

**7** Irish UN peacekeeper shot dead in southern Lebanon



**8** Nurses in Britain begin unprecedented walkout



**13** Ireland Traveler tinsmith mourns lost way of life



**15** Women referees 'opened up possibilities' at World Cup



# World Cup final dream over, but Moroccans hail heroes

Amir, Crown Prince, PM laud Morocco's historic performance



DOHA: Morocco's players pray and thank the crowd after losing 2-0 in the Qatar 2022 World Cup semi-final match against France at the Al-Bayt Stadium in Al Khor on Dec 14, 2022. — AFP (See Page 16)

CASABLANCA: They may have fallen just short of reaching the World Cup final, but Moroccans on Wednesday hailed their team's historic run as it ended with a 2-0 defeat to reigning champions France. Despite the loss, ruler King Mohammed VI sent his "warm congratulations" to the whole team for having "honored the Moroccan people", according to the country's national news agency MAP. The king also conveyed a congratulatory message to French President Emmanuel Macron by telephone post-match, the news agency said.

HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent on Thursday a congratulatory cable to Moroccan King Mohammed VI on the historical performance of the Moroccan team at the World Cup, making them the first Arab/African team to reach the semifinals. HH the Amir praised the Moroccan team's outstanding performance and their high spirits as they represented their country in the best manner, wishing them luck and success in further international and regional championships. HH the Amir expressed good wishes to the King and further progress to his country. HH the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah sent similar

congratulatory cables to the Moroccan King.

"They played a great game but luck wasn't on our side," said supporter Oussama Abdouh in Casablanca. "Still, we stood up to the titleholders, that was great. Beyond the World Cup, this team made us dream until the end, and just for that, I raise my hat to them." But for Hakim Salama, the 2-0 defeat to France was too much. "We missed the opportunity of the century," he said.

Rain lashed the capital Rabat on Wednesday evening and the atmosphere was far from the exhilaration of the historic victories that brought the Lions of the Atlas to within sight of a World Cup final - the first Arab or African team to ever get so far. This time, the car horns and drummers were muted.

"The national team has been performing miracles since the start of the World Cup," Rachid Sabbiq, a street trader in the working-class Derb Sultan district of Casablanca, said before the match. "It doesn't matter whether they win or lose - they've won the respect and admiration of all Moroccans, and that's priceless," he said. Sabbiq had swapped his usual fare of sweets to sell Moroccan flags.

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## News in brief

### UK to relax aircraft liquid rules

LONDON: The UK government announced on Thursday that it will significantly relax limits on taking liquids in carry-on luggage at airports from June 2024. Currently, only containers of less than 100 ml are allowed in the aircraft cabin, while electronic devices such as laptops must be removed from bags. But under a new bill to be presented to parliament on Thursday, limits for liquids will be raised to two liters. Electronic devices will also no longer have to be checked separately. — AFP

### Toxic alcohol kills 22 in India

PATNA, India: At least 22 people have died and several others have been hospitalized in India after drinking toxic alcohol, authorities said Thursday. The deaths happened mainly in two villages in the eastern state of Bihar, where the sale and consumption of liquor are prohibited. Men in Saran district began vomiting on Tuesday before their condition deteriorated. Three died on the way to hospital and others died while being treated on Wednesday and Thursday, with local media reports putting the toll at 31. — AFP

### Jordan jails Captagon smugglers

AMMAN: Jordan's judiciary on Thursday sentenced two men to long prison terms for attempting to smuggle nearly two million Captagon pills into the country from Syria, a judicial source told AFP. The state security court handed a 20-year prison term and a fine of 20,000 Jordanian dinars (\$28,000) to one of those convicted - a Syrian - and a 10-year-term, along with a 10,000 dinar fine, to a Jordanian. The pills were found by narcotics officers in wood-burning stoves. — AFP

## 5 MPs call for sex segregation at university

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Five MPs proposed on Thursday a draft law calling on the government to develop buildings and facilities at Kuwait University to

ensure segregation of sexes at the university. The bill, signed by MPs Khaled Al-Tammar, Hamdan Al-Azemi, Osama Al-Shaheen, Mohammad Hayef and Hamad Al-Obaid, calls to complete the required works to implement segregation within five years.

Meanwhile, National Assembly Speaker Ahmad Al-Saadoun invited lawmakers for a meeting on Monday with HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Sabah and a number of Cabinet ministers to discuss cooperation between the Assembly and the government.

The meeting was requested by the prime minister in a letter to Saadoun in which he stated that the government wishes to meet with MPs to discuss certain issues that concern the two sides. The letter said the meeting was needed to allow the two bodies to outline their visions and determine priority issues and measures required to serve national interests and the interests of Kuwaiti people in a spirit of cooperation between the government and the National Assembly.

Earlier this week, the government submitted its four-year program of action to the Assembly, through which the government outlined its

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## WHO eyes end to COVID, mpox emergencies

GENEVA: The World Health Organization said Wednesday it hoped that COVID-19 would no longer be a public health emergency in 2023, as it urged China to share information that could pinpoint how the pandemic started. As the third anniversary of the original outbreak rolls around, the WHO said the virus was here to stay but would need managing alongside other respiratory illnesses.

WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said the weekly COVID death toll was now around a fifth of what it was a year ago - but was still far too high. "Last week, less than 10,000 people lost their lives. That's still 10,000 too many and there is still a lot that all countries can do to save lives," he told a press conference. "But we have come a long way. We are hopeful that at some point next year, we will be able to say that COVID-19 is no longer a global health emergency."

The WHO's emergency committee on COVID-19, which advises Tedros on whether the virus constitutes a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC), will discuss the criteria for declaring an end to the emergency phase when they next

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GENEVA: WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus gestures during a press conference on Dec 14, 2022. — AFP

## Twitter suspends account tracking Musk's plane

SAN FRANCISCO: A Twitter account that tracked flights of Elon Musk's private jet was grounded on Wednesday despite the billionaire's talk of free speech. "Well it appears @ElonJet is suspended," creator Jack Sweeney tweeted from his personal @JxckSweeney account. The account was in action briefly later in the day, after Twitter sent out word that it updated its policy to prohibit tweets, in most cases, from giving away someone's location in real time.

"Yes I am back!" read a tweet fired off by @ElonJet, which added a link to versions of the flight tracking account at other social networks such as Instagram, Facebook and Mastodon "just in case". A short time later attempts to reach @ElonJet, as well as Sweeney's personal Twitter account, were met with messages that both were suspended. Musk's jet "flew from LA to Austin last night after my account was suspended on Twitter," he said in an Instagram post.

"Any account doxxing real-time location info of anyone will be suspended, as it is a physical safety violation," Musk said in a tweet. "This includes posting links to sites with real-time location info." Doxxing refers to revealing identifying information such as home address or phone number online, typically to target someone for abuse.

Tweets sharing a person's location that are "not



Elon Musk

same-day" are allowed under the tweaked policy, as are posts about being at a public event such as a concert, Twitter said.

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## Local

# Kuwait college students launch anti-bias awareness campaign

## Social media campaign to end discrimination

By Faten Omar

**KUWAIT:** College students launched an anti-bias awareness campaign on social media to end discrimination in the community. Kuwait Times spoke with the four friends who decided to spread awareness by posting stories of people who have experienced discrimination. The four students from the American University of Kuwait - Zahraa Al-Qattan, 17, majoring in systems engineering, Negin Kardani, 19, information systems, Judy Alnaimy, 18, accounting and finance, and Layla Al-Khuraibat, 19, majoring in computer science - have a goal to deliver the message in order to stop this phenomenon.

**Kuwait Times:** Why did you decide to choose this topic?

**Zahraa:** We have witnessed discrimination since we were young, but never acted on it. Now that we are old enough, we want to take action and stop it. We have seen the amount of mental and physical health issues affecting other people and us personally, because we have also experienced it. It's sad to see it spreading in Kuwait and globally. No one should face this just because they are

different from others. Now that we are older, we also see how it impacts the peace of the world. This issue can literally create wars and yet some people are still not taking it seriously.

We have realized discrimination has been escalating globally and we are starting to see it more publicly, especially here in Kuwait. A lot of people are experiencing race, national, religion and color discrimination. It's sad to see this in a developed country like ours, so we created our social media account to try our best and stop this issue.

**Kuwait Times:** Have you noticed any discrimination in the university or your community? How did other people react?

**Judy:** Yes, we have witnessed color discrimination. Back in high school, they made fun of a girl just because of her skin color. Some people were okay with it, while some fought the fact that people are starting to see discrimination as if it's a good act.

**Layla:** National origin discrimination - when I was outside of the country, they hated me and treated me badly without knowing me, just because of my nationality. People didn't even react they continued the hate with them.

**Zahraa:** Race discrimination - it was almost daily that I saw this in high school. Just because some of our teachers were not Kuwaitis, they were treated badly and made fun of. Some didn't like this act, but the rest were okay with it, and in the end, no one reacted.

**Negin:** I have experienced national origin discrimination. Whenever I go to the bank, they ask if I'm Kuwaiti or not. We have noticed discrimination at the university and we want to put it to an end.

**Kuwait Times:** What do you hope to change?

**Zahraa:** In order to live in peace, we hope that discrimination stops and all people start to accept each other for their differences. We hope our campaign opens people's eyes and reduces this issue and hopefully stops it.

**Kuwait Times:** How will you change it?

**Zahraa:** As Paul Klee said, 'One eye sees, the other feels.' Each person sees and feels differently, so we want to spread awareness through anything that can touch a person. Some get touched by stories, poetry, music, shows and movies that represent a type of discrimination.

**Kuwait Times:** Is there any future plan to spread awareness in larger groups?



## DISCRIMINATION

**Zahraa:** In order to spread awareness in larger groups, we hope to grow our social media campaign and start creating posters around the university; maybe even open a club about it in order to support this issue.

### News in brief



#### Bedoon employees hold sit-in

**KUWAIT:** Bedoon employees at the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs held a sit-in at the Ministry in protest for not receiving their late salaries. Financial supervisor at the ministry refused to pay the salaries of nearly 450 workers, among them there are 30 imams and muezzins in addition to several administrators. Senior officials at the ministry are working on solving the issue.



#### Abandoned vehicles removed

**KUWAIT:** Director of Cleanliness Department and Roads Occupancy at Mubarak Al-Kabeer Municipality branch said the cleanliness level has improved and officials have removed all dirty items and obstructions on roads. He said the team went on field inspection from December 5 until December 12. The team placed 53 stickers and removed 12 abandoned vehicles and boats. He said such inspections will continue and legal action will be taken against violators.



#### Specialized programs

**KUWAIT:** The Health Ministry announced increasing the number of those accepted in specialized programs at Kuwait Institute for Medical Specializations by over 50 percent in different programs compared to previous years. The ministry said the percentage of increasing those accepted, reaching 200 percent in some specialties, goes side by side with maintaining the quality of training and education, in addition to increasing opportunities of scholarships to prestigious world universities. Supervisor of higher studies at Kuwait Institute for Medical Specializations Dr Abdallah Rajab said the department oversees interviews with applicants, whose number reached 700 doctors last week.

## Role of media campaigns against drug addiction

**KUWAIT:** Electronic media professor at Kuwait University Dr Mohammad Al-Otaibi underlined the role of media campaigns in raising awareness towards drug abuse, especially campaigns targeting social media platforms as they are the most widespread, reaching a wider segment of the youth. Al-Otaibi, interviewed by Kuwait News Agency (KUNA), said that campaigns whether on social media platforms, billboards on roads, on TV and radio channels or newspapers, could also be instrumental in educating parents on the issue, as well as lending a helping hand to specialized entities in combating the dangers of addiction.

Executive Director of Ghiras, the national awareness project for drug abuse prevention, Dr Ahmad Al-Shatti, stated last June that around half a million drug-related deaths were recorded in 2019. For his part, media professor at Kuwait University Dr Fawaz Al-Ajmi affirmed in an interview with KUNA significant role of the media for promoting awareness and addressing the targeted masses' segments.

He has noted that anti-drugs campaign should be

based on figures, evidences and statistics regarding the drugs' peril. Shedding light on the hazards caused by the narcotics should be also based on scientific bases, elaborate studies, cooperation with concerned departments, namely the ministry of health and interior, sociologists and psychologists, he elaborated.

Awareness campaigns that lack such essential factors do not attain the set objectives, he noted further. Kuwait's Cabinet had decided last October to launch a national campaign to curb spread of substance addiction through raising awareness, combating and providing treatment via rehabilitation centers with complete confidentiality, employing national and international cadres. The campaign comes as per directives by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah to protect the youth from all possible consequences of drug abuse. The cabinet had decided to assign the interior ministry along with health ministry, ministry of education, ministry of social affairs and community development, ministry of women and childhood affairs, Ministry of Awqaf (endowment) and Islamic affairs, as well as informa-



Dr Mohammad Al-Otaibi



Dr Ahmad Al-Shatti



Dr Fawaz Al-Ajmi



## Kuwait's trade surplus with Japan surges 73%

**TOKYO:** Kuwait's trade surplus with Japan surged 73.0 percent from the past year to JPY 100.8 billion (\$743 million) in November, up for the 20th consecutive month, as exports continued to outpace imports by a big margin, government data showed Thursday. Kuwait stayed in black ink with Japan for 14 years and 10 months, the Finance Ministry said in a preliminary report.

## Bangladesh marks 52nd Victory Day

**KUWAIT:** Bangladesh is celebrating the 52nd Victory Day, the most precious day of the Bangali people, on Friday as the country was liberated from the Pakistani occupation forces on the day 51 years back after a nine-month-long bloodstained War of Liberation. On December 16, 1971, Bangladesh was born as an independent country under the leadership of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at the cost of the supreme sacrifice of three million people and the honor of nearly half a million women.

Victory day is celebrated on December 16 to commemorate the victory of the allied forces over the Pakistani forces in the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971. In 1971 Bangladesh fought against Pakistan to become an Independent country, which resulted in the secession of East Pakistan from the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and established the sovereign nation called Bangladesh.

On 7th March 1971, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the founding father of Bangladesh gave speech at the Ramna Race Course in Dhaka to a gathering of over one million people. It was delivered during a period of escalating tensions between East Pakistan and the powerful political and military establishment of West Pakistan. In the speech, Bangabandhu proclaimed: "This time the struggle is for our freedom. This time the struggle is for our independence."

The speech inspired the Bengali people to prepare for a war of independence amid widespread reports of armed mobilization by West Pakistan. On 30 October 2017, UNESCO added the speech in the Memory of the World Register as a documentary heritage. On the night of 25 March, the Pakistan Armed Forces launched "Operation Searchlight" in the capital of East Pakistan. Tanks rolled out on the streets of Dhaka. The troops massacred students and intellectuals in Dhaka University, as well as many civilians in other parts of the city. It set major cities ablaze and crushed resistance from the police and the East Pakistan Rifles (EPR).

Just before his arrest on the night of March 25, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman sent a message about attacks on EPR and police barracks in Dhaka, and declared the independence of Bangladesh. This message was broadcast from Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendro (Independent Bangla Radio Centre) on March 26, 1971, and was widely reported in newspapers all around the world.

Overall exports from Kuwait to Japan ballooned 68.6 percent year-on-year to JPY 122.3 billion (\$901 million) for the 20th straight month of expansion. Imports from Japan also jumped 50.8 percent to JPY 21.4 billion (\$158 million), up for the seventh month in a row. Middle East's trade surplus with Japan inflated 58.4 percent to JPY 1.1 trillion (\$8.2 billion) last month, with Japan-bound exports from the region soaring 56.9 percent from a year earlier.

Crude oil, refined products, liquefied natural gas (LNG) and other natural resources, which accounted for 95.9 percent of the region's total exports to Japan, swelled 60.1 percent. The region's overall imports from Japan jumped 51.2 percent on robust demand for automobiles, machinery and manufac-

tured goods. The world's third-biggest economy logged a global trade deficit in November for the 16th straight month at JPY 2.0 trillion (\$14.9 billion), as higher energy bills and the yen's depreciation contributed to increase the value of its imports.

The figure marked the largest for the month of November since comparable data became available in 1979. Exports rose 20.0 percent from the year before, fueled by sales of cars, machinery and vessels. However, imports surged 30.3 percent on rising energy prices, especially crude oil, coal and LNG. China remains Japan's biggest trade partner, followed by the US. The trade data are measured on a customs-cleared basis before adjustment for seasonal factors. —KUNA



The war pitted East Pakistan and later India against West Pakistan, and lasted for duration of nine months. The war was one of the most violent wars of the 20th century; it witnessed large-scale atrocities, the exodus of 10 million refugees and the killing of 3 million people by the Pakistani armed forces. After nine months of bloody war Bangladesh was liberated on 16 December 1971.

Victory Day is a national holiday in Bangladesh. At the beginning of the day, the President and the Prime Minister pay homage to the martyrs of the Liberation War by placing wreaths at the National Memorial at Savar on the outskirts of the capital with the rise of the sun. This will be followed by the foreign diplomats, family members of freedom fighters and wounded freedom fighters. Later, leaders of different political and social organizations and people from all walks of life will pay tributes to the martyrs of the Liberation War. The celebration of Victory Day has been taking place since 1972. The President and Prime Minister issue separate messages on the occasion, paying glowing tributes to the martyrs of the Liberation War in 1971.

The Bangladesh Liberation War became a topic of great importance in cinema, literature, history lessons at school, the mass media, and the arts in Bangladesh. The ritual of the celebration gradually obtained a distinctive character with a number of similar elements: colorful Parade by the Bangladesh Armed Forces at the National Parade Ground, ceremonial meetings, speeches, lectures, receptions and fireworks displays.

Victory Day in Bangladesh is a joyous celebration in which popular culture plays a great role. TV and radio stations broadcast special programs and patriotic songs. Different political parties and socioeconomic organizations undertake programs to mark the day in a befitting manner, including the paying of respects at Jatiyo Smriti Soukho, the national memorial at Savar in Dhaka District.



The victory day programs also include decorating city streets with national flags and colorful festoons, and illumination of important buildings and establishments, roads and street islands at night. The day's highlight is the colorful parade on National Parade Ground where Contingents of the Bangladesh Army, Navy and Air Force as well as Freedom Fighters, Paramilitary forces, law enforcement agencies and various ministries of the government participated.

The parade is reviewed by the President of Bangladesh in his capacity as Commander in Chief. National dailies brought out special supplements on the occasion while Bangladesh Postal Department released memorial postage stamps. Kuwait recognized Bangladesh on 4th November 1973. Since then two friendly countries has been maintaining excellent bi-lateral relations in the field of trade and economic cooperation, export and import, education and cultural cooperation, labor market and defense cooperation.

We deeply acknowledge the contribution of Kuwait in the natural calamities and making socio-economic development in Bangladesh through Kuwait Fund and hosting around 2,50,000 migrant workers. Similarly, whenever situation demanded, Bangladesh stood shoulder to shoulder to our time tested friend Kuwait. Participation of Bangladesh Army as a part of coalition forces during liberation of Kuwait in 1990, presence of Bangladesh Military Contingent since 1991, sending of emergency medical team during the COVID pandemic are of worth mentioning.

On this joyous Victory Day, we express our sincere gratitude to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, III the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishaal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, III the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and to the brotherly people of Kuwait for their continued support towards us. May Bangladesh-Kuwait friendship live forever!

Local

# 'Health for All: Society approach to enhance health ecosystems'

## WHO Kuwait hosts multi-stakeholder strategic dialogue



KUWAIT: Participants are seen during the summit. WHO Kuwait hosts multi-stakeholder strategic dialogue on achieving "Health for All; a whole of society approach to enhancing health ecosystems" on December 14, 2022.

KUWAIT: WHO Kuwait hosts multi-stakeholder strategic dialogue on achieving "Health for All: a whole of society approach to enhancing health ecosystems" on December 14th, 2022. Achieving the targets of Thirteenth General Program of Work (GPW13) to ensure health and wellbeing for all, requires that all aspects of society get involved in building the health ecosystem. WHO has a longstanding, multifaceted collaboration with Kuwait aimed at improving health outcomes both domestically and globally.

In Kuwait, the Ministry of Health leads this domestic ecosystem by defining health and wellbeing targets in line with Kuwait's national development plan, as well as regional and global health targets. Ensuring that this ecosystem can achieve Kuwait's health targets, requires establishing the right multi-sectoral mechanisms and policies that will enable whole of society involvement and coordination. Outside Kuwait, WHO works with Kuwait Fund to bolster health ecosystems by providing critical support to countries to plug systems gaps and save lives. These combined efforts reflect Kuwait's commitment to health and improving the state of the world.

The "Health for All" multi-stakeholder dialogue is an opportunity to reflect on the positive impact of the WHO-Kuwait collaboration, as well as opportunities for the future. The event convened Government and industry leaders, as well as country representatives, to share good practices, and build further support for health as a national, regional, and global priority. Speaking on this occasion Dr Assad Hafeez, WHO Representative to Kuwait said "WHO's thirteenth general program of work prioritizes health and wellbeing. Here in Kuwait, we are working with the Ministry of Health



and all of society, to ensure that SDG3 on good health and wellbeing are a reality for all."

Dr Hafeez valuing the role the Government plays in supporting WHO global activities, said "The State of Kuwait has a longstanding humanitarian culture that continues to promote health for all both at home and abroad. Through WHO's collaboration with Kuwait Fund, we are bridging critical health system gaps and supporting primary health care (PHC) facilities in low-income countries around the world."

It is noteworthy to mention that WHO Kuwait is currently leading an extensive role in supporting Kuwait to reach all health-related SDGs targets. The Kuwait Ministry of Health is working

with WHO Country Office in a whole-of-society effort to bolster the health ecosystem and promote health for all by all.

Dedicated to the well-being of all people and guided by science, the World Health Organization leads and champions global efforts to give everyone, everywhere and equal chance at a safe and healthy life. We are the United Nations agency for health that connects nations, partners, and people on the front lines in 150+ locations, leading the world's response to health emergencies, preventing disease, addressing the root causes of health issues, and expanding access to medicines and health care. Our mission is to promote health, keep the world safe and serve the vulnerable.



KUWAIT: Sheikh Faisal Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Deputy Chief of the National Guard, toured Salem Al-Ali camp, where he was received by the National Guard Staff Engineer Hashim Abdul-Razzaq Al-Rifai and senior leaders. During the tour, the Deputy Chief of the National Guard listened to a briefing on Sheikh Salem Al-Ali camp and its operating units.

## WHO hails Kuwait

KUWAIT: The World Health Organization representative in Kuwait Dr Assad Hafeez on Wednesday praised cooperation between the United Nations agency and the Kuwaiti government, particularly in low-income countries. The UN's global health agency is currently working with Kuwait's Health Ministry to ensure the achievement of UN-proposed Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) domestically, the WHO representative told attendees of a debate.

Dr Hafeez said he also appreciates the government's role in supporting WHO's global activities, through cooperation with the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development. Through these endeavours, he said, Kuwait seeks to fill critical gaps in health systems and support primary healthcare facilities in low-income countries around the world. —KUNA

## Ministry keen on promoting Kuwait products

KUWAIT: Minister of Social Affairs, Minister of Social Development, and Minister of State for Women and Children's Affairs Mai Al-Baghli affirmed on Thursday that she was keen on supporting and promoting national products within the country and abroad. Speaking to KUNA, Minister Al-Baghli expressed pride in what national products had achieved in quality and quantity in recent years, saying that the products had made their mark in the

competitive market.

She affirmed that she was satisfied with the results of the first national products exhibition, an event hosted by Al-Adailiya cooperative society last Saturday. The success of the event had led several other cooperative societies to express desire to hold similar functions, she said, adding that an event of the same caliber would be held in Al-Naeem cooperative society next Saturday and Sunday. —KUNA



Mai Al-Baghli

In my view

## Restructuring administrative responsibility-VII



By Yousuf Awadh Al-Azmi

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“And oftentimes excusing of a fault doth make the fault the worse by the excuse.” - William Shakespeare. Imagine that you became the decision maker who is held accountable to a higher authority, and having unlimited authorities to relieve, keep, select or reshuffle seniors in the place you were appointed to -how will your behavior be? What will your mind ask you to do? Let us pause here with your mind, and wonder will your mind lead you or another authority which dictates the decision to you; your heart for example!

Why your heart?! Because in your heart lies your hidden personal wishes that speak about keeping the post, and how to remain in the post, and is selecting leaders who are loyal to your wishes. Look deeply at this term - "your wishes". I did not say the right leader for the post, and the difference is huge between the emotional wish and the wish for hard work, as the person who will deal according to the fear for the chair, their wishes will be different from the one who deals according to professional administrative rules.

I here without a doubt, am talking about dealing with leaders in government authorities, especially when we are dealing at this time with continued news about resignations of several senior officials in several state entities, and I do not know, as many others, is it actually the seniors who submitted their resignations as announced or is there a certain arrangement that led to the resignations, as we are in front of two important points: The first is that we are accustomed to the leader clinging to his post until "Allah might accomplish a matter already destined" (8-44), or be forced out.

The general view indicates the second probability, but let it be against his wish. Also, let us be with the right, which is more deserving to be followed, and leave it for those who have the authority. I wonder: Is what is going on is only changing faces or change for the better and appointing competent individuals who are better able to manage? The answer will be in the hands of the future, which will reveal what is behind this and what follows.

Let us leave the above and speak about a different matter. Even if it is somehow linked with what we spoke about, and before anything and before questioning, I will pose another question: Had every appointed senior official realistically passed the managing ability tests, and was it made sure about his competence, and if he is suitable for the post, or if the issue is out of this realistic domain?

It is realistically supposed, and we are still with logic, that no senior official is appointed except according to objective rules related to ability, competence, interaction, achievement, cleanliness and honesty. The official is the main representative of the area he works in. Also, be sure that any leader that keep all signatures to him and monopolizes their authority is a leader that is not fit even to clean dustbins, because he may be corrupt or afraid of the subordinate senior officials under him.

In this case, we face two things - either the leader himself is a failure, not fit and a narcissist who keeps the decision to himself alone, which is of course not good for leadership and good management, or the senior officials under him are not good and he cannot replace them, and in both cases the situation is miserable and is not good at all! A piece of advice: If you do not trust your colleagues, the solution is either to replace them, and if you cannot, it is you who should leave. The continuation of an unhealthy situation is a shame on a competent and active leader.

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## News in brief

## Kuwait crude oil gains

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait crude oil gained \$1.24 during Wednesday's trading sessions to reach \$79.95 per barrel compared to \$78.71 pb the day before, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said Thursday. Brent futures also rose \$2.02 to \$82.70 pb and West Texas Intermediate gained \$1.94 to \$77.28 pb.

## US dollar remains firm

**KUWAIT:** The US dollar on Thursday remained firm against the Kuwaiti dinar - trading at KD 0.306 but the euro rose by 0.23 percent to KD 0.326, compared with Wednesday's prices, the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) said in its daily bulletin. The sterling pound moved slightly up by 0.25 percent to the level of KD 0.379 and the Swiss franc also edged up by 0.36 percent settling at KD 0.330. The Japanese yen remained stable, trading at KD 0.002. The CBK publishes daily average exchange rates that do not necessarily reflect actual prices of currencies for the day. Meanwhile, US Federal Reserve (Fed) has raised its benchmark interest rate by an additional 0.50 percentage points, taking the target range up to 4.25 to 4.5 percent. "The Committee seeks to achieve maximum employment and inflation at the rate of two percent over the longer run. In support of these goals, the Committee decided to raise the target range for the federal funds rate to 4-1/4 to 4-1/2 percent," the Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC), in charge of policy setting, announced it in a statement today. —From KUNA

## Photo of the day



**KUWAIT:** This picture shows a view of fog covering skyscrapers in Kuwait City. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

## KUNA Director receives Ukraine and Jordan envoys, discusses cooperation



**KUWAIT:** Director General of Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) Dr Fatma Al-Salem on Thursday met with the Ukrainian Ambassador to Kuwait Dr Balanutsa Oleksandr. They discussed ways to bolster media cooperation between the two countries. During the reception, Dr Al-Salem affirmed that media and journalism played integral roles in boosting Kuwaiti-Ukrainian relations, commending at the same time, the level of cultural ties.

On his part, the Ukrainian Ambassador revealed that his country's embassy-in coordination with several authorities in Kuwait-would be organizing cultural and

sport events to celebrate 30 years of diplomatic relations. He congratulated Dr Al-Salem on her appointment as Director General of Kuwait News Agency (KUNA), expressing sincere wishes of success.

The Ukrainian diplomat presented KUNA's director with the Arabic version of a book regarding the father of Ukrainian football Valeriy Lobanovskyi. Deputy Director for the Editorial Affairs Department Essam Al-Ghanim, Deputy Director of the Financial and Administrative Affairs Department Mohammad Al-Manna'i, and head of KUNA Director's office Omar Al-Omar were present during the reception.

Also, Director General of Kuwait News Agency on Thursday received the Jordanian Ambassador to Kuwait Sagr Bou-Shtal. Both talked about means of boosting cooperation. Dr Al-Salem affirmed during her reception of the ambassador necessity of boosting cooperation between KUNA and the Jordanian news agency, Petra, and noted the keenness on exchanging expertise between them. The Jordanian envoy for his part lauded the level of media cooperation between Kuwait and Jordan, affirming necessity of employing the two news agencies' potentials for overhauling the media in Kuwait and Jordan. —KUNA



**KUWAIT:** KUNA Director General receives Ukraine and Jordanian Ambassadors to Kuwait yesterday —KUNA photos



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## Govt proposes humble reforms

**KUWAIT:** Developing general and higher education was prioritized in all development and action plans. However, due to corruption and mediocrity of infrastructure, housing, demographics and labor, no reforms were pursued in contrast to government intentions. The education section takes part in the challenges included in the government action plan. After reaching an unbearable situation, reforming the educational section requires revolutionary reforms whereas the government proposes humble reforms.

On average, the general education -Kindergarten to High School — cost per student is around KD 3,800 annually which is one of the highest education costs in the world. However, the student level of a high school graduate is lower than that of a fourth-year middle-class student, and the education gap stated in previous government action plans was around 4.8 years which highlights the issue of cheating. Furthermore, it is now normal that students' parents publicly protest against changing the corrupt proctoring staff that tolerates cheating.

In addition, the offered education programs still lag behind what is required to achieve a "breakthrough in education" and behind the labor market requirements that has changed throughout the years. Moreover, in the challenges section of the government action plan, the government aims to decrease the education gap to around 3 years or lower by 2026 without considering the inverse relation between education costs and its deteriorating quality.

This means that to arrive at the modest quality of our education, we need an additional six years. In order to perform higher education reforms, it should be accompanied by general education reforms since high school

graduates are university entrants. However, with low concern for general education, any higher education reform project would be a delusion. Also, the general education gap is more severe in scientific majors as it is the future of education and the future labor market.

Around 77,000 (66% of the total students enrolled in universities) study in Kuwait University and the Applied School with a cost of KD 13,000 per student in Kuwait University and KD 8,000 per student for the Applied School. The cost per student in Kuwait University is around double the student cost in local private universities. However, Kuwait University was excluded from the list of top thousand universities in the world, and only two local universities were included in that list.

Moreover, Kuwait has no university among the top 700 universities in the world. On the other hand, there are 14 Saudi universities, 11 UAE universities, 8 Lebanese universities, 4 Jordanian universities and 3 Bahraini universities in the list of the top thousand universities in the world. Furthermore, the government intends to establish new governmental education bodies, activate governmental higher education schools, make night shifts for public universities, and finish Sabah Al Salem school which adds up costs while maintaining the humble level of education.

In summary, linking public job positions with the education level is wrong. This is why around 85% of public sector employees have a high school degree and above which is incomparable with the world. Despite that, the productivity of the public sector is considered weak. Moreover, the benefits associated with having a degree have encouraged people to forge degrees, with the knowledge of some people working the general and higher education, and apply for public job positions. The action plan doesn't tackle the issue of linking the degree to the job position nor to subjecting the job to certain specializations, excellence, and labor market demands. Finally, education is the act of building human capital and not destroying it, and no reforms could be completed without having valuable human capital. —Al-Shall

## ESCWA, ACN laud Kuwait consumer protection efforts

**KUWAIT:** The UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and the Arab Competition Network (ACN) have heaped equal praise on Kuwait's efforts to protect consumers from commercial fraud, saying these measures help create competition that is both effective and beneficial. Kuwait's competition protection agency has made much progress over the last decade, helping "regulate the local market," ESCWA economic affairs chief Natalya Khaled told a joint conference over existential challenges.

Echoing her sentiments, the ACN head cited a raft of legislative reforms in Kuwait as the catalyst behind more

stringent competition policies and consumer protection laws in the country, which help foster more efficient regulatory practices in the market. The two-day gathering aims to shed light on the pivotal role the Kuwaiti body plays in its efforts to regulate the market and protect consumers from potential ill practices.

Meanwhile, Promoting Competition Conference "Challenges and Ambitions," concluded on Wednesday with recommendations to revitalize laws and regulations towards fair competition, which in turn aid in the development of Arab economies. The participants called for the signing of agreements and Memorandums of Understandings (MoU) between Arab and international parties to boost fair competition.

The participating parties of the conference called for developing national capabilities to boost the roles of governments and private sector in protecting competition from monopoly. The two-day conference was organized by the Kuwaiti Competition Protection Agency (CPA) in collaboration with the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA). —KUNA



Doctors, drugs, even bandages lacking in remote Niger clinics

## Google says it does not manipulate search results



MANCHESTER: Photo shows an incident involving a scuffle between a Hong Kong pro-democracy protester (center) and Chinese consulate staff, as a British police officer attempts to intervene, during a demonstration outside the consulate in Manchester. — AFP

# China recalls six diplomats over Manchester violence

## Beijing rebukes UK over consulate protest violence

LONDON: China has removed six diplomats from the UK, including its consul-general in Manchester, after they were accused of assaulting a Hong Kong protester in the northern English city, Britain said Wednesday. UK Foreign Secretary James Cleverly said the six envoys had left the country by a Wednesday deadline imposed by London for them to waive their diplomatic immunity and be questioned by police over the October incident.

Greater Manchester Police launched a criminal probe after Hong Konger Bob Chan alleged Chinese diplomats subjected him to "barbaric" treatment - dragging him inside their compound to assault him - at an anti-Beijing protest. "As part of that investigation, we requested that six Chinese officials waive diplomatic immunity so they can be questioned," Cleverly said Wednesday. He added that the Chinese embassy in London had been informed of the deadline for "them to take action".

"In response to our requests, the Chinese govern-

ment has now removed from the UK those officials, including the consul-general himself," Cleverly noted. Britain's top diplomat said London's response demonstrated its "adherence to the rule of law" as well as "the seriousness with which we take these incidents". In response, China's embassy to Britain issued a rebuke to Cleverly on Wednesday, saying he made "irresponsible comments by distorting facts".

"The British government failed to effectively prevent the intrusion and assault carried out by those rioters and to protect the premises and members of the Chinese Consulate General," the Chinese embassy said in a statement posted on its website. "The UK side shows no respect for justice and the rule of law, and is being most irresponsible and disgraceful," it said, adding that they had "launched solemn representations" with Britain over the issue.

### 'Fled like cowards'

In October, the UK's Foreign Office department

summoned Yang Xiaoguang, China's Charge d'Affaires in London, after footage emerged backing up the claims of the pro-democracy protester. Senior ruling Conservative lawmakers had accused consul-general Zheng Xiyuan, one of China's most senior UK diplomats, of being at the Manchester scene and ripping down posters during the peaceful protest.

The removal of the six Chinese envoys is likely to please hardliners on China in the Conservative party, who had demanded their expulsions and accused the UK government of appeasing Beijing. MP Alicia Kearns, chair of parliament's watchdog Foreign Affairs Committee, welcomed the development, saying the six had "fled the UK like cowards, making clear their guilt". "The Foreign Office must now declare those who have fled persona non grata, and make clear they are never again welcome in the UK," she added in a statement.

China on Thursday warned it would take retaliatory action against the UK if it did not move to

ensure Chinese diplomats could work freely in the country, after Beijing recalled envoys accused of assaulting a protester in Manchester. Greater Manchester Police launched a criminal probe after Hong Konger Bob Chan alleged Chinese diplomats dragged him inside their compound to assault him at an anti-Beijing protest in October.

UK Foreign Secretary James Cleverly on Wednesday said six envoys had left the country by a deadline imposed by London for them to waive their diplomatic immunity and be questioned by police over the incident. They included consul-general Zheng Xiyuan, one of China's most senior UK diplomats, whose recall Beijing insisted represented a "normal rotation of Chinese personnel". China called on the UK to "fulfil its obligations under relevant international law and bilateral consular agreements" and "earnestly ensure the normal performance of the Chinese diplomatic and consular missions", foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said. — AFP

## German hospitals overwhelmed by sick children

BERLIN: When Debora Zilz rushed her baby son Andreas to a Berlin hospital because of a serious respiratory illness, she got a shock. "There was no space," she recalled. Medics desperately rang other hospitals in the German capital and neighboring Brandenburg state in an effort to find a bed for the 13-day-old. "Finally, after a night in the accident and emergency department, we were able to stay here," said the 33-year-old mother. Her son, whose weight at one point dropped to below his birth weight of 3.1 kilos (6.8 pounds) before recovering, is now in intensive care.

The baby is battling bronchiolitis, as Germany faces a winter wave of cases of the chest infection in infants, putting already strained hospitals under extra pressure. After two years of the coronavirus pandemic which brought measures like face mask-wearing that shielded the country's youngest from exposure to respiratory viruses, several European countries are seeing a surge in bronchiolitis. The situation is particularly bad in 2022 as newborns and infants are exposed to the respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), which commonly causes bronchiolitis, for the first time.

The paediatric care team at Saint Joseph's in Berlin, where the youngster was being treated, is struggling to handle the surge with a smaller number of staff than ever before. "We are underwater," Beatrix Schmidt, head of the hospital's paediatric and neonatology department, told AFP. A perfect storm of factors have contributed to the problem, Schmidt said - "an incredible number of sick children, infected caregivers, and all that at the same time as chronic staff shortages".

### 'Children pay the price'

In the down-at-heel neighborhood of Tempelhof, close to central Berlin, Saint Joseph's normally has 80 beds for sick children. But due to staff shortages, only 51 can currently be used. Even in the intensive care unit, beds have had to be closed - and all 18 that remain are occupied. As in Andreas's case, medics are frequently finding they have no space for new patients and have to call around to other hospitals.



BERLIN: Director of the pediatric ward of Berlin's Saint Joseph Hospital Beatrix Schmidt sits at her desk. — AFP

Many sick children have even had to be transported by helicopter to regions further afield, such as the northeastern state of Mecklenburg-West Pomerania, and the coastal state of Lower Saxony.

According to figures from the Robert Koch health institute, 9.5 million people in Germany were last week affected by some sort of respiratory illness, across all age groups, in a country of 84 million. The figure is well above that during the same period in 2021, and is higher than at the peak of the 2017-18 flu epidemic. Schmidt believes many problems are caused by cost-cutting. "For years, we have made savings when it comes to our health system. And children are the first to pay the price," said the 63-year-old.

Currently there are 18,000 hospital beds for children in Germany, down from 25,000 in 1995, according to the federal statistics agency. Germany, with an ageing population and fewer children than even many of its European neighbors, has been investing little in pediatric care, according to Schmidt. Children "don't vote and we don't make money treating kids", she said. Health care reforms aimed at reducing costs have been particularly damaging for pediatric care, while medical professions are struggling to attract new entrants, critics say. "Many pediatricians are going to retire in the coming years," said Schmidt, who is herself preparing to leave her position. The younger generation want to combine work and family, a challenge in a profession that often requires long and unpredictable hours, she said. — AFP

## Tunisia awaits languid election for powerless parliament

TUNIS: Tunisians go to the polls Saturday to elect a parliament largely stripped of its powers, under a hyper-presidential system installed by the head of state Kais Saied after his power grab last year. Over a decade since Tunisia's popular revolution unseated dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, opposition parties have urged a boycott of the vote, which they say is part of a "coup" against the only democracy to have emerged from the 2011 Arab Spring uprisings.

The election for the new 161-seat assembly comes after President Saied froze the previous legislature on July 25 last year, following months of political crisis exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic. He later dissolved the parliament, which had long been dominated by his nemesis the Islamist-inspired Ennahdha party. Saied on Wednesday defended his decision, saying that the "Tunisian people, wherever I went, were all asking to dissolve the parliament". "The country was on the brink of civil war," he told

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken in Washington.

The previous legislature had far-reaching powers, in the mixed presidential-parliamentary system enshrined in the North African country's post-revolution constitution. Last July, Saied used a widely shunned referendum to push through a new constitution, stripping parliament of any real clout and giving his own office almost unlimited powers. The legal expert who oversaw its drafting said the version Saied published had been changed in a way that could lead to a "dictatorial regime". Saied later published a slightly amended draft.

Analyst Hamadi Redissi said the aim of Saturday's polls was "to complete the process that started on July 25" last year. The resulting parliament "won't have many powers - it won't be able to appoint a government or censure it, except under draconian conditions that are almost impossible to meet".

Saied's new system essentially does away with political parties and electoral lists, meaning candidates will be elected as individuals with no declared affiliation. The assembly's final make-up is not expected to be determined until March next year, after any second-round run-offs have been completed. The vote aims "to increase the legitimacy of the presidency", Redissi said, adding that the result would be "a rump parliament without any powers". — AFP



TUNIS: Vehicles drive past a billboard encouraging people to vote in the Tunisian national election scheduled for December 17. — AFP

## International

# Doctors, drugs, even bandages lacking in remote Niger clinics

## Niger has a mere 0.35 doctors per 10,000 people

### Key figures in UN nature summit

**MONTREAL:** Representatives from countries around the world have gathered at a United Nations summit in Montreal this week to hammer out a "peace pact for nature." Here are the figures that define the COP15 talks.

#### 30 by 30

Headlining the COP15 biodiversity talks is a drive to secure 30 percent of Earth's land and oceans as protected zones by 2030 — the most disputed item on the agenda. Some campaigners say the so-called "30x30" target is nature's equivalent of the landmark 1.5C global warming target set at climate talks under the Paris Agreement. But delegates are divided over how the measure would be applied, and some countries support a more modest target of 20 percent, either for just the world's oceans, or for both land and oceans.

#### 75% of land altered by humanity

Seventy-five percent of the world's land surface is degraded — a figure that includes cleared forest and ecosystems converted to croplands — 66 percent of the ocean area is experiencing increasing cumulative impacts, and over 85 percent of wetlands have been lost. These are the findings of the IPBES — the scientific body that advises the United Nations on biodiversity, equivalent to the IPCC on the subject of climate. In all, 32 percent of landmass is either moderately or severely degraded, estimates the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). All the more worrying as world agricultural production needs to increase 50 percent by 2050 in order to feed the future population of nearly 10 billion people.

#### Million species threatened

Of the estimated eight million animal and plant species on the planet, one million are threatened with extinction, according to IPBES. The figure is twenty times higher than those actually documented as threatened in the IUCN red list, a global inventory which puts the number at around 42,000. But its number is based only on a small denominator of 150,000 species for which solid scientific data exists. The IPBES figure by contrast is based on modeling — including, importantly, a "cautious" estimate that 10 percent of insect species are threatened with extinction, or 600,000 species.

#### GDP depends on nature

More than half of the world's total GDP — \$44 trillion of economic value generation — is either moderately or highly dependent on nature and its services, the World Economic Forum calculated in a striking report in 2020. Construction (\$4 trillion), agriculture (\$2.5 trillion), and food and beverages (\$1.4 trillion) are the three largest industries that depend most on nature, and are as a result exposed to grave risks from nature loss. — AFP

**SOULOUFETA:** Asked what's on her wish-list for her tiny clinic, Tchimaden Tafa starts to reel off a long string of items but doesn't reach the end, for another patient has come in, seeking her help. In Soulofeta, a village in the remote Air Mountains of northern Niger, healthcare comes in the form of a building that is all but empty, manned by a nurse lacking equipment, drugs and even bandages. Tafa's facility amounts to a two-room concrete-walled structure with a barbed-wire enclosure to keep out camels and goats.

One room is used for examining patients, the other is the storeroom, containing perhaps half a dozen boxes of supplies. There is neither a refrigerator nor lights, because there is no electricity. Tafa has to examine patients with the door open, to let in sunlight. There is not even a scale on which to weigh patients. Often, "all you can do is look at them and observe" their symptoms, the young nurse said with a sigh. "What can you do?"

#### Poverty

Niger, a huge former French colony in the heart of the arid Sahel, is the poorest country in the world, according to the Human Development Index. Its population, the fastest-growing in the world, has per capita GDP of less than \$600 per year, compared to \$70,000 in the United States, according to the World Bank. Soulefeeta comprises around 100 inhabitants living in around 15 mud-brick homes. It lies about seven kilometers from Iferouane, where there is a bigger health centre — but in this mountainous part of the Sahara, that distance is long and gruelling.

The roads are rough, and can be washed out by downpours in the rainy season, says Azori Lahou,



**IFEROUANE:** A 4x4 ambulance drives on a road between Iferouane and Soulofeta. This is the only ambulance that works to evacuate patients of serious cases from the Iferouane health center to Arlit or Agadez. — AFP

who drives a four-wheel-drive ambulance. He takes patients to Iferouane and, if need be, to the nearest hospitals, in Arlit and Agadez. They are respectively five and nine hours' drive away along desert tracks — "And that's on a good day," Lahou remarked. In this vast empty region the size of France, there is just a single tarmacked road. It was built years ago with revenue from uranium mining, but today is almost a memory, eroded by the wind, sand and truck wheels.

#### Motorbikes

The head doctor in Iferouane, Ada Daouda, one of two doctors in the area, said one of his biggest concerns was to get sick patients in a transport-worthy condition so that they could make the long trek to

hospital. "Someone whose vital signs are in danger and who has to wait hours to be treated — you can imagine what this (trip) is like," he said. "Tell them we need resources," he added, in comments that regional and other health officials echoed to AFP. Niger has a mere 0.35 doctors per 10,000 people, according to the World Health Organization. By comparison, the figure in Sweden is 70 doctors per 10,000. Often, sick people are transported from Soulefeeta to Iferouane on the back of a motorbike — cheaper and more rugged than an ambulance, despite the obvious risks, said Tafa. The village's health committee is proposing that local inhabitants contribute a total of 1,000 CFA francs (\$1.50) per month towards buying drugs for the health hut. — AFP

## UN nature talks teeter on brink

**MONTREAL:** Hopes of sealing a historic "peace pact with nature" at a United Nations biodiversity summit will soon rest on the world's environment ministers, arriving in Montreal for the final phase of talks. Stark divisions remain to be bridged, foremost among them the subject of how much developed countries will pay the developing to help them save ecosystems, and whether there should be a new, dedicated fund for this purpose. At stake is the future of the planet and whether humanity can roll back habitat destruction, pollution and the climate crisis, which are threatening an estimated million species with extinction.

The draft agreement contains more than 20 targets, including a cornerstone pledge to protect 30 percent of the world's land and seas by 2030, eliminate harmful fishing and agriculture subsidies, tackle invasive species and reduce pesticides. "I hope what we would have at the end of this... is a Paris moment," said Zakri Abdul Hamid, science advisor for the Campaign for Nature, referencing the landmark climate accord that agreed to hold long-term warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius.

"Decades of study have also clarified what the world must do," he added. In the absence of heads of state and government, more than a hundred ministers will have to drag the text, three years in the making, over the finish line. But its success still hangs in the balance after disagreements over the thorny issue of biodiversity financing led to a walk-out by negotiators from developing nations



**MONTREAL:** A barista makes coffee at the United Nations Biodiversity Conference (COP15) in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. — AFP

overnight Tuesday and a temporary pause in talks.

#### New fund sought

The Global South, home to most of the world's biological diversity, wants a new global biodiversity fund (GBF), something rich countries oppose — proposing instead making existing financial mechanisms more accessible. This debate mirrors a similar disagreement during recent UN climate talks in Egypt on creating a "loss and damages" fund for the most climate-vulnerable nations — though that demand was eventually met. Dozens of nations, including Brazil, India, Indonesia and many African

countries are also seeking funding of \$100 billion yearly, or one percent of global GDP, until 2030.

Current financial flows from high-income countries to lower income ones are in the order of \$10 billion per year. A crisis meeting of heads of delegations, organized on Wednesday by China, which is chairing the meeting, brought negotiators back to the table following the breakdown. A Western negotiator who declined to be named told AFP: "The African group wants to reach an agreement with money in front, other developing countries too, but Brazil is using the financial question to derail the process." — AFP

## World Cup final dream over...

Continued from Page 1

One of the oldest neighborhoods in Casablanca, Derb Sultan was a bastion of resistance against colonial authorities when the North African kingdom was a French protectorate from 1912 until 1956. It also gave rise to one of Morocco's top teams, Raja de Casablanca, and is the birthplace of legendary striker Mohamed Jarir (alias "Houmane"), who in 1970 became the first Moroccan ever to score in the World Cup.

"In this neighborhood, we love football, so of course the national team's victories make us dream," said teenager Mohamed Nadifi, a teenager whose idol is winger Sofiane Boufal. All over Morocco, shops have been selling team jerseys and flags. "Not only have the Lions made us happy but they also allowed us to get business going again" despite rough economic times for many Moroccans, said trader Khalid Alaoui. Touria

Matrougui braved cold and torrential rain to buy jerseys for her four nephews. "They held the Moroccan flag high, and for that, we can never thank them enough," she said.

The team's success has also won it support far across the continent. "Morocco has made an entire continent proud," said Sidibey Zoumana, from the Ivory Coast, who has lived in the country since 2018. "I've been watching their progress as if it was my own country." From Gaza to Senegal, the team's success has transformed the image of Morocco. "They proved that an African team can go places, and really compete," said Said Mouhssine, 48, after the match.

For others, the match had a taste of politics, coming in the middle of a diplomatic spat between Paris and Rabat over the ever-contentious Western Sahara issue. Some fans were doubly disappointed, as national carrier Royal Air Maroc was forced to cancel extra flights for fans to Qatar just hours after announcing them. Other supporters who had already reached the Gulf state were unable to get tickets they had been promised. Some accused staff at the Moroccan Football Federation of handing out the coveted passes to friends and families. — Agencies

US rules require planes in designated areas be equipped with ADS-B technology that broadcasts aircraft positions using signals that relatively simple devices can pick up. Figuring out or confirming to whom a plane actually belongs can require some sleuthing, said Sweeney, who filed a public records request with the US government in order to confirm Musk's ownership of his plane.

Suspension of the account came a day after Twitter co-founder and former chief Jack Dorsey published an online post defending the tech firm's workers, who Musk has criticized for decisions regarding content moderation. "I'm a strong believer that any content produced by someone for the internet should be permanent until the original author chooses to delete it," Dorsey wrote. "It should be always available and addressable. Content takedowns and suspensions should not be possible." — AFP

## Twitter suspends account tracking...

Continued from Page 1

Sweeney attracted attention with his Twitter account that tracks the movements of the billionaire's plane and even rejected Musk's offer of \$5,000 to shut down @ElonJet, which had hundreds of thousands of followers.

Musk had gone public saying he would not touch the account after buying Twitter in a \$44 billion deal as part of his commitment to free speech at the platform. Flight-following websites and several Twitter accounts offer real-time views of air traffic, but that exposure draws pushback ranging from complaints to equipment seizures.

## 5 MPs call for sex segregation...

Continued from Page 1

major policies that it plans to achieve until 2026. The program is based on the introduction of major

## WHO eyes end to COVID, mpox...

Continued from Page 1

meet in January. Maria Van Kerkhove, the WHO's COVID-19 technical lead, said the committee would look at the epidemiology, variants like Omicron, and the impact of the virus.

While waves of infection are still expected, the pandemic "is not what it was in the beginning", with cases resulting in fewer hospitalizations and deaths, she said. "These deaths are largely happening among people who are not vaccinated," or have not received their full course of jabs, Van Kerkhove said. While the WHO says more than 13 billion vaccine doses have been administered, around 30 percent of the world has not received a single dose, she added.

Nearly 650 million confirmed COVID cases and more than 6.6 million deaths have been reported to the WHO, though the UN health agency acknowledges this will be a vast undercount. Tedros said that as the world looks to end the COVID emergency, which has upended economies and left millions suffering ongoing symptoms, it needs to understand how the pandemic began.

The first cases of COVID-19 were recorded in the Chinese city of Wuhan in Dec 2019. "We continue to call on China to share the data and conduct the stud-

political, economic, social and administrative reforms with a special focus on fighting corruption and graft in government agencies.

Also, the Assembly's interior and defense committee decided to postpone the debate on a draft law calling to change the country's election systems by accepting "lists" or parties in order to have more discussions with the government on the key reform bill. The Assembly decided to debate the draft law in its regular sessions next week. A large number of lawmakers support the proposed legislation.

ies that we have requested, to better understand the origins of this virus," Tedros said. "All hypotheses remain on the table," he said, adding that this includes the theory that the virus escaped from Wuhan's virology laboratories. WHO emergencies chief Michael Ryan said the organization could not simply stop engaging with Beijing "because you're not cooperating with us on the origins", as a huge chunk of the world's population live in China.

Tedros said the virus had been around so long, it was almost part of the family. "This virus will not go away. It's here to stay and all countries will need to learn to manage it alongside other respiratory illnesses," he said. The WHO's vaccines chief Kate O'Brien said that the current crop of COVID jabs do not prevent people from catching the virus to the level that had been hoped for. "We would love to have vaccines that are more effective against infection and transmission and have greater duration of protection," O'Brien said, calling for more ongoing investment in research and development.

On mpox — formerly known as monkeypox — Tedros said the global outbreak this year had taken the world by surprise. But like COVID, the emergency phase should be over within 12 months, he said. More than 82,000 cases have been reported from 110 countries, although the mortality rate has remained low, with 65 deaths. "Thankfully, the number of weekly reported cases has declined more than 90 percent since I declared a PHEIC in July," said Tedros. "If the current trend continues, we're hopeful that next year we'll also be able to declare an end to this emergency." — AFP

## International

# Tech giant Google says it does not manipulate search results

## Hong Kong anthem row rages

**HONG KONG:** Google said Thursday it does not manipulate search results, after Hong Kong's government said the tech giant had refused its demand to bury a popular protest song. The controversy began after it emerged that links to the pro-democracy song "Glory to Hong Kong" appeared ahead of China's official "March of the Volunteers" when people searched for the city's anthem.

The song was accidentally played for Hong Kong athletes at two international sports events last month, prompting the demand from the Chinese city to delist it from search results. "Google handles billions of search queries every day, so we build ranking systems to automatically surface relevant, high quality, and helpful information," the tech giant told AFP in response to a query about the anthem request. "We do not manually manipulate organic web listings to determine the ranking of a specific page," it said in a statement.

Hong Kong's security chief Chris Tang said Monday that Google had refused the city government's request. He described the company's explanation - that results were based on algorithms - as "evasive" and "inconceivable". Hong Kong leader John Lee said this week

that Google had a "moral obligation" to respect a country's national anthem, while the Chinese foreign ministry said internet companies "have a duty to deliver correct information to the public".

Google told AFP it was in contact with Hong Kong's government to explain "how our platforms and removal policies work". "We do not remove web results except for specific reasons outlined in our global policy documentation." Both Tang and Lee have argued that Google search results can be manipulated, citing the placement of ads and the deletion of certain results to comply with privacy laws in the European Union.

### 'Streisand effect'

Police have been asked to investigate whether the anthem mix-up in South Korea was a violation of the city's national security law, which Beijing imposed on Hong Kong in 2020 to crush dissent after democracy protests. Ronny Tong, a government adviser and lawyer, told local radio on Thursday that Google may be committing the national security crime of "assisting secession". Hong Kong-based data scientist Wong Ho-wa told AFP that the government's demands could be

met in theory "if changes are forcibly made" but it would be extremely complicated to modify the whole search engine structure. "Google would have to unindex certain search results but new content can be supplemented by third parties relentlessly," Wong said.

The more Hong Kong officials brought up the issue, Wong added, the higher the protest song would go in search results. Local journalists in Hong Kong have made a similar connection, with one asking Lee on Wednesday whether his administration was falling victim to the "Streisand effect" by which attempts to censor or hide something in fact draw more attention to the issue. "We will send our letters to Google again, to pursue this matter," Lee replied.

Google's search engine is banned in mainland China but is freely accessible in Hong Kong, where the firm also has an office. It was among tech companies that suspended cooperation with Hong Kong police on data requests after the security law came into effect. This year, YouTube - a Google subsidiary - terminated Lee's channel, citing US sanctions. Lee was among officials sanctioned by the United States in 2020 for their role in curtailing civil liberties in Hong Kong. — AFP



CALIFORNIA: A worker walks along a path at Google's Bay View campus in Mountain View, California. — AFP

## Iran blames US after being removed from UN rights body

**TEHRAN:** Iran on Thursday accused the United States of orchestrating its removal from a UN women's rights body over its response to protests triggered by death of Mahsa Amini. The Islamic republic has seen waves of protests since the September 16 death in custody of Amini, a young Iranian Kurd who had been arrested for allegedly violating the country's dress code for women. Hundreds of people have been killed and thousands arrested in the street violence, leading to international condemnation and Iran's removal Wednesday from the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UNCWSW).

Iran pointed the finger of blame at the United States, saying the move was a result of its arch-foe's concerted efforts and that it lacked "legal justification". "This one-sided action of the US... is an attempt to impose unilateral political demands and ignore electoral procedures in international institutions," foreign ministry spokesman Nasser Kanani said.

"Removing a legal member of the commission is a political heresy which discredits this international organization and also creates a unilateral procedure for future abuses of international institutions," he added. Iran, which was elected to the body in April for a four-year term, was stripped of its membership with immediate effect. A simple majority was needed to adopt the move, which was approved after 29 members of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) voted in favour, eight countries including Russia and China voted against and 16 abstained.

The text of the UN resolution said the Iranian authorities "continuously undermine and increasingly suppress the human rights of women and girls, including the right to freedom of expression and opinion, often with the use of excessive force." The head of Iran's high council for human rights, Kazem Gharibabadi, said the motive of the United States for supporting the resolution was to protect its own interests. The US "only pursues its inhumane and anti-human rights interests and goals" by issuing "false and hypocritical statements and comments" against Iran, he said in a Twitter post. — AFP

## Russia moms alone as draft exiles dads

**MOSCOW:** Wrapped up in brightly colored snowsuits, Yekaterina Filimonova cycles through Moscow's snow-blanketed streets with her three sons to their nursery. Her husband used to drop them off but not anymore. Now living in exile abroad, he fled after President Vladimir Putin announced in September that Russian men were being drafted en masse to fight in Ukraine. "He left and I got sick the next day. I was so stressed I didn't recover for a month," Filimonova, 34, told AFP.

Days after the call-up her husband Yaroslav Leonov grabbed his bike, took a train 1,500 kilometers to a city close to neighboring Kazakhstan and cycled over the border. "He didn't want to leave us," Filimonova said. But she is not the only one facing the new burden of raising children alone. The chaotic and hurried exodus of tens of thousands of military-aged men has torn apart families and piled pressure on mothers across Russia. There are no figures on the numbers of families impacted, but one nursery employee in Moscow told AFP on the condition of anonymity that around a third of the fathers in one group were abroad. "The first month was very sad of course. It was very hard for me and it was hard for the kids," Filimonova said. "When I'm upset, they get hysterical, they cry and they cry at night. And I realised that I have to pull myself together."

### Looking to history

The splintering in her family has got her thinking about her grandmother, who was separated from her geologist husband when he was sent to Mongolia for work. "I'm beginning to understand how she felt," Filimonova said. "I'd never thought about it before." Now in the Serbian capital Belgrade - a hub for exiled Russian IT workers - Leonov is struggling too. The software developer saw no other choice than to leave Russia in September, fearing he could be drafted. "I

## Fiji oppn calls for halt to counting after 'anomaly'

**SUVA:** Fiji's opposition on Thursday demanded counting stop in the coup-prone nation's bitterly fought general election, alleging serious "anomalies" that put the poll's legitimacy in doubt. Fiji, a tropical archipelago of more than 300 islands in the South Pacific, held a general election Wednesday - a vote seen as a test of the country's fledgling democracy. Incumbent Frank Bainimarama, who seized power in a putsch 16 years ago, is challenged by former Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka, a two-time coup leader nicknamed "Rambo". Voting day passed without major incident, but the count was marred by a late-night glitch that hid the tally from public view for four hours.

Rabuka had led in the first batches of results, lifting supporters' hopes of victory and raising the prospect of the first peaceful transition of power in two decades. But when the system was restored just before dawn on Thursday, he was trailing Bainimarama by a significant margin. Rabuka said the system had been compromised and ongoing counting should be scrapped. In a joint statement, four opposition leaders said the incident "called into serious question the integrity of the entire system".

Rabuka said he was also considering writing to the military to ensure the election was fair - but sought to assure the country that there "will not be a coup". "We will pursue every avenue available to us to make sure that the people are not denied their right of electing their government," Rabuka told AFP earlier. As he spoke, Rabuka thumbed through a copy of Fiji's constitution, which gives the military broad licence to safeguard Fiji's "well-being" and intervene if necessary.

### 'Nothing to hide'

Vote organizers have called the incident an "anomaly", and pointed to provisional results that most observers agreed were improbable. First returns showed a handful of little-known politicians gaining thousands of votes and polling well ahead of the major parties. Election supervisor Mohammed Saneem dismissed the concerns of vote rigging as "conspiracy theories" and invited media to view the national counting centre. "I have nothing to hide," he insisted, while ruling out an early stop to counting.

The clamor of objections became louder Thursday, with the leader of the Methodist Church - the largest Christian denomination in what is a deeply religious country - saying he had lost faith in the vote-counting system. "It is our hope that due prudence will be provided to those who seek justice," Reverend Ili Yunisuwai said in a statement posted to Facebook. Bainimarama, the media-shy ex-navy commodore who won elections in 2014 and 2018, has so far been silent on the controversy. The 97 members of the Multinational Observer Group present in Fiji to oversee vote counting have also avoided weighing in.

the electoral system.

Pravin Lal, 56, said he was happy to continue with the same government. Final results are not expected until Sunday and may be further delayed, but partial tallies showed the race is not yet over. Bainimarama's Fiji First party held around 45 percent of the vote, with more than half of the country's 2,071 polling stations counted. Rabuka's People's Alliance and its coalition partner - the National Federation Party - had just under 42 percent between them. Another potential coalition party is polling just under the five percent threshold to take a seat in parliament.



SUVA: Staff of the election office and scrutineers are seen at the Fijian Elections Office National Count Centre in Suva on December 15, 2022, after the provisional election results were released. — AFP

### Nervous wait

Fiji has endured four coups since 1987 and its institutions are again being tested. Pacific analyst Tess Newton Cain said the error "may undermine confidence in the elections as a whole". "It will quite likely undermine confidence in the office of elections, and Saneem as supervisor," added Newton Cain, from Griffith University's Pacific Hub. Opinions were split among voters at the vast open-air market on Suva's waterfront. Rabuka supporter Jone Nheamautu encouraged the challenge and said he did not "trust"

Bainimarama's broad support among Indo-Fijians and the fracturing of the Indigenous Fijian, or iTaukei, vote, could once again deliver him victory. The result of the election holds significance well beyond Fiji. Rabuka has signaled that Fiji - one of the most prosperous and influential nations in the South Pacific - could loosen its ties with China if he is elected. Fiji has grown closer to Beijing under Bainimarama, who used a "look north" policy to stabilize the economy after Australia and New Zealand hit the country with heavy trade sanctions in retaliation for his 2006 coup. — AFP

## UN peacekeeper killed in Lebanon

**AQIBYA:** An Irish member of the UN peacekeeping force monitoring south Lebanon near the Zionist entity's border was killed and three wounded after their convoy came under fire, UN and Irish sources said Thursday. Irish Prime Minister Micheal Martin said he was "deeply shocked and very saddened" by the loss of life. "A convoy of two armored utility vehicles carrying eight personnel travelling to Beirut came under small arms fire" late Wednesday, the Irish military said.

"Four personnel were taken to Raee Hospital, near Sidon as a result of the (2115 GMT) incident," the military said. "One soldier was pronounced dead on arrival at the hospital and another has undergone surgery and is in a serious condition. The other two soldiers are being treated for minor injuries."

UN peacekeeping force UNIFIL said the "incident" happened near the village of Al-Aqbiya, just outside the force's area of operations in a strip along Lebanon's southern border with Zionist entity. It said it had opened an investigation. An AFP photographer reported that a UNIFIL vehicle had slammed into a shop on the road towards Lebanon's main southern city of Sidon. Witnesses told AFP the vehicle had been blocked by villagers after it took a road along the Mediterranean coast not normally used by the UN force.

They said they had heard gunfire and the driver had appeared to lose control of the vehicle as the convoy attempted to leave the area. Irish Foreign Minister Simon Coveney expressed "profound sadness and a deep sense of shock" over the peacekeeper's death. Lebanon's caretaker Prime Minister Najib Mikati expressed his "deep regret following this painful incident" and underlined the "need to carry out the necessary inquiries to determine its circumstances and prevent its repetition".

### Mandate dispute

UNIFIL was set up in 1978 to monitor the withdrawal of Zionist entity's forces after they invaded Lebanon in

reprisal for a Palestinian attack. Now boasting nearly 10,000 troops, the UN force acts as a buffer between Zionist entity and Lebanon, which remain technically at war. Zionist entity withdrew from south Lebanon in 2000 but fought a devastating 2006 war with Lebanese militant group Hezbollah and its allies.

UNIFIL was beefed up to oversee the ceasefire that ended that war. Over the years there have been a number of incidents between Hezbollah supporters and the UN force in border areas loyal to the Iran-backed group. During the annual renewal of UNIFIL's mandate by the UN Security Council at the end of August, its terms of deployment were slightly altered. To the anger of Hezbollah, the new wording states that the force "is allowed to conduct its operations independently".

Previously, peacekeepers had routinely coordinated their patrols and other movements inside the area of operations with the Lebanese army. Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah condemned the changed rules as "a violation of Lebanese sovereignty" that served Zionist entity's interests. Hezbollah is the only one of Lebanon's armed group that was allowed to keep its weaponry after the 1975-91 civil war. — AFP



AQIBYA: Lebanese forces check the site where a UN peacekeeping force UNIFIL convoy came under small arms fire, in the village of Aqbiya in south Lebanon on December 15, 2022. — AFP



MOSCOW: Yekaterina Filimonova, 34, poses with her children in their apartment. Filimonova's husband Yaroslav Leonov fled after President Vladimir Putin announced in September that Russian men were being sent en masse to fight in Ukraine. — AFP

didn't want to play Russian roulette," he said. "Most likely, you'll win but there's a small chance of quite a dramatic end."

In Belgrade, he reunited with an old maths teacher who left Russia shortly after Putin sent troops to Ukraine on February 24. They are now renting an apartment together. But the relief of being safe has not eased the pain of separation. "Remote children are not the same as remote colleagues," he said, half-joking. "You cannot play with children remotely." In their cosy family apartment in Moscow, Filimonova gathers her sons so their father can read them a bed-time story in a video call.

She sent him photos of pages to read, while their young offspring hold the book, making faces at the computer. "I hope my children understand that their daddy is here, he loves them - even from Belgrade," he told AFP. Russia announced the end of mobilization in late October but many abroad fear a second wave and Yaroslav sees "risks" in returning. He is also questioning if there's "even anything to return to", with authorities imposing controls over the tech sector and "all aspects of reality." — AFP

# Business

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 16, 2022



LONDON: Healthcare workers hold placards at a picket line outside St Mary's Hospital in west London on December 15, 2022. UK nurses staged an unprecedented one-day strike as a "last resort" in their fight for better wages and working conditions. —AFP

## UK nurses stage unprecedented walkout

### UK currently grappling with cost-of-living crisis as spiralling inflation outstrips wage growth

LONDON: UK nurses on Thursday staged an unprecedented one-day strike as a "last resort" in their fight for better wages and working conditions, despite warnings it could put patients at risk.

Up to 100,000 members of the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland are stopping work from 0800 to 2000 GMT after rejecting a government pay offer. The RCN's industrial action is part of a growing wave of stoppages by public and private sector employees. Picket lines were being set up at major state-run hospitals, including Guy's and St Thomas NHS Foundation Trust in London.

Ameera, a senior nurse in London, told AFP that "we have not chosen industrial action lightly". The strike is the first in the Royal College of Nursing union's 106-year history. "We're tired. We're fed up," added the nurse, who asked that her last name not be reported. "We need a pay rise now to make a living."

The UK is currently grappling with a cost-of-living crisis as spiralling inflation outstrips wage growth. Union leaders and health workers also said nurses were being overworked due to staff short-

ages, as the state-run National Health Service (NHS) battled a backlog in appointments made worse by cancellations during the pandemic.

Chemotherapy, dialysis, intensive care and high-dependency units, as well as neonatal and paediatric intensive care will be protected. But other services will be reduced to Christmas staffing levels during the walk-out, the RCN said.

Saffron Cordery, interim chief executive of NHS Providers, said NHS trusts were "pulling out all the stops" to lessen the impact on patients. "The picture will vary across the country as trust leaders work out service levels with unions locally," she added.

#### Care concern

Health chiefs warned unions that care levels could suffer because of the walkout, just as seasonal respiratory conditions such as flu add pressure on already stretched services. Cally Palmer, national cancer director for England, called on the union to exempt cancer surgery from the walkout, while England's chief nursing officer expressed concern over the strike staffing plans.

"We hear from our colleagues that they are concerned by the assumption, implied by the RCN, that night duty staffing on day duty is safe," Ruth May wrote in a letter to the RCN. "Ward activities during the day are very different to those at night."

"This decision has the potential to significantly impact on the safety of patient care (for example, by impacting delivery of intravenous antibiotics on time, patient observations and medication rounds)," she added. Healthcare unions say their members are skipping meals, struggling to feed and clothe their families, and leaving the NHS in droves. The RCN wants a pay rise significantly above inflation which surged to a 41-year high of 11.1 percent in October, falling slightly to 10.7 percent last month. The government maintains the demands are unaffordable and Health Secretary Steve Barclay called the strikes "deeply regrettable".

#### Struggle

RCN general secretary Pat Cullen has offered to "press pause" on the strikes if Barclay agreed to talks. But Barclay insisted that while he was open to

talks on wider issues, the pay settlement was recommended by an independent review body and would not be reopened.

The NHS Pay Review Body recommended a pay rise of at least £1,400 (\$1,740) on top of a 3.0 percent pay rise last year, he said. "Further pay increases would mean taking money away from frontline services at a time when we are tackling record waiting lists as a result of the pandemic," he added.

The main opposition Labour party leader Keir Starmer called the strike a "badge of shame" for the ruling Conservative government. Accident and emergency staff nurse Mark Boothroyd, 37, said the cost-of-living crisis had left nurses struggling to pay bills, transport and rent.

Poor pay meant newly qualified nurses now spend only a year or two before leaving the profession, said Boothroyd, who works at St Thomas' Hospital in central London. The resulting unfilled vacancies have put huge pressure on remaining staff, many of whom were reporting mental health problems from stress. Conditions were "horrendous and cannot be allowed to go on", he added. —AFP

## Biden seeks principled Africa partnership as US businesses pour in

WASHINGTON: President Joe Biden called Wednesday for a long-term partnership with Africa rooted in good governance as US businesses unveiled billions of dollars led by tech investment for a continent where China has become a top player. Addressing a summit that brought 49 African leaders to the Washington cold, Biden avoided uttering China's name but made clear the United States would take a different approach.

At the first such gathering since Barack Obama invited African leaders in 2014, Biden said the United States sought "partnerships - not to create political obligation, to foster dependence, but to spur shared success and opportunity." "When Africa succeeds, the United States succeeds. Quite frankly, the whole world succeeds as well," the president said. The Biden administration is laying out more than \$55 billion in support over the three-day summit and on Wednesday welcomed US and African businesses, which promised more than \$15 billion in trade deals.

In an implicit contrast with China, which takes a hands-off approach in countries where it invests,

Biden highlighted "the core values that unite our people - all our people, especially young people: freedom, opportunity, transparency, good governance." Africa's economic transition, he said, "depends on good government, healthy populations and reliable and affordable energy." Biden stayed uncharacteristically brief, saying leaders likely wanted to see the World Cup, and watched a semi-final with the prime minister of Morocco, the first African nation to advance so far in the football tournament.

Biden later invited the leaders to the White House to a dinner of sea bass and black-eyed peas and a performance by Gladys Knight. In a toast, Biden spoke of the "unimaginable cruelty" of "my nation's original sin" - the enslavement of Africans - and hailed the contributions of the diaspora. "Our people lie at the heart of the deep and profound connection that forever binds Africa and the United States together," Biden said.

#### Pushing tech investment

China in the past decade has surpassed the United States on investing in Africa via highly visible infrastructure projects, often funded through loans that have totaled more than \$120 billion since the start of the century. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin on Tuesday warned African leaders that both China and Russia were "destabilizing" the continent, saying Beijing's mega-contracts lacked transparency. Biden announced a \$100 million aid package for clean ener-

gy and the White House unveiled another \$800 million in public and private financing for digital development in Africa. In one of the biggest corporate announcements, Visa said it would pump \$1 billion into Africa to develop digital payments - an area in which China has emerged as a global leader. —AFP

will take a similarly hawkish position against the markets and ruin any hope of a Santa rally this year."

The Fed also warned that the world's biggest economy would grow less than expected next year, fuelling fresh recession fears. Rising rates fan recession concerns because they push up loan repayments for consumers and companies, denting expenditure, investment and economic activity.

At the same time, however, the world's major central banks are seeking to dampen red-hot inflation, which has been fuelled partly by fallout from Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Recent official data painted a picture of slowing inflation in Britain and the United States, although consumer prices remain elevated.

"The interest rate hikes keep on coming and this trend is almost certainly going to remain intact in early 2023," noted AJ Bell investment director Russ Mould. "Raising rates makes it more expensive for consumers and businesses to borrow money and theoretically causes a reduction in spending and investment which should help to ease the economy and bring down prices. —AFP



WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden delivers remarks at the US - Africa Leaders Summit in Washington. The Summit brings together heads of state, government officials, business leaders, and civil society to strengthen ties between the US and Africa. —AFP

gy and the White House unveiled another \$800 million in public and private financing for digital development in Africa. In one of the biggest corporate announcements, Visa said it would pump \$1 billion into Africa to develop digital payments - an area in which China has emerged as a global leader. —AFP



WASHINGTON: Federal Reserve Board Chairman Jerome Powell speaks at a news conference after a Federal Open Market Committee meeting at the Federal Reserve Board Building in Washington. —AFP

## Germany to dodge recession in 2023

FRANKFURT: Germany will not fall into recession due to relief measures that have lowered energy costs, an institute forecast Thursday, the latest indication an economic shock will be milder than feared.

The German government and a string of think tanks previously predicted Europe's top economy will contract in 2023 after Russia's invasion of Ukraine stoked energy prices, sending inflation soaring.

But the influential IFW Kiel institute now expects gross domestic product to expand next year by 0.3 percent, an improvement from their earlier forecast of a drop of 0.7 percent. "Energy prices for businesses and consumers have risen less sharply than expected, partly as a result of government interventions," said the institute.

The centrepiece of government efforts is a 200-billion-euro (\$212-billion) support package, including a cap on gas prices for businesses and households. Energy costs skyrocketed after Russia sharply reduced crucial gas supplies as tensions soared over its invasion of Ukraine.

The IFW Kiel's Stefan Kooths said the economy could "breathe a sigh of relief" but warned that "no one should sit back in the face of massive risks, least of all economic policymakers". The energy crisis was still a heavy burden, with German economic output expected to be four percent lower at the end of 2022 and 2023 than it otherwise would have been, the institute said.

Other leading groups are starting to sound more optimistic about Germany's economic prospects. This week, the Ifo institute said the recession will be milder than expected, with economic output shrinking 0.1 percent in 2023.

And the ZEW institute's economic expectations index gained 13.4 points compared to November—the third consecutive increase after months of decline. —AFP

## Equities sink on Fed outlook

LONDON: Global stocks sank Thursday and the dollar rose after the US Federal Reserve hiked interest rates again and signalled they would go higher to fight inflation. Markets were also on tenterhooks ahead of expected rate increases from the Bank of England and the European Central Bank.

Both are expected to mirror the Fed's half-point hike to tackle soaring inflation, after rate increases also in Norway and Switzerland. Sentiment was hammered Thursday after the Fed suggested that it saw US rates topping out next year at 5.1 percent, higher than markets had predicted.

"Equity markets are back in the red... as investors reel from the nasty shock delivered by the Fed and look ahead to central bank rate decisions on the agenda today," said Oanda analyst Craig Erlam. "The question now becomes whether other central banks



Business

# ECB to follow Fed with smaller rate hike

## More rate increases needed to return inflation to the bank's 2% target



FRANKFURT: File photo shows Christine Lagarde, President of the European Central Bank (ECB) holds a news conference following the meeting of the governing council of the ECB in Frankfurt am Main, western Germany. - AFP

FRANKFURT: The European Central Bank is expected to follow the US Federal Reserve's lead on Thursday and opt for a smaller interest rate hike, analysts said, on signs that red-hot inflation is finally easing.

The ECB has been hiking rates at what president Christine Lagarde has called "the fastest pace ever" to bring down record-high inflation after Russia's war in Ukraine sent food and energy costs soaring. But following two straight increases of 75 basis points, policymakers in Frankfurt are tipped to downshift to a 50 basis-point rate hike in their final meeting of 2022.

Analysts say policymakers may point to the latest inflation data to justify a slower pace, which showed eurozone consumer prices unexpectedly decelerating in November for the first time in 17 months, to 10 percent.

The early Christmas present could "take away some of the urgency to continue with jumbo rate hikes", said ING bank economist Carsten Brzeski, even if a 75-basis-point hike is "still on the table". The ECB's chief economist Philip Lane hinted at a slightly less aggressive pace last week when he said it was "likely we are close to peak inflation". And although more rate increases would be needed to return inflation to the bank's two-percent target, Lane said "a lot has been done already". A half-point move would mirror the action taken by the US Federal Reserve on Wednesday, after four previous 75-point hikes.

In a key week for central bankers, Ipek Ozkardeska, senior analyst at Swissquote Bank, predicted "a deluge of 50 basis-point hikes", with the Bank of England likely opting for its own half-point rise on Thursday. The BoE had in early November announced its biggest hike in 33 years to fight sky-high inflation that it warned was pushing Britain into a recession that could last until mid-2024.

### Recession fears

Central bankers around the world are walking a fine line between raising borrowing costs to cool inflation, without dampening demand so much it triggers an economic downturn. The ECB's three main interest rates are currently sitting in a range of between 1.5 and 2.25 percent. The bank's next rate move will be guided by the latest economic forecasts, to be released on Thursday, including its first-ever inflation estimate for 2025. The new forecasts are also expected to show the eurozone economy contracting in the final quarter of 2022 and first quarter of 2023 — meeting the technical definition of a recession.

But analysts say the winter recession could be a mild one, in part thanks to European governments unleashing massive support packages to steer households and businesses through the energy crisis. Berenberg Bank economist Holger Schmieding urged the ECB not to "overdo its response to inflation", warning that further

aggressive rate hikes could make the recession "even more painful". ECB policymakers will also be taking a close look at wage growth in weighing their next steps, although analysts say the dreaded "wage-price spiral" has not yet materialised in the eurozone. Lagarde however may face questions at her afternoon press conference on the ECB's own rumbling pay dispute, after staff voiced unhappiness over a proposed below-inflation salary increase in January.

### Excess liquidity

In line with its monetary policy tightening, the ECB will on Thursday shed more light on plans to slim down the bank's massive balance sheet. It has already toughened the terms of an ultra-cheap bank loan scheme, aimed at keeping credit flowing during the pandemic, in a bid to incentivise early repayment of so-called TLTRO loans. The move appears to be paying off, with eurozone lenders handing back around 750 billion euros (\$790 billion) in TLTRO cash since October. Analysts are also eager to hear how and when the ECB plans to start shrinking its five-trillion-euro bond portfolio, after years of hoovering up government and corporate debt.

The ECB has already indicated that the process of "quantitative tightening"—letting the bonds mature or actively selling them—would be gradual and predictable to avoid spooking financial markets. — AFP

## US political world seeks distance from donor Bankman-Fried

WASHINGTON: After years of benefitting from the enormous contributions of FTX founder Sam Bankman-Fried-accused of massive financial fraud—America's political elite are now skittering away, eager to put distance between themselves and the disgraced cryptocurrency darling.

The 30-year-old tycoon—currently detained in the Bahamas awaiting US extradition proceedings—had in recent years become one of the largest public donors to the Democratic Party, and claimed to have privately donated an equal amount to the Republican camp too.

Recipients reach as far into the US political world as President Joe Biden, whose 2020 campaign accepted more than \$5 million in donations from Bankman-Fried. Asked about the situation Tuesday, White House spokeswoman Karine Jean-Pierre deflected. "I'm limited on what I can say," she said, in reference to a law that prohibits her from discussing political matters in her official capacity. The former head of the now-bankrupt cryptocurrency exchange platform was

charged in the United States Wednesday with money laundering, violating campaign finance laws and wire fraud. He is accused of making risky investments with clients' money and fraudulently influencing the political sphere with his offerings.

"Samuel Bankman-Fried and his co-conspirators made millions of dollars in political contributions funded by (his other company) Alameda Research to federal political candidates and committees in advance of the 2022 election," New York prosecutor Damian Williams said in a statement, referencing a practice which is allowed in the United States. But he made those contributions in a way that was designed "to evade contribution limits and reporting requirements," the statement added.

### 'Dirty money'

According to the prosecutor, Bankman-Fried made these donations in such a way that they would appear to be coming from wealthy associates, instead of him directly. "All of this dirty money was used in service of Bankman-Fried's desire to buy bipartisan influence and impact the direction of public policy in Washington," Williams said during a press conference.

A search for Bankman-Fried on the US Federal Election Commission's website shows 213 donations since 2020, including a September 2020 contribution



NASSAU: FTX founder Sam Bankman-Fried (2nd L) is led away handcuffed by officers of the Royal Bahamas Police Force in Nassau, Bahamas. — AFP

for \$5 million to a pro-Biden political group, and another for \$50,000 in October of that year to the "Biden Victory Fund." The vast majority of those publicly declared donations were allocated to Democratic groups or candidates. But Bankman-Fried, who made several media appearances and statements over the last several months as FTX took on water, insisted during a November interview with cryptocurrency expert Tiffany Fong that he had "donated about the same amount to both parties." — AFP

## Swiss central bank lifts rate by 50 basis points to 1%

BERN: Switzerland's central bank on Thursday hiked its key interest rate by 50 basis points despite the slowdown in Swiss inflation. The bank has joined a global tightening of monetary policy to tame inflation, with further rate rises expected from the European Central Bank and Bank of England later on Thursday.

The US Federal Reserve on Wednesday announced a smaller rate hike of half a percentage point but signalled it expected more increases in the future. The Swiss National Bank said in a statement that it was raising its policy rate to 1.0 percent to counter "increased inflationary pressure and a further spread of inflation". Swiss inflation reached 3.0 percent in November, down from the 29-year high of 3.5 percent in August. The central bank said, however, inflation was "likely to remain elevated for the time being". The bank also revised its forecast for inflation, predicting average annual inflation of 2.9 percent in 2022 and 2.4 percent in 2023. — AFP



شركة الصفاة للاستثمار  
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# KUWAIT BOURSA WEEKLY REPORT

WEEK ENDED ON 15 DECEMBER 2022

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No.	Ticker	Sector	Price Movement & Performance										Valuation Multiples *				
			Open Price	Close Price	Week High	Week Low	Range	Volume	WTD Change	WTD %	YTD %	Support Level	Resistance Level	P/E	P/B	Yield	Beta
101	National Bank of Kuwait	Banking	1,097	1,087	1,105	1,076	29	26,040,015	-7	-0.64%	14.48%	1,080	1,100	18.1	2.11	2.2%	1.01
102	Gulf Bank	Banking	330	321	332	321	11	8,346,158	-7	-2.13%	20.81%	321	329	17.1	1.48	2.0%	1.26
106	Kuwait International Bank	Banking	199	194	200	194	6	10,117,667	-5	-2.51%	-7.45%	194	203	35.3	0.62	2.0%	1.16
107	Burgan Bank	Banking	225	221	226	221	5	798,632	-4	-1.78%	-7.55%	217	222	22.3	0.81	2.1%	1.28
108	Kuwait Finance House	Banking	848	828	853	824	29	63,777,985	-22	-2.59%	9.47%	815	840	28.1	3.44	1.3%	1.16
109	Boubyan Bank	Banking	824	816	828	800	28	4,549,174	-5	-0.61%	14.55%	813	822	52.6	3.21	0.6%	1.09
204	National Investments	Financial Services	252	249	257	245	12	1,517,603	-2	-0.80%	13.70%	248	257	18.1	1.00	18.3%	1.86
205	Kuwait Projects	Financial Services	117	113	119	113	6	21,467,776	-4	-3.42%	-20.42%	110	116	-	0.58	4.4%	0.98
252	Al Intiaz Investment	Financial Services	75	75.2	76	74	1	2,369,242	0	0.00%	-36.27%	72.8	78	-	0.45	12.0%	1.23
401	Kuwait Real Estate	Real Estate	110	107	111	107	4	16,118,168	-3	-2.73%	-38.43%	106	111	15.9	0.80	2.7%	1.09
413	Mabaneer	Real Estate	858	859	859	840	19	2,504,852	5	0.59%	14.82%	850	875	17.6	1.88	1.6%	1.03
501	National Industries	Financial Services	236	225	238	225	13	19,567,559	-10	-4.26%	-6.62%	221	232	11.6	1.02	4.8%	1.50
505	Gulf Cable	Industrials	1,269	1,198	1,269	1,151	118	331,014	-72	-5.67%	37.54%	1,176	1,202	11.6	1.16	5.0%	1.01
514	Boubyan Petrochemical	Basic Materials	811	801	819	770	49	1,337,546	-4	-0.50%	-5.99%	790	820	8.5	1.60	7.4%	0.94
603	Agility	Industrials	759	717	764	717	47	18,225,684	-43	-5.66%	-8.95%	687	728	48.2	1.35	2.3%	1.56
605	Zain	Telecommunications	582	572	585	571	14	15,250,413	-10	-1.72%	-3.87%	571	580	13.3	2.08	5.7%	0.77
623	Human Soft Holding	Industrials	3,332	3,377	3,400	3,305	95	1,281,673	-11	-0.32%	4.75%	3,350	3,400	7.1	3.39	11.9%	0.67
642	ALAFCO	Industrials	213	206	219	206	13	27,593,228	-6	-2.83%	-5.50%	206	217	-	0.78	0.0%	1.18
654	JAZEERA	Consumer Discretionary	1,790	1,816	1,816	1,748	68	789,384	69	3.95%	40.78%	1,780	1,820	13.5	10.49	2.6%	1.44
821	Warba Bank	Banking	243	235	243	233	10	13,584,253	-7	-2.89%	-14.23%	229	240	23.7	1.29	0.0%	1.09
823	Mezzan Holding	Consumer Staples	423	395	423	390	33	4,323,842	-19	-4.59%	-31.60%	380	405	-	1.29	3.9%	0.48
824	Integrated Holding	Industrials	345	348	351	344	7	2,638,741	2	0.58%	-5.95%	345	358	22.5	1.41	2.9%	0.76
826	Shamal Az-Zour	Utilities	190	188	192	188	4	2,032,541	-2	-1.05%	-17.54%	188	193	15.6	1.76	9.5%	0.48
827	Boursa Kuwait	Financial Services	2,282	2,129	2,319	2,085	234	656,937	-161	-7.03%	5.40%	2,106	2,150	22.4	6.89	3.0%	0.96
830	AL GHANIM	Consumer Discretionary	807	811	822	806	16	960,310	-1	-0.12%	-8.26%	800	830	11.7	4.09	5.8%	0.54

\* As of end of week closing

## Business

# EU vows investment in push to boost southeast Asia ties

## EU's diplomatic push to galvanise global front against Russia's invasion

**BRUSSELS:** The EU vowed billions of dollars of investment in southeast Asia Wednesday, as leaders looked to bolster ties at a summit in the face of the Ukraine war and challenges from China. The European Union billed its first full summit with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in Brussels as a chance to push trade relations with the region's fast-growing economies.

"There might be many, many miles that divide us, but there are much more values that unite us," European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen told the gathered leaders. But different opinions over Russia's war in Ukraine and concerns about tensions with China over a key shipping route for global trade loomed over the meeting.

The EU has been on a diplomatic push to galvanise a global front against Moscow as its invasion has sent economic and political shock waves around the world. ASEAN's 10 nations-nine of which were represented, after Myanmar's junta was not invited-have been divided in their response to the Kremlin's war on Ukraine.

Singapore has gone along with Western sanctions on Russia, while Vietnam and Laos, which have close military ties to Moscow, have remained more neutral. Along with Thailand, they abstained from a United Nations vote in October condemning Russia's attempted annexation of regions of Ukraine seized since February.

The diverging views led to intense wrangling over a declaration from the summit as the EU pushed for stronger language to condemn Moscow. The final statement said "most members" decried Russia's war, but conceded there were also "other views and different assessments".

### China looms

While Europe pressed for a tougher response to Russia, another global giant figured prominently at the summit. Chinese claims over the South China Sea have set it against some neighbours and sparked fears in Europe over trade flows through the key global thoroughfare. But China remains the biggest trade partner for ASEAN and many in the region are wary of distancing themselves from their giant neighbour.

The EU is keen to pitch itself as a reliable partner for southeast Asia's dynamic economies amid the growing rivalry between Beijing and Washington. The EU and ASEAN are each other's third-largest trading partner and Europe sees the region as a key source for raw materials and wants to increase access to its booming markets.

EU nations are pushing to diversify key supply chains away from China as the war in Ukraine has highlighted Europe's vulnerabilities. Von der Leyen offered an investment package over the next five years worth 10 billion euros (\$10.6 billion) under the EU's Global Gateway strategy designed as a counterweight to China's largesse.

But ASEAN leaders insisted they would not be forced to make a choice between the global players competing for influence. "We absolutely refuse to go back to the situation of the Cold War where we have to pick sides in terms of who the superpower is that we are aligned with," said Filipino President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.

### Sex law furor

ASEAN and the EU suspended their push for a joint trade deal over a decade ago-but the bloc's



**BRUSSELS:** (From L to R) Philippines' President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., Cambodian Prime minister Hun Sen, President of the European Council Charles Michel and President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen hold a press conference during the EU-ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) summit at the European Council headquarters in Brussels. —AFP

top officials said they hoped to relaunch efforts for a broad agreement. So far deals with Vietnam and Singapore are in place, and the EU is looking now to make progress with ASEAN's largest economy Indonesia and to resume talks with Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand.

One issue that had risked clouding discussions was a new law in Indonesia criminalising sex outside

marriage that has sparked fears for foreign visitors to the country. But Indonesia's President Joko Widodo pointedly insisted that the EU-ASEAN relationship needed to be based more on "equality".

"There must be no imposition of views," he said. "There must not be one who dictates over the other and thinks that my standard is better than yours." —AFP

## Arab GDP expected to grow by 5.4% to exceed \$3.4tn by end of 2022

**KUWAIT:** The Arab Investment & Export Credit Guarantee Corporation (Dhahran) revealed that the Arab gross domestic product (GDP) is expected to grow by 5.4 percent to exceed \$3.4 trillion during 2022, according to the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) estimates in October 2022, in spite of the fall of global economic growth to 3.2 percent. It noted that the Arab economy is expected to maintain its positive growth during 2023, but at a slower pace to 3.9 percent to reach around \$3.5 trillion, in light of the continued Russian-Ukrainian war and an expected drop in global oil prices by roughly 13 percent during 2023.

In a press release issued to announce the issuance of its fourth quarterly bulletin for 2022, the corporation said Arab economy performance improvement during 2022 is due to thriving Arab trade in goods and services and a rise of 41.4 percent in global oil prices, coinciding with the increase in oil production by 11.5 percent in the Arab oil countries in addition to the growth of non-oil sectors in some Arab countries and the continued industrial production expansion, beside the growth of total investment by 12.5 percent in the Arab region during the same year.

The corporation added in the editorial of its bulletin that most of the Arab economic performance indicators improved during 2022 compared to 2021, as the GDP per capita in Arab countries rose by 16.8 percent to reach \$7,690 on average, with expectations to decline to \$7,614 on average during 2023. Meanwhile, the average of GDP per capita in the purchasing power parity went up to roughly \$17,061 during 2022, with expectations to keep rising to \$18,020 during 2023.

### Improvement in other indicators comes as follows:

- Average crude oil production in the Arab oil countries went up by 11.5 percent to 24.6 million barrels per day during 2022, and crude oil exports rose by 15 percent to 19.2 million barrels per day. Average gas production in Arab oil-exporters increased by 3.9 percent to 12.2 million barrels of oil equivalent per day, and gas exports hiked by 3 percent to 4.9 million barrels of oil equivalent per day.
- Arab budget performance improved during 2022, achieving an estimated combined surplus of \$119.5 billion during 2022, making up 3.5 percent of Arab GDP.
- Debt indicators improved, as the ratio of government debts to GDP in Arab countries fell to 48.2 percent, with expectations of further decline to 47.6 percent during 2023 and the external debt ratio declined to 54 percent of Arab GDP, with expectations to keep declining to 49.5 percent during 2023.
- Arab foreign trade in goods and services saw a record growth rate of 29 percent to exceed \$3 trillion in 2022 as a result of the growth of exports by 37.2 percent and imports by 19.1 percent, thus achieving an estimated surplus of \$461 billion in the Arab trade balance during 2022, an increase of 141 percent, compared to 2021.
- The current account surplus of Arab countries during 2022 rose by 205 percent to hit \$369.8 billion, making up 10.7 percent of Arab GDP, with expectations to fall to \$294 billion during 2023 and its ratio to GDP will decline to 8.4 percent during the same year.
- Arab foreign currency reserves exceeded \$1183 billion, which are enough to cover Arab imports of goods and services for over 10 months.

In this context, the corporation urges the member states to step up efforts and cooperation in view of finance, trade and investment in light of global economic slowness, the continued Russian-Ukrainian war, rising and volatile prices of goods, specifically food, and stringent financial conditions. It also reaffirmed that it would continue its role of backing trade and investment in the Arab region by providing its services of insurance against political and commercial risks with a view to maximizing the benefits of member states and the peoples of the region.

## China's retail sales plunge on COVID woes

**BEIJING:** China's retail sales plunged last month, official data showed Thursday, as COVID restrictions and a property market crisis hammered the world's second-largest economy.

The figures highlight the work ahead for the government as it moves away from almost three years of strict containment measures that have whittled growth and sent shudders through supply chains.

November retail sales sank 5.9 percent on-year, marking the second successive contraction, according to data released by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). The figure was also much worse than the four percent shrinkage forecast in a survey by Bloomberg News.

The data also showed industrial production grew 2.2 percent on-year last month, less than half October's rate, while unemployment rose 0.1 percentage point to 5.6 percent. China was the last major economy persisting with a zero-COVID strategy through harsh lockdowns and mass testing, with authorities effectively abandoning the policy only last week after suffering an economic slowdown and mounting public anger.

November saw some of the highest infection numbers ever recorded in China, with as much as a quarter of the population under some form of lockdown by the end of the month, according to analysts' estimates.

"In November, local outbreaks spread to most provinces across the country, residents' travel decreased and consumption scenarios were restricted," NBS statistician Fu Jiaqi said in a statement. "The sales of non-essential goods and gathering-based con-

## Philippine Congress passes \$2 billion wealth fund bill

**MANILA:** Philippine legislators endorsed on Thursday a proposed law to create a \$2 billion sovereign wealth fund but slashed its planned initial capital following public fears of corruption. President Ferdinand Marcos has called for a swift passage of the bill, filed by his son and a cousin, to enable the debt-laden government to earn extra funds to finance huge infrastructure projects.

The Senate must pass a counterpart bill for the measure to become law. The version of the "Maharlika Investment Fund" passed by the House of Representatives on a second reading on Thursday will have two state banks initially providing a total of 75 billion pesos (\$1.3 billion).

Central bank profits, which the bill's authors estimate at 35 billion pesos this year, will make up the balance. The total is far smaller than an earlier ver-

## EU faces subsidy race with US in trade spat

**BRUSSELS:** EU leaders met in Brussels on Thursday at a summit focusing on a trade dispute with key ally the United States that threatens to trigger a subsidy race between the economic superpowers. French President Emmanuel Macron said a European response was needed "to maintain fair competition", one which "allows us to match what the Americans are doing".

The European bloc is unsettled by parts of a multi-



**SHANGHAI:** This picture shows an empty shopping mall amid the COVID-19 pandemic in Shanghai. —AFP

sumption were significantly affected," Fu said.

"While the move away from zero-COVID lays the groundwork for an eventual recovery in activity down the line, the transition period will prove quite disruptive," Julian Evans-Pritchard and Zichun Huang, economists at Capital Economics, said in a note on Thursday. The economists predicted subdued economic performance in December and warned of declined activity as "many households try to minimise in-person interactions during the reopening wave of infections".

But "reopening is happening much faster than the market expected two months ago, hence the transi-

sion of the bill that envisioned a 275 billion-peso fund, mostly capitalised by two state-run pension funds.

The House abandoned that version in the face of public opposition. Business groups, opposition leaders and other critics had warned the fund could deplete worker pensions and stoke corruption through reckless investment decisions.

Marcos said in a letter to House Speaker Martin Romualdez the fund would be "a strategic mechanism for strengthening the investment activities of top performing government financial institutions, and thus pump-prime economic growth and social development".

The word "maharlika", meaning "nobility", is widely associated with Marcos's late father, who presided over widespread human rights abuses and corruption during his two decades in power. The elder Marcos was ousted in 1986 but no one in the clan has been jailed.

Marcos Sr claimed to have led an anti-Japanese guerrilla unit called Ang Mga Maharlika during World War II, but he has been accused of lying about his war record. "The Maharlika Investment Fund could be a magnet for corruption," opposition Congressman

billions-dollar US Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) that lavishes subsidies and tax cuts for US purchasers of electric vehicles-if they "Buy American". The European Commission sees that as discriminatory against European car manufacturers, a breach of World Trade Organization rules, and a threat to investment in Europe.

It is urging the EU leaders to sign off on a plan that would loosen state aid rules and boost public investment in cleaner energy. Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen said in a pre-summit letter to the leaders that the measures were needed because of the IRA provisions that "risk un-leveling the playing field and discriminating against European companies".

While Thursday's summit was also to examine Russia's continuing war in Ukraine, and the fall-out in Europe, von der Leyen's Vice President Margrethe

tion period is likely to be shorter," Zhiwei Zhang, chief economist at Pinpoint Asset Management, wrote in emailed comments Thursday.

Chinese leaders have set an annual economic growth target of about 5.5 percent, but many observers think the country will struggle to hit it, despite announcing a better-than-expected 3.9 percent expansion in the third quarter.

A crisis rippling through China's massive property sector has also weighed on the economy, with developers defaulting on loans and struggling to raise cash after Beijing imposed widespread lending curbs in 2020. —AFP



President Ferdinand Marcos

Edcel Lagman told the House in a debate this week as he fought to block the bill's passage.

Lagman said the fund, as passed by the House, would be "the smallest in the world". He said much larger sovereign wealth funds in other countries were typically seeded by surplus revenues, such as windfall government profits from natural resources. —AFP

Vestager warned: "We already have war in Europe. The last thing we need is a trade war on top."

Macron and the commission have tried to persuade US President Joe Biden to change the contentious parts of the IRA, to no avail apart from receiving promises of some "tweaks". Biden and his administration believe the EU is free to come up with its own subsidy arrangement for electric vehicles-a sector in which China has outsized advantages when it comes to batteries and rare-earth supplies.

There were some concerns among EU countries that the bloc's main car-exporting nation, Germany, might go it alone with its own subsidies, as it already did with measures on energy. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said he and his counterparts "will talk about the competitiveness and future viability of our economy" in light of the US IRA. —AFP

Lifestyle | Features

## Black Colombian army major breaks ranks by wearing natural hair

**A** Colombian army major, Martha Estrada, has made history by becoming the first Black police-woman to wear her hair unstraightened while on duty, a symbolic advancement in the country's battle against discrimination. Colombian security forces regulations have prevented Black women from wearing their curly hair in a natural style. But Estrada, an aide to the country's first Black vice president, Francia Marquez, caught observers by surprise when she appeared at a promotion ceremony wearing dense curls.

"We are proud. (Black people's hair) is a matter of birth and having to change it marks a lack of recognition of ethnic diversity and our health," Estrada said Wednesday in an interview with Blu Radio. It was the Ministry of Defense itself that released a handout image of Estrada receiving the rank of major, with her curls in the air and not wearing a quepis, the traditional, flat circular military cap that makes

up the Colombian army uniform. The hat is not designed "aesthetically or structurally" to be worn by Afro-Colombian women, Marquez's office explained in a statement. Black people represent about 10 percent of Colombia's population of 50 million. Estrada confessed she had previously used creams with "obviously harmful chemicals" to straighten her hair in order to "comply with the regulations."

For six years, she together with other officers requested the official uniform be modified, a bid that was only recently granted by Colombia's first Black vice president. Marquez, part of the first leftist government in Colombia's history, was "surprised" at the regulation and interceded with the Ministry of Defense to ease the requirement, Estrada said. "Our institution is in a process of transformation," she added, saying it is carrying out necessary steps to accommodate "a multi-ethnic country." —AFP



This handout picture released by the Colombian Ministry of Defense shows Colombian Defense Minister Ivan Velasquez (left) talking with National Police Major Martha Chaverra, aide-de-camp of Vice-President Francia Marquez, during a promotion ceremony in Bogota. —AFP photos

## tWitch, Ellen DeGeneres DJ, dies in apparent LA suicide

**S**tephen "tWitch" Boss, the DJ from "The Ellen DeGeneres Show," has died, his wife has said, in what Los Angeles media reported was an apparent suicide. Entertainment website TMZ said the DJ and dancer was found in a hotel in the city on Tuesday with what appeared to be a self-inflicted gunshot wound. The outlet said the 40-year-old's wife, Allison Holker, had contacted police because she was concerned for her husband. His body was discovered a short time later.

"It is with the heaviest of hearts that I have to share my husband Stephen has left us," Holker, 34, said, according to multiple media. "Stephen lit up every room he stepped into. He valued family, friends and community above all else, and leading with love and light was everything to him. He was the backbone of our family, the best husband and father, and an inspiration to

his fans." A spokesman for Los Angeles Police Department said officers had responded to a call mid-morning Tuesday involving the death of a man.

The Los Angeles County coroner's office said an autopsy was due to be carried out on 40-year-old Stephen Boss, who they said died Tuesday at a "hotel/motel." Boss became a fixture on "The Ellen DeGeneres Show" after he joined in 2014. He stayed with the program until it ended this year. —AFP



Stephen Boss attends Critics Choice Association's 5th Annual Celebration of Black Cinema & Television at Fairmont Century Plaza in Los Angeles, California. —AFP



This undated and unlocated handout picture released by streaming platform Netflix shows Prince Harry and Meghan, The Duke and Duchess of Sussex, in a photo booth. —AFP

## 'Gloves off' as Prince Harry takes aim at brother in Netflix series

**P**rince Harry looked set to turn his fire on his brother William on Thursday, as Netflix airs the final episodes of the docuseries about the disgruntled royal and his wife Meghan. One trailer for the last three installments of "Harry & Meghan", released last week, already escalated the row between the brothers, who are reportedly now no longer on speaking terms. In an apparent reference to Buckingham Palace, Harry, 38, accused his family of "institutional gaslighting" and claimed they were "happy to lie to protect my brother but were never willing to tell the truth to protect us".

Another trailer, released on Wednesday saw Meghan's lawyer, Jenny Afia, alleging a briefing war against the couple by the palace "to suit other people's agendas". Meghan's friend Lucy Fraser added: "Meg became this scapegoat for the palace. And so they would feed stories on her whether they were true or not to avoid other less favorable stories being printed."

Afia said the "barrage of negative articles" about the breakdown of Meghan's relationship with her father was "the final straw in a campaign of negative, nasty coverage about her". Harry and Meghan, 41, sensationally quit royal life in early 2020 and moved to North America, from where they have launched a series of broadsides about the royal family. In the first three episodes released last Thursday, the couple-also known as the Duke and Duchess of Sussex-criticized the royal family for "unconscious" racial bias.

They accused the palace of failing to protect Meghan and Harry's mother Diana against tabloid excesses. Most of their criticisms were directed at the media. But direct mention of William, 40, in the latest trailer confirmed suspicions that the more

pointed criticisms may have been saved for last.

Daily Mail royal correspondent Rebecca English said "the gloves are off" while her counterpart at ITV, Chris Ship, said, "It's getting dirty." Suggestions that his brother and his entourage were to blame for the negative coverage that Harry and Meghan received was "a dramatic escalation", he added.

### 'Business as usual'

So far the palace has declined to respond to the program and disputed claims by Netflix that they were approached to comment on the contents of the series. Senior royals, led by Harry's father King Charles III, are expected to attend a Christmas carol concert on Thursday in a demonstration of "business as usual". But commentators suggested they may be forced to act if criticism gets personal, as Harry and Meghan faced calls to give up their royal titles-or have them removed.

Last week, Harry appeared to take a dig at his older brother and his wife Catherine. "With many people in the family, especially the men, there can be a temptation or an urge to marry someone who would fit in the mould," he said. Netflix said last week's episodes recorded 81.55 million viewing hours globally—"the highest view hours of any documentary title in a premiere week".

Several British newspapers said the docuseries was an effective declaration of "war" by the couple. They have already faced claims of trying to sabotage William's first trip to the United States as heir with the release of the first trailer.

A December 9 YouGov poll indicated that the docuseries, which comes three months after the death of Queen Elizabeth II, had further dented Harry and Meghan's popularity in the UK. Harry and Meghan saw their negative ratings with the British public fall to -26 percent and -39 percent after the programs, from -13 percent and -32 percent before. Only Harry's disgraced uncle Prince Andrew, who earlier this year settled a US civil claim for sexual assault out of court without admitting liability, was less popular. He had a -79 percent rating. —AFP

## It's no joke: Across globe, satire morphs into misinformation

**I**s a US state considering a tax on breathing? Did insect repellent manufacturers recruit a Ugandan man for his mosquito-killing f\*\*\*s? Satire, parody and jokes packed with absurdity typically draw laughter, but around the world they are too often mistaken as real, prompting fact-checkers to debunk what they call a leading source of misinformation despite pushback from their publishers.

Several satirical outlets mimic legitimate media websites, often sowing confusion among readers with what appear to be typical news articles but are in fact fabricated stories. Sometimes even with disclaimers clearly marking their articles as satire, many readers take them at face value. "Satire can mislead more than you'd think," Shannon Poulsen, who researches the link between humor and misinformation at Ohio State University, told AFP.

"Given that I find new examples of people falling for it every day, I'd say it is a notable and consequential form of misinformation." The humorous fiction often makes the internet erupt with laughter, but researchers are not laughing about its potential to fool the public, which sometimes includes media organizations.

## SATIRE

### Debunking humor

In September, during a live broadcast on France's CNews television channel, presenter Pascal Praud attributed to the country's energy minister remarks that were invented by a parody Twitter account. A version of the article about the man with the "deadly fa\*\*\*s", which AFP traced to a parody website, was published by the British tabloid The Sun and drew thousands of interactions on Facebook.

The one about the Qatar World Cup, published last month by the satirical section of Germany's Die Welt newspaper, was widely shared as authentic news on Facebook, Telegram and Twitter. In the United States, stories by the popular satirical website The Onion are so often mistaken as real that online forums have sprung up to ridicule those who fall for them. But despite such errors, satirists have lashed out at fact-checking websites for debunking their content.

In September, the Indian satirical website Fauxy served a legal notice to the Mumbai-based fact-checker Boom Live, accusing it of damaging its reputation after it labeled one of its articles fake. Boom's editor Jency Jacob contends the action was necessary as many gullible readers were sharing it on social media as legitimate news. "We usually avoid debunking satire as we believe it is a valid form of expression," Jacob told AFP. "But we have done it when we felt it was created without adequate disclaimers and if the satire was widely believed to be true."

### 'Key frustration'

Platforms such as Facebook and Instagram say they reduce the circulation, visibility-and potential for profit-of links that are labeled misinformation. But some websites peddling misinformation skirt the barrier by labeling their content satire, researchers say. Still, the restriction has faced pushback from American satirical websites such as Babylon Bee, which last year accused Facebook of suppressing its content with a drastic decline in reach and engagement.

That followed a 2018 tussle over a Babylon Bee article flagged as false on Facebook, which researchers said highlighted the thin line between satire and misinformation. "Satire should not be treated as misinformation-that appears to be a key part in the frustration from satirical sites," Poulsen said. "We should communicate the satirical intention of a message because it reduces the chances people misinterpret satire as real. But many satirists do not want satire to be labeled as they worry it'll make their content less funny."

Last year, Facebook announced that it will add labels such as "satire page" to posts that appear in the news feeds of users to clearly differentiate them from real information. Third-party fact-checkers working with Facebook, which includes AFP, can append their own fact-checks to the bottom of satirical posts for the same reason. But the problem persists. Last month, authentic-looking imposter or parody accounts proliferated on Twitter, pretending to be celebrities or companies, after it first rolled out a paid subscription service. —AFP



Miyazaki

## Several hundred tourists stranded at Machu Picchu amid protests

**H**undreds of foreign tourists were stranded Wednesday in Peru's renowned Machu Picchu region after train service was suspended due to violent protests following the ouster and arrest of ex-president Pedro Castillo. A state of emergency was declared earlier Wednesday as Castillo's supporters have taken to the streets and set up road-blocks countrywide in protests against new President Dina Boluarte that have left seven people dead and 200 injured. Officials said nearly 800 tourists of varying nationalities had become stranded

since Tuesday. They were stuck in the town at the base of the mountain where Machu Picchu, the most important attraction in Peruvian tourism and a UNESCO World Heritage site, is located. Tourist Gale Dut was unable to return to Cusco to catch a flight out of the country.

"I'm with my kids. For me, it's a problem," Dut told AFP. One Belgian tourist, who identified himself as Walter, said it is "not clear" how he will be able to return home if he is not able to get back to Cusco in order to catch a flight to Lima.

The train service that connects the famed Incan temple with Cusco, the ancient empire's capital city, is the only way to get to Machu Picchu, about 70 miles (110 kilometers) away. Trains were suspended Tuesday as Indigenous and agrarian organizations called for an indefinite strike as part of the protests that began Monday in Cusco, with marches, attacks on public spaces and attempts to take over the city's international airport.

The small town's mayor Darwin Baca called for humanitarian help from the government, seeking helicopters to help evac-

uate tourists from the United States, Mexico and Spain. The country plunged into crisis last week when Castillo tried to dissolve Congress and rule by decree, but was quickly impeached by lawmakers and arrested. The new president, Boluarte, has struggled to quell tensions, and has now called for the next election-normally due in 2026 — to be brought forward to December 2023, after an earlier bid to hold them in 2024 failed to halt the protests. — AFP



A view of the empty restaurant area in the town of Machu Picchu, Peru's main tourist attraction.



Stranded tourists queue at the train terminal in the town of Machu Picchu, Peru's main tourist attraction. —AFP photos

## Release set for animator Miyazaki's first film in 10 years

**O**scar-winning Japanese animator Hayao Miyazaki's first feature film in a decade will be released in July next year, its distribution company has said.

The 81-year-old Miyazaki, who co-founded celebrated anime house Studio Ghibli, came out of retirement to make the movie, titled "How Do You Live?" It has been in production for years with details kept tightly under wraps, and will now be released in Japan on July 14, according to a schedule published Tuesday by distributor Toho. Studio Ghibli and Toho also released a poster for the film featuring a hand-sketched, bird-like creature with an eye nestled below its beak.

"How Do You Live?" is inspired by a 1937 book about a boy from a rich family who learns about poverty and discrimination through conversations with his uncle. Miyazaki has built a cult following with his fantastical depictions of nature and machinery, and beloved characters like the cuddly spirit creature Totoro. His film "Spirited Away" won an Oscar for best animated feature in 2003. After his 2013 movie "The Wind Rises", Miyazaki said he would no longer make feature-length films,

as he could not maintain the hectic intensity of his perfectionist approach to work. However, in an about-turn four years later, Miyazaki's production company said he was retracting his retirement to make what would be "his final film, considering his age". The release date announcement is not the only good news for Studio Ghibli fans this year, after three sections of Japan's new Ghibli theme park opened to the public in November. — AFP

## Lifestyle | Features



This photo shows a woman walking past an old villa in Hanoi. — AFP photos



This photo shows construction workers remodeling an old villa in Hanoi.



This photo shows a construction worker remodeling an old villa in Hanoi.

# 'DON'T WANT TO MOVE': THE RACE TO SAVE HANOI'S CRUMBLING VILLAS

In a small corner of a once-grand villa in the heart of Hanoi, Nguyen Manh Tri surveys the home he has loved since childhood but is now giving up as its foundation cracks, roof crumbles and staircase buckles. Tri, 47, lives in three rooms of the subdivided house, one of around 1,200 French-style villas in the city on a list of protected homes pub-

lished this year. Most of the villas are close to a century old, built during French colonial rule, and have been degraded by age and humidity. The five families living inside face cramped, damp and noisy conditions.

Despite their protected status, the future of these homes—and their inhabitants—hangs in the balance, say architects, as residents struggle to afford

their upkeep and the state flip-flops over how best to preserve the crumbling heritage of Vietnam's capital. "When I was a kid, I remember this was a beautiful house," said Tri of the 1930s villa where he was born, which weaves local design and elements of the Art Deco movement.

"It was romantic. I could hear the bell

prompting his family's decision to move out.

### 'Damage and collapse'

The listed villas—now often hidden behind cafes, noodle shops and fashion boutiques—were built both by the French and by Vietnamese architects for their wealthy compatriots working under the

despite the poor conditions and without knowing if their homes will survive the coming decades. "I have been living here my whole life, so I don't want to move anywhere else," said 65-year-old Hoang Chung Thuy, who shares her three-storey villa with 10 other households, a seafood restaurant, a clothes shop and a tea stall. She cannot fix the crumbling walls

two people died when a villa built in 1905 — and home to around 20 people—fell to pieces.

### \$1 million restoration

Authorities first drew up regulations to protect the villas in 2013, but have gone back and forth over the path forward for the homes. A large swathe of villas has already been razed, Anh says, while in April the city announced a plan to sell 600 of those owned by the state, before retracting the idea just days later. Now Hanoi says it aims to renovate 60 by 2025, but faces long drawn-out negotiations to convince each and every resident to move.

It took a decade for the first project—a \$1 million restoration of an old villa—to begin. But now the city is determined to return the house to its former glory, says Pham Tuan Long, an architect and chairman of Hoan Kiem district, where this villa and Tri's are found.

"We are trying to preserve the original elements and architectural values as much as possible by using traditional materials and traditional renovation techniques," Long said. But just a few streets away, Tri packs up his home, uncertain of its future. Moving out is difficult, he says, but even harder is imagining a time when the house is no longer standing. "It has been a part of my life. This house is the place where I was born, got married, had my kids," he said. "But we can't get out of this situation." — AFP



This photo shows a motorbike taxi driver waiting for customers in front of an old villa in Hanoi.



This photo shows a security guard walking past an old villa in Hanoi.

from the post office and the sound of the train in Hanoi station." But since then the outer shell of his home has begun to crumble and inside "the structure of the house has been deformed" as families built makeshift extensions, trying to eke out a little more space, Tri told AFP. Cracks are spreading across the walls, ceilings and balconies, and clay tiles plunge from the wide, overhanging roof-

colonial power. When the French left in 1954, thousands of these homes were taken over by the communist government and turned into offices, while authorities required any owners still in Vietnam to divide up their property and give portions to poor Vietnamese.

Some private owners, such as Tri, are now keen to escape the villas for modern apartments, but others prefer to stay

without approval and money from her neighbors upstairs but she is determined not to leave the house her grandparents built. Tran Huy Anh of the Hanoi Architect Association says without proper maintenance, these buildings "risk damage and collapse". "Those built at the beginning of the 20th century... need continuous renovation and maintenance every 20 to 30 years, it should not be longer." In 2015,

## Going pro: Senegal's young gamers betting on eSport

Avid fans of the best-selling FIFA video game watched on a big screen as leading Senegalese gamers battled it out as virtual iterations of footballing royalty like Cristiano Ronaldo and Olivier Giroud. Some 400 eSports enthusiasts attended Dakar's recent Esport Experience tournament, inspired by local heroes like Mouhamed Thiam, 19, alias "Dex77" — three-time continental champion — and by Senegal's real-life football team, the continent's reigning champions. Rising star Cheikh Thiaw, 20, alias "Coldfire Junior", said that the national football team's recent successes, making it into the World Cup's last 16, motivated him "to face off against any foreign gamer".

The tournament featured one million CFA francs (\$1,626) in prizes, divided among the top players of the games FIFA, eFootball and Street Fighter. Gamers from the West African nation are now eyeing global eSport success, with their stars competing in tournaments throughout the region. Establishing a career in eSports is no mean feat — the prize money in Senegal is low compared to the rest of the world, and few can become professionals.

But the country is an emerging economy in Africa, and analysts say gaming is



People follow a video game fighting match projected on the big screen in a cinema in Dakar.—AFP photos

likely to expand in the coming years. Senegal is home to some 20,000 competitive video game players, according to Sengames, the country's main gamers' association.

### 'Doctor Dexx'

Dex77's older brother Papa Adama Thiam, 26, alias "Doctor Dexx", is also on the forefront of Senegal's gaming revolution. Alongside his pharmacy studies he has become five-time national FIFA champion. "My father gave me my first

PlayStation when I was 11," he said. "My mother used to work half the year as a hairdresser in the United States and brought back the latest version of PlayStation."

With help from Senegal's few gaming sponsors, Doctor Dexx earns about three million CFA francs per year — more than twice the average yearly salary. He spends his free time coaching younger gamers to nurture "the stars of tomorrow". According to Newzoo, which analyses gaming trends, the African continent is fertile ground for eSports thanks to internet connections that are becoming quicker and cheaper, as well as a growing middle class.

### 'Very promising'

The Middle East and Africa are home to 488 million video game players, or 15 percent of the global total, Newzoo's 2022 report shows. The combined super-region has the highest growth rate, up eight percent in a year. "More and more young amateur gamers want to become professionals," said Mamoudou

Soumare, deputy director of the SOLO Esport club, home of Senegal's best players. Gaming consoles remain prohibitively expensive for many in Senegal. Older models change hands for around 150,000 CFA francs.

"Our recruits work and take part in international tournaments," said Baba Dioum, the SOLO Esport club's co-founder and president of Sengames. "It's a new field that needs to be structured, and that is very promising for Senegal's youth," said Laurent Montillet, deputy director of Dakar's French Institute, which staged a tournament with players from across the Sahel. Senegal is also slowly seeing the emergence of local video games, mainly inspired by African mythology rather than football. "The only sports game we've seen so far is about wrestling," which is Senegal's other main sport, said Soumare. He said that the video game sector will need support in the form of a federation, public funding and training to spur the creation of more Senegalese start-ups.—AFP



A player on his keyboard plays under a photo of Sadio Mane, captain of the national football team, in a cinema hall in Dakar.



## Henry Cavill won't return as Superman in franchise's next movie

Things are heating up in Metropolis, as DC Studios co-head James Gunn has announced he is writing a new feature film about Superman. In step with the new project, Gunn has also revealed that Henry Cavill will not return as the hero. "Peter & I have a DC slate ready to go, which we couldn't be more over-the-moon about; we'll be able to share some exciting information about our first projects at the beginning of the new year," the director-turned-label-chief tweeted Wednesday evening about his work with co-studio head Peter Safran.

"Among those on the slate is Superman. In the initial stages, our story will be focusing on an earlier part of Superman's life, so the character will not be played by Henry Cavill. But we just had a great meeting with Henry and we're big fans and we talked about a number of exciting possibilities to work together in the future." Cavill confirmed that he would not be reprising the role of Superman in a statement shared on Instagram.



"It's sad news, everyone. I will, after all, not be returning as Superman. After being told by the studio to announce my return back in October, prior to their hire, this news isn't the easiest, but that's life," Cavill wrote. "I respect that James and Peter have a universe to build. I wish them and all involved with the new universe the best of luck, and the happiest of fortunes." The Superman news comes after a week of headlines following Warner Bros. decision to not move forward with a new "Wonder Woman" movie with director Patty Jenkins. —AFP

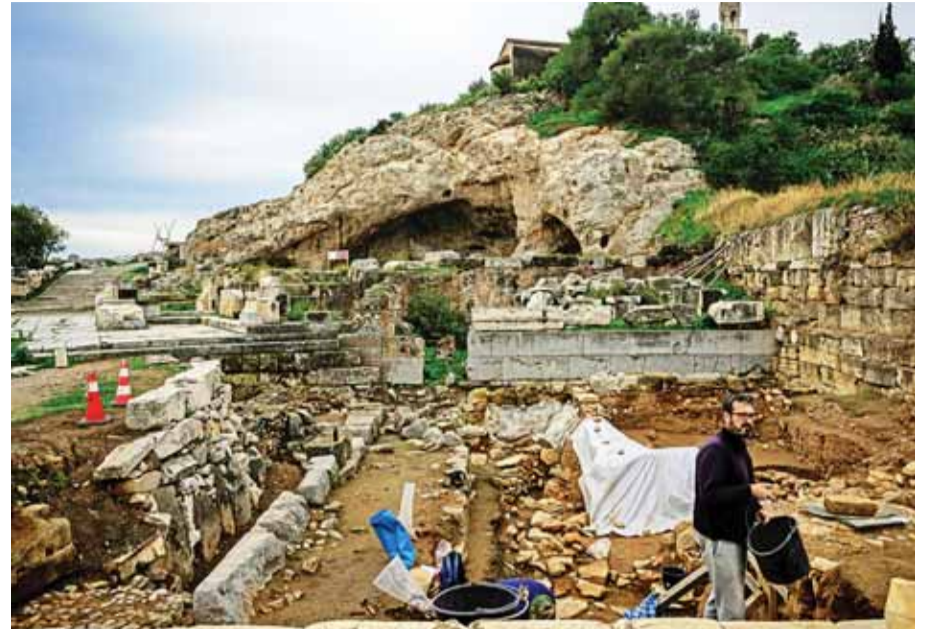
Lifestyle | Features



A view of the archaeological site of Elefsina (Eleusis) which will become European Capital of Culture 2023.— AFP photos



A man visits the archaeological site of Elefsina (Eleusis).



Archaeologists work at the archaeological site of Elefsina (Eleusis).

# BACK FROM UNDERWORLD: GREEK CITY'S CULTURAL REBIRTH

It was the Greek city where the ancients flocked in the hope of learning the secret of life after death. Now Eleusis-known to Greeks as Elefsina-aims to resurrect its flagging fortunes by becoming European capital of culture next year. Roman emperors including Marcus Aurelius and his son Commodus-of

Its grim factories, steelmills, refineries and ship and breaker yards drew thousands fleeing the poverty of rural Greece over the last century. Choked by smog and pollution, its bay a vast ships' graveyard, for decades it resembled a modern version of the underworld from which Persephone escaped. Her rebirth each

Eleusis 2023 CEO Nana Spyropoulou said they had faith that a small "but historically significant city can draw the international and European cultural spotlight. "Our goal is to make use of Elefsina's cultural wealth, and to leave a legacy for the future," she told reporters. Dance, concerts, street art, films and exhibitions will draw on the city's fabled history and its long experience with unemployment, immigration and environmental degradation.

### Ancient 'psychotherapy'

Many locals are descended from ethnic Greeks forced from their homes in Turkey in the wake of the disastrous Greek invasion of Asia Minor after World War I. The refugee legacy continues still, with a large camp there sheltering Ukrainians fleeing the Russian invasion. Several derelict buildings have been repurposed for the 25-million euro (\$26.5-million) event, including a former olive oil mill which is becoming an archaeological museum, and an old bowling alley a conference hall.

Thanks to being a capital of culture, Elefsina has gained use of "infrastructure it never had before", said mayor Argriris Economou. "(This is) a great legacy and an opportunity to upgrade the city," Economou said. For some 12 centuries Eleusis was one of the most important religious centers of both the ancient Greek and Roman worlds. The birthplace of ancient Greek tragedian Aeschylus, its mysterious rites centred on Demeter, the goddess of agriculture and fertility, and



People visit the archaeological site of Elefsina (Eleusis).



People visit the archaeological site of Elefsina (Eleusis).

"Gladiator" fame-were among the glitterati of antiquity who came to be initiated into its secret death-defying cult based around Persephone, the queen of the underworld. But Eleusis long ago lost its glamour.

year with the spring was recreated in the secret ancient rites of the Eleusinian Mysteries. Local leaders hope becoming a European city of culture will do the same trick for the post-industrial city half an hour northwest of Athens.

her daughter, Persephone, wife of Hades and queen of the underworld.

In a large hall that could seat up to 3,000 people, participants at nocturnal torchlit ceremonies were told of the endless cycle of life and death, and attended a re-enactment of the myth of Persephone, archaeologists say. "It was kind of a psychotherapy to deal with the fear of death," Efi Anesti, an archaeologist at the sprawling Greco-Roman sanctuary where the mysteries took place, told AFP. To enforce secrecy, "anyone who revealed the details was supposed to suffer the wrath of the gods," she said.

But the city went into a long decline following the abolition of the sanctuary by the Byzantines in the fourth century. Elefsina shares the 2023 city of culture title with Timisoara in Romania and Veszprem in Hungary. A Belgian artist collective called TimeCircus has already embarked on a 3,000-mile pilgrimage on foot that will connect the three cities. Since 1985 more than 60 European cities including Istanbul have hosted the initiative, which aims to regenerate cities, highlight cultural diversity and boost tourism.—AFP

## One of Ireland's last Traveler tinsmiths mourns lost way of life

Warmed by a wood-burning stove and thinking of the past, James Collins often works with tin late into the evening, the passing of time punctuated by the steady tap of his hammer. Collins, 73, is one of Ireland's last remaining Traveler tinsmiths, a traditional craft passed from generation to generation which now has all but died out. "My father done it and his father before him done it," Collins told AFP in his Dublin workshop. "There was hundreds of tinsmiths. Nearly every Traveler was a tinsmith. There's only two tinsmiths that's left."

Collins grew up in a nomadic culture practiced by Ireland's Traveler ethnic minority that is itself little more than a memory. He was born in a tent by the side of the road in the Irish midlands in 1949. In a time of deep deprivation

even for Ireland's settled communities, Collins lived with his family on the road until his mid-twenties.

He learnt tinsmithing from his father when he was 14, swapping the buckets, mugs and the wire-handled cooking pots or billycans he made for food. The family also offered casual labor on the land, working at the same locations seasonally. "It was a good life but it was a hard life," Collins said. "You'd hate the winter time of the year with the cold, frost and snow. "But you wouldn't pass much heed to it because you were brought up with it."

### Roots

Collins set down roots in the 1970s, moving to a Traveler housing scheme in Avila Park in northwest Dublin where he raised a family. Most Travelers living in the Republic of Ireland now live in a permanent location, according to European Union research.

Those who do travel tend to do so only in the summer. When he arrived, Collins said the few houses on the estate were surrounded by fields on every side. Now the scheme, a cramped cul-de-sac of four adjoining streets, is hemmed in by walls and fences topped with spikes and barbed wire. The move gave Collins' children

the chance to learn to read and write and have the formal education he never had.

In the 1970s the tin items Collins made were replaced with plastic and what little could be earned from the craft disappeared. "I have five sons and none of them are interested in the tinsmithing because there's (no money) to be made out of it," he said. Alone in his workshop with his father's antique tools, the tinsmith says the craft now is little more than a hobby and he thinks of the past often as a happier time. "There's not a day that passes, it always goes through (my) mind. Because you knew so many settled people and settled people knew you," Collins said. "We used to camp outside their gates and there was no problem or no hassle."

### Prejudice

But discrimination against Travelers and friction with the settled communities is centuries old in Ireland, according to Collins' nephew Martin Collins, who is director of Pavee Point Traveler and Roma Centre.

"It's very well documented that Travelers continue to be... one of the most persecuted groups in Irish society," he explained. According to census data, there were 30,987 Travelers in



James Collins, one of the two remaining traditional Traveler tinsmiths in Ireland, works in his workshop in Finglas, Dublin, where he makes tin and copper cups and billy cans.



### Mental health

The challenge facing the community

Ireland in 2016 representing 0.7 percent of the general population. But despite recognition as a distinct ethnic minority since 2017, Travelers still face obstacles in virtually every area of life.

"(Travelers) experience discrimination and racism... in the education system in accessing employment and accessing accommodation, healthcare, and support," said Martin Collins. EU research in 2019 showed Irish Travelers experience some of the worst deprivation and discrimination of any minority group in the bloc. Martin Collins said that while state rhetoric was for pluralism, there remained a "subtext when it comes to Travelers defining my people as backward, as uncivilized".



James Collins poses for pictures in his workshop in Finglas, Dublin, where he makes tin and copper cups and billy cans.

has been underlined in recent years by a growing mental health crisis. A 2021 Irish parliament report showed suicide accounted for 11 percent of Traveler deaths-seven times higher for Traveler men and six times higher for Traveler women than the general population.

Geraldine McDonnell, a mental health worker with Pavee Point, said the deaths touch every part of the tight-knit Traveler community. "We see, unfortunately, a lot of families would have multiple suicides within that family."

Pavee Point has launched an online service to give Traveler-tailored mental health advice, especially to children. But Martin Collins says discrimination is the root cause of the crisis. "If you're hearing from cradle to grave that you're of no value... you're inferior to settled people, it's not surprising many Travelers will internalize that belief," he said. "We need to create conditions where Travelers can be proud and confident of their Traveler identity." — AFP



James Collins, one of the two remaining traditional Traveler tinsmiths in Ireland, works in his workshop in Finglas, Dublin, where he makes tin and copper cups and billy cans.



A photograph shows tin and copper cups and billy cans made by James Collins. — AFP photos

## Sports

# EU legal advisor backs UEFA in battle with Super League

**LUXEMBOURG:** The European Court of Justice's top legal advisor said Thursday that football governing bodies UEFA and FIFA had acted within the law when they threatened to expel clubs or players who joined a proposed Super League.

The opinion of Advocate General Athanasios Rantos is not binding on the court, which is examining a complaint from the company that planned to run the new league, but it will be influential and taken as a sign of the direction the case is taking.

"EU competition rules do not prohibit FIFA, UEFA, their member federations or their national leagues from issuing threats of sanctions against clubs affiliated to those federations when those clubs participate in a project to set up a new competition," he wrote.

The court's final decision is not expected until early next year, but the decision will be a relief for the world's biggest football associations and the existing national European leagues wary of allowing some of their richest clubs to break away.

The legal opinion was immediately welcomed by FIFA and the Spanish La Liga as well as lobby groups representing European football clubs, leagues and supporters.

FIFA said it was happy Rantos had said it could "approve any new football competitions", that he had said it could impose sanctions and it "had exclusive rights to market" its international competitions.

FIFA also welcomed his recognition of "the special nature of sport, including the pyramid structure,

which preserves the nature of sporting merit and open competitions accessible to all, as well as the principles of promotion and relegation, competitive balance, and financial solidarity." The Spanish La Liga also welcomed the news.

"La Liga, along with other European leagues, will continue to fight for European institutions to legislate and provide legal protection for the current European model of soccer," said La Liga president Javier Tebas in a statement.

Fan association Football Supporters Europe said: "Last year, twelve obscenely wealthy clubs tried to destroy European football by creating a closed breakaway league. They failed because fans across the continent — including their own — stood in solidarity against their plans."

And the European Club Association hailed Rantos' advice as "a clear rejection of the efforts of a few to undermine the foundations and historical heritage of European football for the many."

The attempt to set up an elite trans-European league in 2021, under the aegis of the European Super League Company (ESLC), initially attracted the support of some of the continent's biggest and richest clubs — but triggered a backlash from fans and governments.

The effort fell apart within a frantic 48 hours, but left behind bitterness and a key legal question.

The ESLC filed a complaint with a Spanish court accusing UEFA, which regulates European football and organizes the Champions League and Europa

League, of "abusing its dominant position" in the market to squeeze out fair competition.

The case was appealed to the EU's top court and the eventual ruling will be keenly watched by teams and fans across Europe. If the court follows its advisor's reasoning, the ESLC's challenge will fail.

"Whilst ESLC is free to set up its own independent football competition outside the UEFA and FIFA ecosystem, it cannot however, in parallel with the creation of such a competition, continue to participate in the football competitions organized by FIFA and UEFA without the prior authorization of those federations," Rantos wrote.

## Closed elite?

If the court agrees, players from a super league might not be eligible for selection to national sides in UEFA's European Championship and FIFA's World Cup. Super league teams could be excluded from national leagues and competitions such as England's FA Cup.

European law generally protects commercial competition, but the advocate general found that the soccer governing bodies' threats "may be justified by legitimate objectives related to the specific nature of sport". In the case of the short-lived super league initiative, this may be a moot point.

Initially it was supposed to create a new competition for 12 clubs: Arsenal, Chelsea, Liverpool, Manchester City, Manchester United, Tottenham, AC Milan, Inter Milan, Juventus, Atletico Madrid,



Barcelona and Real Madrid.

Fellow giants Paris Saint-Germain and Bayern Munich refused from the start to take part and the English clubs quickly distanced themselves from the plan in the face of fan fury.

UEFA imposed light fines on the nine clubs that dropped out quickly, extracting a commitment they would not try again, but Real Madrid, Barcelona and Juventus face a disciplinary inquiry that has been put on hold pending the legal ruling. — AFP

## Boris Becker released from UK jail for deportation: Media

**LONDON:** Former tennis superstar Boris Becker has been released from prison after serving a sentence relating to his 2017 bankruptcy, British media said on Thursday.

The domestic Press Association news agency said the 55-year-old six-time Grand Slam champion will now be deported from the UK, following earlier reports in the press in Germany. German national Becker was jailed for two and a half years in April for flouting insolvency rules by hiding £2.5 million (\$3.1 million) of assets and loans to avoid paying debts.

He had been declared bankrupt in June 2017, owing creditors £50 million over an unpaid loan of more than £3 million on his estate on the Spanish island of Majorca. A judge at Southwark Crown Court in south London told Becker, who has lived in the UK since 2012, that he would serve half of his sentence in prison.

But he was released on Thursday morning and was now due to be deported, PA said, without quoting sources.



Boris Becker

Becker was initially reported to have been held at Wandsworth Prison in southwest London, near the All England Club at Wimbledon where he won three titles.

He was then transferred to the lower-security Huntercombe prison near Oxford, southern England, for foreign criminals awaiting deportation. Becker qualified for removal as he is not a British citizen and received a custodial sentence of more than 12 months.

The Sun newspaper on Tuesday said Becker's mother Elvira, 87, told a friend that her son's release from prison was "the best Christmas present I could hope for".

"I cannot wait to hold my beloved son in my arms," she was quoted as saying. Reports suggested he would be sent back to Germany and would stay with friends in Frankfurt.

## Downfall

During his trial, Becker recounted how his career earnings were swallowed up by a costly divorce from his first wife Barbara, child maintenance payments and expensive lifestyle.

He said he "shocked" and "embarrassed" when he was declared bankrupt and had relied on advisers to manage his life outside tennis.

But he insisted he had cooperated with trustees trying to secure his assets. Judge Deborah Taylor disagreed, telling him he had shown no remorse or acceptance of his guilt.

"You... have sought to distance yourself from your offending and your bankruptcy. While I accept your humiliation as part of the proceedings, there has been no humility," she said.

Becker, with a shock of strawberry-blond hair, shook up the tennis world in 1985 when he became Wimbledon's youngest men's singles champion at 17. Nicknamed "Boom Boom" Becker for his ferocious serve, he repeated the feat the following year and won a third title in 1989. He also won the Australian Open twice and the US Open during his glittering career, becoming the top-ranked player in the world in 1991. — AFP



Kuwait National Tennis Team players.

## Kuwait ready to host 2nd Arab Masters Tennis Tournament

By Abdellatif Sharaa

**KUWAIT:** Secretary General of Arab and Kuwait Tennis Federations Faleh Al-Otaibi said the 2nd Arab Masters Tennis Tournament will be different and competitions will be of a higher standard as the best top ranked Arab players will participate. The tournament will start Dec 20th and will continue until Dec 27th, as the draw will take place Dec 19th, so that the 24 players will be distributed to four groups.

Otaibi thanked KTF Board of Directors with Chairman Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Abdallah Al-Sabah for their constant support of Arab tennis and keenness on developing the game in all Arab countries. He added the tournament received requests by many ranked players at the Association of Tennis Professionals (ATP) which promises a high technical standard and will add to the players' experience.

Otaibi, who is also the tournament's manager,



Faleh Al-Otaibi

said committees of the tournament completed their preparation for the best possible start adding that the first tournament proved highly successful and hope to build on that success with the second both at the technical and administrative levels.

Kuwait tennis player

Essa Qabazard said he is

technically and physically ready for the event adding "we prepared very well to achieve the best results by participating in several international tournaments in addition to a 4-hour daily training and we intend to compete for places."

Bader Al-Abdallah on his part lauded the ATF and KTF decision to organize the second Masters Edition adding that participating players are considered the best in the Middle East and are ranked by ATP. He said we, as Kuwaiti players will seek top places despite the expected tough competition. Ali Al-Shatti said this is his second participation after reaching the semi-finals of the first tournament and hoped to go further this time as he prepared very well.

healthy we feel like we can beat anybody."

## Jokic powers Denver win

Two-time reigning NBA Most Valuable Player Nikola Jokic scored 43 points to lead the Denver Nuggets over visiting Washington 141-128.

The 27-year-old Serbian center added 14 rebounds, eight assists and four steals to spark Denver, which improved to 17-10 and only one game behind Western Conference co-leaders New Orleans and Memphis. Tyler Herro scored a game-high 35 points and sank the winning jump shot with 4.9 seconds remaining to give the Miami Heat a 110-108 victory at Oklahoma City.

Damian Lillard scored 37 points to lead Portland to a 128-112 triumph at San Antonio while Donovan Mitchell scored 34 points to power the Cleveland Cavaliers to a 105-90 victory at Dallas.



INDIANAPOLIS: Stephen Curry #30 of the Golden State Warriors looks on during the game against the Indiana Pacers on December 14, 2022 at Gainbridge Fieldhouse in Indianapolis, Indiana. — AFP

## Curry suffers shoulder injury in Golden State NBA loss at Indiana

**WASHINGTON:** Four-time NBA champion Stephen Curry suffered a left shoulder injury late in the third quarter of reigning NBA champion Golden State's 125-119 loss at Indiana on Wednesday.

Curry, last June's NBA Finals Most Valuable Player, was hurt trying to strip the ball from Indiana's Jalen Smith as the Pacer drove to the hoop. Curry held his shoulder until leaving the game moments later and was taken quickly to the locker room.

Warriors coach Steve Kerr said Curry will have an MRI exam on Thursday to determine the extent of the 34-year-old guard's injury. "We'll see how he is tomorrow," Kerr said. "He's in good spirits and we'll hope for the best."

Curry finished with game highs of 38 points and seven assists as well as seven rebounds. He scored 27 points in the two quarters, half of the Warriors' first half total as they trailed 74-54, and finished with his 250th career 30-point performance.

Tyrese Haliburton led Indiana with 29 points while reserve Benedict Mathurin added 24 for the Pacers. Golden State, seeking a fifth NBA title in nine seasons, fell to 14-15 overall and 2-12 on the road. "My message to the group was it's about competing, it's about weathering the storm," Kerr said. "This has been a tough start to the season. We're in a tough stretch."

Curry has averaged 30 points a game this season and hit 50% from the floor. He also averaged 6.7 rebounds, 5.5 assists and 1.7 blocked shots a game.

Losing Curry for any length of time would be a major setback for the Warriors.

"Maybe it's going to get tougher if Steph is out for a little while. If he's out, for sure it will be tougher," Kerr said. "But you've just got to persevere, keep playing and keep fighting. If we're

## Mick Schumacher switches from Ferrari to Mercedes

**PARIS:** Mick Schumacher was dropped by Ferrari as a reserve driver on Thursday and immediately signed with their rivals Mercedes in the same role. After Ferrari announced the 23-year-old German was leaving after four years in their academy by mutual agreement, Mercedes said they had signed him.

Mick's father Michael won five driver titles with Ferrari before finishing his career with three seasons at Mercedes. Mick Schumacher raced the last two seasons for Haas, which uses Ferrari engines.

He failed to register a point in 2021. This year, his best finish in 22 races was sixth. He ended up 16th in the driver standings. Haas dropped him in November and signed 35-year-old compatriot Nico Hulkenberg.

Mercedes, who struggled to cope with changes to Formula One's technical rules last season, are busy developing their 'W14' model. "Mick will play an important role in the ongoing development of the W14. He will conduct regular work in the simulator," the team said on their web site. Mercedes has seven-time world champion Lewis Hamilton and George Russell, who finished fourth in the standings last season, as their race drivers. — AFP



Mick Schumacher

Paul George managed a triple double with 17 points, 11 rebounds and 11 assists to spark the host Los Angeles Clippers over Minnesota 99-88. Kawhi Leonard added 19 points and eight rebounds for the Clippers. New York's Jalen Brunson scored six points in overtime as the Knicks outscored Chicago 11-3 in the extra session for a 128-120 road victory.

Julius Randle led New York with 31 points, 13 rebounds and seven assists while Brunson had a season-high 30 points and DeMar DeRozan scored a game-high 32 for the Bulls.

Sacramento's De'Aaron Fox scored 27 points and passed off 10 assists while Domantas Sabonis added 21 points and 20 rebounds to lift the Kings to a 124-123 victory at Toronto.

Alec Burks came off Detroit's bench to score 27 points while Killian Hayes had 25 for the Pistons in a 141-134 victory at Charlotte. — AFP

# France train focus on Argentina as World Cup reaches climax

DOHA: France and Argentina are gearing up for a heavyweight World Cup final that pits Kylian Mbappe against Lionel Messi in a hotly anticipated duel, with history on the line.

Defending champions France beat Morocco 2-0 on Wednesday without needing to find top gear and now stand 90 minutes away from becoming the first team for 60 years to defend their title.

Didier Deschamps' men will approach Sunday's final at the Lusail Stadium with confidence but Messi has his own date with destiny in his last match on the biggest stage.

Goals from Theo Hernandez and substitute Randal Kolo Muani at Al Bayt Stadium on Wednesday snuffed out the challenge of Morocco, the first African or Arab side ever to reach a World Cup semi-final. France are into the final for the fourth time in seven editions and if they triumph on Sunday they will be the first team since Brazil in 1962 to retain the trophy.

They were congratulated in the dressing room by President Emmanuel Macron, while supporters erupted in jubilation around the Champs-Elysees in Paris, waving tricolor flags and setting off flares.

"We are in the final. We are in the final," hundreds of French supporters chanted as drivers sounded horns and anti-riot police lurked in vans lining the area. Delighted France coach Deschamps, who led the nation to success in Russia in 2018, 20 years after captaining them to glory, said: "There is emotion and pride."

"Obviously it was another important step today and now there will be another one. "We've been together for a month. It's never easy, but here it is

— it's been a joy so far and my players have been rewarded." Defeat for Morocco ended their fairy-tale run in Qatar that captured the imagination of Africa and the Arab world.

"We gave the maximum, that's the most important thing," said coach Walid Regragui. "The most important thing is to have given a good image, to have shown the world that Moroccan football exists and that we have beautiful supporters."

## Messi v Mbappe

The final will inevitably be billed as a battle between Messi and his Paris Saint-Germain teammate Mbappe. The two players are joint top of the World Cup goalscoring charts on five goals apiece, with Argentina's Julian Alvarez and France's Olivier Giroud just one behind.

The Copa America champions, who produced arguably their best performance of the tournament in beating Croatia 3-0 on Tuesday, will sense vulnerability in a France team that have not found top gear in Qatar.

Messi, playing in his fifth World Cup, has been a man on a mission, desperate to crown his career by leading Argentina to their first win at the tournament since Diego Maradona inspired the South Americans to the title in 1986.

On Tuesday he produced flashes of genius to help Argentina overcome 2018 finalists Croatia, confirming after the match that he expects Sunday's final to be his last appearance at a World Cup.

"Being able to achieve this, being able to finish my journey in the World Cups by playing my last game in a final, is something very exciting," said the



DOHA: France's defender #22 Theo Hernandez celebrates scoring his team's first goal during the Qatar 2022 World Cup semi-final football match between France and Morocco at the Al-Bayt Stadium in Al Khor, north of Doha on December 14, 2022. — AFP

35-year-old Argentine captain.

Deschamps said he would come up with a plan to counter the threat of the "scintillating" Messi, who will seek to exploit France's vulnerability in the full-back positions.

"He looks in great shape and of course he is one of the best players in the world so we will try to counter Messi's threat as much as possible, just as

Argentina will try to stop the influence of some of my players," he said.

Deschamps also has another headache in the form of an illness stalking the camp after midfielder Adrien Rabiot missed the Morocco game due to illness. Defender Dayot Upamecano also dropped out of the line-up for the semi-final, although he was named among the substitutes. — AFP

## Formidable France in familiar territory in World Cup final

DOHA: The inspirational leadership of Didier Deschamps and a deep pool of talent have turned France into the most formidable force in international football as they prepare to face Argentina in Sunday's World Cup final.

France arrived in Qatar aiming to defy the fate of many recent holders, even as a flood of injuries threatened to derail their title defense.

The reigning champions had been knocked out in the group stage in four of the past five tournaments, including France themselves in 2002.

But Deschamps' side have, in his own words, "reversed the trend" and after beating Morocco 2-0 in the last four on Wednesday, they have the chance to make history in the final at Lusail Stadium.

No team have retained the trophy since Brazil in 1962, while no reigning champions had even made the final since the Brazilians in 1998.

That team lost in Paris to a France side captained by Deschamps, who has been there for almost all of his country's finest moments at major tournaments over a generation. After leading them to glory four years ago, he can become the first coach to win two World Cups since Italy's Vittorio Pozzo in the 1930s.

"Deschamps has been to three finals now, and he wins them," French President Emmanuel Macron said after making a flying visit to Qatar for the semi-final. "Things always come in threes. Didier Deschamps brings luck as well as talent, so we are going to win it and bring the trophy home."

## Sustained success

Win or lose against Lionel Messi's Argentina, France are going through a remarkable period of sustained success in international football that began with that World Cup triumph in 1998 and continued with their Euro 2000 win.

Deschamps was not involved as Les Bleus, with



DOHA: France's coach Didier Deschamps and France's forward #10 Kylian Mbappe embrace after their victory in the Qatar 2022 World Cup semi-final football match between France and Morocco at the Al-Bayt Stadium in Al Khor, north of Doha on December 14, 2022. — AFP

Zinedine Zidane as captain, reached the World Cup final again in 2006 and lost to Italy.

Now, as they look to make history in Doha, it is easy to forget France's disastrous 2010 campaign and that they were not seen as contenders for major honors when Deschamps took over in 2012.

But he has now led them to three finals in four major tournaments, with Euro 2016 ending in an agonizing extra-time loss to Portugal.

France also won the Nations League last year, and their last-16 exit at Euro 2020 looks like an anomaly. They have now reached four World Cup finals in seven editions, putting themselves in the same bracket as multiple winners Germany, Italy and Brazil.

Deschamps' management has been key, even though he played down his personal role after the win against Morocco. "I'm not the most important," he said. "It is about the French national team."

## Talent pool

Morocco's French-born coach Walid Regragui

## Women referees 'opened up possibilities'

TOKYO: Women refereeing at the men's World Cup for the first time "opened up possibilities" and must be built on, Japan's trailblazer Yoshimi Yamashita said Thursday.

Yamashita was one of three women named on the list of 36 referees for the tournament in Qatar, which ends on Sunday. She did not take charge of a match but was the fourth official for six first-round games.

Stephanie Frappart made history by becoming the first woman to referee a match at a men's World Cup when she took charge of the Group E clash between Germany and Costa Rica.

Frenchwoman Frappart was part of an all-women refereeing team for the match, backed by assistants Neuza Back of Brazil and Mexico's Karen Diaz Medina. Yamashita said the tournament has been a landmark moment for football and urged officials not to let it go to waste.

"These are things that should be built on in the future — I want to see them being built on," said the 36-year-old. "If it just ends like this now, it will have no meaning. I want to play my part in helping to make sure it continues in the future," she told reporters in Tokyo. Yamashita said she was "happy from the bottom of my heart" that Frappart was named to referee Germany's game against Costa Rica. "It really opened up possibilities and I could see that happening right in front of me," she said.

Yamashita became the first woman to take charge of an Asian Champions League match this year and has also officiated in the top flight of Japan's J-League. She said officiating at the World Cup reminded her "how amazing football is". "As one of the refereeing team to be appointed to a game I felt a responsibility to make sure it was a good game," she said. Three women officials were also named on a list of 69 assistant referees for the first time. — AFP

# Classifieds

## Hospitals & Clinics

Sabah Hospital	24812000
Amiri Hospital	22450005
Maternity Hospital	24843100
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700
Chest Hospital	24849400
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010
Adan Hospital	23940620
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9

## Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144

Khaldiya	24848075
Kalfan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381
Ayoum Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

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I, SAKINA, holder of Passport No. L-9662354 do hereby change my name to SAKINA FAKHRUDDIN (as Given name) SHAKIR (as Surname) for all purposes. I will henceforth be known in the name SAKINA FAKHRUDDIN SHAKIR and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents. (C#2816)

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I, FATEMA, holder of Passport No. Z5184297 do hereby change my name to FATEMA (as Given name) HAKIMUDDIN (as Surname) for all purposes. I will henceforth be known in the name FATEMA HAKIMUDDIN and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents.

I, ABUZAR SAMIM AHMAD ANSARI holder of Indian Passport No. T7644912 having permanent address Maharashtra, India - 421302, residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as Given name: ABUZAR SHAMIM AKHTAR and Surname: ANSARI. (C#2817) - 14-12-2022

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## France end Morocco World Cup dream to set up Argentina final

### Morocco's run ends after putting valiant effort



DOHA: France's players celebrate their victory in the Qatar 2022 World Cup semi-final football match between France and Morocco at the Al-Bayt Stadium in Al Khor, north of Doha on December 14, 2022. — AFP photos

DOHA: France will face Argentina and Kylian Mbappe will do battle with Lionel Messi in a heavyweight World Cup final after the French beat underdogs Morocco 2-0 on Wednesday.

Holders France stayed on course to become the first team in 60 years to successfully defend the trophy thanks to goals from Theo Hernandez and Randal Kolo Muani at Al Bayt Stadium.

Morocco, the first African side ever to reach a World Cup semi-final, battled as they have done throughout the tournament and were roared on by a crowd predominantly decked out in red and green.

But Azzedine Ounahi's shot in the final minutes that was cleared off the goal line by Jules Kounde was arguably their best chance.

France reached the final for the fourth time in seven editions and if they triumph at Lusail Stadium on Sunday they will be the first team since Brazil in 1962 to retain the trophy.

They were congratulated in the dressing room by French President Emmanuel Macron, who had flown to Qatar on Wednesday to watch the match.

Delighted France coach Didier Deschamps said: "There is emotion and pride. Obviously it was another important step today and now there will be another one. "We've been together for a month. It's

never easy, but here it is — it's been a joy so far and my players have been rewarded."

The final will inevitably be billed as a battle between Messi and his Paris Saint-Germain teammate Mbappe.

Despite not scoring himself, Mbappe had a hand in both French goals on Wednesday and created the second with a dribble and shot that was deflected into the path of unmarked substitute Kolo Muani to net with ease.

#### 'We're dreaming'

Argentina though will look at moments of French defensive fragility that Messi and Julian Alvarez — scorer of two goals in Tuesday's semi-final win against Croatia — will relish exploiting.

Morocco coach Walid Regragui's plans for the biggest match in his nation's history were rocked by injuries. He was hoping to welcome back center-back Nayef Aguerd, but he withdrew at the last minute, then captain Romain Saiss had to leave the field after just 21 minutes. By then Morocco were trailing. Defying the whistles that greeted every French possession, Hernandez scored with an acrobatic volley at the back post after Mbappe's shot was deflected.

It was just the second goal Morocco had conceded at this World Cup.

For a moment it looked as if the floodgates might open, but the Atlas Lions dug in and nearly drew level when Jawad El Yamiq's overhead kick was tipped onto the post by Lloris.

But the second half went France's way and when Kolo Muani came on for Ousmane Dembele he scored with his first touch.

"I just can't get my head round it, it's crazy, we're dreaming," said 24-year-old Kolo Muani. "The final isn't just to be played, it's to be won."

Messi, playing in his fifth World Cup, has been a man on a mission in Qatar, desperate to crown his career by leading Argentina to their first World Cup crown since Diego Maradona inspired the South Americans to the title in 1986.

On Tuesday, Messi produced flashes of genius to help Argentina to a convincing 3-0 victory over Croatia in the semi-finals.

Messi, 35, later confirmed that he expects Sunday's final to be his last appearance at a World Cup. "Being able to achieve this, being able to finish my journey in the World Cups by playing my last game in a final, is something very exciting," the Argentine captain said. — AFP

## Morocco press hails team

RABAT: Moroccan media hailed the national football team on Thursday as the country digested its defeat to France on the doorstep of the World Cup final, ending a history-making run. "Morocco went out with honor and with their heads high," Lakome2 news website said. The "Lions of the Atlas" were the first Arab or African team ever to reach a semi-final in 92 years of football's top tournament.

A string of victories, including over Belgium, Spain and Cristiano Ronaldo's Portugal, "allowed Arabs and Africans to hold their heads high", wrote sports outlet Al-Mountakhab. "We can't fault the Lions of the Atlas, even if we had dreamed of reaching the final," it said. Sports website Le360sport said the team's "epic" run had been hit by "physical glitches" in the back line — a reference to defender Romain Saiss' thigh injury early in the game and the withdrawal of center-back Nayef Aguerd just moments before the start.

News site Le Desk noted that the team had missed "several opportunities to score". But most of the coverage was gushing. Even the habitually sober business journal L'Economiste sang the team's praises, saying they should be added to the "Pantheon of football". Reaching the semi-final of a World Cup, "a first for an African team, is a starting point, not a destination", it said.

Social media was flooded with a mix of praise

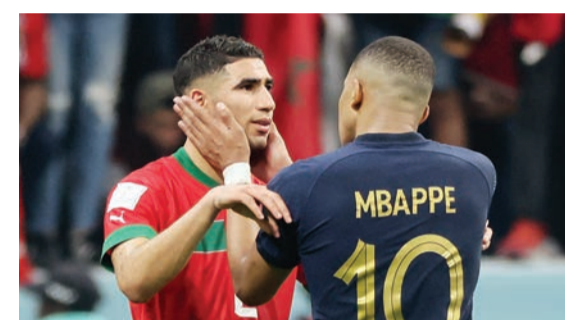


DOHA: France's midfielder Youssouf Fofana fights for the ball with Morocco's forward Youssef En-Nesyri and defender Achraf Hakimi during the match. — AFP

for the team and criticism of the referee. "Our sadness at being defeated mustn't let us forget the joy we've experienced," one user wrote. Another lauded the team for their "sacrifices" and fighting spirit. "Thank you for having restored faith and smiles to a people who desperately needed it."

US-based Middle East cultural magazine the

Markaz Review said that "for the millions watching... it felt like the ultimate showdown." But, it said, "players on both teams fought valiantly and treated each other to hugs and moral support, suggesting a sea change in international relationships between former colonies and their European nemesis." — AFP



France's forward #10 Kylian Mbappe comforts Morocco's defender #02 Achraf Hakimi at the end of the match.



French President Emmanuel Macron celebrates after France won the semifinal at Al-Bayt Stadium.



Morocco's goalkeeper #22 Ahmed Reda Tagnaouti comforts Morocco's midfielder #08 Azzedine Ounahi at the end of the match.



Morocco's defender #18 Jawad El Yamiq (C) attempts a shot on goal.



Supporters of Morocco react after the team's loss.



France's forward #10 Kylian Mbappe apologises to a fan after hitting him in the face with a ball.