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RAMADAN THOUGHT
Verily, Allah commands that you should render back the trusts to those, to whom they are due; and that when you judge between men, you judge with justice. Verily, how excellent is the teaching which He (Allah) gives you! Truly, Allah is Ever All-Hearer, All-Seer. (Qur'an 4: 58)

Prayer times

Fajr....4.12; Zuhr....11.39; Asr....3.07; Maghrib....5.51; Isha....7.21

Fasting times

Iftar today 5.51pm
Imsak tomorrow 4.01am



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QCB licenses PayLater to provide BNPL services

Qatar Central Bank (QCB) has issued the first license in the country to provide the Buy-Now-Pay-Later (BNPL) service to PayLater, a company that was earlier approved among the “first cohort” from submitted applications. With this, some 13 companies have been approved by QCB in the financial technology sector. Earlier, QCB had approved five companies “as a first cohort” from submitted applications under the ‘Buy-Now-Pay-Later’ (BNPL) scheme. The BNPL service provides customers with the flexibility to settle their purchases by instalments over a specified period of time.

Call for sighting Shawwal crescent

The Crescent Sighting Committee at the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs has called on all Muslims living in Qatar to sight the crescent of Shawwal on Saturday evening, Ramadan 29, 1446 AH, corresponding to March 29, 2025. The committee said that whoever witnesses the crescent should head to the committee’s headquarters at the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs in Al Dafna (Towers) area to report their testimony. The committee will meet immediately after the Maghrib prayer on the same day. **(QNA)**

US offers military support to Guyana

It would be “a very bad day” for Venezuela if it were to attack its neighbour Guyana or US-based energy giant ExxonMobil, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said yesterday during a visit to Guyana’s capital. Guyana and Venezuela are locked in a long-running dispute about which country has rights over the 160,000sq km Essequibo area. Washington has offered military support to the tiny South American country amid the territorial dispute.

COMMUNITY

See Pages: 5 & 6

Qatar marks first heart transplant

Qatar has reached a major healthcare milestone with the successful completion of the country’s first heart transplant.

The surgery was performed at the Heart Hospital of Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC) by an expert local heart transplant team, a statement said.

The patient, a 42-year-old man from Bangladesh, is now recovering well. This achievement marks an important step forward for healthcare in Qatar and highlights the strength of the country’s organ transplant programme, it was explained.

Following the procedure, HE the Minister of Public Health Mansoor bin Ebrahim bin Saad al-Mahmoud and HMC managing director Mohammed bin Khalifa al-Suwaidi, visited the patient at Heart Hospital and met the medical team.

“This is a proud moment for Qatar,” said HE al-Mahmoud. “The successful heart transplant shows our strong commitment to devel-



HE the Minister of Public Health Mansoor bin Ebrahim bin Saad al-Mahmoud and HMC managing director Mohammed bin Khalifa al-Suwaidi meeting the medical team.

oping organ transplant services. It also demonstrates that Qatar is becoming a leader in this field, thanks to our skilled doctors, modern hospitals, and support from our country’s leadership.”

Al-Suwaidi added: “This heart transplant shows the high quality of care provided by HMC’s specialist teams. It also highlights the strength of our organ transplant programme and the skill of our surgeons, doctors, nurses, and support staff. We are proud to provide world-class care to our patients.”

The transplant was carried out by a large team that included cardiac surgeons, cardiologists specialising in heart failure, anaesthesia and intensive care teams, interventional cardiac catheterisation nurses, and specialists in infectious diseases, nephrology, pathology, rehabilitation, psychiatry, and social workers. The team worked closely together to make sure everything went smoothly and the patient received the best care before, during, and after the surgery. **To Page 3**

After Khartoum army in push to oust RSF from Omdurman

The Sudanese army shelled parts of Khartoum’s twin city of Omdurman from early morning yesterday, residents said, after declaring victory over their Rapid Support Forces rivals in a two-year battle for the capital.

The army ousted the RSF from

its last footholds in Khartoum on Wednesday but the paramilitary RSF holds some areas in Omdurman, directly across the Nile River, and has consolidated in west Sudan, splitting the nation into rival zones.

Khartoum residents expressed delight fighting was over for the

first time since it erupted in April 2023.

The war has ruined much of Khartoum, uprooted more than 12mn Sudanese from their homes, and left about half of the 50mn population suffering acute hunger in what the UN calls the world’s worst humanitarian disaster.

In a video posted yesterday from the recaptured presidential palace, army chief Abdul Fattah al-Burhan declared: “Khartoum is free”.

The army controls most of Omdurman, home to two big military bases, and looks focused on driving out the last RSF troops to secure control over Khartoum’s entire urban area. Thursday’s shelling was directed at southern Omdurman.

The Rapid Support Forces vowed yesterday there would be “no retreat and no surrender” after rival troops of the regular army retook nearly all of central Khartoum. **(Reuters)**

Qatar mediation leads to reuniting children



Qatar announced the success of its mediation in reuniting two new groups of children in Ukraine and Russia with their families this March, as part of its ongoing efforts to reunite families separated by the conflict between Russia and Ukraine.

Qatar’s continued mediation efforts to reunite children with their families in Ukraine and Russia extend its longstanding approach to mediation and conflict resolution through peaceful means, in ac-

cordance with international law principles. These efforts also reflect Qatar’s unwavering commitment to humanitarian principles and international solidarity.

Qatar expressed its gratitude to Maria Lvova-Belova, the Children’s Rights Commissioner for the President of the Russian Federation, and Dmytro Lubinets, the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights, for their tireless efforts that have led to the success of the family reunification operations. **(QNA)**

690 mosques and grounds to host Eid al-Fitr prayers

A total of 690 mosques and prayer grounds across Qatar will host the Eid al-Fitr prayer at 5.43am on the first day of Eid.

The Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs (Awqaf) has published the names and locations of the mosques on its website.

The mosques and prayer grounds are located in various areas of Qatar, such as Izghawa, Umm Al Seneem, Al Salata Al Jadeed, Umm Salal Ali, Umm Salal Mohamed, Umm Ghuwailina, Umm Qarn, Umm Lekhba, Bin Omran, Bin Mahmoud, Bu Sidra, Al Thumama, Al Jumailiya, Al Kharaitiyat, Al Jeryan, Al Huwaila, Al Kharara, Al Khalidiya, Al Kharsaah, Al Kheesa, Al Dafna, Al Doha Al Jadeed, Al Thakira, Al Soudan, Al Sailiya, Al Sheehaniya, Al Ebb, The Pearl Island, Al Murra, Al Mesila, Al Mirqab Al Jadeed, Al Meshaf, Al Mamoura, the Industrial Area, Al Najada, Al Hilal, Al Wa-

jba, Al Khor, Al Duhail, Al Rayyan Al Jadeed, Al Rayyan Al Qadeem, Al Sadd, Simaisma, Al Sailiya, Al Shamal, Al Aziziyah, Bani Hajer, Bu Samra, Dukhan, Ras Laffan, Rawdat Al Hamama, Rawdat Al Khail, Rawdat Al Fars, Rawdat Aba Al Heeran, Simaisma, Onaiza, Fereej Al Nasr, Fereej Bin Dirham, Fereej Al Manaseer, Fereej Abdul Aziz, Leabaib, Legtaifiya, Meraikh, Mesaieed, Mesaimeer, Msheireb, Nuaija, Wadi Al Sail, Ain Khaled, Al Ghanem Al Jadeed, Al Gharafa, Fereej Bin Omar, Al Luqta, Madinat Al Shamal, Madinat Khalifa South, Madinat Khalifa North, Matar Qadeem, Hamad International Airport, Muaither South, Muaither North, Al Najma, Al Wakra and Al Wukair.

Workers will be deployed to ensure the cleanliness of the prayer grounds while security and traffic personnel will also be deployed to ensure smooth vehicular flow and public safety.

Positive signals in Gaza truce talks

Egypt, one of the mediators in the Gaza ceasefire negotiations, has received positive indications from Israel over a new ceasefire proposal that would include a transitional phase, security sources said yesterday.

The proposal suggests resistance movement Hamas release five Israeli hostages each week, sources said.

A security delegation from Egypt has left for Qatar for talks, which will include increasing aid to the enclave and releasing remaining hostages, state-affiliated Al Qahera News TV said.

Violence has escalated in Gaza since a January truce broke down on March 18 after two months of relative calm. **(Reuters)**



Palestinians make traditional cookies to be distributed during the upcoming Eid al-Fitr in Bureij in the central Gaza Strip yesterday.

Hamis spokesman Qanoua killed in Israeli air strike

Hamis spokesperson Abdel-Latif al-Qanoua has been killed in an Israeli air strike in northern Gaza, Hamas-affiliated media said early yesterday, the latest group figure to be killed since Israel resumed its operations in the enclave. Qanoua was killed when his tent was targeted in Jabalia, the Hamas-run Al-Aqsa television said. The same strike wounded several people. The Israeli military confirmed in a statement that it killed Qanoua. Earlier this week, Israel killed Ismail Barhoum, a member of Hamas’ political office, and Salah al-Bardaweel, another senior leader.



Minister meets Mongolia diplomat



HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Mohammed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaifi met yesterday with ambassador of Mongolia (non-resident) to Qatar Sergelen Purev. During the meeting, they discussed relations between the two countries and ways to support and strengthen them. (QNA)

Minister meets Kuwaiti ambassador



HE the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan bin Saad al-Muraikhi met with ambassador of Kuwait to Qatar Khaled Bader al-Mutairi. During the meeting, they discussed bilateral relations and ways to support and strengthen them. (QNA)

Public parks, recreational facilities ready for Eid visitors: civic ministry

QNA
Doha

The Ministry of Municipality has finalised all preparations to provide families with an enjoyable Eid al-Fitr holiday experience by enhancing recreational facilities, parks, and public gardens across Qatar.

Preparations included key measures such as boosting maintenance and cleanliness efforts and organising a variety of activities suitable for all age groups, ensuring a safe and relaxing environment for visitors. The ministry has taken steps to ensure the readiness of public parks and recreational spaces, including assigning additional cleaning and maintenance teams, providing comfortable seating areas, clean public facilities, and well-maintained green spaces.

Aligning with digital transformation efforts, the ministry introduced an online reservation

service for recreational facilities, making it easier for families to plan their visits. It has also launched an app allowing users to access event timings and recreational locations conveniently. Speaking to Qatar News Agency (QNA), Director of the Public Parks Department at the Ministry of Municipality, Mohammed Ibrahim al-Sada, confirmed that all public parks are fully prepared to welcome visitors during the Eid al-Fitr holiday. He highlighted the completion of various improvements to ensure a pleasant experience for families and park-goers.

Al-Sada detailed the readiness measures, including enhanced cleaning efforts, round-the-clock maintenance teams, and intensified monitoring for visitor safety. He added that parks have been equipped with comfortable seating areas and play zones for children. He noted that the parks will follow a planned schedule to ensure smooth visitor flow, providing all necessary services for guests during the holiday, wishing everyone an enjoyable time.



General Director of the Municipality of Al Khor and Al Thakkira Abdullah Ibrahim al-Sada told QNA that the municipality is ready to welcome visitors during the holiday, adding that all parks and recreational areas in the region have been prepared, including essential maintenance work, with security

personnel directed to cooperate with visitors to ensure their comfort and safety. He mentioned that park entry will be free, except for Al Khor Park, which will maintain its entry fee.

When asked about measures to ensure visitor satisfaction and safety, al-Sada affirmed the municipality's focus on completing all essential maintenance and equip-



ping green spaces, while guiding security teams to assist visitors. He encouraged adherence to park rules and guidelines for the benefit of all.

He further announced that the municipality, represented by its Media and Awareness Unit, will participate in the Spring Festival in Al Khor event organised by the Al Khor Cultural Center at Ain Hleetan market on the fourth day of Eid. The municipality's partici-



pation will include engaging recreational and awareness activities on waste segregation and recycling to promote environmental consciousness and sustainable development.

The ministry's recreational facilities offer an ideal choice for celebrating the Eid holiday in a safe and comfortable atmosphere, featuring exceptional services and diverse activities for the entire family.

Preparations in place to receive beach visitors

Director of Projects Management and Development Department at the Ministry of Municipality Abdulaziz al-Rumaihi, confirmed that the ministry has completed all preparations to welcome visitors during the Eid al-Fitr holiday.

Work has been done to improve facilities, enhance security and safety, and provide integrated services to ensure a comfortable and safe experience for families and individuals, in line with Qatar National Vision 2030 to promote beach tourism.

In an exclusive interview with Qatar News Agency (QNA), al-Rumaihi said that the ministry has paid special attention to beaches that attract families, by equipping them with children's play areas, umbrellas, comfortable seating areas and restrooms, while emphasising the allocation of beaches for families, such as Simaisma, Al Wakra, and Al Farkia. He also stressed the development of Al Mamlha Beach for women, with an area of 15,000 sq

m, to be a destination dedicated entirely to women, with secure gates, solar lighting, and barbecue and recreation areas.

In a related context, the ministry is working to diversify beach activities, with some beaches attracting water sports enthusiasts such as jet skiing, kayaking, and rowing.

Sealine, Al-Gharyiah, and Ras Abu Abboud beaches are among the most prominent destinations offering these activities and thereby boosting recreational tourism in the country, he added. Regarding security and safety measures during the Eid holiday, al-Rumaihi noted that the ministry has reinforced the presence of trained rescue teams operating around the clock, in addition to providing clear signage, and implementing regulations prohibiting random camping and the entry of animals onto certain beaches to ensure visitor safety. He also noted the intensification of environmental awareness efforts through media campaigns and live beach events, urging

visitors to maintain the cleanliness of public places and reduce waste. He emphasised that these efforts are part of Qatar's 2030 strategy, which focuses on environmental sustainability.

In response to a question regarding future development projects to promote beach tourism, al-Rumaihi revealed future development projects aimed at improving the infrastructure of public beaches and increasing the number of facilities and services provided to visitors, in line with the country's aspirations to transform Qatar into a sustainable global tourism destination.

Director of Projects Management and Development Department at the Ministry of Municipality Abdulaziz al-Rumaihi, concluded his interview with QNA by urging visitors to adhere to security and safety instructions and maintain the cleanliness of beaches, so that these natural destinations remain a safe and enjoyable place for families and individuals during Eid and throughout the year.

HMC announces Eid operating schedule

QNA
Doha

Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC) has announced the operating hours of its services during the Eid al-Fitr holiday. The timings of HMC's services during the Eid al-Fitr holiday are the following: All emergency departments continue to operate as normal, 24-hours-a-day, seven days a week for medical emergencies.

The Pediatric Emergency Centers will remain open 24-hours-a-day, seven days a week for medical emergencies involving children under the age of 14 years. The Ambulance Service will continue to operate 24-hours-a-day, seven days a week for people requiring emergency medical assistance.

The Nesmaak 16060 call centre will continue to operate 24/7. The 16000 Government Healthcare Hotline will continue to operate 24/7. All HMC Outpatient clinics will be closed from 30 March to 5



April. Some outpatient clinics will open on 6 and 7 April, with full service operational across HMC from 8 April.

Patients with scheduled outpatient appointments during the Eid period will be contacted if there is any change to their scheduled date. Urgent Consultation Service (accessed via 16000) will be closed from 30 March and reopen 8 April.

Pharmacy Home Delivery Service (accessed via 16000) will be closed 30 March and reopen 8

April. National Mental Health Helpline (accessed via 16000) will be closed for the first three days of Eid.

Therapeutic Dietetics and Nutrition Services (accessed via 16060) will be closed the first day of Eid then open from 7am till 12pm. The Qatar National Blood Donation Center will be closed the first two days of Eid then open from 9am and 9pm. City Center Mobile Blood Donation Camp will be open from 3pm to 8pm daily.

Mol announces working hours

The Ministry of Interior (Mol) has announced that its security-related departments will continue operating 24/7 during the Eid al-Fitr holiday. In a statement, the ministry noted that service departments providing public services will be operational from 8am to 12pm during the holiday period. Regarding the General Directorate of Traffic, the ministry stated that its divisions, including the External Services Section in Al Mamoura, the Vehicle Number Plate Workshop in Ain Khaled, the Licensing Affairs Department in Madinat Khalifa, the Vehicle Registration Section in Madinat Khalifa, the Violations Section in Madinat Khalifa, and the Vehicles Technical Inspection Center (Fahes) in Al Mazrouah, will operate from 8am to 12pm. The ministry also highlighted that the Traffic Movement Section and Traffic Investigation Sections will operate around the clock. (QNA)

Select health centres to provide services

The Primary Health Care Corporation (PHCC) announced the working hours of health centres during the Eid al-Fitr holiday, starting from March 30 to April 7. PHCC has designated 20 health centres out of a total of 31 to provide primary care services during the Eid holiday.

PHCC said that the home delivery of medications service will stop starting from the first day of Eid al-Fitr, and will resume on the fourth day of Eid.

Health centres on duty will continue to operate during the Eid holiday according to the approved working hours for the month of Ramadan.

Family medicine and support services will operate in 20 health centres during the Eid holiday: Al-Wakra, Al-Matar, Al-Mashaf, Al-Thumama, Rawdat Al-Khail, Omar Bin Al Khattab, Al-Sadd, West Bay, Labaib, Umm Salal, Gharaffa Al-Rayyan,

Madinat Khalifa, Abu Bakr Al-Siddiq, Al-Rayyan, Mesaimmer, Muaither, Al-Khor, Al-Ruwais, and Al-Sheehaniya. The Al-Jumailiya Health Center will operate on an on call basis 24 hours a day.

These centres will provide family medicine and supportive services continuously from 7am to 11pm, while dental services will also be available from 7am to 10pm.

PHCC identified nine centres that will not operate during the Eid holiday: Al-Wajba, Al-Waab, Qatar University, Umm Ghuwailina, South Al-Wakra, Al-Dhaayen, Al Ghuwairiya, Abu-Nakhla, and Umm Al-Saneem centers. The Al-Karaana and Al-Kaaban centres will operate to receive emergency cases only.

Specialty clinics (the ophthalmology, dermatology, and ENT clinics) will be available by pre-scheduled appointments at Labaib, Rawdat Al Khail, and Al-Mashaf centres in two shifts: morning from 7am to

2pm and evening from 4pm to 10pm.

The premarital screening clinic will operate at the Al-Mashaf Health Center on March 31 and April 7 in the evening only from 4pm to 10pm; at the Al-Rayyan Health Center on April 1 in the morning only from 7am to 2pm; and at the Labaib Health Center on April 3, in the morning only. PHCC has designated 12 health centres to operate 24/7 throughout the week to provide urgent care services. These centres are: Al-Sheehaniya, Abu Bakr Al-Siddiq, Muaither, Al-Ruwais, Al-Kaaban, Umm Salal, Gharaffa Al-Rayyan, Rawdat Al-Khail, Al-Mashaf, Al-Sadd, Labaib, and Al-Karaana.

The Al-Ruwais, Umm Salal, Leabaib, Muaither, Al-Mashaf and Al-Sadd centres have been designated for urgent cases for children.

Meanwhile, the call centre (16000) will operate 24/7 throughout the week. (QNA)

In brief

Performing Haj requires permit: MoFA official

A senior official from the Department of Consular Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) has called on Qatari citizens intending to perform Haj this season to adhere to the regulations set forth by the authorities of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Among these regulations is the prohibition on entering or staying in Makkah from 1 Dhul-Qi'dah (April 29, 2025) to 14 Dhul-Hijjah (June 10, 2025). The official clarified that performing the Haj pilgrimage requires obtaining a Haj permit. (QNA)



Qatar marks first heart transplant

From Page 1

Despite significant advances in medical and interventional treatments for heart failure patients, some patients still suffer from treatment-resistant conditions and require advanced treatments such as heart transplantation.

Heart transplantation is a highly complex procedure that requires collaboration between multiple medical teams to ensure appropriate patient selection and optimal management of pre- and post-operative care.

Chief medical officer Dr Khalid al-Jalham, said: "HMC is dedicated to delivering world-class specialist healthcare services to our patients. This transplant procedure marks a major milestone for individuals with advanced heart disease in Qatar and underscores our commitment to leading the way in specialised cardiac care."

"In recent years, Qatar's organ transplant programme has made significant progress, supported by international-standard hospitals, a national donor registry, and highly skilled medical teams."

Old Doha Port announces return of annual fishing competition

Old Doha Port's popular annual Fishing Competition returns on April 11 and 12, bringing together professional fishermen, hobbyists, and marine enthusiasts in a spirited celebration of Qatar's deep-rooted maritime culture.

The contest, in collaboration with Doha Marine Sports Club, marks a major feature of the inaugural Fishing Exhibition at Old Doha Port set from April 9-12. With more than QR300,000 in prizes up for grabs, including a grand prize valued at QR150,000 for first place, the event underscores Old Doha Port's commitment to hosting engaging, community-driven initiatives that

celebrate tradition and togetherness. Registration will continue until 2pm on April 11. To secure a spot, participants are encouraged to call 55734539. Teams must be led by a Qatari captain (nukhatha), though residents may join as team members. Participation requires submitting a completed registration form, personal identification for all team members, and a valid boat registration.

This year's competition focuses exclusively on kingfish (kan'ad), a prized regional catch. Participants will set sail from Old Doha Port at sunrise on April 11 for a full day at sea, where they will submit a video documenting their single best catch of the day, including full



footage of the fishing process, boat registration, and weight verification. Final submissions must be sent to the organising committee by 8pm on day one.

On April 12, the final day of the

competition and the Fishing Exhibition, participants will gather at Old Doha Port for live fish weighing, verification, and an awards ceremony at Mina Park, south of Mina District. Winners will be determined based on the weight of their top kingfish catch, and in the case of a tie, the first submission received will be declared the winner. The top 10 teams will be awarded. In a press statement, Old Doha Port CEO engineer Mohammed Abdullah al-Mulla said: "The Fishing Competition supports Old Doha Port's strategy to encourage watersports, which are an integral part of Qatar's rich maritime heritage. This competition reflects our mission at Old Doha Port of being a

place where tradition meets innovation, and where people gather to create shared memories rooted in Qatari culture".

The Fishing Exhibition will take place at Mina Park south of Mina District, marking the official start of the fishing season in the region and serving as the broader cultural platform supporting the Fishing Competition. The event pays homage to Qatar's fishing heritage while highlighting the evolution of the regional fishing industry through 30 exhibition stands, live artisan demonstrations, and traditional maritime music. This combined celebration of sea, craft, and community is part of Old Doha Port's growing cultural calendar.



Waseef hosts Iftar tent at Barwa Village

Waseef, the leading real estate management and marketing company, has been hosting an Iftar tent by Qatar Charity (QC) at the Barwa Village in Al Wakra, for workers and low-income individuals.

This comes as part of Waseef's social responsibility programme, which reflects the company's commitment to Islamic values and Qatari traditions rooted in social solidarity, a statement said. Waseef, in a statement, thanked QC for helping workers and low-income persons enjoy a hearty Iftar meal in a comfortable atmosphere at the tent in Barwa Village.

Waseef continuously co-operates with QC and provides it



with all its needs including locations and logistical support for all the projects it manages across the country. QC also expressed its gratitude to Waseef for host-

ing the Iftar tent at Barwa Village stressing that this co-operation reflects the spirit of community solidarity during Ramadan, the statement added.

All funds paid for residential units will be under direct supervision: Aqarat

QNA
Doha

THE Chairman of the Real Estate Regulatory Authority (Aqarat), Eng Khalid bin Ahmed al-Obaidli, stated that the authority was able, within a short period of time, to implement laws related to real estate development, including the escrow account, which represents a qualitative leap in this sector as it enhances transparency and investor confidence.

Al-Obaidli added, in press statements on the sidelines of the first banking forum organised



by the authority, that the escrow account will be under the supervision of the authority, meaning that all funds paid for residential units will be under the direct supervision of the authority.

In the same context, he pointed

ed out the approval of the initial bond, that will be available for all residential units sold off-plan under the Authority's license and direct supervision. The chairman confirmed that the first meeting with the banks aims to communicate with the private sector and banks to consider mechanisms and procedures to stimulate the real estate sector and provide incentives and distinguished products. He pointed out that the authority benefited from some of the proposals and information provided by bank officials and representatives to enhance co-operation to advance the real estate market.



Souq Al Wakra Hotel introduces Eid offers

Souq Al Wakra Hotel, the 'astounding beachside property nestled in the historic Al Wakra Souq and the perfect sanctuary for patrons favouring peace and tranquillity', has revealed its dining and brunch offers for Eid al-Fitr.

Souq Al Wakra Hotel, with its distinguished location on the historic Al Wakra Corniche with a rich scent of the past, is all geared up to welcome its guests during the days of Eid al-Fitr with special offers that suit the special occasion, a statement explained. The Eid offers will include both the hotel's renowned restaurants, 'Jarnen' and 'Emshoot'. The guests at 'Jarnen' will be able to savour the most delicious cuisines, at the indoor lounge or the outdoor terrace overlooking the sea.

The 4-days Eid special dinner buffet will include a selection of soups, baked goods, cold and hot appetisers and mezzeh, various assortment of salads and a rich selection of oriental and international



dishes, in addition to the live BBQ station grilling the best premium meats, starting from 6pm to 10pm for QR280 per person. 'Jarnen' will also welcome kids under six years to enjoy the Eid dinner buffet for free, while those below 11 will be entitled to get 50% discount. Guests will also be able to redeem their 'Entertainer', 'My Book', and 'Urban Points' vouchers.

During the four days of Eid,

'Emshoot' will offer 'an authentic dining experience that honours the rich culinary traditions and vibrant culture' of Azerbaijan. The set menu, curated for two at QR280, is available at the restaurant, from 6pm to 10.30pm.

'Jarnen' and 'Emshoot' guests, will be able to enjoy the fireworks show that will light up the sky of Al Wakra corniche during the Eid evenings, the statement added.

Dreama receives two vehicles



The Orphans Care Centre (Dreama) has been donated two vehicles by Silver Lake - Exeed, as part of the latter's commitment to social responsibility, a statement said yesterday. This initiative reflects the company's dedication to supporting Dreama's targeted groups, highlighting its commitment to social responsibility alongside the collective efforts of various entities across the country to serve orphans in Qatar. Dreama continues its mission to ensure the integration of its children into society and contribute to their stability at all levels by providing comprehensive social, psychological, educational, and healthcare services, the statement added.



Literary world pays rich tributes to departed Qatari poet

Writer and poet Mohammed bin Khalifa al-Attiyah was laid to rest yesterday at the Al-Attiyah Cemetery in Al Kharaitiyat following the afternoon prayer. The popular writer passed away on March 25 after a prolonged illness, leaving behind a literary legacy rich in poetry that has taken the pride of place in Qatari and Arab libraries.

Poetry lovers in various cultural circles were grieved and deeply affected by the passing of the writer who enriched the scene with his remarkable literary repertoire. “Mohammed bin Khalifa al-Attiyah has departed, but his presence and brilliance live on through the creativity he left behind and the beautiful poetry collections he penned in his lifetime.”

“His output and contributions in the field of beautiful poetry were

evident from his first collection, *Mirror of the Soul*, followed by *Memory without Doors*, wrote Abdulrahman bin Hamad al-Attiyah in an eulogy for the deceased in Arabic daily *Arrayah*.

He added: “The late, beloved Mohammed bin Khalifa al-Attiyah was not an ordinary poet. Rather, he was a distinguished innovator and a remarkable writer, whose distinction, brilliance, and radiance stemmed from his literary abilities and his beautiful, unique perspective of human nature.

“The Qatari poet composed the most beautiful poetry out of love for his homeland and in support of its esteemed leaders on the path of development, renaissance, and modernisation.

“He also composed poetry for the people of the greater Arab world, and for the values of truth,



The late writer and poet Mohammed bin Khalifa al-Attiyah.

goodness, and beauty everywhere. Anyone who has read, or will read, his poetry collections and delves into his letters will sense a harmony between the splendour of his poetry and his inner humanity. Through every stage of his life, his

poetry was characterised by the beauty of his noble character, the brilliance of his mind, the serenity of his nature, and the humanity of his discourse – whether in the field of writing poetry or in his interactions with people. Although

our poet has departed this mortal world for the eternal abode, he will not depart from the memory of his homeland, his people, his family, and his loved ones in Qatar, the Arab world, and beyond.

“His literary and national output continued. I remember how he crafted the most beautiful words while outside his homeland on a therapeutic trip. Interacting, as he always does on all major national and international occasions, with a global Qatari event when Qatar hosted the FIFA World Cup.

“While in a foreign land, he greeted, via a widely circulated video, ‘*HH the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, HH the Father Amir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, and his honourable sons*’.

“He addressed the ‘Leaders of Glory,’ the makers of historical

epics, and at the same time sent words of love, filled with pride and feelings of honour, to ‘Doha of Pride and Glory!’

“The passing of Mohammed bin Khalifa al-Attiyah is a great loss to the nation, to lovers of poetry and fine literary production, to his family, to the extended Qatari family, and to every Arab who respects sobriety, creativity, and noble stances.

“His passing is a great loss to us, as he was a great symbol of free verse and rhyming poetry in Qatar and the Arab world. He was a source of inspiration for a generation of young poets, and a source of enrichment for the cultural space in Doha, the land of goodness and creativity.

“We ask God to have mercy on him and to grant him a place in His Spacious Paradise.”

6 Russians dead in sinking of Egypt tourist submarine



Red Sea governor Amr Hanafi visiting an accident victim.

AFP
Cairo

Six Russian tourists, including two minors, died yesterday when a submarine carrying dozens of passengers sank off a major resort town on Egypt's Red Sea coast. The governor of Egypt's Red Sea region, Amr Hanafi, said “39 foreign tourists had been rescued and six others killed, with no one missing,” according to a statement shared by his office, confirming that the six tourists were Russian.

Russian state news agencies quoted General Consul Viktor Voropaev as saying that two of the deceased were minors. The Russian consulate in the tourist hub of Hurghada earlier said the vessel had been carrying “45 tourists, including minors” on an underwater excursion to observe coral reefs when it “crashed 1 kilometre from the shore” at about 10am local time (0800 GMT).

Hanafi's office said the vessel was carrying 45 tourists “of different nationalities including Russian, Indian, Norwegian and Swedish” and five Egyptian crew members. The website of Sindbad Submarines, the vessel's owner according to the Russian consulate, said it could carry 44 passengers and two crew members up to 25m depth.

The consulate said that accord-

ing to initial information, “most of those on board were rescued and taken to their hotels and hospitals in Hurghada”. Investigations were underway to determine the cause of the accident, the governor's office said, adding that 21 ambulances had been dispatched. The submarine “had a valid license and its crew leader had the requisite academic qualifications,” they added.

“Six people were struggling under the water and we were able to pull them out,” a Sindbad employee told the governor in the hospital, according to a video shared by the governor's office. Four survivors, including at least one minor, were admitted to intensive care, according to the official statement.

Hurghada, a resort town about 400km southeast of the Egyptian capital Cairo, is a major destination for visitors to Egypt, with its airport receiving more than 9mn passengers last year, according to state media. Thursday's forecast in the city was clear, with above average wind speeds reported but optimum visibility underwater.

While dozens of tourist boats sail through the area daily for snorkelling and diving activities, Sindbad Submarines says it deploys the region's “only real” recreational submarine. The vessel had been operational in the area for multiple years, according to a source familiar with the company.

The Red Sea's coral reefs and islands off Egypt's eastern coast are



A police vehicle is parked in front of the hospital where survivors are treated.



Boats sail off the resort town of Hurghada on Egypt's Red Sea coast after a submarine carrying dozens of passengers sank yesterday.

major draws, contributing to the country's tourism sector, which employs 2mn people and generates more than 10% of GDP. The area has been the site of several deadly accidents in recent years.

In November, a dive boat capsized off the coast of Marsa Alam, south of Hurghada, leaving four dead and seven missing.

Thirty people were rescued from another sinking boat, while last

June two dozen French tourists were safely evacuated before their boat sank in a similar accident. In 2023, three British tourists died after a fire broke out on their yacht, engulfing their vessel in flames.

UN rights council adopts Qatar's Universal Periodic Review results

The UN Human Rights Council has adopted the results of Qatar's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) under Item 6 of the agenda for the council's 58th session. In her speech during the session, Acting Charge d'Affaires of Qatar's Permanent Delegation to the United Nations in Geneva Jawhara bint Abdulaziz al-Suwaidi emphasised that Qatar places the protection and promotion of human rights at the forefront of its priorities, considering it a cornerstone of the nations comprehensive reform efforts.

She noted Qatar's collaboration with the council and its mechanisms, particularly the UPR process, as an essential complement to the country's national and international efforts in fostering respect for human rights values and principles.

Al-Suwaidi expressed gratitude for the constructive dialogue during Qatar's fourth UPR on November 12, 2024, which provided an opportunity to share Qatar's experience, vision, and efforts to fulfil its commitments and enhance human rights for all residents.

During the review, Qatar received 317 recommendations, accepting 245 and taking note of 72. The State's stance on these recommendations was shaped by its commitments under international human rights agreements as well as its societal, cultural, and religious values.

Al-Suwaidi highlighted the government's strong political will to collaborate with the council, expressing optimism for continued cooperation. Additionally, she reaffirmed Qatar's commitment to implementing the accepted recommendations in an objective and transparent manner, striving to enhance and protect human rights in line with the highest international standards.

Al-Suwaidi extended thanks to the President of the Human Rights Council, all speakers who offered valuable inputs, and the nations that participated in Qatar's UPR in a spirit of objectivity and constructive cooperation. (QNA)

Lebanon Druze leader accuses Israel of exploiting minority in Syria

AFP
Beirut

Lebanese Druze leader Walid Jumblatt has accused Israel of exploiting followers of his minority faith in Syria as part of a broader plan to divide the Middle East along sectarian lines.

Israel wants “to implement the plan it has always had... which is to break up the region into confessional entities and extend the chaos,” said Jumblatt, a key figure in Lebanese politics for more than four decades. “They want to annihilate Gaza, then it will be the West Bank's turn... they are trying to destabilise Syria, through the Druze but also others,” he told AFP in an interview Wednesday. “It's a dangerous game.”

Israel has been making overtures towards Syria's Druze community since rebels ousted longtime ruler Bashar al-Assad in December after more than 13 years of war. Since then, Is-

rael has sent troops into the UN-patrolled buffer zone along the armistice line on the Golan Heights, and war monitor the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights has reported regular Israeli incursions deeper into southern Syria.

The Druze faith has followers in Israel, Lebanon and Syria, including the Israeli-annexed Golan Heights. They account for about three percent of Syria's population and are concentrated in the southern province of Sweida. This month, Israeli government spokesman David Mencer said 10,000 humanitarian aid packages had been sent to “the Druze community in battle areas of Syria” over the past few weeks. “Israel has a bold alliance with our Druze brothers and sisters,” he told journalists.

Israel also authorised the first pilgrimage in decades by Syrian Druze clerics to a revered shrine in Israel. Defence Minister Israel Katz said Israel would not allow Syria's new rulers “to harm the Druze”, following a deadly clash



Lebanese Druze leader Walid Jumblatt speaks during an interview with AFP at his residence in Beirut.

between government-linked forces and Druze fighters in the suburbs of Damascus.

Druze leaders rejected Katz's warning and declared their loyalty to a united Syria. Druze representatives have been negotiating with Syria's new authorities

on an agreement that would see their armed groups integrated into the new national army. The talks had almost reached completion but “Israeli pressure” on some parties prevented the accord from being finalised, a source close to the negotiations

told AFP, requesting anonymity as the matter is sensitive.

Jumblatt noted that during the French mandate in the 1920s and 1930s, “Syria was divided into four entities: an Alawite state, a Druze state, the state of Damascus and the state of Aleppo”, the latter two being Sunni Muslim.

“The Druze, with the other Syrian nationalists, were able to prevent the division of Syria” by launching a revolt and the plan later collapsed, he said. He expressed hope that any new division of Syria could be avoided, appealing to Arab leaders to support interim President Ahmed al-Sharaa.

Jumblatt in December was the first Lebanese official to meet Sharaa after his group spearheaded the offensive that ousted Assad. Sharaa told Jumblatt that Syria would no longer exert “negative interference” in Lebanon, after Assad's dynasty was accused of destabilising Lebanon for years and assassinating numerous Lebanese officials, including Jumblatt's father.

Kamal Jumblatt, who founded the Progressive Socialist Party and opposed Assad's father Hafez over his troops' intervention in the Lebanese civil war, was killed near the Syrian border in 1977.

This month, Syrian security forces arrested former intelligence officer Ibrahim Huweija, suspected of numerous killings including that of Jumblatt's father. “He's a big criminal, he also committed crimes against the Syrian people and should be tried in Syria,” Jumblatt said.

Lebanon's new authorities have been under pressure since a devastating war between Israel and Hezbollah, Jumblatt said. “The Americans want Lebanon to normalise ties with Israel,” he said. Under a November ceasefire, Hezbollah was to withdraw fighters from the border area and dismantle its military infrastructure there. The Israeli army was also to withdraw but troops are still deployed in five positions inside Lebanon that it deems strategic.

IFTAR GATHERING

Noble International School



Noble International School (NIS) hosted a grand Iftar meet, fostering a spirit of unity and togetherness during the holy month of Ramadan. Chairman Hussain Mohammed U, finance director Showkath Al Taj, other members of the management, and the rest of the school community attended. In his welcome address, principal Dr Shibu Abdul Rasheed emphasised the values of compassion, gratitude, and community bonding during Ramadan. The chief guest, Islamic scholar Sheikh Zakariya Nouri spoke about the spiritual significance of Ramadan and encouraged everyone to uphold its teachings in daily life.

ICAI Doha chapter



The Doha Chapter of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) distributed 100 Iftar boxes at a workers camp in the Industrial Area. The initiative was supported by volunteers, sponsors and chapter members. Chairperson Kishore Alex said: "Ramadan is a time of giving, and we are humbled to have had the opportunity to support the hardworking individuals in our community."

UPWA Qatar



Indian expatriate forum Uttar Pradesh Welfare Association, Qatar, hosted an Iftar party at Masrah Park in Doha. More than 220 people attended. President Ziauddin Ahmad spoke about the importance of the holy month of Ramadan. The guests included Deepak Shetty, Ashok, RJ Fazeel, RJ Sarwar, RJ Nazia, RJ Gaurav of Mirchi Radio, Asif Rahmani, Najmul Hassan, Shahid Yar Khan, Qamar Alam, Jawed Sultan, Ali Imran, Mamnoon Bangash, Faisal, and Dr Jaffery. Vice-president Asif Khan spoke about the objective of the forum. General secretary Junaid Khan proposed a vote of thanks. Treasurer Kashif Habib supported the event.

KWA-Qatar



The Kottar Welfare Association (KWA-Qatar) hosted an Iftar gathering, bringing together members, families, and well-wishers in a spirit of unity and devotion. The event was presided over by president Sheik Ahamed and advisory committee member Tariq. Vice-president Mohamed Badardeen was the host. Secretary Shiffan Sameem Aroosi shared a Ramadan thought, highlighting the values of compassion and togetherness during the holy month. The gathering also included a special speech and Qiraat recitations by children. Treasurer Zahith welcomed the gathering and vice-secretary Syed Ibrahim proposed a vote of thanks.

Shafeeq Koottayma Qatar

Shafeeq Koottayma Qatar hosted an Iftar and third anniversary gathering at Umm Al Seneem Park. President Shafeeq Chakkara presided. General secretary Shafeeq Maliyekkal welcomed the attendees, while vice-presidents Shafeeq Kadavu, Shafeeq Thrissur, and Shafeeq Parakkadavu spoke. Treasurer Shafeeq Manjeri proposed a vote of thanks.



Ipaq

The Indian Pharmacists Association Qatar (Ipaq), hosted a family Iftar meet for members and their families. The event was co-ordinated by Shanavas Kozhikkal, Shajeer, Shanavas Punboli, Hanif Peral, Abdul Rahiman Eriyal, Ameer Ali, Sameer K I, Jafar, Mohammed Navas, Muhammad Riyaz, Shamnad, and Sulaiman Askar, among others.





IFTAR GATHERING

Birla Public School



Birla Public School, Doha, hosted a grand Iftar gathering to celebrate the spirit of Ramadan, bringing together members of the management, guests and the staff in a warm and festive atmosphere. School directors C V Rappai, Lukose K Chacko, management representative Chindhu Antony, life members, principal Dr Anand R Nair, non-academics Vinod Kumar K V, vice-principals Radhika Rele and Edna Fernandez, heads of various sections and teaching and supporting staff attended the event. The Iftar gathering commenced with the Azan Prayer rendered by Thaha C Moitheen, a senior staff of the school. The Iftar gathering was a reflection of the institution's commitment to inclusivity, cultural harmony, and celebrating shared values, a statement added.



Qatar Tamizhar Sangam

Qatar Tamizhar Sangam (QTS) organised an Iftar gathering under the theme 'The greatest Iftar is to break the fast of apathy, with the feast of affection'. Indian embassy deputy chief of mission Sandeep Kumar, the chief guest, spoke about the importance of the holy month of Ramadan, sharing the spirit of unity and celebrating the joy of family, friendship and gratitude. Indian Cultural Centre president A P Manikantan, Indian Community Benevolent Forum (ICBF) president Shanavas Bava, Indian Sports Centre president Mohamed E P Abdurahman, Indian Business and Professionals Council president Thaha Muhammed, and managing committee members from apex bodies and associated organisations attended the event.

More than 300 members and guests, including around 100 fishermen and blue collar workers were special invitees. QTS president Muniyappan welcomed the audience. Islamic scholar Imaduthin Umri spoke on the importance of fasting, prayer and the holy month of Ramadan. A special scheme with the name 'Helping Hands' was released during the event. The president announced that under the scheme, QTS will provide ICBF Insurance for 200 fishermen and blue collar workers, free of cost. He also said that QTS will work to enrol 1,000 more members in the insurance scheme. Insurance forms were distributed to the beneficiaries who received help from volunteers to fill the form. QTS benevolent secretary Brama Kumar proposed a vote of thanks.



MES fetes 22 students for memorising Holy Qur'an

MES Indian School has felicitated 22 students who memorised the verses of the Holy Qur'an. Qatar Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) officials Dr Abdullah al-Merri, Yousuf, Adnan Abu Hulayyil, Muhammad Hisham, Markaz Abdullah Bin Ziyad's Department of Islamic Culture head Dr Ahmed Abdu Raheem Athahan, Markaz officials Abdul Aziz Shakir, Abdu Rasheed and MES governing board treasurer A T Usman were present. The school management, principal and faculty thanked the MoEHE officials, especially Private Schools and Kindergarten Department director Dr Rania Mohamed and Private Education Affairs assistant undersecretary Omar al-Naama for acknowledging the efforts of the school to align spiritual values alongside education.

The event commenced with a recitation from the Holy Qur'an. In his keynote address, Dr al-Merri highlighted the spiritual, intellectual, and moral significance of memorising the Holy Qur'an, emphasising that this rare and prestigious achievement required extraordinary discipline and devotion. Dr Athahan, Hulayyil and Shakir commended the students for their accomplishments and congratulated MES Indian School's commitment to holistic education, blending faith and knowledge. Certificates and mementos were presented to the 22 students. Prize winners of various Islamic competitions conducted during the month of Ramadan also received their certificates. Principal Dr Hameeda Kadar congratulated the students for their perseverance and dedication.

During the ceremony, Dr al-Merri and Hisham presented a memento to the principal. The school's Arabic, Urdu and Islamic Studies Department head Usman Mayyeri welcomed the audience. Manasul Ansari and Rizwa Fathima compered the programme. Rassia Hamza proposed a vote of thanks.



QAD brings back authentic values of Garangao Night

This year, Qatar Academy Doha (QAD), part of Qatar Foundation's (QF) Pre-University Education (PUE), reimagined Garangao night as an educational and humanitarian experience that reflected the true values of the holy month. Instead of focusing on abundance and appearances, the school adopted an approach that promoted the values of generosity, simplicity, and social solidarity. It provided practical guidance to parents, encouraging them to take part in the celebration in a way that brought joy to children avoiding the extravagance that were often associated with this occasion. Yara al-Darwish, assistant principal of the Primary School at Qatar Academy Doha and a parent herself, explained: "What inspired us to launch this initiative were the repeated observations about how some celebrations have shifted toward materialism and consumerism. "We wanted to address that by offering a different model, one that reinforces the



true meaning of Garangao night and engages students in an educational and social experience that enriches their awareness



and reflects the core values of Ramadan. "Over time, Garangao celebrations began to lose their original meaning and turned into occasions dominated by comparisons and extravagance. I clearly remember my son coming home one day

carrying more than 25 large candy boxes from his classmates, that's when I realised we needed to rethink how we approach this event and bring back its simplicity and true value. "This initiative helps reduce the excess

often associated with Garangao celebrations by encouraging students and parents to adopt simple, mindful practices that align with the spirit of Ramadan. "It has effectively promoted awareness around responsible consumption, helped nurture a strong sense of community among students, deepened their understanding of others' needs, and reinforced the idea that true joy lies not only in receiving, but in giving and meaningful participation." Al-Darwish highlighted that this new approach to celebrating Garangao was made possible through the support of Student Council. Central to the initiative was the launch of the "Dual Garangao Bag Initiative," featuring two bags: a maroon bag for exchanging Garangao treats among students at school, and a blue bag, part of which was distributed to Palestinian children evacuated to Doha, while the rest delivered to children from low-income families through Qatar Charity.

POLITICS

Australian PM ‘to call May 3 general election’

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese yesterday said he would call a general election “imminently”, with local media reporting the poll would be held on May 3. Albanese’s left-leaning Labor government is nearing the end of its three-year term and must hold an election by May 17 at the latest. Recent polls show the government is neck-and-neck with its conservative rivals, who were turfed out in 2022 after almost a decade in power. As speculation mounted yesterday, Albanese said he was preparing to call the election “soon”. “It will be called pretty imminently,” he told a local radio station.

CRISIS MANAGEMENT

Japan releases evacuation plan for islets near Taiwan

Japan yesterday unveiled a plan to evacuate around 120,000 residents and tourists from its southern islets near Taiwan within six days in the event of an “emergency”. The plan was put together as “the security situation surrounding our nation grows severe” and with an “emergency” in mind, the government’s crisis management office said. Exactly what that emergency might be was left unspecified in the plan but it envisages the evacuation of around 120,000 people in five Japanese islets close to Taiwan. China claims Taiwan as part of its territory and has not ruled out using force to bring the island under its control.

ACCIDENT

Taiwan navy ship and Chinese fishing boat collide

A Taiwanese navy landing ship and a Chinese fishing boat collided early yesterday outside of restricted waters, and there were no injuries, the Taiwanese navy said. The Taiwanese landing ship, the Chung Ho, collided with the Chinese trawler Minlianyu 61756 shortly after midnight around 45 nautical miles (83km) off Taiwan’s Taichung port, which sits on the Taiwan Strait, and nine nautical miles outside of “restricted waters”, the navy said in a statement. No injuries were reported on either ship and the damage sustained did not affect “safety of navigation”, the navy added. An investigation will be opened to determine responsibility, the navy said.

DATA

UK water companies released sewage for 3.6mn hours in 2024

British water companies released untreated sewage into the country’s waterways for more than 3.6mn hours in 2024, a slight increase on the amount recorded the year before, official data showed. The pumping of sewage into rivers and seas has become a major scandal in Britain, with water firms accused of prioritising dividends over investment and dumping sewage in waterways when its ailing infrastructure cannot cope. The government has launched a review of the whole sector and the industry regulator Ofwat has said that customer bills should rise by an average of 36% before inflation over the next five years to rebuild pipes, tunnels and pumping stations.

India set to double investment limit for foreign individuals

Reuters
New Delhi

India’s central bank is set to double to 10% a cap on investment by individual foreign investors in listed companies, as it aims to boost capital inflows, according to two senior government officials.

Foreign portfolio investors (FPIs), pressured by poor earnings, high valuations and prospects of US tariffs, have pulled more than \$28bn out of Indian stocks since September’s record high in the benchmark NSE Nifty 50.

To boost foreign investment, India is widening to all foreign investors benefits it had until now restricted to overseas Indians, while also raising applicable investment limits, the officials said.

“It is felt that these proposals may be implemented as early as possible,” the central bank told the government in a letter last week, pointing to disruption in capital inflows among recent developments in the external sector.

E-mails seeking comment from the finance ministry, the central bank, and the market regulator, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), did not get any response.

The plans envisage allowing all foreign individual investors to invest a maximum of 10% in a listed company, the document showed.

That is up from the 5% holding in an Indian company allowed to overseas Indian citizens by special rules under the Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA).

“Current foreign exchange

management rules only mention non-resident Indians (NRIs) and overseas citizens of India (OCIs) under Schedule III,” the second government official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

“We are broadening this to include all individual foreign investors.”

The central bank, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), will also raise to 24% the combined holding limit for all overseas individual investors in an Indian listed company, from 10% now, the officials added.

The plan to hike foreign investor limits in Indian listed firms is in the final stages of discussion between the government, the RBI, and Sebi, the officials said.

While the government and the RBI favour the move, the market regulator has flagged some challenges in monitoring compliance with foreign investment limits.

It has warned that a single foreign investor holding of 10%, combined with associates, could exceed 34%, triggering takeover rules.

“Without effective monitoring across different frameworks, such takeovers may go undetected,” Sebi cautioned the RBI in a letter last month.

Indian rules compel an investor who acquires more than 25% of a company to make an open offer for shares held by retail investors.

The government and regulators are now weighing these concerns before finalising the reforms.

“We are working to rationalise the rules to prevent the possibility of such arbitrage across regulations by the foreign investors,” the second official said.

South Korea wildfires wreak havoc



Kun Yeong-nam, 72, uses her mobile phone near her burnt house, where she lived for 52 years, after a wildfire devastated the area in Uiseong, South Korea. The wildfires in South Korea are now the largest and deadliest on record, having burned more forest and killed more people than any previous blaze, officials said yesterday, as the death toll hit 27.

Saudi Aramco ‘looks to invest in Indian refineries’

Reuters
New Delhi

Saudi Aramco is in talks to invest in two planned refineries in India as the world’s top oil exporter looks for a stable outlet for its crude in the world’s fastest-growing emerging market, several Indian sources with direct knowledge of the matter said.

India, the world’s third-biggest oil consumer and importer, wants to become a global refining hub as Western companies cut crude processing capacity in their shift to cleaner fuels.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia’s share of India’s oil imports has declined as refiners that have

invested billions of dollars in upgrading their plants diversify crude sources to tap cheaper alternatives, including from Russia.

Aramco is in separate talks to invest in Bharat Petroleum Corporation’s planned refinery in the southern state of Andhra Pradesh and a proposed Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) refinery in western Gujarat state, the sources said.

Aramco, BPCL and ONGC did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Both Indian firms are state-controlled. While ONGC’s Gujarat refinery plans are at a nascent stage, BPCL’s chairman said in December that it aimed to invest \$11bn in its Andhra Pradesh refinery and petrochemical project.

Two refinery sources said separately that the projects would proceed regardless of whether Aramco invests.

“It all depends on the proposal that Aramco gives,” one of them said.

Sources said state-controlled Aramco proposes to supply oil equivalent to three times its stake in each project, and wants to sell its share of production either in India or by export.

“We want flexibility in crude procurement. If we give them 30% stake, they want to supply crude equivalent to 90% of the capacity, which is not possible,” the second refinery source said.

Other details, including potential investment size and the configuration of the planned refineries, were not immediately available.

UK to ban ninja swords amid knife crime ‘crisis’

Possessing a ninja sword is to be banned in the UK and carry a penalty of up to six months in jail, the British government said yesterday, in a bid to curb what it has called a “national” knife crime “crisis”. The Home Office said most ninja swords had a blade of between 14 and 24 inches, with one straight cutting edge and a tanto style - or sharply-angled - tip. From August 1, anyone caught in possession of a ninja sword in private could face six months in prison. That is set to rise to two years under forthcoming legislation. There is already a penalty of up to four years in prison for carrying any weapon in public. The ninja sword ban is the final part of the so-called Ronan’s law, a raft of anti-knife crime measures introduced in parliament last month as part of the government’s crime and policing bill. The measures include making retailers report bulk or suspicious sales to police and a rise in jail terms to two years for selling weapons to children.

Revision to Indonesia armed forces law sparks anger



Anti-riot police disperse protesters during a demonstration against a revision to the armed forces law in front of the House of Representatives building in Jakarta, Indonesia, yesterday. The Indonesian parliament approved the amendment of the military law on March 20, despite protests that it would expand the armed forces’ role in civilian affairs. The revision to the armed forces law, pushed mainly by President Prabowo Subianto’s coalition, was aimed at expanding the military’s role beyond defence in a country long influenced by its powerful armed forces.

Amazon, Flipkart products seized by Indian authorities

Reuters
New Delhi

India’s state-run product certification agency said it raided the Delhi warehouses of e-commerce giants Amazon and Flipkart this month, seizing items that did not meet quality control standards, as it increased its scrutiny of the two firms.

The Bureau of Indian Standards said last week it conducted similar searches at the companies’ warehouses in Tamil Nadu, saying they stored, sold, and exhibited items that did not have a required standards label. Amazon and Flipkart, which is owned by US retail giant Walmart said they comply with local laws.

A spokesperson for Amazon India said the firm is “engaged closely with various stakeholders, including regulators.”

Both are the dominant players in India’s e-commerce mar-

ket which, according to estimates by consultancy firm Bain, was worth between \$57bn and \$60bn in 2023, and could top \$160bn in value by 2028. The agency said yesterday it has seized items including geysers and food mixers worth about Rs7mn (\$81,561) in warehouses operated by an Amazon subsidiary in Delhi.

The seized products either lacked the standard quality control mark, or carried fake labels, the agency said.

It seized almost \$7,000 worth of sports shoes from a Flipkart unit, which were ready for dispatch but did not carry necessary product certification marks.

The warehouse seizures are the latest troubles for Amazon and Flipkart in India. An antitrust investigation last September found the companies had violated local competition laws by giving preference to selected sellers on their shopping websites.

N Korea’s Kim oversees test of new ‘suicide drones’

Reuters
Seoul

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un supervised the test of suicide drones with artificial intelligence (AI) technology and said unmanned control and AI capability must be the top priorities in modern arms development, state media reported yesterday.

Kim inspected new upgraded reconnaissance drones that are capable of detecting various tactical targets and enemy activities

on land and at sea, KCNA state news agency said. “The field of unmanned equipment and artificial intelligence should be top-prioritised and developed in modernising the armed forces,” KCNA quoted Kim as saying.

The nuclear-armed North also officially unveiled an airborne early-warning aircraft for the first time, a capability that could improve its ageing air defence systems.

Photographs published by state media showed Kim climbing steps toward the door of a large aircraft with four engines and a radar dome mounted on the fuselage,

and viewing the aircraft on a low fly-by. Using commercial satellite imagery, analysts have previously reported that North Korea was converting the Russian-made Il-76 cargo aircraft for an early-warning role.

Such an aircraft would help augment the North’s existing land-based radar systems, which are sometimes limited by the peninsula’s mountainous terrain, London’s International Institute for Strategic Studies said in a report in September.

“The ability of an AEW aircraft to look down mitigates some of

the challenges of the terrain and ground-clutter returns to track low-flying aircraft and cruise missiles,” the report said.

One AEW aircraft would not be enough, however, and North Korea would risk cannibalising the rest of its cargo fleet to build more, the report said.

South Korea’s military said the aircraft’s operational capability is not yet clear but its appearance indicated it is “large and heavy and probably susceptible to interception.”

While the aircraft was refurbished from the existing fleet,

“Russia may have had something to do the internal system and parts,” joint chiefs of staff spokesperson Lee Sung-jun told a briefing, when asked about possible Russian assistance.

Russia has provided North Korea with anti-air missiles and unspecified air defence equipment, in return for Pyongyang’s deployment of troops to help with the Ukraine war, South Korea’s national security adviser Shin Won-sik said in November.

Kim separately inspected newly developed equipment for reconnaissance, intelligence gathering,

electronic jamming and attack systems, KCNA said.

Photos showed fixed-wing UAV zeroing in on a tank-shaped target then exploding in flames. Kim was seen walking with aides with what appeared to be an unmanned surveillance aircraft that resembles the US RQ-4 Global Hawk high-altitude surveillance aircraft parked on the tarmac in the background.

North Korean troops deployed in Russia’s war against Ukraine are believed to have been engaged in drone warfare, gaining valuable battleground experience.

Top US senators demand probe into chat scandal

Senior Republican and Democratic US senators issued a bipartisan call yesterday for a probe into a scandal over an accidentally leaked chat between top officials on Yemen air strikes that has engulfed Donald Trump's White House.

Republican Senator Roger Wicker, the chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, and ranking Democrat Jack Reed wrote to a Pentagon watchdog asking it to "conduct an inquiry" into the incident.

The *Atlantic* magazine published the full chat - which Trump's top security officials conducted on the commercially available app Signal rather than on a secure government platform - after its editor was mistakenly looped in.

Republican Trump has dismissed the scandal as a "witch-hunt" and backed Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth, despite the fact that Hegseth used the app to discuss precise timings of the strikes shortly before they happened and aircraft types involved.

The president told reporters on Wednesday that the prospect of a watchdog investigation "doesn't bother me".

However, Democrats have claimed that the lives of US service members could have been put at risk by the breach, and the row has raised serious questions about potential intelligence risks.

In their letter, Wicker and Reed asked the Pentagon's acting inspector-general to look into the "facts and circumstances", whether classified material was shared, and the security of communications.

"If true, this reporting raises questions as to the use of unclassified networks to discuss sensitive and classified information," they said of *The Atlantic's* story about the chat.

Wicker said on Wednesday that the information shared in the chat "appears to me to be of such a sensitive nature that based on my knowledge, I would have wanted it classified".

The office of Steven Stebbins, the acting inspector-general, did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The White House has gone on the offensive, denying that any classified material was shared and attacking *Atlantic* journalist Jeffrey Goldberg, who revealed that he had been erroneously



Pete Hegseth

added into the supposedly secret chat group.

White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt said yesterday that "we have never denied that this was a mistake" and insisted that National Security adviser Mike Waltz had taken "responsibility" for including Goldberg.

US Attorney-General Pam Bondi said yesterday that the breach was unlikely to face a criminal investigation.

"It was sensitive information, not classified, and inadvertently released, and what we should be talking about is that it was a very successful mission," Bondi told a news conference.

Trump and his top officials have repeatedly tried to turn the conversation towards the strikes themselves that began on March 15.

Washington has vowed to use overwhelming force against the Houthis until they stop firing on vessels in the key shipping routes of the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, with the rebels threatening to resume attacks in protest over the Gaza war.

The Houthis said yesterday that they targeted an Israeli airport and army site as well as a US warship, soon after Israel reported intercepting missiles launched from Yemen.

The Defence Department's inspector-general, a nonpartisan official charged with rooting out waste, fraud and abuse, was one of several officials Trump has fired since he began his second term in January.

Trump has not named a permanent replacement. - **AFP/Reuters**

US 'Healthy Again' agenda begins with massive layoffs

Reuters/AFP
Washington

US Secretary of Health and Human Services Robert F Kennedy Jr announced plans to reshape federal public health agencies yesterday, including cutting 10,000 employees and centralising some functions of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and others under his purview.

The job cuts include 3,500 at the FDA, 2,400 at the CDC, and 1,200 at the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

According to an official statement, the plans would save an estimated \$1.8bn annually - a mere 0.1% of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)'s annual budget of \$1.8tn.

The latest job cuts, and about 10,000 recent voluntary departures, will reduce the number of full-time Health and Human Services (HHS) employees to 62,000 from 82,000, the department said.

"Over time, bureaucracies like HHS become wasteful and inefficient even when most of their staff are dedicated and competent civil servants," Kennedy said in a statement. "This overhaul will be a win-win for taxpayers and for those that HHS serves. That's the entire American public, because our goal is to 'Make America Healthy Again'."

President Donald Trump and billionaire ally Elon Musk, who oversees the DOGE (Department of Government Efficiency) cost-cutting initiative, have been gutting agencies as part of an effort to shrink the federal bureaucracy.

Trump ordered all federal agencies earlier this month to draw up plans for a second wave of mass layoffs and the White House began reviewing the plans last week alongside Musk's DOGE.

Large government agencies like the HHS sprawl over time and there is merit in reorgan-



Robert F Kennedy Jr

ising them, which has happened under both Democratic and Republican administrations, but this plan goes beyond that, said Larry Levitt, executive vice-president for health policy at non-profit KFF.

"This is not just a reorganisation of the HHS. It is also a slashing of the federal workforce, which will ultimately affect government services," said Levitt, a former senior adviser to the White House and HHS under president Bill Clinton.

The planned FDA job cuts would not affect inspectors or reviewers of drugs, medical devices, or food, the HHS said.

The terminations are likely to delay drug and medical device application reviews or cause missed deadlines, said Eva Temkin, a lawyer at Arnold & Porter who advises clients on drug and medical device applications.

"There's a real risk that this results in delayed patient access to treatments," she said.

The Administration for Strategic Preparedness and Response, currently an independent HHS agency with 1,000 employees, will be folded into the CDC.

The NIH will see staff reductions across its 27 institutes and centres.

"The only way to cut that high of a percentage

of our staff, along with the 35% contracting cuts that are being directed, is to drastically scale back what NIH does across the board," said Nate Brought, the recently departed director of NIH's Executive Secretariat.

The Centres for Medicare and Medicaid Services was comparatively spared with a reduction of about 300 employees.

It was not immediately clear from which HHS divisions or offices the remaining 2,600 cuts would come.

As part of the restructuring, the department's 10 regional offices will be cut to five and its 28 divisions consolidated into 15, including a new Administration for a Healthy America, or AHA, which will combine offices that address addiction, toxic substances and occupational safety into one central office.

The AHA will include the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health, the Health Resources and Services Administration, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health.

It will be divided into divisions of Primary Care, Maternal and Child Health, Mental Health, Environmental Health, HIV/Aids, and Workforce, the department said.

The changes centralise functions such as communications, human resources, information technology, and policy planning that currently spread out across several health agencies, including the FDA, CDC, and NIH.

Agencies report to the health secretary but have traditionally operated somewhat independently of HHS and the White House.

The HHS said it would also combine the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation and Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality into a new Office of Strategy that will conduct research that informs Kennedy's policies.

There are no additional cuts currently planned, the department said.

DR Congo seeking 'safe exit' for African troops

AFP
Pretoria

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DR Congo) is working towards a "safe, co-ordinated" exit of troops deployed by a southern African regional bloc to its volatile east, the foreign minister said yesterday.

The 16-nation Southern African Development Community (SADC) this month pulled the plug on the mission after a string of losses and announced a phased withdrawal from the area where the M23 armed group has made major advances.

Details of the drawdown have not been made public.

"The decision of the SADC was totally a legitimate one and we fully respect it," said DR Congo Foreign Minister Therese Kayikwamba Wagner, adding that her government was aware of the "extremely difficult conditions".

"We are working towards paving the way for a safe, co-ordinated exit," Kayikwamba told reporters during a visit to South Africa.

South Africa contributed the bulk of the troops to the SADC mission, which also included deployments from Malawi and Tanzania.

Defence officials have refused to say how many South African soldiers are in the country but the number has been estimated at more than 1,000.

Fourteen South African soldiers were killed in the volatile area in January in the country's biggest loss since the SADC force deployed in December 2023.

South African Foreign Minister Ronald Lamola said the withdrawal did not amount to giving up on the DR Congo - also an SADC member - as it faces the Rwanda-backed M23.

"We have not abandoned the DR Congo either as South Africa or as SADC," Lamola told reporters.

The DR Congo defence minister was also on a visit to South Africa, seeking to deepen military ties.

The conflict in the mineral-rich eastern DR Congo threatens to draw in neighbouring countries, and southern and eastern African regional blocs have made numerous diplomatic efforts to find a solution.

On Monday, the M23 group walked back on a pledge to withdraw from the town of Walikale, the group's furthest advance westward in the DR Congo since it emerged in 2012.

The town is located at the junction of two roads leading to Goma and Bukavu, which the group seized this year after a lightning offensive.

Arctic sea ice hits lowest peak in satellite record, says US agency

By Issam Ahmed
AFP

This year's Arctic sea ice peak is the lowest in the 47-year satellite record, the US National Snow and Ice Data Centre (NSIDC) said yesterday, as the planet continues to swelter under the mounting effects of human-driven climate change.

The start of this year saw the warmest January on record followed by the third-warmest February, with the polar regions heating several times faster than the global average.

The 2025 maximum sea ice extent was likely reached on March 22, measuring 14.33mn sq km - below the previous low of 14.41mn sq km set in 2017.

"This new record low is yet another indicator of how Arctic sea ice has fundamentally changed from earlier decades," said NSIDC senior research scientist Walt Meier in a statement.

"But even more importantly than the record low is that this year adds yet another data point to the continuing long-term loss of Arctic sea ice in all seasons," he said.

The record-low Arctic maximum extent follows a near-record-low minimum extent of



This picture taken in 2021 shows a polar bear on an ice floe in the Franz Josef Land archipelago. This year's Arctic sea ice peak is the lowest in the 47-year satellite record, the US National Snow and Ice Data Centre (NSIDC) said, as the planet continues to swelter under the mounting effects of human-driven climate change.

- **AFP**

sea ice in the Antarctic, where it is now summer.

The 2025 Antarctic sea ice minimum, achieved on March 1, was 1.98mn sq km, tying for the second-lowest annual minimum in the satellite record, alongside 2022 and 2024.

Combined Arctic and Antarctic sea ice cover - frozen ocean water that floats on the surface - plunged to a record low last month, according to both the United States' National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and Europe's Copernicus

Climate Change Service.

While floating sea ice does not directly raise sea levels, its disappearance sets off a cascade of climate consequences, altering weather patterns, disrupting ocean currents, and threatening ecosystems and communities.

Climate change partly behind deadly Argentine deluge: report

Climate change fuelled high temperatures that were partly responsible for extreme rainfall that hit the Argentine city of Bahia Blanca this month, killing at least 16 people, a report said yesterday.

The city of 350,000 people was hit by torrential downpours on March 7 that in just a few hours doubled the annual average.

Two sisters aged one and five swept away with their mother and a man who had tried to save them, are still officially listed as missing.

The deluge flooded the main hospital, tore down bridges, damaged roads and houses and swept away pretty much everything in its path.

Thousands of people were evacuated to temporary shelters.

"The extreme summer temperatures that hit northern Argentina and other parts of South America between December and early March would have been virtually impossible without global warming," said a report by the World Weather Attribution, a network of researchers examining links between environmental change and extreme weather events.

"The same applies to the humid heatwave that immediately preceded the rain event."

It warned that such warm summers will become more common in a few decades "if the world continues to warm at the current rate".

The scientists could not conclusively say that the intense rainfall itself had been fuelled by human-induced global warming.

It was, however, "the most likely explanation, since a warmer atmosphere holds more moisture and leads to more intense downpours".

Under the Paris accord on climate change, the world agreed to try and keep warming to no more than 1.5° Celsius (2.7° Fahrenheit) from the industrial revolution, when humanity started burning large amounts of planet-warming fossil fuels.

Scientists say the risks of climate change increase with every fraction of a degree, and exceeding 1.5C over a decades-long period would greatly imperil ecosystems and human societies.

"As the planet warms and extreme weather becomes more frequent, governments need to prepare for the occurrence of simultaneous events," said the latest report. - **AFP**

Eight killed in several attacks in Pakistan

At least eight people have been killed in multiple attacks in southwestern Pakistan, police said yesterday, with assailants targeting bus passengers based on their ethnicity and security forces.

Pakistan has been battling a separatist insurgency in Balochistan for decades, where militants target state forces, foreign nationals and non-locals in the mineral-rich southwestern province bordering Afghanistan and Iran.

“Terrorists have targeted passenger buses and security officials in multiple districts of Balochistan, killing at least five non-local passengers and a security official,” a senior provincial police official told AFP early yesterday, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The incident took place in the coastal town of Pasni in Gwadar district – home to massive Chinese infrastructure projects attracting workers from all of Pakistan’s provinces.

An improvised explosive device planted on a motorcycle detonated yesterday afternoon near a police vehicle in a busy market in provincial capital Quetta.

“Two civilians were killed and 17 people wounded,” Muhammad Baloch, a senior police official, told AFP.

Wasim Baig, spokesman for the Sandeman Provincial Hospital in Quetta, confirmed the death toll. – **AFP**

Man stabs five people near central Amsterdam square

Reuters/AFP
Amsterdam

A man stabbed five people yesterday in central Amsterdam before being subsequently arrested, Dutch police said, adding that the investigation into possible motives was ongoing.

The stabbing rampage occurred in the afternoon.

Police officers quickly arrived on the scene and soon arrested the male suspect, who was carrying an injury to his leg.

Police had earlier given a toll of four seriously wounded, but confusion appeared to have resulted from the fact the suspect himself was also hurt.

“Update: in the stabbing incident this afternoon, there were not four but five people

wounded. In addition, the suspect himself is also injured,” Amsterdam police said in a statement on X, formerly Twitter.

Dutch authorities said that among the victims were a 67-year-old woman and a 69-year-old man, who were both American nationals.

The other victims were a 26-year-old man from Poland, a 73-year-old woman from Belgium and a 19-year-old woman from Amsterdam.

“The motive behind the attack is currently unclear and under investigation. Police are considering the possibility that the suspect may have randomly targeted victims, but the exact motive remains unknown,” said the Dutch police in a statement.

“The suspect was overpowered with the help of a citizen. Due to an injury to his leg,

he has been taken to hospital,” authorities said.

A police spokesman had earlier told reporters the suspect was receiving medical care and would be questioned at a later stage.

Authorities had sent a trauma helicopter to the square to attend to the injured.

The two seriously injured are currently being treated in hospital, police said.

The police spokesman was unable to give information about the condition of the wounded.

An AFP reporter on the scene said the casualties had been evacuated from the location but there was still a heavy police presence and ambulances were also on hand.

Early images from local news agency ANP showed a person on a stretcher being

loaded into the back of an ambulance.

Public broadcaster NOS showed images of police pushing someone on a stretcher while they were hooked up to an intravenous drip.

According to local media reports, Amsterdam Mayor Femke Halsema left a meeting in the town hall when news of the attack broke.

The police urged anyone with images of the incident to upload them as evidence. They also called on people to avoid the area and let them carry out their investigation.

Local media outlet Het Parool cited a witness, Marco Schoenmaeckers, as saying that he saw one of the victims.

“I saw a knife of at least 10cm sticking out of the girl’s back, between her shoulders,” Het Parool quoted Schoenmaeckers as saying.

Prosecutors seek seven years in jail for Sarkozy

AFP/Reuters
Paris

French prosecutors have requested a seven-year prison sentence for former president Nicolas Sarkozy in his trial on charges of accepting illegal campaign financing in an alleged pact with the late Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi.

Sarkozy, president from 2007-2012 and who denies the charges, was already convicted and jailed for one year in a separate influence-peddling case, a sentence he is currently serving with an electronic tag rather than in prison.

Prosecutors also recommended a fine of €300,000 (\$330,000) and a five-year ban on holding office.

Sarkozy later posted on social media that the prosecution’s request was “an outrage”, calling the allegations against him both “false” and “violent”.

“I will therefore continue to fight step by step for the truth, and for my faith in the wisdom of the court,” he said.

Sarkozy maintained throughout the trial that he had never accepted any money from Gaddafi.

“You will never ever find a single euro, a single Libyan cent, in my campaign,” he said in January.

However, prosecutor Sebastien de la Touanne said that in 12 weeks of hearings, “a very dark picture of a part of our republic has emerged”.

He accused Sarkozy of a “frantic quest for funding” to satisfy a “consuming political

ambition” and said that “only a prison sentence and a fixed fine” would be “capable of protecting society”.

The former president “does not seem to appreciate the seriousness of the breaches of integrity” which he is accused of, de la Touanne added.

Twelve suspects are standing trial, including former close aides, accused of devising a pact with Gaddafi to illegally fund Sarkozy’s victorious 2007 presidential election bid.

They include Sarkozy’s former right-hand man, Claude Gueant, his then-head of campaign financing, Eric Woerth, and former minister Brice Hortefeux.

All deny the charges.

The centre-right former president has been embroiled in legal battles since leaving office in 2012.

Macron hosts Europe’s ‘coalition of willing’ to protect Ukraine

AFP/Reuters
Paris

European countries agreed at a summit in Paris yesterday to ramp up rather than lift sanctions on Russia over its war against Ukraine, as Britain and France began sketching out plans to send a “reassurance” force after any peace.

President Emmanuel Macron hosted the meeting of Ukraine’s European allies and President Volodymyr Zelensky in the latest effort to agree a co-ordinated policy after Donald Trump shocked Europe by opening direct talks with the Kremlin.

The United States claims tentative progress towards a ceasefire to end the three-year conflict sparked by Russian President Vladimir Putin’s full-scale invasion in February 2022.

However, as yet a peace deal appears far off and the meeting of over two dozen European heads of state and government also underlined differences within the “coalition of the willing”, with not all states signing onto the French-British plan to deploy troops post-war.

“He really wants to divide Europe and America, Putin really wants that,” Zelensky said after the summit, adding Kyiv wants Washington to be “stronger” towards the Kremlin.

He warned “everybody understood and understands that today Russia does not want any kind of peace”.

There appeared to be consensus around the table at the Elysee Palace that sanctions imposed against Russia should not be weakened, and rather intensified, until there is peace.

“There was complete clarity that now is not the time for the lifting of sanctions, quite the contrary – what we discussed is how we can increase sanctions to support the US initiative to bring Russia to the table,” British Prime Minister Keir Starmer said alongside Zelensky.

In a separate briefing, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said lifting sanctions would



European leaders, including Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, and officials pose for a family photo during a summit for ‘Coalition of the Willing’ hosted by French President Emmanuel Macron at Elysee Palace in Paris. – **Reuters**

be a “grave mistake” and “makes no sense” without a truce.

Zelensky criticised “very dangerous signals” on that possibility, pointing especially to Saudi Arabia.

As well as boosting Ukraine’s own armed forces, a key pillar of ensuring security and preventing further Russian invasions could be to deploy European troops to Ukraine, although until now it has been far from clear how this could happen.

Macron said after the summit that France and Britain were leading efforts to send a “reassurance force” to Ukraine after any end to the fighting.

“It does not have unanimity today, but we do not need unanimity to do this,” he added, saying a Franco-British delegation would head to Ukraine for talks.

Macron emphasised that members of such a force would not be peacekeepers, deployed on the front line or any kind of substitute for the Ukrainian army.

Also, he said, not all of Ukraine’s European allies would be represented in the force, with some states not “having the capacity” and some reluctant due to the “political context”.

The Franco-British delegation would begin talks over where such a force could be deployed.

It would have the “character of deterrence against any potential Russian aggression”, he said.

Macron added that the summit agreed that he and Starmer would together “co-pilot” Europe’s ‘coalition of action’ for stable and durable peace”.

However, Zelensky struck a more downbeat note, warning that “there are many questions” but “so far, there are few answers” about the force, who would lead it and what it can do.

He told reporters that he had been encouraged by the promises for now and after the war.

“It’s obvious that the strength and size of the Ukrainian army will always be a key guarantee of our security. So we need to build everything around that – our defence forces, their equipment, their technology, their effectiveness – this is the foundation,” he said after more than four hours of talks with some 30 leaders.

However, beyond France committing some €2bn (\$2.2bn) in new aid, including warplanes and missiles, there were no specific announcements.

Italy’s Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, who has long made clear her reserves over the troop deployment plan, said she hoped the US will be involved in the next European

meeting on Ukraine and repeated Rome’s refusal to send troops.

However, Starmer, hailing the summit, said: “This is Europe mobilising together behind the peace process on a scale that we haven’t seen for decades, backed by partners from around the world.”

Ukraine has offered through the United States a 30-day ceasefire, but Russia has so far failed to respond, with the European allies growing all the more impatient.

Underscoring how far apart the sides remain, Ukraine accused Russia yesterday of violating a US-brokered agreement to refrain from targeting energy infrastructure with an artillery strike that caused a power outage in the city of Kherson.

The Ukrainian army meanwhile rejected Russian claims it had itself targeted energy sites.

“I think there should be a reaction from the US,” Zelensky told reporters in Paris, saying that energy facilities had been damaged in a strike yesterday and that it was “unclear who is monitoring” the pledges to halt such strikes.

Yesterday’s meeting comes after the White House said Russia and Ukraine had agreed on the contours of a possible ceasefire in the Black Sea, during parallel talks with US officials in Saudi Arabia.

Space telescope Gaia sent into ‘retirement’ but legacy endures

By Pierre Celerier
AFP

Europe’s Gaia space telescope was powered down and sent into “retirement” yesterday after a decade revealing the secrets of the Milky Way, but its observations will fuel discoveries for decades to come.

Since launching in 2013, the telescope has been charting the positions, motion and properties of nearly two billion stars to create an unparalleled map of our home galaxy, according to the European Space Agency (ESA).

Gaia has been peering into the universe from a stable orbit 1.5mn km (930,000 miles) from Earth called the second Lagrange point.

However, the neighbourhood has been getting more crowded with the recent arrivals of the powerful James Webb and Euclid space telescopes.

To avoid causing any problems for the new kids on the block, the ESA’s team on the ground ordered Gaia’s engines to give a final push yesterday that will take the spacecraft into a distant orbit around the Sun.

This “retirement orbit” will make sure the spacecraft will remain at least 10mn km from Earth for the next century.

Over nearly 11 years, Gaia has uncovered evidence of massive galaxies slamming into each other, identified vast clusters of stars, helped discover new exoplanets and mapped millions of galaxies and blazing galactic monsters called quasars.

A study last year using Gaia data identified two streams of ancient stars at the Milky Way’s heart thought to have formed around the galaxy’s birth more than 12bn years ago.

According to astronomers using Gaia, the Milky Way then swallowed other dwarf galaxies as it grew – nota-

bly one called Gaia-Enceladus around 10bn years ago.

Our home galaxy is still slowing devouring the Sagittarius dwarf galaxy, Gaia helped reveal.

The telescope also spotted more than 50 dwarf galaxies orbiting the Milky Way. Inside the galaxy, it tracked down 150,000 asteroids and detected several dozen black holes.

Yesterday ESA engineers in Germany disconnected – one-by-one – all the satellite’s systems that allow it to survive the perils of space, such as radiation storms or being struck by tiny meteorites.

“The spacecraft are designed so that they cannot be killed – it is very difficult to disconnect them,” ESA operations engineer Tiago Nogueira told AFP.

The team at the European Space Operations Centre in the city of Darmstadt then shut down Gaia’s instruments before issuing instructions

to corrupt its on-board software.

Finally, they said their last goodbye, deactivating the spacecraft’s communication system and central computer.

However, Gaia’s mission will continue back on Earth.

Scientists are still sifting through the deluge of data the telescope sent back, and are expected to deliver its fourth catalogue of the stars in 2026.

The final catalogue – which will encompass 10 and a half years of observations – is expected around 2030.

Ultimately, Gaia’s catalogue “will serve as a reference for astronomy for at least 30-40 years”, Gaia engineer Jose Hernandez told AFP.

This means that even as Gaia distantly orbits the Sun in silence, what it observed will be feeding new discoveries for future generations.

Some of the astronomers who will make these breakthroughs using Gaia’s data are “still in primary school”, Hernandez said.

France auctions off seized superyacht for €10mn

A superyacht seized in a money laundering case involving a Belarusian national fetched €10mn (\$11mn) at auction yesterday, with the proceeds going to the French treasury, the state agency for handling confiscated assets said.

The 41m (135’) boat, Stefania, went under the hammer at the shipyards of La Ciotat, a town located to the east of the southern port city of Marseille.

The vessel, built in 2021, was estimated at between €10mn and €12mn but in the end fetched only the starting price of €10.

The Stefania, which features an Art Deco interior, can accommodate a maximum of 10 guests and up to six crew. It has a pool, a jacuzzi and a wood-burning fireplace.

The superyacht had been seized in 2023 during a stop-over near Genoa in northwestern Italy at the request of French authorities.

French police had been investigating “criminal activities” of Belarusian and Ukrainian nationals, according to the Marseille public prosecutor’s office.

A probe had been launched into “arms trafficking, drug trafficking and money laundering by an organised gang”, it added.

Belarusian national Chaslau Koniukh has been identified by French authorities as the owner of the yacht as well as of a villa on the French Riviera. – **AFP**

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GULF TIMES

Italy’s Meloni is torn between Trump and European allegiance

Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni finds herself playing a political balancing act as Europe moves to bolster its defences.

A nationalist with deep admiration for US President Donald Trump, she is battling to reconcile the growing gulf between her ideological instincts, which lie with Washington, and Italy’s strategic ties to the European Union, analysts say.

Meloni was the only EU leader to attend Trump’s inauguration in January and has carefully steered clear of any criticism of the US president, even as he has hit Europe with tariffs and threatened to abandon Ukraine in its war with Russia.

While she has taken part in emergency talks with European partners on how to navigate the upheavals caused by Trump’s foreign policy, her engagement at times has seemed unenthusiastic, prompting critics at home to accuse her of isolating Italy within the EU.

Meloni, who has been in power since 2023, dismissed suggestions that she was under the sway of Trump as she headed into a summit of European leaders this week.

“I don’t blindly follow either Europe or the United States ... I am in Europe because Italy is in Europe, so it’s not like we’re thinking of going somewhere else, but I also want the West to be compact,” she told parliament.

Ever since Meloni founded her Brothers of Italy group in 2012, she has placed close ties with the United States at the heart of her foreign policy, while watering down initial, fierce euroscepticism.

Trump’s strong-arm tactics with old allies as he looks to enhance American power has wrong-footed pro-Atlanticists, while forcing Europe to hastily review its geopolitical options and shore up its defences.

The turmoil has put on hold Meloni’s hopes of serving as a bridge between Europe and the White House, with Europe’s two nuclear powers France and Britain taking the lead in forging a response to Trump, while Germany grabs headlines with plans for a huge spending splurge to scale up its military.

“Right now, Meloni does not have the leverage to play a mediating role with Trump,” said Giovanni Orsina, a politics professor at Rome’s Luiss University.

“If Trumpism enters a second, more constructive phase, she might be able to play a role, leveraging political and personal affinities.”

Meloni last month called for an “immediate summit” between the United States and its allies after Trump lambasted Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in the White House, but Washington ignored her appeal. Sources in Meloni’s office, who declined to be named, said the Italian leader was seeking a meeting with Trump later in March or early April, when the European Union is due to impose counter tariffs on €26bn (\$28bn) worth of US goods in response to US tariffs on steel and aluminium. In her address to parliament this week, Meloni questioned the wisdom of retaliatory tariffs and urged Europe to continue its military co-operation with the United States inside Nato.

Spooked by Trump’s suggestion he might not defend Nato members in future, the European Commission has laid out plans to boost the bloc’s military spending by €800bn (\$869bn), while France has offered to consider extending its nuclear umbrella to European allies.

“It is right that Europe equips itself to do its part, but it is at best naive, at worst mad to think that today it can be done alone without Nato,” Meloni said, declining to say if heavily indebted Italy would ramp up its own defence budget.

Italy is one of the countries that spends least on defence in Nato – just 1.5% of gross domestic product in 2024, well below the 2% threshold Nato says members should spend and far from the 5% demanded by Trump.

This has undercut her standing in Washington, diplomats say.

“Trump’s perspective is that everybody must pay,” said Kurt Volker, a former US Nato ambassador who worked with the first Trump administration.

“He will probably single out other countries before he gets to Italy ... But it’ll be in his sights,” he told Reuters.

Despite US pressure, Meloni faces opposition from her coalition ally, the far-right League, not to join the European Commission’s “ReArm” project.

“Try and ask our mothers what they think. ... You’ll see they all say the same thing. ‘No,’” said Economy Minister Giancarlo Giorgetti, a senior League member.

There is little public support for defence spending in Italy, where the anti-war stance of Pope Francis resonates. An IPSOS opinion poll this month said 39% of voters were opposed to ReArm against 28% in favour, with the rest undecided. – Reuters

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Reckless Trump leaves a world turned inside out
His shocking actions have eroded the trust that has underpinned America’s global leadership

By Stephen S Roach
Beijing

The world’s major growth engines are about to run in reverse. The policies and uncertainties of US President Donald Trump’s second administration have hit a sluggish global economy with a transformational exogenous shock. Risks are especially worrisome in both the United States and China, which have collectively accounted for a little more than 40% of cumulative global GDP growth since 2010.

America is now the problem, not the solution. Long the anchor of the rules-based international order, the US has turned protectionist, posing major risks to an already fragile global trade cycle.

At the same time, Trump’s MAGA (“Make America Great Again”) movement has driven a powerful wedge between the US and Europe and divided North America, with Canada’s very independence in Trump’s crosshairs. The central role of the US in sustaining post-World War II geostrategic stability has been shattered.

The US will be unable to put the genie back in the bottle. Trump’s shocking actions have eroded the trust that has underpinned America’s global leadership, and the damage will be evident long after Trump has left the scene. Having once abdicated its moral authority as the anchor of the free world, who is to say it can’t happen again?

This breakdown in trust will cast a long and lasting shadow over economic performance, not least in the US itself, where it is affecting business decision-making, especially the costly long-term commitments associated with hiring and capital spending. Businesses need to scale their future operations relative to confident expectations of future growth trajectories – now an increasingly uncertain proposition. Asset values and consumer confidence, too, have been shaken. Uncertainty, the enemy of decision-making, is likely to freeze the most dynamic segments of the US economy.

For China, state-directed policy guidance might temper the initial blow of a Trump policy shock. But the pressures of Trump’s tariff escalation will undermine China’s export-led growth model, which is especially problematic for economic growth, given the lingering weakness of China’s domestic demand.

The country’s long-promised consumer-led rebalancing of the economy remains more of a slogan than an actual shift in the sources of Chinese growth – especially with a deficient social safety net that continues to encourage fear-driven precautionary saving. China’s just-announced 30-point action plan to boost household demand draws much-needed attention to the seemingly chronic plight of the Chinese consumer. But it offers only modest support to an inadequate social safety net.

The Trump shock is likely not only to exacerbate the Sino-

American conflict but also to weaken both countries’ growth prospects significantly. Don’t count on other economies filling this void. Eventually, India might be able to take up some of the slack. But its relatively small share of world GDP – currently 8.5% (in purchasing-power-parity terms), compared to 34% for China and the US combined – means that that day is in the distant future.

The same is true of Europe. While the European Union’s 14% share of world GDP is nearly double that of India, Europe remains saddled with anaemic growth, compounded by mounting trade pressures associated with an escalating global tariff war.

If the apparent breakdown of the transatlantic alliance has a silver lining, it is that the incentives for strategic cohesion should have an outsize impact on European defence spending. But that will also take time. Meanwhile, Europe will equally be exposed to the adverse effects on business and consumer expectations and decision-making, comparable to those afflicting the US.

What does all this mean for global economic prospects in the coming years? The current baseline expectation of around 3.3% world GDP growth for 2025-26, as per recent forecasts by the International Monetary Fund, is far too sanguine. While there may be some front-loading of growth momentum in the early part of this year – exemplified by accelerated shipments of Chinese exports ahead of Trump’s

tariff hikes – I suspect that the downside risks will progressively build.

That points to a fractional reduction of forecasts for global economic growth for 2025, with the slowdown becoming considerably more pronounced in 2026 and after. That could easily push an increasingly fragile world economy down to the 2.5% growth threshold, typically associated with outright global recession.

Nor is this likely to be a standard shortfall of global growth. To the extent that the tariff war is aimed at promoting friendshoring and strengthening supply-chain resilience, the global economy’s supply side is likely to come under significant strain. A new layer of adjustment costs is being imposed on a once-globalised world. Reshoring to higher-cost local producers not only takes considerable time but also erodes the efficiencies of production, assembly, and delivery that have underpinned worldwide disinflation over the past three decades.

Nearly five years ago, in the depths of the Covid-19 shock, I warned that the onset of stagflation was only “a broken supply chain away.” Subsequent experience and research have borne that out, confirming that the supply-chain disruptions during the pandemic and its immediate aftermath generated significant upward pressure on prices.

A global trade conflict implies a similar dynamic. The higher costs associated with Trump’s coming “reciprocal” escalation of multilateral tariffs, which are due to be announced on April 2, are especially problematic. In the face of a likely shortfall of economic growth, the added cost and price pressures are likely to tip the scales toward a global stagflation.

The Trump shock, in short, is the functional equivalent of a full-blown crisis. It is likely to have a lasting impact on the US and Chinese economies, and the contagion is almost certain to spread throughout the world through cross-border trade and capital flows. Perhaps most importantly, this is a geostrategic crisis, reflecting a reversal of America’s global leadership role. In the space of little more than two months, Trump has turned the world inside out. If my assessment of this shock is anywhere close to the mark, concerns over the global economic forecast seem almost trivial. – Project Syndicate

• Stephen S Roach, a faculty member at Yale University and former chairman of Morgan Stanley Asia, is the author of Unbalanced: The Codependency of America and China and Accidental Conflict: America, China, and the Clash of False Narratives.



US President Donald Trump looks in the distance on the day of a meeting with American ambassadors at the White House in Washington, DC, on Tuesday. (Reuters)



Ramadan is the month of supplications

The verses on fasting include an amazing gesture that addresses the depth of the soul, touches the heart, rids the fasting person from the hardship he experiences, and makes him look forward to the full compensation and urgent reward. The fasting person can find compensation and reward when he draws closer to Allah, the Almighty, enjoys invoking Him, and receives a promise of answering his supplications and invocations. Allah, the Almighty, ends the verses on the obligation of fasting with His saying: *“And when My servants ask you [O Muhammad] concerning Me—indeed I am near. I respond to the invocation of the supplicant when he calls upon Me. So let them respond to Me [by obedience] and believe in Me that they may be [rightly] guided.”* (Quran 2: 186) This verse, in the fasting person’s soul, promotes a sense of contentment, closeness, confidence, and faith which he considers as a safe refuge and firm support.

This verse also clearly indicates that fasting is linked with supplication and reveals that most times in which supplications are more likely to be answered fall in the blessed month of Ramadan (the month of supplications). Islamic legal texts reveal the great importance and the merit of supplication, as it is an act of worship which Allah considers the most honourable deed. In addition, it is one of the greatest reasons for preventing trials and calamities as well as warding them off if they are already experienced. Supplication also leads to cheerfulness, relief from worry, and removal of distress; therefore, oppressed and weakened people resort to it. In fact, the most helpless people are those who cannot make supplication.

When I supplicate Allah in a state of distress,

I find relief soon,

You may find a person in adversity,

But his supplication leads to his relief.

There are some conditions and etiquette that should be taken into consideration in order for the supplication to be answered. They include the following:

At the forefront are supplicating and beseeching Allah only, as no one should be invoked but Allah.

Supplicating Allah attentively with a submissive heart, as the Messenger of Allah (sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam) said, “Supplicate Allah when you are assured of being answered, and know that



Allah does not answer a supplication which comes from a careless and inattentive heart.” (Reported by At-Tirmidhi)

The supplicating person should ask Allah confidently without any hesitation and should not show impatience, as the Prophet (sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam) said, “You must not supplicate saying, ‘O Allah, pardon me if You will! O Allah, bestow mercy on me if You will. O Allah, grant me provision if You will.’ An invocation should be made in full confidence, for no one has the power to compel Allah.” The Prophet (sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam) also said, “The invocation of anyone of you is granted (by Allah) if he does not show impatience (by saying, ‘I

invoked Allah but my request has not been granted.’)” (Reported by Al-Bukhari)

The Muslim should seek the times of special virtue, at which supplications are likely to be answered, such as Lailat Al-Qadr (the Night of Revelation), the last part of the night, immediately after the prescribed prayers, the last hour of the daytime of Friday, and while prostrating during prayer, fasting, travelling, etc.

The supplicating person should start his supplication by praising Allah, the Almighty, invoking Allah’s Blessings and Peace upon the Prophet, and confessing his sins and evil deeds. Fadalrah ibn Obaid said that while Allah’s Messenger was sitting, a man entered and prayed saying, “O Allah, forgive

me and show mercy to me.” Allah’s Messenger said, “You who are praying in a hurry. When you pray and come to the point when you sit, you should worthily extol Allah’s praises, invoke blessing on me, and then make your supplication.” (Reported by Al-Tirmidhi)

The supplicating person should persist in invoking Allah, beseech Allah submissively, show how helpless and weak he is, and invoke Allah in all his conditions, including in adversity, prosperity, ease, and hardship. In addition, the supplicating person should repeat his supplication thrice, as the Prophet (sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam) said, “If one of you wishes for something, let him ask Allah for a great deal of it, because he is asking his Lord.” (Reported by

At-Tabarani) The Messenger of Allah (sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam) also said, “If anyone finds pleasure in receiving an answer from Allah in times of difficulty, he should make many supplications when times are easy.” (Reported by Al-Tirmidhi)

It is preferable that the supplicating person performs ablution, faces the Qiblah, raises his hands, and then invokes Allah, as the Prophet (sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam) said, “Your Lord is Modest and Generous and would never return the hands of a slave without gain when he raises them to Him (in supplication).” (Reported by At-Tirmidhi)

The supplicating person’s voice should neither be too high nor too low, as Allah, the Almighty, says:

“Call upon your Lord in humility and privately; indeed, He does not like transgressors.” (Quran 7: 55)

The Messenger of Allah (sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam) said, “Lower your voices, for you are not calling a deaf or an absent one, but you are calling a Hearer Who is near and is with you.” (Reported by Al-Bukhari) The Messenger of Allah meant to advise the people to be lenient to themselves.

The supplicating person should say Jawami’ Ad-Du’a’ (concise yet comprehensive supplications) and reported supplications because they make his supplications likely to be answered. This is in accordance with the Messenger’s saying, “No Muslim will supplicate Allah for anything and fail to receive an answer when he uses Dhun Nun’s (Prophet Yunus) supplication when he was in the belly of the fish: ‘There is no deity except You; exalted are You. Indeed, I have been of the wrongdoers!’” (Reported by At-Tirmidhi)

The supplicating person should avoid using artificial rhymed words and extravagantly formulated phrases, as what matters is the truthfulness of the heart while drawing close to Allah. The Prophet (sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam) preferred only concise and comprehensive supplications.

The supplicating person’s food and drink should be lawful in order for his supplications to be answered. In addition, he should supplicate Allah for good things only, avoid transgression while supplicating Allah, and abstain from supplicating Allah against himself, his properties, and his family. This is in accordance with the Prophet’s saying, “Do not invoke curses on yourself or on your children or on your possessions lest you should happen to do it at a moment when the supplications are accepted and your prayer might be granted.” (Reported by Muslim)

These are brief etiquettes and conditions required for supplication. O fasting Muslim brother, strive to make the best use of times during this blessed month, supplicate Allah frequently for yourself, your parents, children, and the believers. Benefit from the generous rewards bestowed by Allah so that you may save yourself from misery.

Article source: <http://www.islamweb.net/emainpage/>



Fasting expiates sins

Allah The Almighty Says (what means): *{Your wealth and your children are but a trial, and Allah has with Him a great reward.}* [Qur’an 64:15]

{Every soul will taste death. And We test you with evil and with good as trial; and to Us you will be returned.} [Qur’an 21:35]

Ibn ‘Abbaas, may Allah be pleased with him, commented on this verse saying, “We test you with hardship and ease, with health and illness, with richness and poverty, with the lawful and the unlawful, with obedience and disobedience and with guidance and misguidance.”

In a Hadith (narration) on the authority of Huthayfah, may Allah be pleased with him, he said that ‘Umar, may Allah be pleased with him, said, “‘Who has memorised a Hadith on the authority of the Prophet, sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam, about the trial?’ Huthayfah said, ‘I heard him saying: ‘Man’s trial is in his property, family and neighbour and it is expiated by his prayers, fasting and charity.’” [Al-Bukhari and Muslim]

In a Hadith on the authority of Abu Hurairah, may Allah be pleased with him, he said that the Prophet, sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam, said: “Allah The Almighty Said, ‘For every misdeed there is an expiation; fasting is for Me and I give reward for it...’” [Al-Bukhari] According to another narration: “Good deeds expiate sins and fasting is for Me and I give reward for it. (i.e. it expiates sins and is also a reason for receiving reward from Allah.)” [Ahmad]

In a Hadith on the authority of Abu Hurairah, may Allah be pleased with him, he said that the Messenger of Allah, sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam, said: “The five (daily) prayers, and the Friday Prayer to the (next) Friday Prayer, and the Ramadan to the (next) Ramadan are expiations of sins committed in between (their intervals); provided that the grave major sins are avoided.” [Muslim]

In a Hadith on the authority of Abu Sa’eed Al-Khudri, may Allah be pleased with him, he said that he heard the Messenger of Allah, sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam, saying: “Whoever fasts Ramadan and knows its limits and avoids whatever he should avoid in it, it (Ramadan) will be an expiation of what is before it.” [Ahmad] [Ibn Hibbaan: Saheeh]

Benefits and rulings:

First: Man could be tested and tried with good or evil. He could be tested with good by being given abundant wealth and granted successive blessings. He could also be tested with evil like being afflicted with distress, worries and diseases.

Second: Children and property are a trial for man because he may overlook the rights of Allah



for their sake and out of his love for them. Hence, this would be a cause for inflicting punishment on him in the Hereafter. Moreover, one’s children have rights over him; such as teaching and bringing them up, providing for them, etc. If one neglects or does not perform these rights properly, he will be held guilty.

Third: Acts of disobedience and sins are a trial. Anyone who is tried with any sin such as keeping in contact with a woman who is unlawful for him or ill-gotten gains, is undergoing a trial. Some righteous people may be tried in this matter, as Allah The Almighty Says (what means):

{Indeed, those who fear Allah - when an impulse touches them from Satan, they remember [Him] and at once they have insight.} [Qur’an 7:201]

{And those who, when they commit an immorality or wrong themselves [by transgression], remember Allah and seek forgiveness for their sins -- and who can forgive sins except Allah? -- and [who] do not persist in what they have done while they know.} [Quran 3:135]

Fourth: Those who are tried with a sin and insist on committing it should do a lot of good deeds because good deeds expiate sins. Allah The Almighty

Says (what means): *{Indeed, good deeds do away with misdeeds.}* [Qur’an 11:114] Perhaps, when one frequently performs acts of obedience, they could be a cause for him to be released from the captivity of this sin as Allah The Almighty might guide him because of his obedience to a sincere repentance.

Fifth: These Hadiths prove that fasting expiates sins. The Hadith that was narrated by Abu Hurairah, may Allah be pleased with him, might be understood as negating the expiation of sins by fasting. However, this Hadith means that good deeds expiate sins, whereas fasting expiates sins and gives extra reward to such expiation. It means the fasting that is offered with full sincerity to Allah without any ostentation.

Sixth: An-Nawawi said,

“It may be said that if the ablution expiates sins; then what sins do the prayers expiate? If the prayers expiate sins; then what sins do the congregational prayers, Ramadan, the fasting of ‘Arafah (the ninth of Thul-Hijjah) and ‘Aashooraa’ (tenth of Muharram) and saying ‘Aameen’ in prayer in the same time with angels expiate? There are Hadeeths indicating that performing such acts expiate sins. The answer proposed by scholars is that each one of the aforementioned acts of worship is fit for expiation. If there is a minor sin, it would be expiated. However, if there is no major or minor sin to be expiated, they would be recorded as good deeds and would raise one’s rank in Paradise. If these acts of worship meet a grave major sin, we hope that they would alleviate the punishment of these grave major sins.”

Seventh: People’s rights are not expiated by these acts of worship, whether the rights are minor or major. Rather, one must free himself from liability by returning these rights to those who deserve them or by asking them to absolve him.

Eighth: The virtue of fasting and that it is a cause for expiating sins.

Ninth: This virtue of having sins expiated is attained by those who preserve their fasting from being nullified. The evidence for this is the Hadith narrated by Abu Sa’eed al-Khudri, may Allah be pleased with him, “Whoever fasts Ramadan and knows its limits and avoids whatever he should avoid in it...” Accordingly, the Muslim must preserve his day and night during Ramadan by refraining from saying anything unlawful; such as back-biting and tale-bearing. The Muslim must also lower his gaze and avoid looking at anything unlawful like TV serials, entertainment shows or the like which are displayed in abundance in Ramadan. We supplicate Allah to guide us and all Muslims to the right path.

Article source: <http://www.islamweb.net/emainpage/>

Zakatul-Fitr

Zakatul-Fitr is an obligatory charity on every Muslim at the end of the month of Ramadan. Ibn ‘Umar, may Allah be pleased with him, said: “The Prophet, sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam, enjoined the payment of one Saa’ (a volume measure corresponding about to the volume of 5 lb) of dates or one Saa’ of barley as Zakat al-Fitr on every Muslim, young and old, male and female, free and slave.” [Al-Bukhari and Muslim]

The purpose of Zakat al-Fitr is to purify the one who has fasted from any type of indecent act or speech he might have committed while fasting. It also helps the poor and the needy. Ibn ‘Abbaas, may Allah be pleased with him, said: “The Messenger of Allah, sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam, enjoined Zakat al-Fitr on the one who fasts to shield him from any indecent act or speech and for the purpose of providing food for the needy.” [Abu Daawood and Ibn Maajah]

The Amount of Zakatul-Fitr

As the first Hadith indicated, the amount of Zakatul-Fitr is one Saa’ Saa’ is a volume measure corresponding approximately to the volume of 5 lb of good wheat. The material of the Zakat can be either dates, barley, wheat, rice, corn or similar items considered as basic foods. Abu Sa’eed, may Allah be pleased with him, said: “We used to give for Zakatul-Fitr on behalf of every child, aged person, free man or slave during the lifetime of the Messenger of Allah, sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam, one Saa’ of food, or one Saa’ of dried yogurt, or one Saa’ of barley, or one Saa’ of dates, or one Saa’ of raisins.” [Al-Bukhari and Muslim]

The Time for Zakatul-Fitr

Zakatul-Fitr has to be paid by the end of Ramadan. There are two times to pay Zakatul-Fitr. Either one or two days before Eid as ‘Umar, may Allah be pleased with him, used to do, or the day of Eid before the Eid prayer. Ibn ‘Umar, may Allah be pleased with him, reported that the Prophet, sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam, ordered them to pay Zakatul-Fitr before they go out to perform the Eid Prayer. If Zakatul-Fitr is paid after the Eid Prayer, it will only be considered as regular charity. The Prophet, sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam, said: “If one pays Zakat al-Fitr before the Salat, it is considered an accepted Zakat, if he pays it after the Salat, it is considered an ordinary charity.” [Abu Daawood]

Zakatul-Fitr is to be given to the same eight categories or people as in the other types of Zakat. Some scholars say that the poor and the needy are the most deserving ones since the Prophet, sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam, said that it had “...the purpose of providing food for the needy.”

Article source: <http://www.islamweb.net/emainpage/>

UDC to host Eid al-Fitr celebrations on The Pearl, Gewan Islands

United Development Company (UDC), the leading Qatari public shareholding company and the master developer of The Pearl Island and Gewan Islands, will host a special series of Eid al-Fitr celebrations, from March 31 to April 5, a statement said.

As part of the occasion, the popular Pearl Ramadan Bazaar in Porto Arabia will see a change in operating hours, opening daily from 3pm-10pm during the Eid holiday.

Alongside this shift, visitors can expect a refreshed programme of festive entertainment, bringing the spirit of Eid to life across both islands.

Recognised as one of Qatar's premier destinations for family and cultural celebrations, The Pearl Island continues to set the benchmark for vibrant public festivities.

This year, for the first time, Gewan Island will also join the celebration, offering guests a new location to experience the joy



of Eid through curated entertainment and engaging activities.

Across the two islands, guests will be welcomed into a lively atmosphere filled with cultural performances, traditional music, and live stage shows that pay tribute to the rich heritage of the region.

Children can enjoy a variety of engaging activities, including face painting, arts and

crafts workshops, and encounters with roaming mascots in an Eid parade.

Among the crowd favourites returning this year are the henna art stalls, where artists create intricate designs in celebration of Eid, and the caricaturist, offering playful portraits that capture the festive mood.

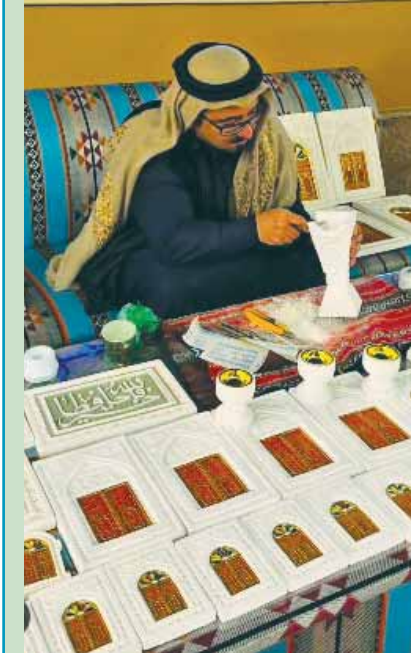
With a focus on community, culture, and celebration, the UDC's Eid al-Fitr initiatives are designed to bring families and friends together in a setting that is both joyful and welcoming.

These experiences aim to create lasting memories, while further establishing The Pearl and Gewan Islands as leading lifestyle destinations during the most cherished seasons of the year.

The UDC welcomes all residents and visitors to be part of this week-long celebration and experience the beauty of Eid through a blend of tradition, entertainment, and togetherness, the statement added.



Ramadan festivities concluding tomorrow



The Pearl Island's Ramadan Bazaar at Porto Arabia.

By Joey Aguilar
Staff Reporter

From nostalgic flavours at the Throwback Food Festival to traditional treats at Souq Waqif, Qatar's Ramadan celebrations are set to conclude tomorrow (March 29), providing residents and visitors a final opportunity to enjoy the festive spirit, according to Visit Qatar.



Ramadan at Hosh Msheireb, inspired by traditional Qatari family gatherings, will also conclude tomorrow.

The **Ramadan at Torba Farmers Market** in Education City Gate 7 will host its final day tomorrow, inviting visitors to explore traditional crafts, indulge in Arabic cuisine, and enjoy games and sweet treats in a lively setting.

Shopping enthusiasts should head to the Doha Exhibition and Convention

Centre (DECC) before the **Ramadan and Eid Shopping Exhibition** closes its doors tomorrow.

It features a wide array of products, from dates and honey to homeware and clothing, ideal for Eid preparations.

Similarly, the **Eid Sweets Exhibition** at Souq Waqif's Eastern Square, showcasing the finest traditional and international sweets in a family-friendly atmosphere, will conclude tomorrow.

For a taste of Qatari heritage, the second edition of Visit Qatar's **Throwback Food Festival** at Old Doha Port will be open until tomorrow, the last day of Ramadan.

This festival celebrates local heritage through traditional cuisine and cultural experiences, recreating the atmosphere of old Qatari souqs through the Dakkan initiative.

Visitors can sample traditional foods and sweets, participate in interactive competitions like Kahoot and a treasure hunt focused on heritage, and even witness chefs battling it out in the "Local Flavour Challenge".

The Throwback Food Festival also features live musical performances of traditional songs, complete with instruments like drums, oud, and marwas.

The immersive **Ramadan at Hosh Msheireb**, inspired by traditional Qatari family gatherings, will also conclude tomorrow.

While some Ramadan-specific events



Ramadan at Torba Farmers Market in Education City.

are wrapping up, other festive experiences will continue into April.

Shoppers looking for high-quality, locally-sourced agricultural products can still visit the **10th edition of the Mahaseel Festival** at Katara – the Cultural Village, open on Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays until April 3.

The festival offers fresh produce, dairy products, meat, and local dates, among others.

The Pearl Island's **Ramadan Bazaar** at Porto Arabia will continue to welcome visitors until April 5.

With more than 35 local and international exhibitors, the bazaar presents traditional attire, handcrafted goods, perfumes, gifts, and authentic Ramadan delicacies.

Visit Qatar noted that the National Museum of Qatar's **Mal Lawal 4 Exhibition** will be on view at Msheireb Sahat Al Nakheel Unit X04 until April 10, showcasing the local heritage and collecting practices in Qatar through vintage gaming items from the 1990s.

Qatar Foundation programme nurturing next generation of female athletes

In a country where sports play a key role in development, Qatar Foundation (QF)'s Creating Pathways is carving a unique space for aspiring female athletes, a statement said yesterday.

The initiative currently focuses on track and field, volleyball, and fencing – with two additional sports to follow.

More than just a sports programme, it is a movement promoting healthier lifestyles, talent development, and structured athletic progression for young girls and women in Qatar.

The track and field Creating Pathways programme, which was launched in September last year, begins at the grassroots level, ensuring that girls from an early age have access to structured, high-quality coaching.

The initiative places qualified coaches in after-school programmes across all QF schools, with hopes of expanding into additional schools in the future.

The objective is simple: create an accessible and structured track and field programme where girls can develop their athletic abilities.

Girls aged 10-16 who demonstrate athletic potential are selected for an elite programme which runs five days a week, and includes sports such as distance running, long jump, and high jump.

Currently, this includes 25 young athletes.

The programme is led by Olympic medalist Liz McColgan, QF's director of athletics, who explains that the initiative takes a holistic approach.

"Participants in the elite group receive mentorship, nutritional guidance, physiology education, and lifestyle coaching," she said. "They are provided with uniforms, running shoes, and transport if needed."

"Our goal is to create a supportive and healthy environment for them to excel in sport," McColgan said.

Hessa al-Mahmoud, a 15-year-old from



Qatar, has been running for nearly five months, joining the programme as a newcomer to track and field.

"I saw results very quickly," she said. "I also get to socialise with people from different countries. I enjoy running, and I want to continue."

Training five times a week, she follows a varied routine.

"We focus on high jump, long jump, circuit training with weights, and distance running," al-Mahmoud said. "We also do sprints across all distances. I really like the

jumps and hurdles because they're new to me, and I'm learning so much."

The programme has had a significant impact on her life.

"I definitely feel fitter. I eat more, and I wake up in the morning feeling fresher. It's a better lifestyle," she said.

Shadan Mohammed, 14, has been running for over a year, inspired by her father's passion for sports and his belief in her potential in track and field.

Reflecting on the programme, she said: "I love how we're all teammates. And my

coaches are really supportive. I feel comfortable."

Mohammed also explained how familiar faces made her transition easier, saying: "I already knew some of my teammates before joining because we trained together on my old team."

When it comes to training, one thing she particularly enjoys is the long jump.

"I've only done a few sessions, but after seeing others try it, I thought it looked like a lot of fun," she said. "But my best events are the 800m and 1.5km."

Looking ahead, Mohammed has ambitious goals.

"I want to compete in the Olympics – and be the best," she said. "I'd love to set a world record. It will take a lot of work, but I'm excited to stay in this program and keep pushing myself."

Beyond the elite programme, Creating Pathways champions women's fitness at all levels.

The ladies-only programme encourages women of all backgrounds to engage in physical activity with the goal of fostering healthier lifestyles that will eventually impact future generations.

Currently, there are 110 women registered for the programme, 85 of whom are Qatari.

"We have partnered with Athletic Edge," McColgan said. "They lead the sessions, while we provide mentorship and support to the coaches, ensuring they have the resources they need to guide participants effectively."

"One of their initiatives is similar to a Couch to 5K, designed to encourage women of all fitness levels to take their first step toward an active lifestyle," she continued. "But it doesn't stop there – on race day, we're right alongside them, offering support and celebrating their progress every step of the way."

"When women become fit and healthy, it influences their children, who will eventually become the next generation of mothers," McColgan added. "This creates a lasting ethos of healthier women in the future. So, ultimately, it's about providing opportunities for lifestyle change for all women in Qatar and reinforcing a shift towards healthier, more active communities."

The QF also offers weekly ladies-only nights at Education City Stadium, which offers a variety of sports and fitness activities.

For more information, please visit www.qf.org.qa or the Education City app.