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# Kuwait underlines stability of Iraq as major global concern

Let Iraq choose own path, Macron tells Jordan summit

## Kuwait Times awards art competition winners



KUWAIT: Kuwait Times awards the winners of 'Kuwait, Years from Now' art competition held in collaboration with strategic partner Zain, the leading telecommunications company in Kuwait, on Dec 20, 2022. The event took place at the print house of Kuwait Times. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat (Full report in tomorrow's edition)

SWEIMEH, Jordan: Kuwait on Tuesday said the stability of neighboring Iraq is among the international community's perennial concerns, underlining the region's cognizance of the need to protect security in Baghdad. The entire region will be affected in the event of any form of unrest breaking out in any country, HH the Amir's representative and Prime Minister HH Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Sabah told the French-sponsored Baghdad Conference for Cooperation and Partnership in Jordan, which brought together a number of leaders from around the region.

The international community and Gulf Arab states in particular are well aware of the "significant position" Iraq holds on the global stage, the Kuwaiti premier emphasized, saying Baghdad deserves to once again play an "active role" in world affairs. With that in mind, he said Kuwait has always stood by the side of its larger neighbor, given the "intertwined fates" of the two countries, citing the



SWEIMEH, Jordan: HH the Prime Minister HH Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Sabah addresses the Baghdad Conference.

copious amount of Kuwaiti aid that has poured into Baghdad in recent years.

Given the "scope" of bilateral relations, the Kuwaiti PM said it would behoove the two countries to resolve any remaining bones of contention, which will be instrumental in ushering in greater levels of progress in ties.

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## Hostages freed, captors killed as Pak siege ends

BANNU, Pakistan: All 33 suspected militant prisoners who seized a Pakistan police station over the weekend were killed and their hostages freed in a clearance operation by special forces on Tuesday, the defense minister said. The hostage takers, who were suspected of being members of various militant groups including the Tehreek-e-Taleban Pakistan (TTP), overpowered their jailers and snatched weapons on Sunday.

"All the hostages have been freed," Defense Minister Khawaja Muhammad Asif told parliament. "Ten to 15 men from the SSG (special forces) including an officer were wounded while two were martyred." Elite troops stormed the police station around noon when differences broke out between the hostage takers over how to handle their captives, Asif said, with witnesses reporting blasts and heavy firing.

The suspected militants were being held on suspicion of terrorism and had demanded safe passage to Afghanistan in return for releasing the hostages, who included at least eight police officers and military intelligence officials. "There were 33 terrorists from different groups who had been arrested and jailed in the counter-terrorism department compound," Asif said. "One of them hit his guard on the head with a brick while going to the toilet and

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## MPs pass conflict of interests law, debate housing

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The National Assembly on Tuesday passed in the second and final reading a law that bars conflict of interests, which stipulates jail terms and hefty fines for ministers, MPs and civil servants who misuse their jobs to make personal gains from graft. MPs also passed in the second reading an amendment to the penal code to include what is called a juridical per-

son, a non-human legal person like corporates, government bodies, non-governmental organizations or international organizations, in corruption cases in courts.

MPs said the amendment was needed to fill a big loophole in laws designed to fight corruption, which target only natural humans and not legal entities. Since its inauguration in October, the opposition-dominated Assembly has passed a number of laws to fight corruption. The Assembly also began debating the housing cities law which aims to accelerate building homes for citizens and allows seeking direct help from foreign companies. Rapporteur of the housing panel MP

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KUWAIT: Lawmakers attend a National Assembly session on Dec 20, 2022. — Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh

## KNPC opens 5th gas pipeline to meet demand

KUWAIT: Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC) on Tuesday inaugurated its fifth liquefied gas pipeline with an output capacity of 805 million

cubic feet per day. High production capability of the pipeline, inaugurated at Ahmadi terminal, includes 106,000 barrels of condensates and liquefied gas, forecast to meet much of the domestic and external demand. The project is of paramount importance as it is linked to the KNPC 2040 main strategic goals for attaining optimum harnessing of hydrocarbon resources, said Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) Chief Executive Officer Sheikh Nawaf Saud Al-Sabah during the opening ceremony.

KPC is the umbrella for a string of national sub-

sidary oil and energy companies, including the KNPC. KNPC's broad strategy mainly aims at broadening exploration for associated and non-associated natural gas, producing highly feasible oil byproducts that meet requirements by the international markets and comply with environmental terms. Sheikh Nawaf has affirmed that a promising future for Kuwait largely hinges on "our success in utilizing our resources in projects that can preserve Kuwait's status as a key exporter of clean energy".

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## COVID cases soar in China, deaths surge

BEIJING: Crematoriums across China are straining to deal with an influx of bodies as the country battles a wave of COVID cases that authorities have said is impossible to track. Cases are soaring across China, with hospitals struggling and pharmacy shelves stripped bare in the wake of

the government's sudden decision to lift years of lockdowns, quarantines and mass testing. The United States has warned the outbreak is now of concern to the rest of the world, given the potential for further mutations and the size of China's economy.

From the country's northeast to its southwest, crematorium workers told AFP they are struggling to keep up with a surge in deaths. In Chongqing - a city of 30 million where authorities this week urged people with mild COVID symptoms to go to

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BEIJING: A woman holds a picture of a loved one at a crematorium on Dec 20, 2022. — AFP



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## Local

# Al-Matouq re-appointed as United Nations chief advisor

## Special advisor for the seventh consecutive year

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait's International Islamic Charity Organization (IICO) on Tuesday said that its chairman Dr Abdullah Al-Matouq has retained his position as UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres' special advisor for the seventh consecutive year. Thankful for the UN chief's trust in him, the Kuwaiti official said it was a recognition of Kuwait's efforts towards regional and global humanitarian endeavors. Al-Matouq, who has served as the UN chief's advisor since 2017, vowed to continue to "work diligently" to serve humanity at a time where the world is rife with conflict and unrest, he underlined.

### Nuclear accord

Meanwhile, a senior UN official has affirmed that there has been no progress in implementation of the Iranian nuclear accord or the UN Security

Council Resolution 2231 designed to ensure peaceful employment of Tehran's nuclear capabilities in exchange for lifting sanctions. Iran is planning to install new uranium enriching centrifuges at a nuclear plant and intends to produce more enriched uranium, forecast to hit as high as 60 percent, at another reactor, said Rosemary DiCarlo, the UN Secretary General Assistant for Political Affairs, addressing a UNSC session on the Iranian nuclear file.

Iran at present has a total reserve of enriched uranium more than 18 times than the allowed cap as set in the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), also known as the Iran nuclear deal that had been worked out after issuance of the UNSC Resolution 2231, DiCarlo added. She called on Tehran to back down from steps it has taken since

July 2019 that contradict its obligations related to the nuclear file, as stipulated in the JCPOA.

Moreover, DiCarlo indicated that there were divergent views regarding Iran's ballistic missiles' tests, particularly those conducted in June and November, as well as a test of a new ballistic missile unveiled in September. Elaborating, she said the UN had received "messages" from Ukraine, France, Germany, the UK and the US regarding purported transport of pilotless aircraft from Iran to Russia, contrary to the UN Resolution 2231. The UNSC Resolution 2231 was a 20 July 2015 resolution endorsing the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on the nuclear program of Iran. It sets out an inspection process and schedule while also preparing for the removal of United Nations sanctions against Iran. —KUNA



UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres' pictured with Chairman of the International Islamic Charitable Organization Dr Abdullah Al-Matouq. —KUNA

## KSSS pays loans of over 107 students

**KUWAIT:** The head of the Kuwait Society for Student Support Abdullah Al-Sabij revealed the society has prepared a project to pay loans of 107 private school students and 17 medical college students for the year 2022/23. The students have been categorized according to their needs and were ranked based on the priority of the most needy students.

Sabij praised the efforts of the endowment ministry represented by Secretary General Sager Al-Sijari for their active support to the society to help needy families who are unable to pay their children's fees in private schools and colleges in Kuwait. He also thanked the endowment ministry for their continuous support regarding charitable work, especially in the education sector, as it cements their role of social responsibility and achieving sustainable development, as well as improving the exceptional humanitarian side of the country.



KUWAIT: Diplomats and embassy labor consuls pose for a group photo after the meeting.



> A woman plays with an owl during an educational event (2018).

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## Envoys and embassy labor consuls meet

**KUWAIT:** In the framework of the Public Authority of Manpower helping and caring for expatriate workers' rights in Kuwait, as well as to learn about the most important obstacles they face, a presentation was organized at PAM headquarters with the attendance of a number of diplomatic envoys and embassy labor consuls, where the services of the authority were

explained with regards to expatriates.

During the presentation, representatives of departments presented a complete briefing on all specialized departments at the authority under the expatriate workers affairs. Fifteen embassies were present at the meeting. The authority ensures to organize such meetings to contribute to the development of work procedures, which increases cooperation between Kuwait and diplomatic envoys for the benefit of workers. A window for questions was designated for representatives of the embassies. At the end of the presentation, all attendees were thanked and their observations were taken in order to ensure the best services are provided.



## Partnership with Kuwait substantial: Italian FM

**ROME:** Italian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Antonio Tajani has stressed the importance of cooperating with Kuwait in various fields. Partnership and cooperation with Kuwait are significant at various levels namely in the realm of energy security and combating terrorism, said Tajani in response to a question by KUNA's correspondent during his first news conference at the foreign ministry's headquarters in Rome since taking office, Tajani, during the press conference, held late on Monday, answered KUNA in regards of the Italian-Kuwaiti cooperation and Italy's stand and bonds with other Arab countries.

Tajani said that he had held talks with Kuwaiti offi-

cial and GCC foreign ministers on a host of issues including energy and anti-terrorism efforts, stressing that the GCC plays a major role in fighting terrorism. The deputy premier and foreign minister also added that during the Mediterranean Dialogues Forum (Rome MED), held early this month in Italy, he had met with Kuwait's Petroleum Corporation Chief Executive Officer Shaikh Nawaf Al-Sabah to discuss energy issues. Asked whether Italy will participate in Turkiye's energy project, turning into "Europe's energy axis"—as the Turks say—he indicated that Rome has an identical enterprise. Tajani also noted that, during the forum, he had held a series of discussions on various issues with officials from several Arab and African countries including Libya, Iran, Lebanon and the Sahel Region. —KUNA



Antonio Tajani

## Local

# Awqaf Ministry intensifies efforts against illicit drugs and narcotics

## War on drugs must become a societal priority

**KUWAIT:** Narcotics and illicit drugs have an adversarial impact on society with all roads leading to "doom and gloom" no matter how "careful" a user is. Kuwait's Awqaf (endowment) and Islamic Affairs Ministry plays a crucial role in the state's efforts to counter the evils of narcotics, providing moral and religious guidance to those entangled with drugs. Speaking to KUNA, religious experts all agreed that the war on drugs must become a societal priority, saying that mosques and guidance centers play a role in countering narcotics' menace.

Several religious-centered media campaigns geared towards warning against illicit drugs were launched in the past in coordination amongst several state entities, said

head of media at the ministry of Awqaf Dr Ahmad Al-Otaibi. He noted that a media campaign was inaugurated recently focusing on the youth sectors, saying that it was to promote the virtue of performing religious duties and steering clear from vices.

Cornering the fight against narcotics, he affirmed that campaigns should be modernized and should target all sectors of society in order for the battle against drugs to be successful. On his part, Imam of Abdullah ibn Al-Arqam mosque Dr Farhan Al-Shimmari stressed that all efforts must be based on the solid principles of Islam, revealing that Imams of mosques and religious centers were encouraged to protect the youth from narcotics through wisdom and patience.

He praised the Ministry of Awqaf for their efforts in supporting Imams and guiding them through the current efforts to combat narcotics, affirming that this cause was worth the fight especially with the rate of death from narcotics related causes was on the rise. The evils of drugs could not be disputed, affirmed Adel Al-Azmi, an Islamic scholar, pointing out that the increase of narcotics use was something that needed to be addressed with all due seriousness. He went on to say that there were main incidents where the use of narcotics had been linked to various crimes including assault and event murder; therefore, society as a whole must stand against the spread of drugs. —KUNA



Dr Ahmad Al-Otaibi



Adel Al-Azmi



Dr Farhan Al-Shimmari



## KSH to implement special program

**KUWAIT:** The Kuwait Awqaf Public Foundation dedicated a fund for 30 children with disabilities to cover their rehabilitation and education services at the KSHs Educational Centers. The Kuwait Society for the Handicapped is eager to implement the "Care of People with Disabilities" project in Kuwait in cooperation with the Kuwait Awqaf Public Foundation.

KSH Director General Dr Elham Al-Hamdan stated: "Since the establishment of the Kuwait Society for the Handicapped in 1971 as the first charity in Kuwait that provides services for children with disabilities at no cost, the Society has continued to provide integrated rehabilitation services to people with disabilities at no cost and

spared no efforts in integrating them into society.

All these efforts were directed to empower and encourage the inclusion of people with disabilities in the mainstream community. In conjunction with the KSH's belief in the rights of people with disabilities, the Kuwait Society for the Handicapped has adopted in its strategy the achievement of sustainability in a way that serves the care of people with disabilities and the fulfillment of Kuwait Vision 2035".

Dr Elham added: "This project aims to provide integrated care programs for people with disabilities, which include rehabilitation services, such as physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech-language pathology, and education. These services develop the abilities of our students helping them overcome obstacles and assist them in improving independence, becoming productive, and adapting to the environment around them.

Moreover, this project contributes to empow-

ering people with disabilities from less fortunate families by covering their treatment fees and granting them access to adequate rehabilitation services, which symbolize solidarity and compassion among community members, especially as it's known that the costs of treatment are pretty high. She added that the Kuwait Society for the Handicapped provides equal services for people with disabilities who reside in Kuwait.

And that the Kuwait Awqaf Public Foundation fund was dedicated to the most underprivileged 30 people with disabilities registered in the society. Concluding her statement, Dr Elham Al-Hamdan expressed her sincere gratitude and appreciation for Kuwait Awqaf Public Foundation's efforts in supporting people in need, and she appraised the strategic partnership between the "Kuwait Awqaf Public Foundation" and the "Kuwait Society for the Handicapped" which is the forefront of sustainability, growth, and development in Kuwait.

## Kuwaiti students partake in Huawei ICT Regional Finals

**MUSCAT:** Three Kuwaiti students will be competing in Huawei ICT Middle East Regional Finals in Muscat, Oman from December 20-22. Students Dalal Al-Awadhi, Abeer Al-Farhan and Faris Al-Mutairi will be among 45 competitors who qualified to the Finals that saw the participation of over 19,000 students from the Middle East and Central Asia.

The Kuwaiti students expressed to KUNA joy for taking part in such competition that witnesses and showcases latest technological developments in the communication and information sectors. Participants will be at Huawei ICT Academy under healthy competition circumstances and a wide range of innovative technologies to be exchanged with ideas from all competitors, as it has been since 2015. —KUNA

## Court orders man to pay KD 500,000 for dud cheque

**KUWAIT:** The Court of Appeal ordered a Kuwaiti to pay KD 500,000 to a compatriot - a carpet seller - for issuing a dud cheque for the amount of KD 339,000 in exchange of 56 Persian carpets. In 2012, the carpet seller sold 56 Iranian-made carpets for an amount of KD 339,300. But the cheque bounced when he went to cash it. This forced the carpet seller to report the incident, and the misdemeanor court ruled the citizen be imprisoned for three years on the charge of issuing a cheque without balance. The plaintiff's defense confirmed there is a contractual relationship between his client and the citizen, and his client has the right to claim the amount, along with the judicial compensation estimated by the court.

## National Assembly OKs several requests

**KUWAIT:** The National Assembly, in its regular session on Tuesday okayed several requests received after completing the discussion of incoming papers and letters. Among them is a letter from Head of the Parliamentary Investigation Committee MP Hamdan Al-Azmi, requesting that complaint number 165 be referred to the Parliament's Financial and Economic Affairs Committee in accordance with the provisions of article 156.

It approved a letter from a group of MPs requesting that the Parliamentary Public Funds Protection Committee be assigned to follow up the losses of the Kuwait Investment Office in London affiliated with the Kuwait Investment Authority along with Glencore company, provided that the committee submits its report to the parliament within two months.

Additionally, it okayed a proposal from MPs requesting that the Parliamentary Environment, Food and Water Security Affairs Committee be assigned to discuss and investigate what is contained in the reports of the oversight bodies, and complaints of citizens residing in Jaber Al-Ahmad city and northwestern Sulaibikhat regarding environmental violations.

The National Assembly welcomed a letter from MP Shuaib Shaaban, seeking that the Parliament's Public Utilities Committee be assigned to discuss with the concerned authorities to solve the problem of the main entrance to Jaber Al-Ahmad city. Also, it adopted a document from two MPs, Dr Abdulaziz Al-Saqabi and Muhammad Al-Sayer, requesting that the Parliament's Sports Affairs Committee be assigned to consider and follow up the issues in connection to cycling, provided that the committee submits its report within four months.

Conversely, the parliament rejected a letter from the Finance Minister and Minister of State for Economic Affairs and Investments Abdulwahab Al-Rasheed, asking for the urgency of the Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee to consider the draft law approving Kuwait's agreement to establishing the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. —AFP



## Japan Embassy holds 15th Japanese Speech Contest

**KUWAIT:** The Embassy of Japan in Kuwait held the 15th Japanese Speech Contest in collaboration with the Center for Community Service & Continuing Education at Kuwait University and the Japanese Society in Kuwait on Monday, December 19, 2022. As the National Council for Culture, Arts and Literature (NCCAL) hosted the contest in the National Library of Kuwait.

In his opening remarks, Charge d'Affaires at the

Embassy of Japan Kaneko Koji expressed great delight in having been able to hold the event for fifteen years, showing his appreciation for the continuous efforts of the Center for Community Service & Continuing Education at Kuwait University in teaching the Japanese language since 1996. Eleven contestants participated in the contest, while almost one hundred people joined the event as audience.

All of the contestants showed brilliant performance of the Japanese speech. And as a side event, two special guests delivered special presentations. The first guest, Dr Oki Yutaroh, Associate Professor of J-MENA Office, Kyushu University gave a presentation promoting studying in Japan with general information of various Japanese famous universities. And the second guest, Faisal Al-Salem, a famous



Charge d'Affaires Kaneko Koji

Japan-friendly Instagrammer aka gaijinexpress, delivered a special speech regarding his experience living in Japan for long years.

## News in brief

## GCC deplores Iraq attack

RIYADH: Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf on Tuesday denounced a recent attack on Iraqi security forces in north Iraq, which left multiple casualties. In a press statement, Al-Hajraf restated the Gulf bloc's unwavering position that decries all forms of violence, extremism and terrorism which run counter to human values and principles. The GCC chief extended sincere condolences to the victims' families and the government and people of Iraq, while wishing a swift recovery for all those injured in the attack. Eight Iraqi policemen were killed and three others injured on Monday in an attack launched by militants in Diyala Province to the northeast of the capital, Baghdad.



Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf

## Arab League condemns Zionists

CAIRO: Secretary-General of the Arab League Ahmad Abul-Gheit strongly on Tuesday condemned Zionist occupation forces' forcibly deporting human rights lawyer and activist Salah Hamouri to France. In a statement, Abul-Gheit stressed that deporting Hamouri violates international and human right laws, and warned against tolerance with the possibility that Zionists will continue taking immoral actions in dealing with Palestinians. He called on the international community to take a strong and unified stand against Zionist entity and their violations as they go against human rights. Authorities deported French-Palestinian human rights lawyer, Salah Hamouri after having been held in prison without charge since March.

## Kuwait crude oil falls

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti crude oil dropped by 86 cents on Monday to reach \$78.92 per barrel as compared to \$79.78 pb on Friday, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said on Tuesday. Brent crude went up by 76 cents to \$79.80 pb and West Texas Intermediate oil rose by 90 cents to \$75.19 pb. —From KUNA

## Cairo hosts Kuwait Week exhibition



13th Kuwait Week exhibition opening ceremony

CAIRO: Cairo is hosting the 13th Kuwait Week, organized by Jabriya Exhibition Group - an expo of Kuwaiti and Egyptian industry, trade, investment, banking, medicine, tourism, media, culture and communications businesses and government bodies. The two-day event, held under the auspices of Egypt Prime Minister Mustafa Madbouly,



KUWAIT: Director General of Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) Dr Fatema Al-Salem receives UNHCR Representative in Kuwait Nisreen Rubaian. —KUNA

## KUNA's chief receives UNHCR representative

KUWAIT: Director General of Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) Dr Fatema Al-Salem on Tuesday met with UNHCR Representative in Kuwait Nisreen Rubaian and Program Associate Eman Al-Einawi, and discussed bilateral cooperation in the area of media and field training. During the reception, they discussed ways of exchanging training experiences and organizing training courses and programs between KUNA and the UNHCR in the media coverage of the UN body's activities.

Both sides stressed the significance of media in highlighting the humanitarian side of different issues, especially the issue of refugees, and exchange of visits and experience as well as training. KUNA's Deputy Director-General for Financial and Administrative Affairs and Communications Mohammad Al-Mannai, Head of KUNA's Planning and Development Office Reham Bushehri, and KUNA's Public Relations and Marketing Department attended the reception. —KUNA

this year is witnessing the participation of more than 80 entities.

Some of the government and private bodies representing Kuwait include the Amiri Diwan's Martyr's Office, the Public Authority for Industry, Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait, Abdulaziz Saud AlBabtain Cultural Award Foundation, Jazeera Airways,



Martyr's office



Kuwaiti Pavilion

Bukhamseen Holding Group and newspapers Al-Anbaa and Al-Nahar. Egyptian bodies include the Tourism Promotion Authority, Middle East News Agency and EgyptAir. The exhibition was inaugurated by Egypt's Minister of Trade and Industry Ahmed Samir and Kuwait's Ambassador to Egypt Ghanim Al-Ghanim, among others. —KUNA

## Social affairs minister honors children who care for parents

KUWAIT: Minister of Social Affairs and Women and Children Affairs Mai Al-Baghlhi stressed the importance of being a child who cares for their parents and the role of the prize in establishing educational values based on humanitarian principles that are derived from Islam, the constitution and original Arab values. "I am glad to meet with you in this event to honor a number of parent-caring Kuwaiti children who have exerted valuable efforts to raise Kuwait's standards in various aspects as individuals and civil institutions in preparing cultural and social activities which serves the society as a whole," Baghlhi said during the ceremony.

"Volunteer work in the service and development of the society is a source of inspiration for social cohesion, and it is a basis to boost good social values such as cooperation and compassion for the prosperity of Kuwait," she added. "Starting from our social responsibility at the ministry towards cases related to enhancing parental and elderly care, we have been sponsoring this award since 2007, which has been contributing throughout the years in guiding programs and social care activities," she added.



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## Kuwaiti designs wooden toys

KUWAIT: Khaled Al-Humaithi, a Kuwaiti artist, is on a mission to create toys made of wood that primarily aims at developing real-life skills of children. Inspired by man, nature, plants, animals, and Kuwaiti landmarks, Al-Humaithi uses a variety of tools to craft toys admired by children. —KUNA





Philippine corpse whisperer seeks justice for drug war victims

## Tunisia arrests former PM over jihadist departures

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# Putin insists no plan to absorb Belarus

## Moscow releases footage of drills with Belarusian forces including tank manoeuvres

**KYIV:** President Vladimir Putin denied plans to absorb Belarus as he paid a rare visit Monday to the country whose strongman assisted his invasion of neighbouring Ukraine. Putin flew into Minsk with his defence and foreign ministers in tow, hours after Russian forces launched a swarm of attack drones at critical infrastructure in Kyiv, which provoked emergency blackouts in a dozen regions.

Putin said that Russia and Belarus — slapped with new Western sanctions since President Alexander Lukashenko was declared the winner of a sixth term in 2020 elections widely criticised as fraudulent — were “united by a common history and spiritual values”. Putin called the countries “closest allies and strategic partners” but said that rumours that Russia sought to take over Belarus came from “ill-wishers”.

“Russia has no interest in absorbing anyone, this would simply make no sense,” Putin said. In Washington, State Department spokesman Ned Price scoffed at Putin’s remarks. “I think a statement like that has to be treated as the height of irony coming from a leader who is seeking at the present moment — right now — to violently absorb his other, peaceful next-door neighbour,” Price said.

“We have seen the Lukashenko regime essentially cede its sovereignty — cede its independence — to Russia,” Price said. Belarus has let Russian forces use its territory and hours before Putin touched down in Minsk, Moscow released footage of drills with Belarusian forces including tank manoeuvres and sniper fire at a snow-dusted training ground.

Lukashenko urged closer military cooperation and said that Russia and Belarus are “open for dialogue with other states, including European ones.” “I hope that soon they will listen to the voice of reason,” Lukashenko said.

Speculation mounted ahead of the Russian leader’s visit that he would pressure Lukashenko to send troops to Ukraine to fight alongside the Russians after Moscow suffered a string of defeats



MINSK: Russian President Vladimir Putin (L) and Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko make a statement during their meeting at the Palace of Independence in Minsk. — AFP

in nearly 10 months of fighting. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov, however, dismissed the reports “as totally stupid, groundless fabrications.” In October, Belarus announced the formation of a joint regional force with Moscow with several thousand Russian servicemen arriving in the ex-Soviet country.

### New explosions near Kyiv

The drone attacks wounded three people near Kyiv. They came as Russia said it shot down several US-made missiles over its airspace near Ukraine. “I first heard the air raid siren... I thought there is going to be a drone attack. For the first time, it scared me,” said Natalia Dobrovolska, a 68-year-old resident of Kyiv. She described hearing multiple explosions before power shut off in her building in western Kyiv. Officials said Russia had flown in 35

attack drones nationwide, including 23 over Kyiv.

Ukraine said it downed 30 of the aerial weapons, including Iranian-made “Shaheds”, which have pummeled the capital in recent weeks. Mayor Vitali Klitschko said critical infrastructure facilities were damaged while regional authorities said nine homes had been scarred by the attacks.

Ukraine has experienced frequent and deadly aerial attacks. After a series of battlefield setbacks, Moscow stepped up its aerial campaign to target the country’s energy grid. With winter setting in, missile and drone attacks have plunged cities around the country into darkness, and severed water and heat supplies to millions of Ukrainians. Speaking to the leaders of several NATO countries via video link on Monday, President Volodymyr Zelensky urged Ukraine’s allies to supply its military with more weapons. — AFP

## Two-year suspended sentence for ex-Nazi camp secretary

**ITZEHOE:** A German court on Tuesday handed a two-year suspended sentence to a 97-year-old former Nazi camp secretary over complicity in the murder of more than 10,000 people. In one of the country’s last Holocaust trials, presiding judge Dominik Gross read out the verdict for defendant Irmgard Furchner for her role in what prosecutors called the “cruel and malicious murder” of prisoners at the Stutthof camp in occupied Poland.

Furchner sat in a wheelchair in the courtroom, wearing a white cap and a medical mask as Gross found her guilty of thousands of counts of accessory to murder. She was the first woman in decades to be tried in Germany for Nazi-era crimes.

Gross noted that justice had come “truly very late” in the case, and only because “the defendant has been lucky to have a particularly long life”. Furchner, whose image the court ordered blurred in media photographs, had expressed regret as the trial drew to a close this month.

“I’m sorry about everything that happened,” she told the regional court in the northern town of Itzehoe. Gross lamented that she had not given a fuller account of her time at Stutthof. “We would have preferred a defendant who spoke—she chose to remain silent,” he said.

Furchner had tried to abscond as the proceedings were set to begin in September 2021, fleeing the retirement home where she lives. She managed to evade police for several hours before being apprehended in the nearby city of Hamburg.



ITZEHOE: Defendant Irmgard F (L), a former secretary for the SS commander of the Stutthof concentration camp, sits close to her lawyers Niklas Weber (2nd R) and Wolf Molkentin (R) in a courtroom in Itzehoe, northern Germany. —AFP

Her lawyers had called for her acquittal, saying the evidence presented “had not shown beyond doubt” that she knew of the killings. But Gross found that “nothing that happened at Stutthof was kept from her” and that she was aware of the “extremely bad conditions for the prisoners”.

### ‘Last of its kind’

The defendant was a teenager when her crimes were committed and had therefore been tried in a juvenile court. An estimated 65,000 people died at the camp near today’s Gdansk, including “Jewish prisoners, Polish partisans and Soviet Russian prisoners of war”, prosecutors said.

Between June 1943 and April 1945, Furchner worked in the office of camp commander Paul Werner Hoppe. She took dictation of the SS officer’s orders and handled his correspondence. Public

prosecutor Maxi Wantzen late last month had asked the judges to hand down a two-year suspended sentence—the longest possible without jail time.

“This trial is of outstanding historical importance,” Wantzen said, adding that it was “potentially, due to the passage of time, the last of its kind”. Several Stutthof camp survivors offered wrenching accounts of their suffering during the trial.

Gross thanked them for their testimony, acknowledging that it had been an “agonising torment” for them to relive their memories. Stefan Lode, a lawyer representing three survivors who live in the United States, said they were “satisfied that a verdict was reached”.

“Our state under the rule of law prosecuted this matter after all these decades and sent the message that there is no statute of limitations on murder or accessory to murder,” he said. — AFP

## Six dead as Thai navy continues search for sailors

**PRACHUAP KHIRI KHAN:** Six bodies were recovered in the Gulf of Thailand on Tuesday, the Thai navy chief said, following the sinking of a naval vessel two days ago. More than 70 survivors from the HTMS Sukhothai have been hauled from the sea since the vessel went down late Sunday roughly 37 kilometres (22 miles) off Thailand’s southeastern coast.

Rescuers in helicopters, two planes, and four vessels — the HTMS Kraburi, HTMS Anghong, HTMS Naresuan and HTMS Bhumibol Adulyadej — were scanning the turbulent waters for more than 20 sailors still missing, the navy said.

“Six found dead,” commander-in-chief of the Royal Thai Navy Choenchai Chomchoengpaet told a press conference in Bangkok. Earlier Tuesday, naval commander Pichai Lorchusakul confirmed rescuers had found, in good health, 23-year-old Chananyu Gansriya, from Loei province.

“I believe that this is good news that we could find more people,” he said, adding that Chananyu was being cared for onboard the HTMS Anghong. Efforts to find the missing crew were focused on aerial searches, with the Royal Thai airforce assist-



PRACHUAP KHIRI KHAN: Relatives of missing sailors wait for news during the search for survivors of the capsizing of the Thai naval vessel HTMS Sukhothai. —AFP

ing the operation, which has been affected by strong winds.

At a pier in Prachuap Khiri Khan province, anxious families of those missing gathered to wait for news. Siri Esa, the mother of 21-year-old Saharat Esa who was onboard, had a smile on her face when she heard about the latest rescue. “I also have faith in my son. This is good news,” she said.

Tuesday’s waves were still high, navy spokesperson Admiral Pogkrong Montradrpalin said, noting the search area had grown and was focusing “on the

area near shores, according to the currents and the wind”. Another naval officer, Narong Khumburi, had earlier expressed hope that more survivors would be discovered, as they had life vests — “But I imagine they must be exhausted.”

Sahachart Limcharoenphakdee, a member of the National Institute for Emergency Medicine, said they were working with naval personnel to care for those plucked from the waters. “I am hopeful, and have trust for the navy rescue team, who are skillful,” he said of the search for survivors. — AFP

## Lawmakers call for criminal charges against Trump

**WASHINGTON:** Lawmakers investigating last year’s assault on the US Capitol recommended Monday that Donald Trump be charged with multiple offenses including insurrection-raising the stakes in a parallel criminal investigation that could put the former president in jail.

The House of Representatives select committee called for the indictment—as well as charges of obstruction of an official proceeding and conspiracy to defraud the United States—after an 18-month probe into the storming of Congress on January 6, 2021.

At least five people died after a mob whipped up by Trump’s false claims of a stolen election, and directed to march on Congress by the defeated president, ransacked the seat of US democracy in a thwarted bid to prevent the transfer of power to President Joe Biden.

The bipartisan committee voted unanimously to refer the charges to the Justice Department after opening remarks by vice-chair Liz Cheney in which she accused Trump of “a clear dereliction of duty” in failing to immediately attempt to stop the riot and called him “unfit for any office.”

“No man who would behave that way at that moment in time can ever serve in any position of authority in our nation again,” she said. The referrals are seen as largely symbolic, as the panel has no control over charging decisions, which rest with the Justice Department.

Jack Smith, a largely independent special prosecutor appointed by Attorney General Merrick Garland, is leading his own investigation into Trump related to the 2020 election.

### Major blow

Trump issued a statement claiming that the purpose of the investigation was to “keep me from running for president because they know I’ll win” and that any prosecution would be “a partisan attempt to sideline me.”

Trump’s approval ratings are underwater—at minus-20 percentage points in the RealClearPolitics average, compared with minus-eight percent for Biden. But the lawmakers’ move is nevertheless historic, as Congress has never made a criminal referral against a sitting or former president, and it will add to the clamor among Trump’s opponents for prosecution.

It is also a major blow to Trump amid a series of missteps in the weeks since he announced a comeback bid for the White House—including the Republicans’ poor midterm election showing in states where the tycoon endorsed candidates.

Charges could result in a ban from public office for the 76-year-old Republican, who still wields considerable power in the Republican Party, and even prison time. “To cast a vote in the United States is an act of faith and hope,” committee chairman Bennie Thompson said. — AFP

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## International

# 'Rambo' Rabuka: Double coup maker and Fiji's PM-elect

## 'I'm more interested in lifting the standard of this country

**SUVA:** As a coup-maker turned politician, Sitiveni "Rambo" Rabuka is an ex-soldier and former international sportsman who is poised to again become the prime minister of Fiji after a 23-year hiatus. Rabuka turns 75 next September, but proved he still packs a punch at the polls.

During this year's campaign, he turned to TikTok to reach young voters-appearing in one clip in a training singlet after finishing off a resistance-band workout. "Someone asked me the other day, 'Do you ever lift, bro?'" the trim septuagenarian tells the camera.

"I said: 'I used to but now I'm more interested in lifting the standard of this country.'" The natural athlete was a powerful all-rounder in his youth. He represented Fiji in the hammer throw, shot put, discus and decathlon disciplines at the 1974 Commonwealth Games and scrummed down as a prop forward for the national rugby team.

He also made a name for himself on the parade ground and, having enlisted in the army following military school, Rabuka rose through the ranks. The lieutenant colonel led two coups in 1987 to earn the nickname "Rambo" by seizing power after armed troops took over parliament on his signal.

He was, however, unhappy with the way political negotiations progressed and then staged a second

coup by declaring Fiji a republic with himself as leader. "I had to do what I had to do in 1987," he told the Fiji Sun in a 2014 interview.

Rabuka retired from the military to go into politics, taking his no-nonsense style of command from the parade ground to parliament. He was elected prime minister in 1992 and held power until he lost at the 1999 polls to Mahendra Chaudhry, Fiji's first Indo-Fijian premier.

A devout Christian, Rabuka married in 1975 but there are allegations in a biography, published in 2000, that he has had affairs. "I have admitted I'm no angel... I have been weak in those areas," he told the New Zealand Herald at the time.

Following a nine-month legal battle, Rabuka admitted in a magistrate's court in 2002 that he had fathered a child during an affair with a journalist. After Frank Bainimarama seized power in his own bloodless coup in 2006, he and Rabuka regularly locked horns over the years as fierce political rivals who traded barbs during this year's election campaign.

Rabuka sat out the 2014 elections, but led the Social Democratic Liberal Party-SODELPA to a narrow defeat in 2018, despite the threat of disqualification hanging over him. His party lost to Bainimarama's Fiji First, but only after an appeal



**SUVA:** People's Alliance Party leader Sitiveni Rabuka (2nd L) joins hands with the coalition partners, Biman Prasad (2nd R), Party leader of the National Federation Party, and Anare Jalu (L), Chair of the Social Democratic Liberal Party (SODELPA), after an agreement to form a new government in Suva. — AFP

court dismissed a corruption case against Rabuka just two days before the election. After quitting SODELPA in 2020, he founded the rival People's

Alliance party, whose coalition partners have now helped oust Bainimarama and returned Rabuka to the prime minister's office. — AFP

## Tunisia arrests former PM over jihadist departures

**TUNIS:** Tunisian police have arrested former prime minister Ali Larayedh, his Islamist-inspired Ennahdha party said Tuesday, accusing authorities of trying to divert attention from calls for President Kais Saied to quit.

The arrest of the Ennahdha number two comes just days after nearly 90 percent of voters boycotted an election to a toothless new parliament established by Saied following his seizure of sweeping powers in 2021.

Larayedh, who served as premier from 2013 to 2014, was detained as part of an investigation into alleged connivance in the departure of thousands of young Tunisians to fight with jihadist groups abroad.

As many as 6,000 Tunisians travelled to Libya, Iraq and Syria to volunteer as foreign fighters, a number that secular opposition groups say indicates deliberate neglect. The investigation, which has also targeted Ennahdha's veteran leader Rached Ghannouchi, was launched after the vehemently anti-Islamist president sacked the government and suspended parliament in July 2021.

Saied has defended his power grab as necessary to end the repeated political crises that accompanied the North African country's transition to democracy following the first of the Arab Spring revolutions of 2011.

But his efforts to legitimise his new powers have been repeatedly snubbed by voters, first in a widely boycotted July referendum and then in Saturday's parliamentary election. Ennahdha, which like almost all Tunisian parties boycotted the



**TUNIS:** Tunisia's former premier and deputy head of the Islamist Ennahdha party, Ali Laarayedh, addresses a press conference in Tunis. — AFP

vote, accused Saied's government of "systematically targeting" its leadership.

The party said that Larayedh's arrest marked a "desperate effort by the coup administration and its president, Kais Saied, to cover up the farce of the parliamentary election which was boycotted by 90 percent of voters".

Ahmed Nejib Chebbi, president of the country's main opposition coalition, told journalists on Tuesday that the arrest was intended "to distract attention from the results of an election ignored by the public".

Chebbi's National Salvation Front, which includes Ennahdha, had said the slim election turnout should be a cue for Saied to step down. But Saied hit back at his critics Monday, noting that some of them had criminal charges hanging over them, a veiled reference to investigations into Ennahdha officials. — AFP

## Iran releases dissident after three months

**PARIS:** Iranian authorities have released one of the country's best known dissidents after he spent three months in jail as protests shook the country, his brother said. Majid Tavakoli was released on bail from Tehran's Evin prison after 89 days behind bars, his brother Mohsen wrote on Twitter late on Monday. Tavakoli had been arrested shortly after the start of the anti-regime protests sparked by the death of Mahsa Amini who had been arrested by the morality police for allegedly violating Iran's strict dress rules for women.

Iran has arrested prominent lawyers, actors, cul-

tural figures, journalists and campaigners in a crackdown that according to the UN has seen at least 14,000 people detained. "We are happy about this news, but our happiness will be complete when all the dear ones who are in prison are released," said Mohsen Tavakoli, posting a picture of his brother outside jail clutching a bouquet of flowers.

Tavakoli has spent much of the last one and a half decades in and out of jail and became prominent as a student leader during the 2009 mass street protests over disputed presidential elections. He is hugely respected by activists as one of the most astute and analytical rights campaigners remaining inside Iran. In 2013 he won the Student Peace Prize, which is awarded every two years in Norway. His release comes after Iranian authorities in late November released the prominent dissident Hossein Ronaghi who had also been arrested at the onset of the protests and had been on a two-month hunger strike. — AFP

## Australia urges release of citizens in China

**SYDNEY:** Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong on Tuesday urged the release of citizens held in China, as she prepared to embark on a landmark visit to Beijing. Wong is set to be the first top Australian diplomat to visit China in four years, a trip aimed at thawing troubled relations.

She will depart Australia on Tuesday for a meeting with Chinese state councilor and minister of foreign affairs, Wang Yi, and indicated before her departure that the issue of the two imprisoned Australians would be on the agenda.

Australian journalist Cheng Lei was detained by Chinese authorities in August 2020, and Chinese-born Australian Yang Jun was detained in January 2019. Wong said their release would remove one obstacle to improving relations between the two countries. "I think that it would be beneficial not just for the individuals, which is I think important in its own right, but it would be beneficial to the relationship for those consular matters to be dealt with," she said.

Cheng, a mother of two and former anchor at Chinese state broadcaster CGTN, was formally arrested in February 2021 and charged with "supplying state secrets overseas". Chinese-born Australian Yang Jun, who also goes by the pen name Yang Hengjun, wrote a series of spy novels and a popular Chinese-language blog. He has been accused by Beijing of espionage and has been tried behind closed doors. — AFP

## Kuwait underlines stability of Iraq...

Continued from Page 1

Meanwhile, French President Emmanuel Macron called for Iraq to be allowed to choose a path not dictated by foreign powers, in an address Tuesday to the summit aimed at helping to resolve Middle East crises. The "Baghdad II" meeting in Jordan, which alongside regional powers also includes officials from France and the European Union, follows an Aug 2021 summit in Iraq's capital organized at the initiative of Macron.

"There is a way that is not... a form of hegemony, imperialism, a model that would be dictated from outside," Macron told the summit at Sweimeh, a resort on the shores of the Dead Sea. Iraq has been caught for years in a delicate balancing act between its two main allies, the United States and Iran, and Baghdad only recently arrived at a fragile compromise government after a year of political stalemate.

It has endured nearly two decades of turmoil since the US-led invasion toppled dictator Saddam Hussein in 2003. The Islamic State group seized roughly one third of Iraq and declared a "caliphate" in 2014, before its defeat more than three years later. "Iraq today is the scene of influences, incursions, destabilizations that are linked to the entire region," Macron added.

## MPs pass conflict of interests...

Continued from Page 1

Abdulaziz Al-Saqabi said the bill calls for the establishment of companies to build new cities and residential areas with the help of foreign companies as strategic partners and who can operate in the country without the need for a local agent. Saqabi said based on government statistics, the housing welfare establishment has enough land for up to 200,000 houses, more than enough to meet accumulated applications by citizens. The applications

The summit in neighboring Jordan was aimed at providing "support for the stability, security and prosperity of Iraq", the French presidency had said ahead of the gathering, adding it hoped this would benefit "the entire region". The meeting takes place as several countries in the region are mired in unrest. Syria remains a battleground for competing geopolitical interests, and Lebanon is stuck in an economic and political quagmire.

For over three months, Iran has bloodily suppressed a wave of popular demonstrations sparked by the September 16 death in custody of Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old Iranian woman of Kurdish origin. The meeting was also being attended by the EU's top diplomat, Josep Borrell, who has been mediating talks aimed at reviving the 2015 Iran nuclear deal. Borrell met with Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, talks the EU diplomat said were "necessary... amidst deteriorating Iran-EU relations", adding that they agreed to keep communications open.

The summit also brings together Iraq's new Prime Minister Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani, Iran's foreign minister and delegations from Turkey and Saudi Arabia. "This summit has great ambitions but no one expects miracles," says Riad Kahwaji, director of the Institute for Near East and Gulf Military Analysis. France's role as a mediator is crucial, Kahwaji said, with Paris "keeping the thread of dialogue on behalf of Westerners with Iran, especially as the Vienna nuclear negotiations are currently in stalemate". — Agencies

are estimated at more than 100,000.

The foreign partner will provide the necessary financing for preparing the land and building the homes. According to the bill, the companies must be established within three years and 50 percent of their shares must be distributed to Kuwaitis. Some MPs said the draft legislation will be a qualitative move to resolve the chronic housing problem affecting a majority of Kuwaitis. The Assembly will continue to debate the bill today.

The Assembly also approved a motion to speed up debating a number of important issues, including the purchase of some KD 14 billion in consumer and personal loans of Kuwaitis. But the government demanded the postponement of the debate for two weeks and its request was granted by the speaker on the basis of the law.

## Hostages freed, captors killed as...

Continued from Page 1

snatched his weapon," he added, explaining how the siege unfolded. The TTP, which is separate from the Afghan Taliban but with a similar hardline ideology, emerged in Pakistan in 2007 and carried out a horrific wave of violence that was largely crushed after a military operation beginning in 2014. Attacks are rising again since the Afghan Taliban seized control of Kabul last year, with most targeting security forces. Racketeering has infested Pakistan's borderlands, locals say, with the TTP emboldened by its sister movement's success.

## KNPC opens 5th gas pipeline to...

Continued from Page 1

Using gas for generating energy has become a favorite option globally from environmental and economic perspectives, in contrast to other fossil types of fuel, he said, noting that gas generates, relatively, low harmful emissions. "Nowadays, the world is witnessing the golden age for the natural gas industry," he said, stressing that it is high time for the Kuwaiti oil sector to double investments in projects that secure supplies to the international

A shaky months-long ceasefire between the TTP and Islamabad ended last month. About 300 incidents of militancy have been recorded in 2022 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, which borders Afghanistan, according to the government. The defense minister said at a press conference in Islamabad that a fresh security operation against militancy in the region must be carried out. "There's a spillover effect from the situation in Afghanistan and that's affecting Pakistan, we have to launch this operation," he said.

The police station is within a cantonment area in Bannu, adjacent to Pakistan's formerly self-governed tribal areas and close to Afghanistan. Offices and roads were closed and checkpoints were set up around the area. Local schools were ordered shut on Tuesday out of fear of more kidnappings, a senior government official at the scene told AFP. — AFP

markets. Therefore, the fifth liquefied gas pipeline constitutes a key part of this approach.

Considering the oil sector plays a vital role in supporting the state economy and attaining Kuwait's 2035 vision, oil companies diligently work to secure new clean energy resources with a forecast of higher revenues and future sustainable growth.

KNPC CEO Wadha Ahmad Al-Khatib affirmed that construction of the pipeline was warranted by the increasing demand. The five-pipeline liquefied gas plant in Al-Ahmadi meets local demand for liquefied gas, co-supplies power and water stations as well as processing industries. The plant also exports derivatives such as propane and butane. — KUNA

## COVID cases soar in China...

Continued from Page 1

work - one worker told AFP their crematorium had run out of space to keep bodies. "The number of bodies picked up in recent days is many times more than previously," a staffer who did not give their name

said. "We are very busy, there is no more cold storage space for bodies," they added. "We are not sure (if it's related to COVID), you need to ask the leaders in charge."

In the southern megapolis of Guangzhou, an employee at one crematorium in Zengcheng district told AFP they were cremating more than 30 bodies a day. "We have bodies assigned to us from other districts. There's no other option," the employee said. Another crematorium in the city said they were also "extremely busy". — AFP

## International

# Philippine corpse-whisperer seeks justice for drug war victims

## It is grim and lonely work, and not without its dangers

**MANILA:** Raquel Fortun whispers to the human skeletal remains spread out in a makeshift morgue in the Philippine capital Manila. She is seeking the truth about their violent deaths—and justice for their families.

Six months after Rodrigo Duterte left office, Fortun, 60, continues to examine the bodies of some of the thousands of people killed during the former president's brutal drug war. One of only two forensic pathologists in the country, Fortun is helping rights groups gather evidence that one day could be used in court against police accused of carrying out extrajudicial killings.

"I know they were killed violently and yes, I do whisper things to them. I do ask for help," said Fortun, referring to the bones laid out on wooden tables. Fortun works alone in a whitewashed room at the University of the Philippines College of Medicine, where she heads the pathology department.

Soiled clothing is piled on the floor near body bags and plastic boxes containing human remains. They were exhumed from tombs by a Catholic priest, who is helping families find answers about the deaths of their loved ones.

As she painstakingly examines the bones, Fortun said the souls of the dead try to catch her attention. She believes they want to explain what happened to them. "I would hear something falling on the floor, a very small object like a button, a coin... and of course you'd take a look and there's nothing there," she said.

It is grim and lonely work, and not without its dangers. Fortun's findings and Twitter rants about the Philippine government and justice system often "ruffle feathers" of Duterte supporters and she gets frequent death threats.

"I'm more afraid of the living than the dead," said Fortun. "At any time somebody can just drive next to my car... and shoot me. So the sense of mortality is very, very strong. Especially now."

### Bodies keep piling up

More than 6,200 people died in Duterte's anti-drug campaign, according to official figures. Rights groups estimate the true figure was in the tens of thousands. President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., who succeeded Duterte in June, has pledged to continue the drug war but with an emphasis on prevention and rehabilitation.

Yet the bodies keep piling up. Rights groups estimate at least 150 people have been killed since Marcos took office. Police recently put the figure at 46. Fortun said she has so far examined the remains of 70 people killed during Duterte's term. Eleven had their skulls or other bones punctured by bullets, some in the wrists indicating defensive wounds.

Her findings contradict the official death certificates, which stated they died from natural causes. That has fuelled suspicions that medical examiners falsified their reports. Fortun hopes her evidence could eventually be used in a Philippine court or at The Hague-based International Criminal Court (ICC).

In 2021, the ICC began a full-blown investigation into possible crimes against humanity committed during the drug war. But Fortun is not holding her breath for that to happen anytime soon. "Will I be called by the ICC or a similar court? I don't know," she said. "Will anything happen to these cases in my lifetime? I also don't know."

### 'The dead are keeping me alive'

Since the start of the drug war in 2016, only three policemen have been convicted for killing a drug suspect. Another officer was jailed last month for torturing two teenagers who were killed at the height of the crackdown.

Despite her rare expertise, Fortun said authorities seldom called on her to investigate suspicious or unexplained deaths. Police typically relied on witness testimony, not forensic evidence, to build

source said, adding a date had not yet been set. Verdicts in Suu Kyi's previous trials have typically come days after final arguments.

Each corruption charge carries a maximum jail term of 15 years. In previous corruption cases, the court has generally sentenced Suu Kyi to three years per charge. Suu Kyi, 77, appeared in good health, the source said.

### Turmoil

Since the coup, Suu Kyi has largely disappeared from view, seen only in grainy state media photos from the bare courtroom. The country has plunged into turmoil, with some established ethnic rebel groups renewing fighting with the military in border areas and the economy in tatters.

Dozens of "People's Defence Forces" eschewing Suu Kyi's strict policy of non-violence have also sprung up to battle the junta and have surprised the military with their effectiveness, analysts say.

There are almost daily killings of low-level junta officials or anti-coup fighters, with details murky and reprisals often following quickly.

The military alleged widespread voter fraud during the November 2020 election, won resoundingly by Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party,



**MANILA:** Photo shows forensic pathologist Raquel Fortun arranging the skeletal remains of a drug war victim for autopsy in her laboratory at the University of the Philippines College of Medicine in Manila. —AFP

a case.

Autopsies also require the approval of the next of kin. When they are carried out, they are usually handled by the police medicolegal division or general practitioners when the bodies are in remote areas. Neither have the equipment or training required for forensic pathology, Fortun said.

"They don't even know how to do autopsies," she said. But there are signs things might be changing. Recently, Fortun was brought in to perform a second

autopsy on the body of an inmate who was accused of being involved in the high-profile murder of a journalist.

The police autopsy had found "no apparent sign of external physical injury". Fortun determined he had been suffocated by a plastic bag, leading to criminal complaints being filed against the prisons chief and numerous inmates. Justice Secretary Crispin Remulla has also announced plans to train more forensic pathologists. — AFP

## Trial of Suu Kyi enters final phase

**YANGON:** A junta court will hear the final arguments in the 18-month-long trial of Myanmar's Aung San Suu Kyi next week, a legal source said Tuesday, before reaching its final verdicts against the Nobel laureate.

Suu Kyi has been a prisoner since the military toppled her government in February 2021, ending the Southeast Asian nation's brief period of democracy. The junta court has found her guilty on every one of the 14 charges it has heard so far, including corruption, illegally possessing walkie-talkies and flouting COVID restrictions, and jailed her for 26 years.

Rights groups have slammed the trial as a sham and designed to remove the democracy figurehead permanently from Myanmar's political scene.

Lawyers from both sides will make "final arguments" relating to five remaining charges of corruption on December 26, according to a source with knowledge of the case.

"The verdict will be given after that stage," the

## Afghan survivors get new homes after deadly quake

**KABUL:** Labourer Rasool Badshah has moved into a new home six months after a deadly earthquake rocked eastern Afghanistan, but without his mother, who was killed by collapsing walls. More than 1,000 people were killed and tens of thousands made homeless after the 5.9-magnitude quake—the deadliest in Afghanistan in nearly a quarter of a century—struck the impoverished province of Paktika on June 22.

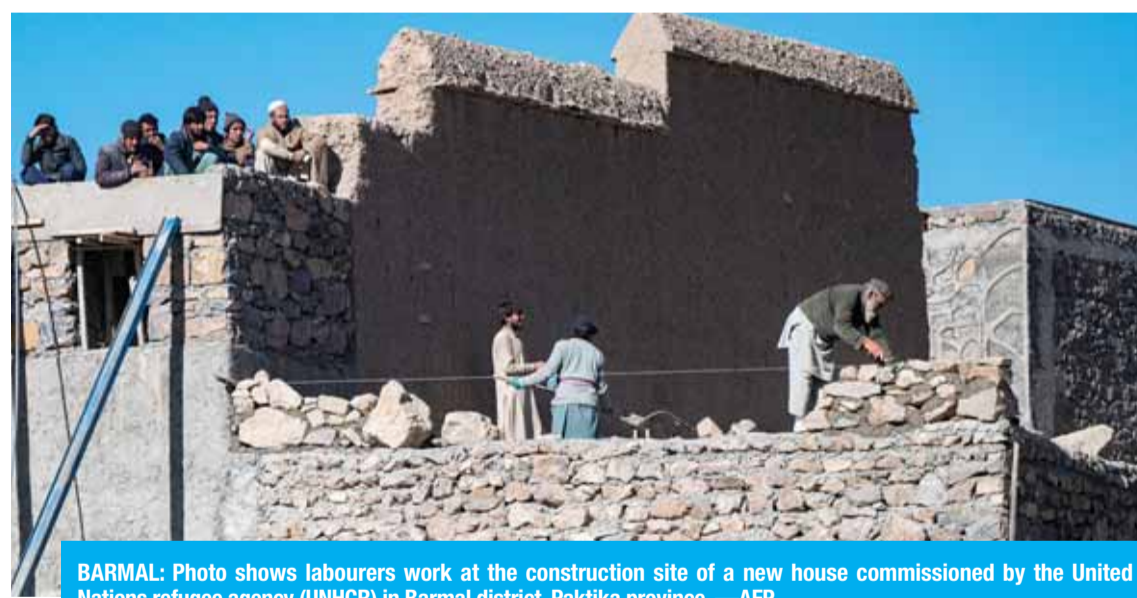
"When I reached here, my mother, brothers, everyone was already buried," Badshah, 21, told AFP, explaining how he rushed back to his village from Pakistan, where he was working. Hundreds of earthquake-resistant concrete homes, many built by local labourers with the support of the United Nations refugee agency, have now been handed over to survivors who were until now living in makeshift tent cities.

"We couldn't have built these houses, not even our children or grandchildren (could have)... we could not afford it. We were living in huts," Badshah said. The UNHCR said the new homes are equipped with solar panels, independent toilets and traditional heaters to help residents face harsh winters.

## Rescue calls for stranded boat holding refugees

**JAKARTA:** Southeast Asian politicians called Tuesday for the rescue of a boat carrying as many as 200 Rohingya refugees including women and children stranded at sea for several weeks. Thousands of the mostly Muslim Rohingya, heavily persecuted in Myanmar, risk their lives each year in long, expensive sea journeys—often in vessels in poor condition—trying to reach Malaysia or Indonesia.

The boat carrying the refugees has been reported in waters close to Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia and



**BARMAL:** Photo shows labourers work at the construction site of a new house commissioned by the United Nations refugee agency (UNHCR) in Barmal district, Paktika province. —AFP

Even before the earthquake, Afghanistan was in the grip of a humanitarian disaster made worse by the Taliban takeover in August 2021. International development funding on which the South Asian country relied dried up after the takeover and assets held abroad were frozen.

The remote east where the quake struck had been neglected by authorities for years, said survivor Bara Khan. "After the earthquake, people

India in the Andaman Sea and the Malacca Strait, one of the world's busiest shipping routes. "We urgently call on ASEAN member states and other countries in the region to... launch search and rescue operations," said ex-Indonesian MP Eva Sundari, who is a member of advocacy group ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights (APHR), in a statement.

"It is disgraceful that a boat filled with men, women, and children in grave danger has been allowed to remain adrift." Charles Santiago, a former Malaysian MP and chairman of APHR, said in the same statement that the delay in rescuing the stranded refugees likely "has already caused untold suffering and loss of life".

The vessel's current location is unknown and it is unclear when or exactly from where it departed. But at least one relative of a passenger hoping to reach Malaysia told AFP he was taken to the boat in deep



Aung San Suu Kyi

although international observers said the poll was largely free and fair.

More than 2,500 people have been killed in the military's crackdown on dissent, according to a local monitoring group. Rights groups have accused the military of extrajudicial killings and launching air strikes on civilians that amount to war crimes. The latest civilian death toll issued by the junta stands at over 4,000. — AFP



came and saw that residents of the area were in trouble. We don't even have a clinic or a school," Khan said. "Everybody has grown up illiterate."

The UNHCR will start work to build two schools and a clinic in the area, still strewn with rubble, after the winter. Afghanistan is frequently hit by earthquakes, especially in the Hindu Kush mountain range, which lies near the junction of the Eurasian and Indian tectonic plates. —AFP

waters by a small fishing trawler from Bangladesh.

Sprawling refugee camps in Bangladesh are home to some one million Rohingya, many of whom fled neighbouring Myanmar after a 2017 military crackdown bringing accounts of rape, arson and killings. But the dire conditions of Bangladesh's overcrowded camps have forced many to flee again.

Rohingya activists and relatives of some of those aboard the vessel told AFP it had been adrift at sea for at least two weeks. The United Nations refugee agency (UNHCR) said last week that the boat has been in waters since late November, and it had received reports of at least a dozen people dying on board. Those remaining had no access to food or water, it said. Noor Habi, a resident of a Rohingya refugee camp in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar, said her 23-year-old daughter Mnuwara Begum was on the stranded boat and had spoken to her sister by walkie talkie. — AFP

## Kim's sister defends N Korea's satellite capabilities

**SEOUL:** North Korea has developed advanced technologies to take images from space using a spy satellite, the powerful sister of leader Kim Jong Un insisted Tuesday, after experts mocked black-and-white pictures supposedly taken from space in a weekend launch.

Kim Yo Jong's defence of North Korea's satellite capabilities comes after the isolated country said it conducted an "important final-stage" test for the development of a reconnaissance satellite. But experts in Seoul quickly raised doubts, saying the quality of the photos — presumably taken from the satellite — was too poor.

In a lengthy, vitriolic statement carried by the official Korean Central News Agency, Kim said it was "too inappropriate and careless" to evaluate Pyongyang's satellite development progress and capability based on the two images.

She insisted a camera installed on the satellite had the "reliability of ground control including attitude control and shooting control command in a suitable space flight environment". Kim also said the satellite's data transmission devices and encryption processing technology were reliable.

"We carried out a necessary test and reported the significant and satisfying result, which was not lacking," she said. The development of a military reconnaissance satellite was one of Pyongyang's key defence projects outlined by her elder brother Kim Jong Un last year.

North Korea is under biting international sanctions for its nuclear weapons programmes, but peaceful satellite launches are not subject to the same level of restrictions. But analysts say developing such a satellite would provide North Korea with cover for testing banned intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM), as they share much of the same technology.

Earlier this year, Pyongyang carried out two launches, claiming it was testing components for a reconnaissance satellite, which the United States and South Korea said likely involved components of its new Hwasong-17 intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBMs). The younger Kim rebuked claims that the North's satellite launches were thinly disguised firings of banned ICBMs. "If we develop ICBMs, we will fire ICBMs, and not test long-range rockets disguised as satellites," she said.

Kim also dismissed analysts doubting that the North has the advanced technology needed for the rocket to survive re-entry into the Earth's atmosphere, saying she would explain it in "an easy-to-understand manner" to their naysayers.

"If the atmospheric re-entry technology was insufficient, it would not be possible to receive remote data from the pilot combat unit until the moment of impact," she said.

### Air drill

The weekend's launch comes after a year of unprecedented weapons tests by North Korea, including the launch of its most advanced intercontinental ballistic missile the month before. The United States and South Korea have warned for months that Pyongyang is preparing to conduct its seventh nuclear test.

The two countries held a joint air drill on Tuesday, and deployed a US B-52H strategic bomber to the Korean peninsula, the South Korean Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement. The long-range heavy bomber was part of an exercise that included the US and South Korea's most advanced jets — including the F-22 and the F-35 stealth fighters. — AFP

# Business

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2022

## Al-Terkait: Arkan assets grew by 67% to KD 150m

Arkan Al-Kuwait Real Estate Company holds ordinary and extraordinary general assembly meetings

By Majd Othman

**KUWAIT:** Vice Chairman and CEO of Arkan Al-Kuwait Real Estate Company Abdulrahman Hamad Al-Terkait announced that the company's board of directors succeeded in setting plans and strategies that contributed significantly to reach the planned goals to maintain the company's stability and maximize assets to grow annual profits for shareholders and maintain the financial stability of the company in order to achieve the best possible financial results.

Al-Terkait made the statement during the ordinary general assembly meeting of Arkan held on Tuesday, which approved the distribution of 6 percent cash dividends, equal to 6 fils per share. He said total assets grew by 67 percent compared to the previous fiscal year - from KD 89.7 million to KD 149.6 million. Total managed properties exceeded KD 570 million in various sectors, while operating revenues amounted to KD 7.7 million, an increase of 57 percent compared to the previous fiscal year.

Al-Terkait mentioned rental revenues amounted to KD 6.3 million, a 23 percent increase compared to the previous fiscal year, which led the company to achieve a net profit of KD 2,216,998, with a profit of 8.83 fils per share. He added the company in 2022 continued to achieve positive results supported by a steady and strong performance, which in turn led to achieving the desired profits and implementing the expansion strategy.

"It consolidated our vision that Arkan Al-Kuwait Real Estate be among the largest leading companies in the real estate sector in the local market, stressing that it is keen on establishing solid bases that are compatible with its future aspirations through its strategy to enhance and diversify its investments in new markets, as well as its keenness to reduce its presence in real estate markets affected by the current economic difficulties and fluctuations," Al-Terkait said.

Al-Terkait explained that the company seeks during the coming period to increase its market



**KUWAIT:** Vice Chairman and CEO of Arkan Al-Kuwait Real Estate Company Abdulrahman Hamad Al-Terkait (center) addresses the ordinary general assembly meeting on Tuesday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

share in the real estate sector by investing in attractive markets to obtain high returns in various real estate sectors as well as development and operation projects. He added that the company also officially announced its acquisition of a controlling stake in First Investment Company (FIC) with a financial value of about KD 7.3 million, which is considered one of the most important current deals in the local real estate sector. The project of the SVN health club has been completed, which is a quantum leap in the field of entertainment and sports.

Al-Terkait said Arkan's successes are represented in enhancing operating revenues by raising occupancy rates in various real estate sectors, the first of which is the medical sector, as Arkan Clinic offers a privileged location and a rental area of up to 5,000 square meters with an occupancy rate of 100 percent, and the commercial sector, the most prominent of which is Wafi Complex in Khaitan with an occupancy rate of 98 percent, the vital industrial sectors on Al-Zina Street and service sectors on King Fahd Highway with an occupancy rate of 100 percent, as well as real estate manage-

ment services on top of the distinguished services provided by the company, as its long-standing experience in this field contributed to obtaining the trust of the General Secretariat of Awqaf to entrust it with a real estate management contract with a total value of KD 425 million, which contributed to raising the total real estate managed by the company with various clients to more than KD 570 million. Meanwhile, the company also held an extraordinary general assembly meeting, where it agreed to add an activity to the company's purposes - the "real estate appraisal" activity.

## Yen surges on surprise BoJ policy move

**TOKYO:** The yen soared to a four-month high against the dollar Tuesday after a surprise tweak to monetary policy of the Bank of Japan, which has decided against hiking interest rates to tame decades-high inflation. Rallying also against the euro, the yen's jump weighed heavily on share prices of Japanese exporters.

"The shift in (Bank of Japan) policy was slight," noted Susannah Streeter, senior investment and markets analyst at Hargreaves Lansdown. "The decision is being read as a sign of testing the water, for a potential withdrawal of the stimulus which has been pumped into the economy."

The Bank of Japan (BoJ) adjusted its parameters for controlling bond yields, in a shift away from its long-running dovish stance of keeping rates ultra-low to boost the struggling economy. Inflation in Japan has risen sharply this year, with the consumer price index in October at 3.6 percent, the highest in four decades, though bank boss Haruhiko Kuroda and other officials have said that would be temporary, citing a lack of strong demand and wage rises.

The BoJ move sent the yen to 132.30 per dollar, its strongest level since August. Japan's unit has been hobbled this year by its central bank's determination



**TOKYO:** A man looks at an electronic display board showing the numbers on the Tokyo Stock Exchange, along a street in Tokyo on December 20, 2022, after Japan announced a surprise tweak to its ultra-loose monetary policy. —AFP

to stick to its loose monetary policy-hitting a 32-year low of around 150 to the dollar in October-even as the Fed ramped up borrowing costs.

Tuesday's policy move "was bound to happen with inflation rising in Japan, it's just happened sooner than many thought", said Amir Anvarzadeh of Asymmetric Advisors. "It could spark money flowing back into Japan."

Elsewhere, stock markets fell following a spike in COVID infections in China as officials roll back

many of the strict containment measures that have been in place for almost three years. The World Bank on Tuesday slashed its China growth forecast for the year as the pandemic and weaknesses in the property sector hit the world's second largest economy. A so-called Santa rally appears to be eluding investors, with the mood dampened by last week's warnings from the Federal Reserve and European Central Bank that they would likely push interest rates higher than expected next year. —AFP

## US lawmakers release \$1.7tn spending bill

**WASHINGTON:** US lawmakers early Tuesday released the text of a \$1.7 trillion funding bill which Congress hopes to pass within days to avert a government shutdown. The bill includes \$858 billion in defense funding and will also provide \$44.9 billion in emergency assistance for Ukraine.

It also includes \$772.5 billion for non-defense discretionary programs, including \$118.7 billion for Veterans Affairs medical care, a 22 percent increase, and provides \$40.6 billion to help US communities hit by recent natural disasters such as hurricanes and floods. "The pain of inflation on American families is real, and it is being felt right now across the federal government," Senate Appropriations Chairman Patrick Leahy said in a statement announcing the release of the text of the appropriations bill.

"From funding for nutrition programs and housing assistance, to home energy costs and college affordability, our bipartisan, bicameral, omnibus



appropriations bill directly invests in providing relief from the burden of inflation on the American people." The Senate and House Appropriations Committees released the text of the bill, which runs to 4,155 pages and covers spending through the end of fiscal 2023.

Congress last week adopted a short-term budget

bill to avert a shutdown of federal services and give the Democratic and Republican parties a little more time to reach a compromise ahead of the December 23 deadline. "The choice is clear. We can either do our jobs and fund the government, or we can abandon our responsibilities without a real path forward," Leahy said. —AFP

## Twitter users vote to oust Musk as CEO

**SAN FRANCISCO:** Twitter users voted on Monday to oust owner Elon Musk as chief executive in a highly unscientific poll he organized and promised to honor, just weeks after he took charge of the social media giant. A total of 57.5 percent of more than 17 million accounts voted for him to step down. Musk, who also runs car maker Tesla and rocket firm SpaceX, has not yet reacted publicly to the results.

"The question is not finding a CEO, the question is finding a CEO who can keep Twitter alive," the South African-born billionaire tweeted before the vote closed.

In a response to another tweet, he added: "No one wants the job who can actually keep Twitter alive. There is no successor." Musk has fully owned Twitter since October 27 and has repeatedly courted controversy as CEO, sacking half of its staff, readmitting far-right figures to the platform, suspending journalists and trying to charge for previously free services.

Analysts have also pointed out that the stock price of Tesla has slumped by one-third since Musk's Twitter takeover. The share price briefly rallied by 3.3 percent on Monday before fading.

"It's hard to ignore the numbers since [the Twitter] deal closed," tweeted investment expert Gary Black, saying he reckoned Tesla's board was putting pressure on Musk to quit his Twitter role. In discussions with users after posting his latest poll, Musk renewed his warnings that the platform could be heading for bankruptcy. Resorting to Twitter's polling feature has been a favorite strategy of Musk's to push through policy decisions, including the reinstatement of the account of former president Donald Trump.

Paris-based Reporters Without Borders, which defends press freedom around the world, said the polls were a "crude and cynical" ploy. "These methods appear to be democratic procedures, but in reality they are... the opposite of democracy," said the group's head, Christophe Deloire. Unpredictable entrepreneur Musk posted his latest poll shortly after trying to extricate himself from yet another controversy. On Sunday, Twitter users were told they would no longer be able to promote content from other social media sites. —AFP



## Business

# Greek woodcutters give energy crisis the chop as gas bills soar

## Loggers in Greece struggle to keep up with rising demand for wood

**GREVENA:** Huddled around a campfire sipping hot tea, a group of Greek lumberjacks take a badly needed break in an oak forest not far from the Albanian border.

With petrol and gas bills increasing, loggers in northern Greece say they are doing their best to keep up with rising demand for wood, considered a more affordable option for people to heat their homes. Many Greeks, still reeling from their country's decade-long economic crisis, are desperate to counteract energy prices soaring on the back of Russia's war in Ukraine and national inflation running at over eight percent.

"We have had an increase in demand," said timber transporter Yannis Paligiannis, 44.

"People are thinking of turning their heating to wood, but next year what will happen? Nobody is sure that next year wood won't be more expensive than petrol. Everyone is wary," he added.

For now, an abundant local supply makes firewood the best option in the north of Greece where temperatures dip well below zero Celsius (32 Fahrenheit) in deep winter. "People here can get through winter by spending 300-400 euros (\$320-425) on firewood, perhaps even cheaper if they transport it and chop it themselves," Zisis Giakopoulos, a pensioner in his late 60s from the village of Amilianos in the northwest region of Grevena, told AFP.

"Many of them also use the firewood in stoves on which they also heat their food," Giakopoulos added. In comparison, figures recently compiled by

Greek insurance website Pricefox showed an 80-square-metre flat needing to spend some 650 euros on petrol fees, nearly 1,000 euros on air-conditioning and nearly 1,300 euros for gas heating to get through winter.

Paligiannis says 70 percent of the firewood sold in Greece comes from Grevena, this mountainous region not far from the border with Albania. "There is a higher demand for wood compared to last year because of the energy crisis, but we shouldn't abuse the forest," cautioned lumberjack Dimitris Basnas, 34. "If the trees are old and tall, it's slow work. You don't get a lot of quantity. If it's a younger forest you get more."

### 'Villages are deserted'

Greece has nearly 270 cooperatives with some 8,500 forestry workers registered at the environment ministry. But despite heightened demand this year, the future of the profession is by no means guaranteed. Numbers are dwindling, with younger people opting for less back-breaking work. Most of the wood is still transported by mule through thick foliage.

"We learnt this trade from our grandparents and we carry on the same way," says Thanassis Papanikolaou, president of a forestry cooperative that produces about 10,000 tons of firewood every year. Opening access roads to vehicles through the forest is forbidden, he adds.

"My father managed to raise five children doing this job," says 62-year-old Yiorgos



**GREVENA:** A lumberjack walks as a mule carry wood in a forest near Grevena, northern Greece. Their arduous work, a local tradition which goes back generations, has become all the more vital this winter amid soaring prices for heating fuels. — AFP

Koutoulas, the group's eldest member, who is near retirement. "When I leave there is no young person to replace me," he added. "All the villages are deserted. The young people have left to work in the big cities," he said.

According to forestry maps—which are a decade

old in a country that experiences annual wildfires—nearly 50 percent of Greek territory is made up of forest cover. Logging figures show a timber production of nearly 700,000 cubic meters last year, down from nearly 895,000 a decade ago and from nearly 720,000 in 2020. —AFP

## UK nurses stage new walkout over better pay

**LONDON:** UK nurses on Tuesday staged a second one-day strike amid an increasingly acrimonious fight with the government for better wages and warnings that patient safety could be jeopardized. Up to 100,000 members of the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland walked out for the first time in the union's 106-year history last Thursday.

They want an above-inflation pay increase to make up for years of real-terms salary cuts, but the government insists it cannot afford anything above a roughly 4-5 percent rise. On the picket line outside a central London hospital opposite parliament, Mamta Pun, 25, said Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's stance on the pay dispute was "a slap in the face for all healthcare staff, the general public and patients".

The intensive care nurse at the St Thomas' Hospital, where former premier Boris Johnson was treated in intensive care for COVID-19, said she and her colleagues finished shifts "anxious, scared, terrified" because of their workload. Outside Aintree University Hospital in Liverpool, northwest England, Suni George, 45, said his pay had hardly changed in his 17 years as a nurse.

"We get a lot of tax so even when the annual income looks like it's gone up, we don't have more money," he said. The striking nurses are among growing numbers of UK public and private sector workers taking industrial action over pay and working conditions, as they grapple with a cost-of-living crisis worsened by decades-high inflation.

The UK consumer prices index is currently running at nearly 11 percent, with inflation in double digits and energy prices soaring on the back of the war in Ukraine. Ambulance workers, including paramedics and call handlers, are set to strike on Wednesday, prompting fears that many emergen-



**LONDON:** Healthcare workers hold placards at a picket line outside St Thomas' Hospital in London on December 20, 2022. — AFP

cies will not be dealt with. A second walkout is scheduled for December 28, while others, including postal, railway and Border Force staff, are staging stoppages over the busy Christmas travel period.

### 'Unaffordable'

The RCN has criticized Sunak's government for refusing to discuss pay as part of stalled negotiations. RCN chief Pat Cullen said nurses would take wider industrial action next month if the dispute was not resolved. "If this government keeps giving our nursing staff the cold shoulder as they have to date then, it's really unfortunate, that come January, we will see more hospitals being involved and striking and that means more nursing staff involved," she said.

The union has also accused Health Secretary Steve Barclay of adopting a "macho" negotiating style during brief meetings held recently. "The RCN's demands are unaffordable during these chal-

lenging times and would take money away from frontline services while they are still recovering from the impact of the pandemic," Barclay said Monday.

He and other ministers have reiterated that they can only accept the recommendations of an independent pay review body. The government-appointed body of economists and human resources experts urged hiking healthcare sector pay at least £1,400 (\$1,740) on top of a 3.0 percent increase last year. But critics argue it is constrained by government-imposed budget limits and that its assessment, published in July, predates current higher inflation rates.

Sunak is expected to be grilled about his response to the strikes and the cost-of-living crisis by senior MPs later on Tuesday. Ministers plan to draft in 750 military personnel to drive ambulances and perform logistics roles to mitigate the impact of the strikes. —AFP

## WB slashes China growth forecasts on COVID, property woes

**WASHINGTON:** The World Bank on Tuesday slashed its China growth forecast for the year as the pandemic and weaknesses in the property sector hit the world's second largest economy. In a statement, the institution slashed its forecast to 2.7 percent from 4.3 percent predicted in June. It also revised its forecast for next year from 8.1 percent down to 4.3 percent.

Both figures are well below Beijing's GDP growth target of around 5.5 percent for the year, a figure many analysts believe is now unattainable. "Economic activity in China continues to track the ups and downs of the pandemic-outbreaks and growth slowdowns have been followed by uneven recoveries," the World Bank said.

"Real GDP growth is projected to reach 2.7 percent this year, before recovering to 4.3 percent in 2023, amid a reopening of the economy." After years of sudden lockdowns, mass testing, long quarantines and travel restrictions, China this month abruptly abandoned its zero-COVID policy.

But disruption to businesses has continued as cases surge and some restrictions remain in place.

Health authorities have admitted that official figures no longer capture the full picture of domestic infections now that mass testing requirements have been dropped. "Continued adaptation of China's Covid-19 policy will be crucial, both to mitigate public health risks and to minimize further economic disruption," Mara Warwick, World Bank Country Director for China, Mongolia and Korea, said.

Last week the IMF warned it too would likely downgrade its projections for China again, blaming a predicted continued rise in cases. The fund cut its growth projection for China in October to 3.2 percent this year—the lowest in decades—while expecting growth to rise to 4.4 percent next year. —AFP

## FTX founder Bankman-Fried back in jail

**NASSAU:** Sam Bankman-Fried, wanted in the United States for fraud after the collapse of his FTX cryptocurrency group, remained in a Bahamas prison Monday after an abortive court hearing that was to consider his possible extradition. One week after the former billionaire was arrested in Nassau, US and local media had reported that the 30-year-old onetime cryptocurrency wunderkind was preparing to accept extradition to stand trial in New York.

Bankman-Fried was seen arriving at the Nassau magistrate court from the Fox Hill prison, and then leaving nearly three hours later without immediate comment from him or his attorneys.

But local media reported that the hearing was ended shortly after it began amid confusion of why it was called. According to the Nassau Guardian, the magistrate, Shaka Serville, permitted Bankman-Fried to speak by phone with his US attorneys before sending him back to the prison.

After Bankman-Fried returned to prison, the Nassau Guardian and the local Eyewitness News cited his local attorneys as saying he had agreed to be voluntarily extradited to the United States. That could not be immediately confirmed with his US attorneys.

If he maintains his right to fight extradition, he is scheduled to appear for a hearing on the issue in early February. Last week the US Justice Department and the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) filed criminal and civil charges against Bankman-Fried, alleging that he cheated



**NASSAU:** FTX founder Sam Bankman-Fried (center) is led away handcuffed by officers of the Royal Bahamas Police Force at the Nassau, Bahamas, courthouse on December 19, 2022. — AFP

investors in FTX and misused funds that belonged to FTX customers.

FTX rose spectacularly from 2019 to become a leading player in the virtual currency industry while based in the Bahamas. Bankman-Fried appeared on the covers of finance and tech magazines, and drew in huge investments from prominent fund managers and venture capitalists.

He was also lionized in the halls of politics, becoming a spokesman for the industry on tough issues such as regulation and risk in Washington. He also contributed tens of millions of dollars to political campaigns of both Republicans and Democrats. But his shooting star snuffed out dramatically in

November when the company and its sister trading firm Alameda Research collapsed into insolvency.

After reaching a valuation of \$32 billion, the group imploded following a November 2 media report that Alameda's balance sheet was heavily built on the FTX currency—a token created by FTX with no independent value—and exposed Bankman-Fried's companies as being dangerously interlinked.

Bankman-Fried was arrested at his Nassau apartment on December 12 at the request of federal prosecutors in New York. He was charged in the United States with eight counts including conspiracy, wire fraud, money laundering and election finance violations. —AFP

## German gas giant's shareholders back nationalization

**BERLIN:** Shareholders of troubled German gas giant Uniper on Monday approved the company's nationalization after it was pushed to the brink of collapse following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

After Moscow sent its forces into Ukraine in February, crucial Russian gas supplies to Germany were drastically slashed in suspected retaliation for Western sanctions. Starved of Russian deliveries, Uniper was left facing bankruptcy, prompting the German government to announce it would nationalize the firm over fears its failure could send shockwaves through Europe's top economy. Shareholders backed the deal "by a large majority" in a vote at an extraordinary general meeting. Uniper said in a statement.

The vote was seen as a formality after the majority shareholder, Finnish state-owned energy company Fortum, agreed to the measures in September. The European Commission still needs to agree to the nationalization under state aid laws. Uniper, Germany's biggest gas importer, said this approval is expected "in the near future".

Ahead of the vote, company CEO Klaus-Dieter Maubach said that "by stabilizing the company, the federal government recognizes the central role that Uniper plays for the security of supply in Germany and Europe". Earlier Monday, the German government and Uniper concluded a framework agreement related to the rescue package. Berlin had initially agreed to an eight-billion-euro (\$8.5 billion) cash injection for Uniper, but the debt-laden company said last month the government would need to spend an additional 25 billion euros. —AFP

## Business

# EU energy ministers reach gas price cap deal, angering Russia

## Cap aims to mitigate energy crunch in EU following Russian invasion of Ukraine

**BRUSSELS:** EU energy ministers on Monday overcame months of wrangling to agree a price cap for natural gas in the bloc, drawing an immediate warning from Russia that the move was "unacceptable". The price ceiling was fixed at 180 euros per megawatt hour, but with conditions attached and a word of caution from the European Commission that it may suspend the measure if "the risks outweigh the benefits".

The aim of the cap on gas prices traded within the European Union is to mitigate an energy crunch brought on by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. EU countries are worried that they will have a hard time filling gas storage tanks in time for next winter. Russia — before the war, the top exporter of gas to the EU — has turned off the taps in retaliation for a series of crippling sanctions against it designed to deplete its income used for its war.

The Kremlin has already said it won't supply oil to countries applying a distinct EU embargo on its shipments of crude, and on Monday lashed out at the gas price cap.

"This is a violation of the market price-setting, an infringement on market processes, any reference to a (price) cap is unacceptable," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov was cited as saying by Russian state-run news agencies.

### Divisive issue

The EU price cap will apply from February 15 and run for a year. It will be triggered if the European benchmark price for natural gas futures goes above 180 euros per megawatt hour for three consecutive days. That ceiling would then apply on trades for at least following 20 working days. For the cap to be deactivated, there has to be three

consecutive days of trading below the 180-euro ceiling. The mechanism is in response to high gas prices seen in Europe in August, which briefly soared to nearly 340 euros per megawatt hour, rattling EU governments. The price of gas in Europe has since fallen, but remains historically high, and was trading at just under 112 euros per megawatt hour on Monday.

The gas price cap divided EU countries. Many said it was urgent to bring it in to force down energy costs. But others — led by economic powerhouse Germany — feared it could provoke suppliers of liquefied natural gas (LNG) to snub Europe in favour of more lucrative Asian markets.

### Consequences

The European Commission was also wary of the consequences of a price cap, and it initially proposed a ceiling of 275 euros and a two-week period above that number before it could be activated. But that proposal met fierce objections from countries, such as Spain and Greece which made other broadly-backed energy measures — including joint gas purchases and speeded-up authorizations for renewable energy sources — contingent on a viable price cap.

Monday's meeting saw Germany agree to the much lower price cap, and the much shorter triggering period to unlock the entire package. "It wasn't an easy thing to achieve," Maltese Energy Minister Miriam Dalli said. In acknowledgement of Germany's concerns, a condition attached to the price cap is that futures prices for gas in Europe must be at least 35 euros more than that paid for LNG on global markets.

EU energy commissioner Kadri Simson also said



**TOULOUSE:** In this file photo, a camp stove burns under a rising curve, in Toulouse, southwestern France. EU energy ministers reached a deal on December 19, 2022, setting a price cap for natural gas in the bloc, officials said, with Malta's minister saying the threshold was 180 euros per megawatt hour. —AFP

the European Securities and Markets Authority (ESMA) and the bloc's Agency for the Cooperation of Energy (ACER) would present a "data report" on the likely consequences of the unprecedented price cap before it takes effect.

"The Commission stands ready to suspend ex-ante the activation of the mechanism, if an analysis

from ECB (European Central Bank), ESMA and ACER shows that the risks outweigh the benefits," she said. France's energy minister, Agnes Pannier-Runacher, said that, with the price cap agreed, attention must now turn to a longer-term reform of the EU's energy market, notably unhitching the price of gas from that of electricity. —AFP

### News in brief

#### Greenland cancels Russia fishing deal

**COPENHAGEN:** Greenland has suspended its fishing agreement with Russia for next year, according to the ministry of fisheries. The ministry of the autonomous Danish territory told AFP that it had informed Russian authorities that "due to the decline of stock for several species, there is no possibility of exchanging quotas for 2023". Since 1992 the agreement has mainly allowed Greenland to fish for Russian cod in the Barents Sea, while Russian fishermen have been able to access halibut in Greenlandic waters. The ministry did not specifically mention the war in Ukraine in relation to the suspension. —AFP

#### UK fines TSB Bank £50m for IT fail

**LONDON:** British regulators on Tuesday said they had fined TSB Bank £48.7 million (\$59 million) over an IT upgrade that left customers unable to access services. The fine adds to £32.7 million paid by the British lender to compensate customers for fallout from its migration to a new system in 2018, the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) said in a statement. A "significant proportion" of the bank's 5.2 million customers were affected by the switchover that took months to resolve, it added. "The failings in this case were widespread and serious which had a real impact on the day-to-day lives of a significant proportion of TSB's customers, including those who were vulnerable," said Mark Steward, FCA executive director of enforcement and market oversight. —AFP

#### 100,000 IT specialists left Russia this year

**MOSCOW:** Around 100,000 IT specialists have left Russia this year, an official said Tuesday, following the start of Moscow's military operation in Ukraine on February 24. Young Russians fled the country in droves, especially those working in the IT sector and able to work remotely, sparking fears of a brain drain. Some months later, the announcement of the mobilization of hundreds of thousands of men in late September triggered another wave of departures. "Up to 10 percent of employees of IT companies have left the country and have not returned. In total, around 100,000 IT specialists are abroad," the minister for digital development, Maksut Shadayev, was quoted as saying by Russian news agencies. —AFP

#### Apple fined one million euros in France

**PARIS:** A French court on Monday ordered Apple to pay one million euros (\$1.06 million) for imposing unfair conditions on app developers and to bring its practices in line with new EU regulations. The ruling stems from a case launched in 2017 by French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire, who accused the US tech giant of imposing prices on French startups who want to sell their apps on the company's platform. The complaint also said that Apple took data from developers and could unilaterally modify contracts. According to the ruling, seen by AFP, the Paris commercial court considered there was a "significant disequilibrium" and "considerable legal and economic insecurity" due to the impossibility of developers to renegotiate the terms of their contract or contest a suspension of their app. —AFP

## IKEA recalling ODGER swivel chair

**KUWAIT:** IKEA urges all customers who own ODGER swivel chair in the anthracite color with date stamps before and including 2219 to stop using it and to contact IKEA for a full refund.

Customer safety is always the starting point for IKEA. Therefore, IKEA is recalling ODGER swivel chair in the anthracite color with date stamps before and including 2219 (22 stands for the year, and 19 stands for the week the product was produced) as there is a risk that the star base leg of the chairs may break and pose fall and injury hazards for the user.

IKEA is urging all customers who own an

ODGER swivel chair in the anthracite color with date stamps before and including 2219 to immediately stop using it and return it to any IKEA store for a full refund.

IKEA develops its products using a rigorous risk assessment and testing program, to make sure that the products live up to all applicable laws and standards on the markets where they are sold. Despite of this it has come to our attention that the star base leg of the ODGER swivel chair in the anthracite color with date stamps before and including 2219 may break.

ODGER swivel chair in the anthracite color with date stamps before and including 2219 can be returned to any IKEA store for a full refund. Proof of purchase (receipt) is not required.

The name and date stamp of the product can be found underneath the seat, molded in the material of the chair.



## France, Germany urge US to expand green exemptions

**PARIS:** France and Germany called Monday on the United States to expand exemptions to domestic production requirements under its massive program to encourage a green energy transition.

Washington's landmark Inflation Reduction Act contains around \$370 billion in subsidies for green energy, as well as tax cuts for US-made electric cars and batteries, to accelerate the transition to a low-

carbon economy. EU countries have poured criticism on the IRA, seeing the domestic production requirement as a threat to European jobs, especially in the energy and auto sectors.

The IRA has exemptions for products from its trade bloc partners Canada and Mexico, and France and Germany called Monday for such exemptions to be expanded to EU nations. "It is in our mutual interest to rapidly find common ground" on the issue when Europe and the United States are "cooperating to face Russia's war against Ukraine," France's finance minister Bruno Le Maire and his German counterpart Robert Habeck said in joint statement.

France and Germany want a solution where "European products are eligible for US tax credits in the same manner as American products are," they

added. The two ministers and European Commission officials are expected to visit Washington soon in the New Year to try to resolve the situation, a source told AFP. EU nations have been divided on how to respond to the IRA, with French President Emmanuel Macron urging Europe to adopt its own lavish subsidies while German Chancellor Olaf Scholz has favored dialogue with Washington. The ministers' joint document advanced proposals for responding to the US subsidies, but EU subsidies were not among them. It did, however, propose to simplify rules for EU state aid and tax credits.

"We will use all of the instruments of EU trade policy to preserve the common market... and guarantee equitable competition conditions on the global level," said the document. —AFP

## Amazon strikes deal with EU to close anti-trust probes

**BRUSSELS:** Online retail giant Amazon has reached an agreement with the European Commission to close two inquiries into anti-competitive tactics, notably using third-party seller data to improve its own sales. EU vice-president Margrethe Vestager announced Amazon's commitments and hailed them as a victory for smaller retailers selling products on Amazon's online marketplace.

Amazon, and its software, will be forbidden from analyzing non-public third-party seller data, and will treat all sellers equally when deciding which offer to put in the best screen location. Sellers will also be allowed to choose their own delivery firm, rather than being obliged to use the service chosen by Amazon's "Prime" premium service. "And this means that by next sum-

mer, Amazon will have to end any preferential treatment towards its own retail and logistics operations in Europe," Vestager told reporters. "So today's decision sets the rules that Amazon will need to play by in the future, instead of Amazon determining these rules for all players on his platform," she said. "With these new rules competing independent retailers, carriers and European customers, well, they will have more opportunity and more choice."

An Amazon spokesperson said the firm, which operates the world's biggest online store, was pleased to have responded to the European Commission's concerns. "While we continue to disagree with several of the preliminary conclusions the European Commission made, we have engaged constructively to ensure that we can continue to serve customers across Europe and support the 225,000 European small and medium-sized businesses selling through our stores," the spokesperson said.

Vestager's investigators were concerned that Amazon was tracking sales by private retailers using its platform to



**STRASBOURG:** European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen (right) speaks with European Commission Executive Vice-President Margrethe Vestager prior to a preparatory debate on the eve of the European Council Meeting, at the European Parliament in Strasbourg, eastern France in this file photo. —AFP

identify lucrative markets and target its own offers.

They also accused Amazon of favoritism in deciding which offers

appear in the "Buy Box", the most prominent panel on a product's web page with a one-click buying option that accounts for the vast majority of sales. —AFP

## Ghana labor unions call for strike over local debt swap

**ACCRA:** Ghana's main unions on Monday called for a nationwide strike from next week in protest against the inclusion of workers' pensions in a local debt swap program as part of the terms for an IMF credit. A top cocoa and gold producer, Ghana has oil and gas reserves but its

debt payments are high and its revenues weak.

Like the rest of Africa, it has been hit by economic fallout from the global pandemic and the Ukraine war. Two weeks ago, the west African nation offered investors a domestic debt swap to ease a crunch in payments.

But labor unions refuse to have pension funds included in the exchange. The unions met in the capital Accra on Monday and told reporters they had called a strike to compel the government to heed their demand. "We have decided firmly that because the government has refused to grant us our request that all pension funds must be exempted from the domestic debt exchange program, all workers of Ghana are going to strike on 27 December

2022," said Yaw Baah, secretary general of Trades Union Congress. "We will be on strike until our demand has been granted," he said. Baah called on workers to stay at home. "We will stay at home until the government acts. That is straight forward and very simple," he said.

"We won't sit down for the vulnerable people to suffer because somebody has made mistakes." Labor unions present at the press conference included the Ghana National Association of Teachers (GNAT), the Ghana Medical Association, the University Teachers Association of Ghana (UTAG), the Ghana Registered Nurses and Midwives Association and the Teachers and Educational Workers Union (TEWU). —AFP

Lifestyle | Features



A pedestrian walks past the Middle Eastern specialist bookshop, Al Saqi Books, in Bayswater, west London. —AFP photos



A bookshop assistant works at Middle Eastern specialist bookshop, Al Saqi Books, in Bayswater, west London.

# London Arabic bookshop to shut after 45 years

Salwa Gaspard gazes fondly at the hundreds of Arabic-language books displayed on dark wooden shelves, putting some back in place while exchanging a few words with customers. In just a few days' time, her London bookshop, known to literary enthusiasts throughout the Middle East, will close for good. Al Saqi Books is another victim of the pandemic, and the economic upheaval in the UK and Lebanon, from where Gaspard and her husband Andre's publishing house prints and ships most of its books.

Since they opened the bookshop in a white colonnaded building not far from Paddington railway station in west London in 1978, it has become a must-see for visitors from the Middle East. "They would go to Oxford Street (the main shopping street), to Knightsbridge (the area around the famous Harrods shop) and to Al Saqi," she told AFP. In Arabic, Al Saqi means a water carrier in the desert, the 74-year-old bookseller said, describing it as a "perfect name". "We thought it was a very nice name for a bookshop, because we were carrying Arabic culture," she added. The bookshop also sells English-language publications on the Arab world "to give them a different idea of the Middle East, which is not about the violent images they see on TV, or they read in the newspaper", she said.

### 'Refuge'

The bookshop's success helped the couple to set up a publishing company, initially translating Arab works into English, such as "The Crusades Through Arab Eyes" by French-Lebanese author Amin Maalouf. For more than 40 years, many writers have come to the London bookshop to present their works, including Syrian poet Adonis. It also became a meeting place, even a "refuge", for those uprooted by conflict and turmoil in the Middle East. But Al Saqi Books always fiercely defended

its independence and open-mindedness. "It was like a safe haven. But also it was like they felt they were with friends who could understand them, because we all understood what was happening,"

lished, the bookshop's window was smashed. But Gaspard said: "We never believed in censorship... we didn't want to ban anything." The couple were also attacked when they published Israeli Abba

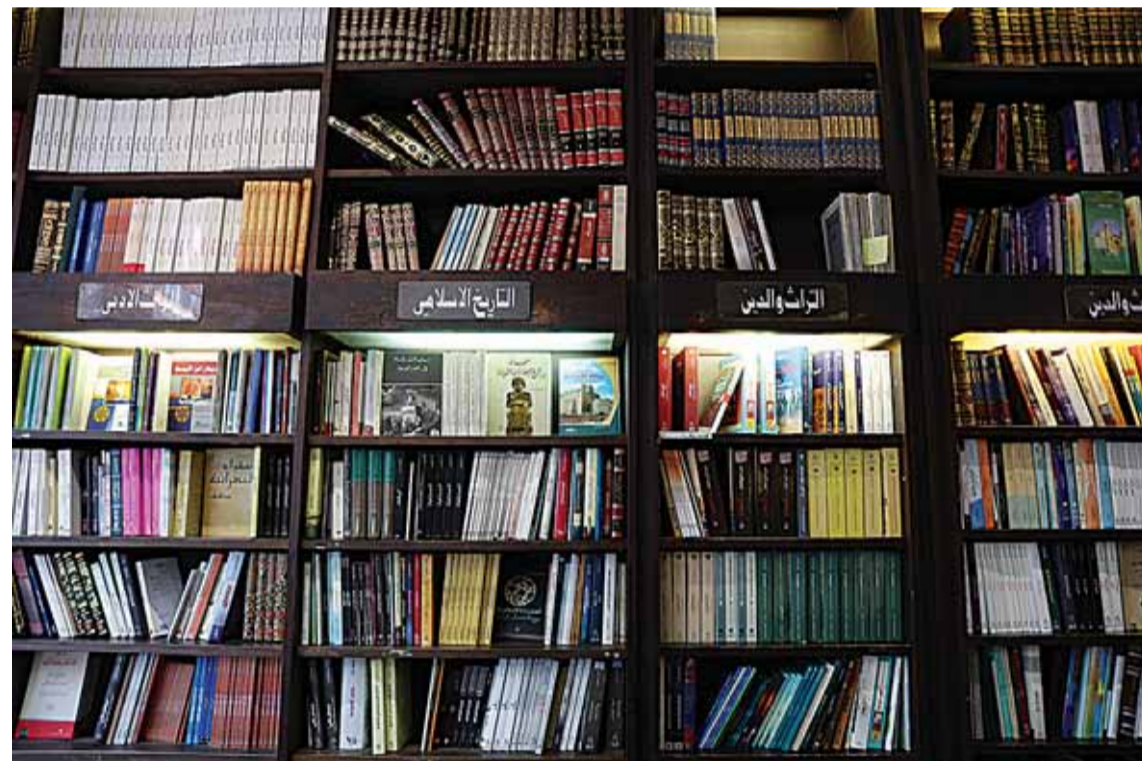
### Arab culture

The announcement on December 5 that the bookshop will close at the end of this month prompted an avalanche of messages. UK-based Algerian journalist and academic Ouissal Harize wrote on Twitter: "You will definitely be missed. Thank you for giving us a home away from home." The editor-in-chief of Esquire Middle East, Nasri Atallah, called the closure "incredibly sad". Al Saqi was "a mainstay of my whole existence in London-and of my father before me", he wrote.

At the bookshop, Farah Otozbeer, a 24-year-old Egyptian student who was in London to receive her degree from the London School of Economics and wanted to visit one last time. "I used to feel like it was a sanctuary in London. So it's... very, very sad news," she added.

Joseph Devine, one of the bookshop's employees and a former Arabic student, likened it to a "cultural centre", publishing books that were often censored back home. "It's always been a place that Arabs often come here from all around the Middle East just to buy books that they can't get in their own countries," he said. "It's also been important for translating our literature and our non-fiction as well into English and spreading that through to Anglophone readers as well."

After COVID closures, Gaspard's hopes of bouncing back were dashed by both the UK cost-of-living crisis that has seen inflation hit double digits and energy prices soar, and economic chaos in Lebanon, increasing import costs to the UK. "It was really very hard to break even," she added. "Fleeing Lebanon, we had no family in London and this was our family. All the employees were like family, some of the customers became like family. It was like a home far from home. So we're losing all this now." —AFP



A photograph shows a general view of the Middle Eastern specialist bookshop, Al Saqi Books, in Bayswater, west London.

said Gaspard.

Even though the owners have always been careful to stay out of politics, the bookshop has not escaped the jolts of geopolitics. In 1988, when Salman Rushdie's "The Satanic Verses" was pub-

lished, the bookshop's window was smashed. But Gaspard said: "We never believed in censorship... we didn't want to ban anything." The couple were also attacked when they published Israeli Abba



A street sign of Middle Eastern specialist bookshop, Al Saqi Books, is pictured outside the shop, in Bayswater, west London.



Bookshop director Salwa Gaspard looks at a book at the Middle Eastern specialist bookshop, Al Saqi Books, in Bayswater, west London.



A bookshop assistant works at Middle Eastern specialist bookshop, Al Saqi Books.

## Terry Hall, singer of ska band The Specials, dies aged 63

Terry Hall, frontman of British ska band The Specials, has died at the age of 63, his bandmates announced Monday. Hall shot to fame in the 1970s as the modish lead singer of the socially conscious 2 Tone band, which was formed with a multi-racial, anti-racism objective. The Specials found success on the UK charts, notching seven consecutive top 10 singles, including "Ghost Town" and "Too Much Too Young". Hall died after a brief illness. The Specials said in a statement. "It is with great sadness that we announce the passing, following a brief illness, of Terry, our beautiful friend, brother and one of the most brilliant singers, songwriters and lyricists this country has ever produced," they wrote on Twitter.

"His music and his performances encapsulated the very essence of life... the joy, the pain, the humor, the fight for justice, but mostly the love." No cause of death was given, and the band asked for respect for Hall's family. Born in Coventry in 1959, Hall spoke of being abducted by a paedophile ring at the age of 12 and subsequently struggling with depression and addiction. Hall joined The Specials, then called the Automatics, in 1977.



Terry Hall

Their popularity peaked with "Ghost Town" in 1981, a prophetic hit about Britain's unemployment, economic decline and urban violence that was released just ahead of summer riots over the police's use of stop-and-search tactics. After the success of "Ghost Town", Hall and bandmates Neville Staple and Lynval Golding split off to form "Fun Boy Three", a new wave pop group. Hall went solo in 1984 and later rejoined The Specials for a 2008 reunion tour. Over the course of his career, Hall collaborated with a motley crew of other musicians, including Bananarama, the Gorillaz, Dub Pistols and Lily Allen. —AFP

## 'Asterix' takes on new writer for 2023 installment

Popular French comic book series "Asterix" will turn a new page for its forthcoming 40th volume, with a new writer chosen to pen next year's installment, the publisher said Tuesday. French novelist and comic book author Fabcaro, who is known for his absurdist humor, will be the fourth scriptwriter to carry on the adventure of the indomitable Gaul who stood against the Romans. As is tradition, the next volume will come out in an odd-numbered year, with the latest release planned for October 26, 2023, publisher Albert Rene said.

The title of the forthcoming book remains a secret. Asterix — defender of the last Gaulish village holding out against the Roman empire — was dreamed up in 1959 by Rene Goscinny, who died in 1977, and Albert Uderzo, who died in 2020. The comic books have sold hundreds of millions of copies worldwide. Before the Asterix series, there was no history of comics having a scriptwriter. Fabcaro, 49, said he was excited to be taking on the task. "I was a huge fan of Asterix. This is a great gift to the child that I once was," he said.



"I want to stay faithful to... what makes Asterix so appealing. With classic ingredients such as the anachronisms, the puns... And especially remain faithful to the characters." As the new writer Fabcaro follows in the footsteps of previous authors Goscinny, Uderzo and Jean-Yves Ferri. He is

well-known for his 2015 comic "Zai Zai Zai", in which a man goes on the run after forgetting a shop loyalty card. The upcoming "Asterix" book is to be illustrated by Didier Conrad, who has been in the job since Uderzo named him as his successor for the 35th volume in 2013. —AFP

## Lifestyle | Features

## Harvey Weinstein guilty of Hollywood rape, jury finds

Disgraced US movie titan Harvey Weinstein was convicted Monday of the rape and sexual assault of a woman a decade ago, in what prosecutors said was part of his "reign of terror" over aspiring young actresses in Hollywood. The 70-year-old "Pulp Fiction" producer, who was once one of the most powerful men in the film industry, faces up to 24 years in jail, in addition to a sentence he is already serving for sex crimes in New York. His victim in the Los Angeles case said Monday she hopes he "never sees the outside of a prison cell during his lifetime."

"Harvey Weinstein forever destroyed a part of me that night in 2013 and I will never get that back," the woman, identified during the trial as Jane Doe #1, said in a statement. A weeks-long trial heard graphic descriptions of encounters between the once-powerful producer and women who were trying to make their way in the world of movies. Prosecutors painted a picture of a predatory ogre, who for years used his physical size and his professional prowess to rape and abuse women with impunity.

His victims were left terrorized and afraid for their careers if they spoke out against a man who dominated Tinseltown, prosecutors said. Rumors of Weinstein's impropriety had circulated in Hollywood for years, but his position at the apex of the industry meant few were prepared to challenge him. That all changed in 2017 with the publication of bombshell allegations against him, ushering in the #MeToo movement and opening the floodgates for women to speak out against sexual violence in the workplace.



In this file photo former film producer Harvey Weinstein appears in court at the Clara Shortridge Foltz Criminal Justice Center in Los Angeles, California. —AFP photos

Dozens of women have since alleged they were victims of Weinstein. His convictions in New York, which landed him with a 23-year jail term, were followed by charges in Los Angeles, ultimately relating to four women. On Monday after two weeks of deliberation, a jury convicted him of three of the seven counts he faced—forcible rape, forcible oral copulation and sexual penetration by a foreign object—all relating to Jane Doe #1 in a Beverly Hills hotel room in February 2013. The eight men and four women on the panel acquitted him of one charge of sexual battery by restraint involving another woman.

They did not reach a verdict on charges relating to



Attorney Gloria Allred converses with reporters after Harvey Weinstein is found guilty of three counts of sexual assault in Los Angeles.

the alleged assaults of two other women, one of whom was identified by her lawyers as Jennifer Siebel Newsom, the wife of California Governor Gavin Newsom. Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Lisa Lench declared a mistrial on those counts. Weinstein faces up to 18 years in prison for the counts on which he was convicted, but aggravating factors could increase that to 24 years. Attorneys will be back in court Tuesday for arguments as to sentencing.

#### 'Despicable behavior'

Siebel Newsom welcomed the verdicts. "Harvey Weinstein will never be able to rape another woman,"

she said. "He will spend the rest of his life behind bars where he belongs. Harvey Weinstein is a serial predator and what he did was rape." Siebel Newsom said that "throughout the trial, Weinstein's lawyers used sexism, misogyny and bullying tactics to intimidate, demean and ridicule us survivors. This trial was a stark reminder that we as a society have work to do."

The Oscar-winning producer had denied all the charges, with his attorney seeking to portray accusers either as liars who never had sex with his client, or as women who willingly lay on the casting couch, swapping sex for a leg up in the competitive world of filmmaking. Weinstein, who was credited with making the careers of household names like Matt Damon, Ben Affleck and Gwyneth Paltrow, used his power to prey on and silence women, said prosecutor Marlene Martinez. The jury heard testimony from women who said they had been tricked into being alone with Weinstein in his hotel room.

Several described how they had begged him to stop as he forced himself on them, made them perform oral sex on him, or watch him masturbate, sometimes as he groped them. "We know the despicable behavior the defendant engaged in," Martinez told the jury in her closing argument, adding Weinstein believed he was so powerful that people would excuse his behavior. "That's just Harvey being Harvey. That's just Hollywood." And for so long that's what everyone did. Everyone just turned their heads," Martinez said. "It is time for the defendant's reign of terror to end," she added. "It is time for the kingmaker to be brought to justice." —AFP



### Former 'Top Gear' host stokes complaints after Meghan 'hate' article

Former Top Gear host Jeremy Clarkson faced a barrage of complaints on Monday after a huge backlash to a newspaper column in which he said he "hated" Prince Harry's wife Meghan. In the article for UK tabloid The Sun on Friday, Clarkson wrote that he dreamed of the day "when she is made to parade naked through the streets of every town in Britain while the crowds chant, 'Shame!' and throw lumps of excrement at her." The outspoken 62-year-old presenter insisted that he had been referencing the television series "Game of Thrones".

"Oh dear. I've rather put my foot in it. In a column I wrote about Meghan, I made a clumsy reference to a scene in Game of Thrones and this has gone down badly with a great many people," he wrote on Twitter. "I'm horrified to have caused so much hurt and I shall be more careful in future." The UK Independent Press Standards Organization (IPSO) said it had so far received more than 12,000 complaints over the article as of 1700 GMT on Monday, nearly as much as it received in total for 2021.

The article, which was later pulled from The Sun website, was written in response to the couple's recent Netflix docuseries "Harry & Meghan". In it, they accuse the voracious UK tabloid press of racism, of trying to "destroy" Meghan and of contributing to her miscarriage through a targeted campaign fuelled by palace briefings. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak warned public figures that "language matters", while Clarkson's own daughter, Emily, said in an online post that she was "against everything that my dad wrote". High-profile critics of Clarkson, who enjoyed global success with Top Gear, and his article included Scotland First Minister Nicola Sturgeon, author Philip Pullman and London Mayor Sadiq Khan. —AFP



In this file photo Actor Amber Heard leaves for the day during the Depp vs Heard defamation trial at Fairfax County Court in Fairfax, Virginia. —AFP photos



In this file photo actor Johnny Depp smokes during a break in his trial at a Fairfax County Courthouse in Fairfax, Virginia.

## AMBER HEARD AGREES TO PAY JOHNNY DEPP \$1M IN DEFAMATION CASE

Johnny Depp and Amber Heard have settled their acrimonious defamation case, they said Monday, with the actress agreeing to pay her former husband \$1 million over claims he physically abused her. In a post on Instagram, Heard said she was dropping an appeal against the \$10 million payout she had been ordered to make by a jury because she "simply cannot go through" another trial. "After a great deal of deliberation I have made a very difficult decision to settle the defamation case," she said. "I make this decision having lost faith in the American legal system, where my unprotected testimony served as entertainment and social media fodder," the 36-year-old said.

"Now I finally have an opportunity to emancipate myself from something I attempted to leave over six years ago and on terms I can agree to," she said. "I have made no admission. This is not an act of concession." In a legal battle involving suits and counter-suits, a Virginia jury found Depp and Heard both liable for defamation—but sided more strongly with the "Pirates of the Caribbean" star following an intense six-week trial riding on bitterly contested allegations of domestic abuse. The jury awarded \$10.35 million in damages to Depp, and \$2 million to

Heard. Lawyers for 59-year-old Depp on Monday hailed the settlement.

"We are pleased to formally close the door on this painful chapter for Mr. Depp, who made clear throughout this process that his priority was about bringing the truth to light," attorneys Benjamin Chew and Camille Vasquez said.

"The jury's unanimous decision and the resulting judgment in Mr Depp's favor against Ms. Heard remain fully in place. "The payment of \$1 million—which Mr Depp is pledging and will (actually) donate to charities—reinforces Ms. Heard's acknowledgement of the conclusion of the legal system's rigorous pursuit for justice."

#### 'Defended my truth'

Depp sued Heard over an op-ed she wrote for The Washington Post in December 2018 in which she described herself as a "public figure representing domestic abuse." The Texas-born Heard did not name Depp in the piece, but he sued her for implying he was a domestic abuser and sought \$50 million in damages.

Heard countersued for \$100 million, saying she was

defamed by statements made by Depp's lawyer, Adam Waldman, who told the Daily Mail her abuse claims were a "hoax." The case, livestreamed to millions, featured lurid and intimate details about the Hollywood celebrities' private lives. Heard's lawyers said following the trial that the actress did not have the resources to pay Depp the \$10 million in damages.

In her Instagram post, Heard said she "defended my truth and in doing so my life as I knew it was destroyed." "The vilification I have faced on social media is an amplified version of the ways in which women are revictimized when they come forward," she said. "I was exposed to a type of humiliation that I simply cannot relive."

"Even if my US appeal is successful, the best outcome would be a retrial where a new jury would have to consider the evidence again," she said. "I simply cannot go through that for a third time."

Entertainment outlet Variety said Heard had initially made claims of domestic abuse in 2016 during her divorce from the "Edward Scissorhands" star. In a settlement she was granted \$7 million and the issue was shelved, with the couple signing non-disparagement and non-disclosure agreements. —AFP

## Princess Diana's former butler paid damages over phone hacking

Princess Diana's former butler was on Tuesday given a public apology and paid substantial damages by the publisher of the Daily Mirror newspaper over phone hacking and the "repeated invasion of his privacy". Paul Burrell's successful legal action against Mirror Group Newspapers (MGN) is the latest in a series of similar claims brought by public figures and celebrities against British tabloids. Burrell took MGN to court after being targeted by private investigators instructed by the publisher and had his voicemails intercepted. "I am pleased to announce that the defendant has now accepted responsibility for its unlawful actions, admitted liability and has agreed to apologize to the claimant for the repeated invasion of his privacy," said Burrell's lawyer Francis Leonard.

Leonard said that MGN had targeted Burrell's voicemail messages and also instructed private investigators at least three times between 2001 and 2002. This led to the publication of "numerous articles concerning the claimant arising from unlawfully obtained information which severely impacted his reputation", he added. "Between 1995 and 2008 the claimant was targeted by the defendant because he was a close friend and trusted confidante to Princess Diana and then subsequently because of his role within the public sphere following his departure from the royal household," Leonard said. "During Diana's lifetime, the activities of the defendant caused his relationship with her to deteriorate as she wrongly

thought that her highly sensitive personal information was being leaked to the press."

#### 'Great psychological harm'

MGN—which publishes the Daily Mirror, Sunday Mirror and The People—had agreed to pay substantial damages plus his legal costs and accept liability for the unlawful acts, Leonard said. The use of the unlawfully obtained information in the press undermined Burrell's relationship with his legal team as he prepared for his criminal trial over accusations that he stole hundreds of items from Diana's estate. Burrell was cleared of the charges in 2002 after it emerged that he had informed Queen Elizabeth II shortly after the princess's death in August 1997 that he had taken some items for safekeeping.

"In relation to his criminal trial, the intense negative daily press coverage led to a disintegration of the claimant's relationship with his wife and children, causing great psychological harm," Leonard said.

Alexander Vakil, for MGN, apologized on behalf of his client. "The defendant is here today through me to offer its sincere apologies to the claimant for the damage, as well as the distress caused to him by the obtaining of his private information and the accessing of his voicemail messages," he said. "It has undertaken never to repeat these actions." "The defendant acknowledges this information should never have been obtained or used in the manner it was and that it is liable for the misuse of private information." —AFP



Princess Diana



In this file photo Stefano Domenicali (right), Chief Executive Officer of Automobili Lamborghini, stands next to the new Lamborghini "Huracan" police car during a press conference at the Interior Ministry "Viminale" in Rome.



In this file photo taken on March 30, 2017, the back of the new Lamborghini "Huracan" police car is pictured during a press conference at the Interior Ministry "Viminale" in Rome. —AFP photos

## Italian police transport organs in Lamborghini supercar

Italian police used a specially adapted Lamborghini supercar to deliver two kidneys to donor patients on Tuesday hundreds of kilometers apart, they announced. "Travelling on the motorway to deliver the most beautiful Christmas present: life," they said in a statement posted on social media, alongside a picture of a medical cool box in a purpose-built compartment at the front of the Huracan.

"Thanks to the State Police's special Father Christmas, two people have received the gift of a kidney." The organs were driven from Padua in Italy's

northeast to hospitals in Modena and then Rome. The Lamborghini Huracan, which has a top speed of 300kmh (190mph) and the capacity to go from 0-100kmh in 3.2 seconds, was a 2017 gift to police from the luxury carmaker. It was assigned to highway patrol in Bologna, northern Italy, for use in both normal police operations and the urgent transport of blood and organs. Another Huracan is operated by the highway patrol in Rome, while a 2009 Lamborghini Gallardo once used by police is now in a museum. —AFP



## Nigerian artist turns old soles into mosaic portraits

Picking through a field of garbage, Nigerian artist Eugene Konboye hunts for particular type of trash: plastic flipflops that he turns into multi-colored mosaic portraits of his community. Both an artist and environmentalist, Konboye says recycling flipflops targets one of the worst plastic polluting items in Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation, with more than 210 million people and growing fast.

Only a tiny fraction of waste is recycled in the West African state, where each year, 200,000 tons of plastic spills into the Atlantic, according to the UN Industrial Development Organization. Using a shovel, Konboye piles up a huge mound of flip-flops he has collected into a corner of his studio. He then cleans them and cuts them into squares—some squares are the size of a typical ceramic wall tile, others the size of a large postage stamp. The tiles are then affixed to a board, becoming pixels in a larger picture.

"Flip-flops are one of the major actors in plastic pollution," Konboye said. "Almost everybody has at least a pair in every home." The artist creates portraits of the local community in Abeokuta city in southwestern Osun State. Sometimes he is paid for his work and gets commissions from some clients. Portraits on his studio walls slowly emerge from a pattern of the multi-colored flip-flop pieces he arranges on backgrounds.

"First is to get my materials and I put them out in the sun and rain before I bring them into my studio," he said. "I sort them according to their color, according to their tone, then I cut them." Mounds of trash on roadsides or on empty lots and landfills are a common sight in Nigeria, and recycling is rare. —AFP

## Russia won't 'steal' Christmas: Kyiv mayor unveils festive tree

Kyiv officials on Monday illuminated a Christmas tree in the city centre, refusing to let Russia "steal" the festive season from Ukrainian children. The day, which started with swarms of attacks on critical infrastructure in the Ukrainian capital, ended with the unveiling of the 12-metre (40-foot) high artificial tree decorated with white peace doves. A few dozen residents braved the sub-zero temperatures to admire the tree located next to the Saint Sophia Cathedral and its emblematic golden domes—and take selfies.

Among them, tour operator Natalya rejoiced, telling AFP that the tree "brings a festive mood in such a difficult time". "It's such an emblematic feature of our New Year holidays," she added. She pointed to the tree illuminated with a constellation of yellow and blue lights, the colors of the Ukrainian flag. Topping the tree is the country's coat of arm, the trident. "Russians try to steal normal life away from our citizens, but we won't give them a chance



A Christmas tree made of camouflage nets draws a small crowd in Mykolaiv amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine. —AFP

to steal the biggest holidays—the New Year and Christmas—from our children," the city's mayor Vitali Klitschko said when unveiling the tree.

### 'Tree of invincibility'

Following the Orthodox tradition, Ukrainians traditionally celebrate Christmas on January 7th, but polls showed an increasing number in favor of moving the Christian holy day to December 25, in line with other churches. An Interfax-Ukraine poll showed support for the change almost doubled in a year, jumping from 26 percent in 2021 to 44 percent in 2022. Kyiv city hall had hesitated to put up the tree, the mayor said, not least because weeks of Russian attacks on energy infrastructures have worn down the Ukrainian power grid.

Moscow's systematic attacks have plunged millions into the cold and dark as winter sets in. But the city hall adapted, powering the tree's fairy lights with a diesel generator and reusing some decorations from previous years. "We called it 'the Christmas tree of Ukrainian invincibility', since they are doing everything for the children to have a holiday despite difficult times," Klitschko said. But some still struggled to get into the Christmas spirit.

"There is no special festive mood," accountant Tetyana Prykhodko told AFP. Prykhodko just moved from Kherson, a southern Ukrainian city that was occupied by Russians for months. "I just hope that finally everything will end, and that peace will come. We are all waiting for this," she said. —AFP

# Record year for auction houses Christie's and Sotheby's

Auction house Christie's on Monday announced record sales of \$8.4 billion in 2022, outshining its rival Sotheby's, which also posted its best-ever result at \$8 billion for the year. Christie's racked up \$7.2 billion in auctions and another \$1.2 billion in private sales, easily topping the \$7.1 billion it made in 2021 as the art world emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic, which greatly hindered auction operations. "In 2022, despite a challenging macro-environment, Christie's has achieved our highest ever global sales," chief executive officer Guillaume Cerutti said, referring to economic challenges sparked by inflation and the war in Ukraine.

He noted "the resilience of the art and luxury markets, the remarkable success of several major art collections—including the unforgettable Paul Allen sale—and the expertise and hard work of our teams around the world." Allen, the co-founder of Microsoft alongside Bill Gates, died in 2018. In 2009, he signed the "Giving Pledge"—a promise to donate the majority of one's wealth to charity. His extensive collection, spanning 500 years of art history, raked in a massive \$1.6 billion. Five works went for more than \$100 million each, including a Cezanne, a Van Gogh and



In this file photo a man looks at Andy Warhol's 'Shot Sage Blue Marilyn' during Christie's 20th and 21st Century Art press preview at Christie's New York in New York City. —AFP

a Gauguin. And at a separate Christie's sale in May, a famed Andy Warhol portrait of Marilyn Monroe—

"Shot Sage Blue Marilyn"—sold for \$195 million, setting a record for a piece of 20th century art.

### Who was buying?

This year at Christie's, buyers from North and South America accounted for more of total sales as compared with 2021 — 40 percent of the value versus 35 percent—while Asian buyers were on the decline. Nevertheless, according to French billionaire Francois Pinault, whose holding company Artemis controls Christie's, Asian buyers were "absolutely crucial" to the overall success of the Allen sale.

The auction house said its banner year was fueled by a "new generation of collectors": 35 percent of all buyers in 2022 were first-time clients, and 34 percent of them qualify as millennials. Asia has the "fastest-growing base of new collectors," Christie's said. Cerutti noted that cars and real estate did not figure in the results. Last week, Sotheby's announced a year-end total sales projection of \$8 billion, as compared with \$7.3 billion in 2021. That data includes art and luxury items, but also homes and collector cars.

The auction house-owned by French-Zionist telecoms magnate Patrick Drahi—also noted that its client base in Asia was "rapidly expanding," and that those collectors were "spending more per person on average than collectors from elsewhere." —AFP



Ballet dancers take part in a rehearsal at the ballet hall of National Opera of Ukraine in Kyiv. —AFP photos



A ballerina and choreographer take part in a rehearsal at the ballet hall of National Opera of Ukraine in Kyiv.

# Ukraine's ballerinas defy war woes with Paris shows

One of Ukraine's most storied ballet companies embarks this week on a run of shows in Paris, a welcome break from airstrikes and blackouts that have bedeviled performances back home. The production of the classic "Giselle" being brought to the French capital by the Kyiv-based National Opera Ballet of Ukraine caps a period of intense hardship for the company. Since Russia's invasion in February, the usual stress of rehearsals has been compounded by fleeing dancers and performances interrupted by air raids. One dancer has even been killed after volunteering to fight. But the show must go on and performers and audiences alike have been forced to adapt.

Prima ballerina Natalia Matsak recalled how one loud siren during a performance several months ago forced a hasty intermission as everyone rushed for cover. "We went out to bow and the curtain fell immediately. We didn't even have time to bow properly," she told AFP. Russian aerial assaults have become a regular feature of life in Kyiv—missile attacks on Friday left swathes of the city without power, water and heat amid sub-zero temperatures.

Every time a raid occurs, the audience at the National Opera—a Neo-Renaissance landmark near the famed Golden Gate—also has to take refuge in the bomb shelters. Dancers join the audience members in the shelters, but face having to remain limber for breaks that can last more than an hour. "After all, as soon as the alarm is lifted, we must be ready to continue the performance," Matsak said. "This is very exhausting... a serious test of strength for artists." But, she added, the pressure doesn't let up once everyone goes home. "After such shelling, we do not sleep at night. We are nervously exhausted."

### Fleeing dancers

The company suffered a mass exodus of dancers when the war began and millions of Ukrainians fled their homes. "A lot of women left the troupe. The changes in the composition of the troupe are colossal," said leading soloist Sergiy Kryvokon. Male dancer Oleksandr Shapoval volunteered to go to the front the day after Russia invaded, leaving behind two teenage daughters. He died in mortar shelling in September in



A ballerina prepares for a rehearsal at the ballet hall of National Opera of Ukraine in Kyiv.

the eastern industrial Donbas region. But these days, dancers are returning as they miss their homes and work, Kryvokon said.

In Paris, he will perform the part of Prince Albrecht alongside Matsak in the titular role. The tour at the Theatre des Champs-Elysees involves 17 performances

over 16 days. The theatre's website describes the tragic love story as "one of the great classical ballets of their repertoire". Both Kryvokon and Matsak have performed the ballet with other partners but it will be their first time doing the piece together. "We've been working on this performance for less than two weeks," Kryvokon said, beads of sweat visible on his forehead after an intense rehearsal.

### No Tchaikovsky

In past years, the National Opera Ballet of Ukraine—which is in the middle of its 155th season—has toured France with Tchaikovsky's Christmastime favorite "The Nutcracker". But the current wartime climate makes such a selection impossible. "Tchaikovsky is a symbol of Russia, so neither the 'Nutcracker' nor his other ballets are danced by our theatre," said Sergiy Skuz, the company's administrative head. On the Russian side too, ballet has not escaped the impact of the conflict. The celebrated Bolshoi Ballet Academy has seen expatriate dancers leave, while its tours in the West have been cancelled in protest of Moscow's invasion.

The Bolshoi, in turn, has scrapped performances by directors who have denounced the war. The Ukrainian dancers are eager instead to promote "Giselle" by French composer Adolphe Adam. It is a "respected world classic" that has appeared "on our stage for many decades", Kryvokon said. The dancers are also keen to show that, despite the many trials of the past year, they can still deliver a first-rate performance. "Every trip abroad is of great importance for us now," Kryvokon said. "We have to be on top there, and we will show the level with pleasure." —AFP



Ballet dancers rest as they take part in a rehearsal at the ballet hall of National Opera of Ukraine in Kyiv.



Ballet dancers of National Opera of Ukraine take part in a rehearsal at the ballet hall in Kyiv.

## Sports

# England inflict first-ever 3-0 Test whitewash on Pakistan

## England beat Pakistan by 8 wickets in third and final Test

KARACHI: England beat Pakistan by eight wickets in the third and final Test in Karachi Tuesday to sweep the series 3-0 and hand the Pakistanis their first home whitewash. "It won't really sink in until we get home or in the new year," skipper Ben Stokes said after securing what was only England's second series whitewash in the subcontinent, following a similar result in Sri Lanka in 2018.

Resuming on 112-2, England reached the modest 167-run target in just 38 minutes, with Ben Duckett and Stokes finishing unbeaten on 82 and 35 respectively. England won the first Test in Rawalpindi by 74 runs and the second in Multan by 26 runs. This was England's first Test tour of Pakistan since 2005, having refused to tour the South Asian country in the years since because of security concerns.

Duckett cracked his 12th boundary off fast bowler Mohammad Wasim to seal the victory on the fourth day, with England finishing on 170-2. Agha Salman dropped Stokes off spinner Abrar Ahmed on 22 and with just 19 needed for victory. With nine wins in their past 10 matches, England have vindicated their newly adopted free-wheeling approach to Test cricket dubbed "Bazball", after the nickname of coach Brendon McCullum.

McCullum and Stokes took charge of a misfiring side in May that had won just one of their previous 17 Tests, including a 4-0 humiliation in the Ashes in Australia. England played power-packed cricket right from the start of the Pakistan tour, smashing 506-4 in Rawalpindi to set a record for the most team runs on the opening day of a Test. Four batters - Zak Crawley, Ollie Pope, Harry Brook and Duckett - scored hundreds that day, another record. Stokes was also bold in his captaincy, setting a tantalizing

343-run target for Pakistan in Rawalpindi and then setting unusual fields to get wickets.

### Stuck to the task

Stokes praised England's adaptability on slow pitches. "We've got a process we want to play but the challenge was the different pitches for every Test," he said "I know it's a cliched thing, but being out in the subcontinent is one of the hardest places to do it." Stokes said his bowlers stuck to the task well. "We were particularly good with the ball," he Stokes. "Whoever I threw it to they seemed to deliver. The commitment and mindset has been top drawer." Stokes singled out Brook, the man of the match in Karachi and player of the series. "Every person has stood up at some point, but Brook has been unbelievable for us. He's set Pakistan on fire, the calmness and belief is high class."

Brook finished with 468 runs that included three hundreds - the most in the series. Stokes also had warm words for leg-spinner Rehan Ahmed, who at 18 years and 128 days became England's youngest Test player and then the youngest in the world to take five wickets on debut. "For an 18-year-old to come into his first Test match and have such a cricket-savvy brain - especially under Test-match pressure - was really good for us," said Stokes.

Pakistan's Babar Azam said he has no intention of giving up the captaincy despite overseeing the whitewash. "Definitely, it's a big disappointment as a team," said Azam. "We are not good enough to fight back. We lost back-to-back wickets here, were good in patches only and that cost us." Asked if he would quit the captaincy to concentrate on batting, Azam told a news conference he still enjoyed the



KARACHI: England's captain Ben Stokes (right) plays a shot during the fourth day of third Test match between Pakistan and England at the National Stadium in Karachi on December 20, 2022. —AFP

challenge. "Captaincy is a matter of honor for me. I will do whatever best I can for my country and for myself," he said.

Pakistan's problems were compounded by injuries to their fast bowlers, with Shaheen Shah Afridi ruled out before the series with a knee injury. Haris Rauf and Naseem Shah missed the last two

Tests with fitness problems. But Pakistan suffered major batting collapses, losing their last six wickets for 108 in the first innings in Karachi and seven for 52 in the second. Tuesday's defeat means it is also the first time Pakistan have lost four home Tests on the trot, having been beaten by Australia in Lahore in March. —AFP

## Draws for Arab Masters Tennis Tournament

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: There will be 11 matches on the second day competition of the Groups Stage for the singles of the second Arab Masters Tennis Tournament for men being held at Jaber Al-Abdallah Al-Abdallah Al-Sabah International Tennis Complex. The draw was made on Monday in the presence of Kuwait Tennis Federation Deputy Chairman of the Board of Directors Adelsamad Al-Aryan, Board member and Treasurer Ali Al-Daihani, Board member of Arab Tennis Federation Waleed Sami and tournament referee Abdelraouf Abdelsalam in addition to 23 Arab players. One player was not able to participate due to an emergency.

Winners of the first and second places of each group will move to the quarter finals. Meanwhile, the leaders of the four groups will meet those in second place following the knock-out system to decide those heading to semi-final. Adelsamad Al-Aryan said the draw went on smoothly with the presence of participating players, under the supervision of ATF and tournament referee. "We thank KTF and ATF President Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Abdallah Al-Sabah for his support," he said.

The 2nd Arab Tennis Masters, (the best ranked players from 10 Arab countries) will be exciting and tough. Players were distributed into four groups to ensure more interaction between Arab players. Algerian player Toufik Sahtali said he was happy to participate in the Arab Masters Tournament. "I am happy to be in Kuwait alongside many Arab players. I am keen to participate for the second time and I have prepared very well for this event," he said. Sahtali lauded the Jaber Al-Abdallah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah International Tennis Complex.

The four groups are as follows: First Group: Fares Abdelkareem (Bahrain), Akram Mohamed



KUWAIT: Abdelsamad (Center), Ali Al-Daihani, Abdelraouf Abdelsalam, Waleed Sami, Ahmad Hashem take a group photo.



KUWAIT: Kuwait Tennis Federation Deputy Chairman of the Board of Directors Adelsamad Al-Aryan is pictured with participating players.

(Egypt), Iskander Mansouri (Tunis), Yassine Dlimi (Morocco), Mohammad Al-Awadhi (Kuwait). Second Group: Bader Al-Abdallah (Kuwait), Toufik Sahtali (Algeria), Amar Alhogbani (Saudi Arabia), Benjamin Hassan (Lebanon), Mohammad Safwat (Egypt), Mousa Alkotop (Jordan).

Third Group: Hassan Ibrahim (Lebanon), Yaqoub

Mohammed (Kuwait), Saud Alhogbani (Saudi Arabia), Abdallah Shelbayeh (Jordan), Mohammed Oukaa (Tunis), Essa Qabazard (Kuwait). Fourth Group: Yacoub Makzoume (Syria), Rayan Dylan (Algeria), Ali Al-Shati (Kuwait), Mohamed Dougaz (Tunis), Mohammad Maamoun (Egypt), Walid Ahouda (Morocco).



ALTA BADIA: Switzerland's Marco Odermatt competes in the second run of the Men's Giant Slalom event during the FIS Alpine ski World Cup in Alta Badia, on December 19, 2022. —AFP

## World Cup's leader Odermatt wins Alta Badia giant slalom

ALTA BADIA: Switzerland's Marco Odermatt extended his alpine skiing World Cup lead after claiming victory in Monday's giant slalom at Alta Badia. Reigning World Cup champion Odermatt won in the Italian Dolomites with a combined time of two minutes and 38.27 seconds, 0.20sec ahead of Norwegian Henrik Kristoffersen and 0.92sec in front of Slovenia's Zan Kranjec. The 25-year-old had set himself up for victory by building a 0.60sec cushion between him and Kristoffersen in the morning's blistering first run which allowed him to be only 21st fastest in the second run and still claim the win.

"This was probably the biggest fight ever. I was so tired already at the start and it didn't get better while racing," said giant slalom Olympic champion Odermatt after his fourth win of the season. "It was a tight battle again but luckily it went for me this time." Odermatt now leads Kristoffersen by 95 points in the giant slalom standings, with Kranjec a further 20 points behind in third, after his third win from four races in the discipline this season.

He now has 12 straight giant slalom podiums stretching back to the start of last season and has been on the podium after nine of this campaign's races across all disciplines. The 25-year-old also increased his advantage on Kristoffersen's compatriot Aleksander Aamodt Kilde in the overall standings to 271 points, with the Norwegian downhill and super-G specialist not taking part in Monday's race. Sunday's giant slalom winner Lucas Braathen trails Odermatt by 481 points in the hunt for the crystal ball after failing to finish his first run on Monday morning. —AFP

## Final farewells: Deaths in sport

PARIS: Shane Warne, Bill Russell, Lester Piggott - just three sports icons who passed away in 2022. AFP Sport looks at their legacies as well as seven other high-profile sports stars to have died over the last year:

### Basketball

Bill Russell: Died aged 88 on July 31 - He won a record 11 NBA crowns as a cornerstone of a Boston Celtics dynasty, overcame racism to become the league's first Black superstar and was a prominent civil rights activist. He was the first Black coach to win the NBA Finals. That triumph came in 1968, especially poignant as it was just weeks after civil rights leader Martin Luther King's assassination. "A good man and great American who did everything he could to deliver the promise of America for all Americans," said US President Joe Biden.

### Boxing

Earnie Shavers: Died aged 78 on September 1 - "Earnie hit me so hard it shook my kinfolk in Africa," remarked Muhammad Ali after their 1977 heavyweight world title bout which Ali won after 15 pulsating rounds. One of 10 children, Shavers' family fled Alabama under threats from the Ku Klux Klan. He only took up boxing in his early 20s but his fearless punch left not just Ali in awe. "I was in the land of make-believe. I heard saxophones and trombones sounding in my ear... I saw little blue rats scamper out to smoke cigars, drink whisky, man," said another opponent, James 'Quick' Tillis.

### Cricket

Shane Warne: Died aged 52 on March 4 - Regarded by many in sports-mad Australia as second only to Don Bradman, Warne mixed legendary cricket deeds with colourful headlines away from the pitch earning him the nickname 'Hollywood' in a career as bewitching as his famed wrong 'un. Warne took 708 wickets in a 145-Test career. "I should think there have been a lot of great cricketers, great spinners and great leg-spinners but Warne will always be, certainly from my point of view, the No 1," said Mike Gatting, who was at the wrong end of Warne's 'ball of the century' in 1993.

Rod Marsh: Died aged 74 on March 4 - A flamboyant Australian wicketkeeper - nicknamed 'Iron Gloves' - he made his international debut in 1970 against England before retiring in 1984 with what was then a world-record 355 Test dismissals, 95 off the bowling of Dennis Lillee. He was no mean batsman either becoming the first Aussie wicketkeeper to score a Test century, against Pakistan in 1982.

### Football

Uwe Seeler: Died on July 21 aged 85 - Played in all four World Cups in which Pele appeared (1958-70) but unlike the Brazilian legend never lifted the trophy. The closest he came was captaining the side that lost to England in the 1966 final. Like his father, Seeler played for Hamburg from 1953 to 1972 where he is referred to fondly as 'Uns Uwe' (Our Uwe) making 476 appearances. "Uwe Seeler stands for everything that characterizes a good person: Down-to-earthness, loyalty, joie de vivre, plus he was always approachable," said Hamburg board member Jonas Boldt.

### NFL

Dan Reeves: Died on January 1 aged 77 - The bespectacled coach shares with Buffalo Bills legendary coach Marv Levy and Minnesota Vikings' Bud Grant, the most visits to a Super Bowl without ever winning (four). Ironically his last trip to the Super Bowl in 1999 resulted in the Broncos (who he had taken three times to the Super Bowl) beating his Atlanta Falcons. He did win one Super Bowl ring - as a running back for the Dallas Cowboys. —AFP

## India looking for a clean sweep over Bangladesh

DHAKA: India will look to steamroll a plucky but inconsistent Bangladesh in the second Test starting on Thursday in Dhaka to cement their standing in the ICC Test Championship. The visitors will however again be without injured skipper Rohit Sharma after he missed the first Test with an injured thumb, the Indian cricket board said Tuesday.

India are currently second in the Test Championship league table behind Australia, who are currently 1-0 up against South Africa in a three-match series at home. The current cycle runs to June 2023, with the nine teams each playing six series. The top two sides will meet in the final at the Oval in London.

India beat Bangladesh in the first Test in Chittagong by 188 runs but the visitors, led by KL Rahul in the absence of Rohit, had to work hard for the victory. Set a monumental target of 513 runs, Bangladesh put up a strong fight with Zakir Hasan and Najmul Hossain sharing a record opening partnership of 124. Debutant Zakir made 100 and skipper Shakib Al Hasan added 84 but India kept their cool and got the win, with Axar Patel taking four wickets and Kuldeep Yadav-the player of the match-grabbing three. "That's Test cricket. You are never going to get a win that is easy. We have played enough cricket to understand that there will be phases when the opposition plays well and you need to respect that," Rahul said. —AFP

# Argentina lauds united players in divided crisis-riven country

## World Cup winners return triumphantly

**BUENOS AIRES:** For the last month, Lionel Messi and his Argentina teammates have brought success and unity to their fans, in stark contrast to the country's economic woes and polarized political landscape. Years of economic crisis weighs heavily on the daily lives of people in a country where some 40 percent live in poverty as rampant inflation and a depreciating currency have decimated ordinary people's savings and purchasing power.

And yet on Sunday the whole country was draped in the national blue and white colors as political and sporting rivalries were put to one side and 45 million people celebrated a first World Cup success in 36 years. But experts say the elation will not last. "What happens is that sport, and particularly football in Argentina, has the ability to unite us through emotion, and that is very important in terms of national symbolism," sociologist Rodrigo Daskal told AFP. "But that does not mean that it can be effectively transferable to other fields."

"United we can achieve much more" - During Sunday's match, supporters of bitter city rivals such as Boca Juniors and River Plate in Buenos Aires, or Rosario's Newell's Old Boys and Rosario Central, stood shoulder to shoulder during the thrilling and at times torturous penalty shoot-out victory over France in Qatar.

"This passion and this unity, hopefully it will serve as an example for the future and to make us realize that we are better together," said fullback Nicolas Tagliafico. The team's success and their tangible togetherness has created a sense of hope amongst some Argentines. "It's not about forgetting our problems, it's about reminding us that we can unite, and when we're united we all pull in the same direction," said Julio Berdun, 50, as he walked through the iconic Plaza Mayo in front of the Casa Rosada presidential palace with his family.

"We have to close this rift that makes us so divided as a country," he said, his face painted blue and white, wearing a curly wig and draped in the Argentine flag. At the same time, there is skepticism



**BUENOS AIRES:** Argentina's players celebrate on board a bus with a sign reading 'World Champions' with supporters after winning the Qatar 2022 World Cup tournament as they leave Ezeiza International Airport en route to the Argentine Football Association (AFA) training centre in Ezeiza, Buenos Aires province on December 20, 2022. —AFP

and weariness that comes from decades of broken promises and shattered dreams. "We're world champions, but nothing more. I have to go to work, everyone has to go work. The situation won't change, it will be like always, only that in the sporting domain we're world champions," said architect Ricardo Grunfeld, 65.

### 'Playing for the people'

What resonated with fans was the players' emotional commitment, embodied in Messi's brilliance, his team-mates' joy and the tears of coach Lionel Scaloni. "This team plays for the people, for the Argentine fans, there are no individual egos, everyone plays for

the team and for the country," said Scaloni. The political class is the polar opposite, and not just because of the fractious relationship between the Peronist government and right-wing opposition.

The current administration has been beset by an ever growing fissure between President Alberto Fernandez and his vice-president and former leader Cristina Kirchner. "This competitive, effective and humble team with good vibes contrasts with a political class fighting amongst itself that doesn't improve things in the country," said political scientist Carlos Fara. "Society is very tired with this rift. They feel like it's political business and a barrier to development." —AFP

## Offside? Macron stirs critics with WCup final role

**PARIS:** From leaping from his seat in the VIP box to consoling crestfallen players on the pitch, French President Emmanuel Macron delivered a wide-ranging performance at the World Cup final that was not to everyone's taste. The 44-year-old was an unmissable presence at the game at the Lusail stadium in Qatar on Sunday, even making an appearance in the team's changing room to deliver an emotional post-game pep talk.

"You're an amazing team," Macron told the players, pounding his fist in his hand for effect. "No other team would have got here and come back on two occasions and being so close to winning it. "You had the heart, the hunger, the desire and the talent to get here and that's why I wanted to come and say thank you," he added, according to a video posted on his social media accounts.

France were 2-0 behind until the 80th minute before a quickfire double by Kylian Mbappe levelled the game. In extra time, Argentina went ahead 3-2 thanks to a second goal from Lionel Messi before another Mbappe penalty led to a shoot-out to settle the final. Macron strode onto the pitch after the game, notably grabbing Mbappe in front of the cameras and holding the striker's head to his chest.

In front of a record domestic TV audience, he could be seen talking animatedly to the distraught player who stared blankly ahead, barely acknowledging the head of state. "I told him that he was only 24 years old," Macron told RMC radio afterwards, adding: "I was as sad as he was." Mbappe turns 24 on Tuesday. "It was a bit disturbing to see him stuck like glue to Mbappe," commented far-right opposition MP Sebastien Chenu to the LCI channel. —AFP

## Jubilant welcome for French team

**PARIS:** Supporters packed a square in central Paris on Monday to give a rousing welcome to the French football team despite their loss to Argentina in a nail-biting World Cup final. Fans filled the Place de la Concorde in central Paris to welcome the team who were driven straight to the square from the airport after touching down from Qatar. They appeared on the balcony of the Crillon Hotel overlooking the square to a rousing welcome, AFP correspondents said.

Despite their disappointment, all 24 French players, including striker Kylian Mbappe whose hat trick failed to bring France glory, appeared on the balcony in regal style to acknowledge the applause. "Frankly, it's magnificent, it warms the heart, it's a great pleasure to see that we were able to make so many French people proud and happy," forward Marcus Thuram told TF1 TV. "We wanted to see them (the fans) on our return from Doha because I think it's the least we can do to come and see them and thank them for their support," he added.

Goalkeeper and captain Hugo Lloris told TF1 that it was a chance to "greet them (the fans), to thank them for their support and, after yesterday's pain, to seek their consolation." Supporters had been kept guessing for most of the day about whether the disappointed players would travel to central Paris to meet them. Sports Minister Amelie Oudea-Castera



**PARIS:** Fans wait at the Place de la Concorde for the arrival of the French national football team at the Hotel de Crillon in central Paris on December 19, 2022. — AFP

had said early Monday that the team planned to go to the place de la Concorde.

But within hours, the French Football Federation (FFF) president contradicted the minister, saying the players would head home straight from the airport. "When you don't win you don't feel like wandering down the Champs Elysees or anywhere else," Noel Le Graet told the BFMTV broadcaster, in reference to the glamorous avenue running from Concorde to the Arc de Triomphe. But the FFF then confirmed that the event would take place.

France lost on penalties on Sunday after the match ended 3-3 following extra time, but French commentators still heaped praise on the defeated side, while highlighting the crucial role of Argentinean captain Lionel Messi. "Invited to the coronation of Lionel Messi, Les Bleus were heroic," said L'Equipe sports newspaper. The match was dominated by Argentina for the first 80 minutes before a quickfire double by Mbappe ignited France. Mbappe went on to score a third goal, becoming only the second player in history to grab a hat-trick in a World Cup final. —AFP

# Classifieds

## Hospitals & Clinics

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

## Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144

Khalidiya	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, Aryan Ajeshkumar viswanathan holder of Indian Passport No: S9920926(Alackel vadakkathil, Njakkana p.o, krishnapuram, kollam, Kerala, India)residing kuwait at present, hereby change my name as Aryan Ajesh (C#2821) - 21-12-2022

I, Mohammad Tawfeeq Ur Rehman, holder of passport No. R5456176, do hereby change my name to Mohammad Tawfeeq Ur Rahman (as Given Name) for all purposes. I will henceforth be known in the name Mohammad Tawfeeq Ur Rahman, and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents. (C#2820) - 19-12-2022



**NOTICE**  
September 29, 2022




Mr. Manikandan Poochattil Bglakrishnan, son of Mr. Balakrishnan, resident of Poochattil House, Kundaliyur PO, Engandiyur, Thrissur - 680616, Kerala and Ms. Mini Puthussery Kochappan, daughter of Mr. Kochappan, resident of Puthussery House, Aloor PO, Kallettumkara Via, Thrissur, Kerala 680683 both Indian nationals presently residing in Kuwait, have given notice of intended marriage between them under the Foreign Marriage Act, 1969. If anyone has any objection to the proposed marriage, he/she may file the same with the undersigned according to the procedure laid down under the Act/Rule within thirty days from the date of publication of this notice. Communications in this regard can be made by Email (cw2.kuwait@mea.gov.in) / letters / telephonic calls (00965 - 22550171, 00965 - 22533125).

(Kamal Singh Rathore)  
 First Secretary (Community Affairs)  
 and Marriage Officer,  
 Embassy of India, Kuwait,  
 Email: cw2.kuwait@mea.gov.in

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## Antetokounmpo's 42 points power Bucks over Pelicans

### Sixers edge Raptors; Timberwolves beat disjointed Mavericks

**LOS ANGELES:** Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 42 points and grabbed 10 rebounds to power the Milwaukee Bucks to a 128-119 NBA victory Monday over Zion Williamson and the New Orleans Pelicans. Two-time Most Valuable Player Antetokounmpo dominated in the paint, making 12 of his 17 shots from the floor and 17 of his 22 free throws.

The Bucks effectively limited Williamson, the New Orleans star forward who finished with 18 points, seven rebounds and seven assists. Milwaukee's attention to Williamson opened the door for the Pelicans outside. Center Jonas Valanciunas drained seven three-pointers on the way to 37 points and CJ McCollum had six three-pointers and 31 points.

They helped New Orleans keep it close but it wasn't enough against a Bucks team that also had 30 points from Brook Lopez and 18 from Jrue Holiday. Milwaukee led by as many as 18 in the fourth quarter. New Orleans cut the deficit to three on McCollum's basket with 1:32 remaining, but Holiday answered with a three-pointer and Lopez drove for a layup as Milwaukee pulled away again.

The East-leading Bucks improved to 22-8. The Pelicans, who were briefly atop the West earlier this month with a seven-game winning streak, suffered a fourth straight defeat. "Overall there was a lot of really good defensive effort," Bucks coach Mike Budenholzer said, noting that the plan was to disrupt the "very unique and special" Williamson and "hopefully just change the dynamics of their team a little bit." Elsewhere, the Philadelphia 76ers squandered a 14-point lead early in the third quarter but held on to eke out a 104-101 overtime victory over the Toronto Raptors.

Joel Embiid scored 28 points and pulled down 11 rebounds and Tobias Harris added 21 points as the Sixers weathered the Raptors' late surge. Pascal Siakam scored 23 of his 38 points in the second half as Toronto battled back. They twice led by seven in the fourth quarter, and Siakam's fin-



Giannis Antetokounmpo #34 of the Milwaukee Bucks

ger-roll layup with 5.1 seconds left in the fourth knotted the score at 99-99. Embiid couldn't convert a game-winner as time expired in the fourth, but Harris drilled a three-pointer in overtime that put the Sixers up for good on their way to a fifth straight win.

In Atlanta, the Hawks survived a late push from the Orlando Magic with Dejounte Murray delivering the game-winning free throws with 1.5 seconds remaining in a 126-125 victory. Trae Young scored 37 points and handed out 13 assists, AJ Griffin added 19 points off the bench and Murray scored 17 as the Hawks ended the Magic's six-game winning streak. Atlanta outscored Orlando 62-48 in the paint and led 124-112 with 3:05 to play. Orlando put together an 11-0 scoring run and took a one-point lead with 3.8 seconds remaining, but Murray came through at the foul line.

#### Mitchell's Cavs silence Jazz

In Cleveland, Donovan Mitchell scored 23 points to lead the Cavaliers to a 122-99 victory over Utah in his first game against his former team since the Jazz traded him in the off-season. Cedi Osman scored 22 points off the bench and Jarrett Allen added 20 as seven Cleveland players scored in double figures on the way to their fourth straight win.

In Oklahoma City, Shai Gilgeous-Alexander drained a pull-up jump shot as time expired to lift the Thunder to a 123-121 victory over the Portland Trail Blazers, spoiling a milestone night for Damian Lillard. Gilgeous-Alexander led all scorers with 35 points. Lillard led Portland with 28 and overtook Hall of Famer Clyde Drexler as the leading scorer in Trail Blazers history. Drexler scored 18,040 points for the Blazers from 1983-95. Lillard came into the contest needing 21 to surpass him.

In Minneapolis, the Minnesota Timberwolves beat the disjointed Dallas Mavericks 116-106, with frustrated Mavs star Luka Dončić and coach Jason Kidd both ejected in the third quarter after arguing over calls. Phoenix star Chris Paul scored a season-high 28 points to lead the Suns to a 130-104 victory over the short-handed Los Angeles Lakers. The Lakers, with Anthony Davis already sidelined indefinitely with a foot injury, were without banged-up LeBron James, Russell Westbrook and Austin Reaves for the contest. — AFP

### Olympics chief Bach 'faces dilemma over Russian athletes'



International Olympic Committee (IOC) President Thomas Bach

**PARIS:** Olympics chief Thomas Bach faces "the toughest decision of his presidency" as he weighs whether Russian and Belarus athletes should be allowed to compete in the 2024 Games, a senior former IOC executive has told AFP. The signs coming from bodies such as the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) and the US Olympic and Paralympic Committee (USOPC) in the past fortnight suggest athletes from Russia and its ally Belarus should be permitted to try and qualify for the Games in Paris.

The International Olympic Committee has agreed to "explore" a proposal allowing athletes from those countries to compete in international events in Asia. Olympic authorities had banned them following Moscow's invasion of Ukraine and those federations who have allowed athletes from those countries to take part have insisted that they do not display national emblems.

The argument given was that the events' integrity would be damaged by the athletes competing. However, the IOC said this month that both the OCA and some International Federations (IFs) "on the Asian continent" believe "the reasons for the protective measures no longer exist". The softening of their attitude enraged Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, who called Bach.

Zelensky claimed 184 Ukrainian athletes have died since the Russian invasion and called for the "total isolation" of Russia and its ally Belarus. The IOC's former marketing chief Michael Payne—who was credited with overhauling the movement's brand and finances—said Bach faces a conundrum. "It is probably the toughest decision that Bach is facing in his presidency," Payne told AFP. "He and the IOC are caught between a rock and a hard place."

Another former IOC marketing executive, Terrence Burns, an American who has since played a role in five successful Olympic bid campaigns, said one problem was that the Ukraine war had gone on for much longer than expected. Burns said the change in the IOC's stance was not a "retreat or softening". "The IOC's very reason for existence is to use sport as a unifying platform—perhaps the only one—and to keep and hold the world together," he told AFP. "I see it as a pragmatic evolution of direction in an almost no-win situation. 'Principles and values matter, no matter how unpopular they be when applied.'"

#### 'Imprisonment or death'

Payne, who is Irish, said the IOC has to view the attitudes to the Ukraine conflict through a multi-cultural prism. "One can't look at this purely through the culture of an Anglo-Saxon viewpoint," he said. "There is no question Asian culture views what is happening slightly differently from the West. 'If you are a global body you cannot allow yourself to only look at something through only one cultural prism.'"

Payne argued that the "one size fits all" model of punishing nations was not practical. "As horrific as the Ukraine-Russia war is, it is not the only one going on the planet at the moment," he said. "If you are looking at it from an Asian perspective, how do some of the American adventures in the Middle East play out?" Bach had also spoken about the participation of Russian and Belarus athletes being politicized by some governments and called for a return "to sporting merits".

Burns said their case should be looked at more positively when taking into consideration by their respective governments. "Do a nation's citizens have a responsibility for their government's actions?" said Burns. He said while that might be the case "in a fully-functioning open democracy", but: "In a totalitarian/police state with little to zero ability to demonstrate, and by doing so risking imprisonment or death, I would argue 'no.'"

"That is where we are with the Russian conundrum." Burns says the awarding of the Olympic Games to places like China and Russia "virtually guarantees the mingling of sport and politics." "It is inevitable and to believe otherwise is nonsense," he said. "I think the IOC's charter-believe it or not, like it or not, respect it or not—is based on principles that differ from popular geopolitical rhetoric." — AFP

### Packers keep hope alive, defeat Rams

**LOS ANGELES:** The Green Bay Packers kept their slim NFL playoff hopes alive on Monday with a 24-12 victory over the reigning Super Bowl champion Los Angeles Rams. Packers quarterback Aaron Rodgers connected on 22 of 30 passes for 229 yards and a touchdown with one interception as Green Bay improved to 6-8. AJ Dillon brought the heat at chilly Lambeau Field in Green Bay, running for two touchdowns for the home side.

That included barreling through the line for a one-yard TD that gave the Packers a 17-6 lead in the third quarter. Rodgers then connected with Aaron Jones on a seven-yard touchdown. The Rams cut the deficit on Baker Mayfield's eight-yard touchdown pass to Tyler Higbee, but the Packers defense clamped down with an interception and a fifth sack of Mayfield. Mayfield, who was claimed off waivers this month after injuries to starter Matthew Stafford and backup John Wolford, completed 12 of 21 passes for 111 yards.

He had led the Rams to a shock win over Las Vegas last week in his first appearance for the team. But the Rams, already off to the worst start by any reigning Super Bowl champion, fell to 4-10 and were eliminated from playoff contention. With three games remaining, the Packers trail the Washington Commanders for the final NFC playoff spot.

#### Tagovailoa tops fan voting

Meanwhile, Miami Dolphins quarterback Tua Tagovailoa and Miami wide receiver Tyreek Hill led



GREEN BAY: Aaron Jones #33 of the Green Bay Packers avoids a tackle by Troy Hill #2 of the Los Angeles Rams at Lambeau Field on December 19, 2022. — AFP

all NFL players in fan voting for the 2023 Pro Bowl Games, the league announced on Monday. Tagovailoa, a Hawaiian signal-caller of Samoan heritage who has thrown for a career-best 3,238 yards this season, received 306,861 votes with Hill second overall on 293,679 after fan balloting concluded last Thursday.

Kansas City Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes, who leads the NFL with 4,496 passing yards and 35 touchdown passes, was third on 271,541 votes followed by Minnesota wide receiver Justin Jefferson on 264,653 and Chiefs tight end Travis Kelce on 248,279. Among all clubs, the San Francisco 49ers had the most votes received from

supporters followed in order by Minnesota, Miami, the NFL-best Philadelphia Eagles and Kansas City.

Roster selections for the American and National conferences are decided by a one-third each combination of fan, players and coaches voting. There will be 88 Pro Bowl players selected in all, with lineups announced on Wednesday. Former NFL quarterbacks and sibling rivals Eli and Peyton Manning will serve as head coaches, Peyton for the AFC and Eli for the NFC. Instead of an exhibition contest as in past years, the 2023 Pro Bowl Games will include skills competitions and a seven-on-seven flag football game on February 5 at Las Vegas. — AFP