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SPORT | Page 1

Garcia praises
Qatar's 'fighting
performance'
against the UAE



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'No room for Kurdish militants in Syria'

Turkish foreign minister said after meeting Syria's de facto leader in Damascus yesterday that there was no room for Kurdish militants in Syria's future, calling for the YPG militia to disband. Türkiye regards the YPG as an extension of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) militants who have fought an insurgency against the Turkish state for 40 years and are deemed terrorists by Ankara, Washington and the European Union. **Page 6**

Trump threatens to retake control of Panama Canal

President-elect Donald Trump threatened to reassert US control over the Panama Canal, accusing Panama of charging excessive rates to use the Central American passage, which allows ships to cross between the Pacific and Atlantic oceans. Trump also warned that he would not let the canal fall into the "wrong hands", and he seemed to warn of potential Chinese influence on the passage, writing that the canal should not be managed by China. **Page 7**

Plane crash kills 10 in south Brazil

A small plane carrying 10 people crashed into shops in the centre of the tourist city of Gramado in southern Brazil yesterday, killing everyone on board, state government officials said. The aircraft's owner and pilot, Luiz Claudio Galeazzi, died along with the other nine passengers, all of whom were members of his family. In addition, 17 people on the ground were injured, including two in critical condition. Manufactured in 1990, the twin-engine Piper PA-42-1000 took off shortly after 9am local time from nearby Canela airport and was heading to Jundiá in Sao Paulo state. **Page 7**

Putin vows more Ukraine destruction

Russian President Vladimir Putin yesterday vowed to bring more "destruction" to Ukraine in retaliation for a drone attack on the central Russian city of Kazan a day earlier. Russia accused Ukraine of a "massive" drone attack that hit a luxury apartment block in the city, some 1,000km from the frontier. "Whoever, and however much they try to destroy, they will face many times more destruction themselves," Putin said. **Page 11**



A group of participants at the registration venue.

Falcons and Hunting Festival registration opens at Katara

The registration for 16th edition of Qatar International Falcons and Hunting Festival (Marmi 2025), which opened yesterday, will continue until December 26 at the headquarters of Al Gannas Qatari Society in Katara - the Cultural Village's Building 33.

The festival's organising committee has allocated the 'Burqa' (Hood) building for participants registering in Al Haddad Challenge Championship, while the ground floor halls of the Society's headquarters are designated for registration in other competitions.

Mutib Mubarak al-Qahtani, chairman of the Marmi festival, said the event, held annually under the patronage of HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, has become a prominent symbol of Al Gannas Qatari Society's efforts to preserve the Qatari and GCC heritage.

The festival attracts a large number of participants in its various championships and competitions, as well as a significant audience of Qataris, expatriates, and international tourists. It serves as a key platform for showcasing this rich heritage in an atmosphere of excitement, challenge, and enjoyment.

Al-Qahtani explained that the 16th edition of the Marmi will take place between January 1 and February 1, 2025 at Sabkhat Marmi in the Sealine Area. The registration for the Saluki Race Championship will conclude today (Monday) while that for Al Haddad Challenge Championship remains open until the last day due to the high turnout.

Registration and inspection for Al Daou and Al Tala'a Championships will take place from December 24-26, with online registration available until December 25, 11pm.

The festival attracts a large number of participants in its various championships and competitions, as well as a significant audience of Qataris, expatriates, and international tourists

The festival chairman highlighted that registration for the Young Falconer Championship will take place at the festival's venue in Sabkhat Marmi in the Sealine. The schedule will be determined after finalising the total number of registered participants and conducting a draw for competitors across all festival championships. The organising committee is keen on encouraging youth participation and has allocated valuable prizes for them.

He also noted that the committee had previously opened early registration for Al Haddad Challenge Championship during October 29-31 and November 14-17. This was aimed to ease the pressure on registration, which began yesterday (Sunday), especially since the championship attracts record numbers of falconers. **Page 12**

Medics struggle to save patients as Israel orders new evacuation

Reuters
Cairo

Israel ordered the closure and evacuation yesterday of one of the last hospitals still partly functioning in a besieged area on the northern edge of the Gaza Strip, forcing medics to search for a way to bring hundreds of patients and staff to safety.

The head of the Kamal Adwan hospital in Beit Lahiya, Husam Abu Safiya, told Reuters via text message that obeying the order to shut down was "next to impossible" because there were not enough ambulances to get patients out.

"We currently have nearly 400 civilians inside the hospital, including babies in the neonatal unit, whose lives depend on oxygen and incubators. We cannot evacuate these patients safely without assistance, equipment, and time," said Abu Safiya.

The hospital is one of the only ones still partially functioning in the once crowded northern edge of Gaza, an area under intense Israeli military pressure for nearly three months in one of the most punishing operations of the 14-month-old war.

Abu Safiya said the military had ordered patients and staff to be evacuated to another hospital where conditions are even worse.

Palestinians accuse Israel of seeking to permanently depopulate the area to create a buffer zone, which Israel denies.

Pope again slams 'cruelty' of Israeli strikes on Gaza

Pope Francis doubled down yesterday on his condemnation of Israel's strikes on the Gaza Strip, denouncing their "cruelty" for the second time in as many days despite Israel accusing him of "double standards". "And with pain I think of Gaza, of so much cruelty, of the children being machine-gunned, of the bombings of schools and hospitals. What cruelty," the Pope said. It comes a day after the 88-year-old pontiff lamented an Israeli airstrike that killed seven children from one family on Friday, according to Gaza's rescue agency.

Elsewhere, Israeli military strikes across the Gaza Strip killed at least 24 Palestinians, eight of them, including some children, at a school sheltering displaced families in Gaza City, medics said.

At least 12 other Palestinians were killed in airstrikes in Rafah and Khan Younis in the south of the enclave, and Nusseirat and Bureij in the central Gaza Strip, medics said.

Mediators have stepped up efforts in recent weeks to secure a ceasefire in Gaza after months when talks were frozen.

The health ministry in Hamas-run Gaza said yesterday that at least 45,259 people have been killed during more than 14 months of war.



Wounded Palestinian children receive treatment at a hospital, in Nuseirat in the central Gaza Strip.

HMC surgeons avoid amputation through new method

The Plastic and Orthopaedic Surgery teams at Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC) recently performed two complex surgeries, in a Qatar first, through the Capa-Masquelet technique, to reconstruct the thigh bone and save limbs from amputation.

Dr Mohammad Mounir, Consultant in Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery at Hamad General Hospital, highlighted the effectiveness of the innovative technique in reconstructing long bones, including the arms, legs, and thighs.

These bones often suffer significant loss or fragmentation due to trauma, advanced cancerous tumours, or severe bone infections. Employing this technique enables preserving the limbs and mitigating the risk of amputation caused by acute bone loss.



The team that performed the surgery.

The first case involved a 16-year-old patient who had previously undergone multiple reconstructive surgeries following the removal of a malignant tumour in the thigh bone. The sec-

ond case was a man in his thirties who suffered severe trauma to the thigh due to a vehicular accident.

After both cases were referred to the surgical and plastic teams at HGH, the decision was carefully

made to utilise the Capa-Masquelet technique to reconstruct the thigh bone and prevent amputation.

"This medical achievement aligns seamlessly with HMC's strategy to achieve excellence in delivering medical services and enhancing the patient experience. It is in line with Qatar's Third National Development Strategy and Qatar National Vision 2030, under which HMC is committed to adopting the latest medical technologies and providing advanced healthcare that significantly improves patients' lives," said Dr Mounir.

"The Capa-Masquelet technique represents a qualitative leap in long bone reconstruction, as it combines the benefits of the Capa-Masquelet method—which uses boosting tissue to regenerate bone—and the Capanna tech-

nique, which involves bone grafting. This unique approach effectively reconstructs missing bone segments, restoring strength, stability, and functionality to damaged femurs," Dr Mounir noted.

Dr Ahmad Mounir, Consultant in Bone Surgery at HMC, explained that this technique is particularly well-suited for advanced cases of long bone loss, especially where reduced blood circulation hinders the success of traditional methods. By replacing lost bone and repairing gaps, the technique promotes bone healing while maintaining the same leg length. This allows patients to recover and regain mobility within a remarkably short period. Typically, patients begin to heal after about six weeks, with a return to normal activities within four to six months of surgery.

GCC Unified Inmates Week 2024 kicks off in Doha

The Ministry of Interior (MoI)'s Penal and Correctional Institutions Department (PCID) kicked off yesterday the GCC Unified Inmates Week 2024 in Doha.

Themed "Toward the Path of Rehabilitation", the event is part of a social inclusion programme for previously incarcerated individuals. It is annually held across the GCC countries in implementation of the decisions of the GCC interior ministers, and will continue until Dec 25.

Public Security Director General Maj Gen Mohammed Jassim al-Sulaiti inaugurated the event that was attended by HE Undersecretary of the Ministry of Endowments (Awqaf) and Islamic Affairs Sheikh Dr Khalid bin Mohammed bin Ghanem al-Thani, HE Assistant Undersecretary for Family Affairs at the Ministry of Social Development and Family Sheikhha Sheikhha bint Jassim al-Thani, PCID Director Maj Gen Nasser Mohammed Issa al-Sayed, alongside a host of directors of MoI's departments and representatives of the participating entities.

Maj Gen al-Sulaiti emphasised that MoI gives a special priority to the PCID thanks to the humanitarian role it performs, along with the PCID's legal and security role, lauding its efforts in advancing the level of services afforded to male and female inmates at all levels of social, health, psychological and educational care.

He commended the PCID's unwavering collaboration with the relevant entities to rehabilitate inmates and include them in the community, as part of the penal philosophy that intends to prevent the resurgence of crimes through providing an environment conducive for inmates to return as good people to the society.

For his part, Maj Gen al-Sayed said the GCC unified inmates' week is part of the social inclusion program to help released



inmates serve the society, highlighting that the event features an exhibition that showcases the most salient initiatives undertaken by the PCID, in collaboration with relevant community and inter-agency institutions.

He added that the exhibition showcases the rehabilitation programmes that embody the keen-

ness to safeguard inmates' rights and provide them with the opportunities to internalise essential skills required for their inclusion after serving their sentence.

Maj Gen al-Sayed expressed his gratitude to government and civil society institutions for their productive co-operation in fostering the correctional and re-

habilitation efforts for inmates, thereby broadening new horizons for their effective inclusion and constructive contribution in the community.

Alongside the security exhibition, the event brings together several MoI departments, including the PCID, General Department of Criminal Investigation, the General Directorate of Drug Enforcement, the Department of Human Rights, the Community Policing Department, the Juvenile Police Department, the Medical Services Department in addition to the Ministry of Awqaf, the Ministry of Sports and Youth, as well as the Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS).

The week features sporting and recreational events, a family day for inmates, visits to patients from inmates of correctional institutions in hospitals, along with a collection of pavilions that showcase the role of interagency institutions and civil society organisations in inmates' rehabilitation.

In addition, the week emphasises the support and assistance provided to their families, as well as the delivery of a wide array of awareness messages aimed at fostering the culture of acceptance and inclusion for released inmates, in addition to promoting their inclusion in the society through the post-release care and support. (QNA)

Al-Misnad meets envoys of Russia, Cyprus, Paraguay



HE the Minister of State for International Co-operation Maryam bint Ali bin Nasser al-Misnad met yesterday with Russian ambassador in Doha Dmitry Dogadkin. The two sides discussed bilateral relations along with regional and international issues of common concern. (QNA)



HE the Minister of State for International Co-operation Maryam bint Ali bin Nasser al-Misnad met yesterday with Cyprus ambassador to Qatar Andreas Nikolaidis. The meeting deliberated bilateral relations, particularly in the development and humanitarian areas, along with latest developments in the Gaza Strip, the occupied Palestinian territories, Syria and Lebanon. (QNA)



HE the Minister of State for International Co-operation Maryam bint Ali bin Nasser al-Misnad met yesterday with Paraguay's ambassador to Qatar Jose Rafael Aguero Avila. The two sides took stock of bilateral relations, particularly in the areas of healthcare and education. (QNA)



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Qatar Rail hosts Zero Harm Awards ceremony

With the presence of managing director and CEO HE Dr Abdulla bin Abdulaziz al-Subaie, along with executive and senior management, Qatar Rail hosted the 'Qatar Rail Zero Harm Awards 2024' ceremony.

The awards are part of the Health, Safety, Environment, Security, and Sustainability (QSH-ESE) team's initiatives to recognise the efforts of Qatar Rail employees, service providers, and contractors who have demonstrated and outstandingly displayed behaviours and practices aligned with the company's principles of injury-free operations and Zero Harm ethos.

In a press statement, engineer Abdulrahman al-Malik, senior QSH-ESE director at Qatar Rail, said: "In collaboration with various partners, we remain committed to adopting the highest standards of health, safety, and security in all our operations, working towards the company's vision of in-



Abdulrahman al-Malik

jury- and harm-free operations.

"At Qatar Rail, we believe that achieving a zero-harm environment is not just a goal but a way of working that reflects our corporate values. Our strength lies in the collective efforts of all teams, including employees, service providers, and contractors. Through these awards, we strive to encourage and enhance innovation in safety, which always remains a top priority for us."

The ceremony, at Qatar Rail's



Qatar Rail honoured employees and service providers at the 2024 Zero Harm Awards ceremony.

headquarters, featured 10 categories focusing on the principle of achieving "zero harm." The inaugural edition provided opportunity to compete for around 4,700 employees, workers, service providers, and subcontractors across the company.

These categories included: Qatar Rail Health and Safety League Champion, Design Contribution

to Health and Safety, Environment and Sustainability Award, Health and Safety Communication Award, The Health and Wellbeing Award, The Inspiration Award, The Team Award, and The MD Special Award in addition to other awards that celebrated individual outstanding achievements in health and safety.

Qatar Rail maintains an ex-



emplary safety record in its operations. For example, the Doha Metro project achieved a total incident frequency rate of 0.01 since its launch in May 2019-No-

vember 2024. This reflects commitment to the highest global safety standards, marking one of the lowest rates recorded worldwide for rail projects.

'Hour and Hour' programme spotlights heritage, culture to mark Qatar National Day



'Hour and Hour' programme, in collaboration with Msheireb Properties, celebrated Qatar National Day (QND) under the slogan 'Our Heritage, Our Identity'.

The event highlighted Qatari heritage and culture, embodying the spirit of national identity. It included various events targeting different people of the society.

Tamani al-Yafei, CEO of the programme, said that the occasion is an opportunity to express loyalty to the nation and pride in the national identity.

"Participation in the National Day celebrations is part of our duty towards our country. It is a reminder of Qatar's rich past, as we recall the great achievements made on all levels. This day represents an annual opportunity to express loyalty, solidarity, and commitment to the wise leadership, and to renew our pledge to work harder for the prosperity and advancement of Qatar. Naturally, celebrating National Day is a precious occasion for everyone, citizens and expatriates alike.

"The activities included a variety of artistic and

cultural events, with the participation of Hitten Model School for Boys in presenting the National Anthem, Qatari Ardha performances, and Qatari chants, in collaboration with Qatar Academy Al Khor and Qatari poet Fida al-Hail. Besides, there was the sixth edition of the intellectual competition titled 'Think and Answer', where prizes were distributed to the winners."

The programme focused on showcasing young talents in recitation, acting, and artistic performance, including public speaking through activities such as puppet theatre and various artistic workshops. It also featured some traditional games and a photography corner. For children, there were face painting and henna stations. A special part was dedicated to showcasing traditional clothing and crafts, such as embroidery by Qatari designer Elham al-Ansari and bisht weaving by Bisht Al-Salem Shop.

The collaborating entities for the event included Qatar Academy Al Khor, Hitten Model School for Boys, and the Siraj Series.

Media partners included *Gulf Times* and *Arrayah* newspapers.

QCS initiative enables children with cancer take part in QND celebrations



Al Rayyan TV hosts children living with cancer.

As part of Qatar Cancer Society (QCS)'s programmes to support children living with cancer, both psychologically and socially, they participated in a special episode of the 'Friends' programme on Al Rayyan TV, as part of Qatar National Day (QND) celebrations at Darb Al Saai.

Mona Ashkanani, general manager, QCS, said: "This initiative is part of the society's strategy, which aims to support and empower children living

with cancer by involving them in all events and activities, especially national ones, enhancing their role in society and restoring their self-confidence.

"The society also aims to strengthen the sense of belonging and solidarity between these children and the Qatari community, providing them with a platform to express themselves, reflecting Qatar's commitment to all segments of society."

"This participation is an opportunity to highlight the soci-

ety's commitment to improving the quality of life for these children, supporting them both psychologically and socially through its various programmes, which include healthcare, psychological, social, and financial support, contributing to enhancing their quality of life."

She also expressed her gratitude and appreciation to Al Rayyan TV for its continuous support and for hosting children living with cancer in the 'Friends' programme.

Gulf Times reporter wins Philippine province award

Gulf Times business reporter Peter Alagos has received the 'Most Outstanding Kapampangan Award 2024' (MOKA) in the Mass Media Category in recognition of his exemplary leadership and contributions to the field of communications in the Province of Pampanga in the Philippines, and abroad.

Established in 1978, the MOKA is an annual search for Kapampangans who excel in their respective endeavours or professions. The MOKA, which is the highlight of the Pampanga Day celebrations held every December 11, has been perceived as the pinnacle of all awards conferred by the Province of Pampanga to its outstanding sons and daughters.

This year, the Provincial Gov-



Gulf Times business reporter Peter Alagos after receiving the 'Most Outstanding Kapampangan Award 2024'. PICTURE: Ric Gonzales

ernment of Pampanga, led by Governor Dennis G Pineda, bestowed awards to 13 individuals

in the Social Services (Institutional Category), Performing Arts (Institutional Category), Medicine, Social Services, Mass Media, Science and Technology, Visual Arts, Performing Arts, Business, Government Service (Posthumous Category), Sports, Government Service, and Education categories.

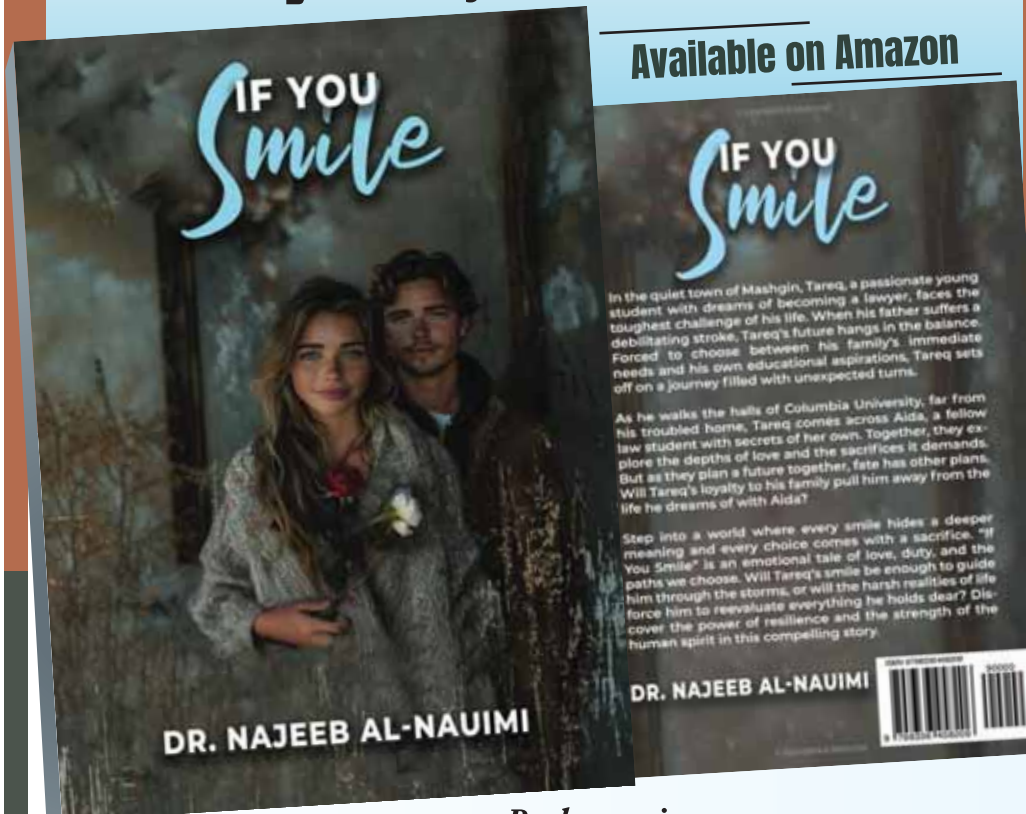
"As we commemorate the 453rd Pampanga Day, we recognise that the heart and progress in the province lies in the people who dedicate themselves to the betterment of our community.

"The annual MOKA ceremony is not only a time to honour our rich heritage but also to celebrate the most outstanding citizens whose passion, commitment, and excellence in diverse fields continue to inspire us all," the governor stated.

If You Smile

by Dr. Najeeb Al-Nauimi

Available on Amazon



About the book:

In the quiet town of Mashgin, Tareq, a passionate young student with dreams of becoming a lawyer, faces the toughest challenge of his life. When his father suffers a debilitating stroke, Tareq's future hangs in the balance. Forced to choose between his family's immediate needs and his own educational aspirations, Tareq sets off on a journey filled with unexpected turns. As he walks the halls of Columbia University, far from his troubled home, Tareq comes across Aida, a fellow law student with secrets of her own. Together, they explore the depths of love and the sacrifices it demands. But as they plan a future together, Tareq's loyalty to his family pull him away from the life he dreams of with Aida? Step into a world where every smile hides a deeper meaning and every choice comes with a sacrifice. "If You Smile" is an emotional tale of love, duty, and the paths we choose. Will Tareq's smile be enough to guide him through the storms, or will the harsh realities of life force him to reevaluate everything he holds dear? Discover the power of resilience and the strength of the human spirit in this compelling story.

Book overview:

"If You Smile" by Dr. Najeeb Al-Nauimi. Tareq, a young man from Qatar, finds himself at the crossroads of tradition and modernity, grappling with the weight of expectations, identity, and the search for personal fulfillment. Set against the backdrop of a rapidly changing society, Tareq's journey is one of self-discovery, resilience, and hope. As he navigates the complexities of family, friendship, and love, Tareq tears that life's greatest challenges often come from within. His pursuit of dreams—both his own and those imposed upon him—leads him on an emotional odyssey that tests his beliefs and pushes him to question everything he once held dear. With wisdom drawn from his heritage and the strength gained from his experiences, Tareq discovers the power of inner peace and the simple act of smiling in the face of adversity. "If You Smile" is a poignant and inspiring tale of growth, courage, and the enduring human spirit.

About the author:

Dr. Najeeb AL-Nauimi is a distinguished Qatari lawyer, human rights activist, and author. He served as Qatar's Minister of Justice from 1995 to 1997 and has been a prominent advocate for human rights. AL Nauimi's rich background in law and justice, combined with his commitment to defending the wrongly accused, shapes his compelling narratives that engage and inspire readers.

Serbian deputy PM meets Qatar's envoy



Serbian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Ivica Dacic met with Qatar's ambassador in Belgrade Faris bin Roumi al-Nuaimi. The meeting discussed co-operation between the two countries. (QNA)

Serbia reimposes visa requirement for Qataris

An official source from the Department of Consular Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has stated that the Serbian Foreign Ministry announced on Dec 6, 2024, a decision to reimpose the visa requirement on all Qatari passport holders, effective from Dec 14, 2024.

The decision is part of preparations for Serbia's accession to the European Union, which requires obtaining a prior visa before travelling to Serbia. The source highlighted those individuals holding a valid visa from Schengen countries, Switzerland, the UK, or the US are permitted to enter Serbia. (QNA)

QSWF attends Unesco's Global Forum against Racism and Discrimination



Qatar Social Work Foundation (QSWF), which is affiliated with the Ministry of Social Development and Family, and its centres – Shafallah Center, Aman Center, and Al Noor Center – has participated in the fourth edition of the Global Forum against Racism and Discrimination, held in Barcelona, Spain, in partnership with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the European Union, and Unesco. This annual forum serves as an important platform that brings together representatives from governments, municipalities, civil society organisations, and

academic circles to discuss prominent issues and exchange the best solutions to strengthen the global movement against racism and discrimination. The fourth edition of the forum focused on key issues, including combating racism, empowering women, and empowering people with disabilities, while enhancing the exchange of experiences between civil society organisations, which contributes to the development of effective policies to combat discrimination at both the local and global levels. The participation of the Qatar Social Work Founda-

tion is part of its commitment to combating discrimination and promoting equality in society, making it a fundamental pillar in supporting the social sector in Qatar. The foundation also seeks to strengthen institutional partnerships with relevant international organisations as part of achieving Qatar National Vision 2030, which aims to build an interconnected society that ensures the well-being of all its members and enhances social solidarity values, with a focus on sustainable human and social development in all areas. (QNA)

QDA launches its annual Al Bawasil camp for kids

Qatar Diabetes Association (QDA), a member of Qatar Foundation (QF) launched yesterday its 25th annual Al Bawasil International Camp for children with diabetes.

Al Bawasil International Camp annually creates an educational, safe, and fun environment for children living with diabetes from across the Middle East and North Africa region to connect and share their experiences, whilst also offering training and practical advice for them.

A total of 60 boys and girls, aged 7-11 and from 13 countries, including Qatar, are participating in the largest of its kind event in the region.

The opening ceremony, at the Student Centre at Education City, QF began with a speech from QDA executive director and camp chairman Dr Abdulla al-Hamaq. A documentary about the camp from 1999 to its 25th year, followed. There were entertainment activities for the children and a theatrical performance featuring cartoon characters.

Educational elements of the camp include workshops that deal with diabetes and its management, such as insulin injections, insulin pumps, Self-Monitoring Blood Glucose, carb counting and a workshop on oral health and activities for handicrafts.

Additionally, the camp incorporates



Some of the participants at the camp.

simple sports activities with entertainment programmes.

Dr al-Hamaq said: "We aim to help the children lead a healthy lifestyle and cope with diabetes by fostering their knowledge of diabetes and building confidence in managing the condition so they can enjoy a normal and productive life."

"QDA launched the first-ever Al Bawasil camp in 1999 only for children from Qatar. In 2009, we opened it up to the Gulf countries, and our first international delegation attended in 2013 when the International Diabetes Federation considered it a global camp that can welcome children from all over the world," Dr al-Hamaq added.

PHCC receives 6,873 patients during Qatar National Day holiday

Primary Health Care Corporation (PHCC) said yesterday it had received 6,873 patient visits during the Qatar National Day (QND) holiday.

A PHCC statement said the patients, both citizens and residents, had been served across 20 operational health centres on the occasion – 5,228 in family medicine clinics and 368 in dental clinics.

The QND is observed annually on December 18, and this year the Amiri Diwan announced December 18-19 an official holiday.

Urgent Care Units across 12 health centres served 696 patients. The speciality clinics available on the QND holiday included ophthalmology, ENT, dermatology, premarital screening, pharmaceutical, radiology, and laboratory services.

A total of 256 virtual consultations were given to patients who accessed the PHCC's Community Call Center – a service provided for urgent cases through specialised physicians prescribing necessary medications in shortest time possible.

The Corp emphasised that all health centres in service on the QND worked diligently to serve all patients without any delays, reiterating that meeting patients' needs is a cornerstone of National Health Strategy, aligning with Qatar National Vision 2030.

The PHCC further underscored the importance of exerting maximum efforts to deliver the highest quality medical services and healthcare to both citizens and residents, reflecting the corporation's ongoing commitment in this field. (QNA)

Sidra Medicine signs pact with MSH International

Sidra Medicine, a member of Qatar Foundation, has signed a contractual agreement with MSH International, a global leader in medical insurance services.

The agreement integrates MSH International into Sidra Medicine's network of insurance providers. The collaboration will facilitate direct billing for patients covered under MSH International plans, streamlining access to Sidra Medicine's world-class women's and paediatric services.

Dr Iyabo Tinubu-Karch, CEO at Sidra Medicine, said: "Collaborating with a globally trusted insurance provider network ensures that patients can prioritise their health, supported through a system designed to streamline access to care."

A reputable insurance provider with over 10,000 corporate clients and a strong presence in the GCC region, MSH International is recognised for its comprehensive medical insurance offerings. Laurent Bonhote, CEO of MSH Mena, stated: "This collaboration with Sidra Medicine represents a significant milestone in our mission to deliver world-class healthcare solutions to our clients across the region. Together, we are committed to ensuring patients and families benefit from exceptional services in a streamlined and supportive environment."



Dr Iyabo Tinubu-Karch and Laurent Bonhote at the signing ceremony.

NHRC celebrates Int'l Human Rights Day

The National Human Rights Committee (NHRC) celebrated the International Human Rights Day and the 76th anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by organising a symposium entitled 'Human Rights: A Path for Solutions'.

The event was held in partnership with the Arab Network for National Human Rights Institutions and the UN Human Rights Training and Documentation Centre for South-West Asia and the Arab Region.

This year's celebration of the International Human Rights Day is held under the theme "Our Rights, Our Future, Right Now".

Following the symposium, the NHRC signed a memorandum of understanding

with the Workers' Support and Insurance Fund.

The symposium recommended strengthening the global movement that supports human rights and giving it the appropriate space for innovation and renewal, in addition to consolidating human rights to prevent conflicts, build peace and put an end to conflict, transform the economy and establish equality and sustainability, and promote human rights in environmental work and work on climate change.

It also stressed the significance of strengthening governance, combating impunity and achieving full participation, advancing technology and science, empowering everyone without exception, enhancing the use of technology for youth to spread awareness about hu-

man rights issues, empowering youth economically to address the issue of high unemployment among youth, and strengthening the human rights system.

The symposium noted the importance of enhancing youth participation at various political and social levels through dialogue platforms between youth and policy makers to exchange views on issues related to human rights, to improve education on human rights through curricula at all educational levels, including vocational training, to enable youth to exercise their rights effectively and contribute to enhancing them in their communities and supporting youth initiatives, by providing financial and technical support to youth initiatives that aim to spread awareness of human rights. (QNA)

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INVITATION TO TENDER

Tender Reference	Description	Tender Fee (QAR)	Tender Bond Value (QAR)	Bid Closing Date
CO-RFQ-235	Resources for Report Development in Power BI	500.00	N/A	14 th January 2025, 2:00PM
QNL-RFQ-28	Research and Contents Support for Qatar History Project	500.00	N/A	23 rd January 2025, 2:00PM
CO-RFQ-236	Supply, Installation & Commissioning of Energy LED Lights and Miscellaneous Fixtures in various QF Sites	500.00	N/A	14 th January 2025, 2:00PM

Qatar Foundation (QF) Procurement Directorate is inviting companies to participate in the above listed public tenders. To receive the tender documents, please follow the below steps:

- Supplier Registration** It is mandatory to be registered as a supplier with QF in order to participate in the above tender(s). Only QF registered suppliers will be allowed to pay the tender fees online. Therefore, please visit QF website at <https://www.qf.org.qa/supplier-registration> to complete the Supplier Registration process.

Tender Fee: Interested bidders can Sign in by visiting this link <https://suppliers.qf.org.qa/abstract> and pay the respective non-refundable and non-transferrable tender fee online.

All Tender Fees are to be paid using credit cards only.

Tender Fee Payment Dates: Payment of Tender Fee online will be from 23rd December until 29th December 2024.

- All bidders, who are registered and have paid the required tender fees online to QF, will then be granted access to download the Tender Document.
- Technical and commercial bids need to be submitted and attached online in QF Supplier Portal as per instructions provided in the "Supplier Portal" work instruction.
 - The commercial bid must be valid for **180 days** from Bid Closing Date.
 - The commercial bid must be accompanied by a bank guarantee (tender bond) issued by a local bank in Qatar and should be valid for **180 days** from the bid closing date (where applicable as per the Tender documents).
 - The successful tenderer will be required to submit a performance bond as prescribed in each of the above tender documents.
 - Qatar Foundation special qualifications, terms and conditions shall apply as stipulated in the tender document.

Note: All work instructions for Supplier registration and Supplier portal can be found in below link: <https://www.qf.org.qa/supplier-registration>

Omani delegation briefed on Ministry of Labour's programmes



The Assistant Undersecretary for National Manpower Affairs Office at the Ministry of Labour, Shaikha Abdulrahman al-Badi, met yesterday with a delegation from the Omani Ministry of Labour led by General Director of General Directorate of Training, Dr Mohamad al-Najjar. During the meeting, the delegation was briefed on comprehensive services and programmes implemented by Ministry of Labour to develop and qualify skills of the national workforce. They also learned about ministry's pioneering initiatives aimed at increasing participation of national workforce in the private sector, in line with the goals of Third National Development Strategy, which aims to raise percentage of Qatari citizens in private sector to 20% of total workforce. The Omani delegation's visit aims to strengthen co-operation between the Ministry of Labour in Qatar and its counterpart in Oman in the field of human resource development, as well as to explore opportunities for mutual benefit and share successful experiences from both countries to benefit workforce. (QNA)

QU invites application for Qatar Entrepreneurship Awards

Qatar University (QU) has announced the opening of applications for the third edition of the Qatar Entrepreneurship Awards (QEAs) and called on all entrepreneurs and startups from Qatar and the region to submit their applications within various award categories.

Organised by QU, represented by the Center for Entrepreneurship and Organisational Excellence (CEOE), in collaboration with HyperThink Systems firm, QEAs constitute a national platform that pays tribute to excellence and innovation in entre-

preneurship environment in Qatar.

Director of CEOE at QU, Dr Said Elbanna, said QEAs underline QU's commitment to creating an environment conducive for innovation and entrepreneurship, in addition to empowering the next generation of entrepreneurs to contribute to Qatar's economic transformation.

For his part, CEO of HyperThink Systems firm, Awadesh Chetal, highlighted the importance of unwavering engagement with QU in hosting QEAs, affirming that these awards are evidence

of Qatar's commitment to fostering innovation and entrepreneurship in the digital epoch.

The 2023 edition of the QEAs fared well with the submission of over 500 applications, as the awards feature several categories, including the best innovative technology and a green startup, as well as women in entrepreneurship, et al.

In addition, QU called on startups and entrepreneurs from Qatar and the region to seize this opportunity to showcase their achievements in entrepreneurship. - QNA

QC project offers help to flood-hit Lanka families

As part of its winter campaign 'How Long', Qatar Charity (QC), through its office in Sri Lanka, implemented an urgent response project for those affected by the flash floods that devastated large areas of the country.

In co-ordination with the National Secretariat for Non-Governmental Organisations and the District Secretariat of Mannar, Qatar Charity's field teams distributed 1,000 food packages to the affected families in the district. Each package contains essential food items that will meet the needs of a beneficiary family for a full month.

These efforts are part of Qatar Charity's commitment to supporting communities affected by natural disasters. The aim is to meet the immediate needs of those impacted by the floods caused by heavy rains across all provinces of Sri Lanka.

Officials and beneficiaries of the project in Sri Lanka appreciated Qatar Charity's relief efforts, and expressed their happiness with the implementation of this vital project for the great positive impact it had on the lives of those targeted by it. (QNA)



Awqaf concludes seminar on Al Ruqyah

The Department of Religious Guidance of the Ministry of Endowments (Awqaf) and Islamic Affairs wrapped up the seminar on the skills of family guidance for Al Ruqyah (treatment of illness and magic through Islamic invocations) delivered by the Islamic Affairs Expert and Family and Educational Adviser at the Ministry of Endowments, Dr Ahmed Abdel Qader al-Farjabi. Assistant Undersecretary for Da'wah and Mosque Affairs Mohamed bin Hamad al-Kuwari

affirmed that the Awqaf ministry gives foremost priority to Al Ruqyah that involves versions from the Holy Qur'an and examples from the Prophetic Hadith. Al-Kuwari added that the ministry strives to enhance the community's awareness of the importance of Al Ruqyah and its correct details based on the Holy Qur'an and the Prophetic Sunnah, highlighting that the ministry always seeks to provide all means that ensure correct

therapy, as per the Shariah rules and offer care and guidance accordingly. Director of the Department of Da'wah and Religious Guidance, Malallah Abdul Rahman al-Jaber highlighted that the ministry is committed to advancing the skills of Imams to perfectly perform their functions, adding that such seminars are part of the ministry's mission to promote Islamic culture and precepts, in pursuit of maintaining tight-knit families. (QNA)

Never share personal data on social media platforms: MoI

By Shafeeq Alingal
Staff Reporter

The Ministry of Interior (MoI) has urged the public not to share personal information on social media. "Never share or publish personal information or data on social media platforms," MoI warned in its advisory against phishing.

"Avoid responding to messages from unknown sources. Verify the identities of your friends on social media and only interact with people you know. Ensure age restrictions and content controls are enabled for young users," the advisory on X said. Phishing is a form of fraud used to obtain sensitive information by disguising as a reputable entity or person through e-mail or other communication channels. It often directs users to enter personal information on a fake website, the look and feel of which are identical to a legitimate site. Phishing mostly steals banking information, data related to e-shopping accounts and social media accounts. By falling victim to such an attack, the users risk having their highly sensitive information stolen and/

Phishing Protection Tips:

- Avoid responding to messages from unknown sources.
- Never share or publish personal information or data on social media platforms.
- Verify the identities of your friends on social media and only interact with people you know.
- Ensure age restrictions and content controls are enabled for young users.

If it doesn't feel right, it probably isn't

#StayAware

or their computers infected. Attackers make their e-mail look like it came from someone or something you know, such as a friend or a trusted company you frequently use. MoI has asked the public to be cautious of being victimised by phishing attacks that use e-mails or messaging services to trick or

fool them into clicking on a link or opening an attachment that contains malicious files. Public can alert the authorities by a direct visit or through Metrash 2 if such suspected fraudulent activities are noted. They can contact on 2347444 or hotline 66815757, as well as by e-mailing to cccc@moi.gov.qa

Qatar Scientific Club launches winter camp

Qatar Scientific Club at the Ministry of Sports and Youth is organising a variety of specialised workshops and programmes as part of the 'Scientific Winter 24' camp.

The camp, which started yesterday will continue until January 8. The activities focus on programming and technology-themed events, while covering other fields such as mechanics, general sciences, and engineering, as they are considered fundamental to science and knowledge.

Participants will learn to assemble and solder electronic circuits, understand their components, design 3D models using Tinkercad, and print them using 3D printers.


Besides, they will explore troubleshooting and error fixing using measurement and processing tools.

A 'Be a doctor' workshop will explore the liver's functions in the human body, its role in producing vitamins and proteins, and the main functions of the heart through the minor and major circulatory systems. They will also learn about the kidneys' role in removing toxins from the body and perform dissections to study the parts of the heart, liver, and kidneys.

Another workshop on 'Reverse Engineering Strate-



gies', aims to introduce participants to the role of reverse engineering in improving industrial efficiency, its feasibility in scientific research and technological development, and its impact on patents and intellectual property. Besides, it will discuss the challenges faced by major companies due to the growing use of reverse engineering and its effects on artificial intelligence in the industrial sector.



INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN BARWA TENDER

BARWA REAL ESTATE COMPANY WISHES TO INVITE CAPABLE AND COMPETENT COMPANIES TO PARTICIPATE IN THE TENDER DESCRIBED BELOW:

TENDER REFERENCE	TENDER DESCRIPTION	TENDER BOND	NON-REFUNDABLE TENDER FEES	CLOSING DATE
BRE/RFP/GRED/005/2024	THE CONSTRUCTION AND COMPLETION OF BARWA HILLS – BUILDING A AT LUSAIL CITY – FOX HILLS (PLOT MU/124) CONSISTING OF RESIDENTIAL APARTMENTS AND RETAILS SHOPS (2B+G+M+5 FLOORS)	QAR 100,000	QAR 250	05 JANUARY 2025 12.00 P.M.

TO RECEIVE THE TENDER DOCUMENTS, A COPY OF THE TENDER FEE DEPOSIT SLIP AND VALID COMMERCIAL REGISTRATION OF THE BIDDER MUST BE FORWARDED TO THE FOLLOWING EMAIL ADDRESS: DEVELOPMENTTENDER@BARWA.COM.QA


TO PAY THE TENDER FEE, IT SHOULD BE DEPOSITED INTO THE FOLLOWING ACCOUNT:

BENEFICIARY : BARWA REAL ESTATE COMPANY
BANK NAME : DUKHAN BANK, MAIN BRANCH, DOHA – QATAR
ACCOUNT NO. : 200000008022
IBAN NUMBER : QA04BRWA000000000200000008022

NO OFFERS SUBMITTED BEYOND THE CLOSING DATE WILL BE CONSIDERED

TENDER BIDS TO BE SUBMITTED TO:

TENDER COMMITTEE SECRETARY
BARWA REAL ESTATE COMPANY
BARWA AL-SADD TOWERS – TOWER 1 – 16TH FLOOR
P.O BOX: 27777 DOHA-QATAR



Syria's new leader says all weapons to come under 'state control'

AFP
Damascus

Two weeks after seizing power in a sweeping offensive, Syria's new leader Ahmed al-Sharaa yesterday said weapons in the country, including those held by Kurdish-led forces, would come under state control.

Sharaa spoke alongside Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan, after earlier meeting with Lebanese Druze leaders and vowing to end "negative interference" in the neighbouring country.

Ankara-backed rebels played a key role in supporting Sharaa's Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) group, which headed a rebel alliance and seized Damascus on December 8, ousting long-time ruler Bashar al-Assad.

During a press conference with Fidan, Sharaa said Syria's armed "factions will begin to announce their dissolution and enter" the army.

"We will absolutely not allow there to be weapons in the country outside state control, whether from the revolutionary factions or the factions present in the SDF area," he added, referring to the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces.

Sharaa - also known as Abu Mohammed al-Jolani - had traded in the olive-green military shirt he sported just days ago for a suit and tie during his meetings yesterday at the presidential palace.

He also said: "We are working on protecting sects and minorities from any attacks that occur between them" and from "external" actors exploiting the situation "to cause sectarian discord." "Syria is a country for all and we can coexist together," he added. Fidan said sanctions on Syria must "be lifted as soon as possible". He called for the interna-



Turkiye's Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan meets with Syria's de facto leader Ahmed al-Sharaa in Damascus, yesterday.

tional community to "mobilise to help Syria get back on its feet and for the displaced people to return". Syria's nearly 14-year civil war killed more than half a million people and displaced more than half its population, many of them fleeing to neighbouring countries, including 3mn in Turkiye.

Turkiye has maintained strong ties with Syria's new leaders, and Ankara's intelligence chief Ibrahim Kalin was in Damascus just four days after Assad fell.

Ankara has meanwhile continued operations against Kurdish-held areas in northeastern Syria, with a Britain-based war monitor reporting on Saturday that a Turkish drone strike killed five civilians in the area.

Ankara regards the People's Protection Units (YPG), the main component of the SDF, as being linked to the militant Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) at home, which both Turkiye and Western allies deem a "terrorist" organisation.

'RESPECT LEBANON'S SOVEREIGNTY'
Regional powerhouse Saudi Arabia is also in direct contact with Syria's new authorities.

Riyadh will send a delegation to the country soon, Syria's ambassador in the Saudi capital said.

During his meeting with visiting Lebanese Druze chiefs Walid and Taymur Jumblatt, Sharaa said Syria will no longer exert "negative interference in Lebanon at all".

He added that Damascus "respects Lebanon's sovereignty, the unity of its territories, the independence of its decisions and its security stability".

Syria "will stay at equal distance from all" in Lebanon, Sharaa added, acknowledging that Syria has been a "source of fear and anxiety" for the country.

Walid Jumblatt, long a fierce critic of Assad and his father Hafez who ruled Syria before him, arrived in Damascus yesterday at the head of a delegation of lawmakers from his parliamentary bloc and Druze religious figures.

The Druze religious minority is spread across Lebanon, Syria and Israel. Walid Jumblatt accuses the former Syrian authorities of having assassinated his father in 1977 during Lebanon's civil war.

In ruined homes, Palestinians recall former Syria leader's torture

AFP
Yarmuk

School lessons ended in Syria's biggest Palestinian refugee camp on October 18, 2012, judging by the date still chalked up on the board more than a decade later.

"I am playing football"; "She is eating an apple"; "The boys are flying a kite" are written in English.

Outside, the remaining children in the Damascus suburb of Yarmuk now play among the shattered ruins left by Syria's years of civil war.

And as the kids chase through clouds of concrete dust, a torture victim - freed from jail this month when rebels toppled Bashar al-Assad's government - hobbles through the rubble.

"Since I left the prison until now, I sleep one or two hours max," 30-year-old Mahmud Khaled Ajaj said.

Since 1957, Yarmuk has been a 2.1-square-kilometre (519-acre) "refugee camp" for Palestinians displaced by the founding of the modern Israeli state.

SHATTERED CITY
Like similar camps across the Middle East, over the decades it has become a dense urban community of multi-storey concrete housing blocks and businesses.

According to the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, at the start of Syria's conflict in 2011 it was home to 160,000 registered refugees. Rebellion, air strikes and a siege by government forces had devastated the area and left by September this year only 8,160 people still clinging to life in the ruins.

With Assad's fall, more may return to reopen the damaged schools and mosques, but many like Ajaj will have terrible tales to tell of Assad's persecution.

The former Free Syrian Army rebel fighter spent seven years in government custody, most of it at the notorious Saydnaya prison, and was only released when Assad's rule ended on December 8.

Ajaj's face is still paler than



Mahmud Khaled Ajaj, 30, reacts while standing before a destroyed apartment building in the Yarmuk camp for Palestinian refugees south of Damascus.

those of his neighbours, who are tanned from sitting outside ruined homes, and he walks awkwardly with a back brace after years of beatings. At one point, a prison doctor injected him in the spine and partly paralysed him - he thinks on purpose - but what really haunts him was the hunger in his packed cell. "My neighbours and relatives know that I had little food, so they bring me food and fruit. I don't sleep if the food is not next to me. The bread, especially the bread," he said. "Yesterday, we had bread leftovers," he said, relishing being outside after his windowless group cell, and ignoring calls from his family to come to see a concerned aunt.

"My parents usually keep them for the birds to feed them. I told them: 'Give part of them to the birds and keep the rest for me. Even if they are dry or old I want them for me.'" As Ajaj spoke to AFP, two passing Palestinian women paused to see if he had any news of missing relatives since Syria's ousted leader fled to Russia.

The International Committee of the Red Cross has documented more than 35,000 cases of disappearances under Assad's rule.

Ajaj's ordeal was extreme, but the entire Yarmuk community has suffered on the frontline of Assad's war for survival, with Palestinians roped into fighting on both sides.

The graveyard is cratered by air strikes. Families struggle to find the tombs of their dead amid the devastation. The scars left by mortar strikes dot empty basketball courts.

Here and there, bulldozers are trying to shift rubble and the homeless try to scavenge reusable debris. Some find work, but others struggle with trauma.

Haitham Hassan al-Nada, a lively and wild-eyed 28-year-old, invited an AFP reporter to run his hand over lumps he says are bullets still lodged in his skull and hands. His father, a local trader, supports him and his wife and two children after Assad's forces shot him and left him for dead as a deserter from the government side.

Nada told AFP he fled service because, as a Palestinian, he did not think he should have to serve in Syrian forces. He was caught and shot multiple times, he said.

"They called my mother after they 'killed' me, so she went to the airport road, towards Najha. They told her 'This is the dog's body, the deserter,'" he said.

"They didn't wash my body, and when she was kissing me to say goodbye before they buried me, suddenly and by God's power, it's unbelievable, I took a deep breath." After Nada was released from hospital, he returned to Yarmuk and found a scene of devastation.

UN investigator says possible to find 'enough' proof for Syria prosecutions

AFP
Damascus

The visiting head of a UN investigative body for Syria said it was possible to find "more than enough" evidence to convict people of crimes against international law, but there was an immediate need to secure and preserve it.

The doors of Syria's prisons were flung open after a rebel alliance ousted long-time ruler Bashar al-Assad this month, more than 13 years after his brutal repression of anti-government protests triggered a war that would kill more than 500,000 people.

With families rushing to former prisons, detention centres and alleged mass graves to find any trace of disappeared



Robert Petit talks to AFP during an interview at his Damascus residence, yesterday.

relatives, many have expressed concern about safeguarding documents and other evidence.

"We have the possibility here to find more than enough evidence left behind to convict those we should prosecute," said Robert Petit, who heads the International Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM) set up by the UN in 2016 to prepare prosecutions for major international crimes in Syria.

But he noted that preserving evidence would "need a lot of co-ordination between all the different actors". "We can all understand the human impulse to go in and try and find your loved ones," Petit said. "The fact is, though, that there needs to be a control put in place to restrict access to all these different centres... It needs to be a concerted effort by everyone who has the resources and the powers to do that to freeze that access, preserve it".

The organisation, known as the Mechanism, was not permitted to work in Syria under Assad's government but was able to document many crimes from abroad. Since Assad's fall, Petit has been able to visit the country but his team still require authorisation to begin their work inside Syria which they have requested.

Cyclone Chido death toll rises to 94 in Mozambique

AFP
Maputo

Cyclone Chido killed at least 94 people in Mozambique in its deadly rampage through the Indian Ocean last week, the country's disaster management agency said yesterday, raising a previous death toll of 76.

The cyclone, which devastated the French island territory of Mayotte before hitting the African mainland, also destroyed 110,000 homes in Mozambique, officials said.

It comes as the southern African nation reels from a deadly post-election crisis pitting the party in power since Mozambique's independence from Portugal against an opposition crying foul over alleged electoral fraud.

After making landfall the storm ravaged the northern province of Cabo Delgado with gusts of around 260 kilometres (160 miles) per hour, pelting it with 250 millimetres (10 inches) of rain in a day.

That part of northern Mozambique is both regularly ravaged by tropical storms and wrestling with



A recent photo shows a drone view of destroyed houses and buildings following cyclone Chido in Pemba, Mozambique.

unrest from a long-running religious insurgency.

More than 500,000 of the 620,000 Mozambicans affected by the storm - which experts say was made more intense by human-driven climate change - are concentrated in Cabo Delgado.

In the hard-hit Mecufi district a mosque had its roof stripped by the gale, as seen in images taken by Unicef. The ruling Frelimo party's presidential candidate

Daniel Chapo - whose win at the ballot box in October has been denounced by the opposition as fraudulent - visited the affected areas yesterday.

At least 130 people have been killed in protests against Chapo's victory in an election that international observers say was marred by irregularities, according to Plataforma Decide. That local civil society group's figures have been cited by Amnesty International.

ANNOUNCEMENT

I, **FRANCK VICTOR PIERRE BOHEC**

holder of

FRANCE Passport No. 18CK05765
QID No. 27925000249

hereby change my name

from

FRANCK VICTOR PIERRE BOHEC

to

FRANCK FRANCES PEDREIRO

Any objection, please contact
THE PERMANENT COMMITTEE FOR NATIONALITY AFFAIRS
within 15 days from the publication of this notice.

ANNOUNCEMENT

I, **DIEGO CHRISTIAN RUI BOHEC**

holder of

FRANCE Passport No. 19IA69482
QID No. 30925000185

hereby change my name

from

DIEGO CHRISTIAN RUI BOHEC

to

DIEGO FRANCES PEDREIRO

Any objection, please contact
THE PERMANENT COMMITTEE FOR NATIONALITY AFFAIRS
within 15 days from the publication of this notice.

ANNOUNCEMENT

I, **FORHAD HOSSAIN ABUL KALAM**

holder of

BANGLADESH Passport No. A08343571
QID No. 29805001099

hereby change my name

from

FORHAD HOSSAIN ABUL KALAM

to

FORHAD HOSEN ABUL KALAM

Any objection, please contact
THE PERMANENT COMMITTEE FOR NATIONALITY AFFAIRS
within 15 days from the publication of this notice.

Women-only flight lands in Iranian holy city for first time

AFP
Tehran

An Iranian airline conducted a rare women-only flight yesterday, landing for the first time in the holy city of Mashhad in the northeast, state media reported.

The Aseman Airlines flight by Shahrzad Shams - one of Iran's pioneering women pilots - carried 110 passengers on board, according to the official

IRNA news agency. Dubbed the "Iran Banoo" (Iran Lady) flight, the plane touched down at Hasheminejad International Airport in Mashhad, Iran's second-largest city and home to the shrine of Imam Reza.

"This is the first time a women-only flight, with both female passengers and crew, lands in Mashhad," the official IRNA news agency said, without specifying the flight's departure point.

Trump threatens to take back Panama Canal

Reuters/AFP
Washington

President-elect Donald Trump has threatened to reassert US control over the Panama Canal, accusing Panama of charging excessive rates to use the Central American passage, which allows ships to cross between the Pacific and Atlantic oceans.

In a Saturday evening post on Truth Social, Trump also warned that he would not let the canal fall into the “wrong hands”, and he seemed to warn of potential Chinese influence on the passage, writing that the canal should not be managed by China.

China does not control or administer the canal.

However, a subsidiary of Hong Kong-based CK Hutchison Holdings has long managed two ports located on the Caribbean and Pacific entrances to the canal.

The post was an exceedingly rare example of a US leader saying he could push a sovereign country to hand over territory.

It also underlines an expected shift in US diplomacy under Trump, who has not historically shied away from threatening allies and using bellicose rhetoric when dealing with counterparts.

“Our Navy and Commerce have been treated in a very unfair and injudicious way. The fees being charged by Panama are ridiculous,” he said in a post on his Truth Social platform. “This complete ‘rip-off’ of our Country will immediately stop.”

“The fees being charged by Panama are ridiculous, especially knowing the extraordinary generosity that has been bestowed to Panama by the US,” Trump wrote.

“It was not given for the benefit of others, but merely as a token of co-operation with us and Panama,” he wrote. “If the principles, both moral and legal, of this magnanimous gesture of giving are not followed, then we will demand that the Panama Canal be returned to us, in full, and without question.”

The Panamanian embassy in Washington did not respond to a request for comment.

Several Panamanian politicians, however, took to social media to criticise Trump’s statements and ask the government to defend the canal.

“The government has the duty to defend our autonomy as an independent country,” Grace Hernandez, a deputy from the opposition MOCA party, said on X. “Diplomacy demands steadfastness in the face of regrettable statements.”

The United States largely built the canal and administered territory surrounding the passage for decades.

However, the United States and Panama signed a pair of accords in 1977 that paved the way for the canal’s return to full Panamanian control.

The United States handed over control of the canal in 1999 after a period of joint administration.

“It was solely for Panama to manage,



This picture released by the Panama Canal Authority on August 30 shows a container ship transiting the Panama Canal in Panama. Trump has threatened to regain control of the canal. (AFP)



not China, or anyone else,” Trump wrote. “We would and will NEVER let it fall into the wrong hands!”

The waterway, which allows up to 14,000 ships to cross per year, accounts for 2.5% of global seaborne trade and is critical to US imports of autos and commercial goods by container ships from Asia, and for US exports of commodities, including liquefied natural gas.

The Panama Canal Authority reported in October that the waterway had earned record revenues of nearly \$5bn in the last fiscal year.

It is not clear how Trump would seek to regain control over the canal, and he would have no recourse under international law if he decided to make a play for the passage.

This is not the first time Trump has openly considered territorial expansion.

In recent weeks, he has repeatedly mused about turning Canada into a US state, though it is unclear how serious he is about the matter.

During his 2017-2021 term, Trump expressed interest in buying Greenland, an autonomous territory of Denmark.

He was publicly rebuffed by Danish authorities before any conversations could take place.

Riding the wave



Hawaiian surfer Noah Beschen catches a wave at the Pe’ahi Jaws Surf Break on the island of Maui, Hawaii. (AFP)

Venezuela says 200 more protesters to be released

Reuters/AFP
Caracas

Venezuelan Attorney-General Tarek Saab has said that 200 more people arrested over election protests are to be freed, the latest in a series of prisoner releases.

Last Monday Saab said the total number of prisoners released until then was 533, out of more than 2,000 people who were arrested for taking part in protests after the contest.

Rights groups have said they have only been able to verify some of the releases and that at least three protesters died in custody.

Electoral authorities and the country’s Supreme Court have said President Nicolas Maduro won a third term, but the country’s opposition has released ballot box-level tallies it says show a resounding victory for its candidate. Yesterday the country’s press

union announced that the authorities have released a journalist accused of terrorism and arrested in the aftermath of Maduro’s disputed July re-election.

Ana Carolina Guaita, arrested on August 2, is a reporter for La Patilla, an outlet that is often critical of the government.

“Ana was imprisoned for more than four months” in La Guaira, a coastal city north of the capital Caracas, the National Union of Press Workers said in a post on social media.

“She was accused of terrorism, incitement to hatred and obstruction of public roads,” the union said.

Before her arrest, Guaita had covered the toppling of a statue of late president Hugo Chavez – whose legacy Maduro claims as his heir – during post-election protests.

Guaita’s release came hours after authorities announced the release of 200 detainees.

One missing after oil rig sinks off Trinidad

An oil rig sank in the waters off Trinidad yesterday, leaving one worker missing, the company and oil workers union said.

The rig, operated by Well Services in the Gulf of Paria, between Trinidad and Venezuela, started sinking around 3am (0700 GMT).

All but one of the workers were safely evacuated, and divers were sent to the site on a search-and-rescue mission, according to Christopher Jackman, president of the Oilfield Workers Trade Union (OWTU)’s Pointe-a-Pierre branch.

One person was injured, Well Services said in a statement, adding that the individual is “in stable condition and receiving medical care”.

The platform was drilling in the Heritage Offshore East Field, the company said, when the incident occurred.

Heritage Petroleum, Trinidad and Tobago’s state-owned oil company, said that while it was supporting the drilling project, the platform was operated by Well Services.

Current Energy Minister Stuart Young said that he had been briefed on the situation and that the incident “is under investigation”.

The government is “currently liaising with both Heritage Petroleum and Well Services”, he said. (AFP)

Starbucks strike expands to New York

Starbucks workers have expanded their strike to four more US cities, including New York, the union representing more than 10,000 baristas said late on Saturday.

The five-day strike, which began on Friday and initially closed Starbucks cafes in Los Angeles, Chicago and Seattle, has added New Jersey, New York, Philadelphia and St. Louis, Workers United said in a statement.

It did not say where the New Jersey walkout was occurring. Starbucks did not immediately respond to a request for comment. (Reuters)

Plane crashes in Brazilian tourist city, killing 10



A piece of the plane that crashed in the centre of Gramado lies on the ground. (Reuters)

Reuters/AFP
Sao Paulo

A small plane with 10 people aboard crashed into shops in the centre of the tourist city of Gramado in southern Brazil yesterday, civil defence officials said, and initial reports indicated that there were no survivors.

“Unfortunately, initial reports indicate that the aircraft’s occupants did not survive,” Governor Eduardo Leite said in a post on social media platform X.

According to the public security office of Rio Grande do Sul state, at least 15 people were taken to the city’s hospital, most of them suffering from smoke inhalation caused by the fire triggered by the crash.

The plane reportedly first struck the chimney of a building, then the second floor of a house, before crashing into a furniture store, authorities said. Debris also reached a nearby inn.

Nestled in a mountainous region, Gramado is the most popular tourist destination in Rio Grande do Sul, which was severely impacted earlier this year by unprecedented floods that claimed dozens of lives, destroyed infrastructure and significantly disrupted the state’s economy.

The plane had taken off from the municipality of Canela, another tourist town in Rio Grande do Sul.

The accident occurred just days before Christmas, a particularly busy period for the city, which is traditionally adorned with decorations and hosts festive events.

Scientists observe ‘negative time’ in innovative quantum experiments

By Ben Simon & Issam Ahmed
AFP

Scientists have long known that light can sometimes appear to exit a material before entering it – an effect dismissed as an illusion caused by how waves are distorted by matter.

Now, researchers at the University of Toronto, through innovative quantum experiments, say they have demonstrated that “negative time” isn’t just a theoretical idea – it exists in a tangible, physical sense, deserving closer scrutiny.

The findings, yet to be published in a peer-reviewed journal, have attracted both global attention and scepticism.

The researchers emphasise that these perplexing results highlight a peculiar quirk of quantum mechanics rather than a radical shift in our understanding of time.

“This is tough stuff, even for us to talk about with other physicists. We get mis-

understood all the time,” said Aephraim Steinberg, a University of Toronto professor specialising in experimental quantum physics.

While the term “negative time” might sound like a concept lifted from science fiction, Steinberg defends its use, hoping it will spark deeper discussions about the mysteries of quantum physics.

Years ago, the team began exploring interactions between light and matter.

When light particles, or photons, pass through atoms, some are absorbed by the atoms and later re-emitted.

This interaction changes the atoms, temporarily putting them in a higher-energy or “excited” state before they return to normal.

In research led by Daniela Angulo, the team set out to measure how long these atoms stayed in their excited state.

“That time turned out to be negative,” Steinberg explained – meaning a duration less than zero.

To visualise this concept, imagine cars entering a tunnel: before the experiment, physicists recognised that while the average entry time for a thousand cars might be, for example, noon, the first cars could exit a little sooner, say 11.59am.

This result was previously dismissed as meaningless.

What Angulo and colleagues demonstrated was akin to measuring carbon monoxide levels in the tunnel after the first few cars emerged and finding that the readings had a minus sign in front of them.

The experiments, conducted in a cluttered basement laboratory bristling with wires and aluminium-wrapped devices, took over two years to optimise.

The lasers used had to be carefully calibrated to avoid distorting the results.

Still, Steinberg and Angulo are quick to clarify: no one is claiming time travel is a possibility.

“We don’t want to say anything travelled backward in time,” Steinberg said.

“That’s a misinterpretation.”

The explanation lies in quantum mechanics, where particles like photons behave in fuzzy, probabilistic ways rather than following strict rules.

Instead of adhering to a fixed timeline for absorption and re-emission, these interactions occur across a spectrum of possible durations – some of which defy everyday intuition.

Critically, the researchers say, this doesn’t violate Einstein’s theory of special relativity, which dictates that nothing can travel faster than light.

These photons carried no information, sidestepping any cosmic speed limits.

The concept of “negative time” has drawn both fascination and scepticism, particularly from prominent voices in the scientific community.

German theoretical physicist Sabine Hossenfelder, for one, criticised the work in a YouTube video viewed by more than 250,000 people, noting: “The negative

time in this experiment has nothing to do with the passage of time – it’s just a way to describe how photons travel through a medium and how their phases shift.”

Angulo and Steinberg pushed back, arguing that their research addresses crucial gaps in understanding why light doesn’t always travel at a constant speed.

Steinberg acknowledged the controversy surrounding their paper’s provocative headline but pointed out that no serious scientist has challenged the experimental results.

“We’ve made our choice about what we think is a fruitful way to describe the results,” the scientist said, adding that while practical applications remain elusive, the findings open new avenues for exploring quantum phenomena.

“I’ll be honest, I don’t currently have a path from what we’ve been looking at toward applications,” he admitted. “We’re going to keep thinking about it, but I don’t want to get people’s hopes up.”



China imposes sanctions on two Canada institutions

Reuters
Beijing

China yesterday said it was taking countermeasures against two Canadian institutions and 20 people involved in human rights issues concerning the Uyghurs and Tibet.

The measures, which took effect on Saturday, include asset freezes and bans on entry and the targets include Canada's Uyghur Rights Advocacy Project and the Canada-Tibet Committee, China's foreign ministry announces on its website.

For the two institutions, China said it is freezing their 'movable property, immovable property and other types of property within the territory of China'

Rights groups accuse Beijing of widespread abuses of Uyghurs, a mainly Muslim ethnic minority that numbers around 10mn in the western region of Xinjiang, including the mass use of forced labour in camps. Beijing denies any abuses.

China seized control of Tibet in 1950 in what it describes as a "peaceful liberation" from feudalistic serfdom. International human rights groups and exiles, however, have routinely condemned what they call China's oppressive rule in Tibetan areas.

For the two institutions, China said it is freezing their "movable property, immovable property and other types of property within the territory of China".

It is freezing the property in China of 15 people in the Uyghur institution and five on the Tibet committee, banning them from entering China, including Hong Kong and Macau.

Calls to the Canadian embassy in Beijing went unanswered. Reuters did not receive an im-

mediate response from the rights groups or Global Affairs Canada.

Meanwhile, China yesterday said it "firmly opposed" US President Joe Biden's approval of \$571.3mn in defence assistance for Taiwan.

The White House said on Friday that Biden had authorised the drawdown "of up to \$571.3mn in defence articles and services of the department of defence, and military education and training, to provide assistance to Taiwan".

The White House statement did not provide details of the military assistance package, which comes less than three months after one worth \$567mn was authorised.

"This move gravely infringes on China's sovereignty and security interests," Beijing's foreign ministry said in a statement, adding it "firmly opposes this action".

China "has lodged stern representations with the US at the earliest opportunity", it said.

The country's Taiwan Affairs Office said such actions by the US "contradict its leaders' serious commitments" to not supporting "Taiwan independence".

"We demand that the US immediately cease arming Taiwan and handle the Taiwan issue with the utmost caution," said spokeswoman Zhu Fenglian, according to state broadcaster CCTV.

The US does not officially recognise Taiwan diplomatically, but it is the self-ruled island's strategic ally and largest supplier of weapons.

China, which has ramped up political and military pressure on Taiwan in recent years, has repeatedly called for Washington to cease sending arms and assistance to the island, which it claims as part of its territory.

Taiwan received 38 advanced Abrams battle tanks from the US last week - reportedly its first new tanks in 30 years.



Soldiers take a selfie on the platform at a metro station in Ho Chi Minh City yesterday.

Ho Chi Minh City celebrates first metro

AFP
Ho Chi Minh City

Thousands of selfie-taking Ho Chi Minh City residents crammed into train carriages yesterday as the traffic-clogged business hub celebrated the opening of its first-ever metro line after years of delays.

Huge queues spilled out of every station along the \$1.7bn line that runs almost 20km from the city centre - with women in traditional "ao dai" dress, soldiers in uniform and couples clutching young children waiting excitedly to board.

"I know it (the project) is late, but I still feel so very honoured and proud to be among the first on this metro," said office worker Nguyen Nhu Huyen after snatching a selfie in her jam-packed train car.

"Our city is now on par with the other big cities of the world," she said.

It took 17 years for Vietnam's commercial capital to reach this point. The project, funded largely by Japanese government loans, was first approved in 2007 and slated to cost just \$668mn.

When construction began in 2012, authorities promised the line would be up and running in just five years.

But as delays mounted, cars and motorbikes multiplied in the city of 9mn people, making the metropolis hugely congested, increasingly polluted and time-consuming to navigate.

The metro "meets the growing travel needs of residents and contributes to reducing traffic congestion and environmental pollution", the city's deputy mayor Bui Xuan Cuong said.

Cuong admitted authorities had to over-



Passengers are seen on a train of the Line 1 of the HCMC Metro in Ho Chi Minh City yesterday.

come "countless hurdles" to get the project over the line.

According to state media reports, the metro was late because of "slow capital disbursement, unexpected technical problems, personnel difficulties and the Covid-19 pandemic".

"The delays and cost overruns have been frustrating," said professor Vu Minh Hoang at Fulbright University Vietnam, who warned that with just 14 station stops, the line's "impact in alleviating traffic will be limited in the short run".

However, it is still a "historic achievement for the city's urban development", he added.

With lessons learnt, "the construction of

future lines will be increasingly easier, faster, and more cost-efficient", Hoang said.

Back on the train, 84-year-old war veteran Vu Thanh said he was happy to experience below ground in a more positive way after spending three years fighting American troops in the city's famous Cu Chi tunnels, an enormous underground network.

"It feels so different from the underground experience I had years ago during the war. It's so bright and nice here," he said.

Reflecting on the delays, he added: "We built the tunnels to hide from our enemies in the past, so building a tunnel for a train should not be that hard," he added. "Finally, we made it!"

Australia bushfire will burn for days, warn officials

An uncontained bushfire raging in Australia's Victoria state that has prompted an evacuation order for hundreds of residents will burn for several days, officials said yesterday.

The order to leave immediately, set at the highest danger rating, remained in place for the fire in and around Grampians National Park, about 241km west of state capital Melbourne, Victoria's emergency services agency said on its website.

"There's a lot of unburnt fuel in the Grampians still, so it's quite a challenge for the days ahead", Country Fire Authority deputy chief officer Garry Cook told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, referring to the fire that now covered 84,000 acres of bush.

The blaze, sparked on Tuesday by lightning, prompted authorities on Saturday to urge residents of several rural towns such as Halls Gap, population 495, to evacuate.

Hundreds of firefighters have battled the bushfire, using more than 100 tankers and 25 aircraft, ABC reported on Saturday.

Squid Game: Season 2 release on Dec 26



Players take part in the Red Light, Green Light game at Gelora Bung Karno Stadium yesterday ahead of the release of the Netflix series *Squid Game: Season 2* on December 26 in Jakarta, Indonesia.

Asean seeks inclusive Myanmar polls: Thailand

Reuters
Bangkok

Thailand has told Myanmar's junta that Asean members would want all stakeholders included in an election the military government plans to hold next year, even as the regional bloc seeks a common position on the polls, Thai officials said.

"If there is an election, Asean would want an inclusive process that included all stakeholders," Foreign Minister Maris Sangiampongsa said in a group interview in Bangkok, after meetings with counterparts and senior diplomats of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) grouping. Myanmar has been in turmoil since early 2021 when its military overthrew an elected civilian government, triggering pro-democracy protests that morphed into a widening armed rebellion that has taken over swathes of the country.

The military is fighting rebels on multiple fronts, struggling

to govern and manage a crumbling economy that was seen as a promising frontier market before the generals ended a decade of tentative democracy.

Thailand hosted two separate regional meetings on the crisis in Myanmar, the first involving the junta and its neighbours, including China, Bangladesh and India, followed by one with Asean members. Myanmar's foreign minister briefed attendees on the outline of the junta's political roadmap and progress towards holding an election, which critics have dismissed as a sham, largely due to the absence and sidelining of opposition groups. "The neighbouring countries said we support Myanmar in finding solutions but the election must be inclusive for various stakeholders in the country," Maris said, stressing that Myanmar's neighbours would advise, but not interfere.

Their effort, he said, would also support Asean's Myanmar peace plan, the "Five Point Consensus", its strategy to diffuse the conflict that has made scant progress.

UK minister to visit China in January to revive economic talks

Reuters
Beijing

Britain's Finance minister Rachel Reeves will visit China for two days in January to revive high-level economic and financial talks that have been frozen since 2019, three people with knowledge of the plan said.

Reeves is scheduled to meet China's vice-premier He Lifeng, the country's economy tsar, on January 11 in Beijing to restart what had been annual talks

known as the Economic and Financial Dialogue (EFD), they said.

If the discussions go well, the two sides could look to re-launch what had been a regular and wider meeting known as the Joint Economic and Trade Commission (JETCO) later next year, the sources said. China is the UK's fifth-largest trading partner.

A UK Treasury spokesperson would not confirm the dates of Reeves' visit and said further details would be announced in the usual way. China's finance ministry did not immediately re-

spond to a request for comment.

Businesses in Britain, where the economy is losing momentum, have also pressed to restart meetings of the UK-China CEO Council, a group established by then-prime minister Theresa May and then-premier Li Keqiang in 2018, one of the sources added.

The media earlier reported that HSBC chairman Mark Tucker will lead a business delegation visiting China next month in a bid to boost trade and investment with a particular focus on financial services.

Reeves will go to Shanghai on January 12, where she will meet with British companies operating in China, according to the sources, who asked not to be named because they were not authorised to discuss the plans.

Britain suspended most economic dialogues with China in 2020 after Beijing imposed a national security law in Hong Kong, a former British colony. Since then, spying allegations, the war in Ukraine, and the sanctioning of lawmakers have increased tensions between the two countries.

The Labour government, in power in Britain since July, has made improving ties with China one of its main foreign policy goals after a period under successive Conservative governments when relations plunged to their lowest in decades.

In 2022, then-prime minister Rishi Sunak, a Conservative, declared the end of a "golden era" of relations with China that one of his predecessors, David Cameron, had championed.

Over the preceding decade, British and Chinese officials had met annually for high-level trade

and investment talks, holding an EFD almost every year and a JETCO every two years.

Those talks resulted in the London-Shanghai stock connect scheme, Britain joining the Beijing-based Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, and joint investment into green technologies, including the UK's Hinkley Point C nuclear power plant.

China bought \$32bn (\$40bn) worth of British goods in the year to the end of June, British government data shows. Chinese inward foreign direct investment stocks in the UK are worth £4.3bn.

Fighters from Myanmar civil war 'aggravate' ethnic conflict in India

Reuters
Imphal, India

Indian militant groups that took refuge in Myanmar and fought in its civil war have been streaming back across the border to Manipur state this year, Indian security officers said, inflaming the bitter 19-month ethnic conflict there with weapons and battle-hardened cadres.

This has led to an increase in violence between Manipur's dominant and mostly Hindu Meitei community and the mainly Christian Kuki tribes - a conflict that critics say is the biggest law-and-order failure of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 11-year-old government.

Since May 2023, some 260 people have been killed in the fighting and more than 60,000 displaced.

Nine Indian military and police officers who spoke to Reuters, plus several politicians and rebel sources in Myanmar, described a conflict that is spreading to new areas as militants from the rival groups come across the border to Manipur.

Fighters are equipped with more sophisticated weapons, including rocket launchers, and 20 people were killed in fighting in November alone. In response, the federal government announced it was deploying 10,000 more soldiers in Manipur, taking the total number of troops to nearly 67,000 in addition to the 30,000-strong police force.

The escalation has been accompanied by an increase in crime - mainly extortion and illegal drugs trade - to fund the weapons and operations of the rival factions, the police and military officers said.

"The insurgents who we had controlled about 10 years ago are gaining relevance again," said Yumnam Joykumar Singh, a former Manipur police chief and the state's deputy chief minister between 2017 and 2020.

"Some of them are coming back from Myanmar, some have already come," said Singh, a Meitei, who led

operations against Meitei militants in Manipur as a hardline chief of police between 2007 and 2012.

The federal interior ministry, Manipur Police and the Myanmar junta did not respond to requests for comment.

Manipur is a hilly, forested region of 3.2mn people in India's northeast, bordered by Myanmar. The fighting there was sparked last year by a court order that proposed giving the Meiteis, who live in the prosperous Imphal valley region of the state, the same government benefits as those given to historically disadvantaged Kukis, who live in the more-impo-erished hills.

Security forces have manned a buffer zone between the two groups to try to limit the violence.

The state has a history of insurgencies and in recent decades many militants fled across the porous border following military crackdowns.

Security officers said Meitei groups have been fighting on the side of the ruling junta in Myanmar's civil war and an estimated 2,000 of their cadres had been camping in Myanmar's Sagaing region, just across the border from Manipur, as of December.

They have fought anti-junta rebels like the People's Defence Force - Kalay (PDF-K) and the Kuki National Army - Burma in Sagaing, Kachin and Chin areas of northern Myanmar, Indian security officers and tribal leaders said.

The Kukis, meanwhile, have support from the Kachin rebels and have bought weapons from Myanmar's semi-autonomous Wa state, according to three Indian officers, several tribal leaders and a PDF-K source in Myanmar.

Some Meitei groups had operated from camps within Myanmar with the support of the military, but were now scattered along the frontier and going back into Manipur, said Sui Khar, vice-chairman of the rebel Chin National Front, an anti-junta rebel outfit that operates in Chin state.

"They closely collaborated with

the Burmese army in operations against us," he said.

The Indian military and police officers said it was difficult to assess the number of militants who have returned to Manipur.

But more than 100 Meitei insurgents, including some intercepted by Indian authorities at the Myanmar border, were arrested in Manipur last year and more than 200 this year, according to a security officer and government data.

About 50 Kuki insurgents were arrested in the same period, the data shows.

"Manipur was a problem, and now you have the Myanmar problem also coming in," Indian Army chief General Upendra Dwivedi said in October. "The battle lines are getting hardened."

In February, India announced plans to fence its 1,600km border with Myanmar.

Rival fighters are now equipped with rocket launchers, machine guns, sniper and assault rifles, including foreign-made M16s, M4A1s and AK-47s, according to seizure announcements by the military and the Manipur police.

While many of the weapons being used in Manipur were looted from state armouries in the initial months of the conflict, the more sophisticated weapons were brought in from Myanmar mostly this year, the officers said.

"These are two distinct conflicts, one for freedom from military rule, and another an internal ethnic conflict largely inflicted by one side on another," said Gautam Mukhopadhyaya, India's ambassador to Myanmar between 2013 and 2016.

"With raging conflicts going on side by side, it can be assumed that some weapons transfers and trade in arms takes place."

About 1,500 illegally imported arms are estimated to be in Manipur's Meitei-dominated valley area, and about 2,000 in the hills where most Kukis live, the Indian officers said, based on details from arrested insurgents.

India govt mulls prison terms and fines for illegal lending

The Indian government is seeking to clamp down on unregulated lending with a proposed law that would impose prison terms of up to seven years and fines for unauthorised loans, including those through digital platforms.

A draft law follows stepped-up Indian government scrutiny since 2022 on digital lending applications following an increase in complaints about unfair lending and predatory recovery practices for loans made to vulnerable and low-income groups. According to the draft law, any lending activity except that authorised by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and by Indian law, would be banned. Unregulated lending activities would attract a prison term of up to seven years, and a maximum penalty of Rs10mn (\$117,515.72). The penalties would be even stiffer for unlawful means used to harass and recover funds, with illegal

lenders punished with a prison term of up to 10 years, and a penalty as high as twice the loan amount, according to the draft.

The draft law also bars unregulated entities from making any deceptive or false claims persuading people to apply for loans. Offenders would face a prison term of up to five years and a penalty of Rs1mn. The government has also proposed an online database that would list regulated lenders and facilitate reporting of illegal lenders.

The draft law was prepared based on the recommendations of a group formed by the RBI to suggest ways to curb unregulated lending practices and protect consumer interests.

The government has sought comments from stakeholders over the proposed bill by February 13, 2025.

Kuwait medal for Indian premier



Kuwait's Amir, Sheikh Meshal al-Ahmad al-Jaber al-Sabah, presents a medal to India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi at Bayan palace in Kuwait City yesterday. Kuwait's Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah al-Ahmad al-Sabah yesterday held talks with Modi. The two sides renewed their commitment to developing bilateral co-operation relations in various fields including health, technology, oil, artificial intelligence and space.

Tax panel snubs airlines' call to add aviation fuel to GST regime

Reuters
New Delhi

An Indian government panel has rejected an airline industry proposal for aviation fuel to be brought under the unified Goods and Services Tax (GST), the finance minister said after a meeting of the panel.

Currently, state governments choose how to tax aviation turbine fuel (ATF). Airlines have been

lobbying to include it in the GST regime so the levy is the same nationwide, but state authorities have opposed that, fearing they could lose revenue. "States do not want ATF to be brought under GST just like petrol and diesel," Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said after the meeting of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council.

The council is chaired by Sitharaman and includes state government representatives.

The tax panel also decided to

impose 18% GST when all used or old vehicles, including electric vehicles, are sold by registered sellers.

Such vehicles sold directly between two individuals will not attract tax.

It deferred plans to slash taxes on some life and health insurance premiums, a move that was seen as key to getting more Indians to sign up for coverage.

Sitharaman said the proposals required further discussion.

India child marriage crackdown reaches nearly 5,000 arrests

A crackdown on illegal child marriages in India's northeast has resulted in nearly 5,000 arrests, after 416 people were detained in the latest police sweep, a minister said yesterday. "We will continue to take bold steps to end this social evil," Himanta Biswa Sarma, chief minister of Assam state, said in a statement.

"Assam continues its fight against child marriage," he added, saying raids have been carried out overnight and that those arrested would be produced in court.

India is home to more than 220mn child brides, according to the United Nations, but the number of child weddings has fallen dramatically this century. Assam state had already arrested thousands in earlier abolition drives that began in February 2023, including parents of married couples and registrars who signed off on underage betrothals.

'Chillai Kalan' begins in Kashmir



A boy warms himself near a bonfire, during the start of 40 coldest days of winter weather locally known as 'Chillai Kalan' in Srinagar, Kashmir, India.

India eyes 'safeguard duty' on steel as imports surge

Reuters
Mumbai

India has launched an investigation to consider if it should impose a safeguard duty or a temporary tax to curtail unbridled steel imports, according to a government notice.

The probe comes after Indian Steel Association, which represents top steelmakers such as ArcelorMittal Nippon Steel India, JSW Steel, Jindal Steel and Power, filed a petition to initiate an investigation concerning imports of "Non-Alloy and Alloy Steel Flat Products" into India.

India's finished steel imports from China reached an all-time high during the first eight months of the fiscal year to March 2025, according to provi-

sional government data, adding to concerns among domestic mills about cheap shipments from China.

"There is a recent, sudden, sharp and significant increase in the volume of imports, which has caused significant injury to the domestic industry in India," ISA said in its petition.

The directorate general of trade remedies, an arm of the federal trade ministry, which launched the probe, in a notice said there is sufficient evidence of "a recent, sudden, sharp and significant increase in imports" to start a safeguard investigation.

An influx of cheap Chinese steel has forced India's smaller mills to scale down operations and consider job cuts, as the nation joins a growing list of countries contemplating action to stem imports.

Britons impacted by no-fault evictions

AFP
Lewes, United Kingdom

Sitting by the fireplace in her house in the south of England, Jackie Bennett recalls the shock she felt when she received out-of-the-blue an eviction notice giving her just two months to move out.

This so-called no-fault eviction, which sees Bennett kicked out of her home without cause, is a feature of English law that could soon be abolished under a new rental bill.

But campaigners have warned that landlords are ramping up these types evictions ahead of the

ban being passed into law. "I've cancelled some of my work. I've cancelled my Christmas plans and my holiday plans," the 55-year-old artist explained, as she pushed back tears.

Hanging across her apartment are colourful crocheted tapestries that mask the damp that covers the walls of her house in Lewes, southern England.

Her landlord explained to her by e-mail that she wanted to sell the property after Bennet had already received the eviction notice.

As a tenant, "you always feel vulnerable", she said.

No-fault evictions were introduced in 1988 by Margaret Thatcher's

government as part of a push to deregulate the rental market to attract more private landlords.

Under the new Renters' Rights Bill, currently under consideration by the Labour majority parliament, landlords will have to provide a reason in advance for evicting tenants, such as to reclaim the property to move into or unpaid rent.

The bill would give tenants a longer notice period in the event of an eviction, giving them more time to plan their next housing arrangement.

It marks an important step in protecting tenants against being evicted after they make reasonable complaints to landlords, said Ben

Twomey, chief executive of tenants rights organisation Generation Rent.

These instances, termed "revenge evictions" by campaigners, are a "massive problem" in England, he added.

While he supports the reforms, Twomey warned that in the absence of a rental price caps, tenants could still be evicted "through the back door" by landlords hiking rents to unreasonable levels.

Rents have already jumped over 9% in the past year in the UK, according to official data.

Between July and September this year, 8,425 households in England where taken to court over no-fault eviction notices, the highest number

in eight years, said Twomey, citing ministry of justice figures.

As the bill comes closer to being passed into law, more landlords have been ramping up the use of no-fault evictions, according to Paul Shampina, founder of Landlord Action, a company that helps landlords repossess properties.

"That will increase until the ban date comes in, because landlords are worried about how will they get their property back," he added.

Alexandra Casson, who works in television production in London, was also served one of these eviction notices after she refused her landlord's attempt to raise the rent by over 50%.

She denounced it as "an absolute brazen attempt to extort tenants".

"They forget that there are humans that live in the property assets that they shuffle around," said the 43-year-old, based in East London's popular Dalston neighbourhood.

Casson, a member of the London Renters Union, welcomed a measure in the new bill that would extend the notice period to vacate a property from two months to four months.

Although, she predicts that it'll take her around six months to finalise purchasing a new property, and even then, she considers herself one of the lucky ones.



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ASD: New insights into the biology of X chromosome

The findings of two new studies which provide even more evidence that complex neurobehavioural conditions like autism spectrum disorder (ASD) can sometimes have simple biologic (genetic) underpinnings have underscored the need for comprehensive genetic analysis. Both studies were published in *The American Journal of Human Genetics* late last week. The first study, which identified a previously unknown genetic link, found that variants in the DDX53 gene contribute to ASD, providing new insights into the genetic underpinnings of the condition. ASD, which affects more males than females, encompasses a group of neurodevelopmental conditions that result in challenges related to communication, social understanding and behaviour.

While DDX53, located on the X chromosome, is known to play a role in brain development and function, it was not previously definitively associated with autism. Researchers from The Hospital for Sick Children (SickKids) in Canada and the Istituto Giannina Gaslini in Italy clinically tested 10 individuals with ASD from eight different families and found that variants in the DDX53 gene were maternally inherited and present in these individuals. Notably, the majority were male, highlighting the gene's potential role in the male predominance observed in ASD. At the same location on the X chromosome, the researchers found evidence that another gene, PTCHD1-AS, might be involved in autism. The study highlights a case where a boy and his mother, both with autism with little support needs, had a specific gene deletion involving the DDX53 gene and parts of PTCHD1-AS.

"Our findings support a direct link between DDX53 and autism..."

The study cohort was assembled through an international collaborative effort, involving several renowned clinical and research institutions from Canada, Italy and the US. Further analysis of large autism research databases, including Autism Speaks MSSNG and Simons Foundation Autism Research Initiative, identified 26 more individuals with ASD who had similar rare DDX53 variants to the study participants.

"This gene has long eluded us, not previously linked to any neuropsychiatric condition. Our findings support a direct link between DDX53 and autism, which is not only crucial for future clinical genetic testing, but its discovery suggests that the pathway it affects is related to the behavioural traits of autism, opening a whole new area of exploration," says lead author Dr Marcello Scala, researcher in Medical Genetics at the Istituto Giannina Gaslini, affiliated with the University of Genoa's Department of Neuroscience.

"By pinpointing DDX53 as a key player, particularly in males, we can better understand the biological mechanisms at play and improve diagnostic accuracy for individuals and their families," says senior author Dr Stephen Scherer, Senior Scientist, Genetics & Genome Biology and Chief of Research at SickKids, and Director of the McLaughlin Centre at the University of Toronto

In another paper published in the same journal, Dr Scherer and lead author Dr Marla Mendes, a research fellow at SickKids, identified 59 genetic variants on the X chromosome significantly associated with ASD. The variants were found in genes linked to autism, including PTCHD1-AS (near to DDX53), DMD, HDAC8, PCDH11X, and PCDH19 beside novel ASD-linked candidates ASB11 and ASB9. Additionally, the FGF13 gene was highlighted as being related to ASD, with sex-specific differences, adding more evidence to the role of sex chromosomes in the condition.

"These findings provide new insights into the biology of the X chromosome in ASD, providing additional evidence for the involvement of certain genes like DDX53 and FGF13, and suggesting they should be investigated further," says Dr Scherer. The team notes that the absence of a similar gene like DDX53 in commonly used mouse models may require future researchers to reconsider how they study ASD. Since it lacks a functional equivalent in these models, findings in DDX53 cannot be easily replicated.

"Insights from this study could significantly influence the design and interpretation of autism research, particularly in developing new models. Identifying these variants is an important step towards developing more precise diagnostics and therapeutics for patients and families with ASD," added Dr Scherer.

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Net zero dreams.
Ground zero screams.



The half promise of weight-loss drugs

By Emily Armistead
London

Groundbreaking weight-loss drugs like Ozempic and Wegovy have understandably generated a lot of excitement, bringing hope to the hundreds of millions of people grappling with obesity. When combined with a healthier diet and exercise, these drugs, which work by suppressing appetite, deliver an average 10% reduction in body weight that can be sustained for years.

With more than two-thirds of adults in the United Kingdom and nearly three-quarters in the US classified as overweight or obese – a health crisis that costs national economies billions of dollars annually – physicians and policymakers could be forgiven for embracing these drugs as a panacea. US President Joe Biden's administration, for example, recently proposed requiring Medicare and Medicaid to cover the costs of weight-loss drugs, offering access to millions of Americans. But addressing obesity requires much more than a technological fix.

To be clear, I am not suggesting these drugs are unnecessary or that medical professionals should avoid prescribing them. But they do not address the problem fuelling the global obesity crisis (and contributing to the climate crisis as well): our broken food system.

The alarming rise in obesity over the past 30 years is not simply a byproduct of higher living standards or more sedentary lifestyles, though these factors play a pivotal role.

The primary factor appears to be the transformation of our food environment, which has fundamentally altered both the types of food we consume and our eating habits.

In recent years, scientists and health experts have increasingly focused on the high-fat, sugar, and salt (HFSS) foods driving unhealthy dietary habits. This trend can be attributed to companies reshaping the food system to produce ultra-processed, hyper-palatable, and highly profitable foods. Consequently, people are snacking more, eating larger portions, and preparing fewer meals themselves. In the UK, for example, the snack market has boomed while the time spent preparing meals has sharply declined.

These changes haven't just fuelled the rapid increase in HFSS food consumption. They have also led to a surge in meat consumption, especially in Europe and North America, where meat-heavy diets have become all too common.

Beyond the heightened risk of heart disease and related health conditions, excessive meat consumption has had devastating effects on the climate and biodiversity. Research shows that animal-based foods generate twice the greenhouse-gas (GHG) emissions of plant-based alternatives. Just as health experts urge us to reduce our HFSS intake, climate scientists consistently emphasize the importance of cutting meat and dairy consumption to keep global warming within safe limits.

In an effort to prevent a lasting change in people's eating

habits, the meat industry is seeking techno-fixes to cut GHG emissions. For example, funding for research on cutting farm emissions – such as feed additives designed to reduce methane levels in cows' burps – has increased markedly.

Such solutions are particularly attractive to governments reluctant to introduce measures that influence consumer behaviour. Fearful of opposition from the Big Food lobby and wary of accusations of overreach, policies like sugar taxes or meat taxes are deemed political hot potatoes to be avoided at all costs.

But the overlapping crises our broken food system is fuelling – from the billions of dollars spent each year on diet-related health problems to the environmental degradation pushing our planet to its limits – cannot be wished away or fixed with technological band-aids. Instead, what is needed is a major shift in dietary habits toward foods that nourish both people and the environment.

To this end, the EAT-Lancet Commission – comprised of the world's leading nutrition and sustainability experts – advocates a diet rich in fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and plant-based proteins while reducing consumption of animal proteins, dairy, and sugars. Taken together, these recommendations offer a clear blueprint for ensuring health and sustainability.

Admittedly, it is unrealistic to expect consumers – conditioned by food environments designed for profit rather than human or environmental health – to drive this transition on their own. With unhealthy foods widely available and aggressively marketed, many

consumers often struggle to moderate their food intake and, in some cases, develop addictive behaviours.

Governments and food manufacturers must take proactive measures to reshape these environments, such as expanding initiatives aimed at reducing the consumption of HFSS foods to include meat, thereby encouraging people to eat more plant-based whole foods and meat alternatives.

Another potential solution would be to extend bans on promotional deals for unhealthy foods to cover meat products. Requiring food companies to report on the types of food they sell, including HFSS foods and the ratio of plant-based to animal proteins, would also help. These measures would incentivise businesses to prioritise healthier, more sustainable options over less nutritious ones.

None of this is to suggest that the new generation of weight-loss drugs cannot benefit individuals living with obesity. For those trapped in a cycle of poor health, Ozempic and Wegovy could even save lives, and efforts to make these treatments widely available are a welcome step.

But it is essential that we recognise that this approach treats the symptoms rather than the underlying pathology. Defusing the time bombs of ill health and environmental catastrophe requires fast, decisive action to remake our dysfunctional food system. – Project Syndicate

• Emily Armistead is Interim Executive Director of Madre Brava.





The Qatar Kite Festival 2024 featured dozens of kites from 20 countries. **PICTURE:** Joey Aguilar

Qatar Kite Festival set to return next month

By Joey Aguilar
Staff Reporter

Following its success in February this year, the Qatar Kite Festival is set to return to Old Doha Port from January 16-18, 2025, promising to transform the skyline of Doha into a canvas of colourful kites.

According to Visit Qatar, the festival will feature dozens of kites from various countries, showcasing their var-

ied colours, sizes, shapes and designs - alongside a crowd-puller day-night kite flying display.

"The Qatar Kite Festival is a vibrant celebration of creativity and culture, captivating visitors with a spectacular showcase of colourful kites soaring across the picturesque skyline of Doha," said Visit Qatar.

Children will have the chance to take part in free kite-building workshops.

Visitors can also try a wide range of cuisines from food carts and kiosks

while enjoying the scenery at the Old Doha Port.

The festival is expected to hold roaming shows, parades, and daily entertainment shows.

The previous edition witnessed notable participation from China, showcasing unique kites such as a 1,000-disc centipede and Qatar-themed designs.

It also included participants from Thailand, Malaysia, and neighbouring GCC countries such as Oman.



Qatar Hot Air Balloon Festival concludes

The fifth edition of the Qatar Hot Air Balloon Festival concluded in the Sealine desert on Saturday, after 10 colourful and captivating days. The spectacular event was intended to attract even more visitors and make Qatar a must-visit global destination for hot air balloon enthusiasts. **(Reuters/AFP)**



Registration begins for Marmi 2025



Registration for 16th edition of the Qatar International Falcons and Hunting Festival (Marmi 2025) will continue until December 26 at the headquarters of Al Gannas Qatari Society in Katara - the Cultural Village's Building 33. Marmi Festival chairman Mutib Mubarak al-Qahtani (**pictured left**) said that the festival's organising committee has allocated the 'Burqa' (Hood) building for participants registering in Al Haddad Challenge Championship, while the ground floor halls of the Society's headquarters are designated for registration in other competitions. Marmi 2025 will take place between January 1 and February 1, at Sabkhat Marmi in the Sealine Area.



DAAM signs financing agreement to support the Marmi 2025

The Social and Sport Contribution Fund (DAAM) has signed a financing agreement with the Katara - the Cultural Village to fund the 16th edition of the Qatar International Falcons and Hunting Festival (Marmi 2025).

Under this agreement, DAAM will provide financial support for the new season of the Marmi Festival, which will take place from the beginning of January until February 1, 2025.

The collaboration between DAAM and Katara is aimed at preserving Qatari cultural heritage, raise awareness among younger generations

about its significance, and reinforce the Marmi Festival's status as one of the region's premier cultural events.

Organised by Al Gannas Qatari Society, the festival gained global recognition when Unesco included falconry on its Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in November 2010.

This initiative underscores the richness of falconry traditions and the commitment to preserving the legacy of past generations.

The Marmi Festival includes a number of competitions, such as "Al Tala'a", which in-

volves falcons hunting houbara bustards, and "Al Da'oo", a speed race for falcons featuring multiple rounds.

Additionally, there is the "Haddad Al Tahadi", a challenge between falcons and homing pigeons, as well as the Young Falconer Championship, the Saluki Racing Championship and a shooting competition.

The festival culminates on the final day with the "Mazayen" Championship, where the rarest and most beautiful falcons are crowned and winners in all categories receive significant cash prizes. **(QNA)**

