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Kuwait dealing firmly with drug smugglers and dealers

Senior official stresses confronting dangers of drugs is everyone's responsibility

News in brief

47K travel bans in 10 months

KUWAIT: More than 47,000 travel ban orders have been issued in Kuwait in the first 10 months of this year, according to statistics by the justice ministry. The 47,512 ban orders imposed on Kuwaitis and expatriates since January until the end of October mark a 17 percent increase over the same period last year, when 30,689 such bans were issued. The ban orders include 19,114 in Farwaniya governorate, followed by Ahmadi with 13,527 travel bans, 13,430 in Hawally, 12,407 in Capital governorate, 11,601 in Jahra and finally Mubarak Al-Kabeer governorate with 4,310 travel bans.

Workforce quota mullied

KUWAIT: The government has assigned a specialized international technical team to set procedures to control the numbers of expatriate workers in the workforce, which will place a maximum limit on some nationalities with large numbers in the country without affecting the market negatively, and without causing a disfunction in the need for workers, which has been reflected in the increase of prices in some sectors. "This resembles a quota system, which will operate by providing visit and dependency visas without a systematic connection to provide work permits," sources told Kuwait Times.

Peace after royal race row

LONDON: Buckingham Palace on Friday declared a reconciliation between Prince William's godmother and a black British woman who was repeatedly asked where she was "really" from. Sistah Space charity founder Ngozi Fulani was grilled at a palace reception on Nov 29 by Susan Hussey, who refused to accept that she was British. Fulani and Hussey on Friday held a meeting at Buckingham Palace, where Hussey offered her "sincere apologies" and pledged to learn more about the racial sensitivities involved, while Fulani accepted the apology "and appreciates that no malice was intended". — AFP

IMF approves \$3bn loan to Egypt

WASHINGTON: The Executive Board of the International Monetary Fund on Friday approved a \$3 billion loan to Egypt, with an immediate disbursement of \$347 million, the IMF said in a statement. Egypt will benefit from the loan over 46 months under the Extended Fund Facility. The agreement is for 2,350.17 million SDRs, or Special Drawing Rights, an IMF unit of account based on a basket of five major international currencies, equivalent to about \$3 billion. — AFP

KUWAIT: Director General of the Interior Ministry's General Department of Security Relations and Media Maj Gen Tawheed Al-Kandari affirmed the ministry's keenness to confront, with all force, firmness, and direct preemptive strikes, drug smugglers and dealers. Based on directives of First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and Undersecretary Lt Gen Anwar Al-Barjas, fighting drugs and protecting youth from its dangers and harms are at top of the ministry's priorities, Kandari

said in a statement to KUNA.

In its war on drugs, the ministry is working on two main axes, Kandari explained. The first is reducing the supply of narcotics, psychotropic substances and alcohol by launching comprehensive security campaigns against drug dealers and smugglers, while the second axis is to reduce local demand for drugs. He mentioned the general department of relations and security media at the interior ministry carries out awareness and educational media campaigns throughout the year in all media and social media to

protect the society and immunize it from the scourge of drugs.

Kandari stressed that confronting the dangers of drugs is everyone's responsibility. "We will not allow harm to our children and youth and rob their future," he vowed, noting that security efforts are continuing to combat all operations and types of smuggling and arrest everyone who brings and trades in narcotic substances of all kinds to protect and safeguard society from these devastating scourges.

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Tawheed Al-Kandari

Jordan arrests 44 after deadly fuel protests

AMMAN: Jordan has arrested dozens of people accused of involvement in protests against rising fuel prices in which a senior police officer was gunned down, the country's security agency said Saturday. Colonel Abdul Razzaq Dalabeh, the deputy police chief of Maan province, died of a gunshot to the head in the town of Al-Husseiniya on Thursday while confronting what the authorities called "riots".

"Forty-four people who participated in the riots in a number of regions in the kingdom have been arrested and they will be brought before the courts," the Public Security Directorate said in a statement. It said reinforcements had been sent to the provinces, and accused "vandals and outlaws" of being behind violence in Maan, in the country's south.

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JERASH, Jordan: Jordanian military personnel take part on Dec 16, 2022 in the funeral procession of a senior police officer who was killed in riots. — AFP

Germany cuts ribbon on first LNG terminal

WILHELMSHAVEN, Germany: Germany on Saturday inaugurated its first liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminal, built in record time, as the country scrambles to adapt to life without Russian energy. The rig in the North Sea port of Wilhelmshaven was opened by Chancellor Olaf Scholz at a ceremony on board a specialist vessel known as an FSRU, named the Hoegh Esperanza. "It's a good day for our country and a sign to the whole world that the German economy will be able

to remain strong," Scholz said from the boat.

The Hoegh Esperanza sounded its horn as the chancellor, dressed in a high visibility jacket, approached. The ship has already been stocked with gas from Nigeria that could supply 50,000 homes for a year, and the terminal is set to begin deliveries on Dec 22. Germany plans to open four more government-funded LNG terminals over the next few months as well as a private terminal in the port of Lubmin.

Together, the terminals could deliver 30 billion cubic metres of gas a year from next year, or a third of Germany's total gas needs - if Berlin can find enough LNG to service them. LNG terminals allow for the import by sea of natural gas which has been

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WILHELMSHAVEN, Germany: (From left) German Minister of Economics and Climate Protection Robert Habeck, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and German Finance Minister Christian Lindner pose during the opening ceremony of the Uniper LNG terminal at the Jade Bight on Dec 17, 2022. — AFP

Musk restores some journalists' Twitter accounts

SAN FRANCISCO: Elon Musk has reinstated the Twitter accounts of several journalists who were suspended after he accused them of endangering his family, with some of those targeted tweeting

Saturday they were back on the platform. Musk had drawn anger and warnings from the EU and United Nations after suspending the accounts of more than half a dozen prominent journalists from the New York Times, CNN and the Washington Post.

"The people have spoken. Accounts who doxxed my location will have their suspension lifted now," the Twitter owner tweeted late Friday. Musk carried out a Twitter poll asking whether he should restore the suspended accounts now or in a week's time. Nearly 59 percent of the 3.69 million who took part said he should restore the accounts now. Some of

the suspended accounts appeared to have been reactivated, with former Vox journalist Aaron Rupar tweeting again. "I was pretty bummed about getting suspended initially but quickly realized it'd be fine because I'm blessed to have an amazing online community," Rupar posted, thanking people for their support. Later on MSNBC, Rupar warned that Twitter's crackdown, even if temporary, would have a "chilling effect on coverage of Elon Musk" and make reporters think twice about running afoul of the company's new owner.

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Kuwait: G77 and China can play a crucial role

Kuwait backs comprehensive UNSC reform

NEW YORK: Kuwait has re-affirmed that the G77 and China can play a key role in implementing the 2030 sustainable development objectives and finding solutions to global issues. Such challenges have been undermining "our national and collective potentials for attaining the sustainable development by 2030," said Kuwait's Assistant Foreign Minister for International Organizations, Minister Plenipotentiary Abdulaziz Al-Jarallah during a ministerial meeting of the group.

He named some of the serious challenges, such as catastrophes resulting from the climatic change and recurring outbreaks of pandemics, noting their adverse impact on nations' economic and social status. "These matters warrant great international cooperation and joint action," he said, calling for formation of "development and funding partnerships" to attain such an objective. Kuwait is pursuing the approach for global cooperation for facing such crossborder challenges, he said, alluding particularly to its support for sustainable development in more than 100 states.

Kuwait will continue cooperating with other states to stem spread of poverty, cement the global nutrition system, alleviate debts, cope with impact of the climatic change, he said. He lauded efforts by the UN secretary general at the level of boosting joint global action to face the challenges and secure an honorable life for developing nations. Al-Jarallah

added that he was looking forward to the sustainable development summit, due in September, as an opportunity to exchange views on the issue and assess the accomplishments in this regard.

UNSC reform

In another development, Kuwait has expressed support to all efforts aiming to achieve genuine and comprehensive reform of the UN Security Council to make it more effective, representative, transparent, impartial and credible. "Reforming multilateralism is an urgent need and a historical responsibility towards our people," Kuwait's Assistant Foreign Minister for International Organizations, Minister Plenipotentiary told a UN Security Council's open debate on a new orientation for reformed multilateralism.

Al-Jarallah stated that reforming the Security Council was one of the main pillars of the desired comprehensive reform of the United Nations. He hoped these discussions would contribute to advancing efforts aimed at strengthening the multilateral approach in order to overcome the complicated challenges facing the international community. The Kuwaiti official argued that the Council, with its current composition, cannot address today's inter-related and emerging challenges.

He looked forward to the 2024 Future Summit as an opportunity towards a consensus on taking back multilateral action to its desired track,



Kuwait's Assistant Foreign Minister for International Organizations, Minister Plenipotentiary Abdulaziz Al-Jarallah

through which the world can overcome the crises it faces. Al-Jarallah affirmed that reforming the United Nations must be a top priority for the international community, which must put forward innovative ideas to generate the necessary momentum for reform.

He underscored the need for an effective global

system based on cooperation, rule of law and aimed at achieving justice. All states must engage effectively with intergovernmental negotiations, and they must be open to consult with all negotiation groups transparently and constructively, he said, stressing that the concerns of all regional groups must be considered. — KUNA

In my view

Women are their own enemies



By Atyab Al-Shatti

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George Orwell furnishes a true and transparent take on how your enemy can be one of your own. While the "animals" gave their own lives to protect and maintain liberty of the "farm", the conspiracy theory was machinated by one of their own, dividing the nation and weakening them to achieve their own greed and benefit to finally take power and control.

The concept of feminism is hard for many women in Arab countries to internalize and believe in, with women becoming their own enemies and fighting against their own power. It is obvious to say that many cultural aspects play a bigger role in structuring women's mindset before being exposed to civil education and feminism. The idea of being independent and self-sufficient for many women becomes a taboo!

Now, the crucial part in building strong, independent women is actually to make women intellectually enlightened and help them believe that they are empowered enough to live and thrive. But resistance comes from women themselves. It's a systemic abstraction that was generated politically, culturally and financially too, as we see the marginalization against the two female parliamentarians in the current National Assembly.

I look back at female voters with disappointment, considering the fact that women voters outnumber male voters in Kuwait, yet women are not able to endorse and empower each other in a manner that helps change the political scene and represent themselves in political and decision-making positions. Women become their own enemies when they devalue themselves and not appreciate their abilities enough or stand against any decisions taken to employ women in such positions. A good example of this are the female voices in many TV interviews against women taking seats in the judiciary in Kuwait.

It is disappointing to see interviews of women saying "women do not have the same intellectual capacity as men do", despite the fact they have earned their position through equal education. The examples are many, but the root of this disadvantage goes back to the fact a great part of such discrimination is due to a lack of civic education, the cultural aspect that treats women as a lesser being since early childhood and prevents them from engaging in many normal activities.

Even though Animal Farm is an old book that goes back to 1945, the conspiracies, ignorance and nescience weakens women till today. Moreover, according to a great part of the diverse Kuwaiti culture, it is better for women to become financially dependent on a spouse or male relative than becoming self-sufficient, which definitely has its own negative impact on liberty and crucial life decision making, and live under the shadow of a male guardian rather than becoming their own source of power and protection.



Diplomatic women committee celebrates Xmas and New Year

KUWAIT: The members of a diplomatic women committee celebrated Christmas and the New Year in Al-Nakheel Hotel with the attendance of a number of ambassadors and friends. The celebration commenced with a message from consultant of the committee Narjas Al-Shatti who congratulated everyone and prayed for committee's success and prosperity. Organizing committee members thanked Fawzia, the head of the public relations department and Yolanda for their efforts.

She also thanked countries that participated with their popular folklore dance and music.



There were artistic displays from Latin American countries as well as other counties like Eswatini, Nepal, Kenya, and Egypt. At the end of the event,

all participating countries were honored. Santa Clause participated in distributing presents to everyone.

Kuwait envoy presents credentials to President of European Council

BRUSSELS: Kuwait's new Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the European Union Nawaf Al-Enezi has presented his credentials to the President of the European Union Charles Michel. Al-Enezi conveyed the greetings of His Highness the Amir and His Highness the Crown Prince, Kuwait Mission to the EU said in a statement received by KUNA. Ambassador Al-Enezi expressed his aspiration to work with the European side to strengthen bilateral relations at different levels to serves the common interests of both Kuwaiti and European people, said the statement.

On his part, President Charles Michel expressed the appreciation of the European side for the pivotal role of the State of Kuwait in the region, the media-



BRUSSELS: Ambassador Nawaf Al-Enezi presents his credentials to the President of the European Council Charles Michel. — KUNA

tion diplomacy and the dialogue pursued by Kuwait. During the credentials presentation ceremony, the ambassador was accompanied by members of the Kuwaiti diplomatic mission in Brussels, Deputy Head of Mission Counselor Abdulaziz Saud Al-Qadfan, and First Secretary Imad Al-Kandari. — KUNA

Kuwait busts prostitution ring

KUWAIT: The Criminal Security Department at the Interior Ministry managed to arrest a network of 12 people engaged in immoral activities in Ahmadi governorate, the Interior Ministry's public relations department announced on Friday. "This

comes as part of continuous efforts to arrest outlaws and those involved in activities that go against public morals, as well as to combat human trafficking," the public relations department said. "Twelve people, including nine women and three men, were arrested with a number of surveillance cameras and smartphones used to manage the prostitution network on social media," the Interior Ministry said. All the accused were transferred to concerned departments for further legal procedures.

IOM lauds Kuwait's humanitarian efforts

KUWAIT: The head of the International Organization for Migration's mission in Kuwait, Mazen Abulhesen on Saturday affirmed Kuwait's support for the IOM humanitarian operations throughout the globe for decades. In a press release, Abulhesen said that Kuwait has generously backed the operations in Afghanistan, Ukraine and Pakistan, securing aid for thousands of refugees and relocated peoples.

Kuwait participated, in May, in the international forum for revising immigration, held at the UN headquarters, he said, adding that it was an occasion to celebrate successes and discuss challenges facing states in implementing the Global Compact for Migration, adopted in 2018. He affirmed in this regard Kuwait's adherence to attaining the charter objectives, in tandem with its national policies at this level. The IOM mission in Kuwait is celebrating the International Migrants Day, screening films to students and supporting a blood donation campaign, locally. The international occasion is marked on December 18 every year. —KUNA



Mazen Abulhesen

Local

Parents guidance very significant in protecting youngsters from drugs

GCC anti-drugs center plays crucial role against menace

KUWAIT: Parents set the example for the youngsters to follow and play a prime role in their upbringing and immunizing them against serious hazards such as narcotics. Dr Yaacoub Al-Kanderi, a sociology professor, said in an interview with Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) that parents play a great role in raising good-mannered children and those who lack presence and care of the seniors tend to seek alternatives to fill the compassion void. Youngsters deprived of such vital care look for other examples to follow and in some cases, they choose to follow footsteps of drug addicts and criminals.

They may also seek to fill the sentimental void via the social media and become prey of bad influencers. Dr Al-Kanderi had conducted a study, in cooperation with his peer, Dr Humoud Al-Gishaan, examining cases of the addicts at the Central Prison and the Psychiatry Center of Bashaer Al-Khair society. Examining a sample of addicts at correction facilities, Dr Al-Kanderi and Dr Al-Gishaan discovered that 90 percent of the cases started taking narcotics when they were less than 24 years of age.

This is a dangerous index, Dr Al-Kanderi has

said, for it shows that most of the addicts start taking drugs at young age, therefore this is when protection should be applied, not only providing treatment. The society needs a protection system rather than a treatment process to stop drugs' spread, he reemphasized, also stressing the necessity of good guidance to the youth to prevent from acquiring the harmful habit.

In addition to the role of the families, religious, educational, health, civil associations and the media can play a significant role in this regard, Dr Al-Kanderi said. In fact, schools' role comes after that of the families, in addition to the input of the social and psychological specialists. Collective action on part of all these parties can decrease drugs-related problems. Kuwait is not a drugs' exporting country, however there are gangs that promote the harmful commodities and traffic them into the country, he said, warning that the actual numbers of the addicts is quite large.

Anti-drugs center

Aware of the major dangers posed by narcotics against the Gulf communities, the GCC states had

established the Gulf Criminal Information Center to Combat Drugs as part of the efforts to unify efforts in the face of the menace. The center facilitates operations and joint investigations against illegal trade in drugs and enhancement materials.

Issa Al-Kawari, the director, told KUNA that the center, that comprises the six member states of the GCC, is specialized in swapping intelligence related to combating narcotics and relevant offenses. It facilitate and coordinates joint operations, data storage, analysis and swap, in addition to boosting cooperation among the member states in fighting cross-border organized crimes.

Moreover, the center aids local authorities in each of the member countries, draft recommendations regarding the illegal trade and addiction cases, holds cooperation with regional and international centers and agencies also involved in the field. Meanwhile, Moussa Al-Jameel, the head of the international cooperation at the center, affirmed in remarks to KUNA that the center often signs memos with counterpart external bodies to benefit from the foreign expertise in combating drugs and examines latest solutions to the issues abroad.

The center had worked out accords with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime for coordination regarding technical support and training, Nayef Arab University for Security Sciences, the police training academy at the Qatari Ministry of Interior and signed a memo of coordination with the British Anti-Crime Agency. Furthermore, the center maintains "distinctive relations" with the international police, the Interpol, the European police, the Europol, the Asian police, Aseanpol and the joint cell for Afghanistan (Iran and Pakistan) for fighting drugs in addition to many other renowned agencies.

Colonel Hamad Al-Hamad, the head of information and operations, affirmed that the center exchanges information with the security authorities in the GCC countries, depending on its data bank. For his part, Saeed Al-Dbai, the head of studies, said the center devotes particular attention to enhancing skills of the personnel, holding four training courses per year for the staff. The center, he added, contributed to establishing unified international networks for combating the narcotics. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Oil Minister Bader Al-Mulla visits the new Al-Zour Refinery. —KUNA photos

Oil Minister calls for implementing best safety programs

KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister and Oil Minister Bader Al-Mulla on Saturday stressed the importance of implementing the best international scien-

tific programs and methods in health, safety, security and environment fields. This came in Al-Mulla's statement carried by Kuwait Integrated Petroleum Industries Company (KIPIC) during his visit to new Al-Zour Refinery.

Received by CEO of Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) Sheikh Nawaf Al-Sabah and CEO of KIPIC Waleed Al-Bader, the minister said these programs and methods are a major priority as they are connected mainly to the oil sector to maintain safety of workers, ensure facilities and help the

State fulfill its pledges regionally and internationally.

Al-Mullah held a meeting with KIPIC management, congratulating the staff on launching the first phase of the refinery and exporting some products, in cooperation with the KPC international marketing sector, according to the statement. He was briefed on the company's strategy and future prospects, affirming support for everything that would develop the capabilities of the company and all oil sector's companies to enable them to implement their plans and projects. — KUNA

Kuwait's FM hails completion of Iraq housing project

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah has lauded the completion of a housing project in the port city of Umm Qasr, south Iraq. The project will be handed over to the housing department of the Iraqi Ministry of Construction, Housing, Municipalities and Public Works soon, the minister noted. "Under instructions from the Kuwaiti government in 2013, Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development started implementing this housing project to replace the houses in Umm Qasr adjacent to the Kuwaiti-Iraqi borderline as a prelude to removal of those houses," Sheikh Salem pointed out.



Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah

The move is in keeping with recommendations of the UN mission on maintenance of the Kuwait-Iraq border marks and removal of obstacles along both sides of the borderline, he explained. The project is a great achievement that reflects the care of the leaders of the two countries for the brotherly relations and their keenness on opening new horizons for the mutually beneficial cooperation, he added. —KUNA

Flocks of great cormorant rock Kuwait

KUWAIT: Flocks of the greater cormorant fly to Kuwait in November and roam the country until February before departing in the direction of the Caspian Lake during the breeding season. Mohammad Shah, the head of the team for monitoring birds of the Kuwait Environment Protection Society, told KUNA that people have been sighting huge flocks of the bird, boasting the dark-colored feathers, above some regions in Kuwait. These birds spend a lot of time roaming Kuwait Bay but regularly fly to other spots namely the natural reserves, he said, noting that the bay is an incubating spot for many animals, birds and fish. He expressed his belief that some of these birds have been settling in the country due to abundant water and food. — KUNA



Kuwait and WHO discuss draft deal on pandemic prevention

GENEVA: Kuwait and the World Health Organization (WHO) discussed a draft legally binding agreement on the prevention of any future pandemic, and response to it on the basis of solidarity and fairness principles. This came in a meeting held between Kuwait's Permanent Representative to the United Nations and other international organizations in Geneva Ambassador Nasser Al-Hayen and WHO Director General Tedros Ghebreyesus in Geneva.

Speaking to KUNA after the meeting, Al-Hayen said the talks covered the organization's view on the draft, within the framework of applying the lessons learnt from the Covid-19 pandemic. He lauded the WHO's efforts and effective role in shedding light on several problems related to health systems and the importance of being ready for any pandemic or emergency cases across the world. Al-Hayen voiced Kuwait's keenness on enhancing its distinguished ties with the WHO for developing Kuwait's health system to be very ready for any emergency cases. Meanwhile, Ghebreyesus extolled Kuwait's health system performance mainly during the Covid19 and beyond.

Kuwait govt hailed

Meanwhile, World Health Organization representative in Kuwait Dr Assad Hafeez has 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. — KUNA

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News in brief

Kuwait congratulates Qatar

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a cable to the Qatari Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani congratulating him on the anniversary of ascending the throne. His Highness the Amir praised the noticeable development, growth and great achievements that Qatar has witnessed. He also lauded the brotherly, solid and deep-rooted ties between the two gracious families, countries and peoples, affirming keenness on bolstering these bonds further. He also expressed good wishes to the Qatari Amir and his people. Also, His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a similar cable to the Qatari Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani. He wished the brotherly State of Qatar further progress and prosperity under the sagacious leadership of the Amir.

Kuwait decries UN attack

KUWAIT: The Foreign Ministry on Saturday decried the attack on the UN peacekeepers in southern Lebanon where an Irish soldier was killed and others were wounded. The ministry in a statement called for investigating circumstances of the attack and bringing the culprits into account. It emphasized Kuwait's principled and unwavering stand against terrorism and violence, expressing condolences to the Irish Government, people and family of the deceased soldier, wishing quick recovery for the injured.

Kuwaitis in Jordan warned

KUWAIT: Kuwait Embassy in Jordan has warned citizens there to be careful and cautious and to follow security authorities' instructions due to recent incidents by groups of vandals and outlaws in the Hussainiya area of Jordan's southern Ma'an Governorate. The warning was issued for Kuwaiti citizens residing in Jordan instructing them to contact the embassy's emergency contact number (009627932020) in case of any emergency or in need of inquiry. — From KUNA

World Cup draws attention of millions of people worldwide

Kuwait's sports fans support their favorite teams

KUWAIT: The World Cup is the most popular tournament worldwide drawing attention of millions of fans across the globe. Diwanis, malls and cafes in Kuwait have been drawing large numbers of sports fans to watch World Cup games since the 2022 Qatar championship kicked off on November 20, amid even higher attraction in the final rounds of the event. With football fans showing much enthusiasm during the live broadcast of FIFA matches, malls and cafes seek to provide better visual services including big screens, and very attractive food and drinks menus.

The tournament, held once every four years, groups 32 national teams from all continents and is run by the international football federation, FIFA. The final of Qatar 2022 is due on December 18 at Lusail stadium, pitting France against Argentina, a showdown forecast to engage a wide enthusiastic audience across the globe. The first tournament at this level was held in Uruguay in 1930 when the host country beat Argentina 4-2. In 1934, Italy, the host country, won the tournament, beating Czechoslovakia 2-1. Italy won the title again in 1938 beating Hungary 4-2 at a match held in Paris.

Following World War II, the mondial was held in 1950 and Uruguay beat the host country, Brazil, 2-1. In the 1954 mondial, West Germany won the gold trophy overcoming Hungary with a 3-2 result in a match held in Switzerland and Brazil won the first title in the 1959 mondial, beating the host country, Sweden 5-2. It took the gold medal for the second consecutive time in 1962 beating Czechoslovakia in Chile. England, the host country, won the title for the first time in 1966 beating West Germany 4-2 in London.

In the 1970 mondial, Brazil won the title against in a 4-1 match in Mexico. In 1974, West Germany, the host country, won it overcoming the Dutch with a 2-1 score. The Argentines won the championship for the second time in 1986, with a 3-2 score vis a vis West Germany in a match played in Mexico. In 1990, the tournament was held in Italy where West Germany emerged as the top winner after playing against Argentina with a 1-0 result.



KUWAIT: In this file photo, Kuwait's fans cheer up Morocco team during their World Cup match. World Cup is the most popular tournament worldwide drawing attention of millions of fans across the globe. — KUNA

Argentina, the host nation, won the tournament for the first time in the 1978 Mondial beating Holland 3-1. In 1982, Italy won it, thrashing Germany 3-1 in the championship hosted by Spain. The Argentines won it again in the 1986 mondial against Germany (3-2). In the Mexico-hosted tournament in 1990, held in Italy, West German was crowned again beating Argentina with a single goal score. In the 1994 US-hosted mondial, Brazil won the title beating Italy with penalty kicks 3-2. In the 1998 competition, it was the French who took the cup after crushing Brazil 3-0.

In the 2002 mondial, organized for the first time in Asia, namely in South Korea and Japan, the top winner was Brazil after hitting Germany with two

goals without reply. In the 2006 mondial, the Italians emerged as the winners after a heated match with the French with a 5-3 score made in penalty kicks. In the 2014 mondial held in Brazil, the Germans beat the Argentines 1-0 and France won the title another time in the competition hosted by Russia in 2018, beating Croatia 4-2.

Brazil is on top of the list of teams of most wins, taking the title five times (1958, 1962, 1970, 1994 and 2002), followed by Germany four times (1954, 1974, 1990 and 2014) and Italy also four times (1934, 1938, 1982 and 2006). France grabbed the cup twice (1998-2018), Argentina also two times (1978-1986) and Uruguay followed their steps taking it in 1930 and 1950. — KUNA

Kuwaitis celebrate as Bahrain marks 51st National Day

KUWAIT: In a popular event and festive atmosphere, including Al-Ardha dancing performance, Kuwaitis visiting the Avenues Mall joined celebrations by Bahrainis as they mark their country's 51st National Day and 23rd anniversary of King Hamad Bin Issa's assumption of power. The event reflected the level of fraternal and well-established relations between the two brotherly countries and people. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Folk band gives a performance on the occasion of Bahrain's 51st National Day. — KUNA photos



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Candlelight vigil held for gang-rape, murder victim

Report says 2022 'year of botched executions' in US

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KHARKIV: A rescuer walks amid rubbles of a destroyed building following Russian strikes on Dec 16, 2022. — AFP

Ukraine works to restore power

Russian missiles batter electricity grid • Putin meets top military brass

KYIV: Ukraine worked Saturday to restore electricity and water supplies after Russia's latest wave of attacks pitched multiple cities into darkness and forced people to endure subzero temperatures without heating or running water. The volley of missiles unleashed Friday came as President Vladimir Putin held extensive meetings with the military top brass overseeing Russia's invasion of Ukraine, where Moscow has stepped up bombardments. In the capital Kyiv, the metro had stopped running so that people wrapped in winter coats could take shelter at underground stations after air raid sirens rang out on Friday morning. Kyiv mayor Vitali Klitschko said the metro service was relaunched early Saturday and water supply had been restored. However, a third of Kyiv residents were still without power, Klitschko added.

Power was also restored throughout the eastern city of Kharkiv on Saturday, regional governor Oleg Sinegubov said, after the strikes left Ukraine's second city without electricity. Ukraine's national energy provider imposed emergency blackouts, saying on Saturday that the energy system "continues to recover". Ukrenergo had warned the extent of the damage in the north, south and center of the country meant it could take longer to restore supplies than after previous attacks. During a visit to the army staff Friday, Putin sought out proposals from his military commanders on how Russia should proceed with the Ukraine offensive, according to the Kremlin. The

Kremlin released footage of Putin presiding over a round-table meeting with Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and Chief of General Staff Valery Gerasimov among other top brass.

'Inhumane attacks'

After a series of humiliating battlefield defeats, Russia since October has pursued an aerial onslaught against what Moscow says are military-linked facilities. But France and the European Union have said the suffering inflicted on freezing civilians constitutes war crimes, with the bloc's foreign policy chief calling the bombings "barbaric". Russia fired 74 missiles - mainly cruise missiles - on Friday, 60 of which were shot down by anti-aircraft defenses, according to the Ukrainian army.

Kyiv withstood one of the biggest missile attacks since the start of the invasion. Regional officials said their air defense forces had shot down 37 out of 40 missiles. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said the strikes left hit power and water supplies in Kyiv and 14 regions. In the central city of Kryvyi Rig, where Zelensky was born, the air strikes hit a residential building. A 64-year-old woman and a young couple with a little son died, governor Valentyn Reznichenko said Saturday, adding that 13 others had been wounded. In the south, fresh Russian shelling in Kherson, recently recaptured by Ukraine, killed a 36-year-old man and injured a 70-year-old woman, governor



Russian President Vladimir Putin meets joint staff of troops involved in Russia's military operation in Ukraine in an undisclosed place in Russia on Dec 17, 2022. — AFP

Yaroslav Yanushevich said. Kherson has been subjected to persistent Russian shelling since Moscow's forces retreated in November, and power was cut in the city earlier this week.

Protracted war

Moscow has said the strikes on Ukrainian infrastructure are a response to an explosion on the Kerch bridge connecting the Russian mainland to the Crimean peninsula, annexed from Ukraine in 2014. Ukrainian defense officials said this week that their forces had downed over a dozen Iranian-made attack drones launched at Kyiv, a sign that Western-supplied

systems are having an impact.

Ukrainian military leaders have warned Moscow is preparing for a major winter offensive, including a fresh attempt to take Kyiv. Aiming to push Moscow to the negotiating table, the EU on Friday imposed further sanctions, adding restrictions on the export of drone engines to Russia or countries like Iran looking to supply Moscow with weapons. NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg told AFP that Russia was readying for a protracted war. "We see that they are mobilizing more forces, that they are willing to suffer also a lot of casualties, that they are trying to get access to more weapons and ammunition," he said. — AFP



RHONE, France: A firefighting vehicle is parked outside a seven-storey apartment building where 10 people killed when a fire broke out in the Mas-Du-Taureau neighborhood of Vaulx-en-Velin on Dec 16, 2022. — AFP

10 die in Lyon building blaze

LYON: Ten people, five of them children, died in a pre-dawn blaze Friday in a rundown apartment block in a deprived suburb of Lyon, the French government said. The blaze in Vaulx-en-Velin broke out at around 3:00 am (0200 GMT) in a building known as a drug dealing spot, said Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin. "All the flats were destroyed by fire... It's pretty shocking," 22-year-old Yasmine told AFP. "There were no fire doors, no fire extinguisher." The student, who declined to give her last name, said one of the building's doors had been "blocked by police, which undermined everyone's safety". Other eyewitnesses also reported the door being blocked. Lyon police have launched an inquiry into the cause, including possible arson. Darmanin said it was too early to determine how the fire started but hailed the work of firefighters, who arrived on the scene 12 minutes after being alerted.

They "were able to save 15 people by taking considerable risks for their own lives by climbing the building from the outside because they couldn't get inside and saving children and babies up to the seventh floor", he said. "Without the rapidity of the fire services and their heroism, the toll would have been much worse." Twenty four people were injured, including four "whose lives are still in danger", Darmanin said. Some of the bodies of the deceased were still being identified, he added.

The fire broke out on the ground floor and needed 180 firefighters and 70 fire engines to bring it under control, the authorities said. Witnesses at the scene described panicked occupants of the building screaming for help as smoke billowed from the windows. Several described children being dropped to crowds at the foot of the building, while one woman was said to have died after jumping from an upper floor to escape. — AFP

Tunisians vote in poll shunned by opposition

TUNIS: Uninspired Tunisians voted on Saturday for a parliament which will have virtually no power, marking the culmination of a power grab by President Kais Saied in the birthplace of the Arab Spring. Opposition political groups in the North African country are boycotting the election. They say the poll is part of a "coup" against the only democracy to have emerged from the 2011 wave of uprisings across the region.

The ballot follows three weeks of barely noticeable campaigning, with few posters in the streets and no serious debate among a public preoccupied with day-to-day economic survival. Last year, after months of political deadlock and economic crisis exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic, Saied suspended parliament and sent military vehicles to surround it. His assumption of executive power came more than a decade after a popular revolution unseated dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali.

The spark for that revolt came exactly 12 years before this election - on Dec 17, 2010 - when Mohamed Bouazizi burned himself to death to protest police harassment and unemployment. Saied, a former law professor, has pushed through a new constitution giving the presidency almost unrestrained powers and laying the ground for a 161-seat rubber-stamp legislature in the country of around 12 million people.

On Saturday, he told voters that the country was "breaking with those who destroyed the country". "Those who are elected today should remember that they are being watched by their voters, and that if they're not up to the job their mandate will be taken away," he said in front of a polling station in a comfortable district of Tunis. The head of the electoral board, Farouk Bouasker, told state television that more than 270,000 people had cast votes by 10:00 am. He called it "a significant number". But Noureddine Jouni, the head of a central Tunis polling station, sounded a different note. "We knew that it wouldn't be the normal turnout, but it's even less than we predicted," he said.

Boycotting 'farce'

In the streets of Tunis, many expressed indifference about the vote. "I'm not taking part in this farce," said Ridha, a 59-year-old engineer who declined to give his full name. "This president has disappointed us and he's dragging us towards the abyss." Saied's moves against an unpopular political system were initially supported by many Tunisians tired of the messy and corrupt democratic system in the post-Ben Ali era.

But almost a year and half on, the country's economic woes have gone from bad to worse. Inflation is around 10 percent. Frequent shortages of milk, sugar

and petrol are fueling a growing wave of emigration. The previous legislature had far-reaching powers in the mixed presidential-parliamentary system enshrined in Tunisia's post-revolution constitution. But the new chamber "won't be able to appoint a government or censure it, except under draconian conditions that are almost impossible to meet," said political scientist Hamadi Redissi.

Candidates in Saturday's poll are standing as individuals, in a system that neuters political parties including Saied's nemesis, the once-powerful Islamist-leaning Ennahdha party. Another analyst, Hamza Meddeb, told AFP the election was a "non-event" and predicted that few Tunisians would vote for largely unknown candidates. "This election is a formality to complete the political system imposed by Kais Saied and concentrate power in his hands," said Meddeb, a fellow at the Carnegie Middle East Center.

It 'will change nothing'

Almost all of Tunisia's political parties, including Ennahdha, said they would boycott the vote. The powerful UGTT trade union federation has called the poll meaningless. Student Salima Bahri, 21, said she wasn't voting because it "will change nothing". "All the candidates represent Kais Saied, not the Tunisian people," she said. But others were determined to take part. "It's a duty to vote, whatever the process is," said lawyer Ali Bejaoui, 48, after casting his ballot.

The vote comes with Tunisia in the final stages of negotiating a nearly \$2-billion bailout package from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to rescue its crisis-hit public finances. The IMF's top committee was set to approve next week the country's fourth loan in 10 years, but has postponed its decision until early January at the request of the Tunisian government, a source close to the talks said. — AFP



ENNASR, Tunisia: Tunisian President Kais Saied casts his ballot at a polling station near Tunis on Dec 17, 2022 during the parliamentary election. — AFP

Hundreds of fish die as huge Berlin aquarium bursts

BERLIN: A giant aquarium burst in Berlin on Friday, sending a "tsunami" of water and 1,500 tropical fish gushing into a hotel lobby and spewing debris onto a nearby street. It remains unclear what caused the 14-m high, cylindrical AquaDom aquarium to explode at around 5:50 am (0450 GMT), police said. "A million liters of water and all the fish inside spilled onto the ground floor" of the hotel complex housing the aquarium, a spokesman for the Berlin fire department told AFP. Guests at the Radisson Blu hotel reported being woken up by a loud bang and the feeling of a small earthquake, before seeing the destroyed aquarium and wrecked hotel lobby. Two people suffered light injuries from glass splinters and were taken to hospital. "It was a full-on tsunami," said Berlin Mayor Franziska Giffey, adding that it was pure luck the incident had happened in the early morning when very few people were around. "Despite the terrible destruction we're seeing, we're lucky people weren't seriously injured," she told reporters. The 1,500 fish in the tank "could not be saved", Giffey added.

However, firefighters said later that some of the fish were in fact rescued and taken to an adjacent aquarium. "We did manage to find fish that were still alive - they were in places where water had collected," a fire brigade spokesman told local media, saying "several dozen" had been saved. More than 100 emergency workers were at the scene, which was scattered with glass and other debris.

The AquaDom, which opened in 2004, has long been a popular tourist attraction in the German capital. It is located in the foyer of a Radisson Blu hotel and had a clear-walled elevator built inside to be used by visitors to the Sea Life leisure complex. According to the Sea Life website, the AquaDom is the largest cylindrical, freestanding aquarium in the world. Hotel guest Claudia Gonzales said she "jolted out of bed" when the aquarium burst. "It sounded almost like a firework but the hotel actually shook inside," she told AFP. Berlin police said water had "massively" leaked onto the adjoining Karl Liebknecht Street, forcing the partial closure of the major traffic artery. Tram service was also suspended. The area around the hotel remained sealed off by the early afternoon. The deluge of water left a path of destruction in its wake, breaking windows and doors and sweeping chairs, tables and plant pots into the street outside the hotel. — AFP

International

South Africa's Ramaphosa seeks re-election as ruling party boss

Dozens of delegates - largely supporters of Zuma - heckle president



JOHANNESBURG: South African President Cyril Ramaphosa gives a speech to launch the 55th National Conference of the African National Congress (ANC) at the National Recreation Center (NASREC) on Dec 16, 2022. - AFP

JOHANNESBURG: South Africa's ruling ANC was due to elect a new leader this weekend after the country's embattled president Cyril Ramaphosa pitched to steer the graft-tainted party for a second term. Despite a tarnishing cash-heist scandal and vociferous internal opposition, Ramaphosa, 70, is tipped to win re-election as the head of the African National Congress (ANC).

But after 28 years in power, the party shaped by Nelson Mandela into the main weapon that ended apartheid faces deep rifts and declining support. Its image has been stained by corruption, cronyism, nepotism and a lackluster economic record. In a three-hour-long address on Friday at a key ANC conference, Ramaphosa sought to project confidence and authority.

"The people of South Africa ... expect us to have the courage and the honesty to recognize our shortcomings and the resolve to correct them," he told some 4,500 ANC delegates at an events center near Johannesburg. Almost three decades after the end of white-minority rule, unemployment and crime rates are sky high, poverty and inequality remain widespread, and power cuts have hit record levels amid a

worsening energy crisis.

Dozens of delegates - largely supporters of corruption-tainted former president Jacob Zuma who was forced out by Ramaphosa - heckled Ramaphosa, chanting "Change! Change!" and banging on their tables. "Let us exercise discipline, let us exercise political consciousness," Ramaphosa said, urging attendees to debate issues instead of "shouting" and "howling at each other". The conference started several hours late on Friday but party officials said voting was still expected to take place on Saturday.

Bitter rivalry

Portraying himself as a graft-busting champion, Ramaphosa took control of the ANC in 2017 after his then boss Zuma became mired in corruption. But his clean-hands image has been dented by allegations he concealed a huge cash burglary at his farm rather than report the matter to the authorities. Ramaphosa won a reprieve ahead of the conference when the ANC used its majority in parliament to block a possible impeachment inquiry.

He is still leading the list of only two nominated presidential candidates so far and is seen to be the

most viable in the absence of better options in the 110-year-old party. "The president's term came with a lot of challenges like COVID-19 and he has really tried to pull through," said ANC delegate Mike Mtsweni, 28. "He is going to come back ... as the (party) president".

Ramaphosa's rival is his former health minister Zweli Mkhize, who is facing corruption allegations linked to COVID-19 funds. An ex-trade unionist, Ramaphosa fronted the historic negotiations to end apartheid in 1994 and helped draft the constitution - hailed as one of Africa's most progressive charters. On Friday, he was captured on camera laughing and shaking hands with Zuma, who is leading internal opposition to his rule.

On the eve of the conference, Zuma announced he was seeking to sue Ramaphosa over a leaked medical report linked to a 1990s arms corruption trial involving him. But the action is unlikely to hamper Ramaphosa's chances of securing a second term as ANC chief. The party has lost its grip over key cities in municipal elections and its electoral showing slumped last year to under 50 percent for the first time in its history. But it remains South Africa's largest party. — AFP

Zimbabwe fears losing teachers to Great Britain

BULAWAYO: After an exodus of nurses, Zimbabwe now faces losing its teachers as a new British recruitment policy threatens a fresh brain drain in the southern African country confronting a devastated economy. A British government update posted earlier this month listed teachers who qualified in Zimbabwe as eligible to apply directly for "qualified status" - allowing successful candidates to go straight into classrooms without further training.

The new policy, which the British government says will boost "opportunities for highly qualified teachers wherever they trained", will begin in Feb 2023 and also applies to teachers who qualified in Ghana, Nigeria and South Africa. For decades Zimbabwe's education system was respected as one of the best on the continent - one of the few accomplishments of former president Robert Mugabe's regime.

Years of unstinting economic decline blamed mainly on misgovernance have taken off the shine but the country still retains a pool of highly educated and skilled teachers. Yet, like most public workers, they earn meagre salaries. Some have already moved to other countries including South Africa and Rwanda. "This is great news," said Nyasha, a teacher who asked to be identified only by her first name. "The conditions here are unbearable".

In Zimbabwe teachers can make up to 50,000 Zimbabwean dollars (\$75) a month, a tiny fraction of what they can hope to earn in Britain. Zimbabwe's for-

mer colonial ruler. Qualified teachers in England, where the cost of living is significantly higher, are paid at least £2,300 (\$2,800) per month according to the Department for Education.

But an analysis by Schools Week, an outlet covering the sector, suggested just 73 percent of a key recruiting target for new teachers in English secondary schools would be met this year. Some in Zimbabwe have warned that the prospect of its teachers relocating to the UK threatened to tip over an already wobbly schooling system.

'What will happen?'

"Where does that leave us as a country?" asked Obert Masaraure, the head of a rural teachers' union. Zimbabwe, with a population of 15 million people of which 41 percent are under the age of 14, has about 150,000 teachers for more than 10,000 schools. The government says that it is at least 25,000 short of the number required. "If we all leave, what will happen to our own children?" asked Tafadzwa Munodawafa, who leads another educators' union fighting for better pay.

The education ministry refused to comment saying the government was unaware of the United Kingdom's recruiting policy. To try to stem an outflow of doctors and nurses, who have moved aboard en masse in recent years, authorities have made it more difficult to obtain the necessary paperwork to prove their qualifications. But some say this misses the point.

"Government should do the right thing and prioritize paying our professionals well so that we can stem the brain drain," Dr Henry Madzorera, a former health minister and opposition official, told AFP. The latest statistics from Zimbabwe's health watchdog show that over 4,000 healthcare workers resigned from public institutions in the year to November - with many thought to have emigrated. — AFP

Report says 2022 'year of botched executions' in US

WASHINGTON: One-third of the executions by lethal injection in the United States this year were "botched," a capital punishment watchdog group said Friday. The Death Penalty Information Center (DPIC) said 18 executions were carried out in the country in 2022, the fewest in a non-pandemic year since 1991. "2022 could be called 'the year of the botched execution' because of the high number of states with failed or bungled executions," the nonprofit DPIC said in its annual report.

"Seven of the 20 execution attempts were visibly problematic - an astonishing 35 percent - as a result of executioner incompetence, failures to follow protocols, or defects in the protocols themselves," it said. In Alabama, for example, it took three hours to set an IV line for the July 28, 2022 execution by lethal injection of convicted murderer Joe James Jr, the DPIC said.

Two other execution attempts in Alabama were halted because of problems setting IV lines and the governor ordered a moratorium on executions while a review of procedures is carried out. The DPIC said 37 of the 50 US states have abolished the death penalty or not carried out an execution in more than a decade. The governor of Oregon this month commuted the sentences of all 17 inmates on the state's death row to life in prison.

This year there were five executions in Oklahoma, five in Texas, three in Arizona, two in Alabama, two in



WASHINGTON: An anti-death penalty demonstrator stands outside the US Supreme Court on Oct 11, 2022. — AFP

Missouri and one in Mississippi. Among those executed in 2022 were "prisoners with serious mental illness, brain damage, intellectual disability, and strong claims of innocence," according to the DPIC. It said the number of death sentences imposed was also on the decline with just 20 so far this year. In perhaps the most notable case, the young man who carried out the 2018 mass shooting at a high school in Parkland, Florida, was given life in prison after a jury declined to sentence him to death. — AFP

Kuwait dealing firmly with...

Continued from Page 1

Kandari said the administration has developed an educational awareness strategy for students of schools, universities and institutes in

Jordan arrests 44 after deadly...

Continued from Page 1

Jordan's King Abdullah II warned on Friday that "anyone who raises a weapon against the state will be dealt with firmly". Interior Minister Mazen Al-Faraya, also on Friday, said "the security services are working to arrest the perpetrator and bring him to justice as soon as possible". Two other policemen were shot and wounded, also in Al-Husseiniya, the security directorate said.

Cab and truck drivers in several provinces of southern Jordan began strike actions more than a week ago. They were joined by bus drivers, and merchants who closed their shops on Wednesday to protest higher fuel costs. Protests broke out last week when demonstrators blocked roads with burning tyres and confronted security forces in some areas. Fuel prices have nearly doubled in Jordan compared with a year earlier, particularly the diesel used by trucks and buses, and kerosene for heating. The government has proposed relief measures including financial aid for the most-affected families.

Forty-nine security force members have been injured and more than 150 security and private citizens' vehicles attacked, PSD chief Major General Obaidullah Al-Maaytah told reporters. The PSD's cybercrime unit said on Friday it suspended operations of the TikTok app inside the kingdom "after its misuse", citing incitement to violence and "calls for chaos".

"Our demands are only reducing the price or cancelling taxes on fuel, effectively linking it to the global price," one protester, Majed Al-Sharari, told AFP. He joined dozens of striking public transport drivers who stopped their buses at the side of the road in Maan. They raised ban-

coordination with the General Administration for Drug Control and the Ministry of Education. Around 42 lectures have been held in public and private schools, in addition to Kuwait University, Public Authority for Applied Education and Training and private universities. In coordination with concerned authorities, 15 exhibitions were also held during the first semester of the academic year 2022-2023 to raise the level of awareness among male and female students. — KUNA

ners that read "Dignity strike". "We're not calling for chaos, and we're not rioters," Sharari said, blaming the government for "the blood of the martyr". The strike is peaceful and we are cooperating with the security services," Sharari, 56, complained that the protesters had been there for 15 days but no official had spoken with them.

Faraya told a press conference the government "is aware of the difficult living conditions and that coping with them is not easy," but violence would only make things worse. "This crime will not go unpunished, and the security services are working to arrest the perpetrator and bring him to justice as soon as possible," Faraya said. He added that government buildings and private institutions had been set on fire, car windows smashed, and 48 electricity poles toppled in Maan.

Energy costs have led to protests in Jordan before, including in 2018 when prime minister Hani Mulki resigned after several days of rallies against proposed tax reforms and energy price increases. The United States, a close ally of Jordan, on Thursday said US government personnel had been restricted from both personal and official travel to the provinces of Karak, Tafilah, Maan, and Aqaba until further notice. This was because of "reports of ongoing protests, burning tyres, and throwing stones at vehicles on streets and highways throughout Jordan and particularly in the south," the US embassy in Jordan said.

King Abdullah personally extended condolences to the family of the dead officer. "We will not accept assaults on the members of our security forces," a statement from his office quoted him as saying. The king affirmed the citizens' "right to express their opinions through peaceful means" over the economic conditions, but added "anyone who raises a weapon against the state will be dealt with firmly". The World Bank says Jordan is heavily in debt and faces around 23 percent unemployment. The Hashemite kingdom relies extensively on foreign aid. — AFP

Germany cuts ribbon on first...

Continued from Page 1

chilled and turned into a liquid to make it easier to transport. The FRSU stocks the LNG, then turns it back into a ready-to-use gas. Until now, Germany had no LNG terminals and relied on cheap gas delivered through pipelines from Russia for 55 percent of its supply.

But since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, gas supplies to Germany have been throttled and Berlin has been forced to rely on LNG processed by Belgian, French and Dutch ports, paying a premium for transport costs. The government decided to invest in building its own LNG terminals as quickly as possible and has spent billions of euros on hiring FSRUs to service them. However, Germany has not yet signed a single major long-term contract to begin filling the terminals from January.

"The import capacity is there. But what worries me are the deliveries," Johan Lilliestam, a researcher at the University of Potsdam, told AFP. A contract has been signed with Qatar for LNG to supply the Wilhelmshaven terminal but deliveries are not set to begin until 2026. Suppliers want long-term contracts, while the German government is not keen to be locked into multi-year gas deals as it wants the country to become climate-neutral by 2045.

"Companies need to know that the purchasing side in Germany will eventually diminish if we want to meet

climate protection targets," economy minister Robert Habeck has said. Environmental campaigners have criticized the LNG project, with the DUH association announcing it will take legal action. A handful of protesters turned out in Wilhelmshaven with placards demanding an "End to gas".

Germany could initially be forced to buy LNG from the expensive spot markets, which would lead to higher prices for consumers. The market could also be squeezed next year by renewed demand in China as it emerges from strict COVID-19 curbs, Andreas Schroeder, an expert at the ICIS energy research institute, told AFP. "If Europe has been able to receive so much LNG in recent months, it is because Chinese demand was low," Schroeder said.

China recently signed a deal to buy gas from Qatar for 27 years - the longest such deal in history, according to Doha. Germany has also had a cold winter so far, meaning the gas tanks have been emptying faster than expected. "Gas consumption is increasing. This is a risk, especially if the cold spell continues," said Klaus Mueller, the head of the country's Federal Network Agency regulatory body, in a recent interview.

As a result, there is a real risk that Germany could experience temporary supply disruptions next winter, according to Schroeder. Gas usage is currently down 13 percent compared to last year but the government wants that figure to be closer to 20 percent. In Europe, the gap between supply and demand could reach 27 billion cu m in 2023, according to an IEA report - equivalent to 6.5 percent of the European Union's annual consumption. — AFP

Musk restores some journalists'...

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The accounts of some other journalists remained suspended early Saturday, including those of Business Insider's Linette Lopez and former MSNBC anchor Keith Olbermann. The latest controversy began Wednesday when Musk suspended @elonjet, an account that tracked flights of his private plane. Musk said the move was necessary after a car in Los Angeles carrying one of his children was followed by "a crazy stalker" and seemed to blame the jet tracking for the incident.

Some of the journalists had reported on the affair, including tweets linking to the suspended @elonjet account, which Musk said amounted to offering "assassination coordinates" against him and his family. In a chat hosted live on Twitter, Musk provided no evidence for his claim but told suspended reporters that on Twitter "everyone's

going to be treated the same... they're not special because you're a journalist". Pressed further on his allegations, Musk ended the conversation. Twitter Spaces, the feature where the chat took place, was then suspended. The live audio service was back up Friday, with Musk saying they had been fixing a bug.

Musk's suspensions had drawn sharp criticism from media organizations, the European Union and the United Nations. UN rights chief Volker Turk welcomed Musk's decision to reinstate the accounts, "but serious concerns remain", he posted on Twitter. He also urged Musk to "commit to making decisions based on publicly-available policies that respect rights, including free speech. Nothing less."

Earlier the spokesman for UN chief Antonio Guterres called it a "dangerous precedent at a time when journalists all over the world are facing censorship, physical threats and even worse". The EU had warned Twitter could face fines through European laws. "News about arbitrary suspension of journalists on Twitter is worrying," EU commissioner Vera Jourova tweeted after the move. — AFP

International

Candlelight vigil held for 2012 Delhi gang-rape, murder victim

Singh's parents pay silent tribute, seek justice for families of other rape victims

NEW DELHI: Scores of activists and campaigners held a candlelight vigil on Friday for Jyoti Singh, the young woman who was brutally gang-raped and murdered on a New Delhi bus 10 years ago. The horrific crime appalled India and the world and shone a spotlight on the scourge of sexual crimes against women. The crowd at the vigil, led by Singh's parents Asha Devi and Badrinath Singh, paid silent tribute and sought justice for the families of other rape victims.

"Nothing has changed in the last 10 years. I have been continuously raising my voice against crime against women but things haven't improved," Devi, 57, told reporters. "Small girls are being raped. How can we say things have changed... Things have changed only on paper." India registered 31,677 cases of rape in 2021, an average of 86 a day, according to the latest government crime report. Government figures show there were 24,923 rape cases in the year Singh was killed.

Singh, 23, was returning home from watching "Life of Pi" at the cinema with a male friend when they boarded a bus on the evening of Sunday Dec 16, 2012. Six assailants knocked out her male friend and dragged Singh to the back of the bus, where they raped and assaulted her with a metal rod. She and her friend were dumped for dead about an hour later.

Singh survived long enough to identify her six attackers but died a fortnight later in a Singapore

hospital. Five adults and a juvenile were charged with 13 offences two months later, and four men were hanged in 2020. The main accused was found dead in his prison cell a month after he was charged in what officials suspected was a suicide, although his family and lawyer alleged he was murdered. The youngest of those charged spent three years in a juvenile detention center.

Singh was dubbed "Nirbhaya" ("fearless") by the Indian media and became a symbol of the socially conservative country's failure to tackle sexual violence against women. Her death sparked huge, and at times violent, demonstrations involving tens of thousands of people in Delhi and elsewhere. It led to much soul-searching in a country where patriarchal attitudes still rule and girls are often seen as a financial burden.

Under pressure, the government introduced harsher penalties for rapists and the death penalty for repeat offenders. Several new sexual offences were also introduced, including for stalking and jail sentences for officials who failed to register rape complaints. More CCTV cameras and street lights have been installed, and there are centers where rape survivors can access legal and medical help. However, tens of thousands of rape cases remain stuck in India's overburdened legal system and horrific crimes against women continue to be reported. — AFP



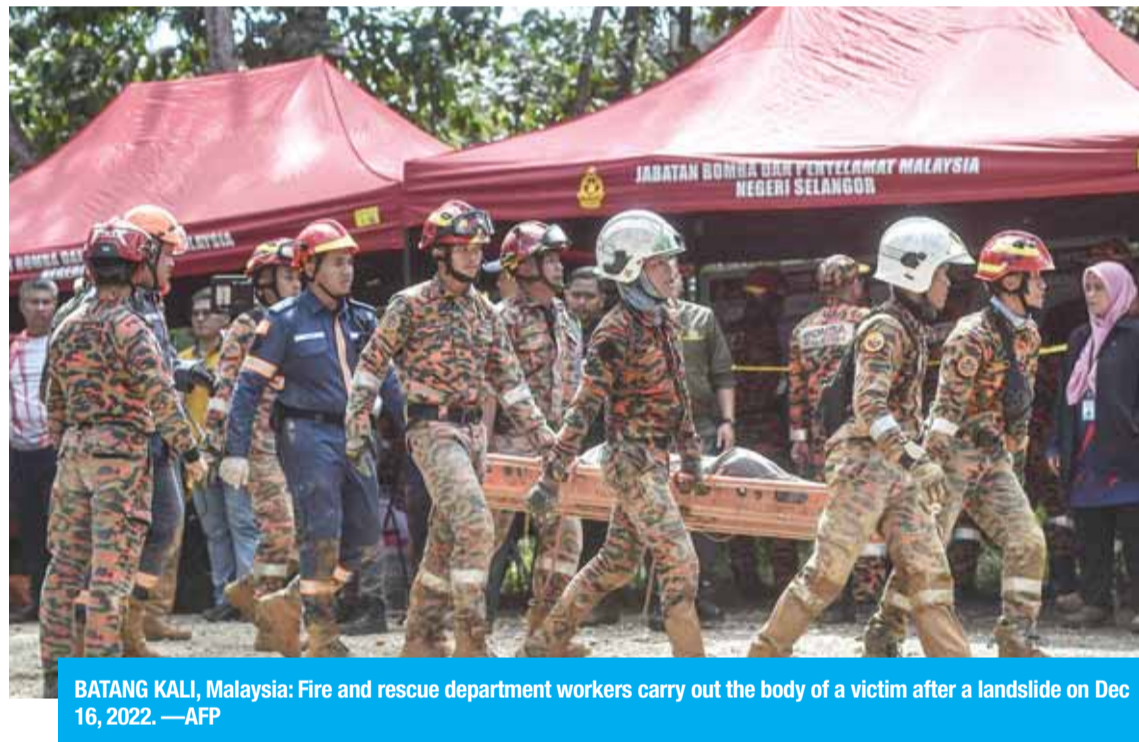
NEW DELHI: Asha Devi, mother of the 2012 Delhi gang rape victim, along with people, holds candles and placards during a vigil on Dec 16, 2022 on the tenth anniversary of the heinous gang rape of the young woman. — AFP

Malaysia landslide death toll hits 23

BATANG KALI, Malaysia: Rescue workers scoured muddy terrain for survivors and bodies on Saturday as the death toll from a landslide at a Malaysian campsite rose to 23, including six children, authorities said. Ten people were still missing after a predawn landslide hit the site located at an organic farm near the town of Batang Kali just outside the capital Kuala Lumpur on Friday. Selangor state fire and rescue director Norazam Khamis said the chances of finding survivors in the mud and debris a day after the disaster were "slim."

Officials said there had been more than 90 people, most of them asleep, at the campsite near a mountain casino resort when the landslide struck. Authorities said 61 people had been found safe or rescued. Two of the victims were "believed to be a mother and her child in a state of embrace buried under the earth", Norazam told reporters on Friday.

The farm did not have a license to run a campsite and its operators would be punished if they were found to have broken the law, authorities said. Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim visited the area late Friday and said financial aid would be given to the families of those killed or injured in the disaster. Selangor state chief minister Amirudin Shari tweeted that all picnic and camping sites in the state would be closed for a week.



BATANG KALI, Malaysia: Fire and rescue department workers carry out the body of a victim after a landslide on Dec 16, 2022. — AFP

Landslides are common in Malaysia after heavy rains, which are regular at the end of the year. However, no heavy rains were recorded in the area on the night of the disaster. The government has imposed strict rules on hillside development. In March, four people were killed after a massive

landslide triggered by heavy rains buried their homes in a Kuala Lumpur suburb. In one of the deadliest such incidents, a huge mudslide in 1993 brought on by heavy rain caused a 12-storey residential building outside the capital to collapse, killing 48 people. — AFP

Philippine Maoist leader dies at 83

MANILA: Jose Maria Sison, who launched one of the world's longest-running Maoist insurgencies, has died at 83, the Communist Party of the Philippines announced Saturday. The former university professor died in the Netherlands, where he had lived in self-imposed exile since the collapse of peace talks in 1987, when the rebellion that has claimed tens of thousands of lives was at its peak.

"Sison... passed away at around 8:40 p.m. (Philippine time) after two weeks' confinement in a hospital in Utrecht," the party said in a statement, without specifying the cause of death. "The Filipino proletariat and toiling people grieve the death of their teacher and guiding light." The Philippines' defense ministry said his death could finally lead to an end of violence in the country, calling Sison the "greatest stumbling block" to peace.

"The death of Sison is but a symbol of the crumbling hierarchy" of the communist movement, it said, calling for remaining rebels to surrender. "A new era without Sison dawns for the Philippines... Let us now give peace a chance." Sison had hoped to overthrow the government and establish a Maoist regime that would end "US imperialism" in the former American colony. The US State Department designated the communist party and its armed wing foreign terrorist organizations in 2002.

The ongoing armed struggle, launched in 1969, grew out of the global communist movement, finding fertile soil in the Philippines' stark rich-poor divide. Recruitment for the rebellion also benefited from Ferdinand Marcos's 1972-1986 dictatorship, when the legislature was shuttered, the free press muzzled and thousands of opponents tortured or killed.

At its peak in the 1980s, the group boasted about 26,000 fighters, a number the military says has now dwindled to a few thousand. Since 1986, successive Philippine administrations have held peace talks with the communists through their Netherlands-based political arm, the NDF. The 2016 election of former president Rodrigo Duterte - a



Jose Maria Sison

self-declared socialist and a former student of Sison - brought a burst of optimism for peace talks.

But the talks later devolved into threats and recrimination, with Duterte officially cutting them off in 2017, declaring the group a terrorist organization and accusing them of killing police and soldiers while negotia-

tions were under way. In recent years, the government has claimed that hundreds of communist rebels have surrendered in exchange for financial assistance and livelihood opportunities. Deadly clashes still take place in different parts of the country, which is also plagued by kidnap-for-ransom groups and Islamist secessionist movements in the southern region. — AFP

Toxic alcohol kills 37 in 'dry' Indian state

CHAPRA, India: Toxic hooch has killed at least 37 people in the eastern Indian state of Bihar where alcohol is banned, officials said Saturday, with unconfirmed reports putting the death toll at over 70. Selling and consuming liquor is banned in several parts of India, driving a thriving black market for potent and sometimes lethal backstreet moonshine that kills hundreds every year.

Families of the victims in the latest tragedy said that people from several villages drank a locally made tittle known as "Mahua" or "Desi Daru" on Monday at a wedding and other events. Many then complained of stomach pain and vision loss and started vomiting. By Thursday more 20 people were dead and on Saturday around a dozen were in hospital in a critical condition.

"More than two dozen people have lost lives in the last 48 hours," a police official told AFP, saying that 37 people had died so far. He was unable to confirm some local media reports that 71 people had died. Police have detained more than 100 people in connection with illegal manufacturing and



BAHRAULI, India: Villagers gather near a body of a victim before his last rites, who lost his life after consuming locally made tittle, on Dec 17, 2022. — AFP

selling liquor in the last three days, while 600 liters of hooch have been seized. Local authorities have been trumpeting their use of drones, helicopters

and motorboats to crack down on the black market, but the most recent incident is just the latest in a string of similar deadly cases. — AFP

BJP members burn effigies of Pak FM

BHUBANESHWAR: Members of India's ruling party set fire to effigies of Pakistan's foreign minister on Saturday, following a war of words between the rival South Asian rivals at the United Nations. The nuclear-armed neighbors have had poisoned relations and fought several wars since independence from Britain 75 years ago.

This week at the UN in New York, Indian Foreign Minister S Jaishankar told Pakistan to "try to be (a) good neighbor", calling the country the "epicenter of terrorism". His Pakistani counterpart Bilawal Bhutto Zardari responded by calling India's Hindu nationalist Prime Minister Narendra Modi the "butcher of Gujarat". This was in reference to when Modi was chief minister of the state of Gujarat when sectarian riots in 2002 left more than 1,000 people, mostly Muslims, dead. He was accused of turning a blind eye.

On Friday hundreds of members of Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) members held a protest outside Pakistan's High Commission in New Delhi over the remarks. The BJP announced new protests around the country for Saturday, and in the cities of Bhubaneswar, Amritsar and Ranchi demonstrators set fire to effigies of Bhutto Zardari and shouted slogans. On Friday, India's foreign ministry called Bhutto Zardari's comments a "new low even for Pakistan", while quipping that "Made in Pakistan" terrorism had to stop".

Pakistan on Saturday responded with its own statement saying that the Indian government "has tried to hide behind subterfuge and canard to conceal the realities of the 2002 Gujarat massacre". "It is a shameful story of a mass killings, lynching, rape and plunder. The fact of the matter is that the masterminds of the Gujarat massacre have escaped justice and now hold key government positions in India," the statement added. — AFP

Fiji vote tight with count in final stretch

SUVA: Fiji's tumultuous election was too close to call Saturday heading into the final stretch of counting, with a thin margin separating incumbent Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama from bitter rival Sitiveni Rabuka. Two-time coup leader and former prime minister Rabuka, 74, is challenging Bainimarama, 68, an ex-navy commodore who has won two elections since first seizing control of the island nation in a 2006 putsch.

Rabuka's People's Alliance party and its coalition partner held a 45 to 42 percent lead over Bainimarama's Fiji First on Saturday evening, with more than half the country's 2,071 polling stations having submitted their results. But Bainimarama - who has been silent since votes were cast Wednesday - is widely expected to gain ground when booths in urbanised areas submit their tallies, with a final result anticipated by Sunday.

Police summoned Rabuka for questioning late Friday after he repeatedly complained about "anomalies" in the results and asked the military to step in. People's Alliance general-secretary Sakiasi Ditoka was also questioned. Rabuka said Saturday he believed he had been summoned because of his request to the military, which has "overall" responsibility for maintaining stability under Fiji's 2013 constitution. "They tried to paint a picture of a person, a high-profile person, making a statement like that - and how that would impact on the people," he told reporters.

Analyst Lucy Albiston from the Australian Strategic Policy Institute said all options were on the table for both sides as the final result loomed. "Depending on the results on Sunday, we may still see more calls questioning the electoral process or utilizing the legal system in an attempt to hold on to a chance of power," she told AFP. — AFP

Business

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2022

At COP15, big businesses urged to act for nature

Delegates working on a new 'Global Biodiversity Framework'

MONTREAL: Widely blamed for ravaging Earth's ecosystems, big businesses are nevertheless being turned to as key players in a deal to save nature at the COP15 biodiversity conference.

With hundreds of billions of dollars needed for the task, public funds can only fill part of the gap. Campaigners and experts at the talks are demanding companies act to reduce their impact and firms in turn are asking for clear rules of engagement. Ministers at the meeting in Montreal are thrashing out a global agreement for the next decade to curb damage to Earth's forests, oceans and species—with conservation and finance top of the agenda. "One of the other things at stake in this COP is getting businesses involved," said Pierre Cannel of the Worldwide Fund for Nature, on the sidelines of the talks. "Whatever the outcome of the summit, they will have to ask themselves how they can curb the fall in biodiversity."

Elizabeth Mrema, the head of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity that underpins COP15, said a record number of private-sector parties registered for this year's summit, where delegates are working on a new Global Biodiversity Framework. "Clearly they've listened," she told AFP. "They have understood or they are getting there now, understanding also the impact of their operations on nature, the nature biodiversity which we all depend on and (they) also depend (on) for their businesses," she added.

"If they are not part of the framework, their businesses will also suffer."

Invest in nature

Some \$900 billion a year is needed to move from

"an economy that devours nature to a neutral and then a positive economy," says Gilles Kleitz of the French state development agency AFD. For this, "the role of businesses is fundamental," said Didier Babin, a researcher at Cirad, an institute that focuses on sustainable agriculture. "More businesses have to be brought on board" to help fund the targets, he added. "They depend on biodiversity and they must invest more in the capital of nature. Nature needs to be thought of as an asset." One of the targets in the framework under discussion at COP15 is a section aimed at obliging big companies and financial groups to measure and publish their impacts on the natural world and their exposure to it.

The World Economic Forum said in a 2020 report that more than half of global production depends heavily (15 percent) or moderately (37 percent) on nature and services related to it.

It calculated the value of businesses' exposure to degraded ecosystems at \$44 trillion. The report found that the construction sector was the most exposed with \$4 trillion, followed by agriculture with \$2.5 trillion and the food and drink industry with \$1.4 trillion.

Measuring biodiversity impact

At COP15, a grouping of 330 businesses called Business for Nature is pushing for a uniform framework for all corporations to report their impacts and exposure. With collective turnover of more than \$1.5 trillion, they include big names such as Unilever, Ikea, Danone, BNP Paribas and Tata Steel.

"There will be no economy, there will be no business on a dead planet," said the grouping's executive director, Eva Zabey. "And so now we need gov-

Data scientist Adriana De Palma of London's Natural History Museum, who serves as research lead for the BII, told AFP it is based on a robust, peer-reviewed and open access methodology. As negotiations happen, the team behind BII input, for example, how many countries have committed to implement a cornerstone pledge of protecting 30 percent of lands and oceans by 2030. "We can then predict what that is going to mean for biodiversity in 20, 50 or 100 years," she said.

Rooting for success

New funding pledges by wealthy countries to assist lower income nations in protecting their biodiversity have helped to nudge up slightly the predicted global average of BII to 70.7 percent by 2050 — meaning the average ecosystem will have that percentage of its natural ecological community left. The current figure is 68.5 percent, set to drop to 66.4 percent if "business as usual" continues but rise to 76.4 percent in case of "real action" which the UN summit was meant to deliver.

For now, ECONARIO is cycling between the pessimistic and optimistic scenarios in order to show what could be possible—but if policymakers fail to achieve an ambitious target, that will be reflected in a very sorry looking robotic plant.

"We shouldn't shy away from the hard numbers, it's not time to sugarcoat anymore," said Biersteker.

De Palma added they were in talks with North American museums to loan the artwork out after the UN summit concludes, and it will eventually return



MONTREAL: Conference participants play soccer as climate activists hold signs during the United Nations Biodiversity Conference (COP15) in Montreal, Quebec, Canada, on December 16, 2022. —AFP

ernments to adopt an ambitious global biodiversity framework that will provide the political certainty and it will require businesses to contribute."

Brune Poirson, director of sustainable development at the hotel group Accor, said COP15 "must be a key milestone" in this process. "We need a framework with all the actors in the sector," she said. Efforts are gaining pace to make companies disclose their contribution to the carbon emissions that drive climate change—but relatively few companies currently declare their impact on the ecosystems

that support all life. "This summit needs to be a turning point in humanity's relationship with nature and to do so it needs to kick off fundamental changes in the way the economy works," said Eliot Whittington of the Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership. "More and more businesses and financial institutions are realizing how essential action on nature and biodiversity is, but they need governments to provide the right rules and incentives to solve market failures and make change possible." —AFP

Robot plant grows, wilts on fate of UN nature talks

MONTREAL: It's not always easy to make sense of the complex environmental diplomacy taking place at a UN summit billed as humanity's last hope to save nature. That's why a scientist and artist have teamed up to build a large, data-driven robotic plant that withers or flourishes depending on countries' policy commitments: a tangible demonstration of how human actions will impact the world's threatened species.

Called "ECONARIO," the 5.5-meter (18-foot) tall artwork took a year to build from recycled steel and is currently on display in Montreal Convention Centre, keeping policymakers at the COP15 meeting on their toes as they attempt to hammer out a deal to protect ecosystems. Its creator, Dutch artist Thijs Biersteker, told AFP the idea behind it is simple: "If the research does not reach us, then how can the research teach us?"

"Art reflects the time we're in, and it should reflect these important issues." The plant feeds on data from the Biodiversity Intactness Index (BII) — an estimated percentage of the original number of species that remain, and their abundance in any given area, despite human impacts.

Canada increases biodiversity funding in crunch UN talks

MONTREAL: Canada said Friday it was ramping up its international biodiversity funding, an overture to developing countries during difficult UN talks aimed at sealing a "peace pact with nature." Environment minister Steven Guilbeault announced an increase of 255 million Canadian dollars (US\$186 million) in the aid it will send to lower income countries to help them protect their ecosystems, bringing the total figure to 1.5 billion Canadian dollars annually. It comes as the world's environment ministers have converged on Montreal for the final phase of the summit, called COP15.

The talks' success hinges on an agreement regarding the mobilization of funds to help developing countries meet the draft agreement's more than 20 targets, including protecting 30 percent of lands and oceans by 2030. Brazil — one of the most prominent voices at the summit — is seeking at least \$100 billion from the Global North, a demand shared by India, Indonesia and African countries.

That is about ten times more than current flows, and about as much as has been pledged for adaptation against climate change (though not delivered).

When the ministers arrived on Thursday, a dozen developed countries touted new or recently increased commitments to biodiversity funding, in a move welcomed by observers and nonprofits. The ambition remains to seal an agreement for biodiversity that is as historic as the Paris accord

for climate was in 2015.

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 plant and animal species with



to Europe. "Using a piece of art like this to really connect with people so they see the damage that individual choices, company choices and government choices are having on the world, is incredibly valuable," she said. —AFP

Dubai mulls new 5-year multiple entry tourist visa

DUBAI: A five-year multiple entry tourist visa on a bigger scale is being studied by Dubai tourism body in order to attract more tourists, according to a senior official. "We are working with authorities closely to ensure that we roll out on a much bigger scale very soon - because the multi-entry visa will again help us a lot in terms of attracting tourists, especially from the nearby region," said Issam Kazim, CEO, Dubai Corporation for Tourism and Commerce Marketing. India is the top source market for Dubai and the UAE with millions of tourists visiting the emirate every year. The latest data showed 1.438 million Indians visiting Dubai during January-October 2022 period.

The main objective is to get to a stage where people can apply for a five-year visa from Dubai Corporation for Tourism and Commerce Marketing digital platform. The UAE cabinet has approved a new long-term visa system aimed at attracting international investors and high-skilled professional workers. In a major announcement, the UAE had cabinet also approved 100 percent foreign ownership of companies in the country, which has previously been limited to those companies based in free zones. — Agencies

UAE president opens Khalifa Port expansion

ABU DHABI: Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, president of the UAE, inaugurated Khalifa Port's expansion - a major development project with a total investment of AED 4 billion. The official inauguration of the expansion program by the UAE president marks another major milestone in a year that has seen AD Ports Group list on the Abu Dhabi Securities Market (ADX), open new trade corridors, complete a series of major acquisitions, rapidly transform its business and portfolio of services, and build strong relations with existing and emerging trade partners for the UAE.

As part of the expansion, which includes the development of the port's South Quay, Khalifa Port Logistics, and Abu Dhabi Terminals at a total investment of AED 4 billion, Khalifa Port has grown from 2.43 km to 8.63 km, while its quay wall has been significantly extended from 2.3 kilometers to 12.5 kilometers. It now provides 21 berths and offers a range of bespoke services for key strategic industries, positioning it among the global elite of deep-water ports, with an estimated value of AED 20.4 billion.

The program is set to make a major contribution to AD Port Group's goal of increasing handling capacity at Khalifa Port by 2030 to 15 million TEUs per year, and general cargo handling capacity to 25 million tons. Officially inaugurated by the late Sheikh Khalifa on 12.12.12, Khalifa Port was developed from a stretch of reclaimed land four kilometers out to sea and is now a major hub serving more than 25 container shipping lines with direct links to more than 70 international destinations. — Agencies



MONTREAL: Global Youth Biodiversity Network holds a protest during the United Nations Biodiversity Conference (COP15) in Montreal, Quebec, on December 16, 2022. Montreal is expected to have at least 10 cm (4 inches) of snow throughout the day. — AFP

Business

Biden administration to start refilling strategic oil reserve

Keystone Pipeline leak prompts new emergency exchange

WASHINGTON: The US Energy Department announced Friday a plan to add oil back to the Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) after a historically large release undertaken by the Biden administration. The policy marks a significant shift after President Biden authorized the biggest-ever release earlier this year following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which sent oil prices to \$120 a barrel.

The plan represents "an opportunity to secure a good deal for American taxpayers by repurchasing oil at a lower price than the \$96 per barrel average price it was sold for, as well as to strengthen energy security," the Department of Energy (DOE) said in a news release.

The agency said it will buy up to three million barrels of oil under a pilot program designed to attract sellers who can lock in prices. The SPR currently holds 382 million barrels of crude, down some 216 million barrels from its level before September 2021. The new emergency exchange is aimed at addressing "potential supply disruptions" caused by the shutdown of the Keystone Pipeline due to a leak earlier this month, the Energy Department said. Part of that key pipeline remains shuttered and no timeline has been issued for a full reopening. Emergency exchanges allow oil refineries to borrow oil from the SPR for a short period due to supply disruptions such as hurricanes or pipeline outages. Unlike with emergency sales such as the record-setting release of 180 million barrels announced in March, this oil must be returned. A Biden official said in October that the administration planned to purchase oil to refill the reserve as soon as prices hit around \$67-72 a barrel. Crude prices have fallen significantly from their peak levels earlier in the year. On Friday, US benchmark West Texas Intermediate dropped 2.4 percent to \$74.29 a barrel.

The DOE announcement noted that gasoline prices have dropped by more than \$1.80 a gallon from their



HOUSTON: In this file photo taken on October 19, 2022 in an aerial view, the Strategic Petroleum Reserve storage at the Bryan Mound site is seen in Freeport, Texas. — AFP

June 2022 apex and now stand at the cheapest level since September 2021. Average retail gasoline price stood at \$3.178 per gallon, according to the American Automobile Association - down from the record high at \$5.02 in June and nearly 15 cents under the year ago level. The Energy Department will start with an initial request for 3 million barrels, asking companies for the barrels to be delivered in February, the administra-

tion official said on a call with reporters. Companies participating in the process must submit their offers by Dec 28 and will offer oil at a fixed price. "There's still quite a bit of volatility in the system," the official said. "When we think the price is in the range where we think it's a good deal for taxpayers and good for the market, we will buy. The buyback will take months, it will take years."

The administration had announced in October it

would set up a process to purchase oil from companies to refill the SPR at a price of \$67 to \$72 a barrel. The department will also offer 2 million barrels for exchange to fuel producers looking to make up supply lost because of the Keystone pipeline transporting crude from Canada to refineries in the U.S. Midwest and Gulf Coast going offline after a spill last week, the official said. — Agencies



General Motors' Cruise vehicle equipped with autonomous driving system.

Feds probe GM's Cruise vehicles equipped with ADS

WASHINGTON: Federal regulators are eyeing autonomous vehicles with suspicion more than ever. In 2021, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) opened an investigation into Tesla's autonomous driving system (ADS). Now, the agency is looking into General Motors' Cruise vehicles equipped with ADS after receiving reports that they were becoming immobilized during operation and engaging in hard braking.

NHTSA's Office of Defects and Investigation is opening a Preliminary Evaluation to determine the scope and severity of the potential problem. The agency received three reports of Cruise vehicles slamming on the brakes, resulting in each one being rear-ended. The three were operating with an onboard human supervisor at the time of the crashes. NHTSA notes that the incidents resulted in two injuries.

NHTSA is uncertain of the number of incidents where the Cruise vehicles became immobilized. However, the agency said it has received "multiple" ones where the vehicles were operating without onboard human supervision. They originated from discussions with Cruise, media reports, and local authorities like the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency and the San Francisco Transportation Authority.

Cruise said that its vehicles had traveled nearly 700,000 miles autonomously without any life-threatening injuries or fatalities. It also said it would continue to cooperate with NHTSA. When NHTSA opened its

investigation into Tesla, it looked at 11 crashes involving the brand's EV and at least one stationary first responder vehicle. The crashes resulted in 17 injuries and one death, most occurring after dark. The dream of a driverless taxi has now become a reality - at least for General Motors and its autonomous vehicle company, Cruise. In a unanimous vote this week, the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) has given Cruise the green light to operate in San Francisco. This makes GM and Cruise the only companies to operate commercial driverless ride-hail service in a major US city.

The keyword here is "major city" as Waymo was the first to offer autonomous vehicles as taxi rides to the public in 2020, albeit, in suburban Chandler, Arizona. Waymo has expanded since, even offering autonomous taxi services in China. Autonomous driving systems are not perfect, and there are still issues to iron out before the technology goes mainstream. Ambitious promises of the tech haven't been met, even though automakers like Volkswagen believe that autonomous cars could be mainstream by 2030. Even though NHTSA is investigating the company, GM's robotaxi division has plans to expand in 2023. It is looking at places like Austin and Phoenix to enter. Currently, the company operates around 30 Chevrolet Bolt taxis. The dream of a driverless taxi has now become a reality - at least for General Motors and its autonomous vehicle company, Cruise. In a unanimous vote this week, the CPUC has given Cruise the green light to operate in San Francisco. This makes GM and Cruise the only companies to operate commercial driverless ride-hail service in a major US city. The keyword here is "major city" as Waymo was the first to offer autonomous vehicles as taxi rides to the public in 2020, albeit, in suburban Chandler, Arizona. Waymo has expanded since, even offering autonomous taxi services in China. — Agencies

Since then however, it has been stalemated. Members have spent months wrangling and hours this week alone debating a factual statement on the need for extending the looming deadline, according a Geneva-based trade official. In the end, the WTO's Council for Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) managed to agree to recommend to the WTO General Council meeting next week to "extend the deadline". That agreement came just a day before time ran out Saturday.

A previous, longer version of the text had suggested a six-month extension, but the final version made no reference to a timeline. Public interest groups, already harshly critical of the original deal for not going far enough, were outraged by the decision. "We are nearly three years into the COVID-19 pandemic," Max Lawson, co-chair of the People's Vaccine Alliance, said a statement. "As many as seventeen million people are estimated to have died in the time that the WTO has bickered over intellectual property rules for tests and treatments. "To say that more time is needed to consider the issue is utter nonsense," he added. "WTO members have decided to let another year pass without making any meaningful contribution to the fight against COVID-19." — AFP

UK retail sales drop on weaker online shopping

LONDON: British retail sales dropped in November, hit by weaker online shopping despite Black Friday and the run up to Christmas, official data showed Friday. Sales by volume fell 0.4 percent last month after rising in October, the Office for National Statistics said in a statement.

"Retail sales fell overall in November, driven by a notable drop for online retailers, with Black Friday offers failing to provide their usual lift in this sector," said Darren Morgan, ONS director of economic statistics. "However, department stores and household goods shops did report increased sales with these retailers telling us a longer period of Black Friday discounting helped boost sales."

Total retail sales had jumped 0.9 percent in October, a figure skewed by a drop in September which saw a public holiday for the funeral of Queen Elizabeth II. "The drop in retail sales in November suggests that consumers are buckling under the pressure of surging... inflation, despite additional government support for their energy bills," noted Gabriella Dickens, senior UK economist at Pantheon Macroeconomics.

"Retailers likely will endure a further drop in

demand in December due to the heavy snowfall" seen across the UK so far this month. "The EY ITEM Club expects the pressure on household budgets will remain severe in the near-term, with wage growth continuing to run well below inflation," the consultancy's economist Martin Beck said.

The latest readings of Britain's economy came a day after the Bank of England raised interest rates for the ninth meeting in a row and indicated more hikes were likely. But investors said the central bank might be getting close to the end of its increases in borrowing costs as inflation shows signs of having peaked and the economy appears to have entered a recession.

Olivia Cross, an economist with Capital Economics, said the dip in inflation from 11.1 percent in October to 10.7 percent in November was unlikely to provide much relief to consumers. "We doubt there is a sustained recovery in retail sales volumes in the pipeline," Cross said. "We expect that high inflation will drive further falls in real household disposable income of 1.1 percent in Q4 2022, which will keep sales volumes subdued in December."

Samuel Tombs, an economist with consultancy Pantheon Macroeconomics, said retailers would also probably face a further drop in demand in December due to heavy snowfall this month. Compared with a year earlier, retail sales in November were 5.9 percent lower, the ONS said, a slightly steeper fall than forecast in the Reuters poll. An ONS survey published on Thursday showed one in six people in Britain were worried about running out of food and more cannot keep warm enough in their own homes. — AFP



LONDON: British retail sales fell 0.4 percent last month after rising in October, the Office for National Statistics said in a statement.

Spain to test effect of shorter working week

MADRID: The Spanish government Friday launched a pilot scheme designed to allow small and medium sized firms to test the effect of a shortened working week, without salary loss, on productivity.

The scheme will be tested over two years across companies seeking labor reforms that can "generate a rise in productivity which compensates salary costs" whereby wages are maintained, the labor ministry said. Firms interested in joining the pilot must commit to cutting weekly hours by at least ten percent over two

years for at least a quarter of their staff. In return they will receive state assistance designed to compensate for the impact on production as well as additional administrative costs which may arise from putting the scheme into operation, the ministry said.

After assessing the effect on productivity the ministry said the government would then determine whether to "roll it out to the rest of the economy." Recent years have seen several large Spanish companies-including telecoms giant Telefonica and fashion group Desigual test or in some cases adopt the four-day week. However, few of those cases have been in industry and have also mainly been accompanied by a corresponding drop in wages.

The issue has proven a sensitive one with unions largely in favor but bosses opposing a measure they see as difficult to apply across numerous sectors of the economy. — AFP

WTO postpones decision on COVID linked patent waiver

GENEVA: World Trade Organization members agreed Friday to push back Saturday's deadline on whether to expand an agreed patent waiver for COVID-19 vaccines to tests and treatments, drawing fierce criticism from NGOs. During the WTO's ministerial meeting in June, all 164 members finally agreed after two years of bruising negotiations to temporarily lift patents on COVID-19 vaccines. The idea was to boost global production and help address the glaring inequity in access to the jabs. The agreement granted developing countries the right to produce COVID vaccines for five years "without the consent of the right holder".

But it fell short of initial demands for the waiver to apply to all countries and to cover COVID tests and treatments. Under the terms of that deal, WTO members had six months to decide whether to extend the measures to also "cover the production and supply of COVID-19 diagnostics and therapeutics".

Business

EU studies ways to rival vast US subsidies on greener tech

IRA lavishes subsidies and tax cuts for US purchasers of American EVs

BRUSSELS: EU leaders tasked the European Commission with coming up with ways to vie with huge US subsidies on greener tech such as electric vehicles to protect the bloc's industrial base.

"We will come forward in January with a state aid proposal that is not only faster and simpler, but even more predictable," commission chief Ursula von der Leyen said after a summit. The European bloc is unsettled by parts of the multi-billion-dollar US Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) which lavishes subsidies and tax cuts for US purchasers of electric vehicles-if they "Buy American".

The bloc views the act as discriminatory against European car manufacturers, a breach of World Trade Organization rules, and a threat to investment in Europe. To compete-and keep big industrial companies on its shores-many EU countries want rules around national subsidies loosened and public investment in cleaner energy boosted.

European companies "need subsidies in the same way as those in the United States, and of the same magnitude, if you want to avoid a fragmentation of the European market," French President Emmanuel Macron said. The EU leaders, in their

summit conclusion text, stressed the need to safeguard "Europe's economic, industrial and technological base and of preserving the global level playing field".

The commission's upcoming proposals, it said, should look at "mobilizing all relevant national and EU tools as well as to improving framework conditions for investment, including through streamlined administrative procedures."

Some unconvinced

Some EU countries, though, were not convinced that a big-gun response was needed. "Finland is not ready for new instruments," Prime Minister Sanna Marin said, adding that Europe needed to ensure that "we do not get into an unnecessary trade war with the US". German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said he believed the EU had a possibility of winning status like Canada within the United States' application of its subsidies-despite it not being part of the North American Free Trade Agreement.

"In the next few weeks, we will have to agree on a fair framework with the US and then we will have



BRUSSELS: European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen speaks during a press conference at the end of the European Council Summit in Brussels. — AFP

to make regulations to defend our own industrial development," Scholz said. 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 advantages when it comes to batteries and rare-earth supplies. While positions were being worked out on that issue, the European Union on Thursday adopted a plan to sign a global minimum 15 percent tax on multinational businesses, after months of wrangling. The landmark agreement between nearly 140 countries is intended to stop governments racing to cut taxes to lure the world's richest firms to their territory.

"Today the European Union has taken a crucial step towards tax fairness and social justice," EU economy commissioner Paolo Gentiloni said. "Minimum taxation is key to addressing the challenges a globalised economy creates." The plan was drawn up under the guidance of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development and already had the backing of Washington and several major EU economies. —AFP

Tesla to announce EV assembly plant in Mexico next week

WASHINGTON: Tesla is finalizing plans to build an electric vehicle assembly plant in an industrial area of northeastern Mexico and may announce the factory as early as next week. The plant is to be located in Santa Catarina in Monterrey city, the capital of Nuevo Leon state, according to people familiar with the automaker's plans, who asked not to be identified discussing internal business.

Final details are still being worked out, and the talks with the company have involved both the state government and Mexico's foreign relations ministry, one of the people said.

Chief executive Elon Musk visited Nuevo Leon in October and met with officials there, and the company's relationship with the state's government has already earned it an exclusive customs lane for parts crossing the border into Texas. The factory would be Tesla's first south of the border and part of a push to expand global manufacturing that has included vast new plants in Austin, Texas, and Berlin, as well as a sprawling factory in Shanghai.

Tesla has long mulled building a third factory in North America, with Musk telling shareholders in August that a decision might be made before the end of the year. The announcement would come just days after Mexico and Canada won a trade dispute with the US over cars shipped across regional borders, a development that gives automakers more incentive to manufacture in those nations.

A Mexican-made electric vehicle would likely qualify for subsidies under recent US legislation signed into law in August designed to spur adoption of EVs, as long as it met battery content requirements. It's unclear which models Tesla will produce in its Mexican factory or when it would begin production. Those details could be announced in the coming days, the people said. — Agencies

World Bank launches \$2bn Ukraine private sector aid package

WASHINGTON: The World Bank on Thursday announced a \$2 billion package to support Ukraine's private sector, in a bid to help pave the way for reconstruction amid the devastation resulting from Russia's invasion. The latest package by the International Finance Corporation (IFC), the bank's development arm focused on private-sector development in emerging markets, adds to its ongoing support of Ukraine. The group has been working to help Ukraine maintain trade flows, while retaining access to essential resources like food and fuel, it said.

Moscow's invasion has damaged Ukraine's infrastructure and disrupted the private sector, which previously contributed up to 70 percent of the country's gross domestic product, the IFC said in a statement. Some 11 percent of businesses have shuttered as of September, and more than half operate below capacity, it added, citing the National Bank of Ukraine. "Many firms are continuing to provide jobs and essential goods and services but need finance to continue operations," said the IFC. During the war and early reconstruction stage, the IFC's new program will focus on ensuring access to critical goods and services, with emergency support for agribusiness and trade finance, including for fuel imports.

"Deploying capital during this extraordinary time is essential to keep businesses and vital services running, and, when the time is right, prepare for the massive reconstruction efforts to come," said IFC Managing Director Makhtar Diop. The package includes up to \$1 billion from the IFC, with added financing dependent on guarantees from donor governments, it said. — AFP

Stocks, oil prices extend losses on recession fears

NEW YORK: Stock markets dropped further Friday on prospects of more aggressive rises in interest rates to fight inflation, renewing concerns over the global economy entering recession next year. After a healthy rally in recent weeks fueled by signs that price rises were slowing, the US Federal Reserve, European Central Bank and Bank of England this week dampened the holiday cheer by hiking borrowing costs again by sizable amounts and warning of more pain.

While inflation in many leading economies has started coming down-helped by a drop in energy costs-it still remains at or near multi-decade highs. Observers have warned that economies could be heading for a period of stagflation where prices keep rising but growth stalls.

"In a nutshell, it is all about fears over a sharper economic slowdown in 2023 than previously expected," noted Fawad Razaqada, market analyst at City Index trading group. "While macro data have been weak of late, there was still hope that the downturn might be short-lived and that a recession might be avoided in some regions altogether, amid signs of inflation peaking in some regions like the US." The latest rate hikes came as data showed US and UK retail sales dropping in November as consumers-key drivers of growth-feel the pinch from high prices and rate hikes.

Recession on horizon?

Eurozone and London shares all closed firmly in

Timeline: Twitter mayhem since Musk takeover

SAN FRANCISCO: Since buying Twitter, Elon Musk has made radical changes that have sparked fears for the future of the platform, from firing half the staff to restoring ex-president Donald Trump's account and suspending those of several journalists. AFP looks back at a rollercoaster two months at the Silicon Valley giant.

Enter Elon

Musk, the world's second-richest man and CEO of Tesla and SpaceX, buys Twitter in late October for \$44 billion after months of on-off negotiations. "Let the good times roll," he tweets after the deal is sealed on October 28. He becomes the sole director of the company after dissolving its corporate board.

'Content moderation council'

In one of his first moves, the self-declared free speech absolutist announces he will form a "content moderation council", in a nod to concerns that Twitter could become a free-for-all platform for disinformation and hate speech.

Monthly charge

On November 1, Musk announces the site will charge \$8 per month to verify the accounts of celebrities and companies-a service that used to be free. But

Germany's deficit to hit 3.25% of GDP next year

BERLIN: Germany's public deficit will widen to 3.25 percent in 2023, up from 2.5 percent forecast for this year, as the country spends big to counter a painful energy crisis, the finance ministry said Friday. "Next year (...) we will see a deficit of 3.25 percent," Finance Minister Lindner said, warning that the figure could even reach 4.5 percent depending on "the scale of spending" to help counter soaring gas and electricity prices.



TOKYO: A man walks past an electronic board showing the numbers on the Tokyo Stock Exchange, along a street in Tokyo. —AFP

the red. Wall Street stocks meanwhile extended losses too, with major indices ending about one percent lower. OANDA analyst Craig Erlam said the prospect of a "Santa rally" was fading.

"Going into December, there was growing optimism that policymakers could be a source of optimism going into the new year but instead, they've taken on the role of grinch, bringing a swift end to the celebrations," he added. Earlier, Asia had also seen losses, with Tokyo closing down 1.9 percent.

On the upside, Hong Kong rose on progress in talks over allowing US officials to audit Chinese firms listed in New York, easing concerns about a possible delisting of some big names such as Alibaba

and Tencent. The news provided a little more help to Hong Kong traders, whose sentiment has been lifted also by China's shift away from the economically damaging zero-COVID policy as well as moves to open the city further to overseas visitors.

And a report in Hong Kong's South China Morning Post said the border with mainland China would be fully reopened next month, providing another much-needed boost to the beleaguered economy. However, the mood was soured a little by a US decision to put 36 Chinese companies including top producers of advanced computer chips on a trade blacklist, severely restricting their access to any US technology. —AFP

the November 6 launch of the Twitter Blue subscription plan goes awry. Musk is forced to suspend the move after an embarrassing rash of fake accounts alarm advertisers.

Brands step back

Top global companies, including General Mills and Volkswagen, suspend their advertising on Twitter on November 3 as they monitor the new direction the company will take.

Massive layoffs

On November 4, half of Twitter's 7,500-strong staff are made redundant, sending shockwaves through Silicon Valley. Musk tweets that "unfortunately there is no choice when the company is losing over \$4M/day".

Regulator's 'concern'

The chaos draws a rare warning on November 10 from the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), the US authority that oversees consumer safety. "We are tracking recent developments at Twitter with deep concern," says an FTC spokesperson.

Ultimatum to staff

Musk delivers an ultimatum to Twitter staff on November 16, asking them to choose between being "extremely hardcore" and working long hours, or losing their jobs. He gives them a day to decide. Large numbers of staff quit.

Trump reinstated

Musk reinstates the account of banned former president Donald Trump after conducting a poll of users, a narrow majority of whom support the move. A

The previous forecast for 2023 was for a deficit of just two percent of GDP. A "normalization of public finances" should be achieved by 2024, according to the finance ministry. "We have made enormous efforts during the crisis to relieve the burden on people and avoid structural disruptions," Lindner said.

The German economy has been particularly hard hit by the fallout from the war in Ukraine, with spiraling energy costs squeezing the country's flagship industrial sector and dampening consumer purchasing power. The government has unveiled a 200-billion-euro (\$210-billion) support package to mitigate the impact of the energy crisis, including a cap on gas prices for businesses and households.

The economy is nevertheless expected to con-



SAN FRANCISCO: In this file photo taken on October 28, 2022, the Twitter logo outside their headquarters in San Francisco, California. — AFP

few days later he announces an "amnesty" for all banned Twitter accounts.

'War' with Apple

On November 29, Musk tweets that he is going "to war" with Apple, claiming it has threatened to oust Twitter from its App Store. After meeting with Apple boss Tim Cook he later says the clash was a misunderstanding.

COVID controversy

In late November, Twitter says it is no longer enforcing a policy of combating COVID-19 disinformation. Musk had fiercely opposed COVID restrictions. Days later he is rapped by the White House for calling for President Joe Biden's chief COVID adviser Anthony Fauci to be prosecuted. — AFP

tract by 0.4 percent in 2023. The government also said in November it now expects new net borrowing next year to climb to 45.6 billion euros, more than double the 17.2 billion euros initially estimated. Germany is however planning to return to the constitutionally enshrined "debt brake" in 2023, which limits annual new borrowing to 0.35 percent of gross domestic product. The government had lifted the debt brake at the start of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020 to cushion the blow from shutdowns.

But reinstating the debt brake has been a priority for Lindner, a fiscal hawk from the pro-business FDP party who came into office last December. In order to meet this commitment, the government has announced that "special funds" such as the 200-billion-euro energy package will be considered separate from the regular federal budget. — AFP



Lina Bakir Music Academy owner Lina Bakir conducts a candlelight music concert. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Children perform during the candlelight concert.

Sound of music: Lina Bakir Music Academy children stage candlelight performance

By Abdellatif Sharaa

Lina Bakir Music Academy organized a candlelight concert at Al-Yarmouk Cultural Center on Saturday, where children of various ages performed on the piano, accompanied by an orchestra. The event gave children an opportunity to express their talent in front of a full-house audience of parents and invitees. Lina Bakir has been teaching music for over 40 years.

fallen ill. Other performers include one aged three-and-a-half, up till the age of eight. She said an advanced group will perform in the evening. "If you hear what they are doing, you will never believe that these are kids or students under the ages of 15 - you will feel they are professional pianists, and we are very proud of that. We are not just an academy that teaches piano. We do care about the wellbeing of musicians," she said.

"If the kids have the gift, we want them to explore performing with an orchestra. We are the only academy that has students performing with an orchestra, and parents love it. This is a step forward for the younger generation. Children are excited, although we are much tougher than regular schools. But we have a very good family relationship. We have teachers who become tough when they need to, but with a lot of love," Bakir said.

Bakir said it is very difficult to keep up with this caliber of lifestyle. "When you are tough, but with hugs and kisses, they love it. There are obstacles that come with it though, as parents do not realize the tedious hours of rehearsals we have to put up with. Every rehearsal takes us 8 to 9 hours with orchestra," Bakir said.

When Kuwait Times asked her about the difficulties the academy faces, she promptly said "parents". "Parents are not easy to deal with, because we are a nation that is spoiled. Everything comes easy, and sometimes when people are very privileged, it is worse," Bakir said. She said



Lina Bakir

"You have to want to learn, and if you are interested, this is where it starts. Sometimes you may be very musical, but may not be for you," she pointed out.

Kuwait Times met one of the parents, who said her daughter is seven years old, and learned about the academy through recommendations. She said her daughter has been playing music for two years, and has been in the academy for eight months. "I am very happy with the academy, and

being tough is necessary, otherwise you will not get anything done. "Parents give many excuses why their children are not attending, but we do not allow this. You can miss classes twice only in a semester, and we will not accept any excuse. We want commitment and continuity - we need to teach our children the structure, as with structure comes everything," she told Kuwait Times.

"I see how the culture is changing. The first generation I taught was very aristocratic. Not everybody took the piano, only the aristocrats and they were the ones who never wanted their kids on stage. If you wanted to host a party, they would sell the tickets among themselves because they did not want to expose their kids out of fear of the evil eye. The second generation got better, and with the third generation, things became easier and parents want their children out there, and this is good," she explained.

Bakir said there are no specific requirements to get into the academy.



The audience watching the performance.



Lina Bakir addresses the audience.

"I have taught three generations, and I have been running this academy for six years. We are primarily a piano academy, and what makes us distinguished is that we go out of way to give an experience to the students that no one would give them. It is very tiring and needs hard work to deal with kids," Bakir told Kuwait Times, adding, "We are by far the only academy that takes kids at the age of three."

Bakir said a three-year-old student was supposed to perform, but he had



A view of the candlelight concert.



Lina Bakir makes her introductory remarks before the concert.

Lifestyle | Features



Cairo Bike: Cairo's project for addressing traffic, improve air quality

The Egyptian city, Cairo, launched a bike-sharing project with the aim of encouraging and spreading use of bicycles in the capital. People using Cairo Bike, carried out in cooperation with the UN Human Settlements

Program (UN-HABITAT) and Swiss Drosos Foundation, will have dedicated lanes in what will be a change in culture in transportation by lessening use of cars thus addressing traffic. Cairo Bike also aims at improving air quality and

introducing a new lifestyle for Egyptians. People could rent the bikes from different locations in Cairo whether by a mobile application or other payment methods.—KUNA



Swedish zoo shoots dead three chimps on the run

A Swedish zoo said Thursday it had to shoot dead three chimpanzees after they escaped from their enclosure, with the situation still not under control. A fourth primate was injured by gunshot, according to the company that runs the Furuvik Zoo around 200 kilometers (125 miles) north of Stockholm. "A chimpanzee is considered a high-risk animal. If this kind of animal gets out into the zoo, it can pose a threat to people's lives", Annika Troselius, a spokeswoman for Parks and Resorts, told AFP.

Five of the zoo's seven chimps managed to escape from their enclosure on Wednesday shortly after noon (1100 GMT), and were roaming freely around the zoo. It is not yet known how they escaped. The zoo is currently closed to visitors for the season, but staff were either evacuated or ordered into safety

indoors. The decision to shoot dead the chimps came in for harsh criticism on social media sites.

According to the zoo, tranquilizing the animals "was not an alternative". "In order to fire an anaesthetic dart, you need to be very close to the animal. In addition, you have to wait up to 10 minutes for the tranquilizer to take effect", the zoo said in a statement. On Thursday afternoon, the zoo's four surviving primates were in the monkey building but had not yet returned to their enclosure, Furuvik Zoo wrote in an update on Facebook.

"This means that we can't let people move freely inside the zoo and we are still on high alert", the zoo said. The chimps' escape comes on the heels of several other high-profile evasions in Sweden. At the end of October, a king cobra slithered out of Stockholm's open-air museum and animal park Skansen and was missing for about a week until it returned on its own. A month later, two great grey owls escaped from the aviary at the same zoo but have since flown back. — AFP



A photo shows a vehicle of a security company near the main entrance of the Furuvik Zoo, around 10 km east of Gavle, Sweden. — AFP

New hammerhead shark nursery discovered near Galapagos

A third nursery used by scalloped hammerhead sharks to raise their pups has been discovered off the Galapagos Islands, a boon for a species in critical danger of extinction, the Ecuadorian national park said Friday. "It is very important to find these new breeding areas, especially for the hammerhead shark, because it is an iconic species for the Galapagos, one that is critically endangered," Eduardo Espinoza, a ranger at the Galapagos National Park, said in a statement.

After months of traveling around the Galapagos, which comprise 13 major islands, Espinoza and other investigators discovered the nursery off Isabela, the largest of the islands, which are about 1,000 kilometers (600 miles) from mainland Ecuador, the statement said. The park said it hopes the research leads the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) "to include these nurseries in the listing of important areas for the conservation of sharks," which now is a special category of protection.

Scalloped hammerhead sharks (Sphyrna Lewini) search for shallow nurseries to raise their pups in protected conditions, the statement said. The shark is an open-water hunter but has been hard hit by commercial fishing to satisfy an appetite in East Asia for its fins. The park has not offered specific locations for the three nurseries in order to protect the species.

Some of the sharks at the nurseries have been tagged so that scientists can monitor their migration patterns and determine how they interact with sharks elsewhere. The Galapagos Marine Reserve, one of the largest and most diverse in the world, covers an area of 198,000 square kilometers (76,450 square miles), contains some 30 species



Handout picture released by Parque Nacional Galapagos showing a hammerhead shark (Sphyrna lewini) on Isabela Island, Galapagos, Ecuador. — AFP photos



Picture shows an expert preparing to measure a hammerhead shark (Sphyrna lewini) on Isabela Island, Galapagos, Ecuador.



Picture shows experts measuring a hammerhead shark (Sphyrna lewini) on Isabela Island, Galapagos.

of sharks, among them the blacktip shark, which also has nurseries there. Concentrations of sharks in its waters are believed to be the most dense in the world. The Galapagos Islands contain flora and fauna found nowhere else. British

naturalist Charles Darwin visited in 1835 and developed his theory of the evolution based on his findings. — AFP

Loco for Lorca: UK theatre fuels passion for Spanish

"That Lorca is completely bonkers," says the actress in Spanish, prompting laughter from a group of British teenagers at London's Cervantes Theatre. Artistic director Paula Paz, who co-founded the theatre with the actor and director Jorge de Juan, said Spanish poet Federico Garcia Lorca is a firm favorite with audiences in the UK. From an unassuming corner of south London, the venue is helping to drive a growing interest in Spanish, which is now the most-studied foreign language in the UK. The theatre, built from scratch in a former garage under railway arches, opened in 2016 with Lorca's 1933 tragedy "Bodas de Sangre" ("Blood Wedding").

One of the highlights of its forthcoming season is a seven-week run of his last play from 1936, "La Casa de Bernada Alba" ("The House of Bernada Alba"). Lorca-killed later than year during Spain's civil

war-is not the only dramatist to be showcased at the tiny 80-seat theatre in Southwark, on the south bank of the River Thames.

Others include the 16th-century playwright Felix Lope de Vega as well as lesser-known and up-and-coming writers from Spain and Latin America. They include Chilean author Isabel Allende's "La Casa de los Espiritus" ("The House of the Spirits") and "La Realidad" ("The Reality") by Argentina's Denise Despeyroux.

Bilingual performances

To reach a wider audience, performances alternate between Spanish and English, although plays have also been performed switching between both languages. They include a bilingual performance of Cervantes' farce "El Juez de los Divorcios" ("The Divorce Judge") and Shakespeare's monologues in 2016. In September there

was a complex in-house production based on Pablo Sorozabal's 1942 operetta "Black, El Payaso" ("Black The Clown").

The dialogue was in English and the songs in Spanish, all translated with digital subtitles. Despite its name, the Cervantes Theatre is independent from the Spanish language and cultural body the Instituto Cervantes, from which it receives a small grant. This month, Lorca's lesser-known "Retablillo de Don Cristobal" ("The Puppet Play of Don Cristobal") has been delighting students.

"I think it's a nice way to look at the language," said Zack Fecher, 17, on a trip from Haberdashers' Boys' School in Elstree, just outside London. "I've seen films in Spanish but this is the first play and you have to focus on the words and they speak very fast." Ana Zamora, director of the theatre company Nao d'Amores, which specializes in reviving lost plays,

has been invited from Spain to present the production.

"You don't have to embellish the texts to make them easier for foreign audiences to access," she told AFP. Audiences can recognize the similarities between the puppet Don Cristobal and the traditional English character Mr Punch, she said. At the same time there is "an intriguing air of the exotic", she added.

'Nothing like it'

For Paz, the "demand for quality" gives the theatre its audience, which she describes as a mix of people who like alternative theatre, fans of Hispanic culture, and students of Spanish. Students studying Spanish are becoming increasingly common in England. In 2019, Spanish became the foreign language most studied in high schools.

According to the British Council's latest

"Language Trends" report, last year 8,433 students took Spanish for their end-of-school exams at aged 18. That compared to 7,671 for French, the study of which has been declining among teenagers alongside German since 2005. French, however, remains the most-taught language in primary schools.

It may have taken Zack and his classmates 90 minutes to travel to the theatre but other groups come from as far as Liverpool, in northwest England, and Brussels. "There's nothing like it in Europe," said Paz. The three tiers of seating and small stage makes the theatre an intimate venue, where the audience can almost touch the actors and feel the emotion. "It's a magical space, with a very special atmosphere," said Eduardo Mayo, who plays Lorca and voices Don Cristobal. —AFP

Lifestyle | Features



This photo shows retired hairdresser Nguyen Thi Kim Quy carrying rescued dogs dressed in Santa costume in a tuk tuk along a street in Hanoi. — AFP photos



Retired hairdresser Nguyen Thi Kim Quy holding one of the dogs she rescued and dressed in a Santa costume.

MOTORBIKE OF MERRY MUTTS CHALLENGES VIETNAM'S DOGMEAT CULTURE



Retired hairdresser Nguyen Thi Kim Quy carrying rescued dogs dressed in Santa costume in a tuk tuk.

Retired hairdresser Nguyen Thi Kim Quy is an anomaly as she navigates Hanoi's bustling streets in a pimped-out motorbike tuk-tuk, 13 multi-colored rescue dogs in tiny Christmas outfits yapping away happily inside. An estimated five million canines are consumed every year across Vietnam, where dogmeat is considered a delicacy, but the Southeast Asian nation is trying to phase out consumption that is second only to China. Quy, 71, has devoted her retirement to rescuing homeless pooches so they don't wind up on dinner plates-or beaten-and spends much of her monthly stipend from her relatives on the cause.



Retired hairdresser Nguyen Thi Kim Quy posing for a photo in a tuk tuk with dogs she rescued and dressed in Santa costume.



A dog rescued by retired hairdresser Nguyen Thi Kim Quy and dressed in Santa costume.



Retired hairdresser Nguyen Thi Kim Quy cleaning up dog cages at her home.



Retired hairdresser Nguyen Thi Kim Quy dressing up one of the dogs she rescued in a Santa costume in a tuk tuk.

"It would be disastrous if they would be sent to the slaughterhouse. I really couldn't bear it," she told AFP. "Eating dog or cat meat, for me, is a crime." She says the culture is changing slowly and more Vietnamese are adopting dogs as pets and companions. "I think Hanoi residents have become friendlier to pets, turning away from their habit of considering dogmeat a delicacy," she said.

Quy wakes early to take the dogs for a morning walk and is sometimes still combing the streets befriending strays as night falls. Quy dyes the dogs' fur and dresses some up in Santa and reindeer costumes

for festive cheer as the temperature drops over the winter months. Her motorbike of mutts has become a popular sight on Hanoi's streets, with many commuters stopping to pose for social media photos. "They have very bright smiles and sometimes they even give gifts to the dogs... they love these dogs very much," Quy said. She believes pets "bring peace, sweep away sadness and hardship". "To me, the dog is like a friend, a true friend," Quy said. "If I could, I would give care to all the abandoned and abused dogs." — AFP

French artist publishes every Google search she ever did

When French artist Albertine Meunier discovered in 2006 that Google was storing her entire search history, she decided to retaliate in a unique and "very boring" way: publishing it all in a book. "At that time, it was difficult to access your own data, so I had to copy and paste incessantly," Meunier told AFP in her small gallery in central Paris. Sixteen years later, things have changed and anyone can use Google's TakeOut service to download their entire browsing history, which is stored on its servers, though it can take hours or even days to download it all.

Meunier has already published three volumes of her Google searches, and has recently opened an exhibition in Paris in which she has papered the walls of her gallery with those searches. A digital artist and pioneer of using NFTs (digital certificates, often linked to online art), she is aware that the searches make for dull reading. "It's very, very boring," she said. "Mainly because everyone's life is pretty boring."

But the project aims to draw attention to the vast reams of data being stored about each of us on the servers of tech giants — and which they use to make billions of dollars from advertisers. "If everyone started releasing their data publicly, bit by bit, you could destroy the value that those companies are built on," she said.

Meunier is an avid collector of NFTs, which had a boom in 2020 and 2021 but have seen their value collapse along with the price of cryptocurrencies in recent months. The peak came in March 2021 when digital artist Beeple auctioned a work for \$69.3 million, the third-highest figure in history for a living artist. The NFT market saw a 77-percent drop in the third quarter of the year — a net loss of some \$450 million, according to specialist site NonFungible.

That doesn't bother Meunier. "The speculation only benefitted a certain class of artists," she said. Meunier still sees NFTs as a useful form of support for artists, especially since they allow them to receive a commission each time their work is resold — which has never been possible in the art market before.

According to NonFungible, however, resales were down 84 percent in the second quarter, and some platforms such as LooksRare said they would no longer insist on commissions to artists. "The fall is noticeable, of course," said Meunier. "But I continue collecting and advocating for them." —AFP



Client Kimberly Westgarth at NAAMA Studios, a tattoo removal clinic in Marylebone, London. — AFP photos



Repent Ye: UK studio helps ex-fans of Kanye get rid of their tattoos

Kimberley Westgarth says she was so disgusted by Kanye West's recent anti-Semitic comments that she is getting rid of her tattoo of him. Two years ago, the 24-year-old architecture student had her upper left arm inked with an image of West's face, with tears of blood from his eyes. "I loved his music and at the time I did like him as a person. I liked what he stood for, how he stuck up for the bipolar community," she told AFP. "I did idolize him at the time but obviously people change, so I want him off my skin."

West, now known as Ye, sparked outrage earlier this month by declaring his "love" of Nazis and admiration for Adolf Hitler. His rambling, hours-long appearance with conspiracy theorist Alex Jones on the latter's Infowars livestream saw him kicked off Twitter. It was the latest in a series of anti-Semitic comments that have seen the troubled one-time titan of fashion and music's commercial relationships crumble.

For Westgarth, the comments hit home hard, as her best friend is Jewish. But she is not spending a penny to get the tattoo of him removed. NAAMA Studios in London's upmarket Marylebone district is doing it for free. It is providing her with 12 sessions of laser treatment over the course of a year under a special program it runs called "Second Chance".

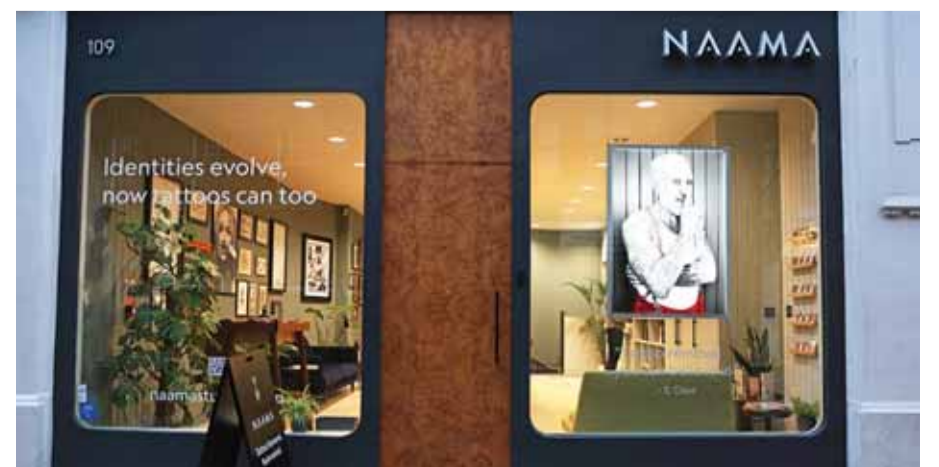
Painful past
The initiative was set up to provide the

free removal of tattoos that have come to be a constant reminder of an individual's painful past. That could be tattoos about gang membership, a stretch in prison, a toxic relationship or hate symbols. It has now been extended to include those of Kanye West. Already, about 100 people have got in touch with NAAMA Studios via their website, said owner Melina Lawson. Two people have been selected and are receiving treatment, she added.

"It is a journey for the client, especially with any history on their tattoo, especially if you don't like the tattoo or what it represents to you anymore," said Lawson. "It can be a bit sensitive to the client but as they progress into the treatment, they start

to change themselves. They can see that actually it's being removed. They can see something else." The total cost of removing a tattoo is on average £2,000 (\$2,400) but varies according to the size of the inking and the number of sessions required.

But the social impact of a removal and the positivity it can bring to a client "is much bigger" than money, said Lawson. "I was so pleased," said Westgarth. "I've been looking to get it removed for about a couple of months now and everywhere was so expensive. "So when I've seen this opportunity, I leapt for this opportunity. And to get it for free-I can't thank them enough." — AFP



NAAMA Studios, a tattoo removal clinic in Marylebone, London, is pictured.

Sports

Nets cruise to fifth straight NBA victory; Celtics, Warriors beaten

Irving drills a buzzer-beating three-pointer

LOS ANGELES: Brooklyn star Kyrie Irving drilled a buzzer-beating three-pointer to lift the Nets to fifth straight NBA victory on Friday as reigning champions Golden State and league-leading Boston both lost. Irving's step-back three-pointer gave the Nets a 119-116 victory over the Raptors in Toronto. Irving led the Nets with 32 points. Kevin Durant added 28 as Brooklyn notched their ninth win in 10 games.

Brooklyn trailed by as many as 18 in the first half, but rallied to stay a game behind third-placed Cleveland in the Eastern Conference. The Cavs-fueled by 41 points from Donovan Mitchell-rallied for a 118-112 victory over the Indiana Pacers. Fred VanVleet scored a game-high 39 points for the Raptors, his pull-up three-pointer knotting the score at 105-105 with 3:06 to play. Brooklyn responded with dunks from Ben Simmons and Durant as the teams traded the lead, the Nets going up 116-114 with 14.1 seconds left on a three-pointer by Yuta Watanabe who was fed by Irving.

Toronto's Scottie Barnes made two free throws to tie it up again, but Irving came through at the buzzer. "Once you get that ball in your hands at the end of the game, it's what you dream about," Irving said. The Nets stayed a game ahead of the fifth-placed Philadelphia 76ers, who beat the short-handed Warriors 118-106 in Philadelphia. Joel Embiid scored 34 points and grabbed 13 rebounds and James Harden added 27 points and nine assists for the Sixers, who were short-handed themselves with Tobias Harris a late scratch with back pain.

The Warriors were without superstar Stephen Curry, who will be sidelined indefinitely after injuring his left shoulder in a loss at Indiana on Wednesday. Andrew Wiggins missed a sixth straight game and Draymond Green was out with a thigh contusion as the Warriors fell to 2-14 on the road. Jordan Poole led the Warriors with 29 points and Donte DiVincenzo scored 17 - including 15 on five three-pointers in the first half.

But Golden State couldn't maintain their early pace and couldn't contain Embiid as he scored 12 points in the third quarter on the way to his sixth straight game of at least 30 points. "They made a lot of shots, they were hot to start the game," Embiid said of a Warriors team that led by two at halftime. "We knew at some point they were going to cool down. We just had to stay aggressive, get stops." In Boston, the young Orlando



WASHINGTON: Kyrie Irving #11 of the Brooklyn Nets falls into fans on the sidelines during the second half of the game at Capital One Arena in Washington, DC. — AFP

Magic sprung a surprise with a 117-109 victory over the Celtics, whose league-best record fell to 22-8.

Jayson Tatum led the Celtics with 31 points and seven rebounds. Jaylen Brown added 26 points, but Boston couldn't hold off a Magic team that won their fifth straight. Boston center Robert Williams made his season debut after having surgery on his left knee in September. He scored nine points and pulled down five rebounds off the bench. Moritz Wagner scored 25 points and Paolo Banchero added 20 for the Magic, who out-rebounded the Celtics 53-38 and never trailed in the second half.

Lakers win, Davis hurt

The Los Angeles Lakers pulled away late for a 126-108 victory over the Denver Nuggets, despite losing Anthony Davis to a right foot injury at halftime. Davis was clearly hindered after tangling with

Denver's Nikola Jokic under the basket in the first quarter but played on, the Lakers trailing 65-64 after a hard-fought first half. Denver led by 12 with 8:03 left in the third quarter, but a driving layup by LeBron James and a three-pointer from Dennis Schroder had the Lakers up by five going into the fourth, when they relentlessly pulled away.

James led the Lakers with 30 points and Thomas Bryant added 21 off the bench as he filled in for Davis in the second half. Two-time reigning NBA Most Valuable Player Jokic scored 25 points and grabbed 11 rebounds for Denver. The New York Knicks pushed their winning streak to six games with a 114-91 victory over the Bulls in Chicago. RJ Barrett scored 27 points and Jalen Brunson and Quentin Grimes added 22 apiece, Brunson making a career-high six three-pointers and Grimes draining five as the Knicks finished with 17 from beyond the arc. — AFP

Woods, son seek title before Tiger rests sore foot

MIAMI: Tiger Woods will play alongside his 13-year-old son Charlie this weekend at the PNC Championship even though the 15-time major winner said Friday it could delay his injury recovery. The 36-hole parent-child golf event will be played Saturday and Sunday at the Ritz-Carlton in Orlando, Florida. It will be the third consecutive start for the Woods duo, 2021 runners-up. "Any time I get a chance to spend time with my son, it's always special," Woods said. "The last couple years have been magical. We're looking forward to it."

Woods said playing the event might set back his recovery from the plantar fasciitis in his right foot that caused him to miss his Bahamas invitational earlier this month. "I don't really care about that," Woods said. "I think being there alongside my son is far more important, and get to have a chance to have this experience with him is far better than my foot being a little creaky."

Woods, who turns 47 on December 30, has played only nine competitive rounds this year as he recovered from severe leg injuries suffered in a 2021 car crash. After finishing 47th at the Masters in his comeback event, Woods withdrew after three rounds at the PGA Championship with leg pain and missed the cut in July at the British Open at St Andrews. "I played more this year than I certainly thought at the beginning of the year," Woods said. "But I got the chance to play in three major championships. That's far, far more than what I had expected going into the year. So it has been a positive."

Woods is uncertain of his 2023 plans but hopes for a return to the majors. "If I didn't have the plantar feeling like this, I'd have a better idea," Woods said. "I'm supposed to be resting this thing and stretching and letting it heal. But I'm not doing that at the moment." Woods, whose 82 PGA Tour wins equals Sam Snead for the all-time record, played in a 12-hole exhibition match with carts last weekend but still struggles to walk 18 holes. "This off season hasn't really been an off season. I've kind of ramped things up," Woods said. "But after this, come Monday, we shut it all down and take care of this foot so that I can ramp up properly. I can practice. I just can't walk... I can hit golf balls. I can do all that. I can hit shots around the green. I just can't get from point A to point B." — AFP



ORLANDO: Charlie Woods and Tiger Woods of the United States walk on the 11th green during the pro-am prior to the PNC Championship at Ritz-Carlton Golf Club on December 16, 2022 in Orlando. — AFP



Below Zero Ice Skating team grab 2nd place

KUWAIT: Below Zero Ice Skating Academy team succeeded in obtaining second place in the Asian figure Skating championship "Sub-Zero Bangkok Ice Skating International 2022," sponsored by the Asian Ice Institute "ISIA Asia." The competition was held between 9-11 December 2022 with 500 skaters from 18 rink athletes from all over Asia and the Middle East.

The team presented an exceptional and remarkable performance that dazzled the judges and the audience. Below Zero team's hard work culminated in achieving 31 gold medals, 23 silver medals, and 23 bronze medals. The team includes 17 skaters, ranging in age from 3 to 20 years. They competed with the oldest and highest-level teams and showed great talent and dedication during the championship, raising the name of Kuwait high. Before the tournament, all the contestants underwent an intensive training program with qualified and specialized trainers.

Saad Al-Mutawa, Below Zero General Manager, commented on this great achievement by saying: "Participating in this type of tournament comes within the academy's agenda to participate in regional and international sports forums, pointing out that it is an opportunity for players to acquire the necessary experience and skills that qualify them to compete in upcoming competitions."

He added, "We are very proud of what the Below Zero team has achieved, and we would like to thank the team, the players' families, coaches, and administrators for their efforts and time to ensure that the skaters receive the best training." Below Zero devotes its efforts to establishing a Kuwaiti team that will represent the country in foreign competitions as part of its vision to encourage the practice of this type of winter sports among children and youth.

Below Zero Ice Skating Rink is one of Kuwait's ideal recreational and educational destinations. It offers group and individual training and education programs for ice skating under the supervision of certified trainers. It is also worth noting that the Below Zero rinks are in Kuwait's most important and largest shopping centers, including the Avenues Mall, the Marina Mall, and the Jahra Mall. Thank you, Below Zero Academy team, for what you have accomplished. You are the pride of Kuwait.

Curry relieved to avoid surgery on injured shoulder

WASHINGTON: Four-time NBA champion Stephen Curry said Friday he was relieved that he won't need surgery on his partially dislocated left shoulder, but had no timetable for his return. Curry suffered the injury when he tried to make a steal during the reigning NBA champion Golden State Warriors' 125-119 loss at Indiana on Wednesday. An MRI on Thursday showed the extent of the damage and confirmed he would not need an operation to repair the shoulder.

"From what I know about shoulder injuries and situations like that, avoiding surgery is great news," Curry said. "I'll try to figure out how to get pain-free quickly, get the strength back and work my way back into it appropriately." The 34-year-old superstar guard, a two-time NBA Most Valuable Player, said he would have missed at least the remainder of the season if surgery had been required. "Surgery would have been four to six months," Curry said. "Nobody was trying to deal with that right now."

Curry will be sidelined indefinitely as he prepares for rehabilitation work to begin once his shoulder no longer hurts. "I've just got to trust the plan we have and do my work," Curry said. "There's a couple guys I've seen that had a little bit more severe cases, their timelines. You kind of do your homework," Curry said. "You try to stay away, mentally, from how long it's going to be because (the injury) will let me know."

Regarding the possibility of surgery on the shoulder after the season, Curry said, "It will let me know if that's necessary or not." Having been through injuries before, notably left hand surgery in 2019, Curry is familiar with what must be done. "Once you get pain-free, you work on getting your mobility, range of motion back, strength back and all that and get back to basketball," Curry said. "Once you hurt something like this it becomes a little more unstable. Just trying to manage it as much as possible."

Warriors 2-13 on road

The Warriors were off to a 14-15 start to stand 10th in the Western Conference when they lost Curry, who led Golden State with 30.0 points and 6.8 assists a game and ranked second with 6.6 rebounds per contest. "It's a matter of other guys stepping up," Curry said. "Every team goes through something like this during the year, dealing with injuries, your main guys being out. You've got to figure out how to perform and embrace the challenge. I'm confident in the guys we have on this team to figure it out."

The Warriors are a woeful 2-13 on the road, with the second-fewest wins away from home and level for the most road losses. "This is a very important stretch because you want to maintain as much positivity and belief in what we're doing as possible and give ourselves a chance to finish the year strong," Curry said. Asked if it was important the Warriors manage a .500 mark during his absence, Curry was matter-of-fact about Golden State's road troubles. "That's always a good soundbite because it gives you something to key on," Curry said. "But where we're at, we just want to win a road game." — AFP

Gill, Pujara hit tons as India dominate Bangladesh in Test

CHITTAGONG: Shubman Gill and Cheteshwar Pujara each struck a century as India took control of the first Test against Bangladesh in Chittagong on Friday. The visitors declared their second innings on 258-2 in the third session of the third day to set the home side a daunting 513-run target. Bangladesh were all out for 150 runs in their first innings, leaving India the overwhelming favorites to secure victory. "Obviously we will see a result in this match. Either we will win or they will win," said Bangladesh all-rounder Mehidy Hasan.

"But our batsmen need to take responsibility," he said. "The wicket is still good. Execution is very important." India's skipper KL Rahul called back his batsmen once Pujara brought up his 19th Test hundred with a four off Taijul Islam soon after their lead surpassed the 500-run mark. Pujara, who scored 90 in India's first innings total of 404, was unbeaten on 102 after smashing 13 fours, with former skipper Virat Kohli 19 not out at the other end.

Gill earlier completed his maiden Test century before he was dismissed by Mehidy for 110. Gill, who hit 10 fours and three sixes, shared a 113-run partnership for the second wicket with Pujara, after Rahul holed out to Taijul Islam at fine leg off Khaled Ahmed on 23. Bangladesh survived the day unscathed in their second innings, reaching 42-0 at stumps to leave them still needing another 471 runs to pull off the unlikely of victories. Najmul Hossain and debutant Zakir Hasan will resume on 25 and 17 respectively on the fourth day.

India earlier bowled Bangladesh out cheaply to take a sizable 254-run first innings lead but decided not to enforce the follow-on. Left-arm spinner Kuldeep Yadav led India's bowling attack with career-best figures of 5-40, his third five-wicket haul in Tests, and the visitors needed barely an hour to mop up the Bangladesh tail after the hosts resumed on 133-8. Kuldeep last played a first-class match in September for India A and admitted he was "a bit nervous" coming back to the red-ball game. — AFP

Messi targets WCup glory against Mbappe's France

France and Argentina face off in final

DOHA: Lionel Messi is hoping to crown his stellar career by leading Argentina to World Cup glory on Sunday but Kylian Mbappe's history-chasing France are standing in his way. Qatar's World Cup has been tarnished by controversy off the pitch but it concludes with the electrifying prospect of a final between two of global football's powerhouses. France may need every hour available as kick-off looms after their camp was struck by illness, forcing a number of players to sit out training and giving coach Didier Deschamps an unwanted headache.

Argentina and France are both aiming to win the trophy for the third time, with Les Bleus returning to the final four years after their triumph in Moscow. Back-to-back titles would be a monumental achievement for the side coached by Deschamps—the only teams to have done it previously are Italy in the 1930s and Pele's Brazil in 1958 and 1962. Yet that potential achievement is trumped by Messi's quest to win the ultimate prize in the game in what is almost certainly his final World Cup match.

The former Barcelona star has won everything going at club level, also claiming the Ballon d'Or seven times, and last year led Argentina to victory in the Copa America. Messi has been brilliant in his fifth World Cup as the team bounced back from a shock opening loss to Saudi Arabia, while his new sidekick, Julian Alvarez, has scored four times. "It is exciting to be in the final, but there is still one step to go," said coach Lionel Scaloni.

WCup 'spider' man Alvarez, the pride of his village

CALCHIN: Julian Alvarez has been a revelation for Argentina at the World Cup but back in his tiny home village the player nicknamed "Spider" is celebrated for his humility and hailed as a "hero" and "ambassador". Having started the Qatar tournament as a substitute, Alvarez has forced his way into the starting line-up through a series of match-winning displays that have seen him bag four goals.

The 22-year-old is a near certain to start – and perhaps star – in Sunday's final against France. "At seven years old he was a very supportive, responsible and studious boy, given to help his companions," Patricia Magnino, one of Alvarez's teachers at the Rivera Indarte primary school in Calchin, told AFP. "Now he's a star, a great, alongside (Lionel) Messi." Another of his former teachers, Graciela De Barberis added: "He always stood out for his humility and speaking little. Dreams come true if you work for them."

Calchin, which means 'salty spot' in the local vernacular, is a humble village of 3,000 people located in the northeast of the rich rural and industrial province of Cordoba. At the entrance to the village and on the school walls there are billboards praising "Julian, the pride of Calchin," alongside depictions of large spiders. Every building in the grid-like village is a single storey, with roads lined with trees such as white quebrachos, pines, carobs and chanaras. It is deathly quiet in the village, aside from the sounds of a few metal workshops. The surrounding area is fields of grain and livestock.

Generosity

Alvarez was nicknamed the spider because of his ability to control a football and send it into the back of the net, like a spider catching a fly and confining it to its web. His two goals in Tuesday's 3-0 quarter-final victory over Croatia added to previous strikes against Poland and Australia. He began playing for his local Club Atletico Calchin whose stadium has just one main stand which can hold only 150 people. On Sunday, Alvarez will play

Chase for third title

Aged 35 and driven by his desire to make up for defeat by Germany in the 2014 final, Messi has scored five goals and produced some sublime assists. Sunday's match is likely to be his last chance to match the achievement of Diego Maradona, who inspired Argentina to victory in Mexico in 1986. "I am really enjoying myself. I have felt happy throughout this World Cup," Messi said after Argentina's 3-0 semi-final win against Croatia.

But will this World Cup be remembered as Messi's tournament, or will France be top dogs once again? Les Bleus have returned to the final without ever really hitting top form and they now have to contend with illness in their camp. Central defenders Raphael Varane and Ibrahima Konate, as well as Kingsley Coman, sat out training on Friday with cold-like symptoms. Konate replaced Dayot Upamecano in defence for the semi-final against Morocco after he was ruled out by illness, while Adrien Rabiot was also unwell for that game.

The one player they cannot afford to lose is Mbappe, who scored five goals in the team's first four games but was largely kept quiet in the wins against England and Morocco. Four years ago Mbappe became the first teenager to score in a World Cup final since Pele when, aged 19, he helped France beat Croatia 4-2. Yet the iconic image of that tournament was Mbappe consoling Messi after starring as France beat Argentina in the last 16.



DOHA: This combination of photos shows France's forward #10 Kylian Mbappe and Argentina's forward #10 Lionel Messi in Lusail. —AFP

These days they are club colleagues, jostling for the limelight at Qatar-owned Paris Saint-Germain and now jousting with each other on the greatest stage of all. France are wary of reducing the match at the 89,000-capacity Lusail Stadium to just a

showdown with Messi. "Yes they have Leo Messi but there will also be 10 other players next to him who have lots of quality," said midfielder Aurelien Tchouameni. "So we will need to be ready, aware of the opportunity we have to make history." —AFP

Mbappe seeks to re-order football's hierarchy in final

DOHA: Kylian Mbappe can on Sunday become the youngest player to win two World Cups since Pele achieved the feat at the age of 21. Mbappe, who turns 24 two days after the final, is the joint leading scorer with five goals at this World Cup and the face of football's new generation. The last World Cup for Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo, the tournament in Qatar surely marks the passing of the baton from the two players who have dominated the sport for nearly two decades.

While Messi has one final chance to claim an elusive World Cup title, Mbappe and France hope to usher in an era of dominance for a nation appearing in a fourth final in seven attempts. With a squad decimated by injuries and struggling for form in the run-up, there were genuine concerns France would suffer the same fate they did as holders in 2002 and crash out in the group stage. France may not have set the world alight en route to the final, but they have been masters of the key moments—demonstrating a ruthlessness and killer instinct when it matters most.

Much of that stems from Mbappe, the most feared player on the planet, whose goals have helped carry France to within one win of becoming the first team to retain the World Cup since Brazil in 1962. "There is a great connection between the team. We work together but, when you start to come close to the title in this competition you need your main players at their best," said goalkeeper and captain Hugo Lloris. Mbappe announced himself on the global stage in 2018 with a brace against Argentina in last 16 in Russia, where he won the best young player award.

Aged 19, he became the youngest player to score in a World Cup final since a 17-year-old Pele in 1958, and Mbappe already has more World Cup goals than Portugal's Ronaldo or Diego Maradona. He bagged four goals in total in the 2018 edition—his first major tournament—drilling home France's fourth in the 4-2 win over Croatia in the final. Only Just Fontaine, who scored an incredible 13 times at the

1958 tournament in Sweden, has more World Cup goals for France.

'Difficult to see the limit'

Mbappe has scored 250 times in 362 games for club and country, a tally that far exceeds those of Messi and Ronaldo at the same age. "It's difficult to see the limit for Kylian. He's capable of breaking all records. It's amazing to have a team-mate like him," said Lloris.

But personal accolades are not the motivation for Mbappe with Les Bleus. "The only objective for me is to win the World Cup," he said. "That is what I am dreaming of. I didn't come here to win the Golden Ball. That is not why I am here. I am here to win and help the French national team. "This World Cup is an obsession for me, it's the competition of my dreams." France are not short on talent, but Mbappe is simply on another level. So much so that France coach Didier Deschamps has given Mbappe a licence to roam and he often takes full advantage of that liberty, rarely getting back to help in defence at this World Cup.—AFP



DOHA: This combination photo shows Argentina's forward #09 Julian Alvarez and France's forward #07 Antoine Griezmann. —AFP

in front of almost 89,000 fans in Doha's Lusail stadium. The concrete stand sticks out amongst the vast Argentine pampa in this humid region, 800 kilometers from Buenos Aires.

Calchin play in the same colors as River Plate, the club that launched Alvarez's professional career before he moved to Manchester City. Despite his big-money switch to the English Premier League, the richest competition in the world, Alvarez remains attached to his home village. A few years ago he bought a truck for his first coach, Rafael Varas, to help with his job as a delivery man. "It was a huge gesture by Julian to give me the truck. I wasn't expecting it but knowing the person he is, I expected nothing less," Varas said in a recent television interview.

'The best ambassador'

"Julian makes us proud. I remember teaching him mathematics, language, social sciences," said De Barberis. "But his strength was sports, where he shone. I adore him." She remembers mischievously joking with Alvarez that journalists would come looking to interview him, "and he became embarrassed." "He is the best ambassador we have. He is an example for our children, not just for his qualities as a player but also as a person," said local mayor Claudio Gorgorino. —AFP

Today's match on TV

FIFA World Cup 2022

Argentina v France 18:00

BBC One

Alkass One HD

beIN Sports HD

beIN Sports 1 FR

beIN Sports HD 3 Max

beIN Sports HD 1 Max

Alkass EXTRA One HD

Alkass EXTRA TWO HD

beIN Sports Connect

beIN Sports HD 5 Max

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
Kaifan	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
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

CHANGE OF NAME

I, INSIYA FAKHRUDDIN, holder of Passport No. T-2410916 do hereby change my name to INSIYA FAKHRUDDIN (as Given name) SHAKIR (as Surname) for all purposes. I will henceforth be known in the name INSIYA FAKHRUDDIN SHAKIR and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents.

I, FAKHRUDDIN, holder of Passport No. M-6102365 do hereby change my name to FAKHRUDDIN TAIYEBALI (as Given name) SHAKIR (as Surname) for all purposes. I will

henceforth be known in the name FAKHRUDDIN TAIYEBALI SHAKIR and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents.

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)

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, HAKIMUDDIN, holder of Passport No. Z3830256 do hereby change my name to HAKIMUDDIN (as Given name) JUZERALI (as Surname) for all purposes. I will henceforth be known in the name HAKIMUDDIN JUZERALI and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents. (C#2819) - 16-12-2022

Croatia secure World Cup third place, stun Morocco

Orsic's terrific curling strike ensured Croatia's bronze



DOHA: Croatia's players celebrate with their medals after winning the Qatar 2022 World Cup third place play-off against Morocco at Khalifa International Stadium on Dec 17, 2022. — AFP

DOHA: Croatia defeated Morocco 2-1 in the World Cup third place play-off on Saturday, with Mislav Orsic curling home the winner. Josko Gvardiol, one of the stars of the tournament in Qatar, headed Croatia into the lead in the seventh minute at the Khalifa International Stadium but Achraf Dari brought Morocco level right away.

Orsic's terrific curling strike late in the first half ensured Croatia took home the bronze medal, the 11th World Cup in a row a European team has finished third. Morocco, the first World Cup semi-finalists in history, had signalled their intent with a spirited display against 2018 runners-up Croatia in their opening game in Qatar.

The rematch was nothing like the cagey 0-0 draw in the group stage, with Morocco goalkeeper

Yassine Bounou dangerously close to passing the ball into his own net early on. Croatia soon surged in front from a well-rehearsed free-kick as Ivan Perisic nodded Lovro Majer's clip into the box back towards a diving Gvardiol, who planted his header into the corner. But Morocco hit back two minutes later when Hakim Ziyech's free-kick looped up off the head of Majer, allowing Dari to head past Dominik Livakovic.

Andrej Kramaric headed straight at Bounou, who then did well to scoop the ball to safety as Marko Livaja closed in after spilling a drive from Luka Modric. Orsic curled in brilliantly via the post from the corner of the box to put Croatia back on top before half-time after 18-year-old Morocco debutant Bilal El Khannouss lost the

ball deep in his half. Orsic again went close moments after the restart, his goalbound effort brushing Jawad El Yamiq and fizzing narrowly past the post.

Croatia were furious when Gvardiol tumbled inside the area when his foot appeared to be caught by Sofyan Amrabat, but there was no VAR review. It could have proved a match-changing moment had Youssef En-Nesyri found a way past Livakovic, who spread himself superbly to block the striker from close range. Mateo Kovacic put wide with the chance to put the game beyond doubt. Morocco had a late penalty appeal turned down and En-Nesyri headed just over but the Atlas Lions could not find a way back after their historic run. — AFP



Kuwait's racer Abdullah Al-Fadhel

Kuwaiti crowned world champion in Jet Ski

KUWAIT: Kuwait's racer Abdullah Al-Fadhel was crowned world champion in Thailand Jet Ski Championship's PRO-Stock category as part of the third phase of the event supervised by the International Jet Sports Boating Association (IJSBA). In a statement on Saturday, Al-Fadhel expressed his utmost delight at winning the biggest title during his sports career.

He added that the competition in which he also achieved the fourth place cup was strong, indicating that the Thailand championship includes a large number of competitors totaling 300 in 20 categories. Al-Fadhel was the runner-up of the 2022 world cup in Stock category and won the third position in the 2022 Europe event in the same game.

Burbea wins

Also, Kuwaiti athlete Faisal Burbea has won the Stock division for beginners in Thailand Jet Ski Championship within the third round of the event supervised by the International Jet Sports Boating Association (IJSBA). In a press statement, Chairman of the Kuwaiti Sea Sports Club's delegation Abdullah Burbea hailed the promising champion's feat as part of the great accomplishments made by Kuwaiti athletes so far during this international championship.

He added that Burbea had won European and international Jet Ski championships in Poland and US state of Arizona respectively. However, he hoped that Kuwaiti athletes would win more categories during this international event held in Thailand, speaking highly of Kuwaiti sports authorities' great support. Earlier in the day, Kuwait's racer Abdullah Al-Fadhel was crowned world champion in Thailand Jet Ski Championship's PRO-Stock category. — KUNA

'Greatest' Messi ready for fitting WCup farewell

DOHA: Thirty-seven club trophies, seven Ballon D'Or awards and six European Golden Boots. A Copa America title, an Olympic gold medal and a list of scoring and statistical records that may never be beaten. Over the course of an 18-year career Lionel Messi has, with one obvious exception, won the lot. And won it again and again. On Sunday, the 35-year-old Argentina captain has the chance to fill the last remaining hole on his CV: a World Cup winners' medal. For Messi's most ardent admirers, victory over France at Doha's Lusail Stadium will settle the debate over where he ranks in the most exclusive inner sanctum of football's pantheon.

Messi's career achievements to date have already earned him the right to be mentioned in the same breath as Pele, Diego Maradona, Alfredo Di Stefano and Johan Cruyff. Does a World Cup win on Sunday nudge him ahead of that exalted company? Some think it does. Others think he already stands alone. "I don't have any doubt saying that: he is the best in history," was the verdict of Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni after Messi's virtuoso display in the 3-0 semi-final win over Croatia.

Former England captain Alan Shearer says he has long regarded Messi's compatriot Maradona as the greatest player of all time on the basis of his 1986 World Cup triumph in Mexico. "If Messi were to win it here, my view would change," Shearer told the BBC. A more nuanced view came from former Argentina striker Jorge Burruchaga, scorer of the winning goal-set up by

Maradona in the 1986 World Cup final victory over West Germany.

For Burruchaga, Messi has been the greatest player of an era where only Cristiano Ronaldo can rival his achievements. But the 60-year-old says comparisons with previous generations are futile. "Win or lose, Messi is not more or less than Maradona," Burruchaga told AFP. "Messi is going to be in history whatever happens. "There are five players in the past 70 years who can be considered the best in the world-Di Stefano, Johan Cruyff, Pele, Maradona and Messi. "Messi is in that list, whether he wins the World Cup or not. But I hope he does."

Weight of history

While the debate over Messi's place in history rumbles on, the man himself remains focused on what he has said will be his final appearance on the World Cup stage. Messi's fifth World Cup campaign has arguably been his best, thriving as the attacking fulcrum of a balanced Argentina starting line-up assembled by Scaloni. In previous World Cup appearances, Messi has appeared weighed down by history, struggling to shoulder the hopes and dreams of millions of Argentines desperate for international glory.

For much of the past decade it seemed as if he was destined to fall short in his quest to land a major title with Argentina. The soul-destroying extra-time defeat to Germany in the 2014 World Cup started a run of three consecutive major final losses. In 2015, a star-studded Argentina side lost the Copa America final to Chile in a penalty shootout. A year later, the Albiceleste were beaten again by Chile in the final of the Copa America Centenario, Messi missing a penalty in yet another shootout defeat. — AFP



FIFA President Gianni Infantino (left) and Qatar's Prime Minister Khalid bin Khalifa bin Abdulaziz Al Thani speak during the Qatar 2022 World Cup third place play-off football match on December 17, 2022. — AFP photos



A Croatian supporter waves a flag as fans watch the Qatar 2022 World Cup football third-place match between Croatia and Morocco on December 17, 2022.



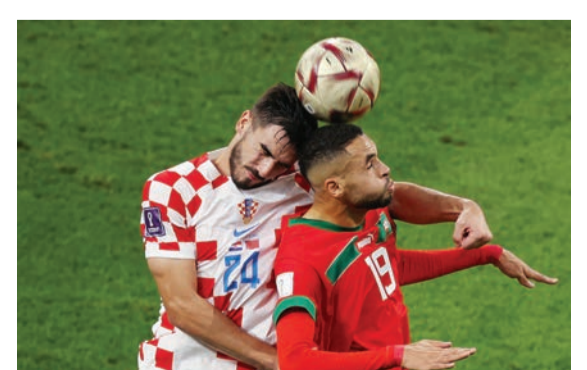
A photo shows a fireworks show prior to the Qatar 2022 World Cup third place play-off football match between Croatia and Morocco on December 17, 2022.



Morocco supporters cheer during the Qatar 2022 World Cup third place play-off football match between Croatia and Morocco.



A Morocco supporter poses prior to the Qatar 2022 World Cup third place play-off football match between Croatia and Morocco.



Croatia's defender Josip Sutalo (left) and Morocco's forward Youssef En-Nesyri fight for the ball during the Qatar 2022 World Cup football third place play-off match between Croatia and Morocco.