



### A SPRINKLE OF EMIRATI FLAIR



### Look: Historic first official visit by Sheikh Khalifa to UK



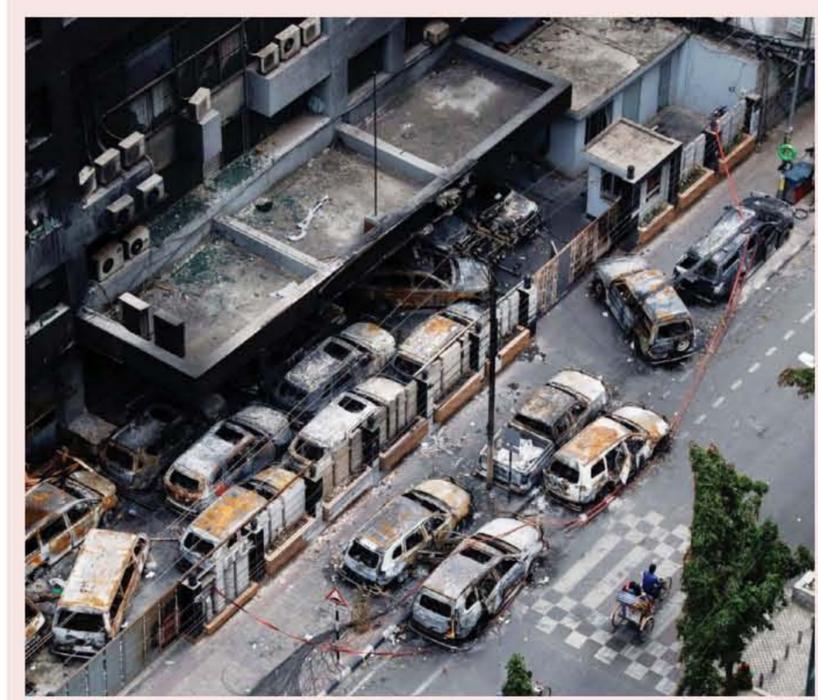
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Vehicles that were set afire during violent protests by students against government job quotas in Dhaka on Sunday. — REUTERS

## Bangladeshi expats worry about families back home

SM Ayaz Zakir  
ayaz@khaleejtimes.com

Bangladeshi expats in the UAE were growing anxious as violent clashes between protesters and police raged back home. Worse, communication lines were disrupted, and the Internet was shut down nationwide.

"There is no way we can reach out to our families," worried expats told *Khaleej Times* on Friday.

At least 114 people have died in the recent student protests against job reservations in the South Asian country.

Telecom links were widely disrupted, with television news channels going off the air. Overseas telephone calls and those through the Internet were crippled, while the websites of several Bangladesh newspapers did not update on Friday and were also inactive on social media.

Akram Hassan, a 28-year-old in Sharjah, had been trying nonstop to contact his family in Bangladesh. "The Internet was very slow over the last four days

and I could barely get in touch. However, from Thursday morning it was completely shut, and I don't know what condition my family is in," said Hassan, who hails from Feni town.

"The situation is very bad in our country — and the sad part is I cannot even call my family directly on the phone as the connectivity has been disrupted," he told *Khaleej Times*.

The government offered no immediate comment on Friday's severed communications, but said police in Dhaka, the capital, had barred all public meetings and processions indefinitely.

In what is considered the "worst unrest" Bangladesh has seen in years, students are demanding that the government scrap its preferential hiring rules for sought-after civil service jobs. Analysts, however, say economic woes are fuelling the anger.

Another expat who lives in Dubai, 40-year-old Altaf Hussain, said he was "really stressed about the situation". "My family did not have enough supplies of food back

home and I have no idea how they are managing without food," said Hussain, a printing and advertising executive in Deira.

Hussain wasn't able to call his wife for nearly five days, but he finally reached her on Thursday morning.

"She was explaining the situation in Dhaka. I have told her to get essentials from one of our relatives' stores close to our home. The Internet line got cut at the same time and since then, I am really worried about my kids and family. I don't even know the amount of essentials they have in stock at home," said Hussain.

Ashraf Islam in Jebel Ali had not been able to speak to his family for days, too. "The last I heard from them was about an intensifying clash that resulted in the death of two in our city. I am really scared for my family's safety and well-being," said Islam, a 25-year-old expat hailing from Chittagong in Bangladesh. "We are in a dire situation, and this silence and not being able to talk to my loved ones is terrifying."

## No late payment fees, other charges caused by system errors: DIB

Angel Tesorero  
angel@khaleejtimes.com

Customers affected by the system upgrade by Dubai Islamic Bank (DIB) will not be charged late payment fee or other charges caused by system errors, it was announced on Saturday.

The affected customers will also be "compensated in the next few days with Walaa rewards" — the bank's loyalty programme that can be redeemed against a list of offers.

In a letter addressed to bank customers that was shared with *Khaleej Times*, DIB assured: "After working over the last month to transform our core banking systems, we have recently concluded the upgrade of our banking platform to a more secure, safe and reliable cloud technology system."

"We are mindful of the teething issues being faced by some of you and would like to assure you that we are taking immediate and ongoing steps to resolve them," the bank added.

DIB said the Walaa rewards can be utilised across a variety of transaction categories in lieu of cash, as "a token of our appreciation for your (customers) ongoing support, patience and loyalty".

## More landlords in Dubai ask tenants to pay repair cost

Waheed Abbas  
waheedabbas@khaleejtimes.com

Property owners are increasingly asking tenants to pay for the repairs and maintenance costs as landlords are witnessing strong demand from new residents.

Josh Naim, leasing manager, Huspy, said that traditionally, landlords in Dubai bore the burden of routine maintenance, encompassing everything from external repairs to minor fixes. "Recently, there has been a discernible trend where landlords increasingly transfer these costs to tenants. This shift often stems from financial considerations amidst rising property values and operational expenses," he said.

Siyazini Kunle Biko James, leasing manager at Betterhomes, said landlords are increasingly passing on maintenance costs to tenants. "We are in a time where landlords are not only benefiting from rising market values but also capitalising on the lack of knowledge on the tenants' part, particularly those who are new to Dubai," he said.

Rents in Dubai increased 10 per cent during the first half of 2024 and it is projected that rents will rise at a similar rate in the second half of the year on the back of rising population in the country.

## Bangladeshis face trial for rioting in UAE

### Attorney-General urges residents to adhere to the nation's laws

Web Desk  
webteam@khaleejtimes.com

A group of Bangladeshi nationals was arrested for gathering and inciting riots in several streets across the UAE on Friday, authorities said. Chancellor Dr Hamad Saif Al Shamsi, UAE Attorney-General, has ordered an immediate investigation and referred the suspects to an "urgent trial".

The protesters reportedly disrupted transportation and destroyed public and private property, the prosecution said in a statement released on Saturday. They also "called for such demonstrations, recorded videos, and uploaded them online", it added.

Investigations revealed that they

committed the following violations: Public assembly; protesting against their home country's government with the intent to cause unrest; obstructing the enforcement of laws and regulations; endangering individuals; blocking traffic; assault; and damaging public and private property. These actions threaten state security and public order and could endanger the state's interests, said the prosecution. The suspects were taken into custody as further investigations continue.

Al Shamsi urged everyone residing in the country to adhere to the nation's laws and not be swayed by such calls and actions. These, he said, constitute serious crimes that are punished with harsh penalties.

Bangladesh is facing its worst unrest in years, with protesters demanding the government scrap its preferential hiring rules for sought-after civil service jobs.

## President calls on residents to uphold security, safety of Emirates

Web Desk  
webteam@khaleejtimes.com

The UAE President called on residents across the country to uphold security and safety through a post on X on Sunday.

Praising the Emirates' diverse population, Sheikh Mohamed encouraged the implementation of principles of peace and tolerance within the community. "More than 200 nationalities live side by side in the UAE, all contributing to the ongoing development of our nation."

"Security and safety are the bedrock of our society and we encourage everyone who calls the UAE home to uphold these principles of peaceful coexistence and understanding," added the leader.

The UAE hosts a diverse community of residents who come from various countries, seeking a better life and opportunities in the Emirates, with many calling it their 'second home'.

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# Khaleej Times

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WEEKEND SPECIAL  
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## Britain urged to back Arab peace efforts

Shahk Khalifa bin Zayed, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, urged Britain to support Arab peace efforts and peace moves in the Middle East by exerting pressure on the European Community and the United States.

Shahk Khalifa made this call during an official meeting with British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher at the meeting were Mr Khalifa bin Zayed, the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, and Mrs Thatcher held identical views on the need for continued contacts between the UAE and Britain to support peace efforts at ending the war, the source said.

The official said both sides appealed to the international community to support them in finding a quick solution to the war so that the region could continue its role in serving the international economy.

The two sides reviewed the recent reconciliation in Lebanon and agreed on the necessity of strengthening this agreement to attain peace in the country.

Shahk Khalifa called for Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon so that the Arab country could restore its role as a link between the Arab world and Europe.

On bilateral relations, the two sides noted with satisfaction the existing cooperation and agreed on promoting the ties.

Shahk Khalifa later attended a luncheon banquet given by Mrs Thatcher in his honour.

The banquet was attended by the delegation accompanying Shahk Khalifa, Mr Richard Luce, British Minister for Foreign Affairs, and Mr Geoffrey Batti, Minister of State at the Defence Office, and a number of senior officials and diplomats.

In a banquet speech, Shahk Khalifa expressed the hope that his visit would boost cooperation between the UAE and Britain for the benefit of the people of both countries and for the restoration of peace in the Gulf and the Middle East.

She said both the UAE and Britain were doing their best to stop



Shahk Khalifa bin Zayed, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, with British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher at 10 Downing Street yesterday.—UPI wirephoto

greeting of the President. His Highness Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, and the vice president, and Prime Minister, His Highness Sheikh Rashid bin Saeed Al Maktoum, to Queen Elizabeth and the people of Britain.

Referring to Mrs Thatcher's visit to the UAE, Shahk Khalifa said: "We are looking forward to more exchange of visits between officials from our countries to consolidate friendly relations."

He thanked Mrs Thatcher and the British people for the warm hospitality he and the delegation received during the visit.

Mrs Thatcher in her speech praised the UAE and the progress the country made under the wise leadership of Shahk Khalifa.

Mrs Thatcher, welcoming Shahk Khalifa, said his first official visit to the UK came at the time when the Gulf region was passing through a critical stage.

She said both the UAE and Britain were doing their best to stop

## 11 top army officials retired in Bangladesh

DHAKA—The Bangladesh military government has retired 11 senior army officers including two key Generals from active service—the largest number of army officials to be retired at one time since the military coup in March, 1982, an official source said here yesterday.

The two Generals are Nazirul Aziz Chisti, formerly Principal Staff Officer to President Hossain Mohammed Ershad and Shamuz Zaman, currently Bangladesh's Ambassador in Kuwait and formerly Commander of the elite Ninth Army Division stationed near the capital.

Gen Chisti, a known hardliner, was President Ershad's top political adviser but, earlier this year, he fell out with the ruling Government following differences over the government's handling of the agitation by the opposition parties and was transferred to the foreign ministry.

Those retired this week also include seven Brigadiers and two Colonels already posted outside the army in civilian administration.

The source said that the army officials would keep their current civilian jobs but would no longer be on active army service.

The opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) headed by Mrs Khaleda Zia meanwhile said yesterday it would take part in parliamentary elections on December 8. It, however, set several pre-conditions.

"We are ready to participate in the elections, but the government should withdraw martial law before the voting and set up a caretaker government to conduct the elections freely and fairly," it said in a statement after a three-day party convention.

The party accused President Ershad of trying to consolidate his power under the pretext of the poli-

## ICO will launch new peace bid

JEDDAH—A seven-member peace committee, set up by the Islamic Conference Organisation (ICO) to mediate an end to the Gulf war, met here yesterday with a pledge by its chairman, President Dawda Kairaba Jawara of Gambia, to renew contacts to try to secure an Iraq-Iran ceasefire within weeks.

The committee, formed by the ICO summit held in 1981, was in session for the first time in 20 months to renew efforts to end hostilities in the 45-month-old war.

Mr Jawara, who earlier was elected chairman to succeed the late President Ahmed Sekou Toure of Guinea, pledged to initiate contact "in the next few weeks" both with Iraq and Iran and with countries that maintain channels to the combatants.

He said the goal would be to work for "the vital first step... a cessation of hostilities."

The meeting follows reports that Saudi Arabia has invited Iranian parliament Speaker Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani to perform Haj this year.

Presidents Mohammad Zia-ul-Haq of Pakistan and Hossain Mohammad Ershad of Bangladesh joined Mr Jawara at the session where the other committee members—Turkey, Malaysia, Guinea and Senegal—were represented by their foreign ministers

## Session is prorogued

THE President, His Highness Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, in his capacity as the Ruler of the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, has issued an Amiri decree closing the first ordinary session of the seventh legislative chapter of the National Consultative Council (NCC) as of July 15.—WAM

## Lenient view on re-entry of families

By Somaya Amendola

WIVES and children of expatriate employees who stay out of the country for more than six months will not be denied re-entry into the country, according to a high-ranking official at the Dubai Department of Immigration and Naturalisation.

The rule that expatriate families who stayed out of the country for more than six months, would have to obtain new residence visas to enter the country, was enforced in late 1982.

But immigration officials have contended in the past that the measure was an administrative one and that the department had been empowered to use its judgment and discretion in deciding such cases on merit.

## Agreement ratified

DOHA—The Qatari Cabinet ratified a cooperation agreement between the Qatari Chamber of Commerce and the UAE Chambers of Commerce and Industry here yesterday.

The Cabinet held its regular weekly session under the chairmanship of His Highness Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad Al Thani, the Amir of Qatar.

# Historic first official visit by Sheikh Khalifa to UK



Then British PM Margaret Thatcher, accompanied by Sheikh Rashid bin Saeed Al Maktoum, inspects the guard of honour presented by the UAE armed forces upon her arrival at Abu Dhabi airport on April 22, 1981.

This was one of the meetings that galvanised the countries' bilateral relations and bolstered the cooperation and economic ties between the two sides

Angel Tesorero and Thanweeruddin Mohammad newsroom@khaleejtimes.com

This day - 40 years ago - on July 19, 1984, *Khaleej Times* bannered the historic first official visit to UK by the late Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, who was then Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces.

It was one of the meetings that galvanised the UAE-UK bilateral relations and bolstered the cooperation and economic ties between the two sides. It was also a meeting where the UAE urged UK to support Arab issues and peace moves in the Middle East.

Sheikh Khalifa, who eventually became the second president of the UAE in November 2004, met with then British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. As quoted by *Khaleej Times*, an official said after the meeting that "Sheikh Khalifa affirmed during the talks the necessity of finding a just and comprehensive settlement of the Middle East problem and the Palestinian people's right to self-determination and the establishment of a state on their land."

The same official added the two leaders also discussed the Iraq-Iran war (which happened between 1980 and 1988) and its effects on stability and security in the region. Sheikh Khalifa and Thatcher "held identical views on the need for continued contacts between the UAE and UK to support peace efforts," the official noted.

Three years before Sheikh Khalifa's first official visit to UK, Thatcher - for her part - made history as the first sitting UK prime minister to visit the UAE on April 21, 1981. She was accompanied by her husband, Sir Denis Thatcher.

In a photo taken by KT photographer Shaheedi, Thatcher was welcomed by the late Sheikh Rashid bin Saeed Al Maktoum, who was then UAE Vice-President and Prime Minister and Ruler of Dubai.

Several sheikhs, ministers and the diplomatic corps welcomed Thatcher and her entourage who were put up in the best hotels.

The following day, on April 22, Thatcher went to Dubai and tried her hand at playing goatskin tambourine. She also enjoyed a brief cruise along Dubai Creek in the same traditional Arabian sailing boat that carried Queen Elizabeth II during her first official visit to the UAE in February 1979.

The official visits and direct meetings between the UAE and UK leaders were undoubtedly key milestones that helped advance the cooperation between the two countries.

During her first visit to the UAE in February 1979, Queen Elizabeth II was welcomed warmly by Sheikh Zayed, Sheikh Rashid and Members of the Supreme Council.

The British monarch inaugurated the desalination plant at the Dubai Aluminium Smelter in Jebel Ali. She also inaugurated other major projects in the UAE, including Dubai International Trade & Exhibition Centre, Dubai Dry Docks, Dubai Municipality building and Jebel Ali Port.

Fast forward to the present, President Sheikh Mohamed was among the first world leaders who congratulated Keir Starmer on his appointment as the new UK Prime Minister.

In a phone conversation, the UAE President wished Starmer success in leading his country and also called for further strengthening "the historical and strategic relations between the UAE and UK".



Queen Elizabeth II inaugurates the desalination plant at the Dubai Aluminium Smelter in Jebel Ali on February 27, 1979. — KT FILE PHOTOS

# Can an employee be fired for extending leave after rejection?

After one year of service, an employee in the UAE is entitled to 30 days of annual leave per year

## LEGAL VIEW

Ashish Mehta

**Question:** I am on leave in my home country and am supposed to rejoin my workplace in Dubai on July 29. However, I desperately need to extend my leave due to some family commitments. My boss is refusing to approve the extension. If I have enough leave left, can he reject my extension application? Will he be able to fire me if I extend my leave without his approval?

**Answer:** In UAE, upon completing more than one year of service, an employee is entitled to only 30 days' annual leave per year for each subsequent year. This is by Article (29) (1) (a) of the Federal Decree Law No. 33 of 2021 on the Regulation of Employment Relations.

"Article (29)

1. Without prejudice to the worker's acquired rights for the period preceding the date of enforcement of the provisions of this Decree-Law, the worker shall be entitled to an annual leave with full wage of not less than:

a. Thirty days for each year of extended service;

In addition, it is at an employer's discretion to decide the dates of annual leave of its employees on rotation based on the work requirements. This is in accordance with Article (29) (4) of the UAE Employment Law which states:

"The employee shall use his leave in the year of entitlement. The employer may fix the dates of leave according to the work requirements and in agreement with the employee, or rotate leaves among employees for the smooth progress of work, and shall notify the employee of the date of his leave at least (1) one month before the same."

Additionally, an employee who does not directly return to work after the approved leave period without a valid reason is not entitled to the salary during that period. This is in accordance with Article 34 of the Employment Law. The said Article reads as:

"Article (34)

Absence after the Leave:

The worker, who does not return directly to his work without a legitimate reason after his leave, shall



not be entitled to his wage for the absence period following the leave end."

Moreover, an employer may terminate an employee without notice in the event he or she is absent without a valid reason for 7 (seven) continuous days or 20 (twenty) non-continuous days in a year.

This is in accordance with Article 44(8) of the UAE Employment Law, which states, "An employer may dismiss an employee without

prior notice, after a written investigation with him, and dismissal decision shall be in writing and reasoned, and given by the employer, or his representative, to an employee:

- If an employee absent from work without a legal cause or justification acceptable to the employer for more than 20 (twenty) interrupted days in a year, or more than (7) seven consecutive days."

Therefore, your leave extension

approval is under the prerogative of the employer. He may not accept your request for the extension if he has a valid reason, as he already has approved the stipulated annual leave you are entitled to. However, if you have a genuine reason for which you have to stay back in your home country and extend the leave, you may submit valid documentary evidence (if any) to your employer and convince him to extend your annual leave.

If you extend your annual leave without your employer's approval, you may face consequences such as loss of your salary and may result in termination of your employment.

However, in the event of termination of your employment, you may challenge the termination if you have valid reasons and documents to justify availing of an extension of your annual leave without the consent of your employer.

**Ashish Mehta is the founder and Managing Partner of Ashish Mehta & Associates. He is qualified to practise law in Dubai, the United Kingdom and India. Full details of his firm on: [www.amalawyers.com](http://www.amalawyers.com). Readers may e-mail their questions to: [news@khaleejtimes.com](mailto:news@khaleejtimes.com) or send them to Legal View, Khaleej Times, PO Box 11243, Dubai.**

# Do property owners need permission to add room, partition?

Ashish Mehta

**Question:** I recently moved into a villa that I bought in a popular Dubai community. I need to add a room to the villa by partitioning the living room. This would involve some minor construction work. Would I need regulator approvals for this?

**Answer:** The Building and Government Housing Department of the Dubai Municipality is the 'Competent Department' which issues approvals for constructions

and repair works of a building. This is in accordance with 'Definitions' mentioned in Article 3 of the Local Order No. 3 of 1999 Regulating Construction Work in the Emirate of Dubai.

No individual may carry out permanent or temporary works on a building or property without a permit issued by the Competent Department of Dubai Municipality. This is under Article 4 of the Dubai Local Order No. 3 of 1999, which states, "No natural person or public or private legal person may imple-

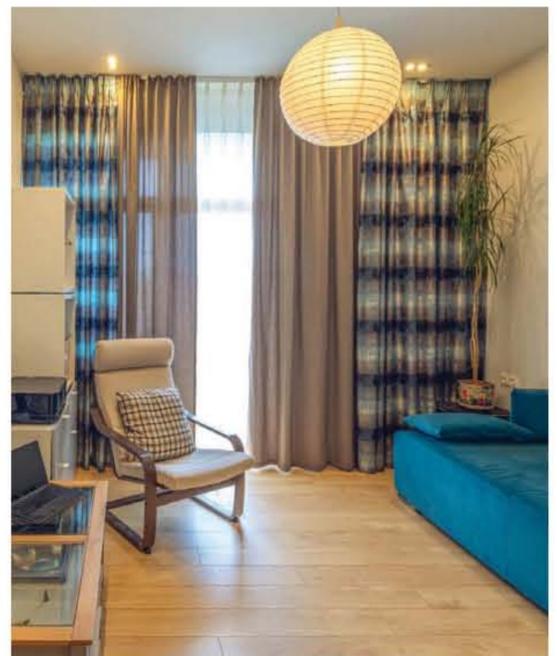
ment any construction works that involve permanently or temporarily changing, whether in whole or in part, the features of any land or real property, without first obtaining the relevant permit from the competent department."

An individual or his or her representative (engineers or contractors) should file an application with the Department related to construction works to be undertaken in a building. This is in accordance with Article 5 of the Dubai Local Order No. 3 of 1999, which states, "A permit application signed by the Applicant will be submitted to the Competent Department on the form prescribed for this purpose, together with the relevant required documents. The implementing bylaw of this order will determine

the documents required in this respect."

Furthermore, any construction works including temporary constructions may be implemented as per approved plans and drawings and technical requirements as approved by the Competent Department of Dubai Municipality. This is under Article 14 of the Dubai Local Order No. 3 of 1999, which states, "Construction works must be implemented as per the approved plans and drawings, the conditions based on which the permit is issued, and the technical engineering standards adopted in this respect. No changes or amendments to these documents may be made without the relevant approval of the Competent Department."

Moreover, Article 19 to Article



26 of the Dubai Local Order No. 3 of 1999 mentions the obligations of the relevant parties who undertake construction works such as contractors and engineers. The said clauses also mention the safety conditions which need to be undertaken while conducting construction works on a building or a property.

Additionally, Schedule No. 1 of the Local Order No. 3 of 1999 mentions the applications fees of Dubai Municipality for engineering audit of plans and Schedule No. 6 of the said order mentions the fees of Dubai Municipality for modifications and additions to the approved plans.

Based on the aforementioned provisions of the local order of Dubai, you may appoint a licensed contractor or engineer who may assist you in obtaining various permissions from Dubai Municipality to undertake renovation work in your villa. You may be required to obtain a No Objection Certificate (NOC) from the master developer or the community management in order to ensure that the modifications or alteration comply with the guidelines set by master developer or community management, Dubai Municipality, Dubai Development Authority (DDA) and any other relevant authority as applicable.

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# FB group on 'dating same guy' violates privacy laws: Experts

**Khaleej Times consulted legal experts who confirmed that many of the posts violated local laws and could result in penalties**

Mazhar Farooqui  
mazhar@khaleejtimes.com

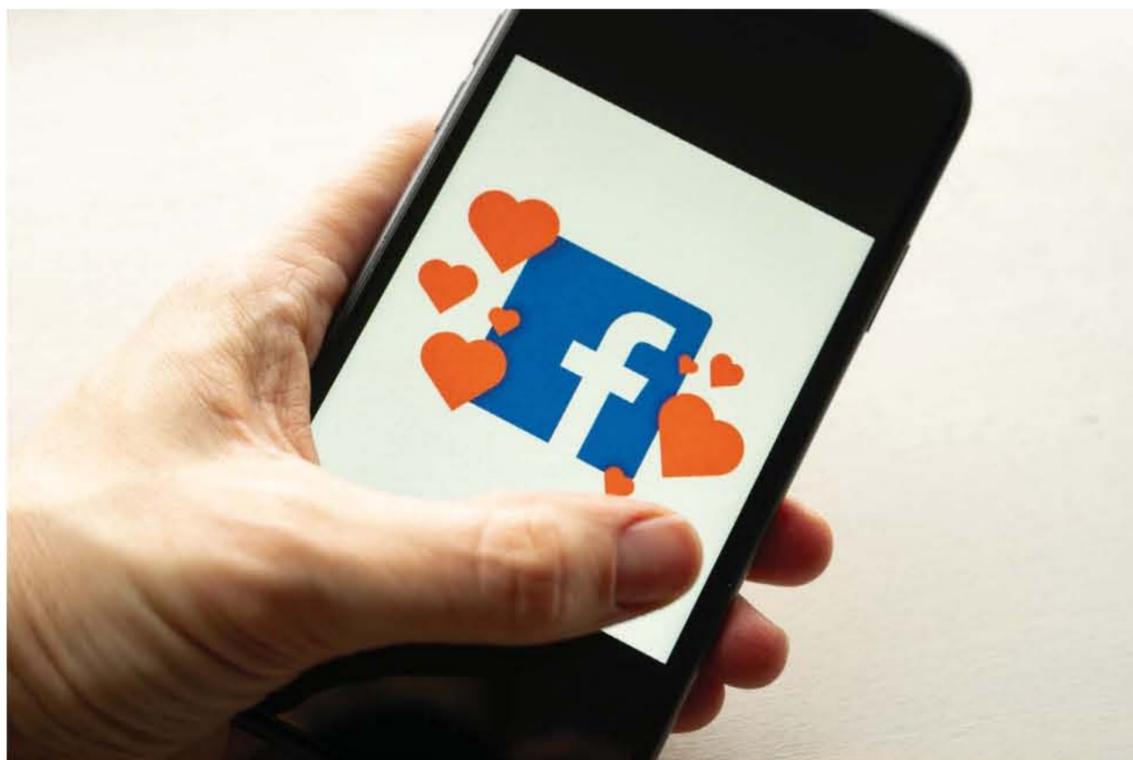
A new Facebook group encouraging Dubai women to share pictures and personal details of men they've dated could be violating privacy-related laws in the UAE, legal experts have said.

The group, named 'Are We Dating the Same Guy in Dubai' has attracted over 5,000 members within days of its recent launch. Many members migrated from another group called 'Whose Guy Is It Anyway' which was created two years ago and operates on similar principles. However, 'Whose Guy Is It Anyway' is more discreet, sharing only hints about the men rather than explicit details.

In contrast, the new group takes a no-holds-barred approach. Women post pictures of men with the caption, "Any tea?" prompting other users to share sensitive information and 'warnings' about these men.

A man whose picture was posted on the group recently said: "It is truly disheartening to see how this group has spread lies and hatred about me, especially from girls whom I have never even met in person. The gossip and false accusations have not only affected me personally, but also impacted my reputation in business. These actions are not only hurtful, but they are also damaging to my career and livelihood."

"I will be taking legal action against anyone who has intentionally posted false and damaging comments about me."



Lawyers have cautioned that this practice is risky.

Ahmed Odeh, a legal consultant with Abu Baker Salem Advocates, highlighted the potential legal ramifications in a viral video. He warned that posting pictures and making comments could lead to criminal liability.

Speaking to *Khaleej Times*, he said, "This Facebook group is potentially violating several articles of UAE's Federal Decree-Law No. 34 of 2021 on Combating Rumors and Cybercrimes and Federal Decree-Law No. 31 of 2021 (UAE Penal Code). The severity of the violation and potential penalties would depend on the specific content shared and the impact on the individuals involved. Legal authorities would need to assess each case

**Ahmed Odeh, a legal consultant with Abu Baker Salem Advocates, highlighted the potential legal ramifications in a viral video. He warned that posting pictures and making comments could lead to criminal liability.**

individually," he explained.

Group members admitted that men are routinely mocked and criticised in the posts. *Khaleej Times* has reviewed the messages exchanged in the group. When KT consulted with legal experts, they confirmed that many of the posts violated local laws and could result in penalties.

Poorvi Aswani, Principal Associate at legal consultancy firm CMI & Co, said using social media to defame and publicly criticise individuals for alleged 'double-dating' violates UAE defamation and privacy laws. "Anyone who attributes an incident to another person that could subject them to public hatred or contempt is punishable for libel and slander," she said.

Additionally, Aswani highlighted that Federal Decree No. 34 on Countering Rumours and Cybercrimes penalises the use of the internet and information systems for insulting or subjecting someone to punishment or contempt, even if the allegations are true. Both laws prescribe prison terms and fines, with the latter law imposing a

fine of up to Dh500,000 and/or a prison sentence of at least one year.

Some women in the group have reported being added to dubious subgroups after joining the group's WhatsApp extension.

"I didn't sign up for this," said an Italian marketing manager who was removed from the Facebook group after voicing her concerns. "I joined the group looking for information about my boyfriend after breaking up with him," she told *Khaleej Times*.

Efforts to reach the group admins for comments were unsuccessful. Their UAE phone numbers remained unresponsive, and messages sent to them went unanswered.

## UAE airline revises timings as unrest continues in Bangladesh

Angel Tesorero  
angel@khaleejtimes.com

Dubai-based carrier flydubai has made changes to its flights to Dhaka, Bangladesh, an airline spokesperson confirmed to *Khaleej Times* on Saturday.

"Flydubai flights to Dhaka International Airport (DAC) between Saturday (July 20) and Tuesday (July 23) will operate with a revised departure time. Flights FZ 501 will operate at 7am (UAE time) - instead of 12.10am - from Dubai International (DXB) and return flights FZ 502 will leave at 3pm (Bangladesh time) from Dhaka Airport (DAC).

The airline spokesperson said they are in touch with their customers regarding their flight bookings, adding "we will continue to monitor the situation closely (in Bangladesh)."

Meanwhile, an Emirates spokesperson has confirmed to *Khaleej Times* that "flights to Dhaka are operating as scheduled".

Bangladesh on Friday announced the imposition of a curfew and the deployment of military forces after police failed to quell days of deadly unrest that has spread throughout the country.

Bangladesh is facing its worst unrest in years after at least 110 people were killed in protests demanding the government scrap its preferential hiring rules for sought-after civil service jobs.

Bangladeshi expats in the UAE, meanwhile, have been growing anxious for their families back home, as violent clashes between protesters and police continue to worsen. Communication lines were disrupted and Internet was shut down nationwide.

## No late payment fees, other charges caused by system

From page 1

Aside from Walaa rewards, DIB said there will be no late payment fees or cheque return charges - if any - caused by system errors.

Any profit accrual due to settlement of finance amounts will be reversed. Liability letter issuance fees will be waived and a discount of up to 25 per cent will be provided on early settlement fees.

Moreover, AECB (Al Etihad Credit Bureau) credit score will not be affected due to any related incident.

DIB reiterated: "We sincerely apologise for the inconvenience and stay committed and com-

**On June 14, DIB sent out an email to its customers about upgrading its system to provide better and safer banking services. The upgrade was planned to take place from June 14 to June 19.**

pletely driven to deliver the highest level of service that our customers expect of us.

We would like to highlight that we have entered a stage of stabilisation and we continue to iron out and smoothen our services as we move ahead."

There was an issue last month over salary withdrawals for

some bank customers. DIB said they "immediately contacted the affected customers" as soon as they came to know about the disruption and salary delays.

On June 14, DIB sent out an email to its customers about upgrading its system to provide better and safer banking services. The upgrade was planned to take place from June 14 to June 19.

DIB said some services and channels were expected to be impacted, including those related to wages protection system registration and file processing, as well as cash on card and balance transfer from DIB credit cards, and other related services.

## Dubai to get over 600 new buses in RTA's Dh1.1B deal

Web Desk  
webteam@khaleejtimes.com

Dubai will get 636 new buses in a Dh1.1 billion contract awarded by the emirate's Roads and Transport Authority (RTA). These buses - which have low carbon emissions and comply with European specifications - will be delivered in 2024 and 2025.

The fleet includes 40 electric buses, marking the largest and first of their kind in the UAE. RTA aims to increase the share of public transport journeys to 25 per cent by 2030 and make public transport the preferred mode of mobility - and the new deal will aid in that, said Mattar Al Tayer, Director General, Chairman of the Board of Executive Directors, RTA.

"The buses are compatible with RTA's Public Transport Zero Emissions in Dubai 2050 Strategy to convert all buses, taxis, and limousines to zero-emission vehicles, targeting 100 per cent conversion of public transport buses to electric and hydrogen-powered vehicles by 2050," Al Tayer said.

**CORRIGENDUM**  
**Request for Expression of Interest (EOI)**  
**(For Consulting Services)**

In continuation to Expression of Interest (EOI) earlier published on June 27, 2024, Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (OGRA), invites electronic Expression of Interest (EOI) from reputable Technical Consultant firms, registered with Income Tax and Sales Tax Department with international repute having at least twenty years' experience of management and supervision of projects of similar nature of oil refining sector *inter alia* feasibility study, designing, engineering, construction, procurement and commissioning. The selection of firm/company shall be based on quality and cost as per regulation 3(B) of Procurement of Consultancy Services Regulations, 2010 of PPRA.

2. Electronic Expression of Interest documents along with further information, TORs and Evaluation Criteria etc. are available for the registered bidders on EPADS at ([www.eprocure.gov.pk](http://www.eprocure.gov.pk)).

3. The electronic Expression of Interest, prepared in accordance with the instructions on the EOI documents, must be submitted through EPADS on or before **(August 22, 2024 at 1100hrs)**. Manual bids, shall not be accepted. The electronic expression of interest (EOI) will be opened on the same day by using EPADS at **1130hrs**.

4. In terms of Rule 48 of Public Procurement Rules, 2004 Grievance Redressal Committee (GRC) is constituted for subject procurement. Notification of said GRC is provided on the website of OGRA ([www.ogra.org.pk](http://www.ogra.org.pk)) and on EPADS at ([www.eprocure.gov.pk](http://www.eprocure.gov.pk)).

**Senior Executive Director (Refining & Lubricants)**  
Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority  
Plot # 37, 39, Mauve Area, G-10/4, Islamabad  
Ph no. 051-9108809

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## YOUR UAE GUIDE

LIFE AND LIVING IN THE EMIRATES, EXPLAINED



# How Indian expats can apply for Aadhaar card: Process, documents explained

**If NRIs plan to return to India or stay in the country for an extended period, it could be useful for them**

Web Desk  
webteam@khalajeetimes.com

If you are an Indian living in UAE and wish to have Aadhaar as an identity proof, it is not difficult to get one if you have the required documents in order.

Linked to biometric data, Aadhaar is a centralised unique 12-digit number that can prove identity, age and address in India. While non-resident Indians (NRIs) can apply for an Aadhaar, they don't necessarily need one. However, if they plan to return to India or stay

in the country for an extended period, it could be useful for them in opening bank accounts, renting properties, other financial transactions and government processes.

The Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) has a provision of 'Aadhaar on Arrival' for NRIs. While an NRI can take the appointment for Aadhaar card issuance online or offline, they are required to be physically present in India to complete the biometric authentication.

#### Forms of Aadhaar cards

There are different forms of Aadhaar cards that need to be filled up for different age groups.

- » **Form 1:** For those aged 18 and above
- » **Form 2:** For NRIs enrolling or updating with an address outside of India.
- » **Form 3:** For children aged 5 to under 18 years, residents or NRIs with an Indian address proof.

» **Form 4:** For NRI children in the same age group without an Indian address proof.

#### Step-by-step guide

##### Book an appointment

You can book your Aadhaar appointment online or offline.

» **Online:** Visit the UIDAI website, choose your location, provide your India mobile number and book an appointment slot. You can book an appointment before arriving in India as well.

» **Offline:** You can visit an Aadhaar centre and take a biometric appointment.

##### Submit documents

Next, you will need to submit all the necessary documents in person when you visit the UIDAI enrolment centre.

##### Biometric data collection

You will need to visit the UIDAI enrolment centre to record your bio-

metric details. Following biometric data will be taken: a scan of all ten fingers; a scan of irises of both eyes; a photograph. Your card will be sent to your registered address in India within 90 days.

#### Mandatory documents required for NRI Aadhaar card

- » A valid Indian passport as proof of identity and proof of address
- » In the absence of a valid Indian address proof, any of the other UIDAI approved Proof of Address (PoA) documents like PAN, utility bills.
- » You can also be asked for other documents for evidence of your residency status in another country, like a photocopy of your stamped visa of the country of residence.
- » Birth certificate for those born on or after October 1, 2023
- » For NRI children, a valid Indian passport is the only accepted Proof of Identity (POI) and Proof of Address (POA).

## Need to renew your Indian passport? How to apply

According to the Indian Embassy in Abu Dhabi, the community is the largest in the country – making up 30 per cent of the population

Web Desk  
meher@khalajeetimes.com

The United Arab Emirates is rightfully called a 'melting pot of cultures' by those residing here. The nation has a significant number of expatriates that reside in the country.

According to the Indian Embassy in Abu Dhabi, the Indian expatriate community is the largest in the country – making up 30 per cent of the population. The number of resident Indian Nationals is estimated to be 3.5 million in 2021 as per UAE records. A question that possibly crosses several minds is 'how do I renew my Indian passport?'. Khaleej Times has put together a list of all you need to know, which you can find below:

#### Documents required

- » The filled online passport application form (Form can be found at <http://embassy.passportindia.gov.in>)
- » 2 recent clear photos 51mm x 51mm (not older than three months, no uniform) with white background and dark clothing. Eyes must be open, with ears, forehead and chin completely visible;

with no shadows on the face and neck, no reflections on the glasses.

» Current original passport for submission, along with any additional booklets

» Clear photocopy of passport's first, last and address page. Along with any other endorsement pages, valid UAE visa page, and additional booklets (if any)

» All signatures in the application form should be in black ink and signed in the presence of BLS International Services Customer Service Officer

» All applicants should submit the application in person for identification (including minors and new born babies)

**Fees**

- » For adults (36 pages booklet) - Dh285
- » For adults (60 pages jumbo booklet) - Dh380
- » For Tatkal Service (36 pages booklet) - Dh855
- » For Tatkal Service (60 pages jumbo booklet) - Dh950
- » Services Charge - Dh9

» Indian Community Welfare Fund - Dh8

In case of emergency, an applicant can visit the Consulate and pay an additional fee under the 'Tatkal scheme' to issue their passport on same day.



# Gaza Conflict



People mourn members of the Qadih family in front of the morgue of the Nasser hospital in Khan Younis following an overnight Israeli strike that hit their house in Bani Suheila, reportedly killing two children, their father, uncle, paternal grandparents and severely injuring their mother on Sunday. — AFP

## Israel strikes Gaza, Yemen, Lebanon foes after attacks

The Middle East was reeling on Sunday from deadly violence with Israel bombing Gaza, Lebanon and Yemen in quick succession in response to attacks from Iran-backed militant groups.

Despite Washington's top diplomat asserting a deal is near the "goal line" to end more than nine months of devastating war between Israel and Gaza rulers Hamas, the Israeli military said it intercepted a missile fired from Yemen, as it pressed on with its offensive in the besieged Palestinian territory.

Dozens have been killed since Saturday across the Gaza Strip, the civil defence agency said, including in strikes on homes in the central Nuseirat and Bureij areas and displaced people near southern Khan Younis.

Residents said a major operation was underway in Rafah in the south, reporting heavy artillery and clashes.

The deadly strikes in Gaza came hours after Hezbollah and its ally Hamas said they fired at Israeli positions from south Lebanon, while Yemen's Houthi rebels vowed to respond to Israeli warplanes hitting a key port.

The fire left raging by the strikes on rebel-held Hodeida port "is seen across the Middle East and the significance is clear," Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant said.

Detailing the first strikes claimed by Israel in Yemen, Gallant warned of further operations if the Houthis "dare to attack us" after a rebel



A giant fire erupts at an oil storage facility following Israeli strikes in Houthi held port city of Hodeida on Saturday. — AFP

**The war has also unleashed hunger and health crises in Gaza, with Israel and the UN trading blame for vital aid supplies failing to reach those in need**

drone strike killed one in Tel Aviv on Friday.

In Hodeida three people were killed and 87 wounded, health officials said in a statement carried by Houthi media.

The trio of militant groups has

vowed to keep up attacks on Israel until a truce ends the violence in Gaza, which lies in ruins, with most residents forced to flee their homes.

The Gaza war was triggered by Hamas's October 7 attack on southern Israel, which resulted in the deaths of 1,195 people, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally based on Israeli figures.

The militants also seized 251 hostages, 116 of whom are still in Gaza, including 42 the Israeli military says are dead.

Israel's military retaliation to wipe out Hamas has killed at least 38,983 people, also mostly civilians, according to data from

the health ministry in Hamas-ruled Gaza. The war has also unleashed hunger and health crises in Gaza, with Israel and the United Nations trading blame for vital aid supplies failing to reach those in need.

After the detection of poliovirus in Gaza sewage, though no individual cases, the World Health Organisation said there were "monumental" constraints to mounting a timely response. WHO spokesman Christian Lindmeier said Friday the agency believes many more diseases are "spreading out of control" inside Gaza.

The months-long war has also brought Israelis to the streets, sometimes in their tens of thousands, focused on securing the release of the remaining hostages.

"Bring them home," demonstrator Ofira Azrieli said Saturday in Tel Aviv, appealing to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

The premier is due to address US lawmakers Wednesday in Washington, where he will be under pressure to reach a ceasefire with Hamas.

"He doesn't have to go there. First, you have to sign the deal and after, go to Washington," Azrieli, 64, said.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Friday a truce was within reach.

"I believe we're... driving toward the goal line in getting an agreement that would produce a ceasefire, get the hostages home, and put us on a better track to trying to build lasting peace and stability," he said. — AFP

### Defiant Netanyahu to face US Congress

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is to deliver a landmark speech to the US Congress this week as he fights off intense pressure to cut a Gaza war ceasefire deal with Hamas.

Israel's longest-serving premier will on Wednesday become the first foreign leader to address a joint meeting of the two chambers four times — pulling ahead of Britain's Winston Churchill on three.

But analysts say the Gaza war since the October 7 Hamas attacks has created worrying tensions between Israel and the United States, its main military and diplomatic backer. Netanyahu's office announced that he will meet US President Joe Biden on Tuesday.

Washington fears a backlash from the mounting civilian toll in the Gaza Strip, while protests in Israel by families of hostages taken by Hamas are also causing headaches for Netanyahu.

Biden and some Israeli ministers say a deal negotiated through Qatar, Egyptian and US mediators is possible. A plan outlined in May proposed a six-week ceasefire when some Israeli hostages would be swapped

for Palestinians held in Israeli prisons. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Friday that negotiators were "inside the 10 yard line and driving toward the goal line".

Hamas has accused Netanyahu of seeking to block a deal however and Blinken said he wants to "bring the agreement over the finish line" when Netanyahu is in Washington.

"This double pressure is not delaying the deal — it is advancing it," Netanyahu told troops in Gaza on Thursday.

Publicly, Biden has voiced strong support for Israel. But he expressed concern over an offensive on the southern city of Rafah in May and for a while suspended deliveries of heavy bombs to Israel. Supplies of 2,000-pound bombs remain embargoed.

"Never before has the atmosphere been so fraught," said Council on Foreign Relations Middle East specialist Steven Cook.

"There is clearly tension in the relationship, especially between the White House and the Israeli prime minister," Cook said in a commentary. — AFP

## Hospital says newborn saved from dead mother's womb

Doctors in Gaza described delivering a newborn baby against incredible odds on Saturday, pulling him from his mother's womb moments after she died of wounds sustained in an Israeli air strike.

At nine months pregnant, Ola Adnan Harb Al Kurd managed to survive just long enough to reach Al Awda Hospital in central Gaza after an overnight strike hit her home in the Nuseirat refugee camp, medics said.

Emergency department doctors rushed into action when

they saw the heavily pregnant woman arrive in critical condition, the head of the obstetrics and gynaecology department, Raed Al Saudi, said.

She was taken to the operating room, but was already "almost dead", surgeon Akram Hussein said.

Unable to save the mother, who they said was in her 20s, doctors detected a heartbeat and a team of obstetricians and surgeons was called.

"An emergency caesarean section was performed, and the foetus

**Just 1,500 hospital beds are currently available to Gaza's more than two million people, compared with 3,500 beds before the war, say UN agencies**

was extracted," Saudi said.

Kurd was among at least 30 people killed across the Gaza Strip in a punishing 24 hours of Israeli bombardment that killed six members of one family in a neigh-

bourhood north of Gaza City, rescuers and medics in Hamas-run Gaza said.

At least seven people were killed in overnight strikes on the Nuseirat refugee camp, a civil defence spokesperson said.

Medical sources at Al Awda Hospital said four children from Nuseirat were wounded while playing on a roof, with one requiring an amputation. Kurd's husband was also wounded in the missile attack that hit their home, said surgeon Hussein.

After surviving the C-section,

baby Malek Yassin faced further medical hurdles. Born in critical condition, he was stabilised after receiving oxygen and medical attention, Saudi said.

The war in Gaza has made childbirth increasingly perilous, with pregnant women facing near-daily strikes that hamper access to health facilities.

If they are able to reach a hospital, they find facilities that humanitarian groups say are stretched to breaking point.

Just 1,500 hospital beds are currently available to Gaza's

more than two million people, compared with 3,500 beds before the war, UN agencies have said.

Al Awda Hospital in Nuseirat is the only medical facility that has been able to provide obstetric and gynaecological care in central Gaza since the war began last year.

Pre-term deliveries and maternal complications, including eclampsia, haemorrhage and sepsis, have been rising, Doctors Without Borders said this week. — AFP

## Spotlight



# Biden drops out of election race

**U**S President Joe Biden announced on Sunday that he was dropping out of his reelection battle with Donald Trump, in a historic move that plunges the already turbulent 2024 White House race into uncharted territory.

"It has been the greatest honour of my life to serve you as president," the 81-year-old Democrat said in a letter in X, posted while he was recovering from Covid at his beach house in Delaware.

"While it has been my intention to seek reelection, I believe it is in the best interest of my party and the country for me to stand down and focus solely on fulfilling my duties as President for the remainder of my term."

Biden said he would "speak to the nation later this week in more detail about my decision". The Democratic Party is now

plunged into chaos and needs to find a new candidate by November's election, with Vice-President Kamala Harris the frontrunner.

Biden bowed out after weeks of pressure that began with a disastrous debate performance that raised fears over his health.

The stunning move makes Biden the first president in US history to pull out so late in an election race, and the first to bow out because of concerns over his mental acuity and health.

Biden spent more than three weeks resisting calls to step down following the shock of the June 27 debate, at one point insisting that only the "Lord Almighty" could convince him to back out.

In a bid to show he was up to the job, he gave a number of interviews and what was billed as a "big boy" press conference in

**The stunning move makes Biden the first president in US history to pull out so late in an election race, and the first to bow out because of concerns over his mental acuity and health.**

which he took numerous questions but made further gaffes including calling Harris "Vice President Trump."

A tide of voices within his own party calling on him to go, starting with donor and actor George Clooney and ending with former president Barack Obama, sealed his fate.

The end finally came shortly after Biden had been diagnosed with Covid, forcing him off the campaign trail and into isolation.

Biden's decision to pull out also caps a tense and chaotic period in the US election, with Trump having survived an assassination attempt at a campaign rally on July 13.

He joins a small club of US presidents who have decided to throw in the towel after just one term, with the last being Lyndon Johnson in 1968 -- a year also marked by political turmoil and violence.

Johnson's replacement as nominee, then-vice president Hubert Humphrey, went on to lose heavily to Richard Nixon.

But Democrats are counting on Harris to fare better, and hoping that she can prevent convicted felon Trump from making a sensational comeback to the Oval Office.

In recent weeks, the Biden campaign has reportedly been quietly carrying out a head-to-head survey of voters measur-

ing how she matched up against Trump.

While Harris struggled to make an impact in her first years in the White House, she has emerged in the last year as a strong performer on the campaign trail on key messages such as abortion rights.

The former prosecutor has also made much of her life story as the first woman in US history to hold the vice presidency, as well as the first person of Black and South Asian origin.

Harris is now set to be nominated at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago on August 19 in what promises to be a dramatic moment -- and a heartrending one for Biden.

Biden took office in January 2021 pledging to heal the "soul of America" after four turbulent years under Trump and the shock of the January 6, 2021 Capitol assault by his supporters.

Overcoming a reputation for verbal flubs, Barack Obama's former vice president pushed through a massive Covid recovery plan and a green industry scheme.

US allies welcomed his pledge that "America is back" following Trump's trampling on international alliances, and his strong support for Ukraine as it battled Russia's 2022 invasion.

But he faced criticism over the catastrophic US withdrawal from Afghanistan and inflation that meant overstretched Americans ignored otherwise positive economic numbers.

Behind it all were the ongoing concerns about his age with a series of senior moments, including tripping up the stairs to Air Force One and falling off his bike, contributing to the doddering image played up by Republicans. — AFP

## I took a bullet for democracy, says Trump

Donald Trump, holding his first campaign rally on Saturday since surviving an assassination attempt, rejected concerns that he is a threat to America's democratic system, triumphantly telling the crowd: "I took a bullet for democracy."

"I'm not an extremist at all," the newly-crowned Republican presidential nominee continued at the rally in swing state Michigan, dismissing his reported links to Project 2025, a shadow manifesto from figures close to him that has been characterized by opponents as an authoritarian, right-wing wish list.

And he mocked the rival Democratic Party, roiled by unprecedented pressure for President Joe Biden to abandon his reelection bid amid concerns over his age and fitness to serve, if reelected, until 2029.

"They have no idea who their candidate is... This guy goes and he gets the votes, and now they want to take it away. That's democracy," Trump told the 12,000-strong crowd of passionate supporters. In the fiery but typically ram-

bling speech, the Republican riffed on his hardline immigration views, espoused falsehoods about migrant crime, and repeated his baseless claim that Democrats "rigged" the 2020 election.

He expressed admiration for foreign autocrats including China's "brilliant" Xi Jinping, whom he praised for controlling "1.4 billion people with an iron fist."

And he evoked the seconds after a gunman tried to kill him at a rally in Pennsylvania, when, bloodied and surrounded by Secret Service agents, he raised a fist and yelled for his supporters to "fight!"

The crowd in Grand Rapids chanted the word back to him multiple times Saturday, though some appeared to tire of the lengthy address after 90 minutes and began heading to the exits.

The rally represented a moment remarkable by any measure, with Trump back on the campaign trail exactly one week since the assassination attempt.

He wore a new, smaller, flesh-colored bandage over his right ear, grazed in the attack by a 20-year-



Republican presidential nominee and former US president Donald Trump is joined on stage by his wife Melania, Republican vice-presidential nominee J.D. Vance and Usha Chilukuri Vance as balloons fall after he finished giving his acceptance speech on Day 4 of the Republican National Convention at the Fiserv Forum in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, on July 18, 2024. — REUTERS

old gunman who also killed one bystander.

But Trump, after his near-death experience, ignored his self-declared pivot to unity and launched into the divisive rhetoric that has

marked his political career. He hurled insults and invective, calling Biden "stupid" and a "feeble old" man, and branding Harris "crazy" and "nuts."

The Biden-Harris campaign dis-

missed the speech as Trump "peddling the same lies (and) running the same campaign of revenge and retribution."

Security was tight inside Van Andel Arena, amid questions over Secret Service lapses at the Pennsylvania rally — though there were few visible signs of enhanced law enforcement in Grand Rapids.

Meanwhile, Biden loyalists continued to defend the embattled president as the drumbeat of calls for him to abandon his campaign grows louder.

The 81-year-old and his team have remained publicly adamant that he is staying in the race, though some reports suggest discussions have begun in his inner circle about how exactly he might step aside. There has been massive speculation over who could replace him. As vice president, Kamala Harris appears best positioned.

Senator Elizabeth Warren, a leading progressive, gave Harris a boost Saturday without turning her back on the president. "Joe Biden is our nominee," she told MSNBC. "He has a really big deci-

sion to make. But what gives me a lot of hope right now is that if President Biden decides to step back, we have Vice-President Kamala Harris, who is ready to step up, to unite the party, to take on Donald Trump, and to win in November."

Some Democrats, however, fear such a late switch could trigger chaos, dooming the party at the polls. Team Trump, for its part, is effervescent after an exceptional streak of luck — from surviving an assassination to favorable court rulings to Biden's disastrous debate performance last month.

Saturday was Trump's debut campaign appearance with running mate J.D. Vance, a 39-year-old US senator with blue-collar roots who could help win over critical Rust Belt battlegrounds like Michigan and Pennsylvania.

Vance warmed up the crowd, taking a swipe at Harris. "I did serve in the United States Marine Corps and build a business. What the hell have you done, other than collect a check?" he said of the former US senator and California attorney general. — AFP

# In raging summer, sunscreen misinformation scorches US

Dismissively tossing a tube of sunscreen over his shoulder, a bare-chested TikTok influencer declares that the cream causes cancer. He instead promotes "regular sun exposure" to his 400,000 followers — contradicting US dermatologists fighting a surge in such dubious misinformation.

In the midst of a blazing summer, some social media influencers are offering potentially dangerous advice on sun protection, despite stepped-up warnings from health experts about over-exposure amid rising rates of skin cancer.

Further undermining public health, videos — some garnering millions of views — share "homemade" recipes that use ingredients such as beef tallow, avocado butter and beeswax for what is claimed to provide effective skin protection.

In one viral TikTok video, "transformation coach" Jerome Tan discards a commercial cream and tells his followers that eating natural foods will allow the body to make its "own sunscreen."

He offers no scientific evidence for this. Such online misinformation is increasingly causing real-world harm, experts say.

One in seven American adults under 35 think daily sunscreen use is more harmful than direct sun exposure, and nearly a quarter believe staying hydrated can prevent a sunburn, according to a survey this year by Ipsos for the Orlando Health Cancer Institute.

"People buy into a lot of really dangerous ideas that put them at added risk," warned Rajesh Nair, an oncology surgeon with the institute. As influencers increas-

ingly cast doubt on commercial sunscreen products, another US survey showed a dip in their use, with some 75 per cent of Americans using sunscreen regularly, down from 79 per cent in 2022.

The findings coincide with other trends showing rising public mistrust of established medical guidance — including on Covid-19 and other vaccines — and increasing reliance on influencers with little or no scientific knowledge.

Dermatologists are scrambling to disabuse people of the increasingly popular perception that higher levels of sun exposure are good for the skin.

"There is no safe tan," Daniel Bennett, a dermatologist and professor at the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health, said "The evidence

**“There is no safe tan. The evidence that ultraviolet light exposure is the primary preventable driver of skin cancer is overwhelming.”**

**Daniel Bennett**  
A dermatologist and professor at the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health

that ultraviolet light exposure is the primary preventable driver of skin cancer is overwhelming," he added. Many of the misleading or false claims come from influencers seeking to monetise their content on social media platforms, an echo chamber where sensational and

false claims often drive engagement, experts say.

Some content creators are leveraging "sunscreen skepticism" to "sell their own supplements or endorse alternative all-natural sunscreens," Eric Dahan, founder of the influencer marketing agency Mighty Joy, said.

Dahan pointed out one Instagram post that advised against "wearing sunscreen constantly" while promoting a range of skincare products. "Say goodbye to sun paranoia," the emoji-laden post said. "Catch some (guilt-free) rays this summer."

Clutching a surfboard on a beach, another bare-chested Instagram influencer says he rejects sunscreen. "Do I worry about skin cancer? I do not," he posted, while promoting "animal-based sun-

screen" made from beef tallow.

Tallow — essentially rendered, purified beef fat — alone has no ability to block ultraviolet radiation, said Megan Poynt Couvillion, a dermatologist practicing in Texas. "I don't see a problem with using it on the skin as an emollient, but absolutely not as a sunscreen," she said.

The US Food and Drug Administration has called for more research into the ingredients in commercial sunscreens, but it does recommend their use, noting that excessive sun exposure is a major contributor to skin cancer.

Homemade sunscreens "lack effective sun protection," leaving users vulnerable to sunburn, premature skin aging and skin cancer, the American Academy of Dermatology warns. — AFP

## Seoul: More trash balloons launched from North Korea

North Korea has resumed sending balloons carrying trash across the border into the South, Seoul's military said on Sunday, in apparent response to the South restarting loudspeaker propaganda broadcasts.

The two Koreas have engaged in a tit-for-tat balloon campaign, with the North sending nearly 2,000 trash-carrying balloons southwards since May, saying it is retaliation for propaganda balloons launched by South Korean activists.

"The North is launching another batch of rubbish-carrying balloons," the Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement on Sunday, noting they were flying towards the northern part of Gyeonggi.

"Please report them to the military or police and refrain from direct contact with the objects."

The latest batch of balloons comes three days after Seoul announced it had resumed loudspeaker propaganda broadcasts directed at North Korea.

Seoul warned it will broaden the scope of such broadcasts if the North persists in sending the trash-carrying balloons, describing them as "low-class actions" and noting that "all responsibility lies squarely with the North Korean military."

"We can increase the number of broadcast speakers in the frontline areas if the North continues its provocations," a military official told Yonhap news agency on Saturday.

The North's balloons have disrupted more than 100 flights carrying 10,000 passengers, a South Korean lawmaker said earlier this month.

In response, Seoul has fully suspended a tension-reducing military agreement and announced in June that it was resuming propaganda broadcasts along the border.

In addition to anti-Kim leaflets sent from the South, isolated North Korea is extremely sensitive about its people gaining access to South Korean pop culture products, with a recent South Korean government report pointing to a 2022 case where a man was executed for possession of content from the South.

The two Koreas remain technically at war because the 1950-53 conflict ended in an armistice, not a peace treaty. — AFP



Members of the Bangladesh Army check vehicles during a curfew imposed in response to student-led protests against government job quotas in Dhaka on Saturday. — REUTERS

# Bangladesh top court scraps most job quotas that triggered protests

Streets quiet after ruling, army on patrol; at least 114 killed in violence so far; Internet still suspended

**B**angladesh's Supreme Court on Sunday scrapped most of the quotas on government jobs that had sparked nationwide protests by students that have killed at least 114 people in recent days.

Dismissing a lower court order, the Supreme Court's Appellate Division directed that 93 per cent of government jobs in the South Asian Country should be open to candidates on merit, Bangladesh Attorney General A.M. Amin Uddin told Reuters.

"Students have clearly said they are in no way part of the violence and arson that have taken place in Bangladesh since Monday," he said by phone.

"I am hoping normalcy will return after today's ruling and people with ulterior motives will stop

instigating people," Amin Uddin said. "I will ask the government to find out the culprits behind the violence and take strict action against them."

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's government had scrapped the quota system in 2018, but the lower court reinstated it last month, pegging total quotas at 56 per cent, sparking the protests and an ensuing government crackdown.

Internet and text message services in Bangladesh have been suspended since Thursday, cutting off the nation of nearly 170 million people as security forces cracked down on protesters who defied a ban on public gatherings.

Soldiers have been patrolling the streets of capital Dhaka, where army check points have been set up, after the government ordered a curfew late on Friday.

Streets near the Supreme Court were quiet immediately after the decision, a Reuters witness said. A military tank was stationed outside the court's gate, television footage showed.

Local media had reported scattered clashes earlier in the day between protesters and security forces. Overseas telephone calls mostly failed to connect while websites of Bangladesh-based media organisations did not update and their social media accounts remained inactive.

The government extended the curfew as authorities braced for the Supreme Court hearing on the job quotas.

The curfew until 3pm (0900 GMT) on Sunday was to resume for an "uncertain time" after a two-hour break for people to gather supplies, local media reported.

Reuters could not immediately determine what would happen to the decision after the ruling.

Nationwide unrest broke out following student anger against quotas for government jobs that included reserving 30 per cent of positions for the families of those who fought for independence from Pakistan.

The Supreme Court directed the government to cut the job quotas for families of independence fighters to 5 per cent, the attorney general said. The remaining 2 per cent of jobs still subject to quotas are for people from so-called backward groups and the disabled, he added.

The demonstrations — the biggest since Hasina was re-elected for a fourth successive term this year — have also been fuelled by high unemployment among young people, who make up nearly a fifth

of the population. High living costs sparked deadly protests in Bangladesh last year, months after it turned to the International Monetary Fund for a \$4.7 billion bailout as it struggled to pay for imported oil and gas because of dwindling dollar reserves.

Many opposition party leaders, activists and student protesters have been arrested in the current crackdown, said Tarique Rahman, the exiled acting chairman of the main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party. Police arrested Nahid Islam, a leading student coordinator, on Saturday, the protesters said.

Universities and colleges have been closed since Wednesday.

The US State Department on Saturday raised its travel advisory for Bangladesh to level four, urging American citizens not to travel there. — REUTERS

## Italy's PM put domestic concerns first in rejecting von der Leyen

Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's decision not to back Ursula von der Leyen as European Commission chief was driven by fear of losing rightwing grassroots supporters, analysts say, but may curb her influence over EU choices.

The European Parliament elected von der Leyen for a second five-year term on Thursday to lead the bloc's executive with support from centre-right, centre-left, liberal and green groups. She got 401 votes, with 284 against in a secret ballot in the 720-member chamber.

Meloni's Brothers of Italy, part of the European Conservatives and Reformists group (ECR), revealed its decision after the vote when it said von der Leyen had shifted too far left, particularly on green pledges.

Even though von der Leyen did not need Meloni's 24 lawmakers to win, the vote marked a shift

from the prime minister's past efforts to keep good relations with the Commission as Rome grapples with mammoth public debt.

"Meloni cares a lot about being consistent. She had said she would never vote with the left. When it became clear that her votes were not needed, she stuck to that pledge," said Giovanni Orsina, politics professor at Rome's Luiss university.

However, the move dismayed many Italian commentators who said the Commission may now be less indulgent towards Italy's public finances and its faltering attempts to spend billions of euros of EU post-Covid recovery funds.

That remains to be seen, but Meloni's first concern appeared to be fending off internal competition at home from her hard-right coalition ally, Matteo Salvini's League.

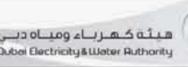
"She is afraid of exposing herself on the right, and this fear overwhelmed everything else," said Francesco Galiotti, from Rome-based political risk consultancy Policy Sonar.

Brothers of Italy is now polling at nearly 30 per cent — its highest ever — while the League is around 8.5 per cent, but Galiotti pointed to volatility in Italian politics and said Meloni could not afford to alienate traditional voters. Before moderating her positions after coming to power in 2022, Meloni was considered further to the right than Salvini, and used to advocate for Italy to leave the euro zone.

Von der Leyen, asked by reporters on Thursday whether she regretted seeking Meloni's support, said only that the vote showed she had taken the right approach in assembling backers who are "pro-European, pro-Ukraine and pro-rule of law." — AFP



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GOVERNMENT OF DUBAI



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## One dead from Nipah virus in India's Kerala state

Authorities in southern India's Kerala state are taking preventive steps after the death of a 14-year-old boy from the Nipah virus and the identification of 60 persons in the high-risk category, the state's health minister said on Sunday.

Parts of Kerala are among those most at risk globally for outbreaks of the virus, a Reuters investigation showed last year. Nipah, which comes from fruit bats and animals such as pigs, can cause a lethal, brain-swelling fever in humans.

Nipah is classified as a priority pathogen by the World Health Organisation (WHO) because of its potential to trigger an epidemic. There is no vaccine to prevent infection and no treatment to cure it.

"The infected boy died on Sunday after a cardiac arrest," Veena George, the state health minister told local TV reporters.

Earlier, in a statement on Saturday, she said as part of Nipah control, the government has issued orders to set up 25 committees to identify and isolate affected people.

Dr Anoop Kumar, director of critical care medicine at Aster MIMS Hospital in Calicut, said one positive case of Nipah had been diagnosed in a school-going boy and persons who had been in contact with him were being watched.

"There is a minimum chance of an outbreak of Nipah virus at this stage," he said, adding that the situation would be monitored for the next 7-10 days.

There are 214 people on the primary contact list of the boy, the statement said. Among them, 60 are in the high-risk category, it said, and isolation wards have been set up at health institutions to treat patients.

Family members of the affected patient were kept at a local hospital for observation, after a case of Nipah virus was confirmed in Malappuram, a town about 350km from Kerala's capital Thiruvananthapuram, local media reports said. Other people who might be at risk were asked to isolate at home.

The state government said it is working to trace any affected people to contain the spread of the virus. Nipah has been linked to the deaths of dozens of people in Kerala since its first appearance in the state in 2018.

The virus was first identified 25 years ago in Malaysia and has led to outbreaks in Bangladesh, India and Singapore. — REUTERS

## Manila eyes faster, more lethal jets

Philippine pilots take part for the first time in multinational war games overseas in Australia.

The Philippine Air Force must ramp up pilot training if it is to buy 20 or more multi-role fighter jets as it modernises and expands joint operations with its navy, a commander said on Saturday.

Philippine pilots are taking part for the first time in multinational war games overseas, the Pitch Black war games involving 20 Indo-Pacific and European countries over a vast area of northern Australia.

The exercises are consuming a million litres of aviation fuel a day, as fighter jets from the United States, Britain, Australia, Singapore, Japan and South Korea, among others, test war tactics and skills, organisers said.

The Philippines brought four of its 12 South Korean-built FA-50 fighter jets to the games and is assessing the capabilities of more advanced jets for its modernisation programme, the contingent's commander, Colonel Randy Pascua, told Reuters in Darwin.

The Philippine military chief Romeo Brawner said this month the government had approved a decision to buy "faster and more lethal" multi role jet fighters because the FA-50 was "not enough to defend our country", although no decision had been made on the type or how many.

Pascua said the air force needs to close a "big technological gap" as it modernises its fighter jets, including lifting pilot skills.

"If we have to acquire more than 20 multi-role fighters, we really need to step up," he said. "We are here to train and enhance our operational capability because we had lost capability for air defence for decades." — REUTERS

# A torrent of conspiracy theories takes off after global IT crash



Travellers rest where they can in the McNamara terminal at the Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County Airport on Sunday in Detroit, Michigan. Two days after many travellers were rerouted or had their flights cancel-led, airlines are slowly coming back online, but many passengers are finding themselves sleeping at the airport while waiting for rescheduled flights. — AFP

From fearmongering about a looming "World War III" to false narratives linking a cabal of global elite to a cyberattack, a torrent of online conspiracy theories took off Friday after a major IT crash.

Airlines, banks, TV channels and financial institutions were engulfed in turmoil after the crash, one of the biggest in recent years that was the result of a faulty software update to an antivirus program operating on Microsoft Windows.

The proliferation of internet-breaking conspiracy theories on social media platforms — many of which have removed guardrails that once contained the spread of misinformation — illustrates the new normal of information chaos after a major world event.

The outage gave way to a swirl of evidence-free posts on X, the Elon Musk-owned site formerly known as Twitter, that peddled an apocalyptic narrative: The world was under attack by a nefarious force.

"I read somewhere once that ww3 (World War III) would be mostly a cyber war," one user wrote on X.

The IT crash also stirred up an unfounded theory that the World Economic Forum — long a magnet for wild falsehoods — had plotted a global cyberattack.

To make that theory appear credible, many posts linked an old WEF video that warned about the possibility of a "cyberattack with Covid-like characteristics."

**“The proliferation of conspiracy theories in the wake of major global events such as the outage is a sad testament to the volatile nature of the information ecosystem.”**

Rafi Mendelsohn  
Vice-president at the disinformation security company Cyabra

The video, available on the WEF's website, had cautioned that the only way to stop the exponential spread of the cyber threat would be to disconnect millions of vulnerable devices from each other and the internet.

The WEF has long been a target for conspiracy theorists pushing the idea of a shadowy cabal of elites working for private gain under the garb of solving global issues.

Also gaining rapid traction online were conspiratorial posts using the hashtag "cyber polygon," a reference to a global training event aimed at preparing for potential future attacks.

"The proliferation of conspiracy theories in the wake of major global events such as the outage is a sad testament to the volatile nature of the information ecosystem," Rafi Mendelsohn, vice-president at the disinformation security company Cyabra, said.

"What is unique to events like these is how social media plat-

## Australia warns of malicious websites

Australia's cyber intelligence agency said on Saturday that "malicious websites and unofficial code" were being released online claiming to aid recovery from Friday's global digital outage, which hit media, retailers, banks and airlines.

Australia was one of many countries affected by the outage that caused havoc worldwide after a botched software update from CrowdStrike.

On Saturday, the Australian Signals Directorate (ASD) — the country's cyber intelligence agency — said "a number of malicious websites and unofficial code are being released claiming to help entities recover from the widespread outages caused by the CrowdStrike technical incident".

On its website, the agency said its cyber security centre "strongly encourages all consumers to source their technical information and updates from official

CrowdStrike sources only".

Cyber Security Minister Clare O'Neil said on social media platform X on Saturday that Australians should "be on the lookout for possible scams and phishing attempts".

Friday's outage hit Commonwealth Bank of Australia, the country's largest bank, which said some customers were unable to make PayID payments, an issue later resolved. National airline Qantas and Sydney airport said planes were delayed but still flying.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said late on Friday that there had been no impact to critical infrastructure, government services or emergency phone systems.

CrowdStrike — which previously reached a market cap of about \$83 billion — is a major cybersecurity provider, with close to 30,000 subscribers globally. — REUTERS

forms, forums, and messaging apps facilitate the rapid dissemination of content, allowing theories to gain traction quickly and reach a global audience."

The trend demonstrates the ability of falsehoods to mutate into

on major tech platforms, with users scrambling to obtain accurate information in what appears to be a sea of false or misleading posts that rapidly gain traction.

"This poses the larger question of combatting mis- and disinformation," Michael W. Mosser, executive director of the Global Disinformation Lab at the University of Texas at Austin, said.

"The level of trust that is required to accept information from reputable sources has declined to such an extent that people are more willing to believe wild conspiracies that 'must be true' rather than the factual information relayed to them."

The global outage, which brought myriad aspects of daily life to a standstill and sent US stocks falling, was linked to a bug in an update to an antivirus program for Windows systems from American cybersecurity group CrowdStrike.

Assurances by the Austin-based company's chief executive, George Kurtz, that CrowdStrike had rolled out a fix and was "actively working" to resolve the crisis did little to stem the spread of online conspiracies. "Combatting this misinformation with factual rebuttals is difficult, because the issue is so technical," Mosser said.

"Explaining that the fault was in an improperly configured system file and that a fix is in process may be accurate, but it is not believed by those who are predisposed to see nefarious motives behind failures." — AFP

# Philippines and China agree on 'arrangement' for reef resupplies

The Philippines and China have agreed on an "arrangement" for resupplying Filipino troops stationed on a South China Sea reef, Manila said on Sunday, after a series of escalating confrontations in the disputed waters.

A remote outpost on Second Thomas Shoal has been a focus of clashes between Chinese and Philippine ships in recent months as Beijing steps up efforts to push its claims to almost the entire South China Sea.

A Filipino sailor lost a thumb in the latest June 17 confrontation when Chinese coast guard members wielding knives, sticks and an axe foiled a Philippine Navy attempt to resupply its troops.

Sunday's announcement follows talks between the Philippines and China this month when they agreed to increase the number of communication channels to resolve maritime disagreements between them.

"The Philippines and the People's Republic of China have reached an understanding on the provisional arrangement for the resupply of daily necessities and rotation missions to the BRP Sierra Madre in Ayungin Shoal," said the Philippine foreign ministry, using the Filipino name for Second



Chinese Coast Guard vessels fire water cannons towards a Philippine resupply vessel Unaizah May 4 on its way to a resupply mission at Second Thomas Shoal in the South China Sea on March 5, 2024. — REUTERS FILE

Thomas Shoal. The foreign ministry did not provide details of the arrangement, but said both sides recognised the need to "de-escalate the situation in the South China Sea and manage differences through

dialogue and consultation". China's embassy in Manila did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

A handful of Filipino troops are stationed on the rusty BRP Sierra

Madre warship that was deliberately grounded on Second Thomas Shoal in 1999 to assert Manila's claims to the area.

They require frequent resupplies for food, water and other necessities

as well as transport for personnel rotations. Earlier Sunday, Manila said the resupply missions would remain a Philippine operation, after Washington vowed to "do what is necessary" to support them.

"As far as the RORE (rotation and resupply mission) is concerned, we're keeping it as a purely Philippine operation utilising Philippine ships, personnel and leadership," National Security Council assistant director-general Jonathan Malaya said.

"That may change depending on the guidance from top management but that's the direction or policy at present."

Malaya's remarks came after White House National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said the United States "will do what is necessary" to ensure the Philippines can continue to resupply its troops on the contested atoll.

"We will continue to support the Philippines and stand behind them as they take steps to be able to ensure that," Sullivan said during the Aspen Security Forum conference in Colorado.

Malaya said the National Security Council appreciated the US offer and the Philippines would continue consultations as treaty allies. — AFP

# Developers sharpen focus on deliveries



## DUBAI REAL ESTATE MARKET PERFORMANCE

<p><b>H1 2024</b></p> <p><b>80,118</b> Properties were sold in Dubai in H1 2024</p> <p><b>Dh233.1 billion</b> Worth of properties were sold in H1 2024</p>	<p><b>33,704</b> apartments were sold in Q2 2024, 45% higher compared to Q1 2023</p> <p><b>5,887</b> villas were sold in Q2 2024, 18.7% higher than Q2 2023</p> <p><b>2,891</b> plots of land changed hands in Q2 2024, 154.3% jump compared to Q2 2023</p> <p><b>1,130</b> commercial units were sold in Q2 2024, 22.2% higher compared to Q2 2023</p> <p><b>8,989</b> mortgage transactions were recorded in Q2</p>	<p>2024, up by 6.8% compared to Q2 2023</p> <p><b>Dh44.3 billion</b> value of mortgage transactions in Q2 2024, up 34.8% compared to Q2 2023</p> <p><b>Q1 2024</b></p> <p><b>36,506</b> units were sold in Q1 2024, which is 17.5% higher compared to Q1 2023 sales figure</p> <p><b>Dh108.5 billion:</b> Total sales value of properties in Dubai in Q1 2024</p> <p><b>28,739</b> apartments,</p>	<p>worth Dh55.3 billion were sold in Q1 2024, which is 24.7% percent higher than Q1 2023</p> <p><b>3,910</b> villas, worth Dh20.5 billion were sold in Q1 2024, which is 9.4% lower than Q1 2023</p> <p><b>2,890</b> plots of land, worth Dh30.8 billion were sold in Q1 2024, which is 2.1% higher than Q1 2023</p> <p><b>967</b> commercial units worth Dh1.9 billion were sold in Q1 2024, which is 9.4% higher than Q1 2023</p>	<p><b>2023 STATISTICS</b></p> <p><b>719,000</b> size of the residential stock in Dubai, at the end of 2023</p> <p><b>35,160</b> units were completed in Dubai in 2023, including 28,650 apartments, 5,187 villas and townhouses, and 1,323 commercial properties across 154 projects</p> <p><b>42,241</b> units expected to be completed in 2024, comprising 31,341 apartments, 9,909 villas and townhouses, and 991 commercial properties.</p>
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SOURCE: DUBAI LAND DEPARTMENT

Somshankar Bandyopadhyay  
somshankar@khalajeetimes.com

More and more developers are focusing on the delivery of properties than launching new projects as Dubai's real estate market shows signs of stability, a sign that the supply of property has caught up with demand. This year, 42,241 units are expected to be completed by developers, including 31,341 apartments, 9,909 villas and townhouses, and 991 commercial properties.

So far, 13,815 units have been completed, featuring 11,035 apartments, 2,562 villas and townhouses, and 218 commercial properties within 64 projects.

In 2023, as many as 35,160 properties were completed, including 28,650 apartments, 5,187 villas and townhouses, and 1,323 commercial properties across 154 projects, taking the residential stock of properties in Dubai to 719,000 units by the end of 2023, according to market reports quoting Dubai Land Department figures.

With the ongoing deliveries, Dubai's residential stock would cross 760,000 units by the end of 2024 that will help demand-supply situation to rebalance to a comfortable level. However, the statistics by Dubai Land Department shows that the market has started to stabilise while the sale transactions in the second quarter of 2024 has started to decline. A total of 80,118 properties, valued at Dh233.1 billion were sold in Dubai in the first half of 2024, according to Dubai Land Department statistics.

A total of 43,612 land and

properties valued at Dh124.6 billion were sold in Q2, 2024, which is 44.1 per cent higher compared to Q2 2023 sales figure. These included 33,704 apartments, 5,887 villas, 2,891 plots of land and 1,130 commercial units. 8,989 mortgage transactions were recorded in Q2 2024, up by 6.8 per cent compared to Q2 2023. Mortgage transactions were valued at Dh44.3 billion in Q2 2024, up 34.8 per cent compared to Q2 2023.

A total of 12,152 land and property transactions took place in the second quarter of 2024, valued at Dh33.9 billion, 62.5 per cent lower than Q2 2023. Of these, 10,041 apartments worth Dh18.8 billion were sold in Q2, 2024, which is lower by 56.6 per cent and 999 villas worth Dh5.4 billion were sold which is lower by 75.5 per cent compared to Q2 2023 and 796 plots of land worth Dh9.2 billion were sold in Q2 2024, 58.9 per cent lower compared to Q2 2023.

While leading developers such as Emaar Properties, Nakheel, Dubai Properties, Wasl Properties, Ithra, Damac Properties, Danube Properties Sobha, Azizi dominate the headline in delivery, and property launch, smaller developers also do their bit, but remain under the shadows of the bigger players.

One such player, Marquis Developers, has commenced the handover of 91 residential and commercial units of its Marquis Signature project in Arjan. The event was attended by Marwan Bin Ghalita, Director-General of Dubai Land Department.

"We are delighted and honoured to deliver these homes to our eagerly awaiting customers.

Witnessing the joy on their faces as they receive their keys is truly gratifying and underscores our unwavering dedication to our valued clients and the real estate sector," Mezuk Mohamed, Managing Director of Marquis Developers, said.

Navas Khan, chairman of Marquis Developers, emphasised the company's commitment to crafting spacious, family-oriented residences that promise both a comfortable living environment and lucrative investment opportunities and trust is the cornerstone of its business, and timely delivery of superior homes is instrumental in fostering customer confidence.

### 'Remarkable growth'

Haider Ali Khan, CEO of Bayut & Dubizzle and Head of Dubizzle Group Mena, said: "Dubai's property market has yet again witnessed a period of remarkable growth. We continue to see an upward trend driven by a variety of factors including enhanced investor facilitation, transparent property transactions, and the introduction of new off-plan projects amongst others.

Dubai has always remained an attractive city globally, but the new residency visas introduced by the government may have encouraged an even higher influx of new residents. The city has welcomed more than 25,000 new residents in just the first quarter of 2024, which has predominantly fuelled the demand for property. Projects such as the new airport in Dubai South, new metro stations and Etihad Railway also seem to have bolstered buyers' interest in nearby areas. Similarly, the launch of new off-plan projects, availability of ready projects, provision of

top-notch amenities, and overall investor convenience have all positively impacted Dubai's real estate market. All these factors have led to a surge in searches for both luxury and affordable properties across popular areas, reflecting consistent growth month after month.

Another real estate company announced the achievement of the Dh20 billion sales mark recently. Unique Properties, a Dubai-based property broker, said its total sales value reached Dh20 billion in recent times. There are hundreds of brokers whose property sales exceeded Dh1 billion.

With the UAE's economy projected to grow by 5.7 per cent, driven by international investments and buyers, the region is set to attract even more global attention. According to Knight Frank, the sale of homes priced above US\$10 million increased by 19 per cent in the first quarter of the year, underscoring its appeal as a destination for affluent buyers and tenants. The investor-friendly environment, freehold areas, and iconic architecture draw high-net-worth individuals seeking an opulent lifestyle. The emirate's status as a premier tourist destination fuels their desire for residential options that reflect upscale hotels, complete with pools, spas, and concierge services, according to Sean McCauley, CEO of Devmark.

"In Dubai, we've noticed a considerable surge in properties that offer extensive amenities, aligning with global trends. Developers of both branded and non-branded residences continually innovate to distinguish themselves through unique offerings, resulting in a series of developments with distinctive amenities," McCauley says.

# What do economists expect from Modi 3.0 budget?

Issac John  
issacjohn@khalajeetimes.com



**The government may simplify the tax code and reduce the number of tax slabs. Additionally, the government may also consider reducing taxes on certain goods and services to boost consumption."**

**D.K. Joshi**  
Chief economist at CRISIL

The Indian federal budget for the fiscal year 2024-25 is one of the most anticipated events for the world's fifth largest economy as the Modi 3.0 government, which came to power for the third time in a row with a reduced majority, seeks to reinforce its development/reform agenda to refurbish its clout.

The record-breaking seventh budget presentation by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday assumes added significance as it is widely anticipated to set the tone for the fastest growing major global economy that has set sights on becoming the world's third largest economic powerhouse in a matter of years.

Most analysts believe that the proposals will largely focus on key areas such as taxes, welfare measures, economic growth, development, infrastructure, digital, and IT sectors. Other key areas expected to get increased attention include green energy, defence, railways, housing and manufacturing.

The budget 2024-25 is set to be presented on July 23, during the monsoon session of Parliament, which begins on July 22 and concludes on August 12.

Economists and analysts expect tax relief for the middle class of the world's most populous nation to boost consumption as speculation is rife about whether personal taxes will be reduced or if the NDA coalition government will increase spending on consumer-focused sectors. Industries like consumer goods, real estate, housing finance, infrastructure, and automobiles are anticipated to benefit from a boost in consumption, according to brokerage firms.

HSBC expects the continuation of production-linked incentive schemes designed to stimulate local manufacturing and job creation. D.K. Joshi, chief economist at CRISIL, said the government is likely to focus on rationalising the tax structure and reducing the compliance burden on taxpayers. "The government may simplify the tax code and reduce the number of tax slabs. Additionally, the government may also consider reducing taxes on certain goods and services to boost consumption and stimulate demand," he says.

Madan Sabnavis, chief economist at Care Ratings, believes that the government may consider measures to provide relief to the poor and vulnerable sections of society, such as farmers, migrant workers, and small businesses. "This could include increased allocations for flagship schemes such as the National Health Mission and the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana."

The Modi 3.0 government has set ambitious targets for economic growth, and the new budget is expected to focus on achieving those

targets. Dr. Soumya Kanti Ghosh, group chief economic adviser at State Bank of India, said, "The government may consider measures to boost investments and create employment opportunities. Additionally, the government may also consider measures to promote exports and reduce imports to improve the balance of trade."

The coalition government is expected to continue its focus on boosting development and improving infrastructure. Dr. Pronab Sen, former chief statistician of India, said the government may increase spending on infrastructure projects such as roads, railways, airports, and ports. "The government may also consider measures to promote private sector investment in infrastructure projects and to create a favorable investment climate."

The infrastructure sector is expected to receive a significant boost with the government expected to increase spending on infrastructure projects. According to Dr. N.R. Bhanumurthy, professor at National Institute of Public Finance and Policy, "The government may create a National Infrastructure Pipeline to fund projects in sectors such as roads, railways, airports, and ports. Additionally, the government may also announce measures to promote investment in emerging sectors such as electric vehicles and renewable energy."

The Modi 3.0 government has been committed to promoting digital adoption and innovation, and the upcoming budget is expected to continue this trend. "The government may promote the adoption of digital payments, e-commerce, and telemedicine. Additionally, the government may consider measures to promote investment in emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, machine learning, and blockchain," says Dr. Arvind Virmani, former chief economic adviser to the Government of India.

The budget, which is going to be a litmus test for Modi 3.0, is expected to leave no stones unturned to shore up its image as a welfare and reform-oriented regime. It will, therefore, not overlook key areas such as taxes, welfare measures, economic growth, development, infrastructure, digital, and IT sectors.



Workers at the construction site of a residential building of Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana in the western Indian city of Ahmedabad. — REUTERS

**NOTICE OF APPOINTMENT**

LYT Technologies Ltd, a Private Company with registered offices at Unit OT 19- 37, Level 19, Central Park Offices, Dubai International Financial Centre, and holding Commercial License number CL3818 (the 'Company'), hereby gives notice that the Company's Shareholder passed a resolution on 15th July 2024 for the Company to be wound up through a Creditors' Voluntary Liquidation process and nominated Mr. Hisham Farouk, CEO of Grant Thornton UAE to be appointed as the Liquidator.

Any queries, claims or objections regarding the proposed winding up and closure of the Private Company are requested to be forwarded to Mr. Hisham Farouk by telephone at +971 (4) 388 9925 and in writing to liquidation@ae.gt.com.

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**NOTICE OF CREDITORS' MEETING**

IN THE MATTER OF LYT TECHNOLOGIES LTD - IN CREDITORS' VOLUNTARY LIQUIDATION

TRADING NAME: LYT TECHNOLOGIES  
DIFC LICENSE NUMBER: CL3818

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN pursuant to section 1.1 of Appendix 1 of the DIFC Insolvency Regulations that a meeting of creditors of the above Company will be held at 11:00 am on 12th August 2024 for the purposes mentioned in the agenda of the meeting.

The creditors' meeting will be held via an online meeting. The instructions on how to join the meeting will be sent to all known creditors ahead of the meeting.

Notice is further given that in order for us to include votes of creditors at the creditors' meeting, all creditors must submit a proxy form and proof of debt form, via email on liquidation@ae.gt.com by no later than noon on 9th August 2024.

For further information and details, please contact Sameer Khan at sameerkhan@ae.gt.com or Matthew Devine at matthew.devine@ae.gt.com

Hisham Farouk  
Nominated Liquidator of  
LYT Technologies Ltd-in Creditors' Voluntary Liquidation

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**NOTICE OF CREDITORS' MEETING**

IN THE MATTER OF LYT HOLDINGS LIMITED IN CREDITORS' VOLUNTARY LIQUIDATION

ADGM LICENSE NUMBER: 000007337.

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN pursuant to section 186(1) of Chapter 4, Part 3 of the ADGM Insolvency Regulations 2022 (the "Insolvency Regulations") that a meeting of creditors of the above Company will be held at 11am on 13 August 2024 for the purposes mentioned in section 186 of the Insolvency Regulations.

The creditors' meeting will be held via an online meeting. The instructions on how to join the meeting will be sent to all known creditors ahead of the meeting.

Notice is further given that in order for us to include votes of creditors at the creditors' meeting, all creditors must submit a proxy form and proof of debt form, via email on liquidation@ae.gt.com by no later than noon on 12 August 2024. A list of the names and addresses of the Company's creditors will be available for inspection free of charge at Grant Thornton Audit and Accounting Limited. For further information and details, please contact Sameer Khan at sameerkhan@ae.gt.com or Matthew Devine at matthew.devine@ae.gt.com.

Mr. Hisham Farouk Mohamed  
Nominated Liquidator

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## Adnoc, Nafis to create 13,500 jobs in pvt sector

Issac John  
issacjohn@khaleejtimes.com

A collaboration between Adnoc and Nafis is set to create 13,500 new jobs for UAE nationals in Adnoc's supply chain by 2028.

The agreement supports the UAE's goal to create 100,000 private sector jobs for Emiratis over the next three years and will unlock high-skilled jobs in advanced sectors including artificial intelligence (AI), engineering and manufacturing.

As part of the agreement, job and training opportunities will be offered to Emiratis in the Al Dhafra region this year. Additionally, 1,000 vocational training opportunities will be provided by Adnoc for UAE university graduates in private companies operating in Adnoc's supply chain through Nafis's Apprenticeship Programme.

Dr Sultan bin Ahmed Al Jaber, Minister of Industry and Advanced Technology and Managing Director and Adnoc Managing Director and Group CEO, said, "Nurturing and empowering local talent is a top priority for Adnoc, and we are extremely proud of the impact of our ICV programme in upskilling our people. Through this new agreement with Nafis, we will provide more private-sector job opportunities for local talent that enable them to contribute to the UAE's industrial and economic growth, as we grow our diversified portfolio to ensure a secure, reliable, and responsible supply of energy to the world."

The collaboration builds on the achievements of Adnoc's In-Country Value (ICV) programme which has created 11,500 jobs for Emiratis in the private sector since it was launched in 2018.

This new agreement will take the total private sector jobs created by Adnoc to 25,000 across its supply chain by 2028 as it accelerates UAE talent development and expands the scope of its ICV programme.

As part of the next phase of Adnoc's ICV programme, the company is expanding the scope to partner with more local and international companies and empower the next generation of Emirati entrepreneurs, micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), and talented UAE Nationals to improve the country's self-sufficiency.

Target sectors include advanced technology including artificial intelligence (AI), manufacturing, transportation, and lower-carbon solutions.

**Through this new agreement with Nafis, we will provide more private-sector job opportunities for local talent that enable them to contribute to the UAE's industrial and economic growth."**

**Dr Sultan bin Ahmed Al Jaber**  
Minister of Industry and Advanced Technology and Adnoc CEO

# Aquaculture key to UAE food security target



Estimates show that the UAE currently consumes about 220,000 tonnes of fish a year, over 85 per cent of which is imported with aquaculture providing only 2.0 per cent of the fish consumed locally. — FILE PHOTO

Issac John  
issacjohn@khaleejtimes.com

Aquaculture is 'the straightest and easiest road' for the UAE, which imports 80 per cent of its food, to reach its self-set target of grabbing the Number 1 position in the Global Food Security Index by 2051, a leading aquaculture expert said.

The UAE, which is a major seafood export destination of leading supplier countries, has to make huge investments in aquaculture, especially if it wants to meet the food security target by 2051. The country, which has an estimated seafood market of \$1.4 billion, has made a good start by actively encouraging innovative, technology-driven agricultural practices, which include vertical and smart farming, hydroponics and aeroponics, said Shaji Baby John, chairman of Kings Infra Ventures, one of India's leading companies focussing on sustainable aquaculture technology.

"The UAE offers an ocean of possibilities for Indian entrepreneurs. If the water resources under the desert sands can be utilised for aquaculture production, it will in fact be as important or even more important than the discovery of oil and the desert will become an oasis of economic prosperity," said John.

"If India and the UAE, which is ranked as the ninth seafood export destination of the south Asian nation, can come together,



they can alter the world fisheries scenario by creating a win-win situation. The UAE gets food security in addition to becoming the largest reprocessing hub catering premium seafood and aquaculture products to global markets and Indian businesses can utilise the world class amenities and infrastructure offered by the UAE to scale their businesses and launch global brands," he said.

### India's share

In 2023-24 fiscal, the UAE accounted for 2.15 per cent share of India's exports of 1.78 million metric tonnes of seafood worth \$7.38 billion. Frozen shrimp remained the major export item in quantity and value with the Middle East accounting for 28,571 metric tonnes of it.

Estimates show that the UAE currently consumes about

solutions like farm automation, IoT, and drone management of offshore sites, said the expert, who is coming up shortly with one of the most technologically advanced aquaculture projects in the UAE. Second, the UAE should heavily invest in India's aquaculture landscape taking advantage of the 100 per cent FDI norms.

The third strategy revolves around the UAE emerging as the largest re-export centre of fish. For this, the country will need to invest in fish processing units with a key focus on global certification which is lacking currently. If this is done, then the fish it produces in India could be imported into the country, processed and re-exported.

### Specific advantage

The UAE has a specific advantage to become a major re-export centre since Dubai is the gateway to the world, with robust logistics infrastructure including world-class airports and seaports. The Kings Infra's project for a Mariculture Eco Park in Tuticorin can be replicated on a much bigger scale in the UAE, John said. A mariculture eco park is an integrated and sustainable technology park focussed on bringing all activities relating to Aquaculture under one roof. Kings has also developed its own proprietary protocols namely SISTA360 as well as Probiotic and Mineral products to support farmers and entrepreneurs to grow shrimps sustainably and cost effectively.

## Demand for finance education on the rise

Issac John  
issacjohn@khaleejtimes.com

The demand for finance education in the Middle East is rising rapidly, driven by strong economic growth, the introduction of taxes, and diversification efforts.

To meet this growing demand, a number of institutions are offering several courses suited to the local and regional markets. FintEdu.com, a Dubai-based start-up, is aiming to set new standards in finance and tax education within the GCC by providing affordable, accessible, and specialised knowledge tailored to the region's unique needs.

FintEdu.com was launched in 2023 by Anu Goel and Rajiv Hira to meet the growing need for specialised, accessible, and affordable education in the fields of tax, finance, and accounting within the GCC region.

The platform features a robust Laws Library, insightful articles from industry professionals, up-to-date industry news, and a dedicated e-learning hub. "Our localised content and practical approach make us unique. We aim to make learning not only relevant but also immediately applicable," Goel explained.

FintEdu.com addresses local demand by offering specialised, locally relevant courses and resources that equip professionals with the necessary skills and knowledge to thrive in this dynamic market.

"We are committed to addressing the specific needs of finance professionals in the Middle East," Goel said.

FintEdu.com's content is localised to cater to the specific regulatory and economic landscape of the Middle East. This ensures that the knowledge and skills acquired are directly applicable to the local market, making the platform particularly suitable for professionals in the region.

"By focusing on the Middle Eastern market, we ensure that our users gain insights and skills that are directly relevant to their work environment," Goel stated.

### Popular courses

Some of the most popular courses on FintEdu.com include UAE Corporate Tax, VAT compliance, transfer pricing, anti-money laundering, international accounting standards, and AI for finance professionals. Topics such as e-invoicing, real estate taxation, and risk-based internal audit also draw significant interest from users.

"Our courses are designed to address the most pressing topics in the finance industry today," Goel remarked.

Looking ahead, FintEdu.com plans to expand its course offerings and introduce more advanced modules tailored to specific sectors within finance and accounting. The platform is also developing new tools to enhance practical learning and aims to launch a detailed Law database to make resources even more accessible without compromising affordability, she said.

## Compliance Corner

# Higher excise duty contributes towards greener future

Mahar Afzal

An excise tax represents an indirect tax imposed on particular goods known for their typical adverse effects on human health or the environment, and these items are commonly known as 'excise goods'.

The UAE government has implemented excise tax as a measure to curb the consumption of unhealthy and harmful goods, while simultaneously generating additional revenues to fund essential public services. This tax policy aims to discourage the consumption of products that pose risks to human health and the environment, aligning with the government's commitment to promoting public well-being and sustainability.

The impact on consumers is evident, as they will be required to pay higher prices for goods that are deemed detrimental to human health or the environment. This increased cost serves as a deterrent, encouraging consumers to make healthier choices and reducing the overall demand for such products. By influencing consumer behaviour through pricing mechanisms, the excise tax contributes to fos-

tering a healthier population and a more environmentally conscious society in the UAE.

Excise tax obligations apply to persons involved in various activities, including importing excise goods into the UAE, producing excise goods for consumption in the UAE, storing excise goods in the UAE under specific circumstances, and releasing excise goods from a designated zone.

In the UAE, excise tax is presently imposed on a range of goods. These items include tobacco and tobacco products, liquids utilised in electronic smoking devices, and the devices themselves. Additionally, the tax is levied on carbonated drinks (excluding sparkling water), energy drinks, and sweetened beverages.

Carbonated drinks encompass any aerated beverage except for unflavoured aerated water, as well as concentrates, powders, gels, or extracts designed to produce an aerated beverage. Energy drinks are defined as beverages marketed or sold for their stimulating properties, containing substances like caffeine, taurine, ginseng, and guarana, or any similar stimulating



Carbonated and energy drinks are among the major items that are subject to excise duty in the UAE. Image for illustrative purposes only. — FILE PHOTO

substance. This definition extends to concentrates, powders, gels, or extracts intended for energy-enhancing drinks. Tobacco and tobacco products are inclusive of all items listed in Schedule 24 of the GCC Common Customs Tariff.

Currently, carbonated drinks are subject to a 50 per cent excise tax, while tobacco products face a hefty 100 per cent tax rate. Similarly, energy drinks, electronic smoking devices, and the liquids used in

these devices are all taxed at a rate of 100 per cent. Additionally, any product containing added sugar or sweeteners is taxed at a 50 per cent rate. These high tax rates are designed to discourage the consumption of these goods.

Excise tax is calculated based on the excise price of goods, which is determined as the higher of the price listed by the Federal Tax Authority (FTA) for excise goods or the designated retail sales price

minus any included excise tax. The tax is then computed as a percentage of this tax base. The excise price encompasses all applicable taxes except VAT. The final selling price includes the tax base, the excise tax at the specified rate (50 per cent or 100 per cent), and VAT. For goods with a 50 per cent tax rate, the excise tax makes up 33.33 per cent of the selling price before VAT, while for goods with a 100 per cent tax rate, it constitutes 50 per cent of the selling price before VAT.

When excise goods are imported, stockpiled, produced, or released for consumption in the UAE, the individual or entity responsible at that moment must enroll for excise tax. This action designates them as a taxable person for excise tax obligations.

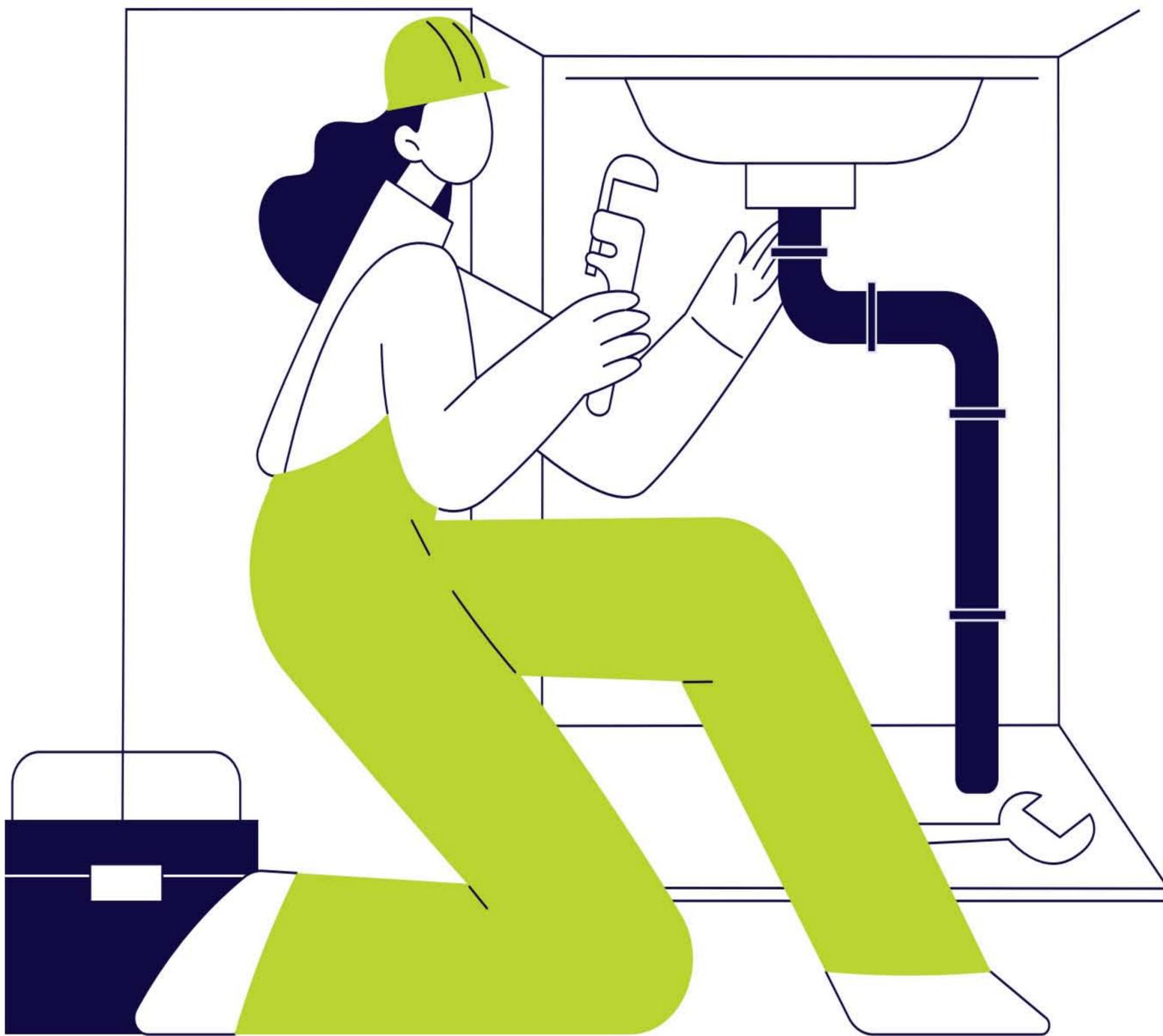
In the UAE, there is no threshold for excise tax registration, meaning that any person engaged in the import, production, or stockpiling of excise goods is required to register for excise tax. The FTA may grant an exemption from registration to a person who import excise goods into the UAE if the FTA determines that they do not engage

in regular importation of excise goods. The FTA defines 'regular' importation of excise goods as happening more frequently than once every six months or when the person imports for the fourth time within a 24-month period.

Upon registering for excise tax, the taxable must submit their excise tax return by the 15th day of the following month; and pay the excise tax accordingly.

Having been implemented years ago, the excise duty in the UAE stands as a testament to the government's enduring commitment to public health, environmental sustainability, and economic stability. As we reflect on the past years, we need to continue to support these initiatives, make informed choices, and work together towards a healthier and more prosperous future for all.

The writer is a managing partner at Kress Cooper Management Consultants. The above article is not an official opinion of Khaleej Times but an opinion of the writer. For any queries/clarifications, please feel free to contact him at mahar@kresscooper.com.



# More landlords ask tenants to pay for repairs, maintenance cost

**Rents in Dubai have increased 10% during the first half of 2024 and is projected to rise at a similar percentage in the second half**

Waheed Abbas  
waheedabbas@khaileejtimes.com

**L**andlords are increasingly asking tenants to bear the cost of repairs and maintenance of the properties due to strong demand for rental properties.

Tenants said that landlords reject requests for repair works such as changing taps, door locks and other leakages, asking tenants to buy the products themselves and get them fixed. They added that landlords are only willing to pay for the repairs within the walls such as pipes and cables.

"This is unfair. Being a tenant, I am not going to take water taps, locks and water heaters etc. with me to a new apartment when I am relocating. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the landlord or building owner to carry out repair work on the property," said Abu Aiman, a long-time UAE resident.

Tenants say that landlords are not cooperative when it comes

to maintenance because there is plenty of demand for their properties due to strong growth of population in Dubai and UAE.

Rents in Dubai have increased 10 per cent during the first half of 2024 and it is projected that rents will rise at a similar percentage in the second half of the year.

Josh Nairn, leasing manager of Huspy, said traditionally, landlords in Dubai bore the burden of routine maintenance, encompassing everything from external repairs to minor fixes.

"Recently, there has been a discernible trend where landlords increasingly transfer these costs to tenants. This shift often stems from financial considerations amidst rising property values and operational expenses," he said.

Dubai's soaring real estate market has enticed a flood of international investors, drawn by promising returns.

"However, the surge has sparked a transformation in the dynamics between landlords and tenants, particularly concerning maintenance responsibilities. In cases where landlords live abroad and do not have an appointed maintenance company, any work required could be delayed or ignored," said Nairn.

Siyazini Kunle Biko James, leasing manager at Betterhomes, said landlords are increasingly passing on maintenance costs to tenants.

"We are in a time where landlords are not only benefiting from the increasing markets but also capitalising on the lack of knowledge of tenants, particularly the ones new to Dubai."

Interestingly, James added that in many cases, landlords are slow to respond and tenants become impatient to have the issues resolved. Hence, they often handle it themselves and bear the costs.

Nairn said that typically, landlords are responsible for all maintenance as outlined in contracts, in particular structural damage and permanent fixtures.

#### Subtle pressure tactic

"However, some landlords strategically limit maintenance services. They may refuse to address issues like water taps or locks unless they involve structural elements like pipes or cables within walls. This tactic not only affects tenant convenience but also serves as a subtle pressure tactic on tenants paying below current market rates, aiming to prompt them to vacate and facilitate re-rental at higher rates — an approach that raises ethical concerns and potential legal disputes," he said, adding that "tenants paying higher rentals expect a high standard of maintenance services, failing which, they are happy to move into a new home."

Nairn added that tenant advocates emphasise the need for

transparent lease agreements that clearly outline maintenance responsibilities from the outset. They recommend tenants negotiate terms diligently during the initial stages of leasing, preferably with trustworthy agents dedicated to long-term client satisfaction.

"As disputes over maintenance costs escalate, stakeholders eagerly await governmental intervention to streamline the reporting process for unethical landlord practices. Simplifying these procedures without imposing financial burdens on tenants is crucial to maintaining Dubai's reputation as an equitable and attractive rental market."

Nairn said over the past few years, Dubai's real estate boom has attracted investors from around the world. However, as they seek to monetise their properties, they also need to invest in their tenant relationship. "It is much more costly for investors to change their tenant every year than to have a longer-term commitment. Prior to signing a contract, tenants must always inquire about the types of maintenance work that is covered within the contract and those that are not."

James of Betterhomes said they have noticed an increasing misunderstanding between both parties as details in the rental contracts are not properly communicated prior to contract signing.

He added that disputes are on the rise between landlords and tenants related to maintenance costs. "Often landlords and tenants are not properly guided or informed and the contracts are not properly detailed to ensure both parties are fairly protected. Some landlords create their own addendums, which are primarily in their favour, and the tenant (in some cases) proceed to sign the contract, especially in highly demanded areas," said James.

He called on the property consultant to operate fairly on both parties' behalf and ensure that the details in the contract and addendums are aligned with the guidelines set by the Real Estate Regulatory Authority.

According to provisions of Law No. 26 of 2007 on 'Regulating Relationship between Landlords and Tenants in Dubai', a landlord is liable to maintain the fixtures and fittings of a rented apartment unless it has been agreed in a tenancy contract that the tenant is responsible for maintenance works of such fixtures and fittings.

Article 16 of the Dubai Tenancy Law states: "Unless otherwise agreed by the parties, a landlord shall, during the term of the lease contract, be responsible for the real property maintenance works and for repairing any breakdown or defect that affects the Tenant's full intended use of the Real Property."



An advertising banner depicts France's basketball player Victor Wembanyama on a street ahead of the Paris 2024 Olympics. — AFP

# We're ready, say Olympic organisers ahead of Friday's opening ceremony

Paris Olympics supremo Tony Estanguet said on Sunday that the city was "ready" for the Games as he played down complaints from some residents and businesses about the impact of the event.

"We are ready as we head into the final phase," Estanguet told a press conference in Paris, five days from the opening parade next Friday.

He added: "For as long as the closing ceremony hasn't finished, we need to remain vigilant. But today we are exactly where we would have dreamed of being a few years ago."

Finishing touches are being applied to the venues across the City of Light and thousands of athletes and officials are pouring in, while the weather has also brightened up after months of rain.

In a further boost for organisers, the water quality of the river Seine — which is set to be used for outdoor Olympic swimming events — has also improved dramatically

## +

### Pope hopes truce on wars can come from Paris Olympics

Pope Francis said on Sunday he hoped the Paris Olympics would be an occasion for truces in the world's conflicts, urging athletes to be messengers of peace and models for young people.

The games start on July 26 with an opening ceremony on the River Seine that will feature about 10,500 athletes and over 100 heads of state and government.

During his weekly address to the crowds in St Peter's Square, the pope said he hoped that "according to the ancient tradition, the Olympics will be an opportunity to establish a truce in wars,

by demonstrating a sincere desire for peace". "Sport has a great social strength, capable of peacefully uniting people of different cultures," he told pilgrims in St Peter's Square after his weekly Angelus prayer, ahead of the Olympics opening ceremony on Friday in Paris. He mentioned the

conflicts in Ukraine, Gaza, Myanmar and other countries, saying "let us not forget war is a defeat". Last month the final statement of a Group of Seven (G7) leaders' meeting held in Italy included a unanimous call for a truce in global conflicts during the Olympic Games. — AFP

since the start of July. "All the indicators for the Seine are positive at this stage," Estanguet added.

The river is set to host the opening ceremony next Friday which will see 6,000-7,000 athletes sail down it on 85 barges and boats.

It will be the first time a Summer Olympics has opened outside the main athletics stadium, with up to 300,000 ticketed spectators set to watch from stands and on the river

banks and another 200,000 expected to watch from the overlooking apartments. Around 4,000 tickets are still available, Estanguet said.

"We've always tried to maintain as high a level of ambition as possible so that these Games make France shine," Estanguet added.

The vast security operation required for the opening ceremony is causing some friction, however, with large parts of central Paris

along the banks of the river and around Olympic venues off-limits for most people.

Trade groups representing Paris shops, restaurants, bars and clubs complained on Friday that they were facing an "unprecedented slump in business and footfall", blaming in part the "heavy security measures".

"It always a choice made in full conscience that the success of Paris 2024 would mean having the

Games in the city," Estanguet explained. "That was the completely unprecedented concept for Paris 2024."

As well as the opening ceremony in the heart of the city, much of the sport is set to take place at temporary venues around Paris, with beach volleyball at the Eiffel Tower, archery at the Invalides and skateboarding at the Place de la Concorde.

"We can't do it without some disruption. We can't do it without some restrictions," Estanguet said. "We tried to anticipate these restrictions and we communicated them a long time in advance."

He thanked "those who have understood this because it's really to honour our country in the most beautiful way."

Around 45,000 members of the French security forces are set to be on duty on Friday evening when the Olympics kick off at 7:30pm (17:30 GMT).

"Security was the number one priority for Paris 2024," Estanguet said.

Cybersecurity is also a major concern, with a global IT outage last Friday caused by an update to CrowdStrike software leading to temporary disruption to accreditation system used for the Games.

The International Olympic Committee said it was bracing for disinformation attacks targeting the sporting extravaganza following recent incidents blamed on Russia. — AFP

## Palestinians are winners by just being in Paris, say athletes

The presence of Palestinian athletes at the Paris Olympic Games is already a major victory for the team amid the conflict in the Middle East, they said less than a week before the start of the Olympics.

The Palestinian team for the Games starting on Friday consists of six athletes who will be competing in boxing, judo, taekwondo, shooting and swimming, with slim hopes of a medal.

"Whether a medal or not, we already win," swimmer Yazan Al Bawwab said. "The fact that we're here. The fact that people don't want us to be here, they don't want us to play sports. They don't want us to exist."

"People don't want Palestinians to exist. They look at the flag and they don't want it. So to be here is a win," said Al Bawwab, who will be the team's flag bearer during the opening ceremony.

About 1,200 people were killed and more than 250 were seized and taken as hostages to Gaza in an attack on southern Israel led by the Palestinian militant group Hamas last Oct. 7, according to Israeli allies. The Israeli military offensive launched in response in Hamas-governed Gaza has killed almost 39,000 Palestinians, health officials in the Palestinian enclave say. Israel says 326 of its soldiers have been killed in Gaza.

In the run-up to the Paris Olympics, Palestinian athletes had been given support by Arab states, including Kuwait, Qatar, Libya and Egypt, to allow training in those countries.

Palestinian sports officials have said that since the start of the conflict in October 2023 more than



Palestinian swimmer Valerie Tarazi during a training session in Paris. — REUTERS

300 athletes, referees and sports officials have been killed and all sports facilities in Gaza demolished.

"I said it before but I'm one of the luckiest people in the world," swimmer Valerie Tarazi said. "I have the opportunity to compete

for my country, to raise the flag for my country. My heart is with them. Every time I swim, every time I jump in the pool, I'm thinking about the people of Palestine, their struggles. And I just want to represent them in the best way possible." — REUTERS

## India not content with just qualifying for team events, says table tennis coach

India will compete in the men's and women's table tennis team event at the Olympics for the first time at the Paris Games after climbing into the top 16 in the rankings, but coach Massimo Costantini is still not satisfied.

India's table tennis team have had some success at the Commonwealth Games but have failed to match that at the Olympics and Asian Games.

However, their qualification for the team events, introduced in 2008, has renewed hopes of a first-ever Olympic medal in the sport, with the Indian men's team ranked 14th in the world as of July, while the women's team was 11th.

"I think making the team event is already a big achievement, because being in the top 16 in the world is not easy," Costantini said. "But for me it's (the rankings) too close, like wearing clothes that are too tight. You're not comfortable, you need to be comfortable to perform as required."

"My goal is to not to fight at the last minute to make the top 16, but to be in the top 10, top eight, or even top four. To not even have the doubt whether India will play in the team events at the Olympics or not."

One of India's leading prospects at the Olympics will be 2018 Commonwealth Games champion Manika Batra, who broke into the top 25 this year and

achieved a career-high ranking of 24 after her victory at the Saudi Smash in May.

Batra (ranked 28) and Sreeja Akula (ranked 25), are among the women leading India's charge up the rankings.

"We have to be consistent in taking opportunities. We don't want just sporadic occasional results that make us climb the world ranking. We need more stability," Costantini said.

"Manika was up there for almost one year, hovering between 35 and 38. She was maintaining her performances quite well, and then one competition helped her make that jump. The women have had great results, they did well. But we can do much better."

The Italian coach added that he has been using data provided by artificial intelligence to improve his players, with the team partnering up with Indian sports analytics company Stupa Sports Analytics for a training camp.

"Technology and AI can help have a better understanding of performance," added Costantini, who returned to the Indian table tennis set up for a third stint this year.

"We're just making little adjustments, like they do in motorsport, where small details can reduce the time maybe by one millisecond. In table tennis, it is exactly the same." — REUTERS



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