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QATAR | Page 6

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SPORT | Page 1

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Shura Council speaker attends 143rd IPU meet

HE the Speaker of the Shura Council Hassan bin Abdullah al-Ghanem participated in the opening of the 143rd General Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), in Madrid yesterday. During the opening ceremony, King Felipe VI of Spain gave a speech in which he welcomed the participating delegations and expressed his condolences for the victims of the Covid-19 pandemic, and paid tribute to parliamentarians who fell victims to the pandemic. The Spanish King expressed his pride and appreciation for the efforts made by the members of the IPU in the service of their countries and peoples. **Page 2**

Kahramaa launches new platform to support cut in energy usage

The Qatar General Electricity & Water Corporation (Kahramaa), represented by the National Programme for Conservation and Energy Efficiency (Tarsheed) in co-operation with Japanese company Marubeni, has launched a smart platform that supports Tarsheed's efforts to reduce energy consumption in the residential sector by 5%. **Page 3**

Today's Gulf Times includes a 4-fold zigzag booklet on

Schools

Qatar's most up-to-date guide on schools.

US dancers enthral audience



Soul Street Dance, a US-based group of hip hop and break dancers, enthralled the audience with their performance at the Katara Opera House yesterday. The event was organised as part of the Qatar-USA Festival, which is being held under the Qatar-USA 2021 Year of Culture initiative. **PICTURE: Thajudheen Page 12**

FM meets Afghan 'govt' delegation

HE the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman al-Thani met yesterday with a delegation of the Afghan caretaker government headed by Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs Amir Khan Muttaqi, who is visiting the country. During the meeting, they reviewed co-operation relations between the two countries and issues related to combating terrorism, promoting human rights, and humanitarian aid. The two sides stressed the importance of humanitarian aid reaching the

deserving Afghan people, especially with the approach of winter. During the meeting, HE the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs underlined the importance of ensuring the continuity of schools in Afghanistan and the need to provide educational opportunities for all segments of Afghan society, especially girls. HE the Foreign Minister reiterated Qatar's commitment to continue working with the Afghan parties and international partners to promote stability in Afghanistan. **Page 4**

'Omicron' triggers new travel curbs

Reuters
London/ Berlin/Amsterdam

Britain, Germany and Italy detected cases of the new Omicron coronavirus variant yesterday and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced new steps to contain the virus, while more nations imposed restrictions on travel from southern Africa.

The discovery of the variant has sparked global concern, a wave of travel bans or curbs and a sell-off on financial markets on Friday as investors worried that Omicron could stall a global recovery from the nearly two-year pandemic.

Johnson laid out measures that included stricter testing rules for people arriving in the country but that stopped short of curbs on social activity other than requiring mask wearing in some settings.

US President Joe Biden has been briefed on the latest situation regarding the new Omicron variant of Covid-19, the White House said.

"At the same time, senior health officials and the Covid response team have been monitoring the latest updates on Omicron and in regular touch with health officials around the world," a White House official said in a statement.

Qatar Airways restricts flights

Due to the recent emergence of the new Covid-19 Omicron variant, and with immediate effect, Qatar Airways will no longer be accepting passengers travelling from five southern African countries in the airline's global network, a statement issued by the national carrier yesterday said. "However, we will continue to accept passengers for travel into these countries in line with current restrictions," it said. Passengers who are booked on Qatar Airways flights from seven

destinations - Luanda (LAD), Angola; Maputo (MPM), Mozambique; Johannesburg (JNB), Capetown (CPT), Durban (DUR), South Africa; Lusaka (LUN), Zambia; and Harare (HRE), Zimbabwe - will not be accepted for travel until further notice. "These restrictions will remain in place until we receive further guidance from the World Health Organisation (WHO). We will continue to review the situation on a daily basis as new information becomes available," the airline said.

Omicron, dubbed a "variant of concern" by the World Health Organisation, is potentially more contagious than previous variants of the disease, although experts do not know yet if it will cause more or less severe Covid-19 compared to other strains.

England's Chief Medical Officer, Chris Witty, said "there is a reasonable chance that at least there will be some degree of vaccine escape with this variant".

The variant was first discovered in South Africa and had also since been

detected in Belgium, Botswana, Israel and Hong Kong.

Dutch authorities said that 61 out of around 600 people who arrived in Amsterdam on two flights from South Africa on Friday had tested positive for the coronavirus.

Kuwait is to suspend direct flights from nine African countries - South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Lesotho, Eswatini, Zambia and Malawi - from today due to the Omicron variant of the coronavirus, the government communication centre tweeted. **Page 11**

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Shura delegation participates in session of IPU council

The Shura Council Speaker, HE Hassan bin Abdullah al-Ghanem participated yesterday in the 208th session of the IPU Governing Council, as part of the work of the General Assembly of the Union (IPU), currently being held in Madrid.

The session witnessed the election of Speaker of the Spanish House of Representatives Meritxell Batet as President of the 143rd General Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union

(IPU). The session also included a speech delivered by President of the IPU, Duarte Pacheco, in which he indicated that this is the first live meeting since the beginning of Covid-19 pandemic. The president of the IPU said that countries should enact urgent legislations to confront the conditions and turmoil of this pandemic.

For her part, former president of the IPU Gabriela Barron thanked the parliaments of the

Union for their co-operation during the past periods, which was brought together by one goal to serve the people and the interests of states, regardless of different cultures, religions and ethnicities.

She hoped the meetings would succeed in producing results that contribute to advancement of the world and the overcoming of the consequences of the pandemic.

The session also featured the elections of the Executive Com-

mittee, as well as a review of reports on the activities of the Union, the activities of other committees and bodies, the adoption of a new strategy for the Union for the period 2022-2026, discussion of issues related to membership of the Union, and the financial situation of the IPU.

The session was attended by Shura Council members Ahmed bin Hitmi al-Hitmi, Sheikha bint Yousef al-Jufairi and Mohamed bin Omar al-Mannai. (QNA)

Meeting of secretaries-general discusses role of committees

The Assembly of Secretaries-General of National Parliaments held yesterday a meeting for the Assembly's executive committee as part of the Inter-Parliamentary Union's 143rd Assembly, currently underway in Madrid, with the participation of HE Secretary-General of the Shura Council Dr Ahmed bin Nasser al-Fadala.

The meeting discussed the working methods of



parliamentary committees, especially with regard to measuring the impact of the committees' work on the legislative process, and whether these committees form part of the formal process of enacting legislation. It also dealt with the role of committees in monitoring, their authority in the field of accountability, and their ability to evaluate general policies. (QNA)

Forum of Young Parliamentarians

The Shura Council participated yesterday in the Forum of Young Parliamentarians during the 143rd Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union in Madrid, Spain. The Council was represented in the forum by HE Mohamed bin Omar al-Mannai, a member of the Council and a member of the Forum of Young Parliamentarians. (QNA)

Shura Speaker hails Qatar's electoral process

QNA
Madrid

HE the Shura Council Speaker, Hassan bin Abdullah al-Ghanem, participated yesterday in the plenary session of the five-day 143rd Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) in Madrid, Spain, under the title "Contemporary challenges to democracy: Overcoming division and building community?"

At the outset of his speech, HE the Speaker expressed happiness to participate in such an important event as the first elected president of the first elected Shura Council in the history of Qatar, after the general legislative elections took place on Oct 2, 2021.

HE al-Ghanem pointed out that all stages of the electoral process were characterised by clarity, transparency, and respect for the Constitution and related laws in accordance with the lofty directives of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, who leads the country with a wise and rational policy whose manifestations are demonstrated in building a state governed by law and pursues a policy aimed at achieving sustainable development and the welfare of citizens, providing them with a decent life, in addition to paying attention to just causes in the world, particularly the cause of the Palestinian people who are struggling to obtain their legitimate rights and establish their independent state with East Jerusalem as its capital, within the borders of June 5, 1967.



HE the Shura Council Speaker, Hassan bin Abdullah al-Ghanem.

He said that the elections were conducted in accordance with the approved international democratic standards, where the Qatari people participated in an atmosphere of freedom and democracy, starting with the registration of voters and the announcement of the list of candidates, then the electoral campaign and conducting the poll until the announcement of the results.

HE al-Ghanem referred to the items included in the 143rd IPU Assembly agenda, especially the discussion of "Contemporary challenges to democracy: Overcoming division and building community," as well as other issues on the committees' agenda.

He explained that democracy is already facing many challenges resulting from the threats of instability in some regions of the world, and the attempt to prejudice security, stability, and peace, are the basis for achieving sustainable development for peoples, with-

out which democracy cannot be achieved.

He called for intensifying the efforts to ensure the success of international endeavours to combat terrorism and violent extremism conducive to terrorism, which poses a real threat to international peace and security.

He stressed that democracy does not grow or prosper in the absence of freedoms, warning of the consequences of blocking the political sphere, which leads to a growing cycle of discord and violence, and everything that threatens stability, social security, and coexistence.

He underlined the importance of such meetings, emphasising the necessity of prohibiting the misuse of the media in political discourse but to using it as a tool to promote dialogue and meaningful rapprochement characterised by tolerance and acceptance of the other opinion, which will achieve good and hope for the future of democracy.

HE the Speaker referred His Highness the Amir's call, which was made several times at the UN General Assembly (UNGA), to regulate the use of technology and information in accordance with an international law regulating this field.

He referred to the Amir's proposal in his speech at the 73rd UNGA in September 2018 to hold an international conference to regulate the use of digital technology, in which His Highness expressed Qatar's readiness to work with UN agencies to legally organise and host it.

Shura Council takes part in human rights meeting at IPU event

The Shura Council participated in the meeting of the Standing Committee on Democracy and Human Rights as part of the 143rd General Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) currently being held in Madrid, Spain. The Council was represented by HE the member of the Shura Council and Chairman of the Council's Internal and External Affairs Committee Dr Ali bin Fetais al-Marri, who is also a member of the Permanent Committee on Democracy and Human Rights of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU).

During the meeting, the committee's draft resolution related to worldwide legislations to combat online child exploitation was discussed. HE Dr al-Marri indicated, during a statement, that this topic was discussed in many committees of the United Nations and other international organisations without tangible positive results. He pointed out that based on his experience as a former public prosecutor for nearly 20 years, he has addressed such issues related to child abuse, adding that no radical or a clear-cut solution to end it have been



reached. He referred to the need for an international will to reach solutions to this problem, indicating that some countries have not developed solutions to end it. He added that some of those countries

are still circumventing legislations to legalise child trafficking in one way or another.

HE Dr al-Marri also referred to the need for these discussions to be taken seriously, and that a comprehensive and exemplary legislation should be put in place and imposed on everyone, with having mechanisms in place to hold those who violate it accountable. He also noted that the issue of child abuse was no less dangerous than terrorism, corruption and money laundering. (QNA)

Contribution of Qatari women highlighted at IPU meeting

The Shura Council participated in the meetings of Forum of Women Parliamentarians as part of the 143rd General Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), currently being held in Madrid. The Council was represented in the meetings by the member of the Shura Council and member of the Women Parliamentarians Forum of the Inter-Parliamentary Union



of women in Qatar, indicating that Qatari women play a prominent role in public work.

They are also making an effective effort through their contribution in various fields within and outside Qatari society.

She touched on the participation of women in the legislative elections to select members of the Shura Council, noting that participation was not the first practice of women in elections, as the experience of choosing members of the Central

Municipal Council in 1999 preceded it. In entrepreneurship, al-Jufairi said that Qatari women have been able to assume all leadership positions as minister, university president, deputy prosecutor, state delegate to the United Nations, official spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, member of the Shura Council, and director of investment companies. (QNA)





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Kahramaa launches new platform to support cut in energy consumption



The Qatar General Electricity & Water Corporation (Kahramaa), represented by the National Programme for Conservation and Energy Efficiency (Tarsheed) in co-operation with Japanese company Marubeni, has launched a smart platform for energy efficiency.

According to an official Kahramaa press statement yesterday, the new platform supports Tarsheed's efforts to reduce energy consumption in the residential sector by 5%.

This platform comes within the framework of the memorandum of understanding signed between the two parties in April to launch a smart platform that includes a number of interactive electronic control panels to measure the subscriber's domestic energy usage behaviour. Consumers fill out a questionnaire while specifying the number of devices consuming energy or water. The application helps them develop a typical consumption plan for each housing category according to the

number and type of residents and other variables, in addition to providing a smart plan according to the actual house consumption pattern to achieve the targeted reduction for each consumer.

In compliance with Tarsheed's sustainability goals and in order to reduce harmful carbon emissions and conserve electricity resources, the programme helps all subscribers know about and compare their consumption, work towards energy efficiency and save on their monthly bill. It can be used via the link - <https://mytarsheed.com/>.

The subscriber only has to enter his/her electricity number in the user name field. The link contains a user guide as well as an awareness film that guides the user step by step to clarify everything related to the platform.

The application is currently available in English in its first phase, and work is under way to launch the Arabic version soon. In case of any enquiries, subscrib-

ers can contact asktarsheed@km.qa or message via WhatsApp to 77728600.

Subscribers who use the platform can also collect a number of sustainability points, which they can exchange for incentives and benefits from specific points that Tarsheed will announce later in co-operation with a number of friendly institutions and Tarsheed's partners.

A short text message has been sent from Kahramaa to all its registered subscribers to activate the platform, numbering some 157,000 messages for the residential sector.

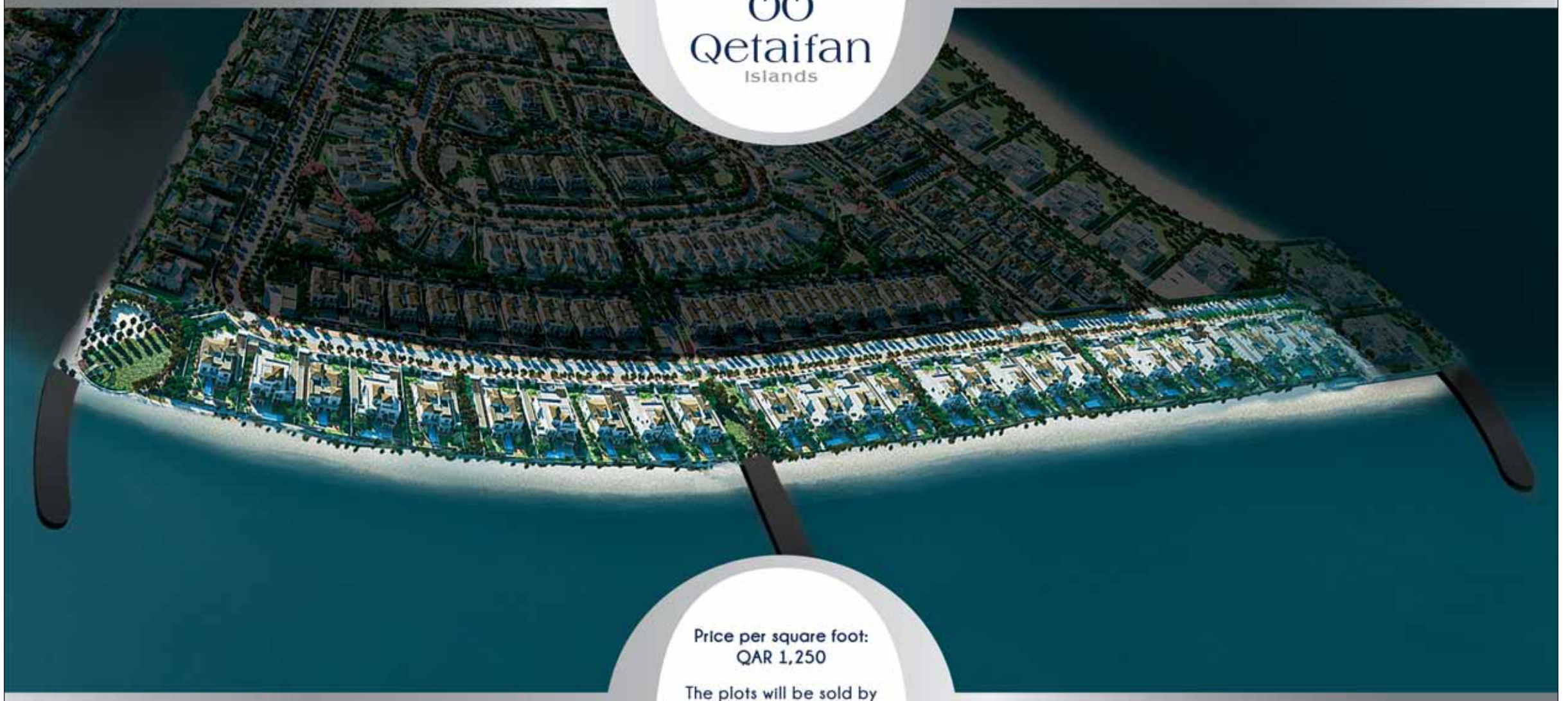
The platform comes within the framework of the efforts made by Kahramaa, represented by Tarsheed, to achieve environmental sustainability in accordance with Qatar National Vision 2030, the global sustainable development goals and the Qatar National Environment and Climate Change Strategy.

AlKhater meets Norwegian envoy



HE the Assistant Foreign Minister Lolwah bint Rashid AlKhater met yesterday via video-conferencing with Norwegian ambassador to Qatar Sten Arne Rosnes. During the meeting, they reviewed bilateral relations and ways to enhance them, in addition to Qatar's role in Afghanistan and its continuous support for the Afghan people. The ambassador extended his country's thanks to Qatar for its role in promoting stability in Afghanistan and its assistance in evacuating Norwegian and Afghan citizens from Afghanistan. The two parties also discussed the incident of encroachment by two Norwegian citizens (journalists) on private property and filming it, without prior permission and without informing the owner of the private property. In this context, HE AlKhater expressed Qatar's disappointment with the announced reaction from the Norwegian side, noting that all official statements about the incident did not address the deliberate infringement of private property by the journalists. She stressed the need for the Norwegian embassy to play a role in informing its citizens, who visit the country, about the laws and regulations and the need to adhere to them. (QNA)

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Amir sends message to chief of Chadian Military Council



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani has sent a message to Chairman of the Transitional Military Council in Chad Lieutenant-General Mahamat Idriss Deby related to bilateral relations between the two countries and ways to support and develop them. The message was delivered by Charge d'Affaires at the Qatar embassy in Chad Abdul Sattar Saleh al-Ansari during his meeting with Minister of Foreign Affairs, African Integration, International Co-operation and Chadians Abroad Mahamat Zene Cherif. (QNA)

High-level Qatari-Afghan meeting reviews efforts to restore stability



A delegation of Qatar, chaired by HE the Special Envoy of the Foreign Minister for Counterterrorism and Mediation of Conflict Resolution ambassador Dr Mutlaq al-Qahtani, met on Friday with a delegation from the Afghan caretaker government, chaired by Acting Foreign Minister Amir Khan. They discussed topics related to counterterrorism, enhancing human rights and humanitarian aid. The two sides stressed on the importance of having humanitarian aid reach its beneficiaries, especially with the winter season approaching. Qatar stressed, during the meeting, on the importance of the continued operation of schools in Afghanistan, and the importance of giving all segments of the Afghan society, including girls, access to education. Qatar also stressed its commitment to continuing work with all Afghan parties and international partners to enhance stability in Afghanistan. For its part, the caretaker Afghan government expressed its gratitude and appreciation for Qatar's role in supporting the Afghan people and enhance security and stability in Afghanistan. (QNA)

QFFD, QRCS ink pacts to provide aid for Syrians

Qatar Fund for Development (QFFD) and its strategic partner Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS) have signed two grant agreements, in order to provide essential winterisation aid for 30,000 internally displaced people (IDPs) in northwestern Syria and 37,500 Syrian refugees in Aarsal, Lebanon.

The Deputy General Manager for Projects at QFFD, Misfer Hamad al-Shahwani, emphasised the importance of early winterisation preparedness, especially amid the difficult conditions suffered by IDPs in northwestern Syria, as well as Syrian refugees in Lebanon, which required immediate action to secure the necessary aid before the coldest months of the winter.

He added: "This vital annual aid is part of Qatar's humanitarian response and winterisation relief, in implementation of Qatar's \$100mn pledge announced in the speech by HE the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs



Two grant agreements were signed by QFFD and QRCS.

Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman al-Thani, during the fifth Brussels Conference on Supporting the future of Syria and the region." The first grant involves providing winterisation support for 30,000 beneficiaries in northwestern Syria, including heating supplies, blankets, hygiene kits, and Covid-19 protection supplies.

The second grant will help to dig 10 drains and install 500 concrete barricades surrounding refugee camps to prevent rainwater leakage into tents.

Moreover, blankets, winter clothes, hygiene kits, and Covid-19 protection supplies will be distributed to a total of 37,500 Syrian refugees in Aarsal, Lebanon. Engineer

Ibrahim Abdullah al-Malki, CEO of QRCS, referred to the solid partnership with QFFD, which evolved through many instances of QFFD funding QRCS's relief and humanitarian operations in many countries. He described the new agreements as "timely, as the too severe weather exacerbates the humanitarian conditions for hundreds or even thousands of families".

"Apart from the projects to be executed under the agreements, QRCS is working on its 11-year-old annual campaign the Warm Winter, aimed at meeting a wide range of winterisation needs for affected and poor families in conflict and/or disaster zones," said engineer al-Malki.

"This year, the drive is titled Home Feels Warm. With the donations by the benevolent people of Qatar, it will satisfy the needs of tens of thousands of vulnerable people. Yet, it remains limited compared to the actual size of needs, which will be partially addressed by QFFD's contribution". (QNA)

QFFD signs MoU with Guatemala for education

Qatar Fund for Development (QFFD) signed an MoU with Guatemala's Ministry of Education in co-operation with its strategic partner Education Above All Foundation (EAA), to enrol 20,570 Guatemalan Out-Of-School Children (OOSC) into a quality primary education. This new, six-year project between EAA's Educate A Child programme funded by QFFD and its partner buildOn will focus on supporting children to break the cycle of poverty through the provision of a quality primary education.

The goal of this project is to create improved access to inclusive and equitable quality education for out-of-school children at the primary level in Guatemala. It will do so using four key strategies, including building school infrastructure and construction of new primary schools in rural communities; sensitisation and capacity building with community members, leaders, teachers, government officials, and students; accelerated education programmes and direct support to OOSC through classes, school kits, and securing birth certificate registration; and income-generating initiatives and the provision of individual small loans.

Being a student in Guatemala is not a simple task as distance to school, poor infrastructure, high education fees and overcrowded classrooms are all obstacles that face students in this country. If a student is fortunate in avoiding those barriers, they may face other issues such as poor perception of education, caste/ethnic discrimination, birth registration challenges. And it is harder for girls to attend to school.

Stemming from poverty, one of the more significant barriers to education in Guatemala is child labour. Today 90.2% of the children are attending schools, however 6.5% are drop out of school and working and 3.3% are combining between education and working.

And all those obstacles stem from the bigger problem which is poverty. The Deputy General Manager for Projects at QFFD, Misfer al-Shahwani, said on this occasion: "The strategic agreement signed today is guided by the adamant belief that access to quality education is a fundamental driver of social and economic prosperity. To this end, the project will seek to create improved inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities to more than 20,000 out of school children of primary school age in Guatemala."

Guatemala's Minister of Education Claudia Ruiz announced that this signing of the Memorandum would contribute to strengthening childhood education and the efforts made by the Ministry of Education based on its strategic lines. The Director of the Education Above All Foundation, Talal Alhothai, said: "Today's agreement between QFFD and the Republic of Guatemala is a step towards far-reaching change, built around inclusive and equitable quality education for some of the world's most marginalised children.

The strategic partnership between QFFD and EAA is deeply rooted as there is a common ground between both institutions in their aim to support the most marginalised out of school children around the world with the opportunity to enrol in a quality primary education. (QNA)



The agreement signing ceremony.

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SER. NO.	Tender NO.	DESCRIPTION	QUANTITY	Document's Fees	TENDER CLOSING DATE
1	AKCC/T08/21	Supply Sweet Water at Al Khalij Cement Plant Factory, Employee Accommodations- Umbaab & Umsaled Yard Approximate Contract Qty: 50,000,000 (Fifty Million) US Gallon	50,000,000 US GLN	200 QR	09/12/2021
2	AKCC/T08/21	Sewage Waste collection at Al Khalij Cement Plant Factory, Employee Accommodations- Umbaab & Umsaled Yard Approximate Annual Contract Collection Qty: 15,000,000 (Fifteen Million) US Gallon	15,000,000 US GLN		
3	AKCC/T08/21	Garbage Skip collection at Al Khalij Cement Plant Factory, Employee Accommodations- Umbaab & Umsaled Yard Based on AKCC requirement, the number of trips is not exceeding 26 trips/month	312 Trips		

General conditions:
1) Tender Documents can be collected from Qatari Investors Group head office at below address from Sunday to Thursday: Qatari Investors Group.
Qatari Investors Group. (Al Khalij Cement Co.)
QIG Tower - Lusail, 3rd Floor, Zone No: 69, Street No: 223
Tel: +974 44 74 70 00, Fax: +974 44 86 09 76
PO Box 22504, Doha, Qatar
2) Documents fees should be paid by cash during collection of documents and non refundable
3) Offers validity should be 120 days from BID CLOSING DATE
4) Offers should be sent in sealed envelope on order before 9th December, 2021 at 12 PM. Any offer after this date and time will be automatically rejected

Invitation to Tender

S.no	Tender Ref. No.	Description	Tender Bond	Tender Fees	Bid Closing Date
1	TC No INQ-TDR-2021-0011	Kitchen Equipment Maintenance	QR 180,000.00	500 QR	21th December 2021
2	TC No INQ-TDR-2021-0012	Printing Services	QR 20,000.00	500 QR	05th December 2021

- The Tender Documents can be obtained from IN-Q Enterprises W.L.L. as electronic copy after providing evidence of tender fees submission. Nonrefundable Tender documents fee, to deposit in INQ A/C Nu 0013-037407-002 At QNB. Indicate the tender ref. and your company name on the deposit slip
- The proposals must be submitted electronically as separate e-mail (Technical and Commercial) via E-mail to INQETC@qm.org.qa
- The proposal must be accompanied by a bank guarantee (tender bond) issued by local bank in Qatar and should be valid for 120 days from the bid closing date.
- Auditing financial statements for last Three years should be submitted.
- The successful Tenders shall be submitting performance Bond with the amount ten percent (10%) of the total contract Value valid until 90 days after accomplishing the contract.

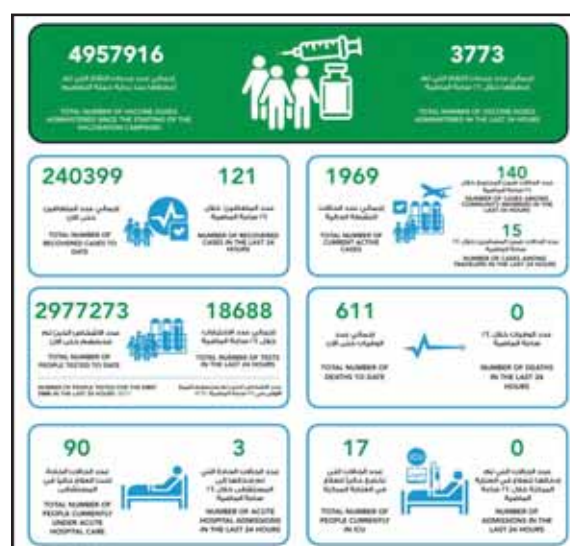
**For more information please contact us on
Direct 33488019 or Email: schacko@qm.org.qa**

Qatar reports 155 new Covid cases

The Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) reported yesterday 140 new confirmed cases of Covid-19 among the community and 15 among travellers. The MoPH recorded 121 recoveries from the virus during the past 24 hours, bringing the total number of cases recovered in Qatar to 240,399.

Vaccination Data:

- 4,957,916 doses have been administered since the start of the programme.
- 3,773 vaccine doses have been administered in the past 24 hours.
- 85.3% of the total population are now fully vaccinated with two doses. (QNA)



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TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

The Tender Committee of QAFAC invites qualified local suppliers to participate in the following Tender in accordance with QAFAC tendering procedures:

No.	Tender No.	Description	Collection Fees Qrs.	Tender Bond Qrs.	Bid Closing Date
1	QTC/059/21	Design, Fabricate & Supply of T-Type Titanium Strainers for Sea water lines	300/-	150,000/-	20th December '21

Interested companies are invited to collect the above tender documents as follows:

- Collection Date** : From Sunday, 28th November 2021 (QAFAC working days from Sunday to Thursday only)
- Collection Time** : 08:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.
- Location** : The Gate, Bay Tower 2, 13th Floor, West Bay, QAFAC
- Tender Fees** : As shown above, (Non-refundable) can be paid at QAFAC Doha Office
- Validity** : Offers must be valid for 120 days from closing date.
- Bid Bond** : Offers must include a Bid bond issued from a local bank and valid for 120 days from closing date.
- Authorization** : Tenders will be issued to authorized company personnel with the following :
 - Official authorization on Company Letter Head,
 - Proper Identification,
 - Copy of Company's Commercial Registration.

WISE addresses world's critical education issues ahead of 2021 summit

World Innovation Summit for Education (WISE), a Qatar Foundation education think tank, has released 10 timely and comprehensive research reports, featuring action-oriented recommendations and policy guidance for stakeholders across the education industry. Produced in collaboration with recognised global thought leaders, the 2021 Research Series was informed by the unique challenges Covid-19 presented to education across the globe.

WISE continues to lead an evidence-based exploration of current education challenges, in line with the priorities of the Qatar National Research Strategy. Its findings, many of which draw on Qatar as one of several case studies, highlighted the central need to place innovation and collaboration at the heart of all efforts to redesign current education models.

Dr Asmaa Alfadala, director of research and content development at WISE, said: "We are immensely proud of the strong collaboration and resilience of our research teams, and of these new reports that have once again produced profound insights into the ever-changing education sector. Global education has been uniquely impacted by the pandemic, including in the way that our youth experience learning. The emerging research ecosystem is marked by an accelerated move to digital platforms and new ways of learning."

Four of the recently released reports explore education theory, policy, and practice in the context of Qatar's education system. Hundreds of local education stakeholders have contributed their perspectives, resulting in locally-informed, globally-relevant research findings.

Developed in partnership with Duke University and The Wellbeing



Dr Asmaa Alfadala.

Project, the Teacher Wellbeing Report undertook a scoping literature review and case studies in Cambodia, Kenya, and Qatar. It points to new emerging challenges, particularly during and post-pandemic, and aims to make a global contribution to the overlooked issue of teacher wellbeing.

Revisiting Equity: Covid-19 and Education of Children with Disabilities, conducted with Cambridge University, analyses the impact of Covid-19-related school closures on the education of primary-school-aged children with disabilities. Data collected from over 100 parents and 142 teaching staff across 18 schools in Qatar shows a significant socio-emotional impact on both parents and children. The report advocates for action from policymakers to create more supportive at-home learning environments, ensuring undisrupted and equal access to education for every child. Developing Local Learning Ecosystems in Qatar to Advance Equity, Inclusion and Social Cohesion explores how learning ecosystems may evolve as new drivers of education in Qatar and beyond. By engaging over 150 local stakeholders as well as a selection of global experts, the research indicates that building purposeful collaboration across institutions and sectors can support shared learning goals, as schools are making the transition back to in-person learning.

Through interviews with selected local stakeholders and experts, the Local Learning Ecosystems project also takes a look at the nature of leadership, collaboration and partnership in Qatar. The report features case studies of key organisations that are developing collaborative ecosystems across institutional boundaries, including Qatar Museums, IN-JAZ Qatar, Qatar Shell, Generation Amazing, Ibtechar, as well as Qatar Foundation's Higher Education, Renad Academy and HBKU Makkers Majlis. The Embedding Innovation Labs in Schools as a Vehicle for Transformation in Education report addresses the challenge of changing education, offering practical insight on how to reap the benefits of innovation labs in schools. 'How must we be educating our learners today to prepare for the complex world of tomorrow?' is one of the questions posed.

Authors and researchers will come together as part of several research presentations and 'Meet the Authors' events during WISE 2021, returning to Doha in a first-ever hybrid edition on December 7 and 9 under the theme 'Generation Unmute: Reclaiming our Future through Education'.

CONDOLENCES

The Pearl Modern School Management deeply mourns the sad demise of



M.K. Abdullah

(Founder of EMKE Group and beloved uncle of Padma Shri Dr. Yousuffali M A)

We convey our deepest condolences and prayers to his bereaved family.

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The QIFF returns with its largest edition ever

The 11th edition of Qatar International Food Festival (QIFF) opened on Friday.

In a first for the festival, the QIFF is set to run for three weeks before closing on the eve of Qatar National Day.

The festival is being staged at Al Bidda Park against the backdrop of Doha's skyline, where over 140 vendors will serve culinary masterpieces.

Vendors from Doha, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and international markets will participate in the festival.

The QIFF is Qatar's longest-running food and beverage festival, combining culinary arts with a range of activations, including a live cooking theatre by globally renowned chefs.

The festivities include plenty of family entertainment for residents and visitors of all ages, Qatar Tourism has said in a statement, adding that this is the largest ever edition of the festival.

Qatar Tourism chairman and Qatar Airways Group chief executive HE Akbar al-Baker said: "The QIFF is a celebration of Qatar's multiculturalism, contributing to the diversity of tourism experiences in the country."

"Over the past 11 years, the festival has been instrumental in enhancing the country's thriving dining scene," he said. "Before opening local outlets, many international chefs have tested the waters at the QIFF, as have local entrepreneurs."

"The QIFF is illustrative of our sector, and its importance - introducing people to new products and experi-



ences and facilitating business," HE al-Baker added.

The festival will also host food trucks along a stretch of Corniche Road, for eight days until December 3.

There will also be fireworks displays at 8pm on the weekends - Thursday, Friday and Saturday - throughout the course of the festival.

QIFF Cooking Theatre

The QIFF will stage a daily cooking theatre with at least two demonstrations, events and competitions every day.

The cooking theatre will feature celebrity chefs from the region, including Dani Garcia, Aisha al-Tamimi, Shams al-Qassabi, William Disen & Saif Rahman, Hervé Courtot, Hassan al-Ibrahim, Grenal Godinho, Aleksandre Ugrehelidze, Arturo Mendez, Roberto Reatini, Aaj Fernando, Sergio Galaz,



Snapshots from the opening of the 11th Qatar International Food Festival.

Hari Wahyudin, and Santiago Guerrero. Timings: from 4pm-10.30pm.

Digital Recipe Wall

A digital recipe wall will be set up so that attendees can scan a QR code to access a Web page app enabling them to share their favourite recipes.

Entertainment

The QIFF is providing family entertainment throughout the festival.

The entertainment features a mix of live music and DJs, roaming entertainment, mini golf, trampolines, a hot air balloon experience, carnival games and more.

Multiple local and regional artistes will also perform at the festival, including Music Vending Machine, 11 Strings, Harget Kart, Pablo Discobar, Hadis, Soul Brother, REJAM, AFCENT Band,

and Charlie Porter Quintet.

Chef's Table

The Chef's Table gives diners the opportunity to sit and eat with the chef who cooked their meal.

The following restaurants have confirmed their participation in the Chef's Table: Hakkasan with chef Ho Yiek Chung, Scalini with chef Roberto Apa, Riyasat with chef Grenal Godinho, and Isaan with chef Somporn.

For further details and bookings, one can contact the restaurants directly.

Opening Hours

Weekdays: from 3pm-11pm; and weekends: from 3pm-1am.

While general admission to the QIFF is free, 10 VIP areas around the festival can be reserved for QR350 per two-hour booking.



2. There is also limited parking space available for cars at Al Bidda Park's Car Park 5.

Zones

The festival will be split across five themed zones at Al Bidda Park and one at the Corniche:

1. Al Bidda Park - Oasis, Pier, Urban, Market and Garden.

Al Bidda park will also have a Qatari Corner to give visitors a unique, traditional Qatari experience.

2. Corniche - The QIFF Avenue.

Partners

The 11th edition of the QIFF is supported by partners across key sectors, including Qatar Airways as the exclusive airline partner, Ooredoo as the telecommunications partner, Snoonu as the delivery partner, and Al Bidda Park as the host venue.

Monoprix is the exclusive provider of ingredients for the live cooking theatre, with Askar Industrial providing kitchen and cooking equipment for the live cooking theatre.

Qinwan is providing Arabic coffee and dates to guests in the VIP area.

Lastly, Wasfa is supporting the event by setting up and organising the digital recipe wall.

Qatar Tourism supports its partners from the private sector in developing a diverse and rich annual events calendar in order to energise the hospitality and retail sectors, drive domestic tourism and attract regional visitors the year round, the statement adds.

Street of glory



Flags of countries participating in the FIFA Arab Cup adorn a street at Katara - the Cultural Village Foundation. PICTURE: Noushad Thekkayil



Various activities are being held at different places for fans.

Numerous exciting fan activations planned during FIFA Arab Cup

Host of events planned at stadiums, Doha Corniche and tourist attractions



Stadium Express Services

- ◆ Stadium Express will provide direct transport to stadiums on match days
- ◆ Stadium Express Hub located at Khalifa Street Bus Hub
- ◆ Buses will operate from 4 hours before kick-off
- ◆ Final bus will set off 1 hour before kick-off
- ◆ Return bus services will operate for 1.5 hours after each match ends
- ◆ Free travel for Hay'ya Card (Fan ID) holders

Special bus service announced to take fans to stadiums

Starting from November 30 and running throughout the FIFA Arab Cup, the Stadium Express will transport fans between stadiums and the Khalifa Street Bus Hub, the Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy (SC) has announced.

The service is available free of charge for Hay'ya Card (Fan ID) holders and will start operating four hours before kick-off until 1.5 hours after the final whistle, the SC said in a tweet. The Stadium Express will provide direct transport to stadiums on match days.

Excitement is building in Qatar and across the region for the start of the FIFA Arab Cup, as 16 national teams prepare to battle it out for the prestigious title from November 30 to December 18.

As part of the celebration of the beautiful game and Arab culture, the Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy (SC) is planning a number of cultural activations for fans during the tournament.

Those attending FIFA Arab Cup matches will experience pre- and post-match activations around five tournament venues: Al Bayt, Ahmad Bin Ali, Al Janoub, Al Thumama, and Stadium 974.

This will include music, dance, folklore and other performances from communities representing Qatar, Egypt, Lebanon, Palestine, Morocco, Sudan, and others.

Cultural activations will be located in the last mile area and Metro/bus stations near the stadiums, with a total of 200 performances in 60 locations set to take place during the tournament.

Away from the tournament venues, fans will have the opportunity to enjoy exciting activations along the Doha Corniche - thanks to a collaboration between the SC, Qatar Tourism, the Ministry of Culture and Katara - the Cultural Village Foundation.

Numerous performances will take place on three mini stages along the Corniche at the 11th Qatar International Food Festival (QIFF), with performers coming from local communities that represent the participating teams in the tournament.

Operetta 'Folktales' to be launched in Katara to coincide with FIFA Arab Cup

Katara - the Cultural Village Foundation has announced the launch of an operetta entitled *A Folktales in Love of the Nation*, as part of activities coinciding with the start of the FIFA Arab Cup Qatar 2021, which will be held from November 30 to December 18.

The 25-minute operetta includes three lyrical performances, the first urging the girls to play the rattlesnake game, the second show a dialogue between the grandfather and his grandchildren, in which he urges them to play popular games instead of immersing themselves in electronic games; it concludes with the folk song *Taq Taq Taqiyya*. The third show includes urging children to pay attention to sports.

The performances conclude with the song *Ya Marhaba*, welcoming guests from Arab countries that are participating in the tournament, written by poet Hussein al-Bakri and produced by musician Walid Aba al-Qassem.

The operetta is written and directed by artist Shuail al-Kuwari, and the lyrics are by the poet Hessa al-Awadi. The operetta includes a puppet theatre as well as show scenes inspired by folk songs.

The operetta will be performed on Thursdays and Fridays from December 2-17. - QNA

QU leaders visit free zones to discuss co-operation in R&D, innovation



Qatar Free Zones Authority (QFZA) received a delegation from Qatar University (QU) led by its president, HE Dr Hassan al-Derham, along with vice-presidents, deans and other members of the university. The delegation was received by HE the Minister of State and QFZA chairman Ahmad al-Sayed, in the presence of several leaders from QFZA. QFZA and the delegation discussed ways to strengthen co-operation, specifically in the fields of R&D and innovation. The visit included presentations from QFZA and companies based in the free zones, including Google Cloud, Thales and Gaussin, among others to showcase their experiences. The visit also included an introductory tour of Ras Bufontas Free Zone and the Business & Innovation Park, as well as visits to some companies in the free zones to showcase the advanced infrastructure and services offered to investors in Qatar Free Zones.



Katara to host GPDNet general assembly from tomorrow

The event of the Global Public Diplomacy Network will be attended by hosts Qatar, 14 member countries and seven others awaiting membership

Katara – the Cultural Village Foundation will host the seventh General Assembly of the Global Public Diplomacy Network (GPDNet) from tomorrow until December 1.

According to an official press statement by Katara, the event will be attended by hosts Qatar, 14 member countries and seven others awaiting the membership.

Prof Khalid bin Ibrahim al-Sulaiti, Katara general manager and GPDNet president, expressed happiness at Katara hosting the event, noting the foundation's successes during its presidency of the current session of the network. "There have been successive achievements within the framework of building bridges of communication and spreading a culture of coexistence, understanding and mutual respect through its success in attracting many countries from different continents of the world as new members of the network or through its adoption of a distinct strategy and launch of an electronic platform," he said.

The official pointed out that the electronic platform has become an essential factor for cultural communication between member states while providing them with many common cultural services that fall within what is known as global public diplomacy.

"After being able to establish an innovative approach based on the knowledge economy and



Prof Khalid bin Ibrahim al-Sulaiti



Darwish Ahmed al-Shaibani

the development and building of self-capacity, Katara intensifies its activities to create new spaces in culture, art and tourism sectors and strengthens its presence as a cultural forum that brings together cultures of the world. Also, it transfers bilateral relations to higher levels and pushes them towards broader horizons while consolidating brotherhood and friendship and opening more doors of co-operation. These are in addition to signing many agreements and memoranda of understanding that are in the interest of states and societies, and enhance the values of dialogue, understanding and communication between people," Prof al-Sulaiti added.

Darwish Ahmed al-Shaibani, secretary-general of GPDNet, said many ambitious programmes have been launched by Katara during its leadership of the diplomatic network.

He expressed happiness at the remarkable achievements made during the current session of the network despite the difficulties it faced and the repercussions re-

sulting from the Covid-19 pandemic at the international level. He pointed out that Katara's tireless efforts contributed to the implementation of bilateral projects and joint programmes, which would strengthen co-operation, enhance international relations and contribute to deepening rapprochement and communication between peoples and societies.

"The seventh session will witness the presentation of new initiatives, most notably the transformation of the network into an international organisation after Katara puts the final touches on the studies required to achieve this matter," he said, pointing out that the meeting will discuss radical changes in the development of the network's structure.

He explained that the network's seventh general assembly will discuss activating the digital diplomacy project by focusing on areas such as building human capacities and promoting sustainable development programmes. "This will, in turn, contribute to increasing the ex-

change of experiences between member states, in addition to the knowledge and awareness exchange programme between these countries," he said, adding that lectures, seminars, training courses and digital conferences will be held while focusing on enhancing communication between members in the field of exchanging experiences and information related to culture, arts and public diplomacy, through the network's website.

On the other hand, the meeting is scheduled to witness seven new countries joining the network. These are Bulgaria, Albania, Romania, Tajikistan, Ghana, Rwanda and Palestine.

A series of important lectures and courses in the field of global public diplomacy will be held during the meeting. These will be delivered by a group of international academics, the most important of which are 'The Peace Museum Project' - Bosnia and Herzegovina, 'Creative Incubator' - Georgia, 'Diplomatic Culture' - Malaysia, 'Heritage and Music' - Hungary, 'Public Diplomacy' - Mexico, 'Mobile Education' - Mozambique, 'The Power of Language' - Nigeria, 'A March of Public Diplomacy' - Turkey, and 'The Impact of Public Diplomacy' - Ukraine.

Represented by Katara, Qatar obtained its GPDNet membership in 2017 and received the presidency from Turkey on May 4, 2019, while becoming the first Arab country to head this international network since its establishment in 2014.

GPDNet was established by public and cultural institutions in nine countries: the Philippines, Sweden, Korea, Taiwan, Nigeria, Poland, Portugal, Singapore and Turkey.



Snapshots from the launch event.



La Boutique Blanche launches new collection

La Boutique Blanche held a private event recently where three different collections were presented to the media and clients: Fil Noir, Ecaille Paris and The Collector.

For the first time, La Boutique Blanche has launched an abaya collection. The brand Fil Noir is made with the most refined fabrics following the same business line and strategy of exclusivity and quality of the other two brands, Ecaille and The Collector, a press statement noted.

The evening was a tribute to quality and beauty, and counted with the support of the brands designers and representatives.

Fil Noir Confection was created by French designer Leila Elbaoune 10 years ago. She sets about creating a style that fulfils the functional aspect of the traditional abaya but also offers the wearer more creativity.

Her collection is feminine and sophisticated, it combines graciously black flowing cuts with feathers and other materials that make the abayas comfortable but very elegant at the same time.

Two talented women are behind the Ecaille Paris



brand. Zeinab Kazoun has 30 years of experience in the international fashion industry; she believes that fashion can be avant-garde and ongoing at the same time. Mona Maalouf's design philosophy is rooted in an addiction to beauty and creativity, and she is an expert in image consultancy and multi-brand haute couture fashion management. She has more than 20 years' experience as a fashion adviser for royalty and VIP clients.

The Collector is a Swiss accessories brand founded in 2015 by Sophie Bonvin. The brand specialises in the creation of exceptional pieces using beautiful exotic leathers for its designs. Also, it uses the most experienced artisans from Italy; that work only with



very high-quality materials. The Collector from Geneva combines limited editions of classic to artistic handbags and clutches and special orders.

Difi focuses on enhancing cohesion at Gulf Family Policy Forum

Participating in the first Gulf Family Policy Forum, Qatar's representatives highlighted the State's dedicated ongoing endeavours to enhance cohesion and well-being of Qatari families - the most notable being the adoption of a part-time work system for Qatari female employees in government agencies.

Organised by Difi, a member of Qatar Foundation, in cooperation with the Executive Bureau of the Council of Ministers of Labour and Ministries of Social Affairs in the Gulf Co-operation Council states, the forum was inaugurated by Dr Amer Mohamed al-Hajri, director-general of the Executive Bureau.

Dr Sharifa Noaman al-Emadi, executive director, Difi, stressed the importance of the event, and noted how the forum provides a platform that unites policymakers, specialists, and civil society organisations, bringing them together to exchange experiences and enhance aspects of co-operation regarding Gulf family issues,



Participants in the forum.

thereby contributing to the enrichment of well-being and cohesion in the Gulf family as a whole.

Khalid al-Naama, director of the Family Policy Department, Difi, underscored the importance of adopting "flexible working arrangement" policies, based on evidence-based studies conducted by Difi, a key recommendation to address many family-related issues ensuring

the development of society. These policies help in dealing with emergency events and contribute to achieving "family cohesion"; enhancing "child well-being"; improving "parental relations"; "raising the fertility rate" and achieving "gender equality", al-Naama said, adding: "Difi intends to keep at its efforts in this field by conducting more research, as it is now

engaged in research on family-friendly work policies."

Difi also previewed the preliminary findings of its major survey jointly with the League of Arab States on Marital Relations Assessment, which to date has featured contributions from around 1,150 respondents across 19 Arab countries. It revealed the causes of marital disputes and early divorce, which included emotional incompatibility, difficulty accepting one's partner, financial problems, work stress and issues regarding behaviour.

Forum contributors called for devising a pilot premarital education programme at the level of Arab countries, to be worked on jointly with the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States and work teams from Arab nations. They also suggested developing a premarital education programme allocated for the Gulf context, provided it addressed the actual causes

of imbalance in marriage relations and the early collapse of the institution.

Ibtechar's new branding eyes further development for Qatar

Ibtechar, Qatar's first incubated innovation and integrated solutions company, has launched a new logo as part of its 10th anniversary celebrations.

Between 2011 and 2021, Ibtechar built an excellent track record, by meeting the technology and innovative solutions needs of clients, gaining great trust in such a promising sector, a statement said yesterday.

"The new logo represents the company's strategic plans and vision for the coming years," said Khalid Aboujassoum, founder and chairman of Ibtechar.

"We have already proved ourselves and stood out among competitors, not only as the number-one local company specialised in innovation and technology, but also with our ability to pro-



vide turnkey solutions that address the challenges of modern technology and further contribute to the current progress in almost everything in the country," he added.

Nayef al-Ibrahim, founding partner and CEO of Ibtechar, said the new logo embodies its identity, which evolved over the years, as well as its aspiration to keep excellence, embrace the highest professional standards, and expand the network of government and non-government clients.

The new branding combines three elements: (1) spirit of innovation (the letter "i" which is the initial of both Ibtechar and innovation), (2) focus on persons (being the target of all business activities, whether clients/service seekers or end users of the company's solutions), and (3) moving forward (as an anticipatory vision towards the hopes and possibilities of the future).

Accordingly, a new strategy has been outlined to empower corporations/organisations to integrate practical innovation strategies and processes into their ideas, initiatives, and projects.

To that end, three major domains - innovation consultancy, innovation development, and innovation management - have been identified.



Sudan PM sacks police chiefs after post-coup violence

AFP
Khartoum

Prime Minister Abdallah Hamdok said yesterday he has replaced Sudan's police chiefs after more than 40 people were killed in a crackdown on protests following last month's military coup.

Military chief General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan seized power and detained Hamdok on October 25, but after international condemnation and mass protests he reinstated the premier in a November 21 deal.

Medics say at least 42 people were killed as security forces sought to crush weeks of anti-coup demonstrations, with protests continuing even after Hamdok's release from house arrest and return to his post last

week. Yesterday, Hamdok said he had sacked the director general of the police, Khaled Mahdi Ibrahim al-Emamf, and his deputy, Ali Ibrahim.

In their place, he appointed Anan Hamed Mohamed Omar with Abdelrahman Nasreddine Abdallah as his deputy, the premier said in a statement.

Medics have accused security forces of targeting protesters in the "head, neck and torso" with live ammunition, as well as with rubber-coated bullets and tear gas canisters.

The police have denied reports they opened fire using live bullets.

In addition, hundreds of political activists, journalists, protesters and bystanders watching the rallies have been arrested in recent weeks, and remain in custody.

While several civilian leaders have been released since last Sunday's deal, key figures are also still in detention.

The deal raised hopes for some that Sudan will be able to return to its tenuous transition process. But critics slammed the agreement as "whitewashing" the coup, with some protesters accusing Hamdok of "treason" by signing it.

Hamdok, who has headed a transitional government since the 2019 ouster of long-time ruler Omar al-Bashir, said Wednesday he partnered with the military in order to "stop the bloodshed" and "not squander the gains of the last two years". The deal he signed with Burhan lays down a "clear date" for Sudan's first free elections in three decades slated for July 2023, the premier said.



Algeria's Council of the Nation (Senate) leader Salah Goudjil casts his vote during municipal and provincial council elections, at a polling station in the capital Algiers, yesterday.

Algerians vote in local polls to seal post-Bouteflika 'change'

AFP
Algiers

Algerians voted yesterday in local elections seen as a key in President Abdelmadjid Tebboune's push to turn the page on the two-decade rule of late president Abdelaziz Bouteflika.

Tebboune called the election "the last step in building a modern state", and promised an "economically-strong" nation, as he cast his ballot.

The election is the third vote in Algeria under Tebboune, who has vowed to reform state institutions inherited from Bouteflika, who was driven from power by the Hirak pro-democracy protest movement in April 2019.

But despite official campaigns urging Algerians to "make their mark", the vote for municipal and provincial councils sparked little public interest.

By 1:00pm (1200 GMT), turnout was running at 13%, the election authority ANIE said, with polls to set to close at 7:00pm.

The North African country's rulers are trying to "impose their will despite the embarrassing results of previous elections", said analyst Mohamed Hennad.

More than 23mn people are eligible to vote, with 115,230



A woman picks up a ballot while voting in the Algerian local elections at a polling station in the capital Algiers, yesterday.

candidates standing for municipal and provincial councils. Results are expected today.

Campaigning had been muted, despite calls by authorities on Algerians to take part if they "want change" and "institution building". Omar, an engineer, said he would not cast a ballot.

"Nothing will change," he said. Yacine, a teacher, said he was voting for rivals of the current Algiers mayor "even if I have no illusions" that they will be better.

city of Algiers, said the vote was simply "an attempt to clean up the facade of local councils by changing their members, to benefit the ruling class," he said. "Politics at the moment is limited to slogans proclaiming that the country has entered a new era, while all indicators point to the contrary," Boudjemaa added.

Tebboune, who was a prime minister under Bouteflika, pushed through an amended constitution in November 2020, approved by less than 24% of the electorate, and oversaw a parliamentary election that saw just 23% of voters take part.

His rule has seen a crackdown on journalists and Hirak activists, even as he has packaged major policy moves in response to calls by the protest movement for reform.

He has also faced one diplomatic crisis with Algeria's ex-colonial ruler France, and is embroiled in another with neighbouring Morocco.

Algiers severed diplomatic ties with Rabat in August over the disputed territory of Western Sahara.

Boudjemaa said the main issue at stake was the "huge economic and social challenges of the coming year". "Several indicators show that the pouvoir (ruling elite) has neither the vision nor the strategy to respond to the crisis," he said.

Hamas warns over Herzog's visit

AFP
Jerusalem

Hamas has warned of "repercussions" over plans by Israel's president to visit a disputed holy site in the occupied West Bank during the Jewish festival of Hanukkah.

On Friday, Israeli President Isaac Herzog's office said he would take part in a candle-lighting ceremony today in Hebron.

The holy site is known to Muslims as the Ibrahim mosque.

Hebron, which is the biggest city in the West Bank, is home to about 1,000 Jewish residents living under heavy Israeli military protection, among more than 200,000 Palestinians.

"The Israeli occupation must bear full responsibility to the repercussions of this assault," Ismail Radwan, a senior Hamas official, said in a statement on Friday.

The candle-lighting "is a provocation of the Palestinians' feelings and a blatant desecration of the sanctity of the mosque," he said, calling on Palestinians "to ward off this provocative move".

Hebron has seen regular unrest. In 1994, Israeli settler Baruch Goldstein killed 29 Palestinian worshippers inside the shrine with an assault rifle before being beaten to death by survivors. The announcement by Herzog's office also drew the ire of Israel's leftist anti-settlement Meretz party.

Iran negotiator arrives in Vienna for key N-talks

Iran's chief nuclear negotiator Ali Bagheri arrived yesterday in Vienna ahead of talks aimed at reviving the 2015 deal with world powers on the country's atomic programme, state media said. "Heading a delegation, Deputy Foreign Minister Ali Bagheri has arrived in Vienna, Austria, to attend the next round of the joint commission meeting of the Iran nuclear deal," said the official IRNA news agency. The talks, suspended since June, are due to resume tomorrow between Iran and Britain, China, France, Germany and Russia to salvage the Iran nuclear deal. The United States will take part indirectly. The deal known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA, was designed to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear arsenal.

Arab League to mark Day of Solidarity with Palestinian People

QNA
Cairo

The General Secretariat of the Arab League (the sector of Palestine and the occupied Arab Territories) will organise next Monday the annual event on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People approved by the United Nations General Assembly in a resolution in 1977, and subsequent resolutions adopted by the General Assembly on Palestine.

Arab League Assistant Secretary-General ambassador Saeed Abu Ali who is also Head of Palestine and Occupied Arab Territories sector at the Arab League, said in a statement yesterday.

"The event includes delivering political solidarity speeches and showing a short film, to be followed by the opening of an exhibition of murals showing the fraudulent methods of the occupation to loot and confiscate Palestinian lands."

This event, organised annually by the Arab League General Secretariat and its missions abroad, confirms the centrality of the Palestinian cause and the full support, solidarity with the Palestinian people in their legitimate struggle for freedom and independence and the establishment of their sovereign Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital, which is guaranteed by the principles of international law and confirmed by relevant international legitimacy resolutions.

SA dismayed at 'punishment' for honesty over Omicron variant

AFP
Johannesburg

South Africa, whose citizens have suddenly become persona-non-grata around the world after the discovery of a new Covid variant in the country, says it is being "punished" and unfairly treated for sounding the alarm.

The government in the country worst-hit by the pandemic on the continent, is seething over the stigma it has suffered in the past 48 hours for being the bearer of bad news.

The decision by many countries around the world to ban flights from southern Africa following the discovery of the variant, named Omicron, "is akin to punishing South Africa for its advanced genomic sequencing and the ability to detect new variants quicker," the foreign affairs ministry said in a statement.

"Excellent science should be applauded and not punished," it added. "New variants have been detected in other countries. Each of those cases have had no recent links with Southern Africa," yet the global "reaction to those countries is starkly different to cases in southern Africa."

The World Health Organisation has cautioned against imposing travel restrictions due to Omicron. South Africa's health



Travellers queue at a check-in counter at OR Tambo International Airport in Johannesburg, yesterday, after several countries banned flights from South Africa following the discovery of a new Covid-19 variant Omicron.

ministry slammed the travel restrictions as "draconian", "panic" and "misdirected" measures which go "against the norms and advice by the WHO".

"We feel some of the leadership of countries are finding scapegoats to deal with what is a worldwide problem," said Health Minister Joe Phaahla.

Pretoria fears the border closures will hurt "families, the travel and tourism sector, businesses" and that it may deter other countries from reporting discoveries of future variants for fear of being ostracised and punished.

"Sometimes one gets punished for being transparent, and

doing things very quick," Tullio de Oliveira, a leading virologist who announced the discovery of the Omicron variant, said.

Deputy director at the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC), Ahmed Ogwell, added his disgust.

"Stop this unscientific knee-jerk travel bans against #Africa," tweeted Ogwell. "Use evidence for #covid19pandemic - public health measures, testing, vaccines. Travel bans is politics."

"Politics won't solve pandemics."

Travellers seeking to leave the country also described the

swiftly implemented travel bans as impulsive and ill-considered.

"They don't even care about what South African scientists really think at the moment... they are just in a flatspin, in a complete panic about this new variant," said South African Nica Kruger, 26, scrambling to get a seat on a flight to Dubai yesterday. German university student Ayla Roemer, 28, who arrived in South Africa for a hiking holiday 24 hours earlier, but was flying back today, was surprised at the speed with which the Berlin government acted, banning flights from southern Africa.

UNREST

Ethiopia PM Abiy says military will 'destroy' Tigray rebels

Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed said his soldiers would "destroy" rebels from the northern Tigray region, in the latest instalment of footage which state media said shows him at the war front, AFP reported from Addis Ababa. "You are comprehensively destroying the enemy, there is no going back without winning," Abiy, winner of the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize, said in the 34-minute clip posted Saturday to his office's Twitter page, which AFP could not independently verify. "We will win, the enemy is dispersing, there are areas we have to control," he added. "Until we destroy the enemy there is no rest." Abiy announced this week he would start leading operations against the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), which once dominated national politics but has been locked in a war with his government for the past year. The announcement has spurred new recruitment in Addis Ababa. The country's most famous distance runner, Haile Gebreselassie, said he was determined to "sacrifice and stand for Ethiopia". The TPLF, he added, "is destabilising our country beyond its region". On Wednesday state-affiliated media announced Abiy had handed over regular duties to his deputy. His move came after the TPLF reported major territorial gains, claiming this week to have seized a town just 220km from the capital Addis Ababa.

TENSION

Child injured after Burkina police fire tear gas at protesters

A child was injured yesterday after Burkina Faso police fired tear gas to disperse hundreds of protesters at an anti-government rally in the capital, as anger over militant violence mounted in the country, AFP reported from Ouagadougou. City authorities had banned the gathering, which aimed to voice frustration at the failure of President Roch Marc Christian Kabore to stem the bloodshed. Anti-riot police fired tear gas to prevent the demonstrators from gathering in a square in the centre of Ouagadougou, where substantial police and security forces were deployed and all shops closed. Angry youths erected makeshift barricades and burned tyres in several neighbourhoods, including in front of the ruling party headquarters, in an effort to block police movement. One protester said he and others had come down for a peaceful protest, but that the police's reaction had been excessive, forcing them to set up the barricades. "We don't want to burn down a country already at war, but when faced with savagery, we will defend ourselves," he said. An AFP correspondent said a child who appeared younger than 10 was injured after security forces fired the tear gas. Protesters handed the minor over to an anti-riot squad to get treatment.

Johnson sets out more measures to battle new coronavirus variant

Agencies
London

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson unveiled yesterday new measures to try to stop the spread of a new coronavirus variant called Omicron, saying all arrivals would have to take a test and it was time to step up booster jabs.

"We will require anyone who enters the UK to take a PCR test by the end of the second day after their arrival and to self-isolate until they have a negative result," Johnson told a news conference.

He said those who had come into contact with people testing positive for a suspected case of Omicron would have to self-isolate for 10 days and that the government would tighten up the rules on wearing face coverings.

Britain yesterday confirmed its first two cases of the new Omicron strain of Covid-19, both linked to travel from southern Africa, and expanded travel restrictions on the region.

"After overnight genome sequencing, the UK Health Security Agency has confirmed that two cases of Covid-19 with mutations consistent with B.1.1.529 (Omicron) have been identified

in the UK," a government statement said. "The two cases are linked and there is a link to travel to southern Africa," it said.

One case was detected in the central English city of Nottingham, and the other in Chelmsford east of London, officials said. "We have moved rapidly and the individuals are self-isolating while contact tracing is ongoing," Health Secretary Sajid Javid said.

He added that the government was placing another four African countries on its travel "red list" - Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia and Angola - effective from 4am today. Britain has al-

ready said it is banning travel from six southern African nations because of the emergence of Omicron: South Africa, Namibia, Lesotho, Eswatini, Zimbabwe and Botswana.

The government was widely criticised for its travel and quarantine policy earlier in the pandemic, when it kept borders open to foreign travellers even as infection rates spiralled.

"This is a stark reminder that we are not yet out of this pandemic," Javid said, urging the public to get follow-up booster jabs of vaccines. "We will not hesitate to take further action if required."

Tribute to farmers



Farmers and activists of local political parties take part in a rally to pay tribute to farmers who lost their lives in protests against the central government's agricultural reform laws in Mumbai yesterday.

Calm returns to Solomons capital after deadly rioting

AFP
Honiara

Calm returned to the Solomon Islands' capital Honiara yesterday after days of rioting left at least three dead and reduced sections of the city to smouldering ruins. Petrol stations, shops and other businesses began to reopen, with Honiara residents flocking to buy basic provisions as the violence ebbed.

"The situation is very tense and anything could happen anytime," said Audrey Awao, a working mother who worried there would soon be no food left in the shops.

What began as a small protest on Wednesday quickly descended into a violent free-for-all, with poor Honiara residents joining anti-government protesters to rampage through the shattered glass and burnt-out remains of businesses for things to eat or sell.

For three straight days, angry mobs cut through the usually sleepy seaside capital, demanding the removal of Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare.

Two years of pandemic-induced closed borders have left the already ravaged Solomons economy in tatters, deepening widespread joblessness and poverty among the population of around 800,000. An early estimate of the cost, released by the Central Bank of the Solomon Islands, said 56 buildings in the capital had been burnt and looted, with many businesses facing over a year-long recovery.

While the loss to the economy was expected to be at least \$28mn (24.7mn euros), with the bank's governor warning that the nation's accounts - already struggling to recover from the Covid-19 pandemic - had been further weakened by the riots. A more thorough estimate of the damage would be released in the



A man looks at damages in Honiara yesterday as a tense calm returned after days of intense rioting that left at least three dead and reduced swathes of the city to smouldering ruins.

coming days, he added. "Now the PM needs to step down," a self-employed 32-year-old who gave his name as Selson told AFP. "That's the demand for all citizens of the Solomon Islands."

Local police said a forensic team was working to identify the charred remains of three bodies found in a shop in the city's burnt-out Chinatown district. Heavily armed police were a visible presence on nearby streets as locals began clean up operations and limited bus services resumed. A night-time curfew and the presence of roughly 150 foreign peacekeepers from Australia and Papua New Guinea appeared to have helped cool tensions. But the scale of the recovery was coming into sharp focus, even as the city remained on edge.

"It is very frustrating as it took me more than three hours to reach the fuel pump to get my vehicle fuelled," Awao told AFP.

Many Solomon Islanders believe their government is corrupt

and beholden to Beijing and other foreign interests.

"Most people are barely getting one meal a day, there are no tourists and very little economic stimulus," Douglas Kelson, chief officer at St John Ambulance Service, told AFP. "People do things they normally wouldn't when they are hungry," Kelson said.

Protesters channelled their anger directly at Sogavare and his government, with mobs attempting to torch parliament and the prime minister's private residence as police fired tear gas and warning shots. Over 100 people have been arrested for riot-related activity, Solomon Islands police said Saturday as they tried to restore order. "No one is above the law," said commissioner Mostyn Mangau, urging residents to "respect each other, as well as our visiting friends from abroad".

As tensions escalated, Sogavare had begged neighbours for

urgent help. In a letter obtained by AFP, the prime minister told his Papua New Guinea counterpart James Marape that "certain elements" had "attempted to overthrow a democratically elected government" and called for peacekeepers to be sent for a "period of three to four weeks". In an address to the nation, Sogavare told citizens the Solomons had been "brought to its knees" by the rioting but vowed to resist calls for his resignation.

But the political situation remained fraught. Opposition leaders yesterday called for a vote of no confidence in Sogavare's leadership.

They may not yet have enough votes to pass the motion and remove Sogavare from office, but the move could produce another flashpoint. The pro-Beijing leader claimed foreign powers opposed to his 2019 decision to switch the Solomons' diplomatic allegiance from Taiwan to China were behind the disturbances.



Australian Army soldiers from the Joint Task Group 637.3 talking with local citizens during a community engagement patrol through the Solomon Islands capital of Honiara.



An aerial view shows burnt-out buildings in Honiara's Chinatown yesterday.

But others pointed to inter-island tensions and widespread joblessness among the country's population - 40 percent of whom are under 14 years of age.

The archipelago nation has for decades endured ethnic and political tensions. Residents of the populous Malaita province have long complained that their island

is neglected by the central government, and divisions intensified when Sogavare recognised Beijing.

China's government on Friday condemned the violence and vowed to "safeguard the safety and legitimate rights and interests of Chinese citizens and institutions".

Modi orders review of travel reopening on Omicron concerns

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi told officials yesterday to review plans to ease travel restrictions as concerns rise over the new Omicron variant of Covid-19.

The world's second-worst affected country by the pandemic had only Friday decided to resume international passenger flights from countries deemed "at risk" of the coronavirus, while ordering tightened border screening.

But after the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the new variant to be "of concern", Modi "highlighted the need for monitoring all international arrivals, their testing as per guidelines, with a specific focus on countries identified 'at risk'" the government said in a statement after he met with officials to review the Covid-19 and vaccination situation.

The WHO said Omicron, initially detected in South Africa, may spread more quickly than other forms. This week, India posted the smallest rise in new cases in one and a half years, due to increased vaccinations and antibodies in a large section of its population from previous infections.

The nation's daily caseload has halved since September. It reported 8,318 new cases in the last 24 hours.

But the new variant, with a spike protein dramatically different from the one existing coronavirus that vaccines are based on, has raised global alarms and frightened financial markets.

Modi said people must be more cautious and take proper precautions, such as wearing masks and social distancing. He "spoke about the need to be proactive in light of the new variant," the statement said. "He directed that intensive containment and active surveillance should continue in clusters reporting higher cases and required technical support be provided to states which are reporting higher cases presently."

Modi told officials to accelerate second-dose coverage, it said.

Australia imposes virus curbs for travellers from southern Africa

Reuters
Melbourne

Australia imposed new restrictions yesterday on people who have been to nine southern African countries, as the new Omicron variant raises concerns about another wave of the pandemic. The countries are South Africa, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Lesotho, Eswatini, the Seychelles, Malawi and Mozambique.

Effective immediately, the government will ban non-citizens who have been in those countries from entering and will require supervised 14-day quarantines for Australian citizens and their dependents returning from the countries, said Health Minister Greg Hunt.

These restrictions also apply to people such as international students and skilled migrants arriving from countries with which Australia has travel bubbles, who have been in any of the

Anyone who has already arrived in Australia and who has been in any of those countries within the past 14 days must immediately isolate and be tested

nine countries within the past 14 days. "If the medical evidence shows that further actions are required, we will not hesitate to take them. And that may involve strengthening or expanding the restrictions," he said.

Anyone who has already arrived in Australia and who has been in any of those countries within the past 14 days must immediately isolate and be tested. The Australian government will also suspend all flights from the nine southern African countries for two weeks.

Twenty travellers from South Africa are in quarantine in the Northern Territory's Howard Springs facility, 19 of whom have returned negative coronavirus tests. It is not yet known if

the one positive test result is the Omicron variant, Hunt said.

The discovery of the variant - which has a spike protein dramatically different from the one that existing vaccines are based on - triggered global alarm on Friday as countries rushed to suspend travel from southern Africa and stock markets suffered their biggest falls in more than a year.

Australia early this month eased its international border restrictions for the first time during the pandemic allowing fully vaccinated residents to return to the country without quarantine after higher vaccination levels.

Australia had largely stamped out infections for most of this year until an outbreak of the highly infectious Delta variant in late June spread rapidly across its east. About 205,000 cases and 1,985 deaths have been recorded so far, lower than many other countries in the developed world.

Myanmar-China border crossings re-open for trade

Two Myanmar-China border crossings have re-opened for trade after the movement of goods was suspended for almost seven months due to Covid-19 restrictions, officials said. Five shipping containers of produce were exchanged on Friday at the Kyin San Kyaw border gate, around 11km from the northern Myanmar city of Muse.

Min Thein, vice-chair of the Muse Rice Wholesale Centre, said an estimated 800,000 bags of rice had been in limbo since the border was shut in April. "It will take one month to export all these rice bags," he told AFP. China says it will allow more trucks to cross next week. Elsewhere in Myanmar's Shan state, the Chinshwehwar border gate also re-opened for commerce Friday, the Chinese embassy in Yangon said.

"China-Myanmar border trade is trying to return to normal as soon as possible," the embassy posted on Facebook alongside pictures of container trucks and officials in full plastic protective gear.

Selfie time



A woman takes a selfie in a sunflower field in Lopburi, Thailand.



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GULF TIMES

Raging inflation may cause upswing in US interest rates

Global financial system is eagerly watching the next move of the US Federal Reserve on tackling inflation, with recent official data showing prices rose 5% over the past year, marking the highest inflation rate since 1990.

The US central bank officials at their meeting earlier this month expressed concern about inflation and said they would be willing to raise interest rates, if prices keep rising.

They stressed a "patient" approach regarding incoming data, which has shown inflation running at its highest pace in more than 30 years.

But officials also said they would "not hesitate to take appropriate actions to address inflation pressures that posed risks to its longer-run price stability and employment objectives."

The durability and broadening in price pressures seem to have taken the White House and the Fed by surprise and prompted both to respond.

US President Joe Biden and Fed Chair Jerome Powell stressed they would take steps to tackle the rising costs of everyday items, including food, gasoline and rent.

Although the surge in inflation in late spring and over the summer was portrayed as transitory, concern within the Fed has mounted as readings have continued to remain elevated into the fall, according to Reuters.

All signs point to an acceleration of the bond-buying taper at the Fed's next policy meeting in mid-December

"Various participants noted that the (policy-setting) Committee should be prepared to adjust the pace of asset purchases and raise the target range for the federal funds rate sooner than participants currently anticipated if inflation continued to run higher than levels consistent with the Committee's objectives,"

the Fed said in the minutes.

Fed policymakers unanimously decided at last month's meeting to begin reducing the central bank's \$120bn in monthly purchases of Treasuries and mortgage-backed securities, a program introduced in early 2020 to help nurse the economy through the Covid-19 pandemic.

Powell, speaking after President Biden picked him for another four years at the helm, said policy makers "will use our tools both to support the economy and a strong labour market, and to prevent higher inflation from becoming entrenched."

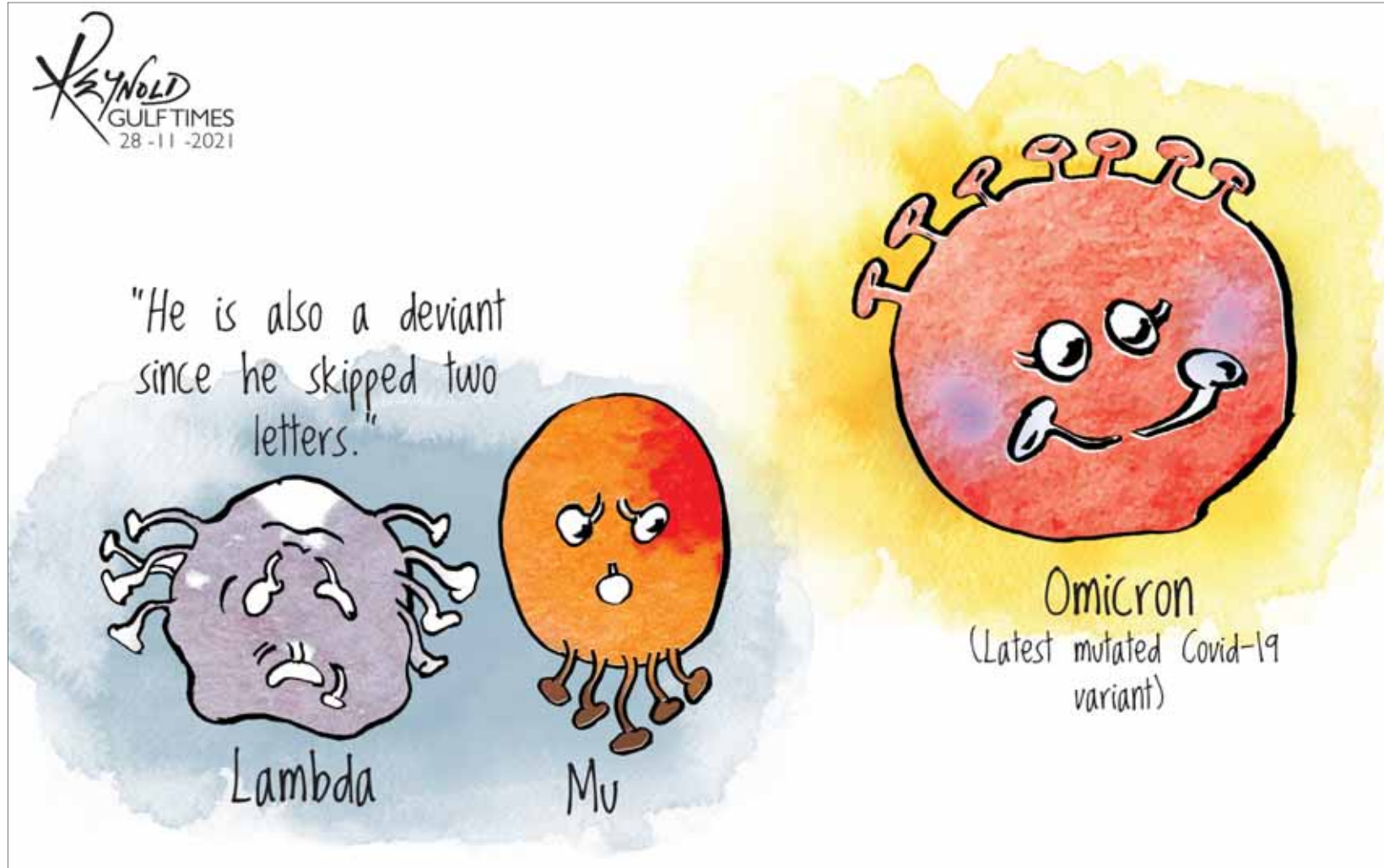
The minutes showed that officials "generally continued to anticipate that the inflation rate would diminish significantly during 2022," while "many participants pointed to considerations that might suggest that elevated inflation could prove more persistent."

"With the latest data suggesting that fourth-quarter GDP growth could be as strong as 6.5% annualised, we expect more officials to jump on that bandwagon," said Paul Ashworth, chief US economist at Capital Economics.

A number of other policymakers at the Fed's November meeting, however, still advocated for a more patient approach, wanting more data in hand, although all agreed the Fed "would not hesitate to take appropriate actions to address inflation pressures that posed risks to its longer-run price stability and employment objectives."

Federal Reserve officials at their last meeting were reportedly open to removing policy support at a faster pace to keep inflation in check, even before data showed price pressures accelerating.

But with further robust economic data released over the past three weeks, all signs point to an acceleration of the bond-buying taper now being firmly on the table at the Fed's next policy meeting in mid-December.



A new world order and India

By Harsh Vardhan Shringla

As the Covid-19 virus ebbs and wanes, post-pandemic realities are beginning to emerge. They underlie a growing set of understandings and arrangements that form the basis of an emerging world order. Empirically speaking, downturns are followed by recovery. The Indian economy is beginning to bounce back with economic output and activity surging.

A vaccination campaign of unprecedented scope and complexity has improved health security and reduced vulnerabilities in record time. The stage is set for a return to normality and more. This is, therefore, a moment of opportunity.

The choices that India makes at this juncture are an indication of where it sees promise of a better tomorrow. The pandemic has demonstrated that we need a more, and not less, interconnected world. Common problems must have common solutions.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, over the last few months, has in the G7, G20, in COP26, in the first Quad Summit, in the UN General Assembly and as Chair of the UN Security Council, Brics and the Shanghai Co-operation Organisation Council of Heads of Government, articulated a vision of a new world order that is relevant to the challenges of the post-pandemic world.

He has also, through a variety of domestic and international platforms, laid down a set of strategies and objectives which will align Indian priorities with this vision for a better tomorrow for all.

A major global challenge on which India has acted to provide leadership and direction is climate change. Despite our developmental needs, we have shown a strong commitment to climate action.

Speaking most recently at the COP26 Summit in Glasgow, the prime minister outlined India's climate ambition through Panchamrit which will put India on an accelerated track to raise non-fossil fuel based energy capacity to 500GW and meet 50% of our energy requirements from renewables by 2030 while reducing projected carbon emissions by a billion tonnes and carbon intensity to below 45% until 2030 and to "net zero" by 2070.

Articulating the concerns of the developing world, the prime minister also



Going green: Indian workers are seen giving the finishing touches to solar panels in Gujarat. The country plans to ramp up renewable generation capacity almost fivefold to 450GW by 2030. (AFP)

called on developed countries to enhance their ambition on the transfer of climate finance and low cost technologies.

Two international organisations, the International Solar Alliance and Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure, initiated by India, have begun to play an important role in climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts globally.

At COP26, the prime minister launched the 'One Sun, One World, One Grid' for interconnected solar energy infrastructure at a global scale and 'Infrastructure for Resilient Island States' for climate and disaster resilient infrastructure in Small Island Developing States under these organisations. India is also seeking to turn into a global hub for Green Hydrogen production and export under its National Hydrogen Mission.

The prime minister's appeal for promoting sustainable lifestyles to deal with climate change found resonance at the G20 Summit in Rome. He has proposed a One-World Movement, i.e., LIFE or Lifestyle for Environment. The adoption of India's own example of sustainable lifestyle on a global basis would be transformational in our fight against climate change.

The pandemic has highlighted the need to de-risk supply chains and make them more resilient.

The prime minister has emphasised three key factors for improving our supply chains: Trusted Source,

Transparency and Time-Frame.

The Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan prioritises resilience and reliability and intends to make India a trustworthy supply chain hub. This is a part of a larger policy framework to augment capacity through fiscal and monetary support, injection of liquidity, financial support for industry, better ease of doing business, and ambitious structural reforms.

A landmark Production Linked Incentives scheme is attracting investment, boosting domestic manufacturing and creating globally competitive Indian businesses. Previously restricted sectors such as space, defence and atomic energy have been opened to greater private participation. A National Education Policy has created the framework for educating a 21st century workforce and making India a global education and skill centre.

India is also making massive public investments in improving its infrastructure. The prime minister's Gati Shakti - the National Master Plan for Multi-modal Connectivity - is set to create a seamlessly connected India. It introduces a non-siloed approach to connectivity and brings executing and policy entities onto a common platform. Improvements in physical infrastructure will be accompanied by focus on SDG goals by initiatives such as those on digital connectivity, financial inclusion and immunisation.

The JAM trinity, composed of Jan Dhan, the world's largest financial inclusion programme; Aadhar, the world's largest biometric programme; and one of the world's largest Mobile phone networks; has enabled Direct Benefits Transfer on a transformational scale. It is now powering a fintech revolution. Jal Jeevan and Ayushman Bharat are changing lives by providing access to clean water and healthcare, respectively, to all Indians.

SDG 3 sets us all towards the target of ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages. At the G20 Summit, the prime minister put forward the holistic vision of "One Earth - One Health" for the world.

The pandemic has moved international systems to the digital space. Whether it is the Co-Win Portal that has managed one of the world's most ambitious vaccination operations in a user-friendly, transparent, equitable and efficient manner; the Digital India initiative; digital payment solutions; or the 24*7 BPO and ITES industry; India has adapted and continues to go digital.

Speaking at the G20 Summit, the prime minister pointed out that India has certified 'at scale' solutions for many developmental problems. It is a proving ground of development. It also has vast experience of South-South Development Co-operation and can offer many templates to other developing countries.

Earlier, at the G7 Summit, the prime minister had announced that Indian open source digital solutions would be available to all. Even during the bleakest days of the pandemic, India did not forget that it was part of an international community. It went out of its way to supply essential medicines to more than 150 countries. It received, in its turn, the support of all, during its "second wave."

While running a successful vaccination campaign at home, India has also now resumed export of vaccines to its neighbours and partners. Through all of these, and more, India is acting as a key and constructive player in the creation of a new world order that can cope with the challenges of tomorrow.

A world order that looks beyond the purely economic, and places human beings and their well-being, as the ultimate objective.

● Harsh Vardhan Shringla is the Foreign Secretary, Government of India. The views expressed are personal.

LETTER

A big 'Thank You' to health workers



Dr Rizwan Ahmad
Associate Professor of Linguistics, College of Arts and Sciences, Qatar University

Dear Sir,

Two weeks ago, my sixth grader came back home with heavy fever and headache.

Initially, we thought it was the regular seasonal flu that we all get during this time of year, but we still took her to a private clinic for a checkup especially because she had mentioned difficulty in breathing.

Since some of the symptoms of flu and Covid are similar, her doctor recommended an antigen test, which

came positive.

We, then, immediately took her to our primary healthcare centre at Qatar University for a PCR test to confirm.

She tested positive - a piece of news that came crashing on us.

The call from the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) which broke the scary news to us also helped us deal with the situation in the best way possible.

In newspapers, when we read about Covid-19 positive cases in Qatar or anywhere else, they are simply numbers and figures, but when a loved one is tested positive the situation strikes at a different level of consciousness.

It was no longer distant statistics; it became our personal issue.

After informing us of the Covid positive test result, the MoPH doctor checked on the health of the rest of the family members and asked if we had a place in our home for our daughter to isolate properly.

In case, we didn't, they told us that

they would offer their own isolation facility for her for two weeks.

We told them we do have a proper room where she can safely isolate.

Since we had been in touch with her, they informed us that they would send a medical team to our home to do a PCR test for the rest of the family members.

Luckily results of all members including our two-year-old baby came negative which was a relief for all of us.

What was very comforting in such a stressful time was that we kept receiving calls from MoPH/HMC/Hukoomi almost every day checking on our daughter's health and instructing us what to do in case her condition deteriorated, or any medicine or medical help was needed.

They offered to deliver cough and fever medicine to our house because we were not allowed to leave until our results came negative.

Since our daughter had spent time with her classmates at school, they also told me that they would inform her school.

I still went ahead and called her school in the morning.

They told me that they had already received a call from the ministry and that my daughter's class was suspended until all students in her class were tested.

It was only after a week that those who tested negative were allowed to come back to school.

As part of my own personal responsibility, I also informed other girls with whom my daughter had spent time on the weekend.

My daughter has recovered quickly, and she is attending her classes online.

This is such a great relief for us all, but it is worth mentioning that a clear communication and caring and responsible behaviour of the MoPH staff contributed a lot to alleviate our stress and anxieties and ensuring the safety of all schoolchildren.

On behalf of my daughter and the family we want to say a big "Thank you" to the staff who work tirelessly to keep the rest of us healthy.

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World races to contain new Covid-19 variant

AFP
Schiphol

Fears mounted yesterday that a highly-infectious new coronavirus (Covid-19) strain was pushing its way into Europe as the world brought the shutters down to contain the new Omicron variant.

Britain confirmed its first two infections and suspected new cases emerged in Germany and the Czech Republic, while Dutch authorities quarantined 61 passengers from South Africa who tested positive for Covid-19.

South Africa complained it was being "punished" with air travel bans for first detecting the strain, which the World Health Organisation (WHO) has termed a "variant of concern".

South Korea, Australia and Thailand joined the United States, Brazil, Canada and a host of

other countries around the world restricting travel from the region, fearing a major setback to global efforts against the pandemic.

Scientists are racing to determine the threat posed by the heavily mutated strain, which is more transmissible than the dominant Delta variant, and whether it can evade existing vaccines.

The virus has already slipped through the net with cases in Europe and Hong Kong and Israel. Both cases in Britain were linked to travel from southern Africa, and in response the government expanded travel restrictions on the region.

Belgium said on Friday that it had detected the first announced infection in an unvaccinated person returning from abroad.

Germany's suspect case, meanwhile, was fully jabbed.

"The Omicron variant has with strong likeli-

hood already arrived in Germany," tweeted Kai Klöse, social affairs minister in the western state of Hesse.

The neighbouring Czech Republic was carrying out further tests on a woman who had travelled from Namibia and was suspected to have the new variant, Prime Minister Andrej Babis said.

The Netherlands meanwhile found around one in 10 - 61 out of 600 - people who had arrived at Schiphol airport on Friday from South Africa were positive for Covid-19.

Those infected, who flew in on two KLM flights that took off before the Dutch government announced a ban on travellers from the region, were being kept quarantined in a hotel.

"The positive test results will be examined as soon as possible to determine whether this concerns the new worrisome variant," the Dutch Health Authority said.

The WHO said it could take several weeks to understand the variant, which was initially known as B.1.1.529, and cautioned against travel curbs while scientific evidence remains scant.

US President Joe Biden meanwhile said that richer countries should donate more Covid-19 vaccines and give up intellectual property protections to manufacture more doses worldwide.

"The news about this new variant should make clearer than ever why this pandemic will not end until we have global vaccinations," he said.

However, with memories still fresh of the way global air travel helped the spread of Covid-19 after it first emerged in the Chinese city of Wuhan in late 2019, countries clamped down swiftly.

Australia and Belgium became the latest to act, banning all flights from nine southern African countries.

South Korea and Thailand restricted flights from eight countries, as did the United States, Brazil, Canada and Saudi Arabia.

EU officials agreed in an emergency meeting to urge all 27 nations in the bloc to restrict travel from southern Africa, with many members having already done so.

The World Trade Organisation called off its ministerial conference, its biggest gathering in four years, at the last minute on Friday due to the new variant.

Vaccine manufacturers have held out hope that they can modify current vaccines to target the Omicron variant.

Germany's BioNTech and US drugmaker Pfizer have said that they expect data "in two weeks at the latest" to show if their jab can be adjusted.

Moderna said it will develop a booster specific to the new variant.

Trudeau tours flood-hit western Canada

AFP
Ottawa

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau visited on Friday areas of Canada's Pacific coast hit by catastrophic floods, warning of further climate mayhem as the region braces for more torrential rains.

"This will not be the last crisis Canadians go through," he told a joint news conference with British Columbia's premier, John Horgan.

"Extreme weather events are going to become more frequent," he said, adding: "We need to address the long term climate change problems", including by cutting CO₂ (carbon dioxide) emissions and making infrastructure more resilient.

Heavy rains hit British Columbia in mid-November, causing flooding and mudslides that damaged or destroyed roads and bridges, forced thousands to evacuate their homes and left at least four dead and one missing.

This followed record-high temperatures over the summer that killed more than 500 people in the province, as well as wildfires that destroyed a town.

"We're facing the brunt of climate change, not in the future, but right now," Horgan said. "Our farms have been flooded, our roads have been washed away and our communities are underwater, and more rain is coming."

On Friday Horgan's government ordered sections of three major highways closed ahead of two more major rain storms expected over the coming days.

Environment Canada has forecast up to 120mm (4.7") of rain over the weekend, warning it could lead to flash floods and washouts.

A second storm is expected to slam the province tomorrow.

Earlier, Trudeau, with a local mayor, surveyed aerial images of the flooded Sumas Prairie east of Vancouver, and met with soldiers sandbagging as well as residents affected by the floods.

"I saw the extent of the pools of water, the challenges of so many farms, so many communities impacted," the prime minister said, and met people "fighting for their homes".

In joint op-ed, China and Russia decry US democracy summit

AFP
Washington

A rare joint opinion article by the ambassadors of China and Russia has sharply assailed President Joe Biden's plans for a virtual summit of democratic countries - from which they were pointedly excluded.

Calling the US plan "an evident product of its Cold-War mentality", ambassadors Anatoly Antonov of Russia and Qin Gang of China said the December 9-10 event would "stoke up ideological confrontation and a rift in the world, creating new 'dividing lines'".

The summit is meant to fulfil a campaign pledge by Biden to advance the cause of global democracy

at a time when autocratic governments have been on the rise.

However, when the State Department on Tuesday published a list of about 110 invited countries - without including Russia or China - their reaction was furious.

China was especially angered by the inclusion of Taiwan, over which it claims sovereignty.

Writing on the website of conservative *National Journal*, the two ambassadors to the United States said democracy "can be realised in multiple ways, and no model can fit all countries".

"No country has the right to judge the world's vast and varied political landscape by a single yardstick," the ambassadors added.

The article described communist China as having "an extensive, whole-process socialist democ-

cracy (which) reflects the people's will, suits the country's realities, and enjoys strong support from the people".

"It has been proved that the whole-process democracy works in China, and works very well."

The article did not mention Taiwan.

It said that Russia - where long-serving President Vladimir Putin in April signed a law that could allow him to remain in power until 2036 - is a "democratic federative law-governed state with a republican form of government" with century-old parliamentary traditions.

Without naming the US, the envoys said that wars and conflicts launched in the name of spreading democracy, "severely undermine regional and international peace, security, and stability".

"Bombings of Yugoslavia, military intervention

in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya, and 'democratic transformation' do nothing but harm," they wrote.

"Countries should focus on running their own affairs well, not condescendingly criticising others."

They concluded by saying that countries should practice mutual respect and co-operation.

Such co-operation should rely heavily on the United Nations, they wrote, adding: "There should be a more inclusive global governance, not something like 'might makes right'."

Among countries invited to the virtual summit are some where democracy appears fragile, has suffered setbacks, or where autocratic trends have emerged.

The invitees include Brazil, India and Pakistan, but not Hungary or North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato) member Turkey.



Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau is seen during his visit to Abbotsford, after rainstorms lashed the western Canadian province of British Columbia (see report on the left).

Weekend do's

Afghan children (above) enjoy a merry-go-round ride at an amusement park in Kabul.

Right: People attend a protest in Madrid against the proposed changes to anti-terrorism and gag laws (see report below).



A man places an advertisement for an exhibitor at the Guadalajara International Book Fair in Guadalajara, Mexico. The Guadalajara International Book Fair will be held this week, with Peru as this year's guest of honour.



Taliban regime won't 'interfere' with other countries

AFP
Kabul

The Taliban co-founder and now Prime Minister of Afghanistan Mullah Mohamed Hassan Akhund has pledged that his government will "not interfere" in other countries' internal affairs, and urged international charities to continue offering aid to the war-ravaged country.

Hassan's audio speech broadcast on state television - his first address to the nation since the Taliban seized power in August - came ahead of next week's meeting between the United States and the Taliban in Doha.

"We assure all the countries that we will not interfere in their internal affairs, and we want to have good economic relations with them," said Hassan in a nearly 30-minute speech that came amid criticism on social media for remaining silent since the Taliban took power, even as the nation faced challenges.

The Taliban seized power on August 15 after ousting the previous US-backed government, as Washington hurriedly withdrew its troops from the country after a 20-year war.

The Taliban's previous regime was toppled in a US-led invasion after the 9/11 attacks in the United States that were carried out by Al Qaeda, whose now-killed founder Osama bin Laden lived in Afghanistan at that time.

Hassan's government faces a series of challenges, in particular reviving the country's dilapidated economy that has been dried of international aid, which used to make up 75% of the national budget under the previous US-backed governments.

"We ask all the international charity organisations to not withhold their aid and to help our exhausted nation... so that the problems of the people could be solved," Hassan said.

Inflation and unemployment have surged in Afghanistan, while the country's banking sector has collapsed.

The financial crunch was aggravated after Washington froze about \$10bn of assets held in its reserve for Kabul, and deteriorated further after the World Bank and International Monetary Fund halted Afghanistan's access to funding.

Pakistan e-commerce platform aims to beef up

Reuters
Islamabad

Pakistan's largest e-commerce retail platform Daraz aims to host up to 300,000 small to medium enterprises (SMEs) in two years, its chief executive said, as the firm seeks to bolster its position in its home market in the face of potential competition from global giant Amazon.

E-commerce growth in the country of 220mn is yet to take off fully, like in neighbouring India where the market features retail heavyweights such as Amazon and Walmart and large local platforms run by India's Reliance and Tata groups.

Daraz, founded in 2012 in Pakistan and acquired by Chinese giant Alibaba in 2018, has 100,000 SMEs in Pakistan on its platform.

"We want to get to 300,000 active and educated SMEs selling on our platform within the next two years, and that will basically create 1mn jobs," chief executive Bjarke Mikkelsen told Reuters on Wednesday.

Pakistan's rapidly growing middle class, over 60% youth population and broadband subscriptions of over 100mn, makes it a lucrative destination for e-commerce platforms.

Amazon announced earlier this year that it will allow Pakistani entrepreneurs to sell products on its marketplace.

Before the interview, Mikkelsen met Prime Minister Imran Khan and his finance and investment teams to discuss co-ordination on free zones where tech companies would get special incentives to flourish, and an e-commerce university that Khan said Pakistan will be opening.

Daraz operates in three other South Asian nations - Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, as well as Myanmar - with access to 500mn customers with a team of 10,000 employees.

It has invested \$100mn in Pakistan and Bangladesh over the last two years, Mikkelsen said.

It is targeting sales this year of nearly \$1bn through its platform, having seen 100% order

growth year-on-year in the last four years, he said.

The e-commerce sector in Pakistan grew over 35% in value in the first quarter of 2021 to 96bn Pakistani rupees (\$548.89mn) compared to 71bn rupees (\$405.95mn) over the same period of 2020, according to commerce ministry data.

Out of the 70mn users who visited the Daraz website last month, 35mn were from Pakistan.

Mikkelsen said Pakistan is seeing more people now ready to use digital services.

He added that e-commerce in the South Asian nations where Daraz operates was only 2% of the retail market, which could be scaled up 10 to 20 times.

Spanish cops march against reform

Thousands of Spanish police officers marched through Madrid yesterday to protest a proposed reform of a security law which they say will hamper their ability to do their work.

Politicians from Spain's three main conservative parties joined police officers in the protest against proposed changes to the 2015 Citizens Security Law, which critics say violates the right to protest and limits free expression.

Dubbed the "Gag Law" by those who oppose it, the legislation allows authorities to fine media organisations for distributing unauthorised images of police, strictly limits demonstrations, and imposes heavy fines for offenders.

Spain's leftist government has proposed reforms including no longer classifying the taking of photographs or making of recordings of police at demonstrations as a serious offence. Under the changes, police will also have to use less harmful materials at protests after a number of people were seriously injured by rubber bullets fired by officers.

The time that suspects who are arrested at protests can be held in custody will be cut from six hours to two, and fines will be proportional to how much offenders earn.

"They should either leave the current law as it is or make it better for the police and for the citizens," Civil Guard officer Vanessa Gonzalez told Reuters.

Organisers said 150,000 people took part in the Madrid demonstration but the government put the figure at 20,000. - Reuters

Soul Street dance their way into people's hearts in Qatar

By Ayman Adly
Staff Reporter

Soul Street Dance, a Houston, US-based group of hip-hop and break dancers, enthralled the audience with their performance at Katara Opera House yesterday.

The event came as part of the Qatar-USA Festival, which is being held under the Qatar-USA 2021 Year of Culture initiative.

The audience, made up of people from different backgrounds and nationalities, was seen enjoying the highly engaging performance of the four performers who had come all the way to Qatar from Houston, Texas to show their skills and highlight a key aspect of American culture.

They also expressed their love and admiration for Qatar, which they are visiting for the first time, referring to the diversity seen in the country and its welcoming nature.

They also stressed that what they have seen



The performers in action.

Qatar Charity backs 'Box of Happiness' initiative for children locally and abroad

The "Box of Happiness" initiative, held in co-operation with Qatar Charity (QC), saw significant interaction with youngsters who donated toys to bring joy and happiness to children of low-income families in Qatar and to disadvantaged children abroad.

The activity took place at the National Museum of Qatar (NMoQ) in conjunction with World Children's Day.

In addition to giving the toys for the initiative, the children, along with their parents and family members, took part in wrapping them in beautiful gift packages for delivery to the target children, aiming to draw a smile on their faces.

Qatar Charity has embraced the "Box of Happiness" initiative and provided it with technical support and volunteers, who assisted the children in collecting and wrapping the toys.

The QC and the initiative's team will soon sort the toys for distribution to beneficiaries in Qatar.

Qatar Charity's Programmes and Community Development department director Fatima Jumah al-Mohannadi said the QC has supported the "Box of Happiness" initiative as part of its keenness to instill the values of sharing and giving in the children and to bring joy and happiness to kids whose parents do not afford such toys for them.

She emphasised that Qatar Charity always supports youth initiatives for



community services, allowing youth to develop their capabilities, and engaging volunteers in community activities.

Launched by Alya al-Maadheed and Tamader al-Buainain, both volunteers, the "Box of Happiness" initiative collected used and new toys and wraps them in beautiful gift boxes to be sent

to children in Qatar and abroad.

"The idea of the initiative stemmed from our sense of responsibility towards children, especially those experiencing tough health and psychological situations, orphans and underprivileged children," said al-Maadheed. "We want to draw a smile on the faces of the



Samantha Jackson addressing the audience.

in Qatar so far during their short stay has convinced them that the country is capable of handling major events such as the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022.

Group member Javier Garcia said he has enjoyed the great hospitality of the people of the country, describing everybody he has met as nice and welcoming.

"The amount of development and growth in the country is clearly great everywhere you go," he said. "We have highly enjoyed the food and the unique tradition and culture of the country." "The spirit of hip-hop and break dance is that of love and unity among people regardless of their differences," Garcia added. "We loved the Qatari culture and hope to have more performances here in the future, as the reception of the audience is encouraging."

Fellow Soul Street Dance member Cedric Hicks stressed that their experience in Doha has been unique and exciting, and said that they hope for possible collaborations with Qatari artists to enhance their music and shows.

"The local music and rhythms can be easily incorporated within the rhythms we use, and we can make exciting new blends that would be a further addition to the performances and the art," he said.

Group member Ichikara Valdez said: "We come from Houston and are used to having different people from various cultures and backgrounds, so we already have open minds about other cultures and ready to embrace different world cultures."

"Qatari culture is rich and diversified, and the place hosts multinational traditions that live together in harmony and peace," he said, stressing that Katara - the Cultural Village is one of the most interesting places he has seen, with its impressive buildings and facilities.

Marco Hernandez said he liked the fashion sense in the country, in particular the quality of exquisite pearls and jewellery designs.

He also expressed his liking for the traditional



The Soul Street Dance members with Faisal al-Dosari on stage.

Qatari dress, and stressed that the local culture would help his team draw inspiration for their future performances by further embracing new cultures.

The group's performance blending classical music - a piece by Antonio Vivaldi - with hip-hop and break dance, in addition to their natural sense of fun, entertained and kept the audience enthusiastic all through the show.

At one point during the show, Qatari IT programmer Faisal al-Dosari, a longtime fan and enthusiast of hip-hop, joined the group on stage and gave an energetic and entertaining performance himself.

He said that when he came to know about the Soul Street Dance show, he was happy, excited, and keen to attend.

Al-Dosari, who was invited to join the group on the stage, said this type of dance is healthy and entertaining, and added that he used to have his own group with some young Qatari men years ago, but they disbanded due to various reasons, and the members got engaged in other things.

He hoped that he would be able to revive the activity again in the country, and promote it among young people.

Samantha Jackson, public diplomacy officer at the US embassy in Doha, stressed that Qatar and the US enjoy good and strong relations, adding that such cross-cultural artistic exchanges, held as part of the Qatar-USA 2021 Year of Culture, play an important role in enhancing such ties.

The Qatar-USA Festival features various as-



Group members bantering during their performance.

pects of culture, including music, art, culinary, dance, and film.

Jackson thanked the partners of the festival, including Katara, Qatar Museums and others.

She stressed that such artistic collaborations enable communities to build bridges of mutual understanding and bring people together, which is important for the mission of the US embassy in Doha and the US State Department.

Jackson added that holding such shows and performances help dispel misconceptions and allow people to appreciate different aspects of other cultures, while promoting love and peace among people.

Both the performers and audience expressed their appreciation for having the opportunity to enjoy such an evening marked by entertainment and cultural exchange.



A section of the audience during the show.



The activity took place at the National Museum of Qatar in conjunction with World Children's Day.

children and bring happiness to their families."

She said the initiative also aims to bring joy and happiness to other sections of the community, in addition to children.

Al-Maadheed indicated that the initiative is currently under the umbrella of the QC, thanking it for the support, and the NMoQ, which is the organising partner of the initiative.

The initiative has earlier distributed a large number of "boxes of happiness" to children in Kenya, Bangladesh, and Jordan.

