

Washington said it would welcome an extension of the truce.



Shura reviews MoCI's efforts in developing various sectors

QNA

Doha

The Shura Council held yesterday its routine weekly sitting, chaired by HE the Speaker Hassan bin Abdullah al-Ghanem and attended by HE the Minister of Commerce and Industry, Sheikh Faisal bin Thani bin Faisal al-Thani.

The sitting at the Tamim bin Hamad Hall started with the legislature hailing the outcomes of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani's official visit to Russia the previous week and His Highness' talks with President Vladimir Putin. The legislative body said the talks bolstered bilateral co-operation across various fields and highlighted the two countries' convergent views on regional and international issues, primarily the efforts backing peace efforts in the Middle East and their firm positions on the Palestinian issue.

In another area, the Council strongly condemned dangerous suggestions by parties affiliated with the Israeli occupation to bomb and demolish the blessed Al-Aqsa Mosque and construct an alleged Temple in its place as a blatant provocation and incitement that offends Muslim sentiments and poses a grave escalation in the region.

Responding to such calls, the legislature reiterated its categorical rejection of any infringement on the historical and legal status of Al-Aqsa Mosque and Holy Jerusalem, calling on the international community to assume its legal and moral responsibilities towards protecting Islamic holy sites and obligating the occupation to cease its repeated violations.

It also reiterated Qatar's firm position in support of the Palestinian cause. HE the Minister of Commerce and Industry presented the key items of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI) Strategy 2024-2030 and its contributions to boosting economic diversification, developing the business landscape, and supporting non-oil sectors in line with Qatar National Vision 2030.

He said the strategy aims to diversify income and amplify the revenues of non-oil sectors, with a focus on developing the trade and industry sectors and stimulating local and foreign investment, thus enhancing the competitiveness of the Qatari economy in light of global changes.

Also among the points addressed in his presentation were the efforts to develop MoCI's e-services, including expanding the provision



of fully digital commercial licensing and registration services and simplifying procedures to conduct commercial activities, ensuring a conducive and growth-enhancing business environment.

Furthermore, he highlighted MoCI's moves to counter commercial fraud and ensure the protection of consumer rights, through the activation of field and digital monitoring systems and strengthening partnerships with relevant authorities to implement the highest standards of safety and quality in the markets.

HE the Minister of Commerce and Industry also discussed the ministry's efforts to support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), providing incentives and facilities that enable entrepreneurs to engage in the market and enhance their competitiveness. He emphasised the ministry's commitment to facilitating the business environment and promoting innovation.

HE Sheikh Faisal explained that the ministry is working to protect intellectual property and develop legislation related to patents and trademarks, contributing to the consolidation of a culture of innovation and encouraging creativity within the country.

He stressed the ministry's dedication to protecting Qatari products and promoting national industries through technical and marketing support programmes, developing supply chains, and providing internal and external marketing outlets that help local products reach new markets.

HE the Shura Council Speaker, Hassan bin Abdullah al-Ghanem, emphasised the pivotal role played by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry in supporting the pillars of the national economy and promoting economic diversification through policies aimed at empowering the private sector, developing the business environment, and stimulating innovation and entrepreneurship. Following the presentation, members of the Shura Council raised a number of questions, focusing on the need to strengthen the country's position as a regional and global centre for trade and industry, attract foreign investment,

open new markets for local products and services, and support Qatari companies in their global expansion.

Their remarks also addressed overseeing e-commerce, facilitating procedures for investors and entrepreneurs, supporting national SMEs, and ways to support farms and national production projects.

They emphasised the importance of the strategy, including practical programmes to support producers and ensure the smooth flow and quality of goods in the local market.

They highlighted the important role played by the "One-Stop Shop" in facilitating company establishment procedures. They also emphasised the importance of developing some technical and logistical aspects to speed-up and enhance user experience, thus supporting the country's business environment.

They also stressed the importance of protecting consumer rights, combating commercial fraud, and taking measures that reduce the cost of commercial and industrial activities, thus contributing to the provision of products and services at competitive prices. Shura Council members addressed the ration card, emphasising its importance in supporting citizens' basic food needs and its role in enhancing food security for Qatari families.

They called for reconsidering the possibility of increasing the number of items included in the ration card and improving the support mechanism provided to meet the needs of Qatari families and price changes in the markets.

For his part, HE the Minister of Commerce and Industry said that the next phase will witness the launch of new initiatives that serve the development of the national economy and contribute to raising market efficiency and achieving market balance, which will reflect positively on citizens' well-being and quality of life.

At the conclusion of the session, HE al-Ghanem briefed the Council on the results of his participation, leading the Council's delegation, in the inaugural meeting of the Parliamentary Group in Solidarity with Palestine, held in Istanbul last Friday.



In her remarks, Shaikha al-Jufairi reiterated Qatar's full solidarity with the Palestinian people, who have been subjected to brutal Israeli aggression for more than a year and a half. She noted that Qatar is continuing its political and humanitarian efforts, in co-ordination with fraternal countries, to achieve a ceasefire and support

the steadfastness of Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank by delivering humanitarian aid and demanding the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. She commended the decision of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, during its recent meetings in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, calling for a two-state solution.

Shura Council partakes in Arab Parliament session in Baghdad

The Shura Council participated in the fourth session of the first regular session of the third legislative term of the Arab Parliament, held at the Iraqi Council of Representatives in Baghdad. Members of the Shura Council and the Arab Parliament Shaikha bint Yousuf al-Jufairi, Essa bin Ahmad al-Nassr, Salem bin Rashid al-Muraikhi and Hamad bin Abdullah al-Mulla represented the Shura Council at the session. The session discussed a host of important Arab issues, including developments in the Palestinian cause and developments in several Arab countries. It also reviewed the reports of the four committees on political, legislative, social, and economic issues, and emphasised the importance of parliamentary diplomacy in supporting security and stability in the region.

Barzan Youth Center holds youth councils' forum

Barzan Youth Center, in collaboration with Nasser bin Abdullah Al Attiyah Secondary School for Boys, organised the second youth councils' forum entitled: Student Councils, Leadership, and Entrepreneurship.

Those in attendance were HE Undersecretary of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE), Dr Ibrahim Saleh al-Nuaimi, President of Barzan Youth Center, Sheikh Abdulaziz bin Abdulrahman al-Thani, alongside a host of officials from the Ministry

of Sports and Youth. Held as part of the ongoing efforts to empower young people and bolster their role in leading the future, the event is literally a role model for the constructive integration between MoEHE and the Ministry of Sports and Youth, as their bilateral collaboration represents an incredible step toward building an integrated youth system that combines pedagogical values, leadership skills, and interactive activities.

Overall, the collaboration underscores the national vision that

intends to prepare a leading and powerful generation that merges science and action and is well-armed with identity, as well as societal values and responsibility.

The forum featured a workshop for participating students from 24 secondary schools, with the objective of advancing their capabilities in thinking, creating initiatives, and collective work, with awards accorded to the winning schools participating in the forum themed: Paths of Knowledge, under the centre's

Official

Amir sends condolences to Kevin Farrell on death of Pope Francis

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani and HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani sent yesterday cables of condolences to His Eminence Cardinal Kevin Joseph Farrell, Camerlengo of the Holy Roman Catholic Church, on the death of His Holiness Pope Francis of the Vatican. **(QNA)**

Qatar, Saudi in virtual meeting on Abu Samra, Salwa passport control borders

As part of efforts to enhance security co-operation between Qatar and Saudi Arabia, a co-ordination meeting was held via video conference under the framework of the project to streamline passenger procedures and exchange data between the Abu Samra Border Passport Control (Qatar) and the Salwa Border Passport Control (Saudi Arabia). Director of the Border Passports Department Colonel Faleh Fahad al-Nuaimi headed the Qatari side at the meeting, while the Saudi side was headed by Director of the Border Passports Department Colonel Abdullah al-Qahtani. The meeting discussed mechanisms to facilitate travel procedures and improve the efficiency of border crossing between the two sides. **(QNA)**



HMC's Mental Health Helpline gets over 2,000 calls per month

QNA

Doha

Hamad Medical Corp (HMC) revealed that its National Mental Health Helpline has been receiving over 2,000 calls per month since its launch in April 2020. The helpline service that has been highly rated by users is the primary access point for mental health services for callers seeking supportive and confidential mental healthcare, and the service has been highly rated by users.

The National Mental Health Helpline, provided by HMC's Mental Health Services Department, is staffed by a highly qualified and experienced team of professionals, including nurses, psychiatrists, psychologists, along with allied health profes-

sionals. The helpline is accessible to all individuals, providing rapid access to necessary support, especially during difficult mental health crises.

Its role is not limited to providing support during crises, but also includes guidance and advice on mental health services available to individuals and their families. It also serves as a key access point for services like specialised support in the field of women's mental health and addiction support, making it a comprehensive reference for anyone facing mental health challenges.

Chairman of the Department of Psychiatry at HMC, Dr Majid al-Abdulla said in press statement that the National Mental Health Helpline serves as a vital lifeline for individuals across Qatar, providing immediate access to the necessary care when need-

ed. He added that timely support through this helpline helps individuals address their mental health problems at an early stage, thus preventing conditions from becoming more complex.

Assistant Executive Director of Clinical Service Development at the Mental Health Services Department, Katja Warwick-Smith said that the helpline services consistently achieve high satisfaction rates of up to 90%, according to callers who have given positive feedback about the service, which is available in Arabic, English, Tagalog, Hindi, Urdu, and Malayalam.

The National Mental Health Helpline, available at 16000, provides confidential, free, and highly efficient support to all residents of Qatar, contributing to ensuring a mentally healthy and well-supported society.

Ministry, Vodafone join hands to conduct work safety seminar

QNA

Doha

The Ministry of Labour's Occupational Safety and Health Department and Vodafone Qatar jointly organised an awareness seminar yesterday for employees and contractor workers in the telecommunications sector. The event was held in co-operation with the Health Promotion Department at the Ministry of Public Health and the Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS), with participation from representatives of the Workers' Support and Insurance Fund.

This seminar is part of the ongoing joint efforts to protect the workforce and educate them on proper practices and preventive measures to be followed while carrying out their duties – contributing to the creation of a safe, healthy, and sustainable work environment in line with national laws and international standards.

Officials from the Occupational Safety and Health departments of both organising parties delivered a detailed presentation on risk control strategies, which included removing hazards from the work environment, replacing risk sources with safer alternatives, isolating workers from sources of danger, improving work methods, and using appropriate personal protective equipment during working hours.

The seminar also highlighted the role of the participating enti-



ties in protecting workers, ensuring their rights, and providing a safe work environment. Inspection teams from the Ministry of Labour and Vodafone Qatar conduct regular and unannounced field visits to work sites to ensure compliance with occupational safety and health procedures and organise ongoing awareness campaigns on how to avoid workplace hazards, especially those associated with working at heights.

The Health Promotion Department at the Ministry of Public Health delivered two awareness presentations. The first focused on the importance of mental health in the workplace, highlighting its impact on productivity and employee safety, and emphasising the need for a mentally supportive work environment. The second addressed personal hygiene practices and their role in disease prevention and in promoting the overall health of workers.

The QRCS also delivered an awareness presentation on occupational safety and health procedures, which included a practical demonstration of best practices for minimising workplace hazards and properly handling injuries and incidents. This reflects the collaborative role of all concerned entities in spreading a culture of occupational safety and enhancing health awareness in the work environment.

Through its series of seminars and workshops held regularly throughout the year, the Ministry of Labour aims to raise awareness among employers and workers across all sectors, foster a culture of accident and injury prevention, and encourage employers to provide safe working environments that align with the best local and international practices and standards. This effort reflects the ongoing collaboration between the public and private sectors in Qatar.





LuLu donates QR150,000 to Qatar Charity

LuLu Hypermarket Qatar donated QR150,000 to Qatar Charity (QC) as part of its ongoing commitment to humanitarian causes, community support and corporate social responsibility. The contribution was made under LuLu's annual 'Shop & Donate' initiative, specially launched during the holy month of Ramadan, in alignment with QC's 'Charity Partner' (CP) Programme, a statement said. The donation cheque was handed over by Shaijan M O, regional director of LuLu Hypermarket Qatar, to Ahmad Yousef Fakhroo, chief communication officer, at QC. The handover ceremony took place at the LuLu Regional

Office in Doha, in the presence of Shanavas P M, regional manager of LuLu Hypermarket Qatar, along with other officials from both organisations. Expressing his gratitude, Fakhroo thanked LuLu Hypermarket for its unwavering commitment to community welfare and social responsibility. He highlighted that the CP Programme is one of QC's largest initiatives dedicated to promoting corporate social responsibility, offering private sector organisations strategic partnership opportunities to support global humanitarian projects. Fakhroo lauded LuLu Hypermarket's consistent

support for QC's projects and campaigns, noting that their efforts contribute significantly to advancing community service and humanitarian activities both locally and internationally. In his remarks, Shaijan expressed his pride in partnering with QC, emphasising that initiatives like 'Shop & Donate' empower LuLu customers to actively contribute to meaningful humanitarian efforts. He further commended QC for its unwavering dedication to humanitarian and development work, describing QC as one of LuLu's foremost partners in charitable initiatives. He reaffirmed LuLu's continued

commitment to supporting QC's various programmes in the future. Over the past five years, LuLu Hypermarket Qatar and QC have built a strong collaboration through multiple co-operation agreements. These include enabling customers to contribute to charitable projects by donating at checkout counters across LuLu stores, promoting QC's Khair Cards to encourage a culture of giving among shoppers, partnering under LuLu's 'Shop & Donate' campaign to raise funds for humanitarian causes, and formalising a strategic partnership under the CP Programme.



Al Jazeera English wins awards

Two documentaries from Al Jazeera English's Fault Lines team have been named winners of the 86th Annual Overseas Press Club of America Awards. *The Night Won't End*, which tracks the fight for survival of three families in Gaza, won the award for the best TV, video or documentary prize about international affairs, while *Children of the Darien Gap* about a family fleeing corruption and gang violence in Ecuador, won the best international TV, video, radio, audio or podcast reporting showing a concern for the human condition. The awards were presented at the annual OPC awards dinner in New York on April 17, a statement said.

Fault Lines' executive producer Laila al-Arian praised both teams, recognising *The Night Won't End* director Kavitha Chekuru, correspondent Sharif Abdel Kouddous and the entire team, along with those who worked on *Children of the Darien Gap*, inclusive of producer Mark Scialla, correspondent John Holman and editor Adrienne Haspel. Al Jazeera English's manager of investigative programmes, Rafi Mustafa, stated that these awards are "a testament to the hard work done by the Fault Lines team in telling these critically important stories and providing our viewers with an unvarnished look at the realities faced by people in Gaza and those on the perilous journey through the Darien Gap."

Qatar Charity unveils smart donating solutions

As the world observed World Creativity and Innovation Day on April 21, Qatar Charity (QC) reaffirmed its commitment to harnessing technology to support humanitarian causes. Through the launch of innovative digital initiatives, QC seeks to make donating easier and more accessible, while fostering a culture of generosity within the community, a statement said. QC's 'Tap to Donate' is a pioneering fundraising technology and a first in Qatar. The solution enables individuals to support humanitarian work through a simple tap of their bank cards, ensuring a seamless and efficient donation process. With a practical design and an easy-to-use screen, the 'Tap to Donate' device is placed in key locations such as shopping malls, hospitals, pharmacies, cafés, fuel stations, and sports clubs. QC's suite of innovative solutions also includes Near Field Communication (NFC) technology. Smart



tags embedded with NFC chips are installed on devices placed in restaurants, cafés, health centres, and mosques, allowing users to easily access a direct link to the donation page when their phone is brought near the tag. QC's updated mobile app sim-

plifies the donation process – enabling users to browse charitable projects, choose their preferred payment method, and contribute to humanitarian causes with ease. The app also enables year-long instalment donations, the statement added.



Douglas Syakalima officially unveiling Malabar Group's 'Hunger Free World' initiative in the presence of Abdul Salam K P, Gerry Muuka, Duncan Mulima, Arif Saeed, and other officials.

Malabar Group launches charity initiative in Zambia

Malabar Group has officially launched its "Hunger-Free World" initiative in Zambia to provide 10,000 meals daily to students, a statement issued in Doha said yesterday. The initiative was unveiled by Zambia's Minister of Education Douglas Syakalima at an event at John Laing Primary School in Lusaka in the presence of Malabar Group vice-chairman Abdul Salam K P, Zambia's consul general in Dubai Gerry Muuka, Zambia's ambassador to Saudi Arabia Duncan Mulima, India's deputy high commissioner in Zambia Arif Saeed, and other officials. The initiative is part of Malabar Group's commitment announced last year to contribute \$1mn in the next three years towards providing nutritious mid-day meals to school students in Zambia. With the launch of the programme, Malabar Group will now provide 10,000 meals

daily across John Laing Primary School, Chingwele Primary School, and Mambilima Primary School in Zambia. "Malabar Group has always been at the forefront of social welfare initiatives aimed at uplifting society," stated chairman M P Ahammed while thanking Zambia's President Hakainde Hichilema, Vice-President Mutale Nalumango and the Zambian government for their support for the initiative. "On behalf of Zambia, I extend heartfelt gratitude to Malabar Group for their generosity and commitment to our children's future," Syakalima said. The "Hunger Free World" initiative, launched by the Malabar Group in 2022, has been operating numerous kitchens across India, providing around 55,000 nutritious meals daily across 81 locations in the country. "The expansion of the 'Hunger-

Free World' initiative to Zambia is driven by our steadfast belief that access to nutritious meals and quality education forms the foundation of a brighter future for all children, regardless of their socio-economic background," said Malabar Group vice-chairman Abdul Salam. Malabar Group has announced that it will invest over \$400,000 this financial year to construct kitchens, enabling the programme to reach more schools across Zambia. "Through the ESG (environmental, social and governance) initiatives that Malabar Gold & Diamonds undertake globally, we have managed to establish ourselves as a key stakeholder in society and have consistently invested in its overall betterment," said managing director (international operations) Shamla Ahamed.



MoEHE hosts Arabic language forum for outstanding educational practices

QNA
Doha

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) organised the second edition of the Arabic Language Forum for Outstanding Educational Practices, bringing together a wide range of Arabic language teachers, co-ordinators, and specialists from various educational institutions across the country. The forum aims to highlight ef-

fective teaching strategies, foster the exchange of field experiences, and explore practical solutions to educational challenges. The event featured eight distinguished educational practices and four visual presentations covering diverse topics, including simplifying grammar rules, enhancing writing and reading skills, integrating digital technologies, and strengthening language proficiency through audio production. Participants also discussed the challenges facing Arabic language

education amid digital transformation and evolving learning patterns, emphasising the importance of turning these challenges into opportunities that reinforce the language's status and national identity. The forum concluded with a panel discussion on ways to support educators in the field, as part of the ministry's broader efforts to improve educational quality and safeguard the Arabic language, in line with its vision of providing high-quality learning opportunities for all members of society.

'Watheq' launched for food inspection redressals

The Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) announced the launch of a new e-service via the "Watheq" electronic food safety system, which allows food establishments to file objections to local inspection results, enforcement decisions resulting from inspections, or laboratory findings, bringing the total number of services provided by the system to 20. This service aims to enhance transparency and strengthen co-operation between regulatory authorities (MoPH's Food Safety Department) and relevant food establishments such as ware-

houses, restaurants, factories, etc. Through this new service, food establishments can submit objections to local inspection results or enforcement decisions based on clear justifications and scientific grounds. They can attach supporting evidence or documents such as images or PDF files. The MoPH clarified that food establishments can submit objections within 15 working days of being notified of the inspection result or enforcement decision. Objection requests should be processed through the "Watheq" system, which allows establish-

ments to track the status of their objection requests using a unique reference number. The objection request will then be reviewed by specialised teams from the Food Safety Department, the establishment will receive feedback, and the decision will be made via e-mail. Based on the case, the team will approve or reject the objection. In case of rejection, the reasons will be clarified, and the applicant may resubmit the request for further review. The establishment will also be notified via SMS to check the inbox for updates. (QNA)

DFI Cinema's free screenings at MIA

By Joey Aguilar
Staff Reporter

DFI Cinema is set to hold free screenings at the Museum of Islamic Art (MIA) from today (April 22), giving viewers the opportunity to experience a unique cinematic journey through the Middle East, Africa, and Southeast Asia. Presented in partnership with organisations including Katara, MIA, Qatar Museums, and Aspire Park, the programme features a curated selection of works from the acclaimed exhibition 'Your Ghosts Are Mine: Expanded Cinemas, Amplified Voices,' which debuted at the Venice Biennale in 2024. The screenings, showcasing filmmakers and artists from the original lineup of more than 40, highlight contemporary independent cinema that explores transnational experiences. Entrance is free and available on a first-come, first-served basis, taking place at 7pm each evening at the MIA Auditorium. The film series will begin today with a screening of *Nezouh*, directed by Soudade Kaadan. The film tells the story of 14-year-old Zeina and her family in besieged Damascus, Syria. The 90-minute film, a co-production of Syria, Lebanon, and Qatar, is in Arabic with English subtitles and rated 15+. The programme continues tomorrow with *House in the Fields* (Tigmi Nigren), directed by Tala Hadid, and a co-production of Morocco and Qatar. The 85-minute documentary presents life in an isolated Amazigh village in Morocco's High Atlas Mountains. According to



Nezouh



Little Palestine: Diary of a Siege

DFI, the series concludes on April 24 with *Little Palestine: Diary of a Siege*, directed by Abdallah al-Khatib (Lebanon, France, and Qatar). This film documents the lives of inhabitants in the Yarmouk district of Damascus, Syria, the largest Palestinian refugee camp in the world, which was besieged by the Syrian regime.

The Pearl Island launches women’s padel tournament

After the success of the second edition of the Men's Padel Tournament during Ramadan, The Pearl Island has launched the first edition of the Women's Padel Tournament.

Eight teams are competing in the five-day event, which concludes on Thursday, a statement said yesterday. The tournament is being held at the state-of-the-art Padel Court in the Fanar area, Fayrouz Zone, on The Pearl Island.

As the first-ever women's tournament of its kind on The Pearl Island, this event represents a significant milestone in empowering women in sports and enhancing the island's diverse and active community, it was explained.

This tournament is part of The Pearl Island's growing calendar of community sports events and described as 'a celebration of unity, health, and community engagement.'



“We are excited to host the first Women’s Padel Tournament here on The Pearl Island,” said United Development Company.

GU-Q student promotes cultural diplomacy on global stage

A student from Georgetown University in Qatar (GU-Q) has presented a paper at the 'International Seminar on Cultural Diplomacy,' in Havana, Cuba, the institution announced yesterday.

Wilbert Fils Pierre-Louis, a third-year student of International Affairs, was carrying Haiti's legacy and GU-Q's commitment to global citizenship, a statement said.

The seminar was hosted by the Instituto Superior de Relaciones Internacionales (ISRI), Cuba's premier diplomatic academy. The GU-Q student's paper, 'Beyond Borders: Haiti's Cultural Diplomacy and Its Global Impact,' was among a select few accepted for presentation.

"I felt like I was representing more than myself," Wilbert said. "I was speaking on behalf of a country often misrepresented, and a university that pushes



GU-Q student at the Cuba seminar.

students to think beyond boundaries." In his presentation, Wilbert argued that Haiti's revolutionary history, rich artistic heritage, and vibrant diaspora are untapped resources in reshaping the country's global image, proposing a model for Haiti to leverage cultural assets as a tool for strategic diplomacy.

During the seminar, he was interviewed by Cubavision Internacional, one of Cuba's leading international television channels. His comments, broadcast across the region, touched on the growing role of emerging technologies like

AI in shaping global narratives and strengthening soft power.

Wilbert's insight into Haiti's cultural diplomacy emerged from research for his Culture and Politics major and his hands-on experience as an intern at the embassy of Haiti in Qatar. He credits the course Cultural Diplomacy: Policy and Practice as foundational to his thinking.

"Dr Nadine Ghamloush, professor of Diplomacy and the Art of Negotiation, always emphasised connecting the classroom to the real world," he said. "That mindset shaped this

research." Wilbert's academic focus blends international relations, history, and cultural analysis, a combination he says prepared him to write and defend the ideas in his paper.

"I want my work to connect lived experience with academic inquiry," Wilbert said. "Diplomacy isn't just what happens between governments, it's also what happens between people."

While in Cuba, Wilbert also had the opportunity to reconnect with his former mentor from the Embassy of Haiti in Qatar, Vichy De La Fayette Thibeaud, who now serves as interim charge d'affaires. During his internship in Qatar, Wilbert gained essential knowledge and insight for his research by shadowing Ambassador Thibeaud's work supporting Haitian expatriates and representing Haiti at cultural exhibitions.

Wilbert is now back in Doha, applying what he learned in Havana to ongoing research and continuing to explore diplomacy, cultural policy, and international co-operation.



Role of national panels for humanitarian law in Gulf in focus

The Gulf Seminar on the Role of National Committees for International Humanitarian Law kicked off in Doha yesterday.

Organised by the National Committee for International Humanitarian Law (NCIHL), the event intends to promote respect for and implementation of international humanitarian law, as well as to strengthen co-operation among national committees in the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) countries.

The seminar was attended by HE the Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs, Ibrahim bin Ali al-Mohannadi; the heads and representatives of the national committees for international humanitarian law in the GCC countries; Regional Legal Co-ordinator for the Middle East at the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Dr Omar Makki; Legal Adviser for the ICRC's mission in Kuwait, Dr Moaz al-Hadhli; alongside a number of invited guests and legal professionals from various government entities.

In his opening remarks, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Justice and Chairperson of NCIHL Saeed bin Abdullah al-Suwaidi affirmed that the seminar aims to enhance respect

for and to enforce international humanitarian law in the participating countries.

The humanitarian challenges in the world today impose heightened responsibilities for spreading awareness of international humanitarian law, deepening its sublime precepts, and seriously working on aligning national legislations with international obligations to ensure human life and dignity are protected in times of armed conflict and to bolster the rule of law, al-Suwaidi underlined.

He noted that the event is an opportunity to review successful activities and experiences to be further utilised and applied in the GCC countries, lauding the tangible efforts and effective initiatives the GCC countries have made in the area of enforcing international humanitarian law, whether at the level of legislation, training, or awareness promotion.

Sharing these successful experiences among the GCC countries stands as one of the principal pillars of strength in the functioning of the national committees for international humanitarian law (NCIHLs), thereby offering the opportunity to collaborate, build on accomplishments, and to avoid challenges others have already encountered,

he highlighted. Al-Suwaidi pointed out that the accumulated Gulf expertise is a source of inspiration and support to create the NCIHLs' work mechanisms in a way that fosters their regional and global effectiveness in this critical domain.

He asserted that NCIHL believes in collective work and effective co-ordination among the Gulf committees as a core pillar toward upgrading the implementation mechanisms at the national level, sharing expertise and experiences, in addition to unifying efforts in the areas of awareness, training, and rehabilitation in support of the role performed by international humanitarian law in the Gulf region.

Rapporteur of NCIHL in Qatar, Khaled Mohammed al-Khamees al-Obaidli, presented a working paper outlining the idea behind establishing the NCIHL, alongside its salient initiatives, with Dr al-Hadhli presenting a similar paper on the NCIHLs and ICRC in enforcing international humanitarian law.

In addition, Dr Makki reviewed the contemporary challenges facing international humanitarian law, along with the appropriate remediation mechanisms to mitigate the humanitarian impact of wars and crises on innocent victims. (QNA)

12 arrested for sending fraudulent links, SMS



The Economic and Cyber Crimes Combating department at the Ministry of Interior (MoI) has apprehended a criminal group of 12 individuals of Asian nationality.

They were charged with targeting the telecommunications towers at a number of areas around the country to send fraudulent messages containing fake links impersonating banks, government and official entities. Such links aimed

at stealing the personal and financial data of the citizens and expatriates in Qatar through using the links to obtain the credit card information and other sensitive information.

The MoI has urged the public to be cautious and avoid opening any dubious links that they receive through SMS or any communication app. The public should also not reveal any personal or financial data under any circumstances.

MoI further affirmed that it will continue its efforts to prosecute any person who attempts to undermine the security of personal data and information, and use all the necessary punitive procedures against any one proven to be implicated in such crimes.

Ministry recalls Jeep model

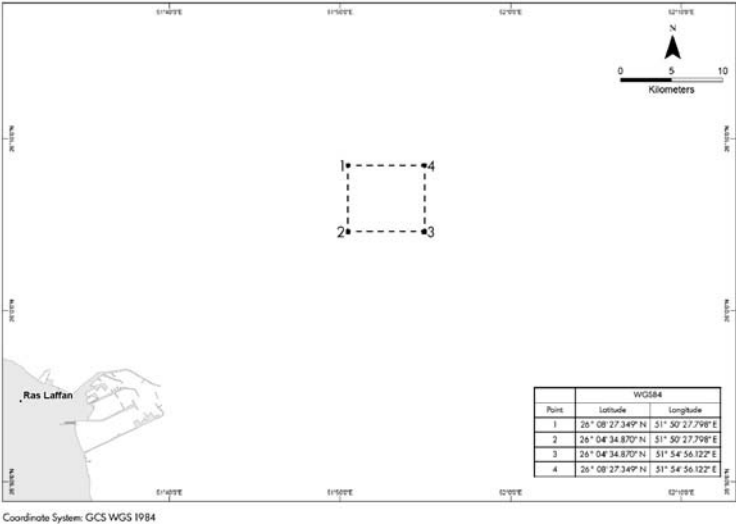
The Ministry of Commerce and Industry, in co-operation with United Cars Almana, has announced the recall of Jeep Wrangler, 2024 model, over a possible fault in the rear fog light wiring, which may reduce the vehicle's visibility to other vehicles.

The ministry urges all consumers to report any violations or breaches by contacting the Consumer Protection and Combatting Commercial Fraud Department, which receives complaints through the following communication channels: Call Centre: 16001, e-mail: info@moci.gov.qa, ministry's accounts on social media: @mociqatar, ministry's Mobile App: MOCIQATAR

Qatar Shell Service Company W.L.L. Public Announcement to Fishermen and Mariners Marine Seismic Survey Offshore Qatar



In pursuant and under directives from the Ministry Of Transport, Seafarers and registration department, Doha, Qatar, this announcement is to inform that during period 17th April until 8th May, Qatar Shell Service Company W.L.L. will commence Marine Seismic Survey operations within the marked area:



Qatar Shell Service Company W.L.L. requests that all vessels keep well clear of the site. Fishermen are requested to remove their equipment and keep away from the area.

Vessels ignoring this announcement will be responsible for all liabilities arising out of their actions (including any damage to equipment and delay time).

Qatar Shell Service Company assumes no responsibility for damage or loss of equipment following this advertisement.

For more details contact
Tel: 44957777, Fax: 44957778

Lyrid meteor shower to light up Qatar’s skies today

Habitants of the Northern Hemisphere, including Qatar, will be able to observe the Lyrid meteor shower this year, which is expected to reach its peak activity this evening and continue through the early hours of Wednesday, the Qatar Calendar House (QCH) reported. Dr Bashir Marzouq, astronomy expert at the QCH, said that the Lyrid meteor shower, which recurs annually during the observational window extending from mid-April through April 25, is forecast to reach its peak intensity on April 22, a date that consistently marks the apex of its celestial activity each year.

The shower, known for its bright meteors, is expected to peak at a rate of 20 meteors per hour. Experts confirm it will be visible to the naked eye across Qatar and the Arab region starting from midnight until dawn on Wednesday, with gaze towards the northeastern horizon of each country's nocturnal sky, Dr Marzouq highlighted. (QNA)



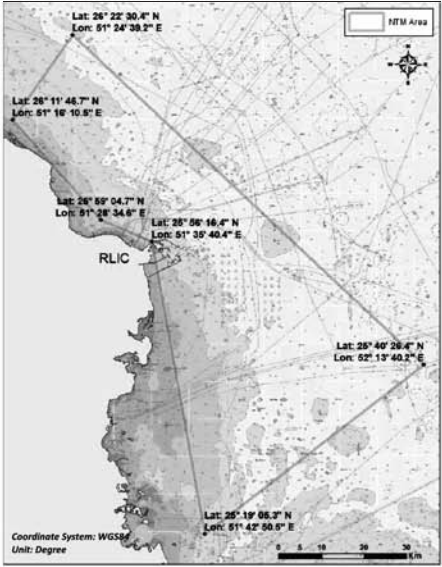
Public Announcement
To all Ships, Fishermen and Mariners
Seismic Survey Acquisition by Vessels AOS Glory, Stanford Hawk, GMS Apollo, Voyager Explorer, BGP Innovator and Safa Searcher
Seismic Survey Works Offshore Qatar from 27th November 2024 – 27th November 2025

Pursuant to and under directives from the Department of Seafarers Affairs & Registration, Ministry of Transport, State of Qatar, this announcement is to inform all Vessels, Mariners and Fishermen that QatarEnergy LNG intends to perform Ocean Bottom Node Seismic Survey Works with Vessels AOS Glory, Stanford Hawk, GMS Apollo, Voyager Explorer, BGP Innovator and Safa Searcher in the locations bound by the coordinates shown in the diagram below.

All Vessels, Mariners and Fishermen are expected to keep clear of the survey locations during the operations.

QatarEnergy LNG takes no responsibility for any loss or damage caused to outside parties in association with this operation, following publication of this notice.

Point	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE
1	26° 22' 30.4"N	51° 24' 39.2"E
2	25° 40' 26.4"N	52° 13' 40.2"E
3	25° 19' 05.3"N	51° 42' 50.5"E
4	25° 56' 16.4"N	51° 35' 40.4"E
5	25° 59' 04.7"N	51° 28' 34.6"E
6	26° 11' 46.7"N	51° 16' 10.5"E



Any further inquiries should be addressed to: Tel. +974 44531797



Snapshots from the seminar organised by the Sudanese University Professors Association of Qatar and the DI.



DI organises seminar on Sudan's antiquities, documentary heritage

The Sudanese University Professors Association in Qatar, in collaboration with the History Programme at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies (DI), organised a seminar on *Sudan's Antiquities and Documentary Heritage: Current Challenges and Possible Solutions*.

The event was attended by HE the Minister of Education and Higher Education Lolwah bint Rashid AlKhater, Sudanese ambassador Ahmed Abdelrahman Siwar al-Dahab, and DI president Dr Abdelwahab ElAffendi, with researchers and individuals interested in Sudanese antiquities and documentary heritage.

In her remarks, HE AlKhater emphasised the importance of regional and international solidarity in supporting Sudan amid its current crisis.

She highlighted the need to protect the country's people, land, antiquities, and documentary heritage, stressing that this responsibility should not rest solely on the Sudanese people and government.

Instead, HE AlKhater said, it requires a collective global effort, especially given that Sudan's antiquities and documentary heritage represent a vital part of the world's cultural memory, as acknowledged by Unesco.

This includes recovering stolen museum artefacts, reclaiming its compromised historical record, and safeguarding its cultural legacy for future generations.

Qatar, HE AlKhater noted, is committed to working with dedicated partners to develop practical solutions that address the threats facing Sudan's cultural and historical assets.

Dr ElAffendi delivered the opening speech, in which he thanked the Sudanese University Professors Association in Qatar for their collaboration in organising the event.

He emphasised that Sudan's cultural heritage has come under attack and stressed the necessity of preserving heritage and safeguarding documentation.

Qatar University (QU) professor of Modern and Contemporary History Dr Ahmed Ibrahim Abu Shouk, who is also the president of the Sudanese University

Professors Association in Qatar, gave a presentation on *Documentary Heritage in Sudan: Risks and Opportunities*, where he explored Sudanese heritage centres both inside and outside the country, with a particular focus on the National Records Office.

Dr Shouk discussed the chronological and thematic classification of its materials and proposed several solutions for preservation, including digitising collections, appointing qualified personnel, and building strategic partnerships with archives around the world.

Salah Mohamed Ahmed, former co-ordinator of the Qatar-Sudan Archaeological Project, spoke on *The Qatar-Sudan Archaeological Project: Achievements Before the War, Current Status, and Prospects for Co-operation*.

He gave an overview of the project, its coverage of various historical periods, and the new sites explored in northern Sudan and the Bayouda Desert.

Ikhlas Elias of Sudan's National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums, addressed the topic *Sudan's Museums: Impact of War and Future Outlook*, where she showcased examples of Sudanese museum artefacts, noting their diversity, historical depth, and educational, scientific, and cultural significance.

Elias pointed out the short- and long-term challenges faced by Sudanese museums, especially restricted access to sites due to military activity.

The seminar concluded with several key recommendations, most notably forming specialised committees in co-ordination with Unesco to assess the extent of looted museum collections and damaged archaeological sites; supporting the "Memory of Sudan" project in partnership with the Qatar National Library (QNL) and the Qatar National Archives to collect and digitise Sudanese documentary heritage and train professional cadres; collaborating with international, regional, and local organisations to repair damaged museum infrastructure; and taking legal measures to recover looted antiquities, in accordance with the 1970 Unesco Convention. - **QNA**

Hawkama International, CEO Women Business Club Partnership Opens new horizons for Qatari and Arab women



Empowering women to reach leadership positions in companies and public and private institutions has become one of the most prominent challenges faced by female leaders in the Arab world.

In this context, Dr. Buthaina Hassan Al Ansari, Chairperson of the Board of Directors of Hawkamah International Management Consulting, announced the signing of a strategic agreement with the Cairo-based CEO Women Club, a qualitative step aimed at expanding women's influence in decision-making positions.

During the signing ceremony, Dr. Al Ansari emphasized that: "Empowering women and instilling confidence in their abilities to advance economically and professionally is no longer a luxury, but rather a strategic necessity addressed by influential organizations such as the CEO Women Club. This agreement is not the end of the road, but rather the beginning of a real launch for a leadership platform that enhances the presence of Qatari and Arab women in decision-making positions."

For her part, Dr. Mona Murad, President of the CEO Women Club, said the club serves as an exclusive global community connecting women leaders across various sectors, empowering them for professional and personal growth. She added, "The issues of empowering women to lead companies are similar across the world, and the goal is one: building a more inclusive and prosperous future for businesswomen." She noted that the club has expanded through strategic partnerships with the Four Seasons Group to include pivotal global cities such as Cairo, Dubai, Riyadh, Casablanca, Doha, London, Singapore, Athens, Switzerland, and Canada. She explained that this network facilitates cross-sector partnerships and fosters leadership collaboration among influential women.

Murad also announced that the club holds an annual conference under the patronage of His Excellency the Egyptian Prime Minister every October to discuss national and Arab trends and policies related to women's leadership empowerment.

Dr. Buthaina Al Ansari praised the development of Qatari women since the beginning of the century, saying, "Women in Qatar today constitute more than 62% of university graduates, with an increasing percentage in STEM disciplines. This progress did not come out of nowhere; rather, it is the result of national policies, leadership will, and systematic empowerment through scholarship and leadership training programs, as well as economic empowerment awards."



Figures and facts that support the empowerment journey
Dr. Al-Ansari said: Women represent 58.3% of the Qatari workforce.

30% of decision-making positions are held by women in fields such as education, health, energy, and technology.

20% of commercial registrations are in the name of Qatari businesswomen.

Women represent 15% of private entrepreneurship in Qatar, with total investments exceeding \$25 billion.

70% of graduates in scientific and technical disciplines in the country are women.

The percentage of women in specialized jobs exceeds 52%, reflecting a concentration in strategic sectors.

This collaboration between "Hawkamah" and the "CEO Women Club" is not only a platform to support women, but also an investment in sustainable national development. Societies that promote women advance all their economic and social components.

Empowering Qatari and Arab women is not a future option, but rather a condition for achieving the desired economic transformation. Decision-makers must realize that every leadership position the state grants to a qualified woman is an additional step toward a more innovative, balanced, and sustainable economy. Women's leadership is not a matter of representation, but a national priority.



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Qalam: Great Writers in Conversation with Kamila Shamsie Sonali Deraniyagala, Winner of the PEN Ackerley Award



Sonali Deraniyagala is the author of *Wave*, one of the 21st century's most acclaimed and beloved memoirs. Winner of the PEN Ackerley Prize and shortlisted for the National Book Critics Circle Award, *Wave* starts with the 2004 Boxing Day Tsunami in which Deraniyagala lost her closest family members and develops into a profound and beautiful account of grief, love, and memory.

Born and raised in Sri Lanka, she is an economist by training and on the faculty of both SOAS in London and Columbia University in New York.



Kamila Shamsie has authored eight critically acclaimed novels, including *Burnt Shadows*, *A God in Every Stone*, and *Home Fire*, which won the Women's Prize for Fiction, was longlisted for the Man Booker Prize, and shortlisted for the Costa Prize. Her most recent work, *Best of Friends*, has received significant recognition, including the Karachi Literature Festival/Getz Fiction Award and a shortlist spot for the Indie Book Awards.

Photo Credit:
Alex von Tunzelmann



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Sonic Jeel announces the launch of two new albums: 50/50 and Supersonic

At a special Live Event this coming Friday, April 25, Liwan Design Studios and Labs, Doha, and Doha-based electronic duo and record label Sonic Jeel will launch two new vinyl albums—50/50 and Supersonic—with a special evening of live performances, spoken word, and DJ sets.

The event will celebrate the culmination of two distinct sonic journeys and highlight the duo's ongoing collaborations with local and international artists.

The evening will open with a spatial ambient sonorization, followed by a live set by Shawky, a musician and artist performing experimental vocals, then move into performances of both albums: Supersonic, by VCUarts Qatar faculty members Michael Hersrud and Simone Muscolino, and 50/50 by Silai Estatira and Dr. G.

Cheb Moha, photographer, poet, and fashion designer, will close the evening with a DJ set, presented in collaboration with the ongoing Sonic Jeel Vinyl Archive Project.

At the event, Sonic Jeel is excited to team up with new media artist Hadeer Omar to curate live projections and with experimental publisher Water with Water to design custom merch for the event.

This event is made possible through the generous support of the VCUarts Qatar Institute for Creative Research and Qatar Foundation.

About the Albums:

Supersonic

A follow-up to Sonic Jeel's 2021 release Zekreet, Supersonic is a limited-edition vinyl album composed of layered sound experiments, modular synth recordings, and live sessions collected over the past two years. Side A and Side B unfold as immersive, ambient, and rhythmic journeys. The 12" neon blue vinyl comes housed in a custom sleeve featuring holographic foil and metallic ink, printed and pressed in the UK. Produced by Michael Hersrud and Simone Muscolino, and published by Sonic Jeel.

50/50

50/50 is a limited-edition double 7" album on custom-colored vinyl, featuring four original tracks—two by Silai Estatira, an anti-disciplinary artist, rapper, musician, writer, and activist; and two by Giovanni Innellai (Dr. G), an author,

researcher, and educator whose work explores politics, economics, and culture through exhibitions, publications, and rap. Produced by Michael Hersrud, Simone Muscolino, and Samip Khulal, the project blends diverse voices and global narratives.

Both albums (50/50 and Supersonic) are hand-pressed and printed, and will be available at the event. Album artwork by Michael Hersrud.

For more information, please contact Kathryn London-Penny, Director of Communications at VCUarts Qatar: londonpeks@vcu.edu.





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A man and woman sit by the rubble of a destroyed building in Gaza City, yesterday.

Palestinian Red Crescent criticises Israeli probe into Gaza aid workers’ killings

Reuters
Ramallah

The Palestinian Red Crescent called yesterday for a “serious investigation” into the killing of 15 aid workers in Gaza last month, a day after the Israeli military admitted “professional failures” and disciplined two officers over the incident.

Younish al-Khatib, chairman of the Palestinian Red Crescent, said he did not consider the measures taken by the Israeli military, which reprimanded one officer and dismissed another from his position, as sufficient. “This looks like the management of a company taking administrative measures against its employees who made some kind of a mistake,” he told Reuters. “When you kill 15 medical staff and civil defence personnel, these can’t be called ‘measures.’”

“There has to be proper accountability and a stop to impunity that Israel has taken for granted

for so many years,” he added.

On Sunday, the Israeli military said members of a special forces unit in Gaza had made a number of errors in three separate incidents on March 23, during which they fired on ambulances, a fire truck and a UN vehicle.

It issued a formal reprimand to a brigade commander and said the deputy battalion commander who was on the ground when the incident occurred would be relieved of his post over the mix of professional failures and breaches of orders, as well as a failure to fully report the incident.

After initially saying the soldiers opened fire on a number of unmarked vehicles that approached their position, the military confirmed that they were clearly marked as emergency vehicles. The investigation found, however, that the soldiers had been unable to see clearly in the dark.

The military advocate general’s office may now take further

action, including possible criminal action against the soldiers, the military said. Killing of the aid workers drew condemnation worldwide, piling pressure on the military to clarify what had occurred and to hold those responsible to account.

Al-Khatib said the army’s investigation, headed by former Major General Yoav Har-Even did not match the seriousness of the incident, which added to a toll of more than 400 Palestinian emergency and health workers killed in the conflict, including 44 from the Red Crescent.

“We don’t look at it as a proper investigation,” al-Khatib said, urging an independent international investigation. He said the Red Crescent would continue to work in Gaza, the West Bank and Jerusalem. Separately, Hamas issued a statement saying the Israeli military investigation was “nothing but a blatant attempt to evade full responsibility for this heinous crime.”

Houthis say US strikes on Sanaa kill at least 12

AFP
Sanaa

Yemen’s Houthis said early yesterday that US air strikes on Sanaa killed at least 12 people and wounded 34, with a military spokesperson later claiming attacks on US aircraft carriers and Israel.

The Houthi-run Saba news agency cited the ministry as saying the dead and injured had come from overnight strikes “by the American enemy” on a market and a residential zone in Sanaa’s Farwa district.

The rebels’ health ministry reported 12 dead and 34 wounded “as a result of a raid by the US enemy” in Farwa.

Other raids were reported late Sunday in the central province of Marib, Hodeidah in the west and the Houthi bastion of Saada in the north, Saba said.

Houthi military spokes-

man Yahya Saree said the group launched attacks on two US aircraft carriers in response to the latest deadly American strikes.

The Houthis also targeted two Israeli locations with drones, he said.

The US military has been carrying out almost daily attacks for the past month, saying it was targeting the “Houthi fighters” to stop attacks on international shipping in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden.

One attack on Thursday on the Ras Issa oil port killed some 80 people and injured 150, according to the Houthis.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said Saturday that he was “gravely concerned” by the US strikes, and called on the Houthis to stop missile attacks on Israel and Red Sea shipping.

The Houthis said they started missile attacks in solidarity with Palestinian group Hamas as it fights Israeli forces in Gaza.

West Bank campus a dystopian shelter for Palestinians

AFP
Jenin

On deserted university grounds in the occupied West Bank, Palestinian children run outside nearly empty buildings, their playground after being driven from their homes by a major Israeli operation.

Between a stadium and flower fields where goats now graze, the children play to escape boredom. They have no school to go to since the Israeli military ordered residents to leave the Jenin refugee camp more than two months ago.

Mohammed Shalabi, a 53-year-old father who is among several hundred Palestinians sheltering at the university campus in Jenin city, recalled the day he heard that special Israeli forces were inside the camp.

“Everyone knows that when the army enters, it destroys the infrastructure, even the cars,” said the municipal worker.

Tens of thousands of Palestinians have been displaced from the northern West Bank since Israel launched the offensive dubbed “Iron Wall” on January 21 in the area.

Shalabi first left Jenin camp for nearby villages before authorities offered accommodation at the now vacant premises of the Arab American University, one of the leading institutions in the West Bank.

Shalabi said he has avoided “discussing all of this” with his 80-year-old father to protect his fragile health.

“But he understands, and sometimes he cries, because he lived through the Nakba, and now this...” said Shalabi, referring to the mass displacement of Palestinians in the war that accompanied Israel’s creation in 1948.

Now forced to leave their homes in the Jenin refugee camp, residents fear a repeat of the collective trauma they inherited.

The UN agency supporting Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, provides aid but recent Israeli legislation barring co-ordination with Israeli military authorities has complicated its work.

The cash-strapped Palestinian Authority, which has partial administrative control in the West Bank, lacks the funds to help.

Many international organisations are already focusing much of their efforts in the Gaza Strip, a separate Palestinian territory where the Israel-Hamas war since October 2023 has created a dire humanitarian crisis.

“No one is interested in what’s



Mohammed Shalabi, 53, who was displaced from Jenin Camp, poses for a portrait in an empty student residence used by displaced families as shelters at the Arab American University outside Jenin, in the occupied West Bank.



Children, displaced from Jenin Camp, run in-between empty student residences used by displaced families as shelters at the Arab American University outside Jenin, in the occupied West Bank.

happening here,” said a social worker who often visits the displacement shelter at the university to hand out blankets, food or grocery money.

Public services like rubbish collection are rare or virtually non-existent. Many displaced residents have asked for a temporary school to be set up for the children but to no avail.

Most shops are closed, and the nearest supermarket is a 20-minute walk away.

All the while, Israeli army bulldozers operate in the Jenin camp, leaving behind a trail of destruction. “They told us we no longer have a home, and that we won’t be returning to the camp,” said displaced resident Umm Majd. Some camp residents who attempted to go back say they were turned away.

In early March, an UNRWA official spoke of growing concerns that “the reality being created on the ground aligns with the vision of annexation of the West Bank.”

‘DAY BY DAY’

The new, makeshift camp has come into being on the university campus in what appears like a dystopian landscape.

The campus buildings carry names that give them an international and prestigious air, like Casa Bella, Concorde and Dubai.

But many of them, not long ago busy with students, are

abandoned. Others have become home to families of the displaced who now cram into tiny studio apartments that served as campus housing. The families cook on gas stoves and sleep on foam mattresses that have to be put away every morning to create space.

“We have 20% of the life we had in the camp,” said Umm Majd, sharing a two-person room with three others.

Farmers bring goats to graze in fields around the campus.

Many of the students that used to fill the university halls and dorms before the Gaza war were Palestinian citizens of Israel, who generally stopped crossing into the West Bank for their studies.

Eateries in the area are either closed down or being refurbished, the sign of economic hardships across the West Bank that have worsened throughout the Gaza war. “We live day by day. There’s no outlook because of the lack of work and resources,” said Ahmad Abu Jos, 30.

His baby boy Mustafa is learning to walk in the tiny apartment space, filled with the smell of detergents and cooking. The boy’s mother, Rama Abu Jos, said: “We left the camp, but not of our own free will. We hope to return home. No one likes life here.”

African leaders praise Pope Francis’ ‘legacy of compassion’

AFP
Nairobi

African leaders praised the “legacy of compassion” and “commitment to inclusivity” of Pope Francis as they joined global mourning over his death yesterday.

Francis, an energetic reformer who inspired widespread devotion from Catholics but riled traditionalists, died aged 88. The chairman of the African Union Commission, Mahmoud Ali Youssouf, praised “the Pope’s courageous engagement with the African continent, amplifying the voices of the voiceless, championing peace and reconciliation, and standing

in solidarity with those affected by conflict and poverty”.

Africa accounts for an estimated 20% of the world’s Catholics, according to the most recent Vatican statistics, most of them in Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, Uganda, Tanzania, and Kenya.

Nigeria’s President Bola Tinubu mourned the passing of a “tireless champion of the poor” and the world’s “most trenchant voice” against climate change.

Kenya’s President William Ruto said his death was “a big loss to the Catholic faithful and the Christian world”.

DR Congo President Felix Tshisekedi paid tribute to a “great servant of God, whose life was a vibrant testimony of faith, humility, and unwavering commitment to peace, justice, and human dignity”.

Pope Francis repeatedly appealed for an end to the long-running conflict in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo.

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa paid tribute to Francis’s “extraordinary life story” and “care for marginalised individuals and groups”.

Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed hoped “his legacy of compassion, humility, and service to humanity continue to inspire generations to come,” Abiy wrote on X.



A person stands in front of a wall of flat panel televisions where the news of Pope Francis passing away is screened, in Cape Town, South Africa, yesterday.

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China warns nations against striking trade deals with US at its expense

China yesterday accused Washington of abusing tariffs and warned countries against striking a broader economic deal with the US at its expense, ratcheting up its rhetoric in a spiralling trade war between the world's two biggest economies. Beijing will firmly oppose any party striking a deal at China's expense and "will take countermeasures in a resolute and reciprocal manner," its commerce ministry said. The ministry was responding to a Bloomberg report, citing sources familiar with the matter, that the Trump administration is preparing to pressure nations seeking tariff reductions or exemptions from the US to curb trade with China,

including imposing monetary sanctions. President Donald Trump paused the sweeping tariffs he announced on dozens of countries on April 2 except those on China, singling out the world's second largest economy for the biggest levies. "The US has abused tariffs on all trading partners under the banner of so-called 'equivalence', while also forcing all parties to start so-called 'reciprocal tariffs' negotiations with them," the ministry spokesperson said. China is determined and capable of safeguarding its own rights and interests, and is willing to strengthen solidarity with all parties, the ministry said.

India govt imposes temporary tariff on some steel to stem cheap China imports

Reuters
New Delhi

India, the world's second-biggest producer of crude steel, yesterday imposed a 12% temporary tariff on some steel imports, locally known as a safeguard duty, to curb a surge in cheap shipments primarily from China.

A flood of Chinese steel in recent years has pushed some Indian mills to scale down operations and mull job cuts, and India is one of a number of countries to have contemplated action to stem imports to protect local industry.

The ministry of finance said in an official order that the duty would be effective for 200 days from yesterday, "unless revoked, superseded or amended earlier".

The move is New Delhi's first big trade policy shift since US President Donald Trump imposed a wide range of tariffs on countries in April, kicking off a bitter trade war with China.

Tensions over cheap steel imports into India predate that, with the investigation behind the latest move beginning in December.

India's Steel Minister H D Kumaraswamy said in a statement the measure is aimed at protecting domestic steel manufacturers

from the adverse impact of a surge in imports, and will ensure fair competition in the market.

"This move will provide critical relief to domestic producers, especially small and medium-scale enterprises, who have faced immense pressure from rising imports," Kumaraswamy said.

New Delhi's tariffs are primarily aimed at China, which was the second-biggest exporter of steel to India behind South Korea in 2024-25.

"The decision is along expected lines and we will now wait and see how this measure supports (the) industry and margins and restricts cheap imports into the country," said a senior executive at a leading Indian steel mill.

"The world is impacted by Chinese imports whether directly or indirectly," said the executive.

India was a net importer of finished steel for a second straight year in 2024-25, with shipments reaching a nine-year high of 9.5mn metric tonnes, according to provisional government data.

New Delhi's leading steelmakers' body - which counts JSW Steel and Tata Steel among members, alongside the Steel Authority of India and ArcelorMittal Nippon Steel India - has raised concerns over imports and called for curbs.



India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi meets US Vice-President JD Vance, second lady Usha Vance and their children at his residence in New Delhi, India, yesterday.

Vance, Modi welcome 'significant progress' on India-US trade deal

● Efforts towards enhancing co-operation in energy, defence, strategic technologies highlighted

Reuters
New Delhi

US Vice-President JD Vance and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi welcomed significant progress in talks for an early trade deal between the two countries, Modi's office said yesterday, as New Delhi rushes to avoid US tariffs and boost ties with Trump's administration.

Vance arrived in India earlier yesterday for a largely personal four-day visit to the country with his family, which includes visiting the Taj Mahal and making a speech in the city of Jaipur, US officials said.

The two leaders also noted continued efforts towards enhancing co-operation in energy, defence and strategic technologies, among others, a statement from Modi's office said after talks between them.

They discussed "regional and global issues" and called for dialogue and diplomacy as the way forward, it said, reiterating a standard Indian line about global conflicts without naming any.

New Delhi has in the past used this formulation for the war in Ukraine.

"(The) prime minister conveyed his warm greetings to President Trump and said that he looked forward to his visit to India later this year," it added.

There was no immediate readout of the talks from the US side. Vance's wife, Usha, is the daughter of Indian immigrants.

Vance landed in New Delhi following a visit to Rome, where he held a private meeting with Pope Francis on Easter Sunday.

"(The) prime minister conveyed his warm greetings to President Trump and said that he looked forward to his visit to India later this year"

Modi and Vance reviewed and positively assessed the progress in various areas of bilateral co-operation outlined in February when the Indian leader met President Donald Trump in Washington. It includes "fairness" in their two-way trade and growing their defence partnership.

The Indian prime minister was one of the first world leaders to meet Trump after he took office, and Reuters has reported that his government is open to cutting tariffs on more than half of its imports from the US, which were worth a total \$41.8bn in 2024, as part of a trade deal.

"We are very positive that the visit will give a further boost to our bilateral ties," Indian foreign ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal told reporters on Thursday, speaking about Vance's engagements in India.

The US is India's largest trading partner and their two-way bilateral trade reached

\$129bn in 2024, with a \$45.7bn surplus in favour of India, US government trade data show. Officials in New Delhi are expecting to clinch a trade deal with the US within the 90-day pause on tariff hikes announced by Trump on April 9 for major trading partners, including Delhi.

India hopes to "positively conclude" the first part of the trade pact by this autumn, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said in San Francisco yesterday as she started on a trip packed with engagements between the two nations.

"The long and short of engaging with the US is not just for this reciprocal tariff-related matter, but in the interest of... our largest trading partner with whom we need to have an agreement," Sitharaman said in an address to the Indian diaspora.

Vance's tour in India is also seen as laying the ground for Trump's visit to the country later in the year for the summit of leaders of the Quad grouping that includes India, Australia, Japan and the US.

Harsh Pant, foreign policy head at the Observer Research Foundation think tank in Delhi, said the timing of Vance's visit was critical in the backdrop of trade talks.

"The fact that the US-China tensions are ramping up, and Vance in particular seems to have taken a very high profile role in American diplomacy, also means that the visit assumes an added layer of significance," he said.

Indian troops kill eight Maoist militants: police

Indian commandos shot dead eight Maoist militants in eastern India yesterday, police said, as security forces ramp up efforts to crush the long-running conflict. More than 10,000 people have been killed in the decades-long insurgency waged by the militants, who claim they are fighting for the rights of marginalised groups. The latest gunfight broke out early yesterday in the forested areas of Bokaro district in the mineral-rich state of Jharkhand. "A gunfight broke out early morning in which eight Maoists have been killed," senior police officer Surendra Kumar Jha said. Several automatic weapons and explosives were recovered from the militants, he added. A crackdown by security forces has killed more than 400 militants in the past year, an overwhelming majority in the state of Chhattisgarh, according to government data.

South Korea ex-president attends trial



South Korea's former president Yoon Suk-yeol arrives to attend his criminal trial on revolt charges at a courtroom of the Seoul Central District Court in Seoul yesterday.

New Delhi airport runway upgrade paused

Reuters
New Delhi

The operator of Delhi International Airport, one of the world's busiest airports, has paused works to upgrade one of its runways after passengers criticised lengthy flight delays, throwing the spotlight on increasing air traffic congestion in major cities in India.

Data from Flightradar24 showed about 400 arrivals and 500 departures were delayed on Sunday - about 60% and 76% of total flights, respectively - which Delhi International Airport Limited (DIAL) said was in part due to adverse wind patterns.

DIAL, which is majority owned by GMR Airports, had shut one of its runways earlier this month to upgrade a system that helps air-

craft land safely in low-visibility conditions. The airport has four runways in total.

DIAL will now resume operations on the runway in the first week of May after postponing remaining upgrade activities "for a month or so," it said in a post on X early yesterday. The upgrade works had come ahead of the busy summer travel season in India.

Passengers on social media complained of flights being delayed for hours on Sunday, both in the ground and in the air, raising concerns about stress on pilots.

India's Civil Aviation Minister Ram Mohan Naidu yesterday chaired a meeting attended by government, airport and airline officials to address challenges being faced by Delhi International Airport, according to a government statement.

Philippines and US launch joint military drills

AFP
Manila

The Philippine and US militaries yesterday kicked off three weeks of joint exercises that will simulate a "full-scale battle scenario" as the two allies seek to deter Beijing's ambitions in the disputed South China Sea.

As many as 17,000 personnel are expected to take part in the annual "Balikatan", or "shoulder to shoulder" drills, which for the first time will include an integrated air and missile defence simulation, to be attended by President Ferdinand Marcos. Sophisticated US weapons

including the NMESIS anti-ship missile system will also be deployed, including near a crucial chokepoint in the waters separating the northern Philippines from Taiwan.

"We will demonstrate not just our will to uphold our mutual defence treaty in existence since 1951 but our matchless capability to do so," US Marine Corps lieutenant general James Glynn said at yesterday's opening ceremony in Manila.

"Nothing builds bonds more quickly than shared adversity," he said, without specifying a common threat. Philippines Major General Francisco Lorenzo added that the 40th Balikatan exercises would reinforce the country's ability to address

"contemporary security challenges".

The Philippines has been engaged in months of confrontations with Beijing over disputed areas of the South China Sea.

It has steadily deepened defence co-operation with treaty ally the US since Marcos took office in 2022 and began pushing back on China's sweeping claims to the crucial waterway. During a recent visit to Manila, US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth said Washington was "doubling down" on the alliance.

"Deterrence is necessary around the world, but specifically in this region, in your country - considering the threats from the Communist Chinese," he said in late March.

In response to the drills, Beijing accused Manila of "collusion with countries outside the region".

The exercises "undermine regional strategic stability", said foreign ministry spokesman Guo Jiakun. "This has already aroused strong aversion and opposition from regional countries," he said.

Last year's Balikatan featured tests of the US Typhon mid-range missile system. The Philippine army subsequently said it was planning to acquire the Typhon, sparking warnings from China of a regional "arms race". Glynn yesterday said the Typhon system would again be present, along with the Marine Air Defence Integrated System, or MADIS, a

short-range platform specialising in knocking out drones.

The Philippines' chief of staff Romeo Brawner said last month that Manila was seeking to upgrade its arsenal, with more missile systems, warships and fighter jets.

On April 2, the US said it had approved the possible sale of \$5.58bn in long-coveted F-16 fighter jets to the Philippines, though Manila said the deal was "still in the negotiation phase". A week later, the Philippines took possession of the first of two corvette-class warships with "advanced weapons and radar systems" acquired in a deal with South Korea's Hyundai Heavy Industries.

China considers Taiwan part of its

sovereign territory and has vowed to bring it under Beijing's control one day. Given the Philippines' proximity to Taiwan and its surrounding waters, Manila's co-operation would be crucial in the event of any US conflict with China.

On April 1, as Chinese ships and warplanes surrounded the island in a simulated blockade, Brawner said his country would "inevitably" be involved should the democracy be invaded. While Manila later said Brawner's comments were primarily referencing efforts to retrieve Filipino workers in Taiwan, its Enhanced Defence Co-operation Agreement with Washington gives US forces access to nine bases in the Philippines.

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GULF TIMES

Markets see door wide open for more ECB rate cuts on tariff hit

Traders saw the all-clear last Thursday from the European Central Bank to bet on even steeper interest rate cuts ahead, confident the central bank will ease policy further if trade tensions dent a fragile economy.

The ECB cut rates by 25 basis points (bps) for a seventh time this cycle to 2.25%, to bolster an already struggling eurozone economy facing a large hit from US tariffs that have whipsawed markets since President Donald Trump's April 2 reciprocal tariffs.

The euro weakened and government bond yields across the bloc fell sharply as traders reacted to the dovish ECB message.

It stressed a deteriorating growth outlook due to trade tensions that have sparked "exceptional uncertainty" and removed a reference to rates being "restrictive" from its policy statement.

The latter would normally be seen hinting at slower cuts, but came as a relief as ECB chief Christine Lagarde explained, assessing the bank's policy stance against an unobservable neutral rate would be "meaningless" during an economic shock.

The decision was unanimous, while a few weeks ago several governors would have argued for a pause, Lagarde said, a sign of how seriously policymakers take the risks to the economy.

All of that "suggests the ECB is willing to do what is needed," said Barclays's head of euro rates strategy Rohan Khanna.

Traders now see around a 75% chance of a June rate cut, up from roughly 60% before the ECB's decision, according to LSEG data, while pricing from ICAP showed a roughly 90% chance of a June move.

By year-end they see around 65 bps of rate cuts, up from nearly 55 before the decision, according to LSEG, meaning they now reckon three rate cuts rather than two are more likely by then.

Contrast that with less than a full chance of another move this year and the pricing in of a chance of a 2026 hike after the March meeting, as investors bet on Germany's historic fiscal overhaul boosting economic growth and inflation.

German two-year bonds yields, sensitive to monetary policy expectations, dropped as much as 7 bps and Italian equivalents fell to their lowest since 2022. Bond yields move inversely with prices.

While the impact of tariffs on inflation looks less clear than on growth, hefty market moves since Trump's latest tariff announcement point to further disinflation.

The euro, which neared parity against the dollar in February, has surged over 9% to around \$1.135 since the start of March, which will contain import costs. It trades at an all-time high on a trade-weighted basis.

Oil meanwhile has slumped nearly 10% this month and China, the biggest source of EU imports, is taking the biggest hit from tariffs.

Markets have parked aside any concerns around inflation, with a key gauge of long-term expectations the ECB also tracks showing inflation right at the ECB's 2% target. That's down from 2.2% in March.

Some economists stress the risk that inflation will fall below the ECB's target. Citi, for example, said ahead of the ECB meeting that it sees price growth at 1.6% next year and 1.8% in 2027.

That's a potential headache for the ECB which struggled for years with below target inflation before the Covid-19 pandemic.

A wide range of estimates on the ECB rate outlook speaks to the scale of uncertainty, which could keep eurozone markets volatile.

Indeed, some ECB policymakers see a high chance of a further interest rate cut in June but others are far from deciding before seeing more economic indicators, sources told Reuters.

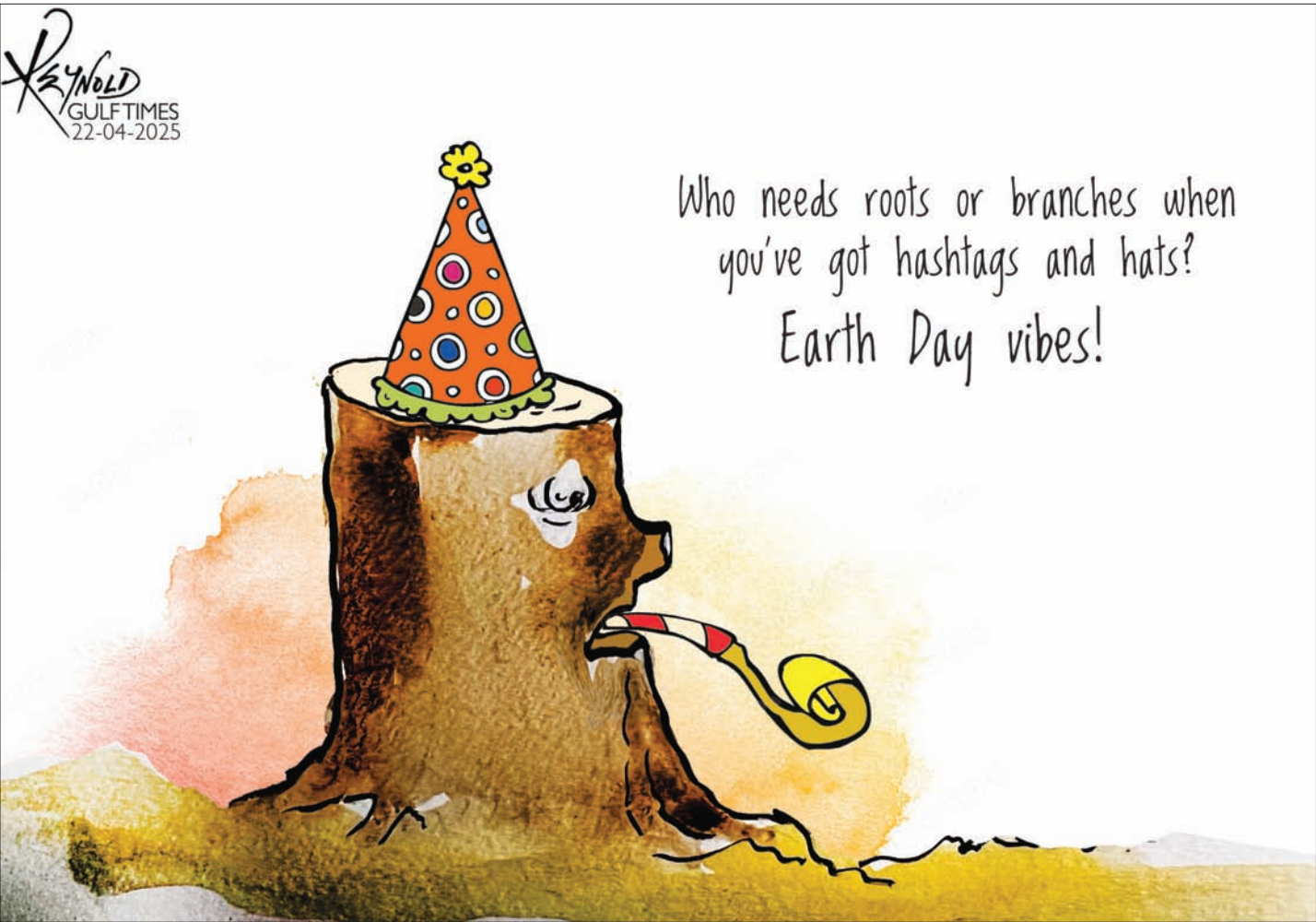
In markets, some analysts reckon pricing had gone far enough. Steve Ryder, portfolio manager at Aviva Investors, said markets expectations now reflected the downside risk to ECB rates, so the firm was now neutral on European bonds, while Nordea expects the ECB to cut rates just once more to 2%.

Barclays, however expects the ECB to cut rates to 1.25% by October, delivering more cuts than markets anticipate.

And Frederik Ducrozet, head of macroeconomic research at Pictet Wealth Management, said while a recession was not his baseline scenario, if one did materialise it would require a bigger response.

"Now you can imagine the ECB cutting 100 bps this year but hiking next year," he added.

The ECB has signalled a strong willingness to cut rates further amid trade tensions and a weakening eurozone economy



Trump funding freeze upends agri research at US varsities

By Karl Plume and P J Huffstutter
Davis (California)

From its earliest days in 1906, when the University of California secured a small stretch of fertile soil in the state's Central Valley, a quiet promise took root - that this place, originally called University Farm, would someday grow mighty.

For decades, UC Davis stood tall among the world's giants in agricultural research. All that changed in a few short days amid a sweeping overhaul of the federal government as the Trump administration froze funds, closed down labs and shut out scientists' ability to secure grants for future research.

Poultry genetics research was shut down, fruit and vegetable test plots went unwatered, and work to help small farms insure against crop loss was handed off to partners overseas as federal support, by far the largest pool of funding, evaporated. Collectively, millions of dollars in funds from the shuttered United States Agency for International Development disappeared and US Department of Agriculture and other federally backed grants were frozen, while broad new administration rules regarding diversity crippled crucial science on food security and climate resilience at one of the nation's top agricultural schools.

The moves at UC Davis and other land-grant universities have halted farm-related research projects midstream, according to interviews with more than a dozen agricultural researchers, professors and economists. "US universities, they're really a model for the world," UC Davis economist Michael Carter told Reuters. "What's at risk of being lost is stuff that can make a difference in the lives of lots and lots of people."

Future food and farm research is also in jeopardy with new federal grants tied up in lawsuits winding through the courts.

And Davis risks having to turn away graduate students this fall: There simply may not be funding for jobs at the scaled-back labs.

The university has not rescinded admission offers to students who submitted a statement of intent to enrol, UC President Michael Drake told Reuters. But some graduate programs have moved students who have not accepted their offers to waitlists due to the funding uncertainty, he said.

Davis researchers applied for about \$2.75bn in federal grants in fiscal 2024, eclipsing \$1.83bn in funding sought from state grants, private contributors and non-profits, according to UC data.

Those funding proposals yielded \$441mn of federal dollars in fiscal 2024, compared with \$238mn from the state, \$120mn from non-profits and \$95 million from companies, a UC Davis spokesperson said.

The university said it did not have an estimate for the recent cuts because Trump's executive orders are still being litigated.

The White House said in a statement to Reuters that Trump's actions would allow for "more critical research, not less, while cutting bureaucracy, bloat, and programs that do not align with the America First agenda," but did not elaborate further.

The State Department, in a statement to Reuters, said its actions were aimed at aligning its programs with the administration's foreign policy priorities and ensuring tax dollars are spent in the national interest.

The USDA did not respond to a request for comment.

Money remains frozen while the Trump administration considers appeals of court orders blocking its freeze on \$3tn in federal grants, loans and other financial aid.

The aftermath has left everyone here shaken.

On a recent morning, researcher Tara Chiu awoke at 3am, as she has every day since a USAID notice arrived, terminating her work helping poor farmers manage market and climate risks. The e-mailed notice from



US President Donald Trump during a ceremony in the Oval Office in Washington, DC, over the weekend. (Reuters)

USAID Agreement Officer Olivia Ricks, reviewed by Reuters, said the work was "not aligned with agency priorities" and "not in the national interest."

"I've had a panic attack every night," Chiu said. "I feel like my entire torso is being crushed."

She and her boss Carter, the economist, relied on USAID funding for research that helps small-scale farmers escape poverty traps. Their appeals to the State Department to remain open went unanswered. The lab's \$4.3mn in USAID funding remaining from a nearly \$22.6mn, multi-year grant is unlikely to be restored, Carter and Chiu said.

The State Department did not respond to a request for comment on the matter.

Across the Davis campus, Erin McGuire's USAID-funded horticulture lab, will also shut down at the end of April. The lab is renowned for tackling some of the world's most pressing questions, including how to feed a growing global population while climate change threatens farmers' ability to grow food.

As the deadline nears, McGuire is scrambling to hand off management of fruit and vegetable test plots overseas to research partners there while also tackling a mound of paperwork required to close out any research project, a process that would typically take up to six months. McGuire's work cultivated drought-resistant tomatoes and ways to kill produce-eating pests and control toxic fungi. It helped the United States remain a leader in agricultural technology even as rivals like China and Brazil ramped up public investment in their own research. Two time zones to the east, University of Illinois researcher Peter Goldsmith laid off 30 staff and will shutter his Soybean Innovation Lab this month.

His research into soybean cultivation in hotter, drier climates was aimed at making soybeans the industry standard for vegetable oil worldwide, opening up future markets for US producers in the coming decades.

The three labs were among 17 lead labs and dozens of collaborating labs at universities across the country within the USAID-funded Feed the Future Innovation Labs program created in 2012.

The US government's funding of agriculture research was slumping even before the Trump cuts, falling by about a third over the past two decades, according to USDA data. According to the agency's Economic Research Service (ERS), funding levels for public agriculture research and development were around \$5bn annually in 2020 - or about the same level as in 1970, when adjusted for inflation. How much private investment offset this drop is

not known, ERS said.

Meanwhile, top farm goods importer China and major exporter Brazil have poured money into such research, with China becoming the largest funder of agricultural R&D in the world, ERS said. If US government funding of public R&D continues its decline, US farmers would see lower crop yields as climate pressures intensify by midcentury, Cornell University and University of Maryland economists and an agricultural ecologist at Stanford University wrote in a Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences journal paper published in March.

If farm productivity drops, the likelihood of government aid bailouts increases, the researchers said. During the first Trump administration, farmers received about \$217bn in crop support, disaster and other aid programs, including some related to Covid and his trade war with China - more than in any four-year period since 1933 when adjusted for inflation, according to a Reuters examination of USDA data. Now, the Trump administration is deciding whether to bail out farmers damaged by the current tariff backlash - even as research programmes that benefit them are shuttering.

Kevin Bellido, manager at the UC Davis avian research and teaching facility, was already concerned that bird flu that has decimated poultry flocks across California would find its way into his research barns.

Now, he worries that suspensions of federal grants would deprive the 18-acre research facility of projects like one aimed at identifying birds that are genetically more resilient against Newcastle disease, which spreads similarly to avian flu and is equally deadly.

"If we get our funding cut, we basically wouldn't have anything to teach students," he said over deafening rooster crows from a nearby barn housing a half dozen breeds, including the heat-tolerant and more disease-resilient Egyptian Fayoumi.

The funding uncertainty is beginning to ripple across the Davis campus in other ways.

Allen Van Deynze, director of the seed biotechnology centre, relies on federal and private grants to fund his work to develop more disease-resistant spinach and easier-to-harvest peppers. His federal grants were spared in the wave of cuts, but that funding only runs through June.

Van Deynze said he is unable to apply for new federal grants because the government's online grant request platform has been frozen.

"Nobody's taking students this fall," he said, "because nobody knows if they'll have money?" - Reuters

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Pope spent last day working against orders of doctors

After spending more than five weeks in hospital for a bout of double pneumonia, doctors told Pope Francis he needed two months' rest - but the leader of the world's 1.4bn Catholics kept working right to the end. On Easter Sunday, the day before his death aged 88, Pope Francis made his first prolonged public appearance since February, entering St Peter's Square in a white popemobile to greet cheering crowds. And for only the second time since leaving hospital on March 23, the pope also met on Sunday with foreign leaders, welcoming US Vice-President J D Vance to his residence for a brief encounter. "I was happy to see him yesterday, though he was obviously very ill," Vance wrote on X. "May God rest his soul."

Croatian Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic and his family also had a brief meeting with Francis on Sunday. "It was a brief moment, but profoundly touching, a meeting of kindness, smiles, and blessing," Plenkovic said in a statement yesterday. For someone in convalescence after a prolonged illness, Pope Francis was working himself hard. Cardinal Michael Czerny, a senior Vatican official who was close to Pope, said: "Absolute rest isn't healing," adding: "He balanced convalescence with his being the Bishop of Rome."

Czerny said the pope was devoted to his work leading the world's Catholics. Citing an instruction Francis often gave Catholic bishops to make sure they were close to their flocks, Czerny said: "He died with the smell of the sheep on him."

Austen Ivereigh, a biographer of Pope Francis who also wrote a book with the Pope in 2020, said the pontiff "listened carefully to his doctors' advice but his first priority was his mission of presence."

Pope, said Ivereigh, was "a master of timing".

"He made sure we had a pope for Easter and kept up his mission of presence to the last," said the biographer.

The Vatican has not given details

about the Pope's cause of death. During his time in hospital, he suffered severe breathing crises, which his doctors later said had nearly killed him. Cardinal Kevin Farrell, announcing the death on the Vatican's TV channel yesterday, said only that Pope Francis had died at 7:35am. Since returning from hospital, Pope had been receiving 24-hour care from a nurse, the Vatican said previously. The Pope had been receiving oxygen via a small hose under his nose overnight, and during the day as needed. During his stay in hospital, the Pope had also been using non-invasive mechanical ventilation, involving the placement of a mask over his face to help push air into his lungs. He was no longer using ventilation after leaving hospital, the Vatican said.

In his last public appearance on Sunday, Pope said only a few words, wishing a happy Easter in a raspy voice to about 35,000 people gathered in St Peter's Square. In a traditional Easter message, read by an aide, Pope Francis reiterated his frequent call for a ceasefire in Gaza, calling the humanitarian situation in the enclave "deplorable".

Father Gabriel Romanelli, from the Gaza parish the Pope called regularly during the Israel-Hamas war, told Vatican News: "The Pope called us for the last time on Saturday evening, shortly before the Easter Vigil began, while we were praying the Rosary. He told us that he was praying for us, he blessed us, and he thanked us for our prayers in his favour."

As he toured the square in his popemobile on Sunday, people lined the aisles to get close to him, many holding aloft national flags and shouting "viva il papa!" (long live the pope!). Some offered babies for him to bless.

Italy's family affairs minister Eugenia Roccella said Pope Francis had given his all, to the end.

The Pope, she said in a statement, "chose not to spare himself, transmitting in his suffering, physical closeness, a message about his whole papacy."

Himalayan snow at 23-year low, threatening 2bn people: report

Snowfall in Asia's Hindu Kush-Himalayan mountain range has reached a 23-year low, threatening nearly two billion people dependent on snowmelt for water, scientists warned in a report yesterday. The Hindu Kush-Himalayan range, which stretches from Afghanistan to Myanmar, holds the largest reserves of ice and snow outside the Arctic and Antarctica and is a vital source of fresh water for about two billion people. Researchers found "a significant decline in seasonal snow across the Hindu Kush Himalaya region, with snow persistence (the time snow remains on the ground) 23.6% below normal - the lowest in 23 years," the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) said.

"This trend, now in its third consecutive year, threatens water security for nearly 2bn people," it said in its Snow Update Report. The study also warned of "potential lower river flows, increased groundwater reliance, and heightened drought risk".

Sher Muhammad, the lead author of the ICIMOD report, told AFP that "this year the snowfall started late in January and remained low in the winter season on average".

Several countries in the region have already issued drought warnings, with upcoming harvests and access to water at risk for populations already facing longer, hotter, and more frequent heatwaves. The inter-governmental ICIMOD organisation is made up of member countries Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal and Pakistan. It urged countries that rely on the 12 major river basins in the region to develop "improved water management, stronger drought preparedness, better early warning systems, and greater regional co-operation".



An aerial view of Apricot Blossom trees along the snow covered field at Choundha Valley of Skardu district in Gilgit-Baltistan region in Pakistan. (AFP)

POPE PASSES AWAY

■ Pontiff, 88, a T2 diabetic, succumbed to stroke
■ From Trump to Putin, rich tributes from all over

AFP
Vatican City

Pope Francis died of a stroke, the Vatican said yesterday, amid widespread mourning for the 88-year-old reformer who inspired devotion but riled traditionalists during 12 years leading the Catholic Church.

The Argentine died yesterday morning at the Santa Marta residence where he lived, almost a month after leaving hospital following a five-week stay battling double pneumonia.

One day after he greeted Easter crowds in St Peter's Square in the Vatican, mourners gathered in the same place, many in tears, to mark his passing.

World leaders from Donald Trump to Vladimir Putin paid tribute to the Pope's moral and spiritual leadership, and prayers were held around the world.

"We are orphaned," said street sweeper Javier Languenari, 53, in the Pope's home city of Buenos Aires, as Argentina declared a week of national mourning.

According to the death certificate released by the Vatican, Pope Francis died of a stroke, causing a coma and "irreversible" heart failure.

It also revealed he had Type 2 diabetes, which was not previously known. Pope had been convalescing in the Santa Marta residence, where he had lived since his election in March 2013.

"Dearest brothers and sisters, it is with deep sorrow that I must announce the death of Pope Francis," said Cardinal Kevin Farrell. The Pope passed away at 7:35am.

His body was set to be laid in a single coffin of wood and zinc in the Santa Marta chapel yesterday evening, before being transferred likely today to St Peter's Basilica to lie in state.

The funeral must take place between four and six days after the death, before Pope Francis is buried in the basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome.

In the meantime, the day-to-day running of the tiny Vatican City state will be handled by Farrell, who holds the job as Camerlengo, a senior cardinal.

But thoughts are already turning to who will succeed him as leader of the world's 1.4bn Catholics, with a conclave of cardinals set to be called within three weeks.

At the Vatican yesterday, a hush seemed to descend on the normally boisterous St Peter's Square as the death knell rang out for the passing of Francis.

Caroline Wahl, visiting with her family from Germany, said the Pope had looked "weak" when they saw him on Easter Sunday, adding that thinking about him now gave her "goosebumps".

The bells at Notre-Dame cathedral in Paris in France rang out 88 times - one for each year of the Pope's life - as well as in Mosul, in Iraq, where the Pope visited in 2021.

In Gaza, the Christian community feels "as though a light of love and peace has been extinguished", said George Ayad, 67.

For Marlon Delgado in the Phil-



Devotees touch the portrait of late Pope Francis during a mass in his homage following his death at the Argentinian church Santa Maria Addolorata in Rome yesterday. (AFP)

He asked for simple, unadorned tomb for final resting place

Pope Francis revealed his last wishes in his will published yesterday, asking to be buried in a simple, unadorned tomb inside his beloved Roman basilica, Santa Maria Maggiore.

"Feeling that the sunset of my earthly life is approaching and with lively hope in Eternal Life, I wish to express my testamentary will only as regards the place of my burial," wrote the Pope in his will dated June 29, 2022, that was published yesterday by the Vatican.

"I ask that my mortal remains rest awaiting the day of the resurrection in the Papal Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore," wrote the Pope, who sought to visit the important Catholic sanctuary before and after every trip he took as pontiff.

In his will, Pope specified the exact spot in the side nave of the basilica for his tomb, even including an attached diagram for clarity, and said the burial expenses had been arranged in advance.

"The tomb must be in the earth; simple, without particular decoration and with the only inscription: Franciscus."

In closing his will, the spiritual leader of the world's Catholics asked God to "give the deserved reward to those who loved me and will continue to pray for me".

"I offered the suffering that became present in the last part of my life to the Lord for world peace and brotherhood among peoples."

ippine capital Manila, "a feeling of sadness overwhelmed me," he told AFP. Pope Francis, born Jorge Bergoglio, was the first Jesuit to lead the Catholic world and the first from the Americas.

He took over after Benedict XVI became the first pontiff since the Middle Ages to step down - and cut a sharply different figure from the German theologian.

A football-loving former archbishop of Buenos Aires who was often happiest among his flock, Pope sought to forge a more open and compassionate Church.

He strongly defended social justice and the rights of migrants, and repeatedly called for action against climate change.

Throughout his papacy, Pope Francis championed the poor and vulnerable and emphasised love over doctrine.

However, his detractors accused him of failing to uphold established Church doctrine.

His views often clashed with those of politicians, but tributes came in from all corners of the globe.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi called him a "beacon of

compassion, humility and spiritual courage", while Italy's Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni called him a "great man".

Argentina's President Javier Milei - who had before taking office accused Pope Francis of being an "imbecile" who "promotes communism" pointed to his compatriot's "goodness and wisdom" despite their "differences".

US President Donald Trump - who recently drew the ire of Pope Francis with his mass deportations of migrants - wrote "Rest in Peace" on his Truth Social platform, and ordered flags to be flown at half mast.

His predecessor Joe Biden, a Catholic, hailed "one of the most consequential leaders of our time".

Italy's Serie A football league called off all the day's matches and the country's Olympic committee called for all sporting events due to take place there yesterday to be postponed.

International Olympic Committee president Thomas Bach said Pope had "inspired" him to create a refugee team.

Pope Francis, who had part of his lung removed as a young man,

almost died twice while in hospital with double pneumonia - but still defied doctor's orders to take two months off after returning home.

Known for being stubborn, he made several appearances in public, including meeting King Charles and visiting a prison.

But he was barely able to speak, and delegated the traditional Easter Sunday "Urbi et Orbi" ("To the City and the World") benediction to an associate.

He later toured Saint Peter's Square in his open-top popemobile, greeting worshippers.

His hospital stay was the latest of a series of health issues, from colon and hernia surgery to problems walking, which saw him take to a wheelchair in recent years.

But he never took a day off and made frequent trips abroad, including a four-nation Asia-Pacific tour only last September.

Huge crowds gathered wherever he went, a testament to his popularity and human touch.

When Pope Francis took over, the Catholic Church was beset by infighting, and plagued by a global scandal over clerical sex abuse of children and decades of cover-ups. Pope Francis initiated a major shake-up of the Vatican's powerful governing body that included improving financial responsibility and allowing lay Catholics to lead Vatican offices.

However, critics accused him of creating doctrinal confusion and failing to defend traditional Catholic beliefs on key issues.

On abuse, he promised an end to impunity and changed Vatican law to help tackle abuse, but victims' groups said his actions fell well short of the "zero-tolerance" he promised.

"In this realm, where Francis had supreme power, he refused to make the necessary changes," said campaigner Anne Barrett Doyle from BishopAccountability.org, complaining of a lack of external oversight and transparency.

"This choice is having devastating consequences for the Church's most powerless members. It will forever tarnish the legacy of this remarkable man."

Trump backs Hegseth after another Signal chat

Reuters
Washington

President Donald Trump said yesterday that he stood behind US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth, after reports that he shared details of a March attack on Yemen's Houthis in a message group that included his wife, brother and personal lawyer.

The revelations that Hegseth used the unclassified messaging system Signal to share highly sensitive security details for the second time come at an uncertain moment for him and the Pentagon, where senior officials were ousted last week as part of an internal leak investigation.

"Pete's doing a great job. Everybody's happy with him," Trump said. Asked if he remained confident in Hegseth, Trump said: "Oh totally."

"Ask the Houthis how he's doing," Trump said. The US military, under Trump, has ramped up its bombing campaign against the Iran-backed Houthi group.

In the second chat, Hegseth shared details of the attack similar to those revealed last month

White House denies seeking replacement

The White House yesterday denied a report that it has begun searching for a new defence secretary after Pentagon chief Pete Hegseth reportedly shared details of a US attack on Yemen's Iran-aligned Houthis on a commercial messaging app. White House spokesperson Karoline Leavitt said the National Public Radio story on the search was not true. "As the President said this morning, he stands strongly behind @SecDef," she wrote on X.

by *The Atlantic* magazine after its editor-in-chief, Jeffrey Goldberg, was included in a separate chat on the Signal app by mistake, Reuters reported on Sunday.

The second chat included about a dozen people and was created during Hegseth's confirmation process to discuss administrative issues rather than detailed military planning. Among them was Hegseth's brother, who is a Department of Homeland Security liaison to the Pentagon.

Hegseth's wife, Jennifer, a former Fox News producer, has attended sensitive meetings with foreign military counterparts, according to images the Pentagon has publicly posted.

A person familiar with the matter told Reuters that Hegseth had been counselled against sharing

information on unsecure systems like Signal before he did so last month.

The Pentagon Inspector General's office announced earlier this month that it was opening a probe into Hegseth's use of the unclassified commercial texting application to coordinate on the highly sensitive March 15 launch of US strikes on Houthis.

Speaking to reporters at the White House yesterday, Hegseth slammed the media and former employees.

"I have spoken to the president, and we are going to continue fighting on the same page all the way," Hegseth said.

Hegseth narrowly secured enough votes to become defence secretary, after fierce opposition from Democrats and even some

Republicans. At least nine Senate Democrats have called on Hegseth to resign since the latest news, saying the existence of a second Signal chat showed that he was not fit for the job.

But Republican lawmakers, who control both the Senate and House of Representatives, have largely been silent and none have called for him to step down.

Trump removed a number of defence secretaries during his first administration over policy differences or questions about their loyalty.

Hegseth, however, is seen as being in lock step with Trump. He has deployed thousands of troops to the border with Mexico, called on Europe to spend more on its defences and taken aim at diversity in the military.

The latest revelation comes days after Dan Caldwell, one of Hegseth's leading advisers, was escorted from the Pentagon after being identified during an investigation into leaks at the Department of Defense.

Caldwell played a critical role for Hegseth and was named as the Pentagon's point person by the secretary in the first Signal chat.



HE Sheikhha Al Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani and other dignitaries at the ceremony yesterday.

Left: HE Sheikhha Al Mayassa honouring a graduate.

QLC celebrates graduation of 2025 cohort

By Tawfik Lamari
Staff Reporter

The Qatar Leadership Centre (QLC) celebrated the graduation of its 2025 cohort yesterday under the patronage of the Chairperson HE Sheikhha Al Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani.

The 2025 cohort comprised 142 national graduates, both male and female, who represent various government and private entities in the country.

The ceremony witnessed the graduation of 127 participants from the National Leadership Programmes, in addition to 15 graduates from the Executive Master's

Programme in Leadership.

The ceremony was attended by a number of ministers, senior officials, faculty members, and families of the graduates, led by HE Sheikhha Al Mayassa and QLC vice-president and managing director Sheikh Abdullah bin Ali bin Saud al-Thani.

In her speech, HE Sheikhha Al Mayassa addressed the role of the QLC in supporting the state's vision towards a knowledge-based economy by establishing a model of ethical and inspiring leadership.

She said that this celebration is not merely an individual tribute, but an embodiment of a national vision that believes in the importance of building leaders.

"Leadership is not a position,

but rather an inspiration for others to dream, learn, and work," HE Sheikhha Al Mayassa said. "Qatar believes in you and awaits your creativity."

She also emphasised the values of leadership.

"Leadership is integrity in one's stance, courage in change, steadfastness in times of crisis, and humility in success," HE Sheikhha Al Mayassa said.

She affirmed that this year's graduates represent an extension of Qatar's development journey, and stressed their role in preserving the country's gains and actively contributing to achieving Qatar National Vision 2030.

HE Sheikhha Al Mayassa highlighted the country's achievements



HE Sheikhha Al Mayassa with Sheikh Abdullah bin Ali bin Saud al-Thani and other dignitaries.

in the fields of education, economy, and diplomacy, as well as its leadership in launching innovative initiatives.

She spoke about Qatar's efforts to empower the Arab voice in

the media, arts, and culture to be present and influential on the global stage.

Founded in 2008 at the initiative of His Highness Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, the QLC is a na-

tional platform for leadership development, working in partnership with leading international universities and institutes to prepare future leaders and enhance Qatar's global standing.

France-Qatar pacts deepen cultural ties

Qatar and France are set to launch a series of cultural projects following the signing of six framework agreements between key institutions after a visit from French Culture Minister Rachida Dati to Doha recently.

Based on a joint statement, Qatar Museums (QM) and France's ministry of culture noted that the agreements were signed on April 19-20, marking a milestone in the strategic partnership between the two countries aimed at enriching their artistic landscapes.

Dati's visit, the first by a French minister of culture to Doha in more than 20 years, coincided with the QM's 20th anniversary celebrations and the ongoing Qatar Creates initiative.

During her visit, the French minister lauded HE the QM Chairperson Sheikhha Al Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani for her strategic vision in transforming Doha into a thriving cultural hub.

Dati also toured prominent cultural institutions, including the Museum of Islamic Art, the National Museum of Qatar, Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, and the Qatar National Library.

"The number and unprecedented ambition of these partnerships demonstrate the shared determination of France and Qatar to take their cultural relationship to a higher level, and to make it one of the fundamental pillars of their bilateral relationship," the statement said.

According to the joint statement, the agreements signed represent a concrete step towards realising commitments made during the state visit of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-



HE the QM Chairperson Sheikhha Al Mayassa with France's Culture Minister Rachida Dati at the signing ceremony.

Thani to France in February last year.

They also build upon the collaborative spirit fostered during the Qatar-France Year of Culture in 2020.

The partnerships, formalised through a memo-

randum of understanding (MoU) signed in June last year, aim to elevate the cultural relationship between Qatar and France, making it a cornerstone of their broader bilateral ties, the statement added.

The agreements cover a variety of sectors within

the arts and culture, such as a key agreement between the French ministry of culture and the QM, focusing on professional training and potentially involving renowned institutions such as Femis and the Institut national du Patrimoine, including residency programmes designed to cultivate talent.

A partnership between the QM and the Etablissement public des musées d'Orsay et de l'Orangerie - Valérie Giscard d'Estaing will facilitate research projects, joint exhibitions, and the exchange of artworks.

Additionally, the QM and the Musée Guimet will collaborate on projects dedicated to Asian arts, fostering research, conservation, and education.

The design and crafts industries will see closer ties through an agreement between the QM and Manufactures nationales - Sèvres and Mobilier national, with potential for joint exhibitions and training programmes hosted at the Musée de Sèvres.

The statement said that the film industry will also benefit, with the Doha Film Institute (DFI) and the Centre national du cinéma et de l'image animée working together to promote co-production projects and offer training for film professionals.

In the literary sphere, the QNL and the Bibliothèque Nationale de France will collaborate on research programmes and the digitisation of Islamic manuscripts.

In the coming months, the statement pointed out that teams from France and Qatar will collaborate to implement the initiatives outlined in these agreements, ushering in a new era of artistic collaboration and mutual enrichment.



HE the QM Chairperson Sheikhha Al Mayassa with Dati and officials from Qatar and France.

Qatar Calendar House organises astronomy show for students

The Qatar Calendar House, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE), has organised an astronomy exhibition for school students.

The exhibition, held on April 20-21, was part of the 9th Qatar Schools Astronomy Olympiad under the theme *The Earth and*



Its Size in Relation to Sunspots.

Engineer Faisal al-Ansari, the general supervisor of the competition and executive director of the Qatar Calendar House, said in a statement that the first day of the exhibition was dedicated to participating girls' schools from the preparatory and secondary levels, while boys' schools and international schools participated on the second day.

He said that 80 schools - 36 for girls, 44 for boys - participated in the exhibition.

Qatar Calendar House is supervising the 9th edition of the Qatar Schools Astronomy Olympiad this year.

The competition includes three astronomical projects: calculating the size of the Earth relative to sunspots, defining the solar activity cycle, and calculating current and future solar activity.



Students from all preparatory and secondary schools will complete the first two projects, while the final project is limited to secondary school students only.

The competition aims to spread astronomical culture among students in vari-

ous independent, private, and language schools in Qatar.

By organising and sponsoring this competition, the Qatar Calendar House aims to create a team of male and female students to participate in the International Astronomy Olympiad. - QNA

Environmental sustainability

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Al-Ansari noted that sustainability is a priority in Qatar National Vision 2030, and this vision has been translated into tangible steps in the Third National Development Strategy, which places environmental protection at the forefront of priorities. He noted that the Council, placing sustainability at the core of its national strategy, has funded more than 200 sustainable research projects worth over QR600mn, and has contributed to the development of innovative technologies to reduce emissions and improve resource efficiency. He explained that the Sustainability Community will accelerate the development and implementation of national solutions in the areas of clean water, the circular economy, and climate change adaptation, cementing Qatar's position as a knowledge and innovation hub. The Sustainability Research, Development, and Innovation Community aims to unify visions and efforts, enhance co-operation, and foster a culture of innovation, contributing to driving the country's digital transformation and adopting latest technologies.