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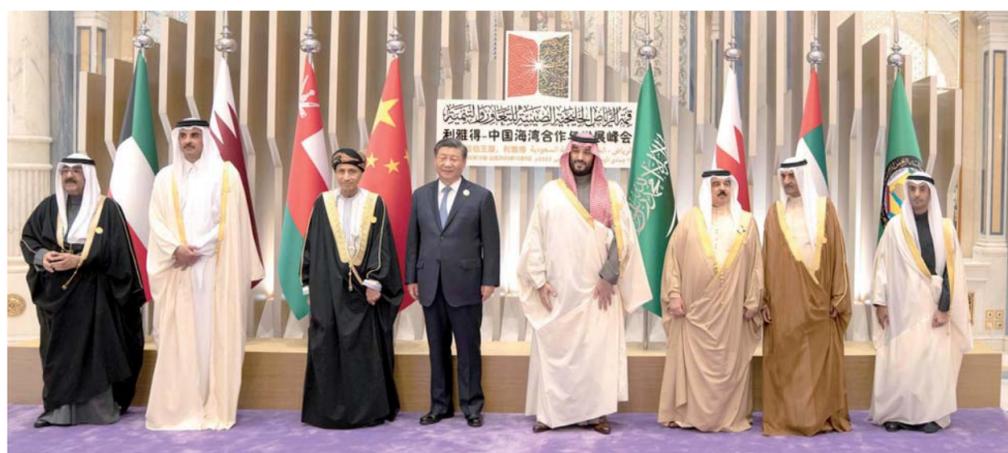


WELCOME TO QATAR 2022



Amir, Chinese President discuss bolstering strategic ties

- Chinese President congratulates Amir on successful hosting of the World Cup.
- The Amir felicitated President Xi on his re-election as General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party.
- The two leaders discussed ways to enhance bilateral cooperation, particularly in areas of economy, investment, energy, and industry.



Amir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani; Saudi Crown Prince and Prime Minister HRH Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud; President of China H E Xi Jinping; and other Gulf dignitaries at Riyadh Gulf-China Summit for Cooperation and Development, in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, yesterday.



I thank my brother, the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, and HRH Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, for their warm reception and generous hospitality, and I congratulate them on the success of the three Riyadh summits that brought together the Arabs with their Chinese friends to strengthen the historical relations between the two sides in a way that achieves their common interest and supports security and peace in our region and the world.

QNA - RIYADH

Amir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani held an official talks session with President of China H E Xi Jinping, on the sidelines of the Riyadh Gulf-China Summit for Cooperation and Development, and the Riyadh-Chinese Arab Summit for Cooperation and Development.

At the outset of the meeting, the Chinese President congratulated the Amir for the success of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, praising the organisation of the event, and wished bilateral relations further progress and development.

The Amir thanked the Chinese President and highlighted the importance of holding these events in the Arab world and Asia. His Highness renewed his congratulations to the Chinese President for his re-election as General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party.

The session dealt with discussing the strategic partnership between the two countries and the means to enhance them in all fields, particularly economic, investment, energy, and industry fields.

The Amir and the Chinese President also discussed the most prominent regional and international issues, and subjects on the agenda of the two summits. The session was attended by Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs H E Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, Chief of the Amiri Diwan H E Sheikh Saoud bin

Abdulrahman Al Thani, Minister of Commerce and Industry H E Mohammed bin Hamad bin Qassim Al Thani, and a number of Their Excellencies members of the official delegation. It was attended on the Chinese side by the delegation accompanying the Chinese President, and a number of ranking Chinese officials.

Earlier, the Amir arrived in Riyadh yesterday to take part in the 43rd session of the Supreme Council of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC), the Riyadh Gulf-China Summit for Cooperation and

Development, and the Riyadh Chinese-Arab Summit for Cooperation and Development.

H H the Amir and the accompanying delegation were welcomed upon arrival at King Khalid International Airport by Acting Governor of Riyadh Region HRH Prince Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, GCC Secretary-General H E Dr. Nayef bin Falah Al Hajraf, Ambassador of Saudi Arabia to Qatar H H Prince Mansour bin Khalid Al Farhan Al Saud and Ambassador of Qatar to Saudi Arabia H E Bandar bin Mohammed Al

Attiyah. H H the Amir also participated in the Riyadh Gulf-China Summit for Cooperation and Development, held at the King Abdul Aziz International Conference Center in Riyadh.

Several of Their Majesties, Their Highnesses, and Their Excellencies leaders of fraternal Gulf states participated in the summit, in addition to the Chinese President. The summit was attended by the Amir's accompanying delegation, Their Excellencies delegate members, senior officials, and guests of the summit.

The Amir also participated along with other GCC leaders and heads of delegations in the 43rd session of the Supreme Council summit, also held yesterday in Riyadh. ➔P2

Saudi Crown Prince lauds Qatar's successful hosting of World Cup

QNA - RIYADH

Saudi Crown Prince and Prime Minister HRH Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud congratulated Amir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani on Qatar's success in hosting the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022.

This came during the speech by the Saudi Crown Prince at the 43rd session of the GCC Supreme Council, held in

Crown Prince calls for a permanent and just solution to the Palestine issue, and stresses Saudi Arabia's support to efforts for a comprehensive political resolution to the crisis in Yemen.

Riyadh yesterday.

His Highness said that the council agreed in its 36th session in 2015, the Council approved the vision of the

Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques regarding the promotion of joint Gulf action.

The vision contributed to strengthening the strategic role of the GCC regionally and globally, and accelerating the pace of the Council's march in the economic, social, security, military and political fields, including the appointment of military leaders for unified military leadership, and activating the role of the GCC police. ➔P2

GCC, China to take ties to new horizons

QNA - RIYADH

The Gulf-Chinese Summit has praised Qatar's hosting of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, and its role in the civilizational and cultural rapprochement among the peoples of the world.

This came in the final communique issued by the Riyadh-Chinese Arab Summit for Cooperation and Development, held in Riyadh yesterday.

The statement confirmed that the leaders praised Qatar's success in hosting the World Cup, its good organisation, and

its impact on the cultural and intellectual rapprochement among the peoples of the world. The leaders also denounced the malicious media campaigns directed against Qatar.

The leaders in the Summit also welcomed Qatar's hosting of the meetings of the second part of the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries on March 5-9, 2023, at the level of heads of state and government.

The leaders agreed to strengthen the existing strategic partnership between the GCC

and China, and emphasised pushing it towards new horizons in various political, economic and cultural fields, and approved the joint action plan for 2023-2027 to achieve these goals.

The leaders agreed to continue strategic dialogue between the two sides at all levels to discuss issues of joint interest, coordinate positions on them, support international economic recovery efforts, address the negative economic effects of the pandemic and other challenges. ➔P2

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FIFA WORLD CUP Qatar 2022

TODAY'S SCHEDULE

18:00 Morocco vs Portugal
22:00 England vs France

YESTERDAY'S RESULTS

1-1 (4-2) Croatia vs Brazil
2-2 (3-4) Netherlands vs Argentina

GCC summit denounces malicious media campaigns against Qatar

QNA - RIYADH

The Supreme Council of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC) praised Qatar's success in hosting the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 and the positive impact it has on the human legacy and its civilizational, cultural, and intellectual rapprochement among world peoples; in addition to denouncing the malicious media campaigns against Qatar.

This came in the final

communiqué issued by the GCC Supreme Council in its 43rd session, in which Their Majesties, Highnesses, and Excellencies leaders and heads of delegates of the GCC countries met at King Abdul Aziz International Conference Center in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, yesterday.

The council also expressed its welcome and support for Qatar to hold the second part of the Fifth UN Conference on the Least Developed Countries (LDC5) on March 5 - 9, 2023, at the level of heads of state and

GCC Supreme Council welcomes Qatar's presidency of the 44th session.

Summit affirms keenness on the strength and cohesion of the GCC, the unity of its member states, and achieving further coordination and integration in all fields.

government.

The Supreme Council expressed its welcome of Qatar's presidency to its 44th

session.

The Supreme Council thanked Crown Prince and Prime Minister of Saudi Arabia HRH Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud for his presidency of the Supreme Council's meeting at its 43rd session, expressing its appreciation for the keenness and interest included in his opening speech to activate the process of cooperation between the GCC countries.

The Supreme Council also expressed its sincere appreciation and gratitude for the great,

honest, and profound efforts exerted by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud of Saudi Arabia, and his esteemed government, during Saudi Arabia's presidency of the 43rd session, and the accomplished steps and achievements.

The Supreme Council commended the outcomes of the Gulf-American Summit, held in Jeddah on July 16, 2022, within the strategic partnership between the GCC Council and the US. ➔P3

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PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR 4:46AM
SUNRISE 6:08AM
DHUHR 11:27AM
ASR 2:25PM
MAGHRIB 4:47PM
ISHA 6:17PM

WEATHER TODAY

21°C Minimum | 26°C Maximum

RUWAIIS: 19-26
ALKHOR: 19-29
DOHA: 18-26
MESAIEED: 19-27
ABU SAMRA: 19-27

Scattered clouds becomes cloudy at times with light rain at places and relatively cold by night.

HIGH TIDE 5:00 - 16:00
LOW TIDE 0:00 - 13:00

Saudi Crown Prince lauds Qatar's successful hosting of World Cup

FROM PAGE 1

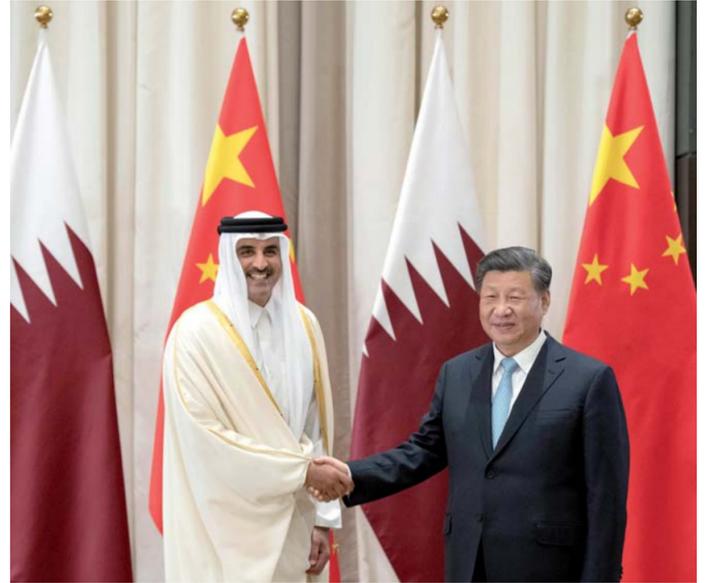
On the Palestinian issue, the Saudi Crown Prince reiterated the necessity of finding a permanent and just resolution to the Palestinian issue, in line with international legitimacy and the Arab Initiative for Peace, guaranteeing the Palestinian people their right of an independent state based on the borders of 1967 with East Al Quds as its capital.

He also stressed the Kingdom's support to efforts for a comprehensive political resolution to the crisis in Yemen. The Crown Prince also said that Saudi Arabia believes that hydrocarbon energy sources will remain an important resource to meet the needs of the world for the coming decades, but maintained that Saudi Arabia is also committed to sustainability.

Amir, Chinese President discuss bolstering strategic ties



Amir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani with Saudi Crown Prince and Prime Minister HRH Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud in Riyadh yesterday. The Saudi Crown Prince congratulated H H the Amir on the State of Qatar's success in hosting the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022.



Amir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani meeting with President of the People's Republic of China H E Xi Jinping, on the sidelines of the Riyadh Gulf-China Summit for Cooperation and Development, and the Riyadh Arab-Chinese Summit for Cooperation and Development.



I was pleased with our discussions with Chinese President Xi Jinping in Riyadh today. We have distinguished relations with him and friendly China, dominated by mutual respect and joint work in all fields of development, in a way that serves the aspirations of our peoples in terms of development and prosperity.

FROM PAGE 1

The session was attended by a number of Their Excellencies members of the official delegation accompanying the Amir, and a number of Their Royal Highnesses Princes, and Their Excellencies members of the official accompanying delegations. It was also attended by the GCC Secretary-General.

The Amir later left Riyadh after chairing Qatar's delegation to the 43rd session of the GCC Supreme Council Summit, as well as the Riyadh Gulf-China Summit for Cooperation and Development.

H H the Amir also sent a message to his brother Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud of Saudi Arabia, and his brother Crown Prince and Prime Minister of

Saudi Arabia HRH Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, in which His Highness expressed his appreciation for the hospitality accorded to him and the accompanying delegation.

The Amir also praised the issues discussed during the summits, expressing hope that their outcomes will bring GCC countries and the brotherly Gulf and Arab peoples the stability and prosperity they aspire for, and that it will enhance solidarity and cooperation between all Arab countries and their various partners in the region and the world.

His Highness also wished them both good health and wellness, and the Kingdom further progress and development under their wise leadership.

GCC, China to take ties to new horizons

FROM PAGE 1

They also agreed to work to ensure flexibility of supply chains, food security and energy supplies.

The leaders stressed the importance of continuing to deepen cooperation between the two sides in the fields of energy, trade, investment, finance, industry, advanced technology, space and health, in the common interest of both sides, including completing free trade negotiations between them as soon as possible.

They also expressed their keenness to promote dialogue

between civilizations, communication and mutual benefit between different cultures, and to preserve cultural diversity.

They stressed that tolerance and coexistence between nations and peoples are among the most important principles and values upon which the international community is based.

They encouraged communication and cooperation between the two sides in the fields of culture, education and tourism, media and sports, friendly exchange between



Amir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani participated with his brothers Their Majesties and Their Highnesses leaders of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC) and President of the People's Republic of China H E Xi Jinping in the Riyadh Gulf-China Summit for Cooperation and Development.



Amir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani holding an official talks session with President of the People's Republic of China H E Xi Jinping, on the sidelines of the Riyadh Gulf-China Summit for Cooperation and Development, and the Riyadh Arab-Chinese Summit for Cooperation and Development. H H the Amir and the Chinese President discussed enhancing strategic partnership.

intellectual institutions and rapprochement between peoples.

The leaders expressed their condemnation of terrorism, regardless of its source, and their rejection of all its forms and images, and work to dry up its sources of financing, and expressed their determination to strengthen regional and international efforts to combat terrorism and extremism, and

to prevent financing, arming, and recruitment of terrorist groups.

They called on Iraq to respect the sovereignty of Kuwait and not violate international resolutions and agreements, in particular Security Council Resolution No. 833 regarding the demarcation of borders between the two countries.

On Palestine, they stressed

the importance of reaching a two-state resolution in line with UN resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative, adding that an independent Palestinian state must be established on the borders of 1967 with East Al Quds as its capital. They also agreed on the importance of ending settlements and respecting the historical status quo and the religious sanctities in Jerusalem.

France's goalpost at The Pearl amplifies Arabic, French poetry

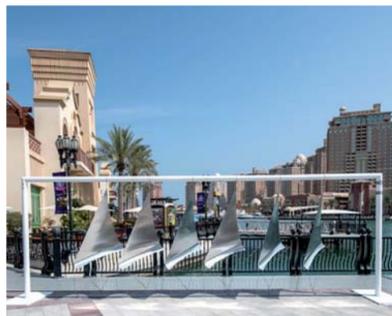
JOEYLN BALUYUT
THE PENINSULA

The France goalpost, which is one of the art installations that can be seen across Doha, brilliantly captures the sailing dhow boats against a backdrop of The Pearl waters. What's more intriguing is it whispers a poetry in Arabic and French languages.

This is part of the 'Posts of Qatar' which Qatar Tourism unveiled in November located at the 10 most iconic landmarks in the country.

Among the eye-capturing installations is the "Sails, Moving Forward," France goalpost by Guillaume Rouseré and Maryam Faraj Al Suwaidi at The Pearl-Qatar.

Al Suwaidi explained to The Peninsula the significance of the artwork to Qatar's culture and the main message to visitors who will see the installation. "The artwork highlights the essence of cultural collaboration between



"Sails, Moving Forward" a goalpost installation by French artist Guillaume Rouseré (centre) and Qatari artist Maryam Faraj Al Suwaidi (right).



the different backgrounds." A shimmering metallic dhow sail is depicted on the goalpost. However, if you get a little closer, you'll start to hear poetry being whispered in both Arabic and French, which the sails themselves reflect and amplify.

Rouseré, a French sound artist said that their artwork is "inspired by multiculturalism and provides an experience to help understand more about the different

interpretations of shifting sounds and visuals. It really is an intriguing experience!"

"The artwork is an extension of one of Guillaume's old works, Sonic, which I managed to translate with visual recombination. When I started working with Guillaume, I realized the level of simplicity he takes to accentuate the aural experience in his work."

"Therefore, I focused on maintaining this clarity to highlight the importance of the

perceptual experience with the viewer, the surrounding environment, and, most importantly, the auditory experience, where sound experience is the primary tool for communicating with the audience," Al Suwaidi explained.

She narrated that they used the reflective iron materials to give the simplified form a dynamic aspect. "The simple structure was a beautiful coincidence of flowing sails that made the perfect megaphone,



or platform, for the sonic art, and so did the modernised dynamism of the form that supported my overarching vision of our cultural background."

On Qatar's growing dynamic art and cultural scene, Al Suwaidi said: "Qatar became a global example of how art and culture can be the country's beating heart. Every corner expresses a different side of its individuality, and every act of its social actors supports its dynamism and movement. I

won't say what lies ahead, but I can imagine a bright future filled with creativity and innovation."

In total, two goalposts were designed by Qatari artists, while the remaining eight were produced by artists from countries that had won the World Cup tournament in the past: England, France, Spain, Italy, Germany, Argentina, Uruguay, and Brazil. Each art installation was made by a single artist or a pair of artists.



20,000 volunteers are essential pillar of World Cup success

QNA — DOHA

A mum and son from Zimbabwe are part of the 20,000-strong volunteer team at the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022.

Rufaro Makambira-Chindalo is supporting operations at the Main Media Centre, while her son Kundai is a spectator services volunteer at Khalifa International Stadium, one of the eight state-of-the-art venues hosting Qatar 2022 matches.

Rufaro has become a seasoned volunteer since moving to Doha in 2019 to work as a support teacher for disabled children at Cardiff International School.

She has previously volunteered at numerous football tournaments in Qatar, including the CAF Super Cup, AFC Champions League, Amir Cup and FIFA Arab Cup.

"Volunteering has increased my confidence and helped me become comfortable approaching people and striking up conversations. Immersing myself in volunteering also helped me to understand and appreciate the local culture here in Qatar. I

was struck by how lovely and welcoming everyone is," said Rufaro, whose role is based at the Qatar National Convention Centre.

Rufaro's experiences encouraged Kundai, an undergraduate who lives in Harare, Zimbabwe, to volunteer at last year's FIFA Arab Cup, with an eye on being a part of the first FIFA World Cup in the Middle East and Arab world.

Rufaro added: "The skills, experience and social interactions are priceless. I wanted Kundai to have all these experiences. I knew volunteering would help him grow and develop, and feel a sense of pride and fulfilment."

Kundai is enjoying his stint at Khalifa, which will host the third-place play-off on December 17, after staging seven matches up to the round of 16 stage.

"I love helping people and my role at Khalifa is all about assisting fans in the stadium. Volunteering has helped improve my communication and networking skills, and given me so much confidence - I am really enjoying meeting people from all over the world,"

said Kundai, a student at Zimbabwe Ezekiel Guti University.

"I want fans to have a great experience and for my interactions to have a positive impact on them. I am also a big football fan so to be part of this tournament is a once-in-a-lifetime experience."

Kundai went on to say volunteering will support his education and career prospects.

"I am a sports coordinator at my university in Zimbabwe and when I go back I intend to share the knowledge I have gained in Qatar - skills like teamwork, organising and strategies," said Kundai, who is studying to obtain a humanity and social sciences degree.

"My goal is to become a social entrepreneur - someone who positively impacts society - and all these skills will be priceless."

Speaking about the opportunity to be part of a global mega-event alongside her son, Rufaro said: "It is amazing - so very special. The World Cup will not just leave a lasting legacy for Qatar and the Arab region, it will also leave a lasting legacy for our family."



Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defense Affairs meets Senior Minister of Singapore

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defense Affairs H E Dr. Khalid bin Mohammed Al Attiyah met with Singapore's Senior Minister and Coordinating Minister for National Security H E Teo Chee Hean, and Minister of Home Affairs and Law H E K. Shanmugam, who are currently visiting the country. During the meeting, issues of common concern were discussed, as well as cooperation and relations between the two sides, and ways to enhance and develop them.

GCC summit denounces malicious media campaigns against Qatar

FROM PAGE 1

The Supreme Council also commended the outcomes of the Jeddah Security and Development Summit between the GCC countries, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt, and the US, and valued its contribution to enhancing the security and stability in the region and achieving prosperity for its people.

The Supreme Council also welcomed the convening of the Riyadh Gulf-China Summit for Cooperation and Development and the Riyadh Arab-China Summit for Cooperation and Development on December 9, 2022, looking forward to their contribution to strengthening cooperation and strategic partnerships with the Chinese side to achieve common interests.

The Supreme Council stressed its support for the 'OPEC+' decisions aimed at achieving balance in oil markets, promoting the prosperity and welfare of the world's and region's peoples, and supporting the growth of the global economy.

The Supreme Council affirmed its keenness on the strength and cohesion of the GCC, the unity of its member states, and achieving more coordination, integration, and interdependence in all fields, in a way that fulfils the aspirations of the citizens of the GCC countries, stressing that the Council's countries stand together in

the face of any threat to any of the GCC countries.

The Supreme Council reviewed the developments of the joint Gulf work, the work program of the GCC Economic and Development Affairs Authority, noting the importance of doubling the efforts to achieve economic unity among the GCC member states.

The Supreme Council approved the general framework of the strategic plan for joint media cooperation for the countries of the Cooperation Council 2023-2030, the charter for the preservation of urban heritage in member countries, and the general framework of the Gulf strategy for tourism 2023-2030.

The Supreme Council affirmed the adoption of the basic pillars of energy transitions (energy security, economic development, and climate change), by continuing with sustainable investments in hydrocarbon sources, adopting the circular carbon economy approach as an integrated and comprehensive approach to addressing the challenges arising from greenhouse gas emissions.

The Supreme Council called for speeding up the ongoing free trade agreement negotiations, and for the start of new free trade negotiations in accordance with the priorities of GCC states, in order to strengthen the economic

relations of the GCC with countries and international blocs in pursuit of common trade and investment interests.

The Supreme Council approved the decisions of the Joint Defense Council at its 19th session, regarding military cooperation between GCC countries, and stressed the importance of strengthening joint military action to achieve collective security for GCC countries.

The Supreme Council of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf renewed the commitment of its members to maintaining stability and security in the region, supporting the prosperity of their peoples, and strengthen the Council's relations with brotherly and friendly countries and regional and international organizations.

The Supreme Council also affirmed its firm stances against terrorism and extremism, regardless of its source. The council expressed its rejection of all forms of terrorism and extremism, as well as its justifications.

On the Palestinian cause, the Supreme Council reaffirmed its firm positions on the centrality of the Palestinian cause, its support for the sovereignty of the Palestinian people over all the Palestinian territories occupied since June 1967, the establishment of an independent Palestinian state

with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The Supreme Council also affirmed its firm positions and decisions regarding relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran, and the need for its adherence to the basic foundations and principles based on the Charter of the United Nations and the charters of international law, the principles of good neighborliness, respect for the sovereignty of states, non-interference in internal affairs, resolving disputes by peaceful means, and non-use of force. Or the threat of it, and renunciation of sectarianism.

The Supreme Council of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf praised the outcomes of the comprehensive Yemeni-Yemeni consultations that were held under the auspices of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf, during the period from March 29 to April 7, 2022, and reached an agreement between the Yemeni brothers on a road map and effective mechanisms towards strengthening unity and restoring security, stability in Yemen.

The Supreme Council praised the announcement by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia of a package of vital development projects to support the Republic of Yemen.

On Iraq, the Council affirmed its firm positions and

decisions towards brotherly Iraq, and support for existing efforts to combat terrorism and achieve security and stability in Iraq, stressing the importance of preserving the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iraq, its Arab-Islamic identity, social fabric, national unity, and support in its confrontation with terrorist and armed militias.

The Supreme Council affirmed its firm positions towards preserving the territorial integrity of the sisterly Syrian Arab Republic and respecting its independence and its sovereignty over its territories, as well as rejecting regional interference in its internal affairs.

The Council stressed the GCC's firm positions towards the brotherly Lebanese people, stressing its continuous support for Lebanon's sovereignty, security and stability, and for the Lebanese Armed Forces, who protect its borders and resist the threats of extremist and terrorist groups.

On the Libyan issue, the Supreme Council expressed concern about the outbreak of repeated armed clashes in the Libyan territories. The council called for adopting political dialogue to resolve differences.

The Council welcomed the joint declaration of the Sudan Political Framework Agreement of December 5, defining constitutional arrangements to guide Sudan through a transitional

period. Regarding the Somali issue, the council affirmed the support of the Federal Republic of Somalia in order to consolidate the foundations of security and stability.

With regard to the Afghan crisis, the Supreme Council stressed the importance of restoring security and stability in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and reaching a consensual political solution that takes into account the interests of all components of the Afghan people.

On the Russian-Ukrainian crisis, the Supreme Council stressed that the GCC position on the Russian-Ukrainian crisis is based on the principles of international law and the United Nations Charter. The council reiterated its support for mediation efforts to resolve the crisis between Russia and Ukraine, a cease-fire, and a political solution to the crisis.

The Supreme Council approved the State of Kuwait's desire to retain the position of Secretary-General of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf for a second term, starting from the end of the current term of HE the Secretary-General Dr. Nayef Falah Mubarak Al Hajraf on January 31, 2023, provided that the Ministerial Council follows up on the nomination of the State of Kuwait for its new candidate to fill the position.

Tourists find Katara Mosque, call to prayer fascinating

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

The Katara Mosque, or the Blue mosque as it is also known, continues to be one of the most important and prominent places for foreign tourists who are in Qatar for FIFA World Cup 2022 and activities around.

With the call to prayer for each prayer, the mosque opens its doors to all visitors, regardless of their affiliations and beliefs, as they are amazed by the splendour of the mosque, which embodies a towering architectural masterpiece in the heart of the cultural district.

The tourists are also fascinated by the magnificence of its designs that highlight a unique combination that mixes various Islamic arts through the ages, accompanied by the passion that possesses them, and pushes them to learn about Islamic culture.

With his dewy voice as he raises the call (God is great), Sheikh Muhammad Makki, the Imam and preacher of the Katara Mosque, attracts a large crowd of foreign tourists amid interaction and a clear impact on their faces, sensing with it the greatness of the divine call.



Makki said that the majority of tourists from Europe and Latin America are attracted to the mosque by its construction and the art of its exquisite engineering architecture.

Katara has prepared restrooms near the mosque in cooperation with many agencies to learn about social life in Qatar, where a number of volunteers answer visitors' questions.

Mashaal Al Shammari from the Qatar Guests Center said that she found a great desire among all tourists to learn about the Islam as a religion, culture, customs and traditions. Al Shammari pointed out that their visit to Katara has contributed to reshaping the correct image of the Arab and Islamic community, which is unlike what is portrayed by the Western media.

Visitors expressed happiness at visiting Katara, which embodies a cultural landmark

that includes the pearls of Arab and Islamic culture and heritage, noting that their visit allowed them to get acquainted closely with the Arab and Islamic culture and its abundant human values and moral principles.

Eileen from the US expressed happiness with the hospitality she finds at any place she visits, noting that she had a different image than what she found in Qatar, where she feels safe and secure in Doha more than she felt in her home city New York.

Julia expressed her admiration for the Arab and Islamic culture, expressing her satisfaction with what she found from the citizens and residents whom she met, as they honestly expressed their high morals and authentic traditions and presented a distinct model of their culture and heritage and gave a true picture of their Arab and Islamic values worthy of all respect.

World Cup: Visually-impaired fan recounts experience with HBKU's commentary service

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

An audio-descriptive commentary (ADC) service being delivered in Arabic and English at the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 could enhance the tournament experience of blind and visually impaired fans and help to ensure an accessible, inclusive event.

Hamad Bin Khalifa University (HBKU)'s Translation and Interpreting Institute (TII) partnered with the Centre for Access to Football in Europe (CAFE) to implement the high-quality ADC service during the World Cup.

The latest in a series of similar offerings, the inclusive commentary service is now enabling partially sighted and blind people to follow live matches inside the stadium alongside their fellow supporters.

More successfully, participants in training programs delivered by CAFE and TII (part of HBKU's College of Humanities and Social Sciences) have delivered Arabic commentary at several sporting events in Qatar, including the 2021 FIFA Arab Cup and Street Child FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022.



Fahd Al Hajri, a football fan

with a visual impairment, has been attending the World Cup matches. He said: "The audio-descriptive commentary is the best and most useful service. In the past, blind and visually impaired fans used to sit in a specific area in the stadium. Now we can sit anywhere in the stadium and enjoy the exciting atmosphere of the match."

The commentary's mix of audio descriptive detail allows Al-Hajri to follow the action

through a running, play-by-play description of the action on the field and immerse himself in the adrenaline-charged stadium atmosphere while listening to the game independently using the FIFA Interpreting application.

He added: "Whereas the TV commentary deviates a lot from the events happening on the pitch, the audio-descriptive commentary describes the action as it unfolds. I attended more than five matches so far."

"The most fun was the match played by the French national team. Lucky for me, my favourite player, Kylian Mbappe, scored a goal, and it was an indescribable feeling. Another one of the most beautiful moments was listening to the commentary of the match between Saudi Arabia and Argentina. I really enjoyed it. It was up to me, I would attend every single match."

While the ADC service significantly enhances the match day experience for football fans like Fahad, it also contributes to Qatar's vision for ensuring an accessible environment at the FIFA World Cup 2022 and future sporting events.

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6 (OSCAR ELECTRIC OVEN)

50

جائزة PRIZES

إشترتي بمبلغ 50 ريال قطري من المجلات المشاركة واحصل على كوبون مجاناً للدخول في السحب الكبير على 50 جائزة:

سيارة (CHERY TIGGO 8 WHITE 2023)
عدد 2 (CHERY TIGGO 7 WHITE and BLACK 2023)
عدد 5 (LG NANOCELL 8K SMART 75 TV)
عدد 6 (LG 65 INCH UHD 4K TV)
عدد 6 (LG 55 INCH UHD 4K TV)
عدد 6 (LG DISH WASHER 14)
عدد 6 (LG 500 LTR REFRIGERATOR)
عدد 6 (LG 8 KG FRONT LOAD WASHING MACHINE)
عدد 6 (OSCAR 60 X 60 CERAMIC COOKING RANGE)
عدد 6 (OSCAR ELECTRIC OVEN)

Al Aziziyah العزيرية SAUDIA HYPER MARKET	Umm Ghuwailina أم غويلينة ترليون للوساطة العقارية جولدن يخت	Old Al Ghanim الغانم العتيق مركز السعيد التجاري	Pan Emirates Bombay silk center Villeroy and Boch شركة السيف للتبريد والتكيف والامانة للديكور ومواد البناء Levante منزل السيراميك للتجارة LG SAUDIA DEPARTMENT STORE MAJLIS SHOPPING CNETER Dana Hypermarket RT SALWA Brymax Trading Company	Max Home Box Steve Madden Villeroy and Boch Pablosky Huawei Show room Xiaomi Show room LG Nike Vans Sun And Sand Timberland Under Armor	Villaggio Mall مول فيلاجيو Steve Madden
Umm Saalal أم صلال HAPPY BABY CENTER	Madinat Khalifa مدينة خليفة نظارات أفا RETAIL MART	Mansoura المنصورة مركز السعيد التجاري شركة البشري للتجارة والمقاولات	The Centre المركز RT CENTER	Ezdan Mall Al Wakrah ازدان مول - الوكرة Homes R us مركز السعيد التجاري RT EZDAN	City Center Doha mall سيطي سنتر الدوحة Max Home Centre Villeroy and Boch LG LG RT DCC Sun And Sand NIKE Columbia Timberland
Mesaieed مسيعيد LG RETAIL MART	Al-Gharafa الغرافة HAPPY BABY CENTER MAJLIS SHOPPING CENETR	Al Khor الخور مركز السعيد التجاري LG SAUDIA HYPER MARKET	Bin Omran بن عمران Al Shaheen EST المستقبل الواعد للتظيفات	Doha Festival City دوحة فستيفال سيتي Carter's Pan Emirates Max Home Centre Steve Madden Villeroy and Boch Villeroy and Boch Pablosky LG NIKE The North Face Vans Timberland Columbia Nike Under Armor	Al Asmakh Mall الأصمخ مول Max Home Centre Dar Al Salam Mall دار السلام مول Max Sun And Sand
Asian Town المدينة الآسيوية SAUDIA DEPARTMENT STORE KENZ DOHA HYPER MARKET	Al Wakrah الوكرة FANTINO SHOES HAPPY BABY CENTER RETAIL MART Dana Hypermarket	Q MALL كيو مول مركز السعيد التجاري	Al Rayyan الريان Al Shaheen EST مجلات السعيد التجاري Max FANTINO SHOES FANTINO/ULTIMA SHOES LG SAUDIA HYPER MARKET	Royal Plaza Mall رويال بلازا مول Al Rahal land & sea equipment Articles & Events	Place Vendôme Mall بالاس فاندوم مول Homes R us Timberland The North Face DROPKICK CONVERSE Under Armor
Al Sadd السد EVENTS ARTICLES	Souq Al Maamoura سوق المعمورة RT PARCO	Souq Faleh سوق فالح مجلات السعيد التجاري	Mattar Qadem المطار القديم Al Shaheen EST معرض الجميل موزاييك جاليري ليفانتي كتنشز لتجارة المطابخ Levante Kitchens LG KENZ MINI MART NEW INDIAN SUPER MARKET RT DOHA	Hyatt Plaza حياة بلازا Homes R us مطعم ألا توركا	Mall of Qatar قطر مول Homes R us Carter's Centrepoint
Muaitheer معيذر SAUDIA HYPER MARKET SAUDIA HYPER MARKET SAUDIA MINI MART NEW HAPPY BABY KIDS TOWN Maha Bazaar Supermarket	Doha Souq سوق الدوحة LG	Al-Nassr St شارع النصر Solez Huawei Show room Xiaomi Show room	Barwa Village قرية بروة Max Brymax Trading Company LG RETAIL MART Brymax Trading Company	Salwa road طريق سلوى ميداس العالمية ميداس العالمية مركز السعيد التجاري	
Industrial Area المنطقة الصناعية MAJLIS SHOOPING CENTER RETAIL MART	Al Muntazah المنتره Brymax Trading Company	Al Souq السوق عالم الازياء			
Others مناطق أخرى Home Centre Bombay silk center LG محمد الشناوي جروب ترندي أون لاين شوبينغ REGENCY SHOPPING COMPLEX	Msheireb مشيرب Panda Hypermarkert BOMBAY SILK CENTER	Al-Markhiya المرخية FANTINO SHOES FANTINO/ULTIMA SHOES			
	Najma نجمة LG MAJLIS SHOPPING CENETR				

FROM 1 NOV
TO 31 DEC 2022

* تاريخ السحب: يوم الإثنين الموافق 9 يناير 2023. المكان: مول حياة بلازا. الموعد: الساعة الحادية عشرة صباحاً.
* Raffle Draw Date: Monday, January 9, 2023. Location: Hyatt Plaza Mall. Time: 11 AM.

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Riyadh summits promise continued Arab-Chinese cooperation

AFP — RIYADH

Chinese President Xi Jinping yesterday touted close security and energy ties with Gulf nations during summit meetings in Saudi Arabia.

On the third and final day of his visit, Xi attended summits of the six-member Gulf Cooperation Council and a broader China-Arab leaders' meeting. This is only Xi's third journey outside China since the coronavirus pandemic began.

"China will continue to firmly support the GCC countries in maintaining their own security... and build a collective security framework for the Gulf," Xi said at the start of the China-GCC summit.

"China will continue to import large quantities of crude oil from GCC countries on an ongoing basis," he said, also vowing to expand other areas of energy cooperation including liquefied natural gas imports.

Saudi Arabia and China have signed 46 agreements and memorandums of understanding. Both sides are seeking economic and strategic benefits by deepening cooperation.

Oil from Saudi Arabia alone accounted for 17 percent of China's imports last year, and last month Qatar announced a 27-year natural gas deal with China.

Earlier yesterday, a joint Chinese-Saudi statement spoke of "focusing on emissions rather than sources" in tackling climate change.

Forty-six bilateral agreements and memorandums of understanding were announced on everything from housing to Chinese language teaching. Both sides are seeking economic and strategic benefits by deepening



Saudi Crown Prince HRH Mohammed Bin Salman and Chinese President Xi Jinping attend the China-Arab summit in Riyadh yesterday.(REUTERS)

cooperation.

A Saudi state media report on Thursday said that about \$30bn in deals would be signed during Xi's visit.

Riyadh and Beijing stressed "deepening relations within the framework of the comprehensive strategic partnership between the two countries, and reaching new and promising horizons", the statement said.

Xi's visit follows US President Joe Biden's trip to Jeddah

in July. Crown Prince HRH Mohammed bin Salman addressed both summits yesterday, promising "continuing Arab-Chinese cooperation to serve our common goals and aspirations of our peoples".

The Gulf countries are bolstering ties with China as part of an eastward turn that involves diversifying their fossil fuel-reliant economies.

At the same time China, hit hard by its COVID-19

lockdowns, is trying to revive its economy and widen its sphere of influence, notably through its Belt and Road Initiative which provides funding for infrastructure projects around the world.

Officials provided few details about the agenda for yesterday's talks, but one potential area of focus was a China-GCC free trade agreement under discussion for nearly two decades.

A breakthrough on the trade pact could help Saudi Arabia, the Middle East's biggest economy, diversify its economy in line with the Vision 2030 reform agenda championed by Prince Mohammed.

Beijing's foreign ministry has described Xi's trip as the "largest-scale diplomatic activity between China and the Arab world" since the People's Republic of China was founded.

Iran says uranium traces came in waste from abroad

AFP — TEHRAN

Iran's nuclear chief has said traces of enriched uranium found on its territory by UN inspectors were brought into the country from abroad, disputing claims of secret nuclear activity.

The UN's International Atomic Energy Agency, or IAEA, has for months been pressing Tehran to explain the presence of the nuclear material at three undeclared sites.

The discovery further complicated efforts to revive the 2015 Iran nuclear

deal that has been hanging by a thread since the United States unilaterally withdrew from it in 2018 under then-president Donald Trump.

In remarks published Thursday by Hamshahri newspaper, the head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, Mohammad Eslami, said the traces came from waste brought into Iran from other countries.

Eslami said the places visited by UN inspectors were a cattle farm, an abandoned mine and a landfill.

"In the landfill, they took samples

from the waste that entered Iran from different countries," the report quoted him as saying. "This does not mean the place of discovery was a nuclear site or that it was an undeclared nuclear activity." "The waste came from Iraq and from other countries," Eslami said.

"We have prevented the entry of much of this waste... They were not nuclear substances from our own manufacturing but perhaps traces from previous use in the country of origin." In a resolution last month, the IAEA's board of governors deplored the lack of

cooperation an "technically credible" answers from Tehran.

As a result, the agency said it was unable to guarantee the authenticity and integrity of Iran's nuclear programme.

But Eslami said Tehran has "provided documented and argued answers to the request" of the UN nuclear watchdog.

An IAEA delegation had planned to travel to Tehran in November, but the visit did not take place.

Efforts to get Iran and the United States back on board with the agreement have stalled.

UN 'appalled' by massacre in DR Congo

AFP — GENEVA

UN human rights chief Volker Turk said yesterday he was "appalled" by the massacre of civilians in DR Congo and added he plans to visit the country next year.

M23 rebels last month massacred at least 131 civilians in the Democratic Republic of Congo's volatile east and committed more than two dozen rapes, the United Nations peacekeeping mission in the country said Thursday.

The government has said some 300 people, almost all civilians, died in the massacre in North Kivu province on November 29-30.

The victims — 102 men, 17 women and 12 children — were "arbitrarily executed" by bullets or knives, the UN mission said.

"It's obviously very, very concerning and I am deeply concerned about the situation, especially when it comes to the exercise of democratic freedoms in the country," Turk told a press conference in Geneva. He said he was "really appalled by the mass killings of more than 130 civilians by the M23", and called for greater international attention, saying DRC was on his list of countries to visit next year.

"We must make sure that DRC remains on the agenda, especially from a human rights perspective. It's very important for us," he said.

Lebanese actress questioned, detained in central bank graft probe

REUTERS — BEIRUT

Lebanese actress Stephanie Saliba was detained yesterday after being questioned by investigators over a corruption case related to Lebanon's central bank governor, a judicial source told Reuters.

Judge Ghada Aoun told

Reuters on Thursday she had ordered security forces last week to bring Saliba, 35, in for interrogation over suspicions that governor Riad Salameh had bought her luxury property using ill-gotten gains.

Salameh has denied any wrongdoing and Saliba has not yet been charged with any

crime. She has not responded to attempts by Reuters to reach her by phone or social media platforms.

Saliba landed at Beirut's international airport on Thursday and was not detained there after Lebanon's top financial prosecutor Ali Ibrahim ordered that she be allowed to

return to the country freely.

Ibrahim then appointed prosecutor Iman Abdallah to Saliba's case, and she was brought in for questioning yesterday and detained after her interrogation, the judicial source said. Earlier this week, French prosecutors said they had put a Ukrainian woman linked to Salameh under formal investigation as part of a cross-border inquiry into alleged fraud to the detriment of the Lebanese state.

Anna Kosakova, with whom Salameh has a daughter according to a birth certificate seen by Reuters, is suspected of aggravated money laundering, according to a spokesperson for Paris financial prosecutors.

A lawyer for Kosakova said he and his client would "react very soon" to the French prosecutors' moves. Salameh has consistently denied allegations of corruption during his 29-year tenure at the central



A file photo of Lebanese actress and model Stephanie Saliba. (AFP)

bank and says the charges against him are part of a political campaign to scapegoat him for Lebanon's financial crisis. The French investigation is part of a coordinated effort by prosecutors in Lebanon, Switzerland, Germany, Luxembourg and Liechtenstein to get to the bottom of allegations that Salameh used his position to embezzle hundreds of millions of dollars in public funds.

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Australia, Japan to pursue 'more complex' joint military drills

AFP — TOKYO

Australia and Japan will pursue opportunities for "more complex" joint military exercises, Canberra's defence minister said yesterday after talks with his Japanese counterpart and the countries' foreign ministers in Tokyo.

The meeting followed the signing in October of a security pact by Japan and Australia, agreeing to share intelligence and deepen defence cooperation to counter China's military rise.

And in Washington this week, the Australian and American defence and foreign ministers said they would welcome Japanese troops into three-way rotations.

Yesterday, Australia's

The meeting followed the signing in October of a security pact by Japan and Australia, agreeing to share intelligence and deepen defence cooperation.

Defence Minister Richard Marles said the security pact and other agreements enable the two nations "to take the strategic alignment and the deep affection between our countries forward".

"We've spent today thinking of ways in which we can operationalise that," he said in a four-way announcement.

"There are a range of opportunities that exist which we will be pursuing where our two militaries can work closely together

to do more high-end exercises and more complex exercises." Marles said Australia was also "looking forward to ways in which, working with America, we can trilateralise that, and make that an effort where it is Australia, America and Japan working together across the three domains" of land, sea and air defence.

The United States has been rotating marines since 2011 through the strategic city of Darwin in northern Australia.

Japan's Defence Minister Yasukazu Hamada did not comment directly on the invitation to participate in trilateral operations in Australia.

He only stated that "for our defence and security, the cooperation between Australia and Japan, together with that of our



Australia's Foreign Minister Penny Wong and Defence Minister Richard Marles meet with Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida in Tokyo, Japan, yesterday. (REUTERS)

ally the United States and other like-minded countries, is of vital importance".

Japan, a treaty-bound ally of the United States, has in recent years sought growing

diplomatic cooperation with Australia, but defence ties have been more sensitive due to the Japanese constitution, which limits Tokyo's military capacity to ostensibly self-protective

measures. But Japan is preparing to announce an overhaul of its security strategy, including plans to ramp up defence spending by more than 50 percent over five years.

No Modi-Putin summit this year after they met in Sept: Indian govt source

REUTERS — NEW DELHI

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Russian President Vladimir Putin will not hold an annual in-person summit this year, an Indian government source said yesterday, after the two held discussions on the sidelines of an event in September.

Bloomberg News reported earlier in the day that the

decision to cancel the summit was taken after veiled threats by Putin to use nuclear weapons in the Ukraine war.

The government source, who declined to be named citing the sensitivity of the matter, said the decision not to hold a summit was taken much earlier and that the nuclear angle was not a factor.

Putin visited New Delhi in December last year for the 21st

India-Russia annual summit.

Spokespeople for India's foreign ministry and the Russian embassy in New Delhi did not respond to Reuters requests for comment on the Bloomberg report.

Modi and Putin met on the sidelines of a regional security bloc summit in Uzbekistan in September and have spoken on the phone a number of times this year, including on the

subject of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

India, which has become one of the biggest buyers of Russian oil along with China since the war began in February, has not explicitly condemned what Russia calls its "special military operation" in Ukraine.

A Russian official told Bloomberg that India's decision not to hold a summit was clear

at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit in Uzbekistan, where Modi told Putin that this was "not an era of war". Putin has issued a series of thinly veiled nuclear threats during the course of the Ukraine war, but several top officials have repeatedly denied Moscow plans to use nuclear weapons in Ukraine and have accused the West of upping the nuclear ante.

Vietnam vessel saves 154 Rohingya from sinking boat

REUTERS — HANOI

A Vietnamese oil service vessel rescued 154 people from a sinking boat in the Andaman Sea and has transferred them to Myanmar's navy, state media reported, a group that was confirmed by activists as minority Rohingya Muslims.

The vessel, Hai Duong 29, was en route from Singapore to Myanmar when it spotted the boat in distress 285 miles (458.7 km) south of the Myanmar coast on Wednesday, VTCNews said in a report aired late on Thursday.

The Rohingya are a minority that has for years been persecuted in Myanmar and many risk their lives attempting to reach predominantly Muslim Malaysia and Indonesia on rickety boats.

Their exodus from Myanmar and from the squalor of refugee camps in neighbouring Bangladesh, has increased after a deadly 2017 crackdown by the military, which is now in charge in Myanmar after a 2021 coup.

The boat's engine was not working and water was leaking into its hull, the VTCNews report said, adding it sank one hour after those aboard had been saved. Of the 154 people rescued, 40 were women and 31 were children.

They were handed over to Myanmar's navy on Thursday, the report said. It was not immediately clear what would happen to them and a spokesperson for Myanmar's junta could not immediately be reached by Reuters.

Vietnam's foreign ministry and the owner of the Vietnamese vessel, Hai Duong Petroleum and Marine Corp (Haduco), did not immediately respond to requests for comment. The UN refugee agency (UNHCR) last week said there had been a "dramatic increase" in the number of people attempting to cross the Andaman Sea between Myanmar and Bangladesh this year. At least 1,900 people have made the crossing so far in 2022, six times more than in 2020, with at least 119 deaths this year among those trying to flee.

South Korean truckers vote to end strike

AFP — SEOUL

South Korean truckers voted yesterday to end a weeks-long strike that has hammered supply chains and businesses in Asia's fourth largest economy.

The strike, which started on Nov 24 over minimum pay, delayed the supply of goods worth an estimated 3.5 trillion won (\$2.65bn) in its first 12 days, according to Seoul's trade ministry.

President Yoon Suk-yeol slammed the action as "a danger to the economy" and on Thursday the government ordered truckers in the fuel and steel sectors to return to work or face the possibility of jail or a fine.

"A majority of votes were cast in favour of ending the strike and returning to work," the 25,000-strong Cargo Truckers Solidarity Union said in a statement.

Over 60 percent of those who voted supported ending the strike, according to the Yonhap news agency.

With fuel prices rising, the drivers had demanded the government make permanent a "safe freight rate" minimum pay scheme, which is set to expire at the end of the year.

South Korea has one of the highest industrial fatality rates for a rich economy, with more than 4,000 work-related deaths reported from 2020 to last year, according to Seoul's labour ministry.

Indonesia mine explosion kills 10

AFP — PADANG, INDONESIA

Ten workers were killed in Indonesia after an explosion in a coal mine caused a collapse, a rescue agency official said yesterday.

The miners were at a coal mine in the West Sumatra province when the blast buried an estimated 14 people.

The mine "reportedly collapsed due to an explosion caused by methane", local search and rescue agency spokesman Octaviano, who like many Indonesians uses only one name, said in a statement. He said 10 bodies were recovered, while four people survived. Mining accidents are common across the archipelago nation, especially at unlicensed abandoned sites where people scrounge for leftover ore without using proper safety equipment.

China reports 16,797 new COVID-19 cases for Dec 8

REUTERS — SHANGHAI

China reported 16,797 new COVID-19 infections on Dec. 8, of which 3,637 were symptomatic and 13,160 were asymptomatic, the National Health Commission said yesterday.

The commission reported 21,439 new cases a day earlier — 4,079 symptomatic and 17,360 asymptomatic infections, which China counts separately.

Excluding imported infections, China reported 16,592 new local cases for Thursday, of which 3,588 were symptomatic and 13,004 were asymptomatic, down from 21,165 a day earlier.

There were no deaths, unchanged from the previous day, keeping fatalities at 5,235. As of Dec. 8, mainland China had confirmed 357,652 COVID cases with symptoms.

China's capital Beijing reported 1,185 symptomatic and 1,488 asymptomatic cases, compared with 1,168 symptomatic and 2,194 asymptomatic cases the previous day, local government data showed.

Financial hub Shanghai reported 28 symptomatic cases and 303 asymptomatic cases, compared with 39 symptomatic cases and 327 asymptomatic cases a day before, the local health authority reported.

Guangzhou, a city in the



A medical worker collects a swab sample at a COVID-19 testing booth in Wuhan, China, yesterday. (REUTERS)

south of nearly 19 million people, reported 854 new locally transmitted symptomatic and 1,005 asymptomatic cases, compared with 155 symptomatic and 1,640 asymptomatic cases a day before, local

authorities said. Chongqing reported 111 new symptomatic locally transmitted COVID-19 infections and 2,656 asymptomatic cases, compared with 155 symptomatic and 3,006 asymptomatic cases the previous day.

Two top Bangladesh opposition leaders arrested

AFP — DHAKA

The two top leaders of Bangladesh's main opposition party were arrested by police early yesterday, a day before a planned rally to call for the prime minister's resignation.

Protests sparked by power cuts and fuel price hikes have erupted across the country in recent months, demanding that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina step down in favour of fresh elections under a caretaker government.

Yesterday's police action comes two days after security forces in the capital Dhaka fired rubber bullets and tear gas into a crowd of thousands of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) supporters preparing for the December 10 rally, leaving at least one dead and scores

wounded. Western governments — along with the United Nations — have expressed concerns over the political climate in Bangladesh, one of the fastest-growing economies in Asia.

The country was long aligned with the US, but in recent years Hasina has courted deeper ties with China, with Beijing bankrolling some of her multi-billion dollar infrastructure projects.

BNP general secretary Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir and Mirza Abbas, a former minister and member of the party's top decision-making body, were taken from their homes at about 3am yesterday, Zahiruddin Swapan, head of the BNP's media wing, told AFP.

"They were plainclothes policemen. Alamgir knew their

identity. They told him he was being taken away on the order of the high command," Swapan said, adding the party did not know where the two had been taken.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police spokesman Faruq Ahmed said the pair had been arrested on suspicion of instigating violence and obstructing government work during Wednesday's clashes. Tensions have been high in the capital ahead of Saturday's planned rally, which the BNP said would draw hundreds of thousands of supporters from all over the country.

Police have insisted they will not allow a demonstration in front of the party office, which they called a "crime scene" after saying they had found Molotov cocktails at the location. Local media said

checkpoints had been set up on routes into the city to prevent opposition activists coming from the rural heartlands to join the protest. But a defiant Alamgir on Thursday told a press briefing the party planned to push forward with the event.

BNP spokesman Swapan said police had arrested "around 2,000" party activists and supporters in a bid to scuttle the rally.

Independent observers have said the past two general elections, in which the BNP was decimated, were rigged by Hasina's government.

Fifteen Western embassies issued a joint statement late Tuesday calling for the country to allow free expression, peaceful assembly and fair elections, with the UN making a similar declaration a day later.

'Made-in-Sialkot' Adidas ball puts Pakistan in the World Cup

REUTERS — SIALKOT

Even though it is a cricket-mad nation, Pakistan is playing a big part in the soccer World Cup by making the balls used on the training fields in Qatar and the replicas sold to fans worldwide.

Forward Sports, a multinational sports equipment company in the northeastern city of Sialkot, has been working with Adidas AG for almost 20 years. It is one of the two manufacturers of Adidas' Al Rihla, the official World Cup ball.

Forward Sports Director Hassan Masood Khawaja said his company had made 5.5 million Al Rihla balls, including 60,000 high-quality replicas of the balls used in matches, only without the real-time

technology helping referees with offside and line calls.

They are used by the teams as they train in Qatar, and sold as a premium product to football enthusiasts across the globe, with the rest sold as lower-priced leisure and souvenir balls.

The match balls are made in China. Adidas declined to identify the manufacturer.

For the company, the contract is a source of pride.

"More than business, it is a matter of prestige and honour for us to make the World Cup ball," Khawaja said.

"How do we do it? It's the skill of the people... and our love for the sport," he said.

While soccer is popular among fans, the national side is



Workers conduct the final check to fix any cavity in the seams of balls inside a soccer ball factory in Sialkot, Pakistan, on December 2, 2022. (REUTERS)

ranked 194 out of 211 countries by FIFA. Cricket reigns supreme.

Sialkot has a rich history of making soccer balls and other

sporting equipment dating back to colonial times.

Pakistan remains one of the world's biggest manufacturers of soccer balls, along with China and India.

The local chamber of commerce said more than 43 million balls valued at \$191m were made in Sialkot in the 2021/22 financial year.

About 8% of Sialkot's population of around 1 million people work in the industry, but many say they have little time to actually see their product in action.

"We work all day," said Forward Sports quality control inspector Amna, when asked if she watched soccer. "At night, when we go home, we need to rest."



Nato chief fears Ukraine war could become a wider conflict

AP — KIEV

The head of Nato expressed worry that the fighting in Ukraine could spin out of control and become a war between Russia and Nato, according to an interview released yesterday.

"If things go wrong, they can go horribly wrong," Nato Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said in remarks to Norwegian broadcaster NRK.

"It is a terrible war in Ukraine. It is also a war that can become a full-fledged war that spreads into a major war between Nato and Russia," he said. "We are working on that every day to avoid that."

Stoltenberg, a former prime

minister of Norway, said in the interview that "there is no doubt that a full-fledged war is a possibility", adding that it was important to avoid a conflict "that involves more countries in Europe and becomes a full-fledged war in Europe".

The Kremlin has repeatedly accused Nato allies of effectively becoming a party to the conflict by providing Ukraine with weapons, training its troops and feeding military intelligence to attack Russian forces.

In comments that reflected soaring tensions between Russia and the West, President Vladimir Putin suggested Moscow might think about using what he described as the US concept of a preemptive

"It is a terrible war in Ukraine. It is also a war that can become a full-fledged war that spreads into a major war between Nato and Russia," Nato Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said. "We are working on that every day to avoid that."

strike. "Speaking about a disarming strike, maybe it's worth thinking about adopting the ideas developed by our US counterparts, their ideas of ensuring their security," he said.

Long before the Ukraine war, the Kremlin expressed concern about US efforts to develop the so-called Prompt Global Strike capability that envisions hitting an adversary's strategic targets with precision-guided conventional weapons anywhere in the world within

one hour. Putin noted that such a strike could knock out command facilities.

"We are just thinking about it, they weren't shy to openly talk about it during the past years," he said, claiming that Moscow's precision-guided cruise missiles outperform similar US weapons and Russia has hypersonic weapons that the US hasn't deployed.

In separate comments via video link to defence and security chiefs of several

ex-Soviet nations, Putin again accused the West of using Ukraine as a tool against his country.

"For many years, the West shamelessly exploited and pumped out its resources, encouraged genocide and terror in the Donbas and effectively turned the country into a colony," he said. Ukrainians say they are fighting for freedom against an unwanted invader and aggressor.

Heavy fighting continued yesterday in eastern and southern Ukraine, mostly in regions that Russia illegally annexed in September.

Ukraine's presidential office said five civilians have been killed and another 13 have been

wounded by Russian shelling in the last 24 hours.

Donetsk regional Governor Pavlo Kyrylenko said the Russians were pressing an offensive on Bakhmut with daily attacks, despite taking heavy casualties. "You can best describe those attacks as cannon fodder," Kyrylenko said.

In neighbouring Luhansk in eastern Ukraine, regional Governor Serhiy Haidai said the Ukrainian military was pushing its counteroffensive toward Kreminna and Svatove.

He voiced hope Ukraine can reclaim control of Kreminna by year's end, and then by the end of winter reclaim areas in the region that were captured by Russia since the war began.



A large fire rages at a shopping mall in Khimki, Moscow, yesterday, in this still image obtained from a social media video. (REUTERS)

One killed as huge fire engulfs giant mall outside Moscow

AFP — MOSCOW

A fire the size of a football pitch ravaged a sprawling shopping centre near Moscow killing one person, officials said yesterday, adding that it had been put out.

"The open blaze was put out at 10:45am (0735 GMT)," Sergei Poletykin, the head of the Moscow region emergency services told Russian media.

Social media footage showed people running out of the Mega Khimki shopping centre in a northern Moscow suburb as the building caught fire and partially collapsed.

Russia's Investigative Committee said it had information that one person had been killed and was clarifying if there were other victims. "Investigators and forensics experts are on the scene," it said.

Emergency services said the fire in the suburb of Khimki was spread over 775,300 square feet. The shopping centre is about 7km from Moscow's Sheremetyevo Airport.

More than 70 firefighters and 20 fire trucks were at the

site, emergency services said, adding that their work was hampered due to the design of the building. "Due to the collapse of the roof, the fire spread instantly to a large area," the Moscow region's emergency services said on Telegram.

Russian news agencies quoted sources in emergency services as saying that "arson" was suspected but state news agencies later quoted sources as saying that safety violations were more likely the cause.

Russia, which frequently has a lax approach to safety rules, has seen a number of deadly fires at entertainment venues in recent years.

Last month, a fire killed 13 people at a club in the city of Kostroma. A man had reportedly fired a flare gun indoors but inadequate fire safety regulations caused the large number of deaths, authorities had said.

In 2018, a fire killed 60 people in a shopping mall in the Siberian city of Kemerovo. In 2009, another blaze at a club in the Urals city of Perm killed 156 people.

German parliament to assess security after coup raids

AFP — BERLIN

The German parliament will review security measures after an ex-MP was arrested over a suspected plot to overthrow the government, a vice-president of the Bundestag said yesterday.

The alleged plotters are thought to be supporters of the "Citizens of the Reich" (Reichsbuerger), an ideological movement that encompasses far-right extremists, conspiracy theorists and gun enthusiasts.

"We will carefully examine which security provisions for the Bundestag we need to adjust," Katrin Goering-Eckardt of the Green party told the

Funk media group.

Birgit Malsack-Winkemann, a Berlin judge and former MP for the far-right AfD party, who served in parliament between 2017 and 2021, was among those arrested in nationwide raids by police on Wednesday.

Malsack-Winkemann and her alleged collaborators are accused by federal prosecutors of preparing "to violently force their way into the German parliament".

During the raids, police found one of the suspected plotters in possession of an "enemies list" with 18 names including prominent politicians and journalists targeted by the

group, according to the TAZ daily. The group is said to have planned to install aristocrat Prince Heinrich XIII Reuss as Germany's leader, while the former MP would have taken over the justice portfolio in a new government.

The presence of a former AfD representative among the accused was "striking and a very serious incident", Chancellor Olaf Scholz said. Malsack-Winkemann's "remaining contacts in parliament need to be checked urgently", Social Democrat MP Sebastian Hartmann also told Funke.

"I assume that they hoped to have help from the inside for

their coup plans," Hartmann said. The AfD, which currently holds 78 of the 736 seats in the Bundestag, sought to distance itself from the alleged putsch attempt. "We condemn and reject such efforts," the leadership of the party said.

Individual AfD members however offered other opinions. The raids were "one of the biggest abuses of power" in the history of Germany, MP Petr Bystron said on Twitter.

The Reichsbuerger generally believe in the continued existence of the pre-World War I German Reich, or empire, under a monarchy and several groups have declared their own "states".

Let the lava flow! Iceland's volcano show is a hit

AFP — REYKJAVIK

In a dark auditorium in Reykjavik, bubbling orange lava flows down a slide to within inches of awe-struck visitors.

The flow, contained on both sides by black sand, lights up the room like a sunrise.

This is the Lava Show, Iceland's latest tourist attraction, that uses reheated lava from a real eruption of the island's Katla volcano more than 100 years ago. The heat emanating from the molten rock is tangible, so much so that some of the spectators shuffle in their seats to remove their coats.

"This is the show where you get to experience real molten lava flowing inside of a building, intentionally," the Lava Show's Scottish host Iain MacKinnon joked.

The molten liquid sizzled as

it hit blocks of ice, crackling like the sound of breaking glass as it cooled. Hundreds of thousands of curious onlookers have flocked to watch the hypnotising jets of lava at Iceland's Mount Fagradalsfjall after two eruptions over the last year just 40km from Reykjavik.

But not all Icelandic eruptions are safe. While the lava used in the show retains a hint of sulphur, the dangerous toxic gases that normally emanate from an eruption have dissipated, since the rock has been reheated and melted down so many times.

More than 600kg of tephra — the rocks ejected from Katla, one of Iceland's most dangerous volcanoes, when it last erupted in 1918 — are used in the Lava Show. "We heat that up to its melting point, which is around 1,100 degrees Celsius

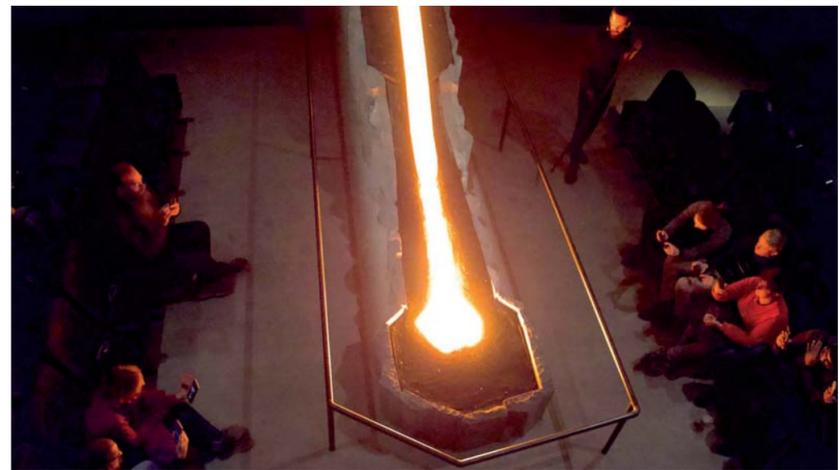
and then we pour it into the room," said the show's founder Julius Jonsson.

In an adjoining room, a large furnace has been modified to suit the show's needs.

He came up with the idea of a lava show when he was standing atop a glacier watching lava flow from Fimmvorduhals, a small eruption that preceded the massive Eyjafjallajokull one in 2010, whose ash cloud disrupted air traffic and stranded more than 10 million travellers.

Known as the land of fire and ice, Iceland has 33 volcanic systems currently considered active, the highest number in Europe. It has an eruption every five years on average.

"We thought it would be wonderful for Iceland if lava would always be flowing," Jonsson said.



Real molten lava originated from tephra and that erupted in 1918 from the Katla Volcano in southern Iceland, cools down on the basalt structure at the Lava Show showroom in Reykjavik city center, Iceland, on December 1, 2022. (AFP)

Kremlin critic Yashin jailed for over 8 years

AFP — MOSCOW

Russia yesterday sentenced opposition politician Ilya Yashin to eight-and-a-half years in prison for spreading "false information" about Russia's offensive in Ukraine, the highest-profile conviction under new legislation criminalising criticism of the assault.

The 39-year-old Moscow councillor is just the latest in a long line of Kremlin critics to have been sidelined in recent years in a crackdown that has intensified after President Vladimir Putin sent troops to Ukraine.

His supporters in the courtroom applauded Yashin, who smiled and waved to family despite being handcuffed, as the sentence was read out. Judge Oksana Goryunova said Yashin had committed a crime by disseminating "knowingly false information about Russia's armed forces" and sentenced him to eight years and six months in a penal colony.

In April, he had described the alleged murder of civilians in Bucha as a "massacre", referring to a town near the Ukrainian capital Kiev where civilians were found killed after Russian forces pulled back.

London may see first snow of winter this weekend

BLOOMBERG — LONDON

The UK's Met Office issued a warning for snow and ice in southeast England and London beginning Sunday morning.

As much as 10 centimetres of snow may accumulate in some places, potentially causing travel delays and power cuts. The cold snap and low wind speeds are testing Europe's winter resilience as costly energy rattles the economy and drives up inflation.

"It is staying cold with daytime temperatures remaining only a few degrees above freezing in many places over the coming days and overnight temperatures dropping to -10C or lower in isolated spots," said Met Office Chief Meteorologist Steve Willington.

The cold is set to continue through next week. While these temperatures aren't unusual for this time of year, they're forcing households to use expensive heating after a milder-than-normal November.

UK media returns fire at Harry over Netflix docuseries

AFP — LONDON

Britain's media, the main focus of criticism so far in Netflix docuseries "Harry and Meghan", yesterday hit back at the estranged prince and his wife, accusing them of lying and insulting Queen Elizabeth II.

The royal family was largely spared during the first three episodes of the show, which aired on Thursday, with the focus more on Harry's early life and his resentment towards the media, which he blames of the death of his mother Diana.

But the prince did accuse the family of unconscious racial bias, and the royals will be braced for next week's instalment, which threatens more revelations.

The saga dominated

yesterday's newspaper front pages, which were largely critical of the Duke and Duchess of Sussex — Harry and Meghan's formal titles.

"Harry the Nasty" said the headline of popular tabloid the Sun, which added the couple had "trashed the Queen's legacy", left Harry's father King Charles III and his brother Prince William in a "state of sadness" and unfairly tarnished the whole country as racist.

The paper, along with many others, picked up on one scene in which Meghan performed a melodramatic curtsy as she recalled meeting Queen Elizabeth II for the first time.

"How low can you go?" asked the tabloid, adding that "mocking Meghan exaggerated a curtsy to poke fun at the royals — and

compared their traditions to a tacky US medieval chain".

The Daily Mail, the right-wing newspaper that has clashed most often with the couple, led with the headline "palace anger at 'assault on the Queen's legacy'", and carried almost 20 pages of coverage on the show. Inside, one commentator took issue with their claim that Brexit had fuelled racism in the UK and contributed to their eventual split from the family, calling it "the most insulting distortion".

Conservative MP Bob Seely said late on Thursday that he plans to bring forward legislation to strip the couple of their royal titles.

"There is a political issue," he said. "As well as trashing his family and monetising his

misery for public consumption, he is also attacking some important institutions in this country."

The Mail also dedicated four pages to rebutting what it called the couple's "fantasies and lies", including their claims of an unrelentingly hostile media and stories about their first date and engagement. It also claimed that the show had "cynically doctored" previous media interviews with the couple.

The broadsheets also dedicated their front pages to the show, with the centre-right Daily Telegraph also leading with the "direct hit" on the queen's legacy.

The Times ran with the less polemic headline "Palace and Netflix clash over Sussexes soap opera", although one

commentator implored: "Please make it stop Netflix, I can't take any more of this self-centred nonsense." The left-wing Guardian newspaper was more supportive of the couple, and focused on Prince Harry's criticism that the royal family did not protect Meghan against racially charged reporting.

The centre-left Daily Mirror, which is generally less critical of the couple than its right-wing counterparts, slammed the show, calling on its front-page to "stop this royal circus".

"Just two months after our Queen died, Prince Harry is bemoaning his treatment again... Prince William is venting his fury again... Meanwhile, thousands of ordinary Brits are choosing between eating and heating."

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CHAIRMAN
DR. KHALID BIN THANI AL THANI

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
DR. KHALID MUBARAK AL-SHAFI
editorinchief@pen.com.qa

MANAGING EDITOR
MOHAMMED OSMAN ALI
osman@pen.com.qa

EDITORIAL

Expanding cooperation

THE participation of Amir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani in three important summits in Riyadh yesterday and Amir's discussions with the President of China have opened new avenues for enhanced cooperation between Qatar, China and Arab countries.

Three important summits were held in Riyadh yesterday, namely the 43rd session of the Supreme Council of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC), the Riyadh Gulf-China Summit for Cooperation and Development and the Riyadh Chinese-Arab Summit for Cooperation and Development.

H H the Amir also held an official talks session with President of the People's Republic of China Xi Jinping. The Chinese President congratulated H H the Amir for the success of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, praising the organization of the event, and wished bilateral relations further progress and development.

The session also dealt with discussing the bilateral strategic partnership between both countries and the means to enhance them in all fields, particularly economic, investment, energy, and industry fields.

The Amir also participated in the Riyadh Gulf-China Summit for Cooperation and Development. The Amir also participated with his brothers Their Majesties and Their Highnesses leaders of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC) and heads of delegations in the 43rd session of the Supreme Council summit.

The GCC countries are a geographical axis linking Asia, Africa and Europe for their prominent geographical advantage, and are a source of energy that feeds the global economy because they are rich with energy resources, where the oil and gas reserves constitute 30% and 20% of the world's reserves respectively. The volume of trade exchange between the two sides exceeded \$230bn and imports of crude oil from the GCC countries exceeded the threshold of 200 million tons in 2021.

Meanwhile the Arab countries and China enjoy a high degree of economically complementary advantages, as the volume of trade exchange between the Arab countries and China increased from 1970 to 2010 by more than 620 times. In 2021, mutual direct investment stocks between the Arab and Chinese sides amounted to \$27bn, and the volume of trade exchange between the two sides amounted to \$330.3bn in the first three quarters of 2022.

The Supreme Council of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf praised Qatar's success in hosting the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 and the positive impact it has on the human legacy and its civilizational, cultural, and intellectual rapprochement among world peoples.

The Peninsula
D-RING ROAD, POST BOX: 3488, DOHA - QATAR
EMAIL: EDITOR@PEN.COM.QA

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OFFICE
TEL: 4455 7741 / 767
FAX: +974 4455 7758

MANAGING EDITOR
TEL: 4455 7769

DEPUTY MANAGING EDITOR
TEL: 4462 7505

LOCAL NEWS SECTION
TEL: 4455 7743

BUSINESS NEWS SECTION
TEL: 4462 7535

SPORT NEWS SECTION
TEL: 4455 7745

ONLINE SECTION
TEL: 4462 7501 email: info@pen.com.qa

PUBLIC RELATIONS
TEL: 4455 7613 email: pr@pen.com.qa

MARKETING
TEL: 4455 7657 email: marketing@pen.com.qa

ADVERTISING DEPARTMENT
TEL: 4455 7837 / 857
FAX: 4455 7870, email: adv@pen.com.qa

CLASSIFIED DEPARTMENT
TEL: 4455 7857 email: adv@pen.com.qa

SUBSCRIPTION & DISTRIBUTION
TEL: 66766718
WhatsApp: 66766718, email: info@tawseelqatar.com

www.thepeninsula.qa

All editorial related correspondences should be directed to Editor-in-Chief office.
e-mail: editorinchief@pen.com.qa
Post box: 3488, Doha - Qatar

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With participation of Amir, three important summits held in Riyadh

QNA

Three important summits were held in Riyadh yesterday, namely the 43rd session of the Supreme Council of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC), the Riyadh-Chinese Gulf Summit for Cooperation and Development, and the Riyadh-Chinese Arab Summit for Cooperation and Development.

Amir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani chaired the delegation of the State of Qatar to the three summits which are of great Arab and international interest.

In preparation for the GCC Summit, the State of Qatar participated last Wednesday in the 154th preparatory ministerial meeting of the GCC Supreme Council in its 43rd session at the headquarters of the GCC General Secretariat in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

In the meeting, the State of Qatar's delegation was headed by Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs H E Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani. During the meeting, the draft agenda was approved, the items on the agenda were discussed and draft decisions and recommendations were adopted.

Regarding the Riyadh-Chinese Gulf Summit which was held with the participation of Chinese President Xi Jinping, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia H H Prince Faisal bin Farhan bin Abdullah Al-Saud stressed that his country is looking forward to working with China and the brothers in the GCC states and Arab countries through the three summits hosted by Riyadh to intensify cooperation in the political, economic, social and developmental fields in order to achieve the aspirations of our countries and peoples towards greater security, stability, well-being and prosperity for all.

In Beijing, the Chinese Foreign Ministry described the GCC countries as important partners for China and said that relations between China and the GCC countries have witnessed comprehensive, rapid and profound growth over the past 41 years, with fruitful cooperation covering the fields of economy, trade, energy, financial services, investment, high-tech, aerospace, language and culture, which set the pace of cooperation between China and the Middle East countries.

The ministry spokeswoman said that during the summit, the Chinese president will hold in-depth exchanges of views with leaders of the participating countries on China-GCC relations and issues of common concern, adding that the summit will continue to enhance China's traditional friendship with the GCC countries and enriching the strategic content of relations and taking them to a new level.

In a joint statement last January, the two sides expressed their satisfaction with the development of the Gulf-Chinese



Amir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani and other leaders participating in the 43rd session of the Supreme Council of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC), in Riyadh, yesterday.

relations and affirmed that strengthening Chinese-Gulf cooperation is in line with the basic and long-term interests of both sides, and they agreed on the need to establish strategic partnership relations between them as soon as possible. They also agreed to sign the joint action plan for the strategic dialogue between the two parties between the years 2022-2025 in order to achieve new horizons and expand areas of cooperation between the two sides. They stressed the need to complete negotiations on the free trade agreement between the Cooperation Council and China and to establish a free trade area between them.

Arab countries are important partners for China in advancing steadily on the path of development, strengthening solidarity and cooperation among developing countries and advancing the building of a community with a shared future for mankind.

The GCC countries are a geographical axis linking Asia, Africa and Europe for their prominent geographical advantage, and are a source of energy that feeds the global economy because they are rich with energy resources, where the oil and gas reserves constitute 30% and 20% of the world's reserves respectively. GCC countries are also considered a fertile ground for the development of modern and advanced technology industries because of their pioneering and initiative spirit, and China is the largest trading partner of the GCC and the largest importer of its petrochemical products. The volume of trade exchange between the two sides exceeded \$230bn and imports of crude oil from the GCC countries exceeded the threshold of 200 million tons in 2021.

The Riyadh Chinese-Arab Summit for Cooperation and Development is an important milestone in the strategic partnership between the two sides and an additional step to support cooperation between them in all fields in order to achieve common interests for the two sides. The summit also reflects the keenness of the Arab and

Chinese leaderships to develop aspects of joint cooperation with China as the second largest economy in the world. It symbolizes the entry of the Arab-Chinese friendship into a new stage.

Arab countries are important partners for China in advancing steadily on the path of development, strengthening solidarity and cooperation among developing countries and advancing the building of a community with a shared future for mankind.

Cooperation between the Arab countries and China in all fields has evolved rapidly and comprehensively, as the Arab countries have become the most

\$319bn and \$295m, an increase of 35.28% over what it was in the same period last year, and is close to the total volume in 2021.

The Arab and Chinese sides established various mechanisms for human and cultural communication within the framework of the Arab-Chinese Cooperation Forum, and China has been making unremitting efforts for peace and stability in the Middle East. China also participates constructively in the Palestinian issue and in the hot issues of Iraq, Libya, Sudan, Yemen and other countries to advance efforts to find solutions acceptable to all parties through comprehensive political dialogue.

The Arab countries and China have joined forces in the spirit of one team since the outbreak of the emerging coronavirus pandemic and have resulted in effective cooperation in the areas of vaccine development and use, prevention and joint control, and the sharing of experiences and therapeutic drugs.

Although they are geographically far apart, China and the Arab world have a long history of friendly exchanges along the ancient Silk Road, which makes them natural partners for cooperation within the framework of the Belt and Road. Nearly 2,000 years ago, the ancestors of the two sides began trading along the ancient Silk Road and forged a friendship that has stood the test of time and is still lively today.

With the world facing a set of unprecedented challenges, including the ongoing epidemic, the economic slowdown more severe than expected and the energy and food crises, and according to media reports in Beijing, it is expected that China and the Arab world, giving their increasing influence in the global arena, will give way to the advantages of each of them and play a greater role in international affairs. The reports said the Chinese side hopes that the Arab and Chinese sides will make joint efforts to stabilize industrialization chains, maintain global energy security, address a series of pressing issues including poverty, terrorism and climate change, as well as maintain global stability.

Global nature pact in doubt as COP15 talks seek breakthrough

JACK GRAHAM — REUTERS

As thousands of people descend on Montreal this week for a crucial U.N. biodiversity summit, fears are growing among delegates over whether the countries involved can agree on an ambitious global pact to protect nature this decade.

Extra talks in the days before the Dec. 7-19 summit, known as COP15, hoped to streamline the wording of draft biodiversity protection targets - pushing more than 190 nations towards a successful compromise.

Instead, the draft nature pact has become even messier.

"I don't feel that the delegates went as far as we would have expected," said Elizabeth Maruma Mrema, executive secretary of the U.N. Convention on Biological Diversity, at a press conference this week.

Environmentalists say a deal on nature is vital amid widespread degradation caused by

human activity, with the world's wildlife populations declining by more than two-thirds since 1970, according to green group WWF. Improving conservation and management of natural areas, such as parks, oceans, forests and wildernesses, is seen as crucial to safeguarding the ecosystems on which humans depend and limiting global warming to internationally agreed targets.

Next week, environment ministers are due to arrive at COP15 to hash out any remaining disagreements but there are still major fault-lines between negotiators.

The current draft agreement has around 1,400 phrases which are bracketed, indicating a lack of consensus over wording, despite years of talks and COVID-19 delays.

"The general approach of parties has been to really entrench themselves in the positions that have come forward

over the last four years," said Masha Kalinina, a conservation officer at the non-profit Pew Charitable Trusts. One key goal that could determine whether Montreal is a success is the headline target to protect at least 30% of lands and oceans by 2030, known as 30 by 30.

The pledge has already drawn support from more than 110 nations, and would represent a significant increase in protected areas, which currently cover just 17% of lands and less than 8% of marine areas, according to a U.N. report released last year. But concern is growing among nature experts that marine protection, in particular, is being weakened during the COP15 talks.

"What I'm most nervous about is that there would be an attempt to reduce the percentage ambition for the ocean down from 30%," said Kalinina.

Kalinina warned that during previous biodiversity talks in

Japan in 2010, scientists called for 20% of the ocean to be protected by 2020 but only 10% was agreed.

"That was a political target that was negotiated on the last day of that COP," she said on the Japan talks.

"We are worried that history could repeat itself but we are not in a place to survive that kind of mistake." Many of the world's most biodiversity-rich areas are situated in developing nations, from the Amazon rainforest to coastal mangroves in Southeast Asia. As about 195 countries look to finalise an accord to safeguard plants, animals and ecosystems, developing nations are seeking more funding from wealthier states to help them achieve any agreed targets.

"Financing is always the achilles heel of every global agreement," said Florian Titz, a policy advisor at WWF Germany, at a press conference.



Peru's ousted president put in provisional detention

AFP — LIMA

Peru's former president Pedro Castillo was placed in provisional detention on Thursday, a day after he was ousted by lawmakers and arrested, accused of attempting a coup.

Prosecutors carried out a dawn raid on the presidency and some ministerial offices in search of evidence against Castillo, who is being investigated for "rebellion and conspiracy." Looking visibly nervous and disheveled, the toppled leftist appeared before the Supreme Court via videoconference as prosecutors sought a week's detention.

A judge granted the request, despite the argument of Castillo's lawyer Victor Perez that "the crime of rebellion was not committed" because it did not materialise.

Castillo's efforts to dissolve Congress and rule by decree were quickly stamped out by lawmakers who voted him out

Mexico's President revealed that Castillo had requested asylum, which he was willing to grant, but the leftist was arrested before he could arrive at the country's embassy.

of office on Wednesday in a day of high drama, by the end of which he was in jail and his former vice president Dina Boluarte had taken over.

Mexico's President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador revealed that Castillo had requested asylum, which he was willing to grant, but the leftist was arrested before he could arrive at the country's embassy.

Mexico was holding consultations with Peru's new government about giving asylum to Castillo, Foreign Minister Marcelo Ebrard later announced.

With Boluarte under



People clash with riot police during a demonstration demanding the release of ex-President Pedro Castillo and the closure of the Peruvian Congress, in Lima, on December 8, 2022. (AFP)

mounting pressure to quell the political turmoil rocking the country, hundreds of Castillo supporters staged protests in the capital Lima and other cities. Asked by reporters if she would consider calling an early election, Peru's first woman leader said that, going forward, she would "look at alternatives to best re-orient" the country.

A thousand protesters marched through Lima

demanding Castillo's release before police dispersed the demonstration with tear gas, making several arrests.

"Pedro Castillo, Peru is with you!" and "If there is no liberation, there will be revolution!" the leftist's supporters chanted.

Protesters in the southern Andean cities of Ayacucho and Puno, where Castillo has a lot of support, demanded early elections. Boluarte took the oath

of office shortly after the impeachment vote, vowing to serve out the rest of Castillo's term, until July 2026.

The 60-year-old lawyer must now form her first ministerial cabinet, which will be an early indication of whether she is likely to survive in office.

However, without her own political party in Congress, Boluarte faces an uphill battle to stay in power.

Biden authorises new \$275m in military aid for Ukraine

REUTERS — WASHINGTON

US President Joe Biden yesterday authorized fresh \$275m in military aid for Ukraine offering new capabilities to defeat drones and strengthen air defenses, according to a memo released by the White House.

The package also includes rockets for High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS) launchers made by Lockheed Martin Corp, 80,000 155mm artillery rounds, Humvee military vehicles and about 150 generators, according to the memo.

This is the 27th use of Presidential Drawdown Authority (PDA) for Ukraine, which allows the United States to transfer defense articles and services from stocks quickly without congressional approval in response to an emergency.

National Security Council spokesman John Kirby told reporters at the White House that the equipment was "on its way." But details were scant on two systems, "counter air defense capability" and "Counter-Unmanned Aerial Systems equipment," which appear to be new capabilities for Ukraine.

Russia's surge in missile strikes in Ukraine is partly designed to exhaust Kyiv's supplies of air defenses and achieve dominance of the skies above the country, a senior Pentagon official said in November.

To counter these attacks, the United States has sent sophisticated anti-aircraft NASAMS systems to Ukraine which have been running for a few weeks.

Chile confirms new cases of bird flu in pelicans

REUTERS — SANTIAGO

Chile reported new cases of a highly pathogenic avian influenza virus in wild birds on Thursday as the disease spreads on the South American continent.

The H5N1 variant was found in two pelicans, the Chilean Agriculture Ministry said on its website, one in the coastal region of Iquique and another in coastal Antofagasta.

The announcement came a day after the country reported its first case of bird flu, also in a wild bird.

In Wednesday's statement, the ministry said it expected to find cases in the country given other South American countries like Peru, Ecuador and Colombia had also reported episodes of bird flu.

Lula names former Sao Paulo mayor Haddad as finance minister

REUTERS — BRASILIA

Brazil's leftist President-elect Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva yesterday picked former Sao Paulo Mayor Fernando Haddad as his finance minister, ending days of speculation about one of his key ministerial appointments.

Lula is set to take office on Jan. 1 after defeating incumbent far-right leader Jair Bolsonaro in October.

Lula chose career diplomat Mauro Vieira as foreign minister, former Congressman Jose Mucio as defense minister, Bahia Governor Rui Costa as chief of staff and the former governor of Maranhao state Flavio Dino as justice minister.

After the announcement of Haddad as finance minister, Brazil's real weakened as much as 1.3% against the dollar, before paring losses to trade down 0.9%. Benchmark stock index Bovespa was trading up 0.3%.

Investors have anxiously awaited Lula's choice to run the economy, unsettled by his announcement of a multi-billion proposal to increase social spending from next year.

The proposal has already been approved in the Senate, but still needs to be voted on in the lower house.

Haddad told reporters yesterday he has started to assemble his team but would not announce any names immediately. A lawyer with a master's degree in economics



Brazil's President-elect Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva and Fernando Haddad gesture during a campaign rally in Campinas, Sao Paulo state, Brazil, in this file photo taken on October 8, 2022. (AFP)

and a doctorate in philosophy, Haddad's name has been

making the rounds for weeks as the future finance minister.

Although he is seen as a moderate within Lula's leftist Workers Party (PT), investors worry about rampant social spending and a lack of fiscal discipline. As the mayor of Brazil's largest city, Sao Paulo, from 2013 to 2016, Haddad renegotiated the city's debt with the federal government, reducing it by about 50 billion reais and gaining investment grade.

Since losing his re-election bid as mayor in 2016, he has described himself as a college professor on Twitter.

Haddad's relationship with Lula grew during the 2018 presidential campaign, when he was the PT candidate after Lula was barred from the race by graft convictions that were later overturned.

Biden backs African Union spot in G20

AFP — WASHINGTON

US President Joe Biden at a summit next week will back a permanent spot for the African Union in the Group of 20 major economies, seeking to elevate the continent's role, the White House said yesterday.

Biden will make the announcement during a three-day US-Africa Summit that opens Tuesday in Washington, where the administration will make a case for US commitment to the continent amid inroads by China and Russia.

"It's past time Africa has permanent seats at the table in international organizations and initiatives," said Judd Devermont, the senior director for African affairs at the National Security Council.

"We need more African voices in international conversations that concern the global economy, democracy and governance, climate change, health and security," he said.

He said the United States would discuss the African Union's role with India, the G20 president for 2023.

South Africa currently is the only African member of the G20, which was launched in its current form during the 2008 financial crisis as a way to bring together the world's top economies. The European Union participates.

Biden's pledge on the G20 comes after he threw his support behind expansion of the UN Security Council, including representation of Africa, during a speech to the world body in September.

While few expect quick changes at the Security Council, the stance pits the United States against China and especially Russia which are seen as opposed to any move to dilute their veto power.

Over 1,400 killed in Haiti violence this year: UN

AFP — GENEVA

More than 1,400 people have been killed and over 1,000 kidnapped in Haiti this year by gangs, the UN said yesterday.

Volker Turk, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, called for a show of "political courage and responsibility at a national and international level" to address the "endemic impunity".

Haiti, the poorest nation in the Americas, is facing an acute political, economic, security and health crisis which has paralysed the country and sparked a breakdown of law and order.

The assassination of president Jovenel Moise in July 2021 exacerbated the crises, as gangs

grew in strength and territorial control.

This "multifaceted and protracted crisis... cannot be ignored," Turk told a press conference in Geneva.

"This is a country where armed gangs, reportedly supported by economic and political elites, control more than 60 percent of the capital, where some 4.7 million face acute hunger," he said.

"Since the beginning of this year, a staggering 1,448 people have been killed, 1,145 injured and 1,005 kidnapped by gangs." He stressed that these were not just numbers, with each victim leaving "entire families and communities... torn apart by the violence."

Turk, who took over as the UN rights chief in October, also decried that gang members were "using sexual violence to instill fear and exert control over the population".

A UN report published in October found that the gangs use sexual violence to "punish, subjugate, and inflict pain" on the citizens and as a coercive tool to force cooperation.

It detailed gang rapes of children as young as 10 and of elderly women, often in front of family members.

"Sexual violence is an additional factor that is very chilling for the population and one that really needs to be countered," Turk said.

He insisted "the root causes

of the crisis, especially social inequalities, rampant corruption, collusion between powerful elites and gang leaders, and endemic impunity, must be addressed." "It is unconscionable that there are people benefiting from this endemic insecurity and the suffering of Haitians," Turk hailed a recent UN Security Council decision to sanction members of Haiti's economic and political elites who reportedly support the gangs, saying it sends "a very strong message to those threatening Haiti's peace, security and stability." He called on countries to make sure that people fleeing Haiti "have access to fair and efficient asylum procedures."

Gasoline queues return in Venezuela as refineries fail to produce

REUTERS — VALENCIA/MARACAY

Long lines for motorists at Venezuela's refueling stations are back due to repeated outages at state oil company PDVSA's refineries and a lack of diesel and gasoline imports.

In 2020 and again in 2021, drivers had to line up for days to get gasoline and farmers halted work because of insufficient diesel. The shortages had eased earlier this year as imports of Iranian crude boosted refinery output.

But Venezuela's refining network again is operating at a fraction of its capacity due to problems with deep-conversion units essential for motor fuel production, according to workers, leading to a new round of shortages.

Venezuela's central region has been most affected by the fuel scarcity, which has not yet reached the capital city Caracas. But lines also have reappeared in Falcon state, home of PDVSA's largest oil refineries.

At many stations, hundreds



A driver waits in line to get gasoline in Maracay, Venezuela, yesterday. (REUTERS)

of motorcycle drivers — a common way of transportation in the country — circle every morning waiting for a chance to fill up. Some motorists said they worry about the dollar-denominated prices charged for the gasoline when supplies are available.

The fluid catalytic cracker at Venezuela's largest refinery, the 645,000-barrel-per-day Amuay in Falcon state, has been out of service since last week.

It was the plant's third outage since July on power interruptions and unplanned maintenance.

The unit has been offline for a total of 23 days this year.

Due to the situation in Amuay, part of the country's Paraguana refining complex, PDVSA is now trying to restart the adjacent Cardon refinery's cracking unit and the naphtha reformer, which has been out of service three times this year.

US basketball star back home after Russia prisoner swap

AFP — SAN ANTONIO

American basketball star Brittney Griner arrived in the United States yesterday morning after being released from a Russian prison in exchange for an arms dealer.

Griner, 32, who was arrested in Russia in February on drug charges, was seen by an AFP reporter walking across a runway after her plane landed in San Antonio, Texas.

White House national security spokesman John Kirby told NBC that Griner was in "very good spirits when she got off the plane and appeared to be obviously in good health." Griner will now be taken to a nearby military facility to make sure she has "all the access she needs to health care workers just to make sure that she is OK," Kirby said.

Griner was exchanged in Abu Dhabi on Thursday for Viktor Bout, a 55-year-old Russian national who was serving a 25-year sentence in a US prison.

Griner, a two-time Olympic

gold medalist and WNBA champion, was arrested at a Moscow airport against a backdrop of soaring tensions over Ukraine.

She was accused of possessing vape cartridges with a small quantity of cannabis oil and sentenced in August to nine years in prison. Bout, who was accused of arming rebels in some of the world's bloodiest conflicts, was detained in a US sting operation in Thailand in 2008, extradited to the United States and sentenced in 2012 to 25 years behind bars.

Another American held in Russia, former US Marine Paul Whelan, was not part of Thursday's exchange.

Russia President Vladimir Putin said yesterday that other prisoner swaps with Washington were possible.

"This is the result of negotiations and the search for compromises. In this case, compromises were found and we aren't refusing to continue this work in the future," Putin told reporters during a press conference in Kyrgyzstan.