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Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney, riding high in polls, looked for support yesterday in British Columbia, one of a few fiercely competitive areas that will help determine the outcome of Monday's national election. Carney's Liberals are leading in the most populous provinces of Ontario and Quebec, after running a campaign focused on countering US President Donald Trump, while the Conservatives, led by Pierre Poilievre, dominate the Prairie provinces. British Columbia's 43 electoral districts, on the other hand, are among the country's most closely contested battlegrounds.

The Cabinet affirmed that the fruitful talks session held between His Highness and President Vladimir Putin and the friendly and positive atmosphere that prevailed, embodied the trust, mutual respect, and shared will to develop economic co-operation and strengthen the partnership

The Cabinet also hailed the outcomes of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani's talks session with President of the Republic of Lebanon General Joseph Aoun during his official visit to Qatar on April 15-16, and the content of the joint statement issued at its conclusion, which affirmed the depth of the fraternal and historical relations between the two countries, and the shared keenness to strengthen and develop them, in a way that meets the aspirations and interests of the two brotherly peoples, and supports efforts for stability and development in the region.

The Earthna Summit 2025, organised by Earthna Center for a Sustainable Future, a member of Qatar Foundation, concluded yesterday following two days of impactful discussions, cross-sector collaboration, bold propositions, and inclusive dialogue, under the theme "Building Our Legacy: Sustainability, Innovation, and Traditional Knowledge."

This year's summit welcomed over 2,000 participants, reinforcing Earthna's status as a leading platform for sustainability innovation in hot and arid regions.

Day two opened with a session titled "Women Leading Collaboration: Partnerships for Sustainable Development," which highlighted the vital role of women in achieving Sustainable Development Goal 17 on global partnerships. Former Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and founding partner and CEO of Onepoint5, ambassador Patricia Espinosa Cantellano underscored the importance of empowering women and equipping them with the necessary resources. **Page 12**

Ahead of Trump's broadside,

(From L) Britain's Defence Secretary John Healey, Britain's Foreign Secretary David Lammy, Ukraine's Minister of Foreign Affairs Andriy Sybiga, Ukraine's Defence Minister Rustem Umerov posing during their meeting in London yesterday.

Vice-President JD Vance laid out the US vision for a peace deal where Russia would get to keep already occupied swaths of Ukraine, which include Crimea.

Zelensky rejected this as a violation of Ukraine's constitution. That in turn prompted Trump's outburst in which he accused Zelensky of "boasting" and taking

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Reuters
Gaza

reduce harm to civilians before it
struck there.

An Israeli air strike on a school sheltering displaced families in Gaza killed 10 people yesterday.

Israeli strikes killed 36 people across the besieged territory, while Germany, France and Britain urged Israel to end its blockade on aid entering.

Since a January ceasefire collapsed on March 18, Israeli attacks have killed more than 1,600 Palestinians, many of them civilians, according to the Gaza health authorities, and hundreds of thousands have been displaced as Israel seized what it calls a buffer zone of Gaza's land.

Israel has also imposed a blockade on all goods into Gaza, including fuel and electricity, since the beginning of March.

Medics said the air strike on the Yaffa School in the Tuffah area of Gaza City set fire to tents and classrooms.

The Israeli military said Hamas and allied group Islamic Jihad were operating within the school and that it took precautions to

Some furniture was still in flames several hours after the strike as people sifted through blackened classrooms and the schoolyard in search of their belongings.

The foreign ministers of Germany, France, and Britain jointly called on Israel to adhere to international law and allow the unhindered passage of humanitarian aid into Gaza.

They also urged for the ceasefire to be restored and for remaining hostages held by resistance group Hamas to be released.

Abbas urges Hamas to free hostages

Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas yesterday urged Hamas to free all hostages, saying their captivity provided Israel with "excuses" to attack Gaza. "Hamas has given the criminal occupation excuses to commit its crimes in the Gaza Strip, the most prominent being the holding of hostages," Abbas said in Ramallah.

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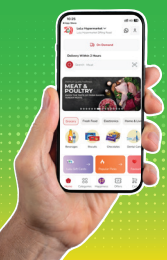
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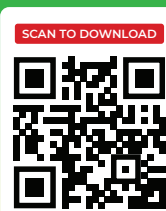


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/بالحبة Italian pizza marguerita, Local



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PM meets German official



HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani met yesterday with the visiting Minister-President of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia of Germany Hendrik Wust. The meeting discussed bilateral relations and ways to support and develop them, along with several issues of joint interest. HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs expressed Qatar's aspiration to elevate its strong relations with Germany to broader horizons of co-operation and to strengthen the strategic partnership. **(QNA)**



Sheikha Al Mayassa flags off ‘Ultraleggera’ at NMoQ

Qatar Museums (QM) Chairperson HE Sheikha Al Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani unveiled ‘Ultraleggera: A Design Journey with Marcello Gandini Between Italy and Qatar’, an exhibition co-produced by the future Qatar Auto Museum (QAM), the MAUTO - Museo Nazionale dell'Automobile in Turin, Italy, and VCUarts Qatar.

The exhibition originates from the vision and tenacity of VCUarts Qatar associate professor Simone Carena, who in 2022 convinced Gandini to embark on his first-ever masterclass project in collaboration with QAM and VCUarts Qatar. The opening of the exhibition was attended by QM CEO Mohammed Saad al-Rumaihi, the National Museum of Qatar director (NMoQ) HE Sheikh Abdulaziz bin Hamad al-Thani, Italian ambassador Paolo Toschi, Piedmont Region President Alberto Cirio, and Mayor of Turin Stefano Lo Russo.

Gandini (1938-2024) is known as the inventor of the supercar, and his iconic designs (including the Lamborghini Miura, Countach, Diablo, and Lancia Stratos) continue to influence the automotive world.

The exhibition is a tribute to his profound impact on design, showcasing key elements of his legacy that span his illustrious career.

As project leader and art director, Prof Carena also serves as co-curator of the exhibition, alongside Gandini's daughter Marzia Gandini, who is also founder of Think PR. The exhibition contents are co-developed by the curators and Gautam Sen, author of the latest monograph on Gandini's design legacy.

Celebrating the groundbreaking principles of one of the automotive world's most influential figures, Ultraleggera centres on Gandini's revolutionary lightweight design philosophy. The exhibition will run at NMoQ until June 2,



before travelling to MAUTO in Turin from June 19-August 31. QAM president HE Dr Hessa Sultan al-Jaber, said: “Marcello Gandini's work is a defining part of automotive design history, and this exhibition is a powerful opportunity to honour his legacy. By pairing his iconic creations with the innovative work of VCUarts Qatar students, a meaningful dialogue has been created between past and present, Italy and Qatar. It's a celebration of Gandini's influence, and a chance to showcase the fresh perspectives of emerging local designers.”

MAUTO president Benedetto Camerana said: “Both the Marcello Gandini Masterclass Project, promoted by QAM with VCUarts students, and the MAUTO Summer School to be held in June in Turin, in deep collaboration with Torino Polytechnics and Marcello Gandini Studio, focus on the power of young design as a creative process capable of building bridges between generations and cultures”.

The showcase integrates important models, sketches, and prototypes on loan from Gandini's studio, offering a rare glimpse into the evolution of his visionary work. With “movement” as a key theme-both as a design element and a symbol of cultural exchange-the exhibition challenges spatial, cultural, and creative boundaries.

On view are experimental works created by VCUarts Qatar students through the Moving Interiors With Marcello Gandini Masterclass, with a special focus on 3D-printed “moving interior” installations and models that reflect their interpretations of Gandini's design philosophies.

VCUarts Qatar dean Amir Berbic said: “By bringing together Marcello Gandini's pioneering design legacy with the fresh perspectives of our talented students, we are creating a multi-layered experience that reveals and celebrates Gandini's innovative design principles.”

Speaker, Saudi counterpart discuss ways to enhance ties

QNA
Riyadh

HE the Shura Council Speaker, Hassan bin Abdullah al-Ghanem, met in Riyadh yesterday with Saudi Shura Council Speaker Dr Abdullah bin Mohammed al-Sheikh. At the outset of the meeting, the Saudi Speaker emphasised the depth of the historical fraternal relations between Qatar and Saudi Arabia.

He noted that co-operation between the Shura Councils of the two countries represents a vital path that contributes to strengthening these relations and co-ordination at various levels.

He also noted that such visits represent a valuable opportunity to exchange expertise and develop prospects for legislative work, which benefits state institutions and society. In turn, HE al-Ghanem highlighted

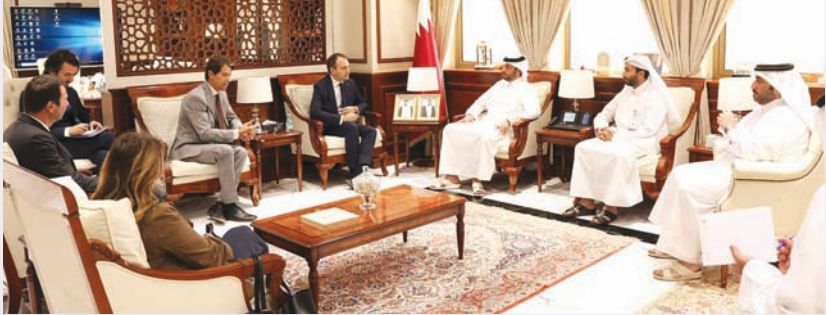


the solid and well-established relations between the two countries, and their continuous development under the wise directives of the leaderships of the two fraternal countries. He stressed that parliamentary co-operation between the two councils constitutes an important dimension of bilateral relations, and reflects the commitment of both sides to institutional and legislative development in a manner that keeps pace with the aspirations of the two peoples, and enhances the vital role of Gulf parlia-

ments in supporting joint Gulf action. The meeting discussed aspects of existing co-operation between the two councils and ways to develop them by enhancing the exchange of legislative expertise and experiences, co-ordination in regional and international parliamentary forums, and best parliamentary practices that would contribute to improving institutional performance within the legislative councils.

In addition, they discussed a number of topics and issues of common interest.

Civic minister meets Mayor of Turin



HE the Minister of Municipality Abdullah bin Hamad bin Abdullah al-Attiyah met yesterday with Mayor of Turin, Italy, Stefano Lo Russo. The two sides discussed bilateral co-operation across areas of shared interest, primarily the municipal sector. **(QNA)**

Citizens need e-visa for travelling to Iraq

The Consular Affairs Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has urged Qatari citizens wishing to travel to Iraq, starting May 1, to apply for an electronic visa via the official website: <https://eservice.evisa.iq>, to obtain an electronic entry visa. An official source at the department said the applications should be submitted several days prior to the intended travel date. **(QNA)**

MoFA organises workshop ahead of discussing Qatar's report before CRC

The Department of Human Rights at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), in co-operation with the UN Human Rights Training and Documentation Center for South-West Asia and the Arab Region, organised a preparatory workshop in preparation for the discussion of the combined 5th and 6th national reports of Qatar before the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in Geneva, on May 21-22. Representatives of relevant government agencies participated in the workshop as part of Qatar's efforts to enhance institutional readiness to discuss the national report before the UN Panel of Experts. Acting Director of the Department of Human Rights Sara al-Saadi emphasised that this workshop falls within the context of Qatar's commitment to promoting and protecting children's rights and presenting a comprehensive and transparent picture to the international community of national efforts in this area.

She indicated that this step comes within the framework of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' commitment, represented by the Department of Human Rights, to highlight the progress made by Qatar in the field of human rights, particularly children's rights. **(QNA)**

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Effective from 01st July 2023, Bids from Local Suppliers and Contractors (companies established under the Law of State of Qatar) who are not in possession of an ICV score in the ICV portal (<https://icv.qa/en-US>) by Tender closing date (or commercial bid submission date if separately mentioned / notified) will not be accepted. Local companies that have been established for less than 2 years are exempted from this requirement. For further details, please visit ICV portal (<https://icv.qa/en-US>).

SI No.	Tender Reference and Description	(i) Deadline for Submission of Information & Interest for Bidding	(ii) Tender Fee	(iii) Tender Publication on ARIBA	(iv) Tender Bond	Bid Closing Date
1	Tender No. P01-01-584 Supply of portable industrial air conditioning units and suitable diesel generators & cables Qty: 6 units (10 TR, 35 KW) and 4 units (25 TR, 88 KW)	28 th April 2025	QAR 500. 00 (Five Hundred)	30 th April May 2025	QAR 35,000. 00	12 th May 2025 12:00 Noon Doha LT
2	RFQ: P10-01-336 Supply of desktop computers, monitors, laptops, docking stations of brands (HP, Dell or Lenovo only) on call off basis for 5 years	28 th April 2025	QAR 1000. 00 (One Thousand)	05 th May 2025	QAR 150,000. 00	26 th May 2025 12:00 Noon Doha LT

- Interested bidders to communicate their willingness to bid and contact details to QAPCO Procurement (procurement@qapco.com.qa) indicating company name, address, telephone, official E-mail, etc. latest by the deadline for Submission of Information & Interest for Bidding indicated above.
- Reference Number and Description of the tender must be mentioned in the email.
- Non-refundable tender fee as indicated above is payable to QAPCO through QNB account # 0013-001688-060 only at any QNB branch latest by 28th April 2025.
- Tender link will be sent via email notification from ARIBA system to the confirmed bidders. Tender Document will be accessible only after attaching the evidence of the tender fee payment in ARIBA by the bidder followed by Qapco approval. QAPCO shall reply with the access to “ARIBA eSourcing RFP event” along with necessary instructions and guidelines for the bid submission.
- Tender Bond (Bank Guarantee): Original tender bond must be submitted by hand to the following address latest by the Bid closing date & time:

Qatar Petrochemical Company (QAPCO) Q.P.J.S.C.
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Tel.: +974 4033 8109 / 102
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Bidder to attach copy of tender bond to the offer in ARIBA. Offer without Tender Bond will not be considered.

Clarifications: Please send your queries with tender reference and description to email procurement@qapco.com.qa.

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HE Dr Abdullah bin Abdulaziz bin Turki al-Subaie, Minister of Environment and Climate Change; HE Ahmed bin Mohammed al-Sayed, Minister of State for Foreign Trade Affairs; and Ibrahim Yousuf Fakhro, Director of Protocol at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, at the cake-cutting ceremony with Pakistan ambassador Muhammad Aamer.

Grand reception held to mark Pakistan Day

By Kamran Rehmat
Doha

The Pakistani embassy hosted a grand reception to mark Pakistan Day – a celebration rich with history, pride, and diplomatic warmth. More than 700 guests filled the grand ballroom, a vibrant tapestry of cultures and communities brought together to honour Pakistan's journey and its bonds with Qatar.

Among them were Qatari dignitaries, senior officials, ambassadors, members of the diplomatic corps, influential business figures, and members of the Pakistani community.

The evening unfolded with elegance and purpose. The gathering was graced by the presence of notable figures, including HE Dr Abdullah bin Abdulaziz bin Turki al-Subaie, Minister of Environment and Climate Change; HE Ahmed bin Mohammed al-Sayed, Minister of State for Foreign Trade Affairs; and Ibrahim Yousuf Fakhro, Director of Protocol at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

As the national anthems of Pakistan and Qatar resonated through the hall, the atmosphere turned reverent. Muhammad Aamer, Pakistan's ambassador to Qatar, took to the podium, extending a heartfelt welcome.

His speech, both reflective and forward-looking, brought to life the legacy of Pakistan Day – a commemoration of the 1940 Lahore Resolution, a turning point that ultimately led to Pakistan's independence in 1947.

He spoke of resilience and unity, of sacrifices made and dreams realised, painting a portrait of a nation continually striving for progress.

The ambassador also celebrated the enduring relationship between Pakistan and Qatar established in 1972 and growing ever stronger. He highlighted the recent visit of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif to Qatar last October, a key moment that expanded bilateral co-operation across trade, defence, education and technology.

One of the evening's most cherished highlights was the mention



Pakistan ambassador Muhammad Aamer addressing the gathering.



A view of dignitaries at the reception.

of the 'Manzar: Art and Architecture from Pakistan 1940 to Present Day' exhibition at the National Museum of Qatar. The exhibition, a result of close cultural collaboration, was brought to life under the patronage of HE Sheikha Al Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani.

In recognition of her pivotal role, she was honoured by the government of Pakistan with the Hilal-e-Pakistan – a symbol of gratitude and admiration.

The ambassador concluded by reaffirming Pakistan's principled support for the Palestinian and Kashmiri peoples, urging international unity in the face of injustice.

He paid glowing tribute to the nearly 300,000 Pakistanis contributing to Qatar's development across diverse sectors, including



The event also featured a vibrant display of traditional Pakistani truck art by artists Shabbir Siddiqui and Shehla Raza.

healthcare, education, finance and construction. The evening stood as a powerful testament to friendship, solidarity, and shared aspirations – a celebration not just of Pakistan's past, but of a future shaped together with Qatar.

Jumbo Electronics unveils Mega Promotion

Jumbo Electronics, the leading name in consumer electronics and home appliances in Qatar, has unveiled its latest Mega Promotion, set to run until May 13, bringing customers 'unmatched value, combining the latest in-home technology with exclusive lifestyle rewards'.

The promotion highlights up to 25% discount on a handpicked selection of world-renowned brands such as LG, Harman Kardon, JBL, Nothing, Nokia, HMD, Ariston, Indesit, Brother, Kenwood, Blueair, Nutribullet, and Oscar. From high-definition televisions and advanced audio systems to energy-efficient appliances and sleek smartphones, Jumbo's offerings cater to every modern lifestyle need, a statement said yesterday.

During the Mega Promotion, customers will receive exclusive gift vouchers redeemable across a diverse range of partner brands. These include popular dining destinations such as Papa Johns, Bo's Cafe, Nando's and Zaatar Restaurant; travel services from Al Jaber Travels; hydration essentials from Qatar Oasis; and luxury fragrances from V Perfumes.

Commenting on the occasion, Sajed Jassim Mohammed Sulaiman, vice-chairman and managing director of Jumbo Electronics, stated: "The Mega Promotion exemplifies our ongoing commitment to delivering technological innovation and exceptional value to our customers. At Jumbo Electronics, we continuously strive to enhance the quality of life for our patrons by offering products that



blend performance with convenience." C V Rappai, director and CEO, further remarked: "Over the past four decades, Jumbo Electronics has remained a trusted name in Qatar's retail sector. Our sustained growth and leadership are the result of a consistent focus on quality, customer satisfaction, and the ability to adapt to an ever-evolving market. We remain dedicated to advancing our service excellence and maintaining the high standards our customers expect."

Customers are encouraged to visit their nearest LG Brand Shop, Jumbo Electronics outlet, or shop online at jumbosouq.com to take full advantage of the promotion before May 13, the statement added.



MoEHE and UDST officials at the ceremony yesterday.

MoEHE reaffirms support for UDST

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) has reaffirmed its support for the University of Doha for Science and Technology (UDST) by adding the UDST Bachelor's and Master's of Science in Teaching STEM and TVET programmes to the in-country scholarship track under 'Tomouh' programme.

This step reflects MoEHE and the UDST shared commitment to advancing education in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. The announcement took place at a press conference on UDST campus yesterday, in the presence of UDST president Dr Salem Al-Naemi, MoEHE's Higher Education Affairs assistant undersecretary Dr Hareb al-Jabri, Scholarships Department director Noora Mohamed al-Ansari, and UDST's student services manager Hamad al-Hajri, marking a significant step forward in Qatar's pursuit of advancing STEM and TVET education.

These initiatives align with the strategic priorities of Qatar's Third National Development Strategy (NDS3), which emphasises the critical importance of developing national capabilities in STEM fields to drive innovation and sustainable development. Al-Hajri said: "We are proud to stand alongside the Ministry of Education and Higher Education in fulfilling Qatar's vision for a knowledge-based economy."

The inclusion of our STEM education programmes in the national scholarship pathway reflects a shared commitment to educational excellence and

national development. With the support of the Ministry, UDST continues to play an important role in preparing national talent and nurturing future educators in STEM/TVET education, ensuring that our graduates are equipped to meet the evolving needs of Qatar and the world.

Al-Ansari commented: "We are pleased to collaborate with UDST, whose applied teaching approach makes its programs ideally suited to prepare the next generation of STEM and TVET educators. The future of Qatar lies in its youth. These scholarships represent an investment in the capabilities of our students and educators, preparing them to lead in fields that are critical to our nation's progress."

UDST's STEM-focused programmes are all designed to equip future educators and specialists with the skills needed to advance STEM learning and include the Bachelor of Science in Teaching STEM, which combines interdisciplinary teaching strategies with hands-on learning. This programme prepares graduates to create dynamic educational experiences. It is specifically designed to address the national demand for skilled STEM educators, ensuring graduates are ready to lead in classrooms and foster innovation, critical thinking, and problem-solving among the next generation of learners. The Master of Science in Teaching STEM is a bilingual (English and Arabic), two-year graduate programme that combines cutting-edge research with practical teaching methodologies, empowering educators to create transformative

learning experiences. Graduates will be prepared to shape the future of education, equipping students with the critical thinking and problem-solving skills needed to thrive in an increasingly technology-driven world.

The Master of Science in STEM Education and TVET is a comprehensive two-year programme designed for qualified teachers who wish to advance their expertise in both STEM education and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET). It focuses on research and leadership, enabling educators to drive innovation, enhance teaching methodologies, and contribute to education policy development.

Graduates will be equipped to lead transformative changes in schools, vocational training centres, and educational organisations, shaping future-ready learners for a dynamic global workforce. This announcement reinforces UDST's mission to deliver applied education and empower students with practical, industry-relevant skills that serve the ambitions of Qatar's future.

The application process and the terms and condition and other details of these programmes will be available through the MoEHE website. Besides, the accepted applicants of such scholarships will be granted some excellent incentives to encourage Qataris to adopt the teaching profession. Besides, MoEHE is set to expand in the schools that apply STEM and TVET programmes and more qualified teachers in these would be needed in the future.

Doha hosts conference on role of education in supporting economy

The Economic Development Qatar 2025 conference, which began in Doha yesterday, sheds light on the role of education in fostering economic growth, empowering women, and elevating community service. Special attention is given to the inclusion of persons with disabilities and their integral role in comprehensive development.

The three-day event, organised by Future Ready Educational and Technological Consultancy in collaboration with the 1st Ladies Forum (USA), focuses on Qatar's achievements in advancing the education sector and securing high international rankings in education quality as per global human development indicators.

During the opening session, Chairman of Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue (DICID) Dr Ibrahim bin Saleh al-Naimi emphasised that developing education, providing equal educational opportunities, empowering women, and achieving social justice are central humanitarian issues that reflect shared



religious values and serve as a gateway to genuine cultural and interfaith dialogue. He lauded Doha's selection as the host for this conference.

He highlighted Qatar's pioneering efforts in supporting women's roles and promoting education and human development globally, stressing that integrating persons with disabilities into development pathways aligns with religious values advocating dignity and justice.

Al-Nuaimi further underlined

that education, women's empowerment, and the inclusion of persons with disabilities are not merely societal demands but also embodiments of ethical and spiritual values. These issues must be strongly present within the contexts of cultural and interfaith dialogue.

He affirmed the DICID's participation as part of its commitment to humanitarian initiatives that serve communities and strengthen cultural exchanges. (QNA)



Toyota Gold Award for Al Abdulghani Motors

Al Abdulghani Motors, the authorised distributor of Toyota and Lexus in Qatar, has received the Gold Award from Toyota Motor Corporation (TMC) as part of the 2024 Distributor Award Programme.

The recognition highlights the company's exceptional achievements in Sales, After Sales, Motorsports, Value Chain initiatives, Best in Town strategies, and overall customer experience throughout the year.

The award was presented by Yasunori Tanaka, executive

vice-president, Toyota India and Middle East Division, and marks another important milestone in the company's long-standing partnership with Toyota, a statement said.

Over the years, Al Abdulghani Motors has consistently delivered high standards across all areas of its operations. Its integrated approach – focused on customer satisfaction, operational excellence, and innovative service delivery – has positioned it as one of the most trusted names in the automotive sector

in Qatar. Commenting on the achievement, Abdulghani Nasser al-Abdulghani, CEO and president of Al Abdulghani Motors, said: "We are proud to receive this award from Toyota Motor Corporation, which reflects our team's dedication to excellence and our commitment to delivering value to every customer. This recognition is not only a celebration of our 2024 performance – it is a motivation to continue leading the way in innovation, service quality, and customer satisfaction in Qatar."



GU-Q's year-long 'Qalam' series ends



Sonali Deraniyagala (right) in conversation with Kamila Shamsie.

Georgetown University in Qatar (GU-Q) concluded its year-long Qalam literary series with a moving conversation featuring acclaimed author and academic Sonali Deraniyagala, a statement said.

The event marked a rare public appearance by Deraniyagala, whose searing memoir *Wave* has been hailed as one of the most powerful accounts of grief and survival in contemporary literature.

Deraniyagala was joined in conversation by GU-Q's Writer-in-Residence, the award-winning novelist Kamila Shamsie. Together, they explored the devastating loss at the heart of *Wave*, the writing process that allowed Deraniyagala to confront memory, and the enduring presence of love in the aftermath of unimaginable tragedy.

Wave, which won the PEN Ackerley Prize and was short-listed for the National Book Critics Circle Award, begins in the immediate aftermath of the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami which engulfed Deraniyagala's family while they were vacationing in Sri Lanka, causing the deaths of her parents, husband, and sons.

Speaking to a captivated audience, Deraniyagala reflected on how the book began not as a literary project but as a private exercise in making sense of the



incomprehensible. "It was important for me to learn to hold my nerve with the remembering," she shared. "What I learned – of course you are terrified of memory – but most of my memories were actually full of joy, so once you get through that pain, you are in a very good place."

Born and raised in Sri Lanka, Deraniyagala holds a PhD in economics from the University of Oxford and currently teaches at both SOAS University of London and Columbia University. In recent years, her work has turned to the economics of disasters. Her rare appearance at GU-Q offered students, faculty, and members of the public an intimate glimpse into the relationship between storytelling

and moving past trauma.

Kamila Shamsie guided the conversation with empathy and insight, drawing connections between memory, survival, and how language can both shield and expose writers and their readers.

In his introduction, dean Safwan Masri, who established the Writer-in-Residence programme in 2024, thanked Shamsie for her service as the programme's inaugural author. "Over the past year, Qalam has brought us together with some of the most celebrated voices in literature from the Global South," he said, adding: "It has been a privilege to share these evenings of literature and dialogue with you."

Awqaf opens new mosque in Muaither Al Wukair



The Ministry of Endowments (Awqaf) and Islamic Affairs has inaugurated a new mosque in Muaither Al Wukair area.

The Amna bint Mohammed bin Mubarak Mosque covers an area of 2,909sq m and accommodates 270 male and female worshippers. It also includes an attached imam's residence.

An Awqaf statement said the mosque, endowed by Sheikha Munira bint Ghanem bin Abdulrahman al-Abdulahman al-Thani and her sisters, is part of the ministry's plan to expand and develop mosques across the country, keeping pace with urban and population growth, in line with Qatar National Vision 2030.

The mosque includes an ablution space and many public parking spaces, some of which are designated for people with disabilities, with well-planned entrances and exits. (QNA)

Chiyoda Almana holds annual beach cleaning

In a strong display of environmental stewardship and community engagement, Chiyoda Almana Engineering organised its annual beach cleaning activity at Al Wakrah Public Beach, in collaboration with the Ministry of Municipality and Urban Planning, a statement said.

This year's initiative brought together Chiyoda Almana employees and their families, uniting them under a shared commitment to sustainability and environmental care. The event is part of the company's long-standing Corporate Social Responsibility programme and held annually to commemorate the company's establishment day – a tradition that began in 2008. Participants collected plastic waste, comprising discarded fishing gear and other debris, working together to preserve the natural beauty of Al Wakrah's coastline and promote marine ecosystem health.

Children and families also took part in an educational session delivered by the health,

safety, environment and security manager of the company on environmental awareness, reinforcing the importance of community-driven conservation while taking all safety precautions to ensure safety of the participating members in any environmental activity.

Seiichiro Togashi, managing director of Chiyoda Almana, expressed gratitude for the enthusiastic turnout.

"We are proud to continue this meaningful tradition, which not only strengthens our bond with the local community but also reflects our core values of sustainability and social responsibility. Partnering with the Ministry of Municipality and Urban Planning has made this initiative even more impactful."

Chiyoda Almana's annual beach clean-up stands as a testament to its enduring commitment to creating a greener and cleaner future for Qatar, aligning with the nation's National Vision 2030 goals, the statement added.



AlRayan Bank takes part in Senyar Festival



AlRayan Bank participated in the Senyar 2025 Haddaq and Laffah Fishing Festival.

AlRayan Bank participated in the Senyar 2025 Haddaq and Laffah Fishing Festival, a distinguished national event that celebrates Qatar's rich maritime traditions while promoting environmental and economic sustainability.

Senyar 2025 has brought together 54 teams and a total of 610 participants, uniting sea enthusiasts and heritage advocates from across the country.

As part of its ongoing brand visibility strategy, AlRayan Bank's newly refreshed logo was prominently displayed throughout the event – from banners and traditional sails to participant kits – reflecting the bank's renewed commitment to community

engagement and cultural connection. The 11th edition of the festival, which encourages the use of traditional, non-motorised wooden boats (shuwaihs), aligns closely with AlRayan Bank's environmental sustainability goals.

By minimising carbon emissions and reducing water pollution, the initiative contributes meaningfully to preserving Qatar's marine ecosystems.

Beyond its ecological impact, the Senyar Festival serves as a vital platform for preserving Qatar's maritime heritage and supporting the cultural legacy of the Gulf.

It also fosters economic and social sustainability by empowering local artisans, boat builders, and marine-based

trades – ensuring that traditional knowledge and craftsmanship continue to thrive in modern times.

Commenting on the initiative, Eman al-Naemi, assistant general manager – corporate communications at AlRayan Bank, stated: "Our participation in the Senyar 2025 Festival reflects AlRayan Bank's deep-rooted commitment to sustainability, community, and culture. Through initiatives like this, we continue to reinforce our brand presence while supporting national efforts to preserve Qatari heritage, protect the environment, and promote local economic resilience. We are proud to align our identity with values that resonate so strongly with the people of Qatar."

Ooredoo reveals new partnership with Rafeeq

Ooredoo has announced a new partnership between its Nojoom Rewards Programme and Rafeeq, which aims to expand the redemption opportunities available to Nojoom members.

The partnership will not only facilitate customer convenience but also promote the innovative services available at local Qatari businesses, a statement said.

Rafeeq, a 100% Qatari-owned platform, has established a reputation as a trusted provider of essential daily services, offering everything from food and groceries to florists, hotel booking, pharmacies, and beauty shops – all with the highest commitment to quality service.

Founded in 2018, Rafeeq has been a disruptor in the Qatari market with its all-in-one service model. This forward-thinking approach aligns with Ooredoo's innovative outlook and reinforces the mutual vision to connect customers with unparalleled experiences.

Through the collaboration, Nojoom members can now redeem their loyalty points for vouchers on the Rafeeq platform, which are converted into wallet credit – allowing them to make multiple purchases across Rafeeq's extensive range of services.

While the initial launch focuses on awareness, customers can look forward to exclusive free delivery vouchers for redemptions made until May



23, 2025. Sabah Rabiah al-Kuwari, senior director, Marketing Communications, said, "By integrating Rafeeq into Nojoom's redemption options, we are offering our members an unparalleled opportunity to enhance their everyday lives with effortless access to essential services provided by a leading Qatari business."

Abdullah Thamer Alhemaiddi, CEO of Rafeeq, added: "Rafeeq's mission has always been to meet our customers' needs no matter where they are in Qatar, and this partnership introduces new and innovative means to fulfil that promise."

Qatar attends GCC Public Prosecution meeting

The Public Prosecution participated in the 12th meeting of the heads of inspection departments of the public prosecution bodies and state prosecutors of the GCC countries, held in Riyadh.

First Attorney-General and Director of the Judicial Inspection Department Abdullah Mohammed al-Maliki led the Public Prosecution delegation at the meeting. The meeting discussed a number of topics on the agenda, especially the preparation of a unified draft code of conduct for members of the Public Prosecution in the GCC countries.

This meeting is part of a series of meetings held by the GCC general secretariat to enhance legal integration among member states, aiming to unify legal systems and practices in the region. (QNA)



Qatar Charity launches aid project in Djibouti



With the generous support of Qatari People, Qatar Charity (QC) has launched a relief and development aid project in Djibouti to assist the most vulnerable groups. The project was inaugurated under the patronage of the Minister of Social Affairs and Solidarity Aloha Ismail Abdo, and in the presence of Qatar's ambassador to Djibouti, Dr Rashid bin Shafi' al-Marri. Also present were the Ministry of Women and Family's secretary-general Anisa Hassan Bahdon, QC's humanitarian interventions head Ibrahim al-Janahi; and QC office director Ghada Ezz al-Din.

The project is expected to benefit 30,000 people, including needy families, orphans, and widows, while also contributing to the economic empowerment of youth through job creation. It further seeks to strengthen vital sectors such as education and healthcare, thereby promoting the principle of sustainable development. The relief and development aid project includes a wide range of support items, such as tents, water filters, water filtration devices, solar-powered lamps, kitchen utensil sets, sewing machines, electronic wheelchairs, manual wheelchairs, three-wheeled tuk-tuk vehicles, and school desks and chairs.

"This event comes just one week after the signing of a partnership agreement between the Ministry of Social Affairs and Solidarity and Qatar Charity, reflecting a swift response and a strong humanitarian commitment," minister Aloha said. "This valuable contribution will enable us to respond swiftly to the needs of local communities, as identified during our recent social convoy to the country's interior regions," she added. Al-Janahi described the project has great importance to the most vulnerable social groups, especially persons with disabilities, as it provides them with essential equipment that facilitates mobility and enhances their daily quality of life.



Qatar-Saudi panel on combating drug trafficking holds meeting



The first meeting of the joint Qatari-Saudi committee tasked with activating the bilateral agreement on combating illicit drug trafficking took place in Doha yesterday. The Qatari delegation was headed by Colonel Mohammed Abdullah al-Khater, who serves as Director of Anti-Narcotics Operations Department at the General Directorate of Drug Enforcement. The Saudi delegation was led by Director of International Co-operation at the General Directorate of Narcotics Control Col Mansoor bin Saleh al-Ghamdi. The meeting dealt with several items on its agenda and adopted relevant recommendations. (QNA)

Iran criticises 'hostile' US sanctions ahead of new talks

AFP
Tehran

Iran's foreign ministry yesterday condemned new US sanctions targeting its oil network, calling the move a sign of Washington's "hostile approach" ahead of a third round of nuclear talks.

In a statement, foreign ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei said Washington's policy of imposing sanctions on the Iranian people was a "clear contradiction with the United States' demand for dialogue and negotia-

tion and indicates America's lack of goodwill and seriousness in this regard". On Tuesday, the US Department of the Treasury imposed sanctions on an Iranian shipping network and an individual named Asadoollah Emamjomeh, who Washington says is the network's owner. It said in a statement the network was "collectively responsible for shipping hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of Iranian LPG and crude oil to foreign markets". "Emamjomeh and his network sought to export thousands of

shipments of LPG — including from the United States — to evade US sanctions and generate revenue for Iran," said Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent. "The United States remains committed to holding accountable those who seek to provide the Iranian regime with the funding it needs to further its destabilising activities in the region and around the world." The sanctions came after Tehran and Washington held two rounds of indirect nuclear talks on consecutive Saturdays in Muscat and Rome, starting on April 12.

HRW accuses Israel of 'indiscriminate' attacks on Lebanese civilians

AFP
Beirut

Human Rights Watch accused Israel yesterday of "indiscriminate" attacks on civilians during its recent war with Hezbollah, saying two deadly strikes in east Lebanon should be investigated as war crimes. A November 27 ceasefire sought to end more than a year of hostilities between the two sides that began with Hezbollah's cross-border fire at Israel in support of its Palestinian ally Hamas. More than 4,000 people were

killed in Lebanon, most of them during two months of all-out war that erupted in September, according to Lebanese authorities. Among the dead were hundreds of Hezbollah fighters and a slew of senior commanders. HRW said "two unlawful Israeli strikes" on the town of Yunin in the eastern Bekaa Valley that killed more than 30 people "were apparent indiscriminate attacks on civilians". "At least one of the attacks used an air-dropped bomb equipped with a United States-produced Joint Direct Attack Munition (JDAM) guidance kit," it said.

Palestinian panel slams Israeli attack on civilian shelters

QNA
Gaza

The Palestinian National Council (PNC) condemned the heinous crime committed by the Israeli occupation forces, which brutally shelled the tents of displaced people in Jabalia and the Yafa School in the Tuffah neighbourhood east of Gaza City, killing a number of children and women. The PNC considered it a war crime against humanity. A statement issued yesterday by the PNC affirmed that the deliberate targeting of defenceless civilians in shelters is an escalation in the policy of genocide and ethnic cleansing practiced by the extremist right-wing government in Israel.

QNL signs pact with France's BnF to enhance cultural collaboration

Qatar National Library (QNL) and the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF) signed a new memorandum of understanding (MoU) to foster collaboration in digitisation, preservation and scholarly research, with a focus on Islamic heritage and the history of the Gulf region.

The signing ceremony was attended by HE the Minister of State and President of Qatar National Library Dr Hamad bin Abdulaziz al-Kawari and French Minister of Culture Rachida Dati.

The MoU builds on the long-standing cultural ties between Qatar and France, which have gained momentum in recent years. Signed by Executive Director of QNL Tan Huism and Director General of the BnF Philippe Lonne, the MoU reaffirms both institutions' commitment to knowledge exchange and mutual cultural understanding. It marks the continuation of a fruitful partnership between QNL and several French cultural entities. The agreement outlines multiple areas of co-operation focusing on heritage preservation and enhancing accessibility. Key initiatives include the analysis of pigments and dyes used in ancient Qur'anic manuscripts held by both libraries, capacity building and expertise exchange in collection management, advanced technologies,



and digital content development. It will also involve the digitisation of rare Islamic scientific manuscripts from the BnF, which will enrich Qatar Digital Library for the benefit of local and international researchers. HE al-Kawari said: "France has always been a valuable partner in supporting Qatar National Library's cultural and academic initiatives. This MoU is the culmination of years of meaningful collaboration and reflects the deep-rooted historical and cultural ties between Qatar and France. Our past partnerships have included joint exhibitions, lectures and seminars with the French embassy, as well as an MoU with the French Diplomatic Archives. "Two years ago, we celebrated the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between our two na-

tions, and today we are entering a new, broader phase of cooperation-one that furthers our mission of heritage preservation and fosters knowledge as a bridge between peoples". Tan Huism said: "We are proud of our enduring relationship with France's leading cultural institutions, and we are particularly honoured to partner with one of the world's oldest and most respected national libraries. This collaboration reflects our steadfast commitment to global partnerships that enrich digital content and open new horizons for academic exploration. By digitising rare Islamic scientific manuscripts and sharing preservation expertise, we are jointly working to realise our shared vision of libraries as beacons of creativity and platforms for intercultural dialogue". (QNA)

Top experts to attend Aspetar Int'l Radiology Conference in May

Aspetar, Orthopaedic and Sports Medicine Hospital, will host the Aspetar International Radiology Conference and Workshops from May 9 to 11, a statement said. The programme which integrates cutting-edge theoretical knowledge with practical, skill-enhancing sessions, has seen all seats being fully reserved within hours of the initial announcement. This exceptional level of demand underscores Aspetar's recognised leadership in sports medicine education and innovation, it was explained. As a globally trusted institution for musculoskeletal care, Aspetar's specialised expertise in radiology is highly sought after by physicians, radiologists, and allied health professionals dedicated to expanding their knowledge and practical proficiencies in this critical field. Organised in collaboration with the International Skeletal Society, the conference will feature international faculty of leading experts in musculoskeletal radiology and sports medicine. The speakers include Dr Ramy



Mansour, a renowned authority on knee and upper limb imaging and the innovative applications of artificial intelligence; Dr Guillaume Bierry, a figure in advanced imaging for hip, groin, and lower limb pathologies; Dr Bruce Forster, widely recognised for his groundbreaking work in dynamic imaging within the context of major sporting events; Dr Marcelo Bordalo, chief of radiology at Aspetar, specialising in the intricate details of muscle injury imaging; and Dr Maryam al-Naimi, an expert in ultrasound imaging techniques, plasma injection for joint treatment, and precise injury assessment.

"The remarkable enthusiasm and unprecedented demand for the Aspetar International Radiology Conference and Workshops unequivocally affirm our institution's global leadership in the realm of sports medicine imaging," stated Salwa Allenjawi, director of Medical Imaging and co-chairperson of the scientific committee.

Cabinet approves decrees to support sustainable energy, water sources

From Page 1

The Cabinet also approved a draft decision of the Minister of Commerce and Industry to adopt a national technical regulation as a Qatari technical regulation. This draft decision was prepared by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry with the aim of facilitating trade exchange, improving the quality and safety of food and agricultural goods and products, and keeping pace with the modern developments in the field of standard specifications. The Cabinet decided to approve a draft agreement for cooperation in the field of agriculture between

the government of Qatar and the government of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria, a draft memorandum of understanding on cooperation in the maritime field between the government of Qatar and the government of the Republic of Cyprus, and a draft executive programme in the fields of sports and youth between the government of Qatar and the government of Hungary for the years 2025-2026. The Cabinet concluded its meeting by reviewing the annual report on the outcomes of the Anti-Concealment Committee's work for the year 2024, and took the appropriate decision in its regard.



Palestinians inspect the damage after an Israeli strike on the Yafa school building, a school-turned-shelter, in Gaza City, yesterday.



Australia opposition leader vows defence boost if elected

Reuters
Sydney

Australia's conservative opposition party leader Peter Dutton, trailing in polls related to the May 3 election, has pledged to boost defence spending to 3% of gross domestic product

within a decade, as the Trump administration pushes allies to spend more on security. "You don't achieve peace through weakness," Dutton said in Western Australia state yesterday, outlining his Liberal Party's defence policy, echoing US President Donald Trump's line of "peace through strength".

His party would offer the US military greater access to northern Australia, he added. Focusing on the conservative party's strength of national security in the final stretch of the campaign, Dutton, a former defence minister, said if he was elected his government would spend A\$21bn (\$13.41bn) more than Labor on de-

fence over five years to reach 2.5% of GDP, and 3% within a decade. Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's Labor government in 2023 committed to spend A\$368bn over three decades on AUKUS, Australia's biggest ever defence project with the US and Britain to acquire nuclear-powered submarines. Labor has previously said it would lift

defence spending by A\$50bn over a decade, but pledged no new money in this year's national budget. The Liberal's defence spokesman Andrew Hastie, a former special forces officer in Afghanistan, told reporters the defence force was suffering a recruitment and retention crisis. "We are going backwards on

AUKUS, this is a multi-generational nation-building endeavour and they are failing," he said. Hastie's Western Australian electorate is near the HMAS Stirling base where a rotating fleet of four United States Virginia attack submarines and a British Astute submarine will be based from 2027.

China, Russia may build nuclear plant on moon to power lunar station: official

Reuters
Shanghai

China is considering building a nuclear plant on the moon to power the International Lunar Research Station (ILRS) it is planning with Russia, a presentation by an official showed yesterday. China aims to become a major space power and land astronauts on the moon by 2030, and its planned Chang'e-8 mission for 2028 would lay the groundwork for constructing a permanent, manned lunar base. In a presentation in Shanghai, the 2028 mission's chief engineer Pei Zhaoyu showed that the lunar base's energy supply could also depend on large-scale solar arrays, and pipelines and cables for heating and electricity built on the moon's surface. Russia's space agency Roscosmos said last year it planned to build a nuclear reactor on the moon's surface with the China National Space Administration (CNSA) by 2035 to power the ILRS.

The inclusion of the nuclear power unit in a Chinese space official's presentation at a conference for officials from the 17 countries and international organisations that make up the ILRS suggests Beijing supports the idea, although it has never formally announced it. "An important question for the ILRS is power supply, and in this Russia has a natural advantage, when it comes to nuclear power plants, especially sending them into space, it leads the world, it is ahead of the US," Wu Weiren, chief de-

signer of China's lunar exploration programme, said on the sidelines of the conference. After little progress on talks over a space-based reactor in the past, "I hope this time both countries can send a nuclear reactor to the moon," Wu said. China's timeline to build an outpost on the moon's south pole coincides with Nasa's more ambitious and advanced Artemis programme, which aims to put US astronauts back on the lunar surface in December 2025. Wu said last year that a "basic model" of the ILRS, with the Moon's south pole as its core, would be built by 2035. In the future, China will create the "555 Project," inviting 50 countries, 500 international scientific research institutions, and 5,000 overseas researchers to join the ILRS. Researchers from Roscosmos also presented at the conference in Shanghai. The ILRS preceded Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 but incentives for co-operation between Roscosmos and CNSA have increased since the outbreak of the war, according to Chinese analysts. With China's rapid technological advances and lunar achievements, and as Western sanctions prevent Roscosmos from many imports of space technology and equipment, China can now "alleviate the pressure" on Russia and help it "achieve new breakthroughs in satellite launches, lunar exploration, and space stations," Liu Ying, a researcher at the Chinese foreign ministry's diplomatic academy, wrote in a journal article last year.

Fire ravages Manila residential area



A man sits atop a tanker watches the fire blazing at a residential area in Manila, Philippines, yesterday.

China says 'door open' to trade talks with Washington

AFP
Beijing

China yesterday said the door was "wide open" for trade talks with Washington, a day after US President Donald Trump signalled the possibility of a "substantial" lowering of tariffs on Beijing. Bringing further relief to global markets spooked by his aggressive trade policies, Trump also said on Tuesday he had no intention of firing US Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell. Since returning to the White House in January, Trump has imposed additional tariffs of 145% on many products from China. These include duties initially imposed over China's alleged role in the fentanyl supply chain and later over practices Washing-

ton deemed unfair. Beijing has responded with sweeping counter-tariffs of 125% on US goods, but reiterated yesterday that it was willing to engage in trade talks. "China pointed out early on that there are no winners in tariff wars and trade wars," Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Guo Jiakun told a daily news conference in Beijing. "The door for talks is wide open." Chinese President Xi Jinping also warned yesterday that trade wars "undermine the legitimate rights and interests of all countries, hurt the multilateral trading system and impact the world economic order", state media said. The reiteration from Beijing comes after Trump acknowledged that 145% was a "very high" level and that will "come down substantially". "They will not be anywhere near that

number" but "it won't be zero," he said. "Ultimately, they have to make a deal because otherwise, they're not going to be able to deal in the US." Those comments came after Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent told a closed-door event on Tuesday that the tariffs amounted to a reciprocal trade embargo. Bessent said he expected a de-escalation in the near future, according to a person who was in the room. Such a development should bring markets some relief, he added at the JPMorgan Chase-hosted event, which was not open to the press. Global finance ministers and central bankers will converge on Washington this week, with all eyes on the progress of trade talks on the sidelines as countries grapple with Trump's new and wide-ranging tariffs.

World Bank warns Lanka poverty alarmingly high

About a quarter of cash-strapped Sri Lanka's population was living in poverty despite the economy making a "remarkable recovery" from its worst financial meltdown, the World Bank said yesterday. The nation's growth surpassed the Bank's forecast of 4.4%, recording 5% in 2024 - the first economic expansion since the 2022 crisis. "While the economy is recovering, many Sri Lankans are still struggling... the poverty rate remained alarmingly high at 24.5% in 2024," the Bank said in its latest update on the island. "The labour market continues to struggle, leading to increased emigration as people look for opportunities abroad. Household incomes, employment and overall welfare remain well below pre-crisis levels." The Bank said wages have yet to catch up to their 2019 levels. Since then, poverty - measured by those earning less than \$3.65 a day - has doubled.

Singapore election campaign kicks off



Workers' Party (WP) supporters and People's Action Party (PAP) supporters gather at a nomination centre ahead of the general election in Singapore yesterday. Singapore's election campaign officially kicked off yesterday, with Prime Minister Lawrence Wong facing his first major test amid public frustration over rising living costs and a rejuvenated opposition. The May 3 polls are also coming as the wealthy city-state faces a turbulent global economy upended by US tariffs.

Japan PM to visit Vietnam, Philippines from Sunday

AFP
Tokyo

Japan's Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba will visit Vietnam and the Philippines next week, officials said yesterday, as Tokyo seeks to ramp up regional ties after Donald Trump's tariff onslaught. The April 27-30 trip follows a Southeast Asia tour by Chinese President Xi Jinping, with Beijing trying to position itself as a stable alternative to the US as leaders confront Trump's levies. "Strengthening relations with Southeast Asia, a global growth centre and strategic location, is one of the top priorities of Japanese diplomacy," chief Cabinet secretary Yoshimasa Hayashi told reporters. "Relations with Vietnam and the Philippines are of particular

importance, with their populations exceeding 100mn and as they continue their strong economic growth." Xi last week urged Vietnam to join forces with China to "oppose unilateral bullying and uphold the stability of the global free trade system". Despite being a key US ally and the biggest investor into the US, Japan has been pinched by steep tariffs imposed by Trump on imports of cars, steel and aluminium. Some Japanese companies, reportedly including gaming giant Nintendo, are increasingly shifting production to Vietnam and its neighbour Cambodia, partly because of the fallout from the last US-China trade war. An official statement from Manila said that Ishiba would visit the Philippines on Tuesday and Wednesday next week.

Cambodia canal's impact on Mekong questioned after China signs deal

Reuters
Phnom Penh

Cambodia should share a feasibility study on the impact of a planned China-backed canal that would divert water from the rice-growing floodplains of Vietnam's Mekong Delta, said the body overseeing the transnational river. After months of uncertainty, Phnom Penh last week signed a deal with China to develop the Funnan Techo Canal when President Xi Jinping visited Cambodia as part of a tour of Southeast Asia. It was Beijing's first explicit

public commitment to the project, giving state-controlled construction giant China Communications Construction Company (CCCC) a 49% stake through a subsidiary, but also linking Chinese support to the "sustainability" of the project. The secretariat of the intergovernmental Mekong River Commission (MRC) that co-ordinates the sustainable development of Southeast Asia's longest river said it had so far received from Cambodia only "basic information" on the project. "We hope that further details, including the feasibility study report and other relevant reports,

will be provided," the commission said in a statement. That would be needed "to ensure that any potential implications for the broader Mekong Basin are fully considered," it added. The canal has already created concern among environmentalists who say it could further harm the delicate ecology of the Mekong Delta, which is Vietnam's major rice growing region and is already facing problems of drought and salination as result of infrastructure projects upstream. Vietnam is also a leading exporter of rice. On Friday, the Cambodian government said the canal would have minimal environmental impact

and "aligns with the 1995 Mekong Agreement" which governs co-operation among riverine countries in Southeast Asia. The Mekong River, fed by a series of tributaries, flows some 4,900kms from its source in the Tibetan plateau through China, Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam to the sea. "Whether the Funnan Techo Canal violates the 1995 Mekong Agreement depends on several factors, including its connection to the Mekong mainstream," the Commission said, offering additional guidance to Phnom Penh and other member states "to ensure compliance".

Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam are members of the MRC while China and Myanmar are dialogue partners. The Cambodian government did not respond to questions about whether it intended to share the requested documents. Vietnam's foreign ministry did not reply to a request for comment after the deal with China was signed, but the country has repeatedly asked Cambodia to share more information about the canal to assess its impact. Xi made no reference to the canal in his public statements in Phnom Penh but a joint communique issued at the end of his visit

said China supported Cambodia in building the canal "in accordance with the principles of feasibility and sustainability". The deal signed by CCCC on Friday was for a 151.6km canal costing \$1.16bn. However, the Cambodian government says on the canal's official website that the waterway would stretch 180km and cost \$1.7bn at completion in 2028. The higher cost reflects a short section to be built by Cambodian firms as well as bridges and water conservation resources, the government said without clarifying who would pay for the bridges and water conservation.

DECISION

Saudi Arabia, India to boost co-operation in energy, defence

Saudi Arabia and India agreed to boost co-operation in supplies of crude and liquefied petroleum gas, according to a joint statement reported by the Saudi state news agency yesterday following a visit by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Saudi Arabia is one of the top exporters of petroleum to India. Modi met Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman before cutting short his visit and returning to New Delhi after a militant attack in Kashmir. The two countries also agreed to deepen their defence ties and improve their co-operation in defence manufacturing, along with agreements in agriculture and food security.

POLICY

Commissioning plan for certain solar power projects extended

India's ministry of new & renewable energy has granted a nine-month extension for the commissioning of certain solar projects by two government agencies, pushing the deadline to the end of December 2025 due to multiple challenges. In a letter to the Solar Energy Corporation of India and the Indian Renewable Energy Development Agency, the MNRE cited limited availability of domestically made photovoltaic solar modules, transmission infrastructure issues, and tender-related delays as reasons for the extension. The SECI and IREDA had requested the extension for projects tendered under the Central Public Sector Undertaking Scheme Phase-II.

DATA

India's infrastructure output rises 3.8% y-o-y in March

India's infrastructure output grew 3.8% year-on-year (y-o-y) in March on strong steel and cement production, government data showed. Infrastructure output, which tracks activity across eight sectors and makes up 40% of the country's industrial production, grew at a revised 3.4% in February, compared to the initial estimate of 2.9%. Cement output rose 11.6% in March, compared to a revised 10.8% increase in February, while steel production climbed 71% against a revised 6.9% advance a month earlier. Fertiliser production grew 8.8% compared with 10.2% in the prior month, while coal production gained 1.6% y-o-y compared to a 1.7% rise in February.

LITERATURE

Set of Shakespeare folios to be sold in rare London auction

A set of four Shakespeare folios estimated to be worth more than £3.5mn (\$4.7mn) will go on sale in London next month, auction house Sotheby's said yesterday. The First Folio, published in 1623, was the first collection of William Shakespeare's plays and is considered one of the most important books in English literature. Without it, up to half of the writer's plays would likely have been lost, including "Macbeth", "Twelfth Night" and "Julius Caesar". The set to be sold by Sotheby's on May 23, with an estimate of £3.5mn to £4.5mn, was brought together in 2016.

World leaders condemn attack on tourists

QNA/Reuters
New Delhi

A deadly militant attack on tourists in the Pahalgam area of Kashmir, India, has drawn widespread international condemnation. The Muslim World League (MWL) yesterday condemned the armed attack which led to several civilian casualties. In a statement, MWL emphasised its stance and that of the entire Muslim world, rejecting violence and terrorism in all its forms and pretexts. It stressed that these forms must be disassociated from any religion or culture. The UAE ministry of foreign affairs said "UAE expresses its strong condemnation of these criminal acts and its permanent rejection of all forms of violence and terrorism aimed at undermining security and stability in contravention of international law." US President Donald Trump wrote on social media platform Truth Social: "The US stands strong with India against terrorism. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and the people of India, have our full support and deepest sympathies." French President Emmanuel Macron in a post on X said "a heinous terrorist attack has struck India, claiming the lives of dozens of men and women from all walks of life. We share the profound sorrow of the victims' families, to whom I extend my heartfelt condolences." British Prime Minister Keir Starmer said on X "the horrific terrorist attack in Kashmir is utterly devastating". Starmer said his

thoughts were with those affected and with the people of India. United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres strongly condemns the armed attack and extended his heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said "we strongly condemn the heinous terrorist attack against tourists in Pahalgam. Our thoughts are with the families of the victims and we wish a speedy recovery for all the injured. Our heartfelt condolences go out to the people of India". Chinese ambassador to India Xu Feihong said he was shocked by the attack in Pahalgam. "Deep condolences for the victims and sincere sympathies to the injured and the bereaved families," he wrote on X. Israel's Foreign Minister Gideon Saar said he was deeply saddened by the "heinous terror attack". "Israel stands united with India in the fight against terror" he said in a post on X. EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas said: "I condemn the heinous terrorist attack in Pahalgam, Jammu and Kashmir, which claimed many innocent lives." Kallas also offered condolences to the victims and people of India and said the EU stands firm against terrorism. Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said he spoke to Prime Minister Modi and offered condolences on behalf of Australia. "The horrific loss of life of innocent civilians is an act of senseless violence which has shocked the world," he said on X. He said those responsible must be held to account.



Demonstrators hold a candle light vigil to condemn a militant attack on tourists near south Kashmir's scenic Pahalgam, in Srinagar yesterday.

India hunts for gunmen who killed 26 in Kashmir

Reuters
Srinagar, India

Indian security forces yesterday launched a massive hunt for militants suspected of killing 26 men at a tourist destination in Kashmir in the worst attack on civilians in the country in nearly two decades, with New Delhi pledging a strong response. At least 17 people were also injured in the shooting that took place on Tuesday in the Baisaran valley in the Pahalgam area of Kashmir. The dead included 25 Indians and one Nepalese national, police said. It was the worst attack on civilians in India since the 2008 Mumbai shootings, and shattered the relative calm in Kashmir, where tourism has boomed as an anti-India insurgency has waned in recent years. The attack is seen

as a setback to what Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party have projected as a major achievement in revoking the semi-autonomous status Jammu and Kashmir enjoyed and bringing peace and development to the region. Modi cut short his two-day visit to Saudi Arabia and returned to New Delhi yesterday morning. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman was also cutting short her visit to the US and Peru "to be with our people in this difficult and tragic time", her ministry said. Modi held a meeting with the national security adviser, the foreign minister and other senior officials at the airport and a special security cabinet meeting was held later in the day, a defence ministry official said. "We will not only reach those who have perpetrated this incident but also those who, sitting behind the scenes, have conspired to

commit such acts on the soil of India," Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said ahead of the meeting. "There will be a loud and clear response soon," he said at a memorial lecture for a former Indian Air Force chief. Security forces rushed to the Pahalgam area soon after the attack and began combing the forests there, two security sources said. About 100 people, suspected to have been militant sympathisers in the past, were called to police stations and questioned, they added. Police also released sketches of three of the four suspected attackers, who were dressed in traditional long shirts and loose trousers and one of them was wearing a bodycam, one security source said. There were about 1,000 tourists and about 300 local service providers and workers in the valley when the attack took place, he said.

Flipkart to shift base back to India from Singapore

Flipkart will shift its holding company from Singapore to India, the e-commerce company said as its parent Walmart aims to take the 17-year-old company public. Many Indian startups that once chose to be based abroad for better access to capital and smaller tax bills are now queuing to return home from financial hubs such as Singapore and the US due to better initial public offering (IPO) prospects in a country that does not allow dual listings. "This move represents a natural evolution, aligning our holding structure with our core operations," Flipkart said in a statement. Flipkart started in 2007 by selling books online and expanded into a behemoth that competes with Amazon in India. It moved its holding company to Singapore in 2011. Walmart bought a controlling stake in Flipkart in 2018, which also gave it ownership of PhonePe, a digital payments company owned by Flipkart at the time.

US vice-president, family visit Taj



US Vice-President J D Vance, his wife Usha Vance, daughter Mirabel and sons Ewan (left) and Vivek pose during their tour at the Taj Mahal in Agra yesterday. Vance said on Tuesday "good progress" had been made towards a trade deal with India after meeting with "tough negotiator" Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi.

LG, Samsung sue govt on e-waste pricing policy

Reuters
New Delhi

South Korea's LG and Samsung have sued India's government to quash a policy which increases payouts to electronic-waste recyclers, court filings show, joining other major companies in contesting the country's environmental rules citing business impact. The lawsuits mark an escalation of a standoff involving foreign companies' and Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government over its stance towards waste management practices. LG and Samsung did not respond to Reuters' requests for comment. India's environment ministry also did not respond. India is the third-biggest e-waste generator behind China and the US, but the government says only 43% of the country's e-waste last year was recycled

and at least 80% of the sector comprises informal scrap dealers. Daikin, India's Havells and Tata's Voltas have already sued Modi's administration. Samsung and LG had lobbied against a decision to fix a floor price payable to recyclers, which New Delhi says is needed to get more formal players into the sector and boost investment in e-waste recycling. LG's filing in the Delhi High Court, which is not public but was reviewed by Reuters, said the pricing rules "fail to take into consideration that merely by fleecing companies and taxing them in the name of the 'polluter pays principle'; the (government) objectives sought to be achieved cannot be achieved." "(If) the authorities have not been able to regulate the informal sector, then it is an enforcement failure," the 550-page court filing from April 16 showed.

Indian economy less vulnerable to global headwinds: RBI

Reuters
Mumbai

India's economy is relatively less vulnerable to global headwinds, and calibrated policy support could help the country turn current volatility into an opportunity, the Reserve Bank of India said in its April bulletin. "Although the dampening global economic outlook could impact India's economic growth through weaker external demand, the domestic growth engines...

consumption and investment, are relatively less susceptible to external headwinds," the RBI said in its article titled State of the Economy. Strong domestic growth impulses and sound macro-fundamentals have helped the economy stay resilient despite global trade tensions, it said, adding that prospects for the farm sector have been boosted by above-normal monsoon forecast. India's retail inflation slipped to a more-than-five-year low of 3.34% in March as food prices continued to moderate, creating room

for deeper central bank rate cuts amid fears the US-China trade war may hit global growth. Earlier in the month, RBI lowered its key policy rate for a second consecutive time and softened its monetary policy stance. It also cut the GDP growth estimate for the current fiscal year to 6.5% from 6.7%. Volatile global financial conditions could put emerging markets at risk from ripple effects and fuel another round of inflation globally, RBI said. "Going forward, India is poised

to benefit from supply chain realignments, diversified foreign direct investment sources, and engagement with global investors seeking resilience and scale, given its already established trade linkages," the central bank said. "India's consistent strength in services exports and remittance inflows continues to provide a vital buffer for the current account," it added. The World Bank yesterday cut its economic growth forecast for India, citing increased uncertainty in the global economy that will dim

prospects for most South Asian nations. The World Bank lowered its forecast for India by 0.4 percentage points to 6.3% for the fiscal year that started on April 1, from its previous forecast in October. "Benefits to private investment from monetary easing and regulatory streamlining are expected to be offset by global economic weakness and policy uncertainty," the World Bank said in its report on South Asia. It cut its growth forecasts for most South Asian nations, citing

"limited buffers to withstand global challenges." Earlier this week, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) also cut its economic growth forecast for India for the current fiscal year, citing increased trade tensions and global uncertainty. The IMF lowered its forecast to 6.2% from the 6.5% it had forecast in January for the current fiscal year. The World Bank and IMF's revised forecasts are marginally below the Reserve Bank of India's 6.5% growth estimate.

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GULF TIMES

AI just beginning to revolutionise the NBA game

It's not a scene out of the future, but a reality on the hard courts of today. Using artificial intelligence, a top basketball team found the right defensive strategy that made the difference to win the NBA championship.

Data specialist Rajiv Maheswaran declines to name the outfit that leveraged AI analysis to victory, saying in a corporate video only that it happened several years ago.

That was "the moment that sealed it," added the co-founder of tech startup Second Spectrum, which provides the league with swathes of player positioning data gathered during crucial games.

Analytics have transformed the NBA over the past decade, with AI and other breakthroughs still ramping up.

Embryonic in the early 2000s, the revolution truly took hold with motion-capture cameras installed in every venue in 2013.

Ten years later, new tech upgraded renderings of the court from 2D to 3D, unlocking even more precious data.

Cameras track 29 points for each player "so you know not just where they are, but you know where their elbow is, and you know where their knee is," said Ben Alamar, a sports analytics writer and consultant.

"You're actually able to see, yes, that was a high quality (defensive) closeout," said Tom Ryan, head of Basketball Research and Development at the NBA, describing an often-used manoeuvre.

"It's adding more context to that metric."

"Now all 30 teams are doing significant analysis with varying levels of success," said Alamar.

Houston, Golden State and Oklahoma City were often cited among early adopters at the turn of the 2010s.

This season, Oklahoma City is on top of regular season standings, "and they play different," said ESPN Analytics Group founder Dean Oliver.

"They force turnovers, and they have very few turnovers themselves. So there are definitely advantages to be gained."

"It's not going to turn a 25-win team into a 70-win team during the season, but it can turn a 50-win team into a 55, 56-win team," according to Alamar.

AI allows for "strategic insights" like "understanding matchups, finding the situations where players perform well, what combinations of players," he added.

None of the dozen teams contacted by AFP agreed to discuss their work on analytics.

"Teams are (understandably) secretive," Oliver confirmed.

Even before 3D, motion capture data was already shifting the game, taking basketball from a more controlled pace to something looser and faster, he added.

The data showed that faster play secures more open looks and a higher percentage of shots – a development that some criticise.

On average, three-point shot attempts have doubled over the last 15 years.

"As a league now, we look deep into analytics," Milwaukee point guard Damian Lillard noted at February's All-Star Game.

While it perhaps "takes away the originality of the game... you've got to get in line with what's working to win."

The league is taking the issue seriously enough that Commissioner Adam Silver recently mentioned that "some adjustments" could be made to address it. Even now, AI has "plenty of upside" yet to emerge, said Oliver.

"The data is massive, but converting that into information, into knowledge that can be conveyed to players, that they can absorb, all of those steps are yet to be done."

The league itself is pursuing several analytics and AI projects, including for real-time refereeing.

"The ROI (return on investment) is very clear," said Ryan. "It's about getting more calls right, faster and in a transparent way to our fans."

"We would love a world where if a ball goes out of bounds and you're not sure who it went off of, rather than going to replay you look at high frame rate video in real time with 99.9 percent accuracy... That's really our North Star."

Spatial data can also extend the fan experience, shown off during the recent "Dunk the Halls" Christmas game between San Antonio and New York.

An alternative telecast rendered the game in video game-style real-time display, with avatars replacing live action images.

"We want to experiment with all different types of immersive media," says Ryan. "We just want to be able to sell our game and present it in compelling ways." - AFP

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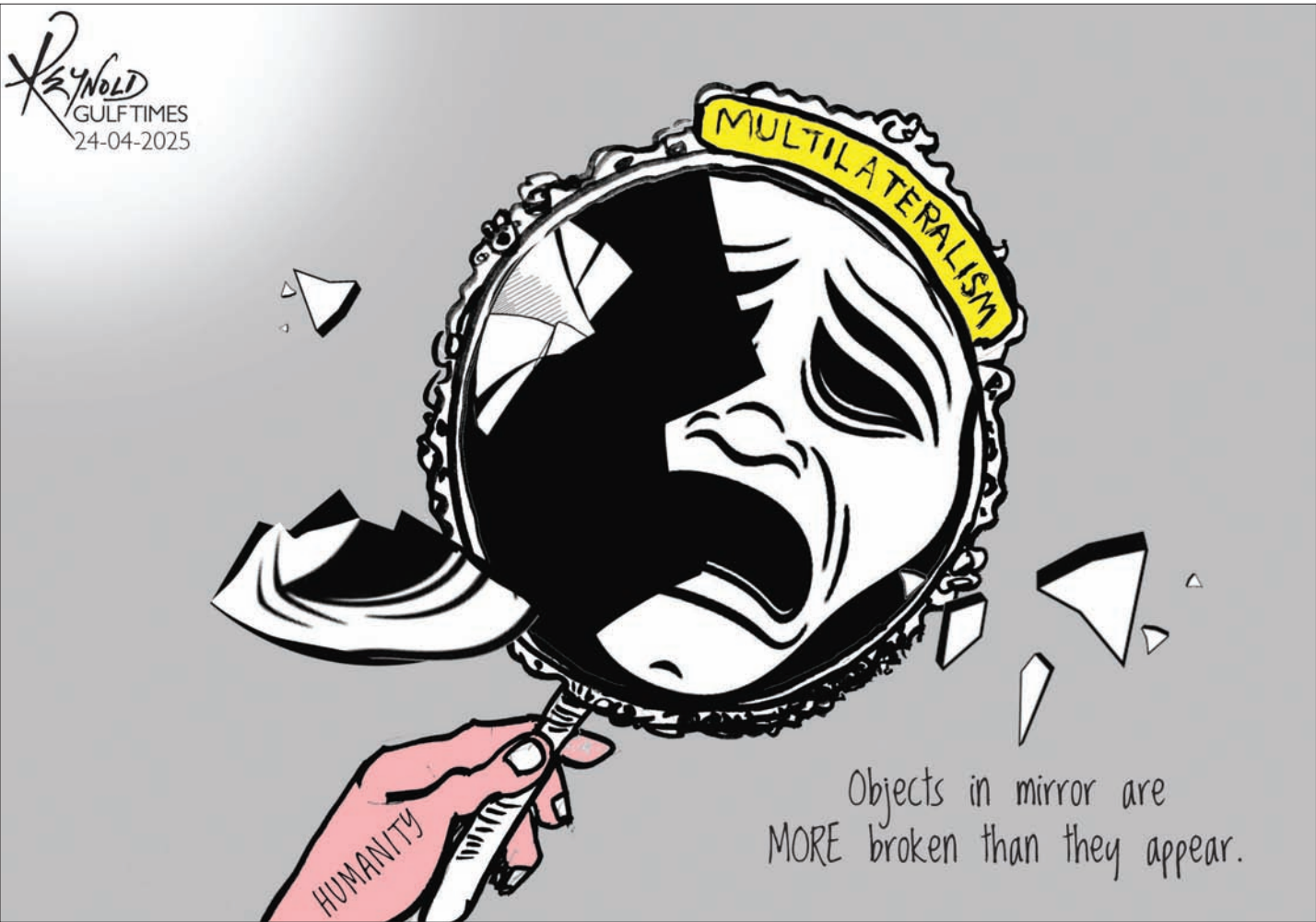
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As Trump eyes coal revival, his job cuts hobble black lung protections for miners

By Valerie Volcovi

Oak Hill (West Virginia)

Josh Cochran worked deep in the coal mines of West Virginia since he was 22 years old, pulling a six-figure salary that allowed him to buy a home with his wife Stephanie and hunt and fish in his spare time.

That ended two years ago when, at the age of 43, he was diagnosed with advanced black lung disease. He's now waiting for a lung transplant, breathes with the help of an oxygen tank, and needs help from his wife to do basic tasks around the house.

His saving grace, he says, is that he can still earn a living. A federal programme run by the Mine Safety and Health Administration and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health called Part 90 meant he was relocated from underground when he got his diagnosis to a desk job dispatching coal trucks to the same company, retaining his pay.

"Part 90 – that's only the thing you got," he told Reuters while signing a stack of documents needed for the transplant, a simple task that left him winded. "You can come out from underground, make what you made, and then they can't just get rid of you." That programme, which relocates coal miners diagnosed with black lung to safer jobs at the same pay – along with a handful of others intended to protect the nation's coal miners from the resurgence of black lung – is grinding to a halt due to mass layoffs and office closures imposed by President Donald Trump and billionaire Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency, according to Reuters reporting.

Reuters interviews with more than a dozen people involved in medical programmes serving the coal industry, and a review of internal documents from NIOSH, show that at least three such federal programmes have stopped their work in recent weeks. A decades-old programme operated by NIOSH to detect lung disease in coal miners, for example, has been suspended. Related programmes to provide X-rays and lung tests at mine sites have also shut down and it is now unclear who will enforce safety regulations like new limits on silica dust exposure after nearly half of the offices of MSHA are under review to have their leases terminated.

The details about the black lung programmes halted by the government's mass layoffs and funding cuts have not previously been reported.

"It's going to be devastating to miners," said Anita Wolfe, a 40-year NIOSH veteran who remains in touch with the agency. "Nobody is going to be monitoring the mines." The cuts come as Trump voices support for the domestic coal industry, a group that historically has supported the president.

At a White House ceremony flanked by coal workers in hard hats earlier this month, Trump signed executive orders meant to boost the industry, including by prolonging the life of ageing coal-fired power plants.

"For too long, coal has been a dirty word that most are afraid to speak about," said Jeff Crowe, who Trump identified as a West Virginia miner. Crowe is the superintendent of American Consolidated Natural Resources, successor to Murray Energy.

"We're going to put the miners back to work," Trump said during the ceremony. "They are great people, with great families, and come from areas of the country that we love and we really respect."

Andrew Nixon, a spokesperson for the Department of Health and Human Services, which oversees NIOSH, said that streamlining government will better position HHS to

carry out its Congressionally mandated work protecting Americans.

Courtney Parella, a spokesperson for the Department of Labour said MSHA inspectors "continue to carry out their core mission to protect the health and safety of America's miners."

Black lung has been on the rise over the last two decades, and has increasingly been reported by young workers in their 30s and 40s despite declining coal production.

NIOSH estimates that 20% of coal miners in Central Appalachia now suffer from some form of black lung disease, the highest rate that has been detected in 25 years, as workers in the ageing mines blast through rock to reach diminishing coal seams. Around 43,000 people are employed by the coal industry, according to the Bureau of Labour Statistics.

Around 875 of NIOSH's roughly 1,000-strong workforce across the country were terminated amid sweeping job cuts announced by HHS this month, according to three sources who worked for NIOSH. That's put the department's flagship black lung programme, the Coal Workers' Health Surveillance Program, on hold, according to an internal NIOSH e-mail dated April 4.

"We will continue to process everything we currently have for as long as we can. We have no further information about the future of CWHSP at this time," the e-mail says.

The CWHSP's regular black lung screenings, which deploy mobile trailers to coal mines to test coal miners on site have ended too, because there's no money to fuel the vehicles or epidemiologists to review the on-site X-rays or lung tests, according to sources familiar with the programme.

For many miners, this programme is the sole provider of medical checkups, according to NIOSH veteran Wolfe.

The loss of staff at NIOSH has also crippled black lung-afflicted miners' ability to get relocated with pay as part of the Part 90 programme.

Miners can only become eligible for the Part 90 benefit by submitting lung X-rays to NIOSH that show black lung. But all NIOSH epidemiologists in West Virginia required to review the X-rays were laid off, according to Scott Laney, who lost his job as an epidemiologist.

Laney told Reuters he and his fellow laid-off team have been working in an informal "war room" in his living room to try to draw

attention to the issue among Washington lawmakers.

"I want to make sure that if there are more men who are going into the mines as a result of an executive order, or whatever the mechanism, they should be protected when they do their work," he said.

Sam Petsonk, a West Virginia attorney who represents black lung patients, said relocating sick miners is crucial because the risks of continuing to work in dust-heavy areas while ill are so severe.

"It gets to the point that days and months matter for this programme," he said.

Last year, MSHA finalised a new regulation that would cut by half the permissible exposure limit to crystalline silica for miners and other workers – an attempt to combat the rising rates of black lung.

Enforcing that rule, which comes into force in August after being pushed back from April by the Trump administration, may prove difficult given the staff cuts and planned office closures at MSHA, said Chris Williamson, a former Assistant Secretary of Labour for Mine Safety and Health under the Biden administration. He told Reuters that before he left MSHA in January, there were 20 mine inspector positions unfilled. A pipeline of 90 people that had already secured MSHA inspector job offers, meanwhile, had their offers rescinded after Trump took office, and around 120 other people took buyouts.

Mine inspectors are meant to uphold safety standards that reduce injuries, deaths and illnesses at the mines.

That loss of staff and resources raises the likelihood that black lung could become even more pervasive among Appalachian coal miners – particularly if mining activity increases, said Drew Harris, a black lung specialist in southern Virginia.

"As someone who sees hundreds of miners with this devastating disease it's hard for me to swallow cutting back on the resources meant to prevent it," he said.

Kevin Weikle, a 35-year-old miner in West Virginia who was diagnosed with advanced black lung disease during a screening in 2023, said the cuts make no sense at a time the administration wants to see coal output rise and will set back safety standards by decades.

"Don't get me wrong, I mean, I'm Republican," Weikle said. "But I think there are smarter ways to produce more coal and not gut safety." - Reuters



Michael Streeby, 67, a retired underground coal miner with 30 years of experience, diagnosed with advanced black lung disease, is examined by nurse practitioner Shelly Pack at the Bluestone Health Center in Princeton, West Virginia, US. (Reuters)

Veteran Chinese astronaut to lead fresh crew to space station

AFP
Jiuquan

China announced yesterday that a veteran astronaut will lead two crew members on their first flight to the Tiangong space station, the latest milestone in its race to send a manned mission to the Moon by 2030.

The Shenzhou-20 mission is scheduled to blast off at 5:17pm today from the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center in northwest China, Lin Xiqiang, deputy director of the China Manned Space Agency (CMSA), told a news conference.

At the helm will be Chen Dong, a 46-year-old former fighter pilot and experienced space explorer who, in 2022, became the first Chinese astronaut to spend more than 200 cumulative days in orbit.

Speaking about today's Shenzhou mission — which will be his third — Chen said he was “still very excited”.

“Every space journey is very unique, so I look forward to bringing in more experience and breakthroughs in the flight,” the mission commander said.

Joining Chen will be two other male astronauts, Chen Zhongrui, a

40-year-old former air force pilot, and Wang Jie, a 35-year-old former space technology engineer.

Both will be embarking on their first space flight, Lin said.

“Today, I am on the point of realising my dream of flying in space,” Chen Zhongrui told another news conference yesterday organised to introduce the astronauts to the public.

“To be honest, when we first started training together, we were still a little nervous,” he said of himself and Wang.

“Now (the three crew members) are integrated like a single person,” he said. The astronauts currently aboard the Tiangong space station are scheduled to return to Earth on April 29 after completing handover procedures with the incoming crew, Lin said.

China's space programme, the third to put humans in orbit, has also landed robotic rovers on Mars and the Moon.

The Tiangong space station — crewed by teams of three astronauts that are exchanged every six months — is the crown jewel of China's space project.

This mission will “lay a firmer technological foundation for a crewed lunar mission and follow-



Astronauts for China's Shenzhou-20 space mission (L-R) Wang Jie, Chen Dong and Chen Zhongrui wave during a press conference a day before the launch of the mission, at the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre in the Gobi desert, in northwest China yesterday. (AFP)

up tasks”, said Zhou Yaqiang, a top technology official at the China Manned Space Program.

An AFP team joined a government tour of the remote launch site yesterday afternoon.

The rocket stood in desert sunlight encased in a sky-blue launch tower, surrounded by fluttering red flags bearing patriotic slogans.

Workers in blue jumpsuits buzzed around the tower and the whir of machinery could be heard.

China has ramped up plans to achieve its “space dream” under President Xi Jinping.

Beijing says it aims to send a crewed mission to the Moon by 2030, where it intends to construct a base on the lunar surface.

China has poured billions of dollars into its space programme in a bid to catch up with the United States and Russia and achieve its celestial goals.

Despite the programme's “impressive” pace of development, China still “lags significantly behind the United States”, Marc Ju- lienne, director of the Center for

Asian Studies at the French Institute of International Relations, told AFP. However, US President Donald Trump “may inadvertently give China an edge by cutting budgets allocated to research and certain space programmes”, he said.

Like previous missions, the Shenzhou-20 crew will conduct experiments in physics and life sciences and will install protective equipment against space debris.

For the first time, they will also bring aboard planarians — aquatic flatworms known for their regenerative abilities.

“The results could help address problems related to injuries sustained in space environments,” Lin said.

China has been excluded from the International Space Station since 2011, when the United States banned Nasa from collaborating with Beijing.

It has since sought to bring other countries into its space programme. China and Pakistan signed an agreement in February paving the way for the first foreign astronaut to board the Tiangong space station.

As part of this process, “two Pakistani astronauts will be selected to come to China for training”, the CMSA confirmed yesterday.

Million-dollar donor fund backs protesting Serbian teachers

AFP
Belgrade

Thousands of Serbian teachers, unpaid for months for supporting protesting students, are relying on donations from a sympathetic public, with over a million dollars raised through a citizen-led platform to make up for part of their lost income.

Since November, when 16 people died in the collapse of a newly renovated railway station in Novi Sad — a tragedy widely blamed on corruption and poor oversight — students, followed by their teachers, have led an anti-corruption protest movement that has spread across Serbia.

Despite not being officially on strike but facing empty classrooms as pupils demonstrate, thousands of teachers — 20,000 according to unions — stopped receiving their pay, in what they say is punishment for backing the protests.

“We received no payment at all in February — except for a small compensation covering the national holiday, which amounted to around 4,500 dinars (\$44) for a full-time teacher,” Biljana Bogojevic, a high school language and literature teacher, told AFP.

With pupils absent, she has been turning up for work to perform other tasks outside of lessons — but in March, she received no pay whatsoever — or a “potato”, as Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic dismissively put it.

In response, activists stepped up to organise a way for Serbians to offer support. After launching an initial online platform connecting individual teachers with donors, the organisers of the project reached out to Aleksandar Kavcic, a Serbian scientist, philanthropist, and head of the foundation that bears his name.

“The foundation already had the infrastructure to accept and distribute donations,” says Kavcic, who donated himself — as did “several companies, athletes” and others.

As of April 22, the solidarity platform had received \$1.1mn.

“It's great because citizens saw what we were doing and helped however they could. They knew it was very hard for us,” said Ana Dimitrijevic, an English teacher at a Belgrade high school.

“On the other hand, it's not very pleasant to receive, let's say, charity,” added Dimitrijevic, a union representative.

She remains fully committed to her students — and still goes to school every day, even though there are no classes.

As the teachers are not technically on strike despite supporting the protests, their pay is a legal grey area that allows for each headteacher to act as they see fit. The president gave them clear instructions: “For those who didn't work, they'll be getting 'potatoes' — that is, nothing,” Vucic said in mid-April.

“What's happening to us feels like pressure, a way to force us to give up the movement. As if principals had full freedom to punish ‘disobedient’ teachers,” said Biljana Bogojevic.

“It's revenge,” agreed Kavcic, “retribution against the whole education system, because this education system has been at the forefront of this, we can call it, rebellion.” Kavcic, who established his foundation after winning a patent-theft lawsuit in the United States, is a former Harvard professor and has long defended a Serbian education system that he sees as beleaguered, with teachers underpaid.

“Look at our teachers' salaries!” Kavcic told AFP: Serbian teachers earn between \$800 and \$1,140 per month in a country where the national average is around \$900.

The philanthropist became known to the Serbian public when he began distributing free textbooks to bypass what he calls a “corrupt system” that he claims charges parents 10 times too much.

Serbians “have realised that if we carry on like this, the country has no future,” he said. “We're a small country. If we don't have educated people, we have nothing.” He accused the government of trying to destroy education to make citizens subservient.

“Educated people are not loyal. They don't subscribe to this personality cult. Educated people are dangerous for an authoritarian government.”

For teacher Bogojevic, “it may now be our duty, as teachers, to nurture the solidarity that has emerged from these difficult times.”



People welcome Serbian university students who cycled more than 1,300km during the last week, from Novi Sad to Strasbourg, France, to draw EU attention to their months-long protests against corruption, in Novi Sad, Serbia. (Reuters)

Crowds bid farewell to Pope on first day of lying in state

AFP
Vatican City

Tens of thousands of mourners paid last respects to Pope Francis at St Peter's Basilica yesterday, on the first of three days of lying in state for the head of the world's Catholics.

Pilgrims and tourists queued for hours to file past the open coffin of the Argentine pontiff, who died on Monday aged 88.

“We wanted to say thank you to one of the most humble popes,” said Portuguese medical student Francisca Antunes, 21, after leaving the Vatican basilica with a friend.

“It felt really good to be in there,” she told AFP.

By 7:45pm (, almost nine hours after the doors of the basilica opened to the public, more than 19,400 people had paid their respects, the Vatican said.

Simonetta Marini, a 67-year-old from Rome, praised Francis's human touch and defence of the world's underdogs, which helped steer the Catholic Church towards a more inclusive, compassionate path. “I came to say a last goodbye to a great man. He stood for the people,” Marini said.

Francis was an energetic reformer who took over as leader of the world's 1.4bn Catholics in 2013.

His death, after a stroke and heart failure, came nearly a month after he left hospital where he spent five weeks being treated for pneumonia.

Dressed in his papal vestments — a red chasuble, white mitre and black shoes — and with a rosary laced between his fingers, the Pope's body has been laid out in a red-lined wooden coffin.

For three days, it will rest on a low bier before the Altar of the



Faithful queue to enter to pay respects to Pope Francis as he lies in state in St. Peter's Basilica, as seen from Rome, Italy, yesterday. (Reuters)

Confession underneath the basilica's soaring dome painted by Michelangelo. His funeral is on Saturday.

The public viewing continued until midnight yesterday, then from 7am to midnight today and 7am to 7pm tomorrow. The Vatican said the hours could be extended.

Vincenza Nocilla, a 67-year-old retired nurse, left her home in Formia, south of Rome, at 4am to be among the first to see the pontiff. She said it was “really moving” but noted, however, that “they don't let you stay long, you walk by, say a quick goodbye and go”.

An Irish couple said it was a “priority” to see Francis while on holiday in Rome, and hailed his efforts to tackle clerical sexual abuse.

“He was a great man, a great advocate for the poor, the underprivileged and those who suffered at the hands of his flock,” said Clodhna Devlin.

Hours before, a procession of cardinals, clergy and Swiss Guards escorted Francis's coffin from the chapel of the Casa Santa Marta,

where he lived during his 12-year papacy, to St Peter's, as the basilica's bells tolled.

Scores of world leaders and dignitaries will attend the funeral, including US President Donald Trump, Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelensky, Argentine President Javier Milei and Spain's royal couple.

Up to 170 foreign delegations are expected, the interior ministry said.

Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni paid tribute at a special joint session of parliament in Rome, before going to pay her own respects at St Peter's.

She described Francis as a “determined” man who nevertheless made others feel at ease.

“With him you could talk about everything. You could open up, and tell your story without filters or fear of being judged,” she said.

After the funeral, Francis's coffin will be taken to his favourite church, Rome's papal basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore, where it will be interred in the ground and marked by a simple inscription: Franciscus.

Authorities have ramped up security for the funeral. The

weekend is already due to be busy because of a public holiday tomorrow.

A spokesman for Italy's civil protection unit, Pierfrancesco Demilito, told AFP it was impossible to predict the expected crowds, but estimated “several hundred thousand at least”.

After the funeral, all eyes will turn to the process to choose Francis's successor.

Cardinals from around the world are returning to Rome for the conclave, which should begin no less than 15 days and no more than 20 after a pope's death.

Only those under the age of 80 are eligible to vote.

Cardinals have already met twice, in so-called general congregations — the first time on Tuesday, when they set the funeral date, and again yesterday.

Some 103 cardinals out of 252 attended yesterday's meeting, the Vatican said. Only 135 are eligible to vote in the conclave.

They agreed a plan for the traditional nine days of mourning for the pope, the so-called “novendiales”, which will run from Saturday until May 4.

Another meeting was set for today at 9am, but the Vatican has brushed aside hopes of an announcement of the conclave date, insisting the focus is on the funeral.

At the time of his death, Francis was under doctors' orders to rest for two months. But the headstrong pope continued to make public appearances despite appearing tired and short of breath.

On Easter Sunday, he circled St Peter's Square in his popemobile to greet crowds, stopping to kiss babies along the way.

He died the next morning after having a stroke, then falling into a coma and suffering heart failure, according to his death certificate.

Gunmen kill two Pakistan cops guarding polio vaccinators

AFP
Quetta

Gunmen killed two Pakistani police officers guarding polio vaccinators in the turbulent southwestern province of Balochistan, officials said yesterday, the second attack since the launch of a nationwide inoculation drive this week.

In Pakistan and neighbouring Afghanistan — the only countries where polio remains endemic — militants have for decades targeted vaccination teams and their security escorts.

The officers were guarding health workers in the Teeri area of Mastung district when they were attacked by two motorcyclists, local administrator Manan Tareen told AFP.

“One of the policemen was

killed on the spot, while the other succumbed to his injuries at the hospital,” Tareen told AFP.

“The team of health workers remained unharmed as they were inside a house conducting vaccinations,” he added.

Shahid Rind, a provincial government spokesperson, confirmed the toll to AFP. No group immediately claimed responsibility for the attack, which comes days after a policeman was killed in neighbouring Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. Over the past decade, hundreds of police officers and health workers have been killed by militants waging an offensive against the Pakistani state.

Denouncing yesterday's violence, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif vowed that the vaccinations would continue “with full force”.

The latest polio eradication

campaign aims to vaccinate over 45mn children, including over 2.6mn in Balochistan.

Polio, a highly infectious virus mainly affecting children under five, can result in lifelong paralysis but is easily prevented by the oral administration of a few drops of a vaccine.

Pakistan recorded a surge in polio cases last year, with 74 infections reported, compared to just six in 2023. So far this year, seven cases have been recorded.

In the past, firebrand clerics falsely claimed the vaccine contained forbidden meat or alcohol, forbidding Muslims from consuming it.

The US orchestration of a fake vaccination campaign in 2011 to track Osama bin Laden only sowed deeper mistrust. In more recent years, militants' attacks on police escorts have stymied vaccina-

tion efforts. Last year, dozens of Pakistani officers who were accompanying medical teams went on strike after a string of deadly attacks.

The country has been rocked by increasing violence in its border regions since the Taliban returned to power nextdoor in 2021.

Islamabad accuses Kabul's new rulers of failing to rout militants organising on Afghan soil, a charge the Taliban government routinely denies.

Balochistan — which sits alongside Afghanistan — was the area with the largest number of polio cases in 2024, despite being the most sparsely populated.

Pakistan's poorest province is in the grip of separatist militants who regularly attack security forces, including a train siege last month that killed dozens of people.



Arid Cities Network gains momentum at Earthna Summit

By **Joey Aguilar**
Staff Reporter

The creation of a global Arid Cities Network (ACN) garnered strong support at the Earthna Summit 2025, highlighting the need for collaborative solutions and a platform to share knowledge among urban centres facing the challenges of arid environments.

A concluding session at the summit, titled 'The Case for an Arid Cities Network', underscored the proposed network's aim to foster resilience and empower cities to thrive amidst increasing water scarcity, extreme heat, and limited resources.

Dr David Simon, professor of Development Geography at Royal Holloway, University of London, presented early findings from an upcoming research report on the ACN, including a challenges and needs assessment conducted in six pilot cities, including Doha and Oman.

He said the research identified converging pressures around water scarcity, heat extremes, urban liveability, and fragmented governance as common obstacles.

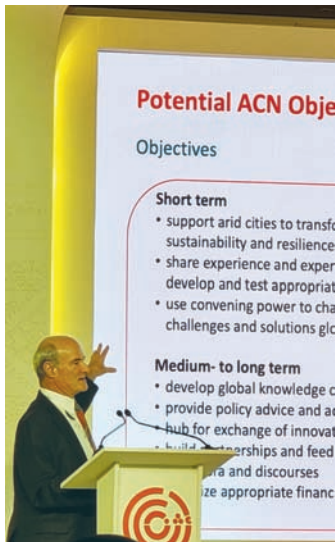
While the study found that many cities are already implementing context-specific solutions, often inspired by traditional knowledge, Dr Simon said significant gaps remain in the integration and scaling of these initiatives.

He noted that a key takeaway from the research was the urgent need for peer-to-peer learning and a centralised platform for sharing best practices.

Dr Simon outlined potential short-term objectives and activities for the ACN, such as supporting arid cities in their transformation towards sustainability and resilience, facilitating the sharing



A concluding session at the summit, titled 'The Case for an Arid Cities Network', underlined the proposed network's aim to foster resilience and empower cities to thrive amidst increasing water scarcity, extreme heat, and limited resources.



Dr David Simon at Earthna Summit 2025 yesterday.
PICTURES: Joey Aguilar

of experiences and expertise, prioritising needs, and developing and testing appropriate solutions.

The network, he added, also aims to use its convening power to champion the challenges and solutions for hot and arid cities on a global scale.

For medium- to long-term aims, he cited the need to develop a global knowledge centre and depository, provide policy advice and advocacy, serve as a hub for

the exchange of innovation and expertise, build partnerships, and contribute to existing global discussions.

The panel discussion following Dr Simon's presentation further strengthened support for the ACN. Ibrahim Thiaw, under-secretary general and executive secretary of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, pointed out that the network was "definitely a good idea".

He stressed the importance of establishing a specific platform for knowledge exchange, highlighting the need to address a number of issues within the context of arid environments.

Msheireb Properties CEO engineer Ali al-Kuwari echoed this view, emphasising the value of continuous dialogue and knowledge-sharing.

Lima mayor Rafael Lopez Aliaga suggested creating a specific chapter dedicated to arid cities within a larger existing organisation, arguing that it is a critical issue affecting not only arid cities but also cities facing water scarcity in general.

Terri Wills, Director at the Climate, Children's Investment Fund Foundation, underscored the potential benefits of the network, particularly for secondary and smaller cities facing current and future challenges.

QF's Earthna Summit 2025 concludes

The Earthna Summit 2025 brought together more than 2,000 attendees, further solidifying Earthna's role as a leading convenor for sustainability innovation in hot and arid regions.

Organised by Earthna Centre for a Sustainable Future, a member of Qatar Foundation (QF), the summit concluded yesterday at Msheireb Downtown Doha, after two days of cross-sector collaboration, bold ideas, and inclusive dialogue under the theme 'Building Our Legacy: Sustainability, Innovation, and Traditional Knowledge'.

Day two opened with a session titled 'Women Leading Collaboration: Partnerships for Sustainable Development', which emphasised the crucial role women play in advancing Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 17: Partnerships for the Goals.



Day two of Earthna Summit 2025 saw a series of panel discussions.

"It is time to support their leadership with the tools and resources they need, and to walk alongside them in shaping a more collaborative and equitable future," said ambassador Patricia Espinosa Cantellano, former executive secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and founding partner and CEO of onepoint5.

HE Dr Hamda al-Sulaiti, Deputy Speaker of the Shura Council,

underlined the importance of advancing SDG 17, saying: "It is the voices, vision, and values of women that are forging the most resilient and transformative pathways toward a more sustainable and equitable world".

The summit was delivered in strategic partnership with the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, alongside corporate and content partners.

Preparing urban centres for a drier future

By **Joey Aguilar**
Staff Reporter

The concluding session at Earthna Summit 2025 yesterday highlighted the power of blending time-tested knowledge with cutting-edge technology in providing solutions for urban centres facing increasing environmental challenges.

Speaking on 'The Case for an Arid Cities Network', Msheireb Properties CEO engineer Ali al-Kuwari cited the long-term benefits of investing a project like Msheireb Downtown Doha (MDD).

"Our district cooling system is a good revenue source for us. Today, we are almost 80% (occupancy), and once it becomes 100%, we'll be getting good revenue from it, and it is very efficient," he said, noting the project's success in combining modern innovation and traditional knowledge.

Beyond the economic advantages, al-Kuwari also stressed the environmental benefits of their approach, saying that MDD collects and reuses rainwater and condensation from air conditioners for irrigation and toilet flushing. This, he pointed out, resulted in a 70% reduction in water consumption.



Ibrahim Thiaw

Drawing lessons from traditional architectural urbanism, al-Kuwari explained that they redesigned the entire downtown area based on local traditions and building practices.

"We looked at our traditions, our people how they used to build their own houses, their homes, their village," he said. This included keeping buildings close together to maximise shade and capture breezes, reducing heat by 30%.

Al-Kuwari noted that these techniques have been in operation for five years, with collected data demonstrating the replicability of the concept in other cities.

Ibrahim Thiaw, undersecretary general and executive secretary of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, underscored the significance of considering solutions applicable even



Engineer Ali al-Kuwari

without high-tech infrastructure. He pointed to the building materials and techniques used by his ancestors in drylands, which provided comfort without air conditioning.

Thiaw also cited ancient underground irrigation systems as examples of indigenous knowledge that are being revived for their efficiency. "If you look at the aridity climates, it is very clear, according to scientific studies, there will be more aridity in the world, it is growing. It is growing in places where the population is also growing because demographics continue to grow."

Thiaw noted that of the nearly 600 cities, a few hundreds more are expected to emerge (as arid) over the next 50 years, especially those in developing countries, many of which may lack access to reliable energy.

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Sadia Chicken Griller 1300 gm x 1 pc



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