At-Tirmithi]

Abu Qatadah, may Allah be pleased with him, was not the only one who behaved in such a manner. Rather, this was the way the entire community of the Companions may Allah be pleased with them dealt with each other.

Many of the companions delayed the debtors who could not pay on time for long periods, and in many cases they even dropped and waived the entire debt altogether.

This was so because they lived the Prophetic narrations practically in their lives. Some of them used to lend others just to get the reward mentioned in some narrations like the saying of the Messenger of Allah, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*,: "Any Muslim who lends another Muslim twice will get a reward as if he has spent this money in charity." Another narration that was an encouraging factor is the saying of the Messenger of Allah, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*: "He who gives respite to someone who is in straitened circumstances, will get a reward as if he has spent this amount in charity for every day he delays him until its due date, and after it becomes due he will get double such reward."

Giving respite and delaying those in tough situations can be the reason of rescuing oneself from Hell. Abu Hurairah, may Allah be pleased with him, reported that the Messenger of Allah, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, said: "There was a person who used to loan money to the people and he used to say to his servant: 'When an insolvent person comes to you, show him leniency so that Allah may forgive our faults.' So when he met Allah (i.e., when he died), Allah forgave him." [Al-Bukhari & Muslim]

Abu Mas'ood Al-Badri, may Allah be pleased with him, reported that the Messenger of Allah, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, said: "A person from amongst the people who lived before you was called to account by Allah on the Day of Resurrection. No good deeds were found in his credit except that he, being a rich man, had (financial) dealings with people and had commanded his servants to show leniency to those who were in straitened circumstances. Upon this, Allah, the Exalted and Majestic Said: 'I am more entitled to this attribute, so waive (his faults).'" [Muslim]

The abovementioned verses and narrations are a great encouragement for the creditor to postpone and give respite to the debtors who cannot repay on time due to their strenuous situations. They are messages to the rich who lend others and embarrass them and humiliate them, and may even be the cause for their imprisonment. Indeed, the creditor has the right to do so, but Allah Says (what means): "... but whoever pardons and makes reconciliation, then his reward is [due] from Allah ..." [Qur'an 42: 40]

Undoubtedly, the reward from Allah is far better than money which is an interim pleasure.

The Debtor:

Repaying the creditor on time: The debtor should take initiative to repay the creditor as soon as the loan is due. If the

debtor is financially unable to repay it all, then at least he should start paying in instalments if he possesses the money to do so. One should rush in repayment, because loans will be a hard thing on him in his grave.

Repaying in the best manner: The debtor should repay in the best manner. Abu Hurairah, may Allah be pleased with him, reported: "A harsh Bedouin came to the Messenger of Allah, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, asking him to repay a young camel he, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, had borrowed from this Bedouin. The Bedouin used harsh words when he was demanding his money, so the Companions were about to strike him for doing so, but the Messenger of Allah, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, said: "Leave him! Indeed a creditor has the right to demand it (i.e. his loan)" the Companions could not find a young camel among the brought ones (from *Zakah*) to match the level of that which was borrowed, and informed the Messenger of Allah, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, that all the camels were of the best type. The Prophet, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, said: "Give it to him, for it is the best of all people who pays back in the best manner?" [Muslim]. In another narration narrated by Abu Sa'eed may Allah be pleased with him the Prophet, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, told the Companions, may Allah be pleased with them, who were enraged with the Bedouin: "You should side with the one who is demanding his right"

Unfortunately, nowadays people hardly side with the one demanding his right, and in some cases even judges deprive people from their rights, and receive bribes to side with the debtor instead of siding with the creditor ... woe to them and what a severe punishment awaits them in Hell on the Day of Judgment.

When the Bedouin saw the good manner in which the Prophet, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, repaid him, he thanked him, and thereupon the Prophet, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, said: "These are the best type of people (i.e. who repay in the best manner). There is no good in a nation whose poor cannot take their rights from their rich without being harassed". The Prophet, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, said this because sometimes the poor might get his right back but only after he suffers and is delayed and is put in embarrassing situations.

Additionally, the debtor must rely on Allah in his attempt to repay the creditor. Abu Hurairah, may Allah be pleased with him, reported that the Messenger of Allah, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, said: "A man from the children of Israel asked another to lend him one thousand Deenars. The second said, 'I want a surety witness' the former replied, 'Allah is sufficient as a surety witness! The second said, you are right, and he lent him the money for an appointed time. The debtor went across

the sea, and when he finished his job, he searched for a conveyance so that he might reach in time for the repayment of the debt, but he could not find any. So, he took a piece of wood, made a hole in it, inserted in it one thousand Deenars and a letter to the lender and then closed (i.e. sealed) the hole tightly. He took the piece of wood to the sea and said: "O Allah! You Know very well that I took a loan of one thousand Deenars from so-and-so. He demanded a surety from me but I told him that Allah's Guarantee was sufficient, and he accepted Your Guarantee. He then asked for a witness and I told him that Allah was sufficient as a witness, and he accepted You as a witness. No doubt, I tried hard to find a conveyance so that I could pay his money but I could not find any, so I hand over this money to You" Saying that, he threw the piece of wood into the sea till it went out far into it, and then he went away. Meanwhile he started searching for a conveyance in order to reach the creditor's country.

One day the lender came out of his house to see whether a ship had arrived bringing his money, and all of a sudden he saw the piece of wood (i.e. the one in which his money had been deposited). He took it home to use for fire. When he sawed it, he found his money and the letter inside it. Shortly after that, the debtor came bringing one thousand Deenars to him and said, By Allah, I had been trying hard to get a boat so that I could bring you your money, but failed to get one before the one I have come by. The lender asked, have you sent something to me? The debtor replied, 'I have told you I could not get a boat other than the one I have come by'. The lender said, 'Allah has delivered on your behalf the money you sent in the piece of wood. So, you may keep your one thousand Deenars so depart guided on the right path.'" [Al-Bukhari]

This is the consequence of relying on Allah, and when one's intention is sincere in repayment, then Allah will assist him in his attempt. The problem that faces many indebted people is that they are not truly sincere in their intention to repay the debt to the creditor and thus they become deprived of the assistance of Allah.

Procrastinating payment: Some debtors delay and procrastinate for no need even when they have the money to repay, but he acts so mean and low and pays back in instalments to the creditor.

Finally, it is recommended that the debtor says nice words of gratitude to the creditor upon repaying him as this softens the heart and encourages the creditor to loan others in the future.

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Trade, finance issues

By Abdullah M al-Mutlaq

The Prophet (*sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*) prohibited some forms of sales that people were known to use during his time. The wisdom behind this prohibition of some sales is to facilitate ease for people and not to increase prices for them. Also, it is designed to stop sales that might include risk of trickery and eliminate any sales that might instigate hatred and enmity among people.

1. The Prophet (*sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*) prohibited that a town dweller (urban resident), as stated in an agreed upon *Hadith*. This means that the urban resident is prohibited from selling the goods of a rural resident on behalf of the latter. This is because the urban resident might wait until people are in need of the goods and then raise the prices. Anas bin Malik said: "We were forbidden to allow a town dweller to sell the goods of a desert-dweller, even if the later is a brother from the same mother and father." (Agreed upon)

2. The Prophet (*sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*) prohibited *najash*. *Najash* is trickery whereby one offers a high price for a commodity not intend upon buying it but upon cheating someone else who wants to buy it, even though it is not worth such an elevated price. Scholars have unanimously agreed on the prohibition of such action if the increase in price puts the commodity at a higher price than similar items. This prohibition is based on the *Hadith* narrated by Ibn Umar that Allah's Messenger prohibited *najash*. (Agreed upon)

Even if the price is increased to the price of a similar commodity, *al-jumhoor* (the majority of scholars) have gone with the impermissibility of such actions based on the generality of the *Hadith* text. Ibn Hazm, Ibn Abdul-Barr and Ibn al-Arabi, however, held the opinion permitting such action. Ibn al-Arabi stated that, "If a man sees a commodity that is sold below its

actual value and he increases the value to the correct value, then he should not be accused of *najash*, especially if he did not have bad intentions." This is supported by the *Hadith* narrated by Imam Ahmad that the Prophet (*sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*) said, "Leave the people alone, for Allah sustains some from others. Should one ask his brother for sincere advice, his brother should give him advice."

3. The Prophet (*sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*) prohibited meeting caravans on route with the intention of purchasing goods before the sellers know the market price. Ibn Mas'oud narrated that the Prophet (*sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*) prohibited going to meet the vendor on route in an agreed upon *Hadith*. Ibnul Qayyim said, "The Prophet (*sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*) prohibited that because it includes deception of the seller who does not know the market price."

4. The Prophet (*sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*) prohibited Muslims from persuading buyers to cancel their purchases from other vendors, and then sell them his goods. This is tantamount to saying to someone who is buying an item for ten riyals, "I have the same item for seven riyals for you." The Prophet (*sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*) also prohibited a Muslim from entering into a transaction to purchase a commodity when his brother Muslim has already negotiated the purchase of that same commodity. For example, one says to a vendor selling a commodity to one person for seven riyals, "I will buy it from you for ten riyals." Ibn Umar narrated that Allah's Messenger (*sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*) said, "Do not urge someone to return what he has already bought from another vendor so as to sell him your own goods. And don't urge a woman who is engaged to someone else to cancel her engagement so that she can become engaged to you, except with the permission of the other person." (Ahmad)

5. It is also prohibited to sell a commodity that might be used in the commission of sin. This would include selling juice to someone

who uses it to make *khamr* (intoxicants), selling weapons during periods of fitnah (confusion or instability), or selling a house to someone who will use it for sinful deeds. Allah says, "And do not help one another in sin and transgression." [5:2] This prohibition is based upon knowledge of the intention or evidence supporting the suspicion.

6. It is also prohibited to sell one debt for another debt. Imam Ahmad had stated that there is no sound *Hadith* on this issue but people have unanimously agreed that it is not permissible to sell one debt for another debt.

7. There is also a prohibition of injustice in sales especially when the buyer does not know the price, or he is not good in bargaining. A person came to the Prophet (*sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*) and told him that he was always betrayed in making purchases. The Prophet (*sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*) then told him, "Say at the time of buying: no cheating." (Agreed upon) Cheating and deception are both prohibited. The Prophet (*sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*) said, "Both cheating and deceiving are in the fire (meaning lead the person to the Fire)." (Ibn Adiy)

8. It is prohibited to sell goods before taking them into possession. The Prophet (*sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*) said to Hakim ibn Hizam, "Do not sell what you have purchased until you receive it." (Ahmad) Ibn Abbas narrated that Allah's Messenger (*sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*) said, "He who buys foodstuff should not sell it until he takes all the measure which he has bought in full." (Agreed upon) Ibn Abbas stated that all types of selling should be done similarly.

Ibn Umar said he saw people at the time of the Prophet (*sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*) buying foodstuff but would not sell it until they brought it to their places (Agreed upon). The followers of madhhab Ahmad ibn Hanbal went with the opinion that only foodstuffs that are measure. Other foodstuffs can be sold before taking them into possession.

Rulings for mortgage

By Dr Saleh al-Fawzan

The linguistic meaning of the Arabic word "*rahn*" is "settlement", and "permanence." The Islamic legal meaning for *rahn* is "a security of a debt by something with which the debt can be fulfilled." In other words, it means mortgaging an item with monetary value or collateral as security against a debt.

Rahn is permissible as indicated in the Book, the Sunnah and by *Ijmaa'* (consensus of scholars). Allah says, "And if you are on a journey and cannot find a scribe, then let there be a *rihaan* (mortgage) taken." (2:283)

When the Prophet, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, died, his armour was mortgaged.

Scholars are in agreement that *rahn* is permissible while travelling. The majority of scholars have held the opinion that it is also permissible in residence. The following points outline the rulings of mortgage:

1. The wisdom behind *rahn*'s validity is to preserve the wealth and protect it from loss. Allah also commanded us to document debts in writing. He says, "O you who believe! When you contract a debt for a fixed period, write it down ... and if you are on a journey and cannot find a scribe, then let there be a *rihaan* taken." (2:282-283)
2. This is a sign of Mercy from Allah where He guides us to do good for ourselves.
3. For *rahn* to be valid, its amount and nature should be known. The mortgagor should have the right to dispose of the item, whether he is owner or has permission to dispose of it.
4. It is permissible to mortgage from your money on behalf of someone else's debt.
5. The mortgaged item should be sellable so that the mortgage can be paid off.
6. The *rahn* can be conditioned in the contract or after the contract. Allah made the *rahn* in lieu of writing a debt, as He says, "And if you are on a journey and cannot find a scribe, then let there be a *rihaan* taken." (2:283)
7. *Rahn* is required from the mortgagor only because the right is for someone else. But it is not required from the mortgagee (the lender) for he can cancel it at any time, because it is his right alone.
8. It is permissible to mortgage one's share from a partnership. This is because the share can be sold at the time the debt is due and then it will be fulfilled. It is also permissible to mortgage something sold for its value. For example, if one buys a car or a house for a deferred price, then one can mortgage it until he pays the price.
9. Neither the mortgagor nor the mortgagee can use the mortgaged (collateral) item without the permission of the other party. This is to protect both parties' rights. If the mortgagor uses it, then he nullifies the right of the mortgagee in securing the debt.

On the other hand, if the mortgagee uses it, then he is actually using something owned by others.

9. Benefiting from *rahn* is permissible, but it should be agreed upon between both parties.
10. The growth of the *rahn* and the benefit derived from it becomes a *rahn* added to the original *rahn* that can also be sold to pay off the debt.
11. All expenses incurred from keeping the *rahn* is the liability of the mortgagor, including storage, guarding the mortgage, etc.
12. If part of the mortgage gets destroyed, then the remainder becomes *rahn* for the entire debt.
13. If the mortgagor pays off some of the debt, the *rahn* remains as the entire collateral and none of it can be released until the entire debt is paid.
14. When the payment of the debt is due, the indebted party must repay the debt, just as one must repay a debt that does not have a *rahn* attached. Allah says, "Let then one who is entrusted discharge his trust (faithfully), and let him have *taqwah* for Allah, his Lord." (2:283) and "Let him have *taqwah* for Allah, his Lord and diminish not anything of what he owes." (2:282)

If the debtor refuses to pay, he will be accused of delay and the judge will then force him to pay. If he continues to refuse, then he should be disciplined by imprisonment or other means until he repays his debt or the mortgage is sold to pay off the debt.

The judge can also sell the mortgage in the debtor's place, if the debtor refuses to do so. If there is money left after selling the mortgage and repayment of the debt, then the excess is returned to the debtor. If there is a portion of the debt that is not covered by the value of the collateral, then it remains as a liability of the mortgagor that must be paid.

15. It is permissible for the lender to use the collateral (mortgaged item) in some cases, such as riding or milking the animal if it was mortgaged, but the lender should spend on it and feed it. This is based on the *Hadith*, "The mortgaged animal can be used for riding, as long as it is fed and the milk of the animal can be drunk according to what one spends on it. The one who rides the animal or drinks its milk should provide the expenditures." (Bukhari)

Imam Ibn al-Qayim said, "This *Hadith*, together with the principles of Shari'ah indicate that the mortgaged animal should be treated with respect, and this is Allah's right. Its owner has the right of ownership. And the animal is in the possession of the mortgagee, but does not milk it, then the milk is wasted. Therefore justice, *qiyas*, and the welfare of the mortgagor, mortgagee and the animal require that the mortgagee benefit from the animal in riding and milking it. This is compensated for by providing the expenses. By benefiting from the animal and paying for its expenses, all rights will be fulfilled."

Some scholars said, "There are two types of mortgage. One requires provision and the other doesn't."



1.67mn passengers on metro, tram from December 11-18

Qatar Railways Company (Qatar Rail) announced that Doha Metro and Lusail Tram networks recorded approximately 1.67mn passengers between December 11-18, including the FIFA Intercontinental Cup Qatar 2024 and National Day celebrations.

During this period, Doha hosted the final three matches of the FIFA Intercontinental Cup Qatar 2024 at 974 and Lusail Stadiums.

Stadium 974 was the venue for the “Americas Derby” on December 11 and the “Challenger Cup” on December 14, while Lusail Stadium hosted the tournament’s final on December 18, coinciding with Qatar National Day and the second anniversary of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 final.

The total number of Doha Metro users during this period was 1.6mn, while the total number of tram users was approximately 70,000.

They relied on the metro and tram networks to access various event areas, tournament stadiums, and other key destinations connected to the networks.

December 18 was the busiest day for the Doha Metro during this period, with approximately 363,517 passengers using the network’s 37 stations.

The Lusail QNB, Souq Waqif and Katara metro stations recorded the highest footfall.

Despite the significant passenger turnout for both metro and tram services during this time, no incidents were recorded.

This further underscores the safety and security of the Doha Metro and Lusail Tram networks, highlighting Qatar Rail’s commitment to prioritising customer safety.

Throughout this time, Qatar Rail continued to collaborate with various partners to enhance the inte-

grated and sustainable transport solutions provided to the residents and visitors.

This included ensuring seamless connectivity to and from the metro and tram networks.

First and last-mile services, such as metrolink and metroexpress, played a key role in facilitating passenger movement to major destinations, activation areas, and stadiums.

The metrolink service operated

across 61 routes serving 30 metro stations, while metroexpress continued to provide services through 10 metro stations and 12 tram stations.

Additionally, “Park and Ride” facilities around a number of metro stations reduced reliance on private vehicles, allowing users to park their cars and complete their journeys via the metro, avoiding traffic congestion, a statement added.



Villaggio Italia lures visitors to Old Doha Port



By Shafeeq Alingal
Staff Reporter

Showcasing Italian culture, tradition, cuisine and its position in innovation and agri-tech, the Villaggio Italia exhibition is beckoning visitors at Old Doha Port.

Open until Sunday (December 22), the exhibition featuring Italian products is a part of the global tour of the historic sailing ship *Amerigo Vespucci*, which arrived in Doha to convey the message of peace and partnership and testify to the diplomatic relations between Qatar and Italy.

While opening the exhibition yesterday, Italian Agriculture Minister Francesco Lollobrigida said that the Villaggio Italia is dedicated to featuring the entire Italy with its characteristics.

“At Expo 2023 Doha, Italy participated while showcasing the innovations in the agriculture sector and technology,” he



Italian Agriculture Minister Francesco Lollobrigida and other dignitaries opening the Villaggio Italia at Old Doha Port yesterday. **PICTURES:** Thajjudheen



said, adding that Italy can help Qatar and the countries in the region attain development in the agriculture sector.

“Italy and Qatar have a good relationship in various sectors,” he said.

“Italian presence is visible in Qatar in the sports, agriculture and technology sectors,” the minister continued. “Italy is known for innovations in the agriculture sector and high-quality agricultural

products. And this expertise can be used by the countries in the region.”

“The co-operation can lead to establishing a supply chain to achieve food security,” he said.

The exhibition is a journey into the Italian taste and artisan tradition.

The “Anima Italia” at the exhibition hosts the vegetable garden of Italian excellence with a space of nature dedicated to typical Italian crops.

The corner for distinguished Italian cuisine is a tribute to the rich tradition of Mediterranean cuisine and the authentic flavours of Italy.

The Villaggio Italia also offers visitors a unique experience to explore cultural activities where Italian music and art performances welcome the visitors.

The *Amerigo Vespucci*, the historic sailing ship and training ship of the Italian navy, docked at the Old Doha Port for the first time in its 93-year history.

Doha is the 30th stop on the Vespucci World Tour which started from Italy on July 1 last year.

The *Vespucci* is open to the public free of charge from 10am-11pm, until tomorrow. The ship will depart on Sunday.

This is the sixth appointment with the Villaggio Italia after those in Los Angeles, Tokyo, Darwin, Singapore and Mumbai.

The event in Qatar is with the support of the Italian embassy in Doha, the Italian Trade Agency, and local partners Qatar Tourism, Katara – the Cultural Village and Old Doha Port.

