

Established 1961

ISSUE NO: 18921
16 PAGES, 150 FILS

The First English Daily in the Arabian Gulf

JAMADA ALTHANI 1, 1444 AH
SUNDAY, DECEMBER 25, 2022



Christmas in Bethlehem reborn after pandemic

Festive air in West Bank town as tourists, pilgrims return



BETHLEHEM: Women dressed in traditional clothing pose for a picture by a Christmas tree in Manger Square outside the Church of the Nativity in this biblical city in the occupied West Bank on Dec 24, 2022. — AFP

BETHLEHEM: With a giant evergreen tree, colorful balloons in the streets and selfies in the Church of the Nativity, Christmas tourism has returned to Bethlehem after two years of COVID-related restrictions. Revered in Christian tradition as the birthplace of Christ (PBUH), the town of Bethlehem welcomes thousands of pilgrims and tourists for Christmas every year, a windfall that dried up over the past two years due to the coronavirus pandemic and travel restrictions.

Now with restrictions lifted in the Palestinian territories and the Zionist entity, where the closest international airport with access to Bethlehem is located, the southern West Bank town has taken on a festive air. Scouts marched with bagpipes as thousands of onlookers lining the streets held balloons and cotton candy.

The Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, Pierbattista Pizzaballa, greeted worshippers upon his arrival to the town, ahead of leading the annual Christmas eve procession at the Church of the Nativity. "Christmas is the town's celebration, and we put in a lot of time and effort to prepare for it," Bethlehem mayor Hanna Hanania told AFP. "We wanted to have international participation, and organized children's songs and shows with singers from France, South Africa and Malta," he added.

Tourists converged on the streets, shops and stone buildings of this Palestinian town, where Christians and Muslims live side by side. It was "wonderful to be

here", said Paul Wittenberger, a 40-year-old American from Michigan who was visiting with his father and siblings. "We've been here for three days and the weather's nice, we're lucky to be here out of the storm" sweeping the United States this weekend, he said.

To John Hughes, just "hanging out" in Bethlehem was meaningful. "It's a pretty cool city," the 22-year-old Canadian from Vancouver told AFP. For him, the birthplace of Christ (PBUH) was a "significant place - especially on Christmas". Michael Al-Siriani, who owns a pottery and ceramics workshop, was delighted to see tourists flocking back to the town after two difficult years, which had seen local hotels standing empty. "Things are much better now after the coronavirus pandemic," he said. "Besides, tourists have started to sleep in the city again."

The Palestinian Authority, which governs the Zionist-occupied West Bank, confirmed Siriani's feelings. "Since the beginning of this year, but more specifically since March, we have begun receiving pilgrims and tourists from all over the world," Palestinian tourism minister Rola Maayah told AFP. "Until now, we have received about 700,000 tourists from around the world," she said. Meanwhile on Saturday, pilgrims were deep in prayer in the Church of the Nativity while others took selfies wearing red and white Santa Claus caps, hours before the traditional midnight mass and its wishes for peace. —AFP

News in brief

400K tons of food wasted

KUWAIT: An estimated 400,000 tons of food is wasted in Kuwait annually, an average of 95 kilograms per person, the ministry of commerce and industry said. The ministry gave these statistics in a campaign on social media to spread awareness on preventing food waste.

82% of Kuwaitis lactose intolerant

KUWAIT: A study conducted by Kuwaiti internal medicine and gastroenterology expert Dr Wafa Al-Hashash revealed 82 percent of Kuwaitis - nearly 1,165,000 people - are lactose intolerant.

22 killed in Russia fire

MOSCOW: A fire erupted overnight in a private illegal nursing home in the Siberian city of Kemerovo, killing 22 people, Russia's investigative committee said Saturday. In a video released by the emergency services, a long row of emergency vehicles lined up outside the burning building, as firefighters tackled flames which sent plumes of smoke into the night sky. — AFP

16 Indian soldiers killed

NEW DELHI: Sixteen soldiers were killed in India's remote northeast Friday when the military truck transporting them skidded down a steep mountain slope and crashed, the army said. The accident occurred in the state of Sikkim while the truck carrying the soldiers was negotiating a treacherous turn in a mountainous area near the border with China. — AFP

'Bomb cyclone' leaves US in deep freeze

NEW YORK: A fearsome winter storm that pummeled the United States with blinding snow and powerful Arctic winds left 1.7 million customers without power Saturday as thousands of cancelled flights stranded travelers making last-minute dashes for Christmas. At least 13 storm-related deaths have been confirmed across six states as heavy snow, howling winds and dangerously frigid tem-

peratures kept much of the nation, including the normally temperate south, in a frozen grip for a third straight day.

The "bomb cyclone" winter storm, one of the fiercest in decades, had already forced the cancellation of more than 1,900 US flights on Saturday, a day after nearly 6,000 were scrapped, according to tracking website Flightaware.com. Cancellations left stranded travelers at airports including Atlanta, Chicago, Denver, Detroit and New York hoping for a pre-Christmas flight rebooking miracle.

Travelers like Zack Cuyler, whose flight to home to Houston on Dec 22 has been postponed then cancelled

Continued on Page 6

China city sees 500K cases of COVID daily

BEIJING: Half a million people in a single Chinese city are being infected with COVID-19 every day, a senior health official has said, in a rare and quickly censored acknowledgement that the country's wave of infections is not being reflected in official statistics. China this month has rapidly dismantled key pillars of its zero-COVID

strategy, doing away with snap lockdowns, lengthy quarantines and travel curbs in a jarring reversal of its hallmark containment strategy.

Cities across the country have struggled to cope as surging infections have emptied pharmacy shelves, filled hospital wards and appeared to cause backlogs at crematoriums and funeral homes. But the end of strict testing mandates has made caseloads virtually impossible to track, while authorities have narrowed the medical definition of a COVID death in a move experts have said will suppress the number of fatalities attributable to the virus.

Continued on Page 6

Sobhraj arrives in France after Nepal release

PARIS: French serial killer Charles Sobhraj, responsible for multiple murders in the 1970s across Asia, arrived in France on Saturday after almost 20

years in prison in Nepal. Nepal's top court ruled on Wednesday that he should be freed on health grounds and deported to France within 15 days. On Friday, he was released and put on a flight at Kathmandu airport to take him to Paris via Doha. While on the flight to Doha, he insisted to an AFP journalist that he was "innocent".

Sobhraj's life was chronicled in the series "The Serpent", co-produced by Netflix and the BBC, detailing how he terrorized the continent with a string of murders that targeted tourists. Sometimes

posing as a gem trader, he would befriend his victims - many of them Western backpackers on the 1970s hippie trail - before drugging, robbing and murdering them.

The court ordered Sobhraj, who had heart surgery in 2017, be released on health grounds after he served more than three-quarters of his sentence for murdering a US tourist and a Canadian in Nepal in the 1970s. "I feel great... I have a lot to do. I have to sue a lot of people. Including the state of Nepal."

Continued on Page 6



LOUISVILLE, Kentucky: Vehicles move along a highway in freezing temperatures on Dec 23, 2022. — AFP



CHONGQING, China: A man stands in front of a cordoned-off area where COVID-19 patients lie on hospital beds in the lobby of the Chongqing No. 5 People's Hospital on Dec 23, 2022. — AFP



9 780202 223841

Local

Media outlets on the frontline against illicit drugs, narcotics

Islamic Organization for Medical Sciences joins anti-narcotics fight

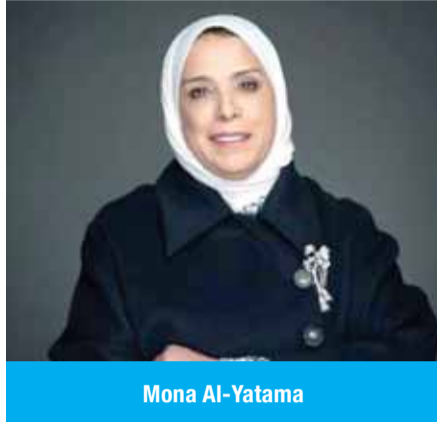
KUWAIT: Media nowadays where nations have become much more closer play a main role in promoting awareness of drastic issues emanating from addiction to drugs. The media outlets in modern times are a powerful means that affect communities; effective not only in combating narcotics but also in fighting all kinds of crimes and negative phenomena that threaten societies, said Dr Hussein Ibrahim, the information professor at Kuwait University in an interview with Kuwait News Agency (KUNA).

Ethics of the profession dictate promoting awareness of the hazards caused by all kinds of addiction, he said, noting that the addictive materials affect not only the addicted but also people close to him (her), namely the family. Digital media in particular can play a major role in this respect, he said, adding that this realm is the most effective means in fighting drugs due to their spread particularly among the youth, many of whom are prone to be addicted.

However, he cautioned that not all media outlets can play the required role in this regard, also underscoring the need that the involved staff must have sufficient education and knowledge to address the appropriate messages to the public. Dr. Ibrahim urged relevant associations and entities to employ experienced media personnel to form the appropriate messages against the narcotics, indicating that age categories



Dr Hussein Ibrahim



Mona Al-Yatama

should be taken into consideration in publicity.

The media is the frontline, after the family, in the education against drugs, Dr Ibrahim said without neglecting role of schools, colleges and sport clubs, cautioning that shopping malls are some of the places where teenagers mingle and may acquire some of the bad habits from each others. Mona Al-Yatama, a consultant for treating addiction, told KUNA that in the past, the media role at this level was largely limited however addiction was on a small scale too.

She advised against soliciting advice from the inexperienced personnel, considering that this issue is quite intricate. Al-Yatama advised stakeholders to abstain from addressing direct advices to the addicted for many tend to reply

negatively. Advising families and parents, he noted that the youngsters, when falling prey to drugs, tend to change friends, ask for money recurrently, manifest unstable mood, lose weight, fail to show up at work and school.

Anti-narcotics fight

Meanwhile, various state and independent entities recently expressed a desire to join the fight against narcotics, notorious effect of which on society cannot be denied. Amongst such bodies is the Kuwait-based Islamic Organization for Medical Sciences, which collaborated with the Health Ministry to become part of the anti-drugs campaign.

In this regard, chairman of the organization Dr Mohammad Al-Jarallah told



KUNA that they had been continuously coordinating with the ministry and other entities to promote healthy living and advise people against the use of illicit material. Last September, the organization had arranged the "mobilization of Islamic medical sciences against drugs" event in coordination with the Health and Interior Ministries, the Arab League and other entities.

He went on to say that the welfare and health of Muslim societies was a priority, affirming that drug use was a threat to address. The organization, he said, targets all sectors of society, providing social and moral guidance, in addition to medical advice. There are

several factors leading to the spread of narcotic use in society, said Al-Jarallah, noting that lack of family supervision and role models contributed to people slipping into the pit of illicit substances.

He called for toughening laws concerning the selling of drugs and those meaning harm to society, indicating that this was a national, regional, and international duty. The Islamic Organization for Medical Sciences was established in 1984 by later Amir His Highness Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. It focuses on unifying Islamic medical stances on various issues including treatment and preventative measures. — KUNA



Insurance Regulatory Unit launches 4-year strategy

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Insurance Regulatory Unit (IRU) launched Saturday its first strategy for the next four years, 2023-2024 to 2026-2027, with the aim of developing and regulating this sector. In a press statement, IRU head Mohammad Al-Otaibi said the new strategy comes in line with Kuwait's 2035 vision, in light of the unit's permanent efforts and keenness to verify the compliance of the facilities and entities under its regulation.

He added that the unit set an integrated strategy for the next four years aiming to benefit from the competitive elements and advantages in the insurance sector. It is also working to meet the aspirations of Kuwait's vision in the next stage by developing and organizing the areas of the insurance industry in the country, he noted. He elaborated that the strategy was formulated, in line



Mohammad Al-Otaibi

with the long-term planning methodology and the views of civil society, and the private sector and government agencies to evolve the local insurance sector and its tools in accordance with international best practices.

The strategy stresses deterrent control policies aimed at protecting the insured and beneficiaries, and raising awareness and insurance culture for those who deal with the insurance sector, he made clear. He said the strategy took into consideration Kuwaitization and empowerment of young people in jobs at the sector, in line with the country's development goals aiming to provide job opportunities to employ national cadres to the local labor market, reduce unemployment rates in the insurance sector and raise living standards. — KUNA



Ministry holds drugs awareness campaign

KUWAIT: The Public Relations Department at the Interior Ministry in cooperation with the anti-drug



department and moral guidance administration organized an awareness campaign under the instruction of the Council of Ministers to combat the spread of drugs and substance abuse - and to protect Kuwait youths and the society from the phenomenon. The lectures included "the role of anti-drug department in combating the spread of drugs and its prevention".

Kuwait workers union marks 55th anniversary

KUWAIT: Kuwait general union of workers marks on Sunday its 55th anniversary, an entity founded to defend workers' rights and promote women engagement in various labor sectors. The union was established on December 25, 1967, as an umbrella for 15 sub unions including workers in the public sector and labor union of the petroleum and petrochemical industries, with objectives focusing on rights of the workers' segment, in addition to issues such as women empowerment and engagement in public affairs, namely affairs concerning the working class.

Since inception, the union has continued to represent the workers, including expatriate laborers, cooperating with other authorities and entities to ensure their rights and encourage female citizens to be engaged in the federation's tasks and activities. Ahmad Al-Enezi, the chairperson, said in a statement that the federation, since its establishment, has defended "syndicate democracy," public liberties and engagement in national action, siding with nations subject to

injustice, namely the Palestinian people in their struggle against "the hateful occupation."

The federation has attached special concern for the labor education and training, he said, noting that the external workers' movement has been greatly hinging on the educated and enlightened elite. In line with this approach, the union established a special institute for labor education in 1972. A successful syndicate leadership largely hinges on intellectual action as complementary to the practical experience, Al-Enezi added.

The union published the magazine "Al-Amel" (the worker) in 1975 to aid in promoting its media message to the Arab world, Al-Enezi said, pointing out the magazine played a role in publicizing the struggle against the Iraqi occupation in the early 90s. Moreover, the union has devoted great attention to woman's affairs, forming in 1982 the worker woman committee to encourage "the other half of the society" to be engaged in the labor and syndicate realms.

Expatriate workers in Kuwait have constituted a significant part of the working force, he said. Aware of this, the union formed in 1992 a special bureau for the foreign workers' affairs. The union encompasses diverse sub entities, such as the union for workers in the ministry of health, the municipality, the ministry of education and other departments. —KUNA

Fire engulfs building in Salmiya; 1 injured

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Fire Force (KFF) squads managed to extinguish a fire in Salmiya and one person was transferred to the emergency room due to suffocation. "The central command administration sent fire squads from the Salmiya and Bidaa fire stations to the scene of the incident. Upon their arrival, the squad found that the fire in a five storey building started on the third floor. The firefighters evacuated people out of the building and started battling the blaze. One person was injured and was sent to emergency section," KFF's Public Relations Department said.



Scientific Center holds last phase of 'Kuwait Sciences Month'

KUWAIT: The Scientific Center is holding the fourth and last phase of "Kuwait Sciences Month" with diverse activities focusing on environmental awareness and biodiversity and children diabetes. Hamad Al-Yassin, the center acting director general, said in a statement on Saturday that the center holds, this week, "the exhibition of wilderness," in coordination with the London Natural History Museum, depicting children's attachment to animals and promoting bio-diversity.

The Scientific Advancement for Publishing, an affiliate of Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences, is displaying the book, "butterflies," in an interactive workshop, in coordination with Sabah Al-Ahmad Center for Giftedness and Creativity (SACGC), providing visitors with virtual reading and examination. Another activity will entertain visitors of video coverage of flamenco birds roaming Kuwait Bay. Kuwaiti divers will also have a stake,



Hamad Al-Yassin



Schedule of the 4th phase of "Kuwait Sciences Month".

shedding light on their clearing of the territorial waters. An electric car will be also put on display and the program will conclude with an educational activity against diabetes among children, due at the Avenues Mall (Dec 30-31). — KUNA

Local

Zain 'Diamond Sponsor' of 13th Kuwait Week in Egypt

Under the patronage of Prime Minister of Egypt Dr Mostafa Madbouly



Minister Ahmad Samir with Ambassador Al Ghanim, Ahmad Bahbahani and VIP guests at Zain's booth.



From the opening ceremony

KUWAIT: Zain, Kuwait's leading digital service provider, announced its diamond sponsorship of the 13th Kuwait Week in Egypt, organized by Jabriya Exhibition Group in Cairo. The event featured over 80 Kuwaiti and Egyptian organizations from across industries and came under the patronage of the Prime Minister of Egypt Dr Mostafa Madbouly.

The opening ceremony was attended by the Egyptian Minister of Trade and Industry Ahmad Samir, Kuwait Ambassador to Egypt and Permanent Delegate at the Arab League Ghanim Saqer Al Ghanim, Director of Jabriya Exhibition Group and the event's organizer Ahmad Bahbahani, as well as many ministers, businesspeople, investors, government officials, and representatives of private and public sectors from the two nations.

Zain's support to this distinguished event comes as part of its keenness - as a leading national com-

pany from the Kuwaiti private sector - to be present at the various projects that contribute to strengthening trade and economic relations between Kuwait and other nations. Such initiatives enrich the investments ecosystem within the most vital sectors and industries and contribute to achieving Kuwait's developmental goals.

Zain had a special booth at the event, through which it showcased its leading experience as a leader in the local and regional telecom sectors. The company also shed light on its goals and strategies to achieve its sustainability strategy, and how it is contributing to tackle climate change and reduce its own carbon footprint.

The 13th Kuwait Week in Egypt featured over 80 Kuwaiti and Egyptian organizations from across industries, including manufacturing, oil, investment, banking, healthcare, tourism, media, culture, tele-

com, and more. The event is considered the biggest Kuwaiti-Egyptian gathering ever, and has achieved tremendous success throughout its previous seasons, contributing to strengthening trade and economic collaborations between the two nations.

The exhibition aimed at shedding more light on the great advancements within Kuwait's economy and the nation's institutions, as well as increasing and supporting investment opportunities for Kuwaiti institutions in all sectors by offering the space for investors and businesspeople to discuss and pursue mutual projects. Zain is aware of the important role played by private sector companies to encourage such initiatives that contribute to supporting Kuwait's national economy. The company's participation at this event reflects its keenness in supporting the various developmental efforts on both local and regional levels.

In my view

Persons with disabilities; Law and convention



By Atyab Al-Shatti

Local@kuwaittimes.com

The number of persons with disabilities registered at the Public Authority for Persons with Disabilities in Kuwait is 59,818, while law No 8 for the year 2010 is subject to a number of amendments. Kuwait also signed and ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, while the domestic law defines a person with a disability as anyone who suffers from total or partial permanent ailments that lead to deficiencies in his physical, mental or sensory capabilities that may prevent him from securing the necessities of his life or participate fully and effectively in society on an equal basis with others.

On the other hand, the convention defines persons with disabilities as all those who suffer from long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments, which may prevent them, when dealing with various barriers, from participating fully and effectively in society on an equal basis with others. Here we note that law No 8 of 2010 expressed a narrow perception of disability, as it did not take into account the existence of barriers in society, and the law did not include a definition of discrimination on the basis of disability, as stipulated in article 2 of the convention.

The scope of its application was limited to citizens and children of Kuwaiti women married to non-Kuwaitis within the limits of health and educational care and employment rights stipulated in this law. The law granted the authority the right to decide the applicability of some of its provisions to people with disabilities who are non-Kuwaiti residents in Kuwait in accordance with the conditions and controls that it deems necessary after the approval of the supreme council, and this contradicts the text of paragraph B of article 3 of the convention, which makes non-discrimination a general principle of the convention.

The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities made a number of recommendations over the concluding observations of Kuwait, including the withdrawal of its reservations to articles 18 (1) (a) and 23 (2) of the convention, rescinding its interpretative declaration of article 12 (2) of the convention and taking legal measures to uphold the right to recognition as equal before the law, which means that all persons with disabilities, including those with mental and intellectual disabilities, have legal capacity on an equal basis with others in all walks of life.

It repealed its interpretative declarations on articles 19 (a) and 25 (a) of the convention, and reviewed policies and legislation, including law no. 8/2010 and law no. 21/2015, the civil code, and the code of civil procedure and the penal code, to ensure a complete shift to a human rights-based approach to the issue of disability, in accordance with the convention, and to take the necessary legal measures to ensure that national legislation, in particular law no. 8/2010, recognizes the change in the concept of disability as a result of persons with disabilities dealing with barriers without the full participation of persons with disabilities in society, and ensuring that national legislation addresses the rights of all persons with disabilities, including non-Kuwaiti persons with disabilities.

News in brief

Environment director to step down Dec 28

KUWAIT: Director of the Environment Public Authority Sheikh Abdullah Al-Ahmad assured he will respect the law and step down from his position on Dec 28 in accordance with the law, which stipulates that the position is for a maximum of two periods of four years each. He pointed out the environment protection law in Kuwait is considered exceptional in all its articles. Sheikh Abdullah also expressed his appreciation for all who worked under him during his tenure at the authority.

Customs participate in 18th Gold and Jewelry Exhibition

KUWAIT: Kuwait Customs participated in the Gold and Jewelry Exhibition's 18th edition. Local, regional, and international companies as well as the largest brands in the world participated in the event. The Customs provided all that is necessary to make the global event successful. Officials provided the necessary assistance needed in coordination with the Commerce and Interior ministries. The exhibition was attended by 165 participants representing a number of countries across the globe. The customs had a special section inside the exhibition to answer any questions, and to clarify the role of the customs in the global spectrum.

Window of nuke deal open, but not forever

TEHRAN: Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian has stated that his country is still ready to reach an agreement for reviving the 2015 nuclear deal, but warned that time is running short. "We have agreed with the EU High Representative Josep Borrell on taking the final steps for reaching an agreement," the Iranian News agency (IRNA) quoted Abdollahian as saying in a tweet today. He, however, warned that "the window for an agreement is open, but not forever". Abdollahian held talks with Borrell recently on the sidelines of the Amman-hosted Second Baghdad Conference. Following their meeting, the EU official said he would continue efforts to revive the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), also known as the nuclear deal, in line with the outcome of the Vienna talks between Iran and other signatories of the deal. Meanwhile, Kuwait reiterated its unwavering position on preservation of international security and peace and nuclear non-proliferation only out of its outright commitment to respecting international conventions. This came in a speech delivered by Kuwait's Permanent Representative at the UN Tareq AlBanai during the Tenth Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). He said the world has agreed that the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) is the keystone of the non-proliferation system, calling for ensuring the credibility of the NPT, especially amid the ongoing developments. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Supporters watch the Qatar 2022 World Cup football final match between Argentina and France, at an outdoor venue along the Sheikh Jaber causeway in Kuwait City. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Qatar WCup 'unites, boosts' Gulf nations

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: The Arabian Gulf Center for Studies and Research (CSRGULF) - the first think tank in Kuwait - revealed the 2022 Qatar World Cup was the main reason for the greatest solidarity among Gulf countries since the invasion of Kuwait. A study confirmed Gulf countries benefited more politically than economically from organizing the World Cup in Qatar.

The study revealed that Qatar's use of symbols of Gulf heritage during the World Cup contributed to strengthening feelings of belonging to the Gulf identity, noting that Qatar and the rest of GCC countries have benefited varyingly, where the World Cup provided a historic opportunity for leaders and people to overcome the sensitivity of a previous Gulf crisis.

According to a survey conducted by the center, there was an unexpected decrease in negative content on social media platforms among Gulf users compared to 2017, the beginning of the Gulf rift, which ended in 2020. Hosting the World Cup in Qatar represented a new turning point in Gulf relations, which witnessed remarkable improvement and harmony and created an unprecedented state of solidarity before and after the World Cup.

Also, the presence of Palestine flags and Islamic identity united the Arab peoples. This provides a greater activation of cooperation within the Gulf Cooperation Council system that almost disintegrated years ago. Despite the Western media campaign that criticized the organization of the World Cup in an Arab country and despite Western boycott attempts, the attendance statistics were surprising. The massive Arab presence boosted the championship's popularity, as some Western countries bet on a mass boycott from Western countries. On the other hand, the first round of the tournament appeared with a decent, civilized, and distinguished audience, according to FIFA.



DOHA: Morocco supporters sit in the tribunes during the Qatar 2022 World Cup third place play-off football match between Croatia and Morocco at Khalifa International Stadium in Doha. — AFP

The attendance exceeded all expectations with around 2.45 million fans. Meanwhile, violent incidents motivated by hatred, intolerance, or racism were largely absent or very limited, even though some Western countries had bet on this World Cup to fail, and tried to fabricate controversial topics and market them in the media to weaken the activities of the World Cup in Qatar.

On the other hand, posts on social media on different platforms gained high interaction rates, while sharing of clips of violent and hateful incidents such as people refusing to speak with Zionist media was almost absent. However, there were mixed reactions from Western fans to the ban on drinking alcohol and wearing rainbow signs during matches.

According to CSRGULF, the Qatar World Cup achieved a historic step in promoting Gulf culture, where it became among the most discussed topic on global media platforms. It also strengthens the GCC position as a promising destination on the map of tourism in the world by promoting culture differences; in addition, it gave the GCC market a chance as an investment opportunity, especially in Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

THE LEADING INDEPENDENT
DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF
ESTABLISHED 1961

Founder and Publisher
YOUSUF S. AL-ALYAN

Editor-in-Chief
ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-ALYAN

EDITORIAL : 24833199-24833358-24833432
ADVERTISING : 2483561677
FAX : 2483562071
CIRCULATION : 24833199 Extn. 353/3561
ACCOUNTS : 24833199 Extn. 125
COMMERCIAL : 24835618
P.O. Box 1301 Safat, 13014 Kuwait.
Email: info@kuwaittimes.com
Website: www.kuwaittimes.com

News in brief

Mol cautions motorists

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Interior has publicized a set of advices to motorists amid the current turbulent weather, seen across the country. The ministry urged drivers to follow security authorities' guidelines on using alternative routes and avoiding roads swamped with puddles and called on motorists to stay fairly apart from the vehicle in front of theirs and buckle up. It reminded parents to keep children on the back seat. Kuwait is currently witnessing an unstable weather with intermittent rainfall and low visibility in some regions.

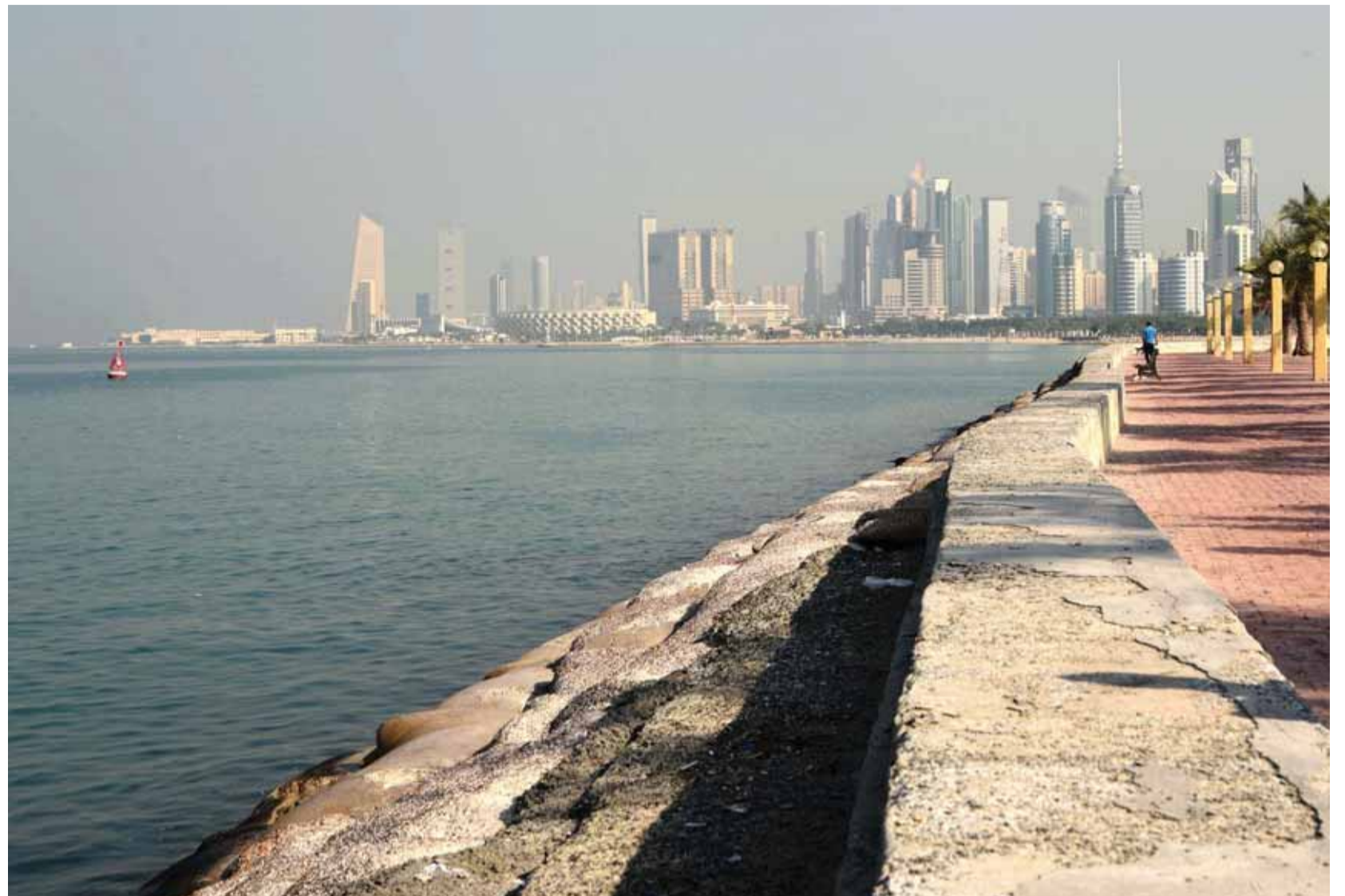
US Dept Counselor's call

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received a phone call from Counselor of the US Department of State Derek Chollet. During the call, they discussed frameworks for joint coordination between both sides regarding regional and international developments, a number of vital issues facing the region and ways to enhance cooperation.

Programs help ICT talents

MUSCAT: Vice President of Huawei Middle East and Central Asia Shunli Wang confirmed that development programs and initiatives in the field of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) provided by Huawei have helped numerous talented youngsters in the Middle East region. This was in Wang's statement to KUNA Thursday, on the sidelines of the ending ceremony of the Huawei ICT Competition for students of Middle Eastern universities, which began on Wednesday in the Omani capital of Muscat. Wang said that the global demand for connectivity is increasing steadily, underlining that empowering youngsters and equipping them with technological knowledge tools will play a major role in building a healthy ICT talent ecosystem while promoting "our countries' digital economies." He urged for investing in experts and leaders for the future who would be responsible for developing the ICT sector. — From KUNA

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Kuwait City's high rise buildings are seen from the beach in Kuwait. — Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh

Kuwait's Al-Salam launches aid campaign for Yemenis, Syrians

Charity helps fund fledgling enterprises in Africa, Yemen

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Al-Salam humanitarian charity has launched a campaign to assist Yemeni and Syrian internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees that will continue until February 11. Speaking to KUNA, charity's chairman Nabil Al-Oun said this year's campaign targets immediately about 2000 camps inside Syria and about 800 others in Yemen, as these areas are suffering a sharp shortage of basic needs in winter.

Of the 8-year campaign goals is to meet the needs of refugees in the camps and the stricken areas in Syria and Yemen, he said, indicating that the new campaign titled "Kuwait Trucks" will reach

its goal by covering the needs of refugees there. The campaign includes more than 500 trucks carrying supplies of winter and basic materials including heating and foodstuffs as well as others, he said.

Meanwhile, Dhari Al-Buajjan, director general of society, said the society has been backing and empowering the needy all over the world by setting up some sustainable projects. The UN recent statistics on the tragic situation in the above-mentioned areas show the serious current situation on families and individual who are displaced and afflicted by wars and disasters, he stated.

Funding enterprises

Meanwhile, a Kuwait-based charity has given out micro loans to help get nascent enterprises off the ground in Africa and Yemen, touching the lives of some 39,000 people, it said. Impoverished families across swathes of Africa have stood to gain from such initiatives, Kuwait Direct Aid Society chief Dr Abdullah Al-Sumait told KUNA, pointing out that the vast majority of the beneficiaries have been



Kuwait-based charity helps fund fledgling enterprises in Africa, Yemen.

women. Loans given out by the Kuwaiti charity towards such endeavors over the course of the last seven years were worth nearly KD 5 million (\$16 million), he added. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Kuwait's Al-Salam humanitarian charity officials pose for a group photo after launching a campaign to assist Yemeni and Syrian internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees. — KUNA photos

'With our health we create our future'

KUWAIT: A lecture by Eijabiya Union Volunteer Group titled 'With our health we create our future' was organized in Kuwait Social Association headquarters in Adaliya area. The lecture was given by a number of students of the Social Sciences College at Kuwait University including Amina Al-Shammari, Haya Al-Assaf and Nour Al-Azmi with the participation of director of Ahmadi medical area Dr Ahmad Al-Shatti.

Team Leader, Narjas Al-Shatti, started by welcoming attendees and talked about the goal of lecture -which is spreading cultural awareness in society for health cities. Al-Shatti then introduced the students, who talked about the factors concerning medical areas and smart cities, as well as their importance and impact on sustainable development.

The attendees listened to the history of medical areas. Moreover, they listened to information about spreading medical awareness in all levels. The lecture was also attended by a member of the National Assembly Dr Khalil Abul, Ghanem Al-Sanad (vice director of Aesthetic Agriculture at the Public Authority for Agricultural and Fishery) as well as members of Kuwait Social Association. At the end of the lecture, team leader Al-Shatti thanked the



head of the Kuwait Social Association Abdullah Al-Radhwan for hosting the lecture. All participants were honored.



Scan & Subscribe
KD 20 a year

For Individuals Only



Scan Now

Kuwait Times
Established 1961
The First English Daily in the Arabian Gulf



Tel: 24833199 Ext: 356-355-353



Six more bodies recovered of Thai warship

US court orders Marines to allow Sikhs with turbans

Page 6

Page 7



KHERSON: A woman reacts next to an injured man after Russian shelling to Ukrainian city of Kherson on December 24, 2022, where eight were killed and 20 injured. —AFP

Zelensky blasts Russian 'terror'

UN's human rights chief warns campaign has inflicted 'extreme hardship' on Ukrainians

KHERSON: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on Saturday blasted Russian "terror" after shelling on Christmas Eve left at least eight dead and 20 injured in Kherson city, which Kyiv's forces recaptured in November. Despite Russia's retreat from the southern port city, Kherson remains within reach of Moscow's weaponry and under constant threat. "Kherson. In the morning, on Saturday, on the eve of Christmas, in the central part of the city," Zelensky said on Telegram, publishing images of the attack and calling it "killing for the sake of intimidation and pleasure."

"It is the real life of Ukraine... The world must see and understand what absolute evil we are fighting against," Zelensky said. On the day marking 10 months

since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, a string of shelling rained down around a busy market, where a fire erupted. AFP journalists at the scene saw several bodies lying on the ground in the street, including a man killed in his car. Another man, whose car had been blown up, had severe head injuries. "At least eight civilians were killed and 17 were injured," the Kherson region's prosecutor's office said on social media.

"Several people were hospitalised with serious injuries," it added. Cars also caught fire in a residential area of the city after shelling, the emergency services said. The fires were put out after 40 minutes but the number of dead and injured was still being "established", they said on Telegram.

Kherson toll

Russian President Vladimir Putin in September announced the annexation of four regions in the east and south of Ukraine, including Kherson, after Moscow proxies held referendums there—denounced as a sham by Kyiv and the West.

His troops never fully controlled any of the territories and last month were forced to retreat from the Kherson region after a months-long Ukrainian counteroffensive. But Kherson has been regularly bombarded ever since, with a heavy toll on civilians and the power supply to the city.

On Friday alone the Kherson region was targeted by 74 Russian strikes, leaving five dead and 17 injured,

according to regional authorities. On December 15, Russian shelling killed two people including a Red Cross worker in Kherson and completely cut electricity as temperatures plunged below freezing.

Much of Ukraine is struggling without heat or power after Moscow started targeting electricity and water systems nearly two months ago. The UN's human rights chief has warned the campaign has inflicted "extreme hardship" on Ukrainians this winter, and also decried likely war crimes by Russian forces.

Zelensky visited the White House this week to meet with US President Joe Biden and argue for a \$44.9 billion emergency military and economic aid package for Ukraine. —AFP

Journalist who nabbed 'The Serpent'

NEW DELHI: Journalist Joseph Nathan went for food at a Kathmandu casino one night in 2003 but ended up with the scoop of his life: French serial killer Charles Sobhraj was there playing baccarat.

His resulting article in the Himalayan Times led to the arrest of Sobhraj and his incarceration—which ended on Friday—for just two of the smooth-talking killer's many murders across Asia in the 1970s.

"He was like an old man. You wouldn't give him a second look. He looked harmless... It was sheer luck that I recognised him. I think it was karma," Nathan told AFP in an interview.

Ending up in Thailand in the mid-1970s after a youth of travel and crime, Sobhraj was linked to more

than 20 murders, many of them young foreigners on the Asian hippie trail.

Justice eventually caught up with him in India in 1976 when he was arrested and imprisoned in Delhi's Tihar jail, where he escaped after drugging prison guards but was recaptured.

Upon release, he moved to France but travelled to Nepal in 2003, apparently believing that authorities there had nothing on him, Nathan said.

However, he was still wanted for murdering two backpackers in 1975 and it was his bad luck that the Indian journalist happened to recognise him, even without his trademark beret.

"The casino manager was a friend of mine and we watched him together on the security camera," said Nathan, editorial adviser at the Himalayan Times and one of its founders.

"I posted a photographer around the clock at his hotel, which was a cheap hotel. Every night he was playing baccarat at the casino."

In the meantime Nathan dug around and managed to secure from the hotel manager a copy of Sobhraj's

passport. He had checked in under an alias.

"On the 12th or 13th day I followed him into the loo and asked him if he was Charles Sobhraj," Nathan told AFP.

"He said: 'Is that a Bollywood actor?' Then I knew I had him. The same night I wrote the story... and the following day he was picked up at the casino (by police)."

Sobhraj, now 78 and with heart problems, according to his lawyer, was released from prison on Friday to be deported back to France. Nathan said he thinks the decision is fair.

"It was time he was released as he has already served his sentence in accordance with Nepal's law," he said.

However, like other protagonists, Nathan is unhappy with the hit Netflix/BBC series "The Serpent" about Sobhraj's life, not least for changing the name of his newspaper.

"It was the greatest scoop," he said. "But Netflix changed the name of our newspaper in its mini-series. We contemplated suing them." —AFP



DOHA: French serial killer Charles Sobhraj looks at his mobile phone in transit at Doha airport to France, on Dec 23, 2022. —AFP

Paris shooter who killed three admits being 'racist'

PARIS: A 69-year-old white French gunman who opened fire at a Kurdish cultural centre in Paris killing three people told investigators he was racist, a source close to the case said Saturday. The shots at the centre and a nearby hairdressing salon shortly before midday on Friday caused panic in the trendy 10th district of the French capital, a bustling area of shops and restaurants that is home to a large Kurdish population.

Three others were wounded in the attack that the gunman attributed to his being "racist", the source said. He was found with a case loaded with a box of at least 25 cartridges and "two or three loaded magazines", the source added.

The weapon was a "much-used" US Army Colt 1911 pistol. French President Emmanuel Macron said "the Kurds in France have been the target of an odious attack in the heart of Paris" and ordered the Paris police chief to meet with leaders of the Kurdish community on Saturday. The gunman, who has a history of racist violence, initially targeted the Kurdish cultural centre before entering a hairdressing salon where he was arrested.

Of the three wounded people, one was being given intensive care in hospital and two were treated for serious injuries. According to the Kurdish Democratic Council in France (CDK-F), the dead included one woman and two men.

'He is crazy'

Emine Kara was a leader of the Kurdish Women's Movement in France, the organisation's spokesman Agit Polat said. Her claim for political asylum in France had been rejected. The other victims were Abdulrahman Kizil and Mir Perwer, a political refugee and artist, according to the CDK-F. A police source confirmed that Kara and Kizil were among the victims.

The Kurdish community centre, called Centre Ahmet Kaya, is used by a charity that organises concerts and exhibitions, and helps the



PARIS: Supporters and members of the Kurdish community take part in a demonstration a day after a gunman opened fire at a Kurdish cultural centre killing three people, at The Place de la Republique in Paris. —AFP

Kurdish diaspora in the Paris region. The Kurdish community is due to hold a demonstration in Paris on Saturday afternoon.

Within hours of the attack, Kurdish protesters clashed with police, who used tear gas in an attempt to disperse them as they tried to break through a police cordon deployed to protect Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin, who had arrived at the scene.

Demonstrators threw objects at police while voicing fury over an attack they saw as deliberate, and which they said French security services had done too little to prevent. Several cars parked in the area as well as police vehicles had their windows smashed as protesters threw bricks.

The shooter—named as William M. in the French media—is a gun enthusiast with a history of weapons offences who had been released on bail earlier this month. The retired train driver was convicted for armed violence in 2016 by a court in the multicultural Seine-Saint-Denis suburb of Paris, but appealed. A year later he was convicted for illegally possessing a firearm. Last year, he was charged with racist violence after allegedly stabbing migrants and slashing their tents with a sword in a park in eastern Paris. —AFP





7 days left

Hurry, last day to deposit is December 31, 2022

1,500,000

1804080 | #KanzBurgan



International

'Rambo' Rabuka returns as Fiji's prime minister

New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern congratulates Rabuka

SUVA: Former military commander Sitiveni Rabuka was on Saturday confirmed as Fiji's prime minister, after accusing the outgoing government of stoking "fear and chaos" to derail his return to power. Rabuka replaces the imposing Frank Bainimarama, who toppled the government in a 2006 coup and became prime minister a year later.

The 74-year-old Rabuka said he felt "humbled" as he made his way out of parliament to be sworn in by the country's president. The two-time coup leader and former prime minister-nicknamed "Rambo"-narrowly triumphed over Bainimarama by 28 votes to 27 in a secret ballot held in parliament, speaker Naiqama Lalabalavu announced.

A smiling Bainimarama appeared to accept defeat as he told reporters after the vote: "This is democracy". A chorus of cars honked in celebration as they drove past the parliamentary building in the capital Suva. New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern congratulated Rabuka in a statement.

"We strongly value Fiji as a close friend and partner as we progress our shared priorities for the region," she said. Fiji is one of the most populous and prosperous Pacific island nations, and has grown closer to China under Bainimarama.

Rabuka has signalled a willingness to shift away from Beijing in favour of traditional allies Australia and New Zealand. The military had been deployed on the streets of Suva as Rabuka and Bainimarama raced to cobble together a coalition government following a deadlocked general election.

Citing unsubstantiated reports of ethnic violence, Bainimarama said the military was needed to maintain "law and order". But Rabuka—who served as prime minister between 1992 and 1999 — said the government was "sowing fear and chaos" and "trying to set the nation alight along racial lines".

'Climate of fear'

Many Fijians feared the government's claims of ethnic violence—and the subsequent military deployment—were a pretext for a "creeping coup" designed to keep Rabuka in opposition. While not an outright autocrat, Bainimarama's government had frequently used the legal system to sideline opponents, silence critics and muzzle the media.

Police last week summoned Rabuka for questioning after he asked the military to step in and help resolve alleged "anomalies" in preliminary election results. "The way this government has operated, we've been talking about a climate of fear," he said at the time.

"This is how they instil that fear," Rabuka led two military coups in 1987, which aimed to increase the political influence of Indigenous Fijians, who make up about 60 percent of the country's 900,000 population.

For this reason Rabuka has long been viewed with suspicion by the country's sizable ethnic Indian minority, who were further marginalised in the aftermath. Incoming deputy prime minister Biman Prasad, a close political ally, has helped to soften Rabuka's image.

Rabuka, a former Fijian rugby international, locked in a coalition deal to form a government

The court noted that the Marines exempted men with razor bumps, a skin condition, from shaving, allowed women to maintain their hairstyles and largely permitted tattoos—"a quintessential expression of individual identity."

"If the need to develop unit cohesion during recruit training can accommodate some external indicia of individuality, then whatever line is drawn cannot turn on whether those indicia are prevalent in society or instead reflect the faith practice of a minority," said the decision written by Judge Patricia Millett, who was nominated by former president Barack Obama.

The court also pointed out that regulations on beards date only from 1976, with hirsute Marines posing no issue from the Revolutionary War to the modern period. While military practices can evolve, any claim of "inflexible necessity" cannot "completely ignore past practice," the decision said.

The court issued a preliminary injunction to allow two of the recruits, Milaap Singh Chahal and Jaskirat Singh, to begin training with their articles of faith while a district court more fully weighs the case.

The appeals court also backed the merits of the case of the third plaintiff, Aekash Singh, but said he appears to have delayed enlistment. Giselle Klapper, a senior staff attorney at the Sikh Coalition advocacy group, hailed the ruling, saying it meant that "faithful Sikhs who are called to serve our country can now also do so in the US Marine Corps." —AFP

she added. In Chicago, Burke Patten of Night Ministry, a nonprofit dedicated to helping the homeless, said: "We've been handing out cold weather gear, including coats, hats, gloves, thermal underwear, blankets and sleeping bags, along with hand and foot warmers".

The National Weather Service forecast early Saturday that dangerously cold conditions would continue throughout the central and eastern United States over the weekend before temperatures returned to more normal seasonal weather next week. In Canada some were taking the biting cold in their stride, including stoic last-minute holiday shoppers in downtown Toronto. Jennifer Campbell, of Caledon, Ontario, told AFP: "I think every few years we get some big storms and we just adjust. We are Canadians, that's the way we do it."

Canadian provinces have nonetheless issued severe weather warnings. Hundreds of thousands were left without power in Ontario and Quebec, while many flights were cancelled at airports in Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal. In the US, transportation departments in several plains states reported near-zero visibility whiteouts, ice-covered roads and blizzard conditions, and strongly urged residents to stay home. Drivers were being warned not to take to the roads — even as the nation reached what is usually its busiest time of year for travel.

By Friday afternoon, the storm had acquired the status of "bomb cyclone" after air pressure dropped precipitously over 24 hours. Bomb cyclones produce heavy rain or snow. They can also cause flooding at coasts, and generate hurricane-force wind. Meteorologist Kelsey McEwen in Toronto tweeted that waves of up to eight meters have been reported in Lake Erie, while in Ohio's Fairport Harbor, winds gusted to 120 km per hour, the NWS tweeted.

Rich Maliawco, lead forecaster for the NWS in Glasgow, Montana, where wind chill plunged to -60 Fahrenheit overnight, warned the weather was extremely dangerous. "With these kinds of wind chills, if you're not wearing those warm layers... unprotected skin can get frostbite in less than five minutes," he said. Conditions were cold enough for people to post videos of themselves carrying out the "boiling water challenge", where boiling water is thrown into the air and instantly freezes. —AFP



SUVA: Fiji's President Ratu Willame Katoivere (R) talks to newly elected Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka (2nd R) and cabinet ministers after an oath-taking ceremony in the capital city Suva on December 24, 2022. —AFP

on Friday afternoon, after successfully wooing the kingmaker SODELPA party. SODELPA had earlier chosen Rabuka's People's Alliance over Bainimarama's Fiji First, but that first vote was ruled invalid by the country's election supervisor. Rabuka could have a difficult time keeping

his three-party coalition on the same page. They hold 29 seats in the 55-seat legislature, yet Rabuka only secured 28 votes—suggesting one member broke ranks in the secret ballot. Fiji has been upended by four coups in the past 35 years. —AFP

US court orders Marines to allow Sikhs with turbans

WASHINGTON: A US court on Friday ordered the Marines to let Sikh recruits maintain beards and wear turbans, rejecting the elite unit's contention that permitting religious exemptions would reduce cohesion. The US Army, Navy, Air Force and Coast Guard—along with many foreign militaries—all already accommodate the religious requirements of Sikhism, the faith born five centuries ago in South Asia that forbids men from cutting hair or trimming beards and requires turbans.

But the Marine Corps, responding to three Sikhs who passed tests to enlist last year, refused to make exemptions to grooming rules during 13 weeks of basic training and during potential periods of combat, although the three could maintain their beards and turbans at other times.

The Marine leadership argued that recruits needed to be "stripped of their individuality" as part of a "psychological transformation" toward shared sacrifice, according to the ruling. A three-judge bench of the US Court of Appeals in Washington disagreed, saying the Marines did not present any argument that beards and turbans would affect safety or physically impede training.

Iran to retry rapper reportedly on death row

TEHRAN: Iran's supreme court has ordered the retrial of a Kurdish rapper who was reportedly sentenced to death over protests sparked by Mahsa Amini's death, the judiciary said Saturday. Protests have gripped Iran since the September 16 death of Amini, a 22-year-old Iranian of Kurdish origin, after her arrest in Tehran for an alleged breach of the Islamic republic's dress code for women.

Iran this month executed two people in connection with the protests. It has sentenced another 11 people to death. One of them, Mahan Sadrat, secured a retrial earlier this week. On Saturday the judiciary's Mizan Online website said the Kurdish rapper Saman Seydi—also known as Saman Yasin—and another protester, Mohammad Ghobadlou, would be retried.

Hours later, however, Mizan issued a new statement from the supreme court that said Ghobadlou's appeal had been rejected and confirmed his sentence. It did not elaborate. Rights groups outside Iran have said Seydi and Ghobadlou had been facing the death penalty based on accusations of involvement in the protests.

Mizan did not specify the verdicts, but confirmed both were charged with offences punishable by death. Ghobadlou was charged in Tehran with "corruption on earth" for "attacking police with a car, which resulted in the death of one officer and the injury of five others".

Seydi was accused of "moharebeh", which means "enmity against God". Rights groups said the rapper had been accused of firing a pistol into the air three times during the demonstrations.

Saturday's developments come three days after Mizan said the supreme court had ordered the retrial of Sadrat, who had been sentenced to death after being convicted of capital offences during the protests.

Iran has arrested thousands of people over the unrest in which the authorities say more than 200 people have been killed, including dozens of security personnel. Foreign-based rights groups say the security forces have killed more than 450 people in a crackdown on the movement.

The Islamic republic has already executed two young men over the protests. Majidreza Rahnavard, 23, was hanged in public on December 12 after being sentenced to death by a court in second city Mashhad for killing two members of the security forces with a knife.

Four days earlier, Mohsen Shekari, also 23, was executed for wounding a member of the security forces. Campaigners say a dozen other defendants are charged with offences that could also see them receive the death penalty. —AFP

'Bomb cyclone' leaves US in...

Continued from Page 1

twice this week already, were "pretty steamed" about the chaos. The 35-year-old, who lives in New York City, now hopes to reach his family by Christmas day. "I'm just glad I'll get to see my family for Christmas," he told AFP.

In hard-hit New York state, Governor Kathy Hochul deployed the National Guard to Erie County and its main city Buffalo, where authorities said emergency services have essentially collapsed in the face of extreme blizzard conditions. "There are still likely hundreds of people stuck in vehicles," Erie County Executive Mark Poloncarz said early Saturday, adding that the National Guard was being sent "right into the city of Buffalo for these life-threatening rescues."

Road ice and white-out conditions also led to the closure of some of the nation's busiest transport routes, including the cross-country Interstate 70, parts of which were temporarily shut down in Colorado and Kansas. Over 200 million Americans were under weather warnings Friday as wind chills sent temperatures plunging to as low as -48 Celsius, according to the National Weather Service (NWS).

While the number of people under severe weather warnings dropped substantially Saturday, authorities were still warning about lethal conditions and urging residents to remain indoors. The biting cold is an immediate concern for the more than 1.7 million electricity customers who were without power, according to tracker poweroutage.us. Some cities, including in the state of North Carolina, began implementing rolling blackouts due to high power demand, in some cases leaving people unable to safely heat their homes.

In El Paso, Texas, desperate migrants who had crossed from Mexico huddled for warmth in churches, schools and a civic center, Rosa Falcon, a schoolteacher and volunteer told AFP. But some still chose to stay outside in frigid temperatures because they feared attention from immigration authorities,

Sobhraj arrives in France after...

Continued from Page 1

Sobhraj told AFP on Friday onboard the plane. Asked if he thought he had been wrongly described as a serial killer, the 78-year-old said: "Yes, yes."

He landed in the French capital on Saturday morning, an AFP reporter confirmed. On arrival at the Charles de Gaulle airport in Paris, he was taken away by border police for extra "identity checks", according to an airport source. The source said he had left the airport, evading a media scrum waiting in the arrivals hall. His French lawyer, Isabelle Coutant-Peyre, told reporters at the airport she was "very happy" he had been released, adding that he had been "unjustly sentenced in a fabricated case with false documents by the Nepali police". "It's a scandal, he is presented as a serial killer, which is completely false".

China city sees 500K cases of...

Continued from Page 1

A news outlet operated by the ruling Communist Party in Qingdao on Friday reported the municipal health chief as saying that the eastern city was seeing "between 490,000 and 530,000" new COVID cases a day. The coastal city of around 10 million people was "in a period of rapid transmission ahead of an approaching peak", Bo Tao reportedly said, adding that the infection rate would accelerate by another 10 percent over the weekend.

The report was shared by several other news outlets but appeared to have been edited by Saturday morning to remove the case figures. China's National Health Commission said Saturday that 4,103 new domestic infections were recorded nationwide the previous day, with no new deaths. In Shandong, the

Born in Saigon to an Indian father and a Vietnamese mother who later married a Frenchman, Sobhraj embarked on an international life of crime and ended up in Thailand in 1975. Suave and sophisticated, he was implicated in the murder of a young American woman, whose body was found on a beach wearing a bikini. Nicknamed the "bikini killer", Sobhraj was eventually linked to more than 20 murders.

He was arrested in India in 1976 and ultimately spent 21 years in jail there, with a brief break in 1986 when he drugged prison guards and escaped. He was recaptured in the Indian coastal state of Goa. Accused of at least 15 murders across 10 countries, by the time he left Indian jails, his alleged other crimes had fallen under the statute of limitations in Thailand. Released in 1997, Sobhraj lived in Paris, giving paid interviews to journalists, but went back to Nepal in 2003.

He was spotted in a casino playing baccarat by journalist Joseph Nathan, one of the founders of the Himalayan Times newspaper, and arrested. "He looked harmless... It was sheer luck that I recognized him," Nathan told AFP on Thursday. "I think it was karma." —AFP

province where Qingdao is located, authorities officially logged just 31 new domestic cases.

China's government keeps a tight leash on the country's media, with legions of online censors on hand to scrub out content deemed politically sensitive. Most government-run publications have downplayed the severity of the country's exit wave, instead depicting the policy reversal as logical and controlled. But some outlets have hinted at shortages of medicine and hospitals under strain, though estimates of actual case numbers remain rare.

The government of eastern Jiangxi province said in a Friday social media post that 80 percent of its population — equivalent to around 36 million people — would be infected by March. More than 18,000 COVID patients had been admitted to major medical institutions in the province in the two weeks up to Thursday, including nearly 500 severe cases but no deaths, the statement said.

There were signs that medical resources remained under stress as the weekend began, as some regional health officials warned that the worst was yet to come. —AFP

International

Myanmar's Suu Kyi to hear final verdicts in junta trial

Final arguments for her trial on five remaining corruption charges are set for Monday

YANGON: A Myanmar junta court could hand down the final verdicts in an 18-month trial of Aung San Suu Kyi next week, closing the latest chapter in the military's decades-long battle with the democracy figurehead. The Nobel laureate, 77, has already been found guilty on 14 charges ranging from corruption to illegally importing walkie-talkies and breaching the official secrets act. Since her trial began she has been seen only once in grainy state media photos from a bare courtroom—and has been reliant on lawyers to relay messages to the world.

Many in Myanmar's democracy struggle she has dominated for decades have abandoned her core principle of non-violence, with "People's Defence Forces" clashing regularly with the military across the country. The nation has been in turmoil since generals seized power last year and deposed Suu Kyi's civilian government. Final arguments for her trial on five remaining corruption charges are set for Monday and verdicts are expected shortly after. The court could add up to 75 years in prison to the 26 she has already been sentenced to, concluding a closed-door trial that rights groups say is a sham.

It is "unlikely" the junta will press any more charges, said Richard Horsey of the International Crisis Group. The military wants the focus next year to be on celebrations for the 75th anniversary of independence from

Britain, "and on elections it is likely to hold mid-year", he told AFP.

But after the polls, any new military regime "could perhaps approach Suu Kyi and try to use such negotiations to try to divide the opposition", Horsey added. Analyst Soe Myint Aung said there is "always a possibility of an unexpected pardon and release" for Suu Kyi once her trial is finished. "The military regime def-



'There is nothing impossible in politics'

initely sees a role for Suu Kyi in reducing societal tensions and stopping the armed resistance," he said. Whether the still-popular ex-leader would play ball in exchange for a pardon or freedom is a matter of intense speculation.

"There is nothing impossible in politics," junta spokesman Zaw Min Tun told AFP in July when asked if the military would consider talks with Suu Kyi to find a way out of the crisis unleashed by its coup.

'Sham' elections

Suu Kyi is currently imprisoned in a compound in the capital Naypyidaw, close to the courthouse where her trial is being held, and has been deprived of her household staff and pet dog Taichido.

"I seriously doubt that the junta would release her from prison, at least until the 2023 election is over," said Htwe Htwe Thein, an associate professor at Curtin University in Australia. Horsey said it was also "unlikely" the generals would allow her to return to her family's colonial-era lakeside mansion in Yangon, where she spent around 15 years under house arrest after winning elections in 1990.

During that time she regularly gave speeches to crowds on the other side of her garden wall, becoming a global democracy icon for her peaceful resistance to authoritarian military rule. The United States has said any elections held by the current junta would be a "sham".

Russia—a major ally and arms supplier—has said it supports the military's plan to hold polls next year. Analysts and diplomatic sources say neighbours China, India and Thailand may also give their blessing. But many of Myanmar's myriad political parties could boycott the polls rather than compete on the junta's terms and risk retaliation from anti-coup fighters. — AFP



NAYPYIDAW: Civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi (L) and detained president Win Myint (R) during their first court appearance in Naypyidaw, since the military detained them in a coup. A Myanmar junta court could hand down the final verdicts in an 18-month trial of Aung San Suu Kyi next week. — AFP



KIBUMBA: Officials of the East African Regional Force (EACRF) meet with the M23 rebels during the handover ceremony in Kibumba, eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. — AFP

DR Congo rebels meet to hand over strategic town

GOMA: DR Congo's M23 rebels on Friday met soldiers from a regional military force to hand over a strategic frontline position near the major eastern city of Goma, an AFP reporter saw. The Tutsi-led group has conquered swaths of territory in North Kivu province in recent months and advance to within a few dozen kilometres of Goma.

Under heavy international pressure to lay down arms, the M23 pledged earlier on Friday to leave its position in the town of Kibumba, about 20 kilometres (12 miles) from Goma. Kibumba lies on the current frontline between the M23 and Congolese troops, on a key highway leading to the regional hub of more than one million people.

According to an AFP journalist, dozens of rebels arrived at Kibumba's main municipal building in the late morning to participate in the handover ceremony with soldiers from the recently deployed East African Community military force.

M23 representative John Nzenze told reporters he hoped the Democratic Republic of Congo's government would seize the opportunity to make peace-and

warned that the rebels would respond to provocation. "If we continue to be attacked, do you think we will cross our arms?" Nzenze said. Kenyan Jeff Nyagah, the force commander, said that the handover was a "positive indicator" for eastern DRC. He added that M23 fighters are meant to withdraw to positions around Mount Sabyinyo, which demarcates the border between Congo, Uganda and Rwanda.

But the current deployment of M23 fighters is unclear. AFP was unable to confirm whether the rebels left Kibumba after the ceremony, for example.

The DRC has repeatedly accused its smaller central African neighbour Rwanda of backing the M23 group, although the latter denies the charge.

The United States and France, among other Western countries, nevertheless agree with the DRC's assessment. A report by independent experts for the United Nations Security Council seen by AFP on Thursday also pointed to Rwanda's alleged support for the M23.

Kigali deployed troops to fight alongside the rebels, and supplied them with weapons, ammunition and uniforms, according to the report. Several diplomatic initiatives have been launched in a bid to ease tensions.

Talks between the DRC and Rwanda in the Angolan capital Luanda unlocked a truce agreement on November 23. Under the deal, the M23 was meant to lay down arms, then pull back from occupied territories. The rebels remained in their positions after the scheduled date for their withdrawal, however. — AFP



KUALA LUMPUR: File photo shows, people inspect the damage after a landslide in Batang Kali, Selangor. — AFP

Malaysia campsite landslide search ends with 31 dead

KUALA LUMPUR: Rescuers have called off the search for bodies after a massive, predawn landslide blanketed a campsite north of Malaysia's capital killing 31 people, officials said on Saturday. According to police, 92 people, including dozens of children, were sleeping at the unlicensed campsite at an organic farm in Batang Kali, Selangor state on December 16 when tonnes of soil and mud thundered down a hill.

All of those killed were Malaysian nationals, including 11 children, while 61 campers were rescued. "We found the last body, that of a boy," senior rescue official Hafisham Mohamad Noor told AFP. "We will end

our search and rescue operations." Many of the victims were families enjoying year-end holidays.

Two of the deceased, a mother and her toddler daughter, were found hugging each other, while a man was uncovered still clutching his dog. Nearly 700 personnel from different government agencies and the emergency services, backed by police tracker dogs and earthmoving machines, trawled through mud and debris to search for survivors and bodies.

The farm did not have a licence to operate a campsite, according to authorities. Landslides are common in Malaysia after heavy rains that regularly punctuate the end of the year. However, no heavy rain was recorded in the Batang Kali area on the night of the landslide. In March, four people were killed after a landslide buried their homes in a Kuala Lumpur suburb. In one of the deadliest such incidents, a mudslide in 1993 brought on by heavy rain caused a 12-storey residential building outside the capital to collapse, killing 48 people. — AFP

Trump should never hold office again: US insurrection report

WASHINGTON: Donald Trump should never be allowed to run for public office again after inciting an insurrection, lawmakers investigating last year's assault on the US Capitol concluded in their watershed final report. The recommendation led a list of proposals from the 845-page document aimed at ensuring there is no repeat of the deadly riot the ex-president is accused of orchestrating in a failed bid to cling to power after losing the 2020 election.

"Our country has come too far to allow a defeated president to turn himself into a successful tyrant by upending our democratic institutions (and) fomenting violence," the panel's chairman Bennie Thompson said in an introduction to the report. The document urges lawmakers to legislate so that Trump and others who "engaged in insurrection" can be barred from holding office - "whether federal or state, civilian or military." Trump has announced he intends to run for the White House again in 2024. The report was the culmination of 18 months of

Six more bodies recovered of Thai warship

BANGKOK: Six more bodies have been recovered from the sea after a Thai warship went down in the Gulf of Thailand six days ago, the country's navy said Saturday. The HTMS Sukhothai sank late Sunday roughly 37 kilometres (22 miles) off Thailand's south-eastern coast, with a massive rescue operation managing to pull 76 crew alive from the waves.

Seventeen members of the 105-strong crew are still missing. "Today we have recovered a total of six bodies," the navy said in a statement. There is "preliminary evidence" that the bodies recovered Saturday were from the Sukhothai's crew, the statement said, adding they would be subject to DNA testing.

Six other bodies retrieved in the past week have been identified as Sukhothai crew members. Helicopters, unmanned surveillance aircraft and warships have been combing the sea in hope of finding survivors.

The search also "received support from various local agencies", volunteers and the private sector, the navy said. On Tuesday, Admiral Chonlathis Navanugraha called the incident "one of the most severe tragedies" in the navy's history.

The vessel—a corvette, among the smallest of military warships—ran into trouble after its electronics system was damaged. The Sukhothai was commissioned in 1987 and built in the United States by the now-defunct Tacoma Boatbuilding Company, according to the US Naval Institute. — AFP



PRACHUAP KHIRI KHAN: Relatives of missing sailors wait for news at Bang Saphan Pier in Prachuap Khiri Khan, during the search operation for survivors after the Thai naval vessel HTMS Sukhothai capsized and sank off the coast on December 18. — AFP

work by congressional investigators who interviewed more than 1,000 witnesses to establish the primary cause of the attack, which they blamed squarely on the Republican billionaire. The committee also recommended reforms of election law, a federal crackdown on extremist groups and the designation of Congress's certification of presidential elections as a "national special security event" on a par with the annual State of the Union address.

It was the panel's final act before it is disbanded as the House of Representatives switches to Republican control in January. The party has opposed the investigation at every step and the switch in the balance of power raises doubts over the possibility of most of the recommendations ever being taken up. Trump posted a statement on his Truth Social platform misrepresenting the role of Democratic leadership in security preparations ahead of the attack, and decrying a "witch hunt", as he does with most investigations accusing him of misconduct. The report was long on detail but short on new revelations as the committee's seven Democrats and two rebel Republicans had already set out their case against Trump over eight blockbuster public hearings in the summer. In their final public meeting Monday, the panel referred the tycoon to the Department of Justice on four potential charges - obstruction of an official proceeding, conspiracy to defraud the United States, making false statements to the government and inciting insurrection.—AFP

News in brief

Death penalty abolished

LUSAKA: Zambian rights activists Saturday hailed as a "huge milestone" a decision to scrap two British colonial-era laws: The death penalty and making criticism of the country's leader a punishable offence. President Hakainde Hichilema, whose party was in opposition for over two decades, had promised that he would scrap the laws if elected to the top job. "President Hakainde Hichilema has assented to the penal code of 2022 abolishing the imposition of the death penalty and the offence of criminal defamation of the president, which has been on the Zambian statute books since (the) pre-independence era," presidential spokesman Anthony Bwalya said in a statement on Friday. Human rights activist Brebner Changala said the decision was a "huge milestone in the removal of colonial laws that do not fit in the democratic dispensation of the country". The executive director of the Centre for Policy Dialogue Caroline Katotobwe said Zambians would now speak freely.

Two rangers killed

GOMA: Two rangers have been killed and another wounded by suspected militiamen in the world famous Virunga National Park in DR Congo's volatile east, authorities said on Saturday. A huge expanse on the border with Uganda and Rwanda, Virunga is the oldest nature reserve in Africa and is renowned worldwide as a sanctuary for rare species, including mountain gorillas. But it also serves as a hide-out for armed groups active in the region for years. The rangers were patrolling in the central sector of the park when they were attacked, the Congolese Institute for the Conservation of Nature (ICCN) said. The dead rangers were aged 29 and 31. A third was injured and taken to hospital.

Plane crash-lands on beach

LOS ANGELES: A plane crash on the golden sands of California's Santa Monica beach that killed one man was being investigated by authorities on Friday. Footage shows the Cessna 150 violently flipping over as it made an emergency landing Thursday just meters (yards) from the world-famous Santa Monica pier, a popular tourist spot. Beachgoers looked on helplessly as the pilot appeared to try to land on the packed sand at the edge of the water before the light plane somersaulted as it hit the waves. Emergency workers raced to free the pilot and passenger. The 95-year-old passenger, Rex Minter, who was mayor of Santa Monica in the 1960s, died. No information was given on the condition of the pilot. Federal Aviation Administration spokesman Ian Gregor said an investigation was under way. — AFP

Business

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 25, 2022

Fed's preferred inflation gauge eases while US spending stalls

Data welcome news to households grappling with soaring costs

WASHINGTON: A key indicator of US inflation edged down in November, according to government data released Friday, in welcome news to households grappling with soaring costs while spending slowed. This extends a downward inflation trend in recent months as officials try to cool the world's biggest economy, though it is unlikely to bring quick relief from a forceful campaign to rein in prices.

The US Federal Reserve's preferred inflation measure, the personal consumption expenditures (PCE) price index, rose 5.5 percent last month from November 2021, Commerce Department data showed. This was below the October level but remains significantly higher than policymakers' target of two percent inflation.

The central bank focuses on the PCE price index as it reflects actual spending of consumers, including shifts to less expensive items, unlike the better-known consumer price index. From October to November, the PCE price index increased 0.1 percent, boosted by food prices, likely pointing to further tightening by the Fed. But an easing of inflation pressures overall has boosted consumer sentiment in December, rising five percent from last month, according to a separate survey by the University of Michigan.

Although "sentiment remains relatively downbeat," consumers' extremely negative attitudes have improved, said survey director Joanne Hsu in a statement.

AEF seeks to unify policies to boost trade in Arab region

BEIRUT: The head of the Arab Economic Forum (AEF) Sameer Nass has underlined the importance of unifying strategic cooperation between Arab countries to improve growth of their economies by forming a combined and developed vision to boost trade. "There is a need for the development of land, marine and air transportation networks to benefit from necessary resources in the Arab region, as well as to increase product trade," Nass said, underscoring the importance of unifying economic policies to boost trade and investments as well as stimulate economic development in the Arab region.

He stressed the importance of the 28th edition of the Arab Economic Forum in Beirut, in which Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati and Secretary General of the Arab League Ahmed Aboul Gheit attended, in addition to around 350 business and financial leaders. The 28th session of the Arab Economic Forum, jointly organized by the Union of Arab Chambers, the Al-Iktissad Wal-Aamal Group and the Federation of Lebanese Chambers, in coop-

eration with the League of Arab States, was held on Dec 22, 2022 in Beirut under the auspices of Mikati. The forum addressed the prospects for the Lebanese economy after the agreement on the demarcation of Lebanese maritime borders, and what could result from it in providing the appropriate environment for the exploration, extraction and marketing of oil and gas and attracting the investments required to develop this sector and supply chains associated with it.

This constitutes a qualitative leap in Lebanon's climate, business and investment opportunities, and governance frameworks. It is expected that these developments will reflect positively on Lebanese-Arab and international economic relations and lead to pumping new investments in the productive sectors and contribute to the activation and development of services and rebuilding and restructuring of banks and companies in general.

The aim of the forum was to consolidate Arab efforts to realize complete integration in order to achieve economic growth and societal wellbeing by developing economic systems and pushing them towards creating higher growth rates in tune with the region's sustainable development goals. "The AEF has not and will not spare any effort in providing all forms of support to member states, supporting the paths of recovery and economic reform in our various Arab countries, and contributing to

erating with the League of Arab States, was held on Dec 22, 2022 in Beirut under the auspices of Mikati. The forum addressed the prospects for the Lebanese economy after the agreement on the demarcation of Lebanese maritime borders, and what could result from it in providing the appropriate environment for the exploration, extraction and marketing of oil and gas and attracting the investments required to develop this sector and supply chains associated with it.

This constitutes a qualitative leap in Lebanon's climate, business and investment opportunities, and governance frameworks. It is expected that these developments will reflect positively on Lebanese-Arab and international economic relations and lead to pumping new investments in the productive sectors and contribute to the activation and development of services and rebuilding and restructuring of banks and companies in general.

The aim of the forum was to consolidate Arab efforts to realize complete integration in order to achieve economic growth and societal wellbeing by developing economic systems and pushing them towards creating higher growth rates in tune with the region's sustainable development goals. "The AEF has not and will not spare any effort in providing all forms of support to member states, supporting the paths of recovery and economic reform in our various Arab countries, and contributing to

erating with the League of Arab States, was held on Dec 22, 2022 in Beirut under the auspices of Mikati. The forum addressed the prospects for the Lebanese economy after the agreement on the demarcation of Lebanese maritime borders, and what could result from it in providing the appropriate environment for the exploration, extraction and marketing of oil and gas and attracting the investments required to develop this sector and supply chains associated with it.

Two years after EU exit, UK business feels Brexit blues

LONDON: Two years after Britain's departure from the European Union, bosses of UK businesses are reeling from the cost of Brexit, including some who voted to cut ties with Brussels. "It's cost, cost, cost with no benefit," noted Adrian Hanrahan, chief executive of a small chemicals company, Robinson Brothers, based in central England and for which the EU remains a key market.

The problem is not the customs duties, largely eliminated by the post-Brexit free trade agreement between London and Brussels, but rather a mountain of new regulatory paperwork. "We've added probably 25 percent extra now on our administration costs just to cope with the changing paperwork... of getting stuff in from the EU and out of the EU," Hanrahan told AFP.

The company employs 265 people, producing chemicals used by various sectors featuring food, electronics, pharmaceutical and other firms. Robinson Brothers exports around 70 percent of its products, of which more than half go to the EU.

'Nothing to help them'

The company is far from alone in struggling with the consequences of Brexit, with 56 percent of UK businesses facing difficulties adapting to new trading rules, the British Chambers of Commerce said Wednesday. "Businesses feel they are banging their heads against a brick wall as nothing has been done to help them," said BCC director general Shevaun Haviland.

"The longer the current problems go unchecked, the more EU traders go elsewhere, and the more damage is done." The government of Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has said it believes the UK economy has entered a recession on fallout from sky-high



EU workers

inflation. While it repeatedly blames this on Russia's invasion of Ukraine fuelling energy prices, analysts claim Brexit has also pushed up costs.

"There's good causal evidence that the depreciation of sterling immediately following (the 2016 vote for) Brexit led to higher inflation, specifically for goods we import a lot of," London School of Economics researcher Nikhil Datta told AFP. He added that new trade deals, such as the one struck with Australia, "have been tiny". Bank of England monetary policy committee member Swati Dhingra told MPs last month that Brexit was to blame for "a much bigger slowdown in trade in the UK compared to the rest of the world".

According to King's College London economist Jonathan Portes, "there is a reasonable degree of consensus that Brexit has reduced UK trade by perhaps 10 to 15 percent compared to a no-Brexit scenario". The government's own economic forecasting body, the OBR, estimates that Brexit will reduce the country's long-term output by around four percent.



remain stubbornly high. Excluding the volatile food and energy segments, the PCE price index rose 4.7 percent from a year ago, down from October but still far off the Fed's goal. The inflation data is "encouraging," but Klachkin cautioned the figures "don't signal a meaningful pullback in consumer

spending" yet. Consumer price increases may be expected to retreat next year, but should still "keep the central bank in an aggressive policy stance," he said. "The recession isn't here today but one will arrive next year," he added. —AFP



Sameer Nass

advancing the process of stability and growth, which will be reflected through the people with goodness and prosperity," Nass said.

He mentioned that he will work hard to find scientific and sustainable solutions to the challenges the private sector in the Arab world is facing, as well as to raise growth levels to achieve sustainable economy in the Arab world. The forum discussed in a lecture titled 'Lebanon, the Road to Oil', the newest updates in investment climate in the Arab world as well as after the redrawing of the border in south Lebanon.

World Bank okays \$500m aid for Egypt

CAIRO: The World Bank (WB) endorsed \$500 million for the Egyptian government to back its efforts to expand social protection and safety, said International Cooperation Rania Al-Mashat Friday. The funding is to support the measures taken by the State to back the low-income groups in the face of international economic repercussions and external shocks as well as reduce their impacts on citizens eligible for cash support, the Ministry added in a statement.

The new phase of cooperation with the WB in the social protection project "Takaful and Karama", solidarity and dignity supports the existing collaboration with the bank to raise investment in human capital, which is a top priority of the Egyptian state to stimulate comprehensive and sustainable growth and support the lowest-income groups, the statement indicated. The new program is part of the soft development funds agreed upon this year by multilateral and bilateral development partners that are estimated at \$13.7 billion, including \$11.1 billion for the country's various development sectors, it said. —KUNA

Indian economy grew 8.7% in last fiscal year: IMF

MUMBAI: India's real gross domestic product grew by 8.7 percent in the 2021-2022 fiscal year, boosting its total output above pre-coronavirus levels despite global macroeconomic headwinds, the International Monetary Fund said.

India, Asia's third-largest economy and the world's fifth largest, rebounded from the deep pandemic-induced downturn on the back of fiscal measures to address high prices and monetary policy tightening to address elevated inflation, the Washington-based lender said in a report on Friday.

"Economic headwinds include inflation pressures, tighter global financial conditions, the fallout from the war in Ukraine and associated sanctions on Russia, and significantly slower growth in China and advanced economies," the fund said. "Growth has continued this fiscal year, supported by a recovery in the labor market and increasing credit to the private sector."

In October, the IMF cut its global economic growth forecast for next year, amid the Ukraine conflict, broadening inflation pressures and a slowdown in China, the world's second-largest economy. The fund maintained its global economic estimate for this year at 3.2 percent but downgraded next year's forecast to 2.7 percent - 0.2 percentage points lower than its July forecast. There is a 25 percent probability that growth could fall below 2 percent next year, the IMF said in its World Economic Outlook report at the time. —Agencies

Business

US Congress green-lights \$1.7tn in annual govt spending package

Plan includes \$45 billion in emergency Ukraine aid

WASHINGTON: US lawmakers approved a sweeping annual spending package Friday that includes \$45 billion in Ukraine aid and reforms to election law aimed at avoiding a repeat of last year's assault on the Capitol. The \$1.7 trillion blueprint passed by senators on Thursday was rubber-stamped by the House of Representatives just hours ahead of a midnight deadline to keep the federal government open—although a damaging holiday season shutdown was never a serious threat.

"This bill is further proof that Republicans and Democrats can come together to deliver for the American people, and I'm looking forward to continued bipartisan progress in the year ahead," President Joe Biden said in a statement welcoming the vote.

Failure to get the package to Biden's desk would have been an embarrassment, days after his Ukrainian counterpart Volodymyr Zelensky visited the White House to argue for the \$44.9 billion emergency military and economic aid proposed as part of the legislation.

But it ultimately enjoyed a smooth passage through the lower chamber, where Democrats have a slim majority for a few more days, until the Republican-led 118th Congress opens for business. Nine Republicans crossed the aisle to help the package cross the line by 225 votes to 201, while one Democrat-New York progressive Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez-voted no. "In this legislation, we proudly deliver another consequential round of security, economic and humanitarian aid," departing House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said in what is almost certainly her last speech as the nation's top lawmaker. "And it really is not-as the president of Ukraine said the other night-about charity. It's about security, it's about working together."

The giant bill keeps the lights on until next October, paying for almost every aspect of the day-to-day management of the federal government, from law enforcement to printing money. But it also features add-ons less obviously connected to funding, such as a reform tightening a 19th century law to make clear that vice presidents do not have the power to overturn elections.

'Season of giving'

Defeated president Donald Trump exploited the loose wording of the text to argue that his deputy Mike Pence could halt the transfer of power after the 2020 election, amid bogus claims of voter fraud.

Pence rebuffed Trump's entreaties and the billionaire Republican's vilification of his vice president was the cornerstone of his speech that allegedly incited a mob to storm the US Capitol on January 6, 2021. Trump, who has launched a run to regain the White House despite being the focus of several criminal and civil investigations, released a statement Thursday describing the package as a "monstrosity... crammed with left-wing disasters."

House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy had also urged his party to vote no, arguing that his side would have more sway in negotiating the size and scope of federal spending when they wrest the lower chamber from the Democrats in early January.

The House was half empty Friday, with more than 200 representatives using an absentee voting provision, strictly meant only for those with Covid-19, to stay home and cast their ballots by proxy.

Republicans there in person lined up to bemoan the lack of time they had been given to study the bill—it was finalized just three days ago—and the "woke" provisions it contained, such as funding for LGBTQ



WASHINGTON: US Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, Democrat of New York, speaks about the government spending bill, during a press conference in the Senate Studio of the US Capitol in Washington, DC. — AFP

projects. There were rumors circulating among congressional staffers and media that McCarthy would use his so-called "magic minute" privilege to spend hours lambasting the bill.

McCarthy held up a budget vote in November of last year with a rambling address lasting a record eight-and-a-half hours. But he took pity Friday on colleagues trying to get home amid a massive winter storm, reining in his criticism of the legislation to just 25 minutes.

"We are two days away from Christmas," he said. "The Christmas season is the season of giving, but in Congress it appears the season of giving will line the pockets of Democrats' special interests and stick the hard-working Americans with the tab." — AFP

US spending bill gives Boeing reprieve on latest MAX models

WASHINGTON: Boeing has won a reprieve from a regulatory deadline for the new versions of the 737 MAX under the \$1.7 trillion spending bill approved by Congress on Friday. The bill, which cleared its final legislative hurdle Friday with passage in the House of Representatives, requires Boeing to make some enhancements to the jets, but allows the Federal Aviation Administration to approve both the 737 MAX 7 and 737 MAX 10 without mandating an overhaul of the crew alerting systems.

Boeing Chief Executive Dave Calhoun had said in July that the company might scrap the MAX 10 if it had to meet the changed standard. More recently, Boeing officials have expressed confidence Congress would provide relief. The company declined comment Friday.

A December 2020 law enacted by the US Congress required the FAA to certify planes only if equipped with a flight crew alerting system designed to help pilots prioritize warnings and advisories activated during flight. The 2020 law enacted to enhance safety after two MAX crashes led to a combined 346 fatalities—gave the FAA until December 27, 2022 to certify MAX models already under review without having to meet the new requirements.

Boeing has argued the benefit of the MAX's "commonality" with earlier versions of the jets, which enabled pilots experienced in those earlier versions to easily transition to newer models.

Under a measure introduced by Senator Maria Cantwell of Washington state, a Democrat, Boeing must retrofit MAX planes currently flying to improve the safety sensor system with features currently being designed for the MAX 10. The bill requires the enhancements to be installed on other MAX models within three years of the date of the FAA certification of the MAX 10. —AFP

Egypt invests in new regions, tourism infrastructure

CAIRO: Egypt has ambitious plans for sustainable growth by investing heavily to improve its infrastructure and develop new tourism areas. CEO of the Egyptian Tourism Promotion Board (ETPB) Amr El-Kady said in an interview with a German Friday.

The CEO of the ETPB referred to the setting up an incentive program for airlines and financially supporting every airline flying to an Egyptian airport, noting that if tour operators include Egypt in their marketing campaigns, then the Egyptian side would take over part of the costs, the magazine said.

El-Kady pointed to FAM trips, press trips and working with influencers are also part of the campaign as the authority is investing in the tourism infrastructure, reported fvw TravelTalk magazine. El-Kady highlighted expansion of the road and motorway network and the establishment of tracks for high-speed trains to connect the Nile region and the Red Sea with the Mediterranean, adding that construction works should be completed within the upcoming three years, underlining investments in renewable energies, according to the magazine.

The official said holidaymakers would be able to travel much faster, for example, to the pyramids of Giza, saying that a lot of money is being directed to the infrastructure sector in Egypt as the high-speed trains alone cost \$1 billion, it said. El-Kady highlighted importance of focusing more on medical, religious and ecotourism, added the magazine. — Agencies

GCC markets edge lower

KUWAIT: GCC stock markets recorded negative performances mostly as global uncertainty and energy price volatility continued to weigh on expectations. Oil prices remained exposed to more volatility after Russia announced it would take measures to counter the European price cap. The measures could impact supply levels. At the same time, concerns about global demand could weigh on energy prices over the longer term. The Dubai stock market extended decline as it continues to trade sideways on a larger scale with relatively large price movements. The main index could maintain this course during the remaining days of this year. The Abu Dhabi stock market recorded additional price corrections following last week's surge.

However, the main index could find some support and see a reversal thanks to the improving oil prices. The Qatari stock market closed the week with limited price movements but remained exposed to new price corrections that could extend previous losses. The volatility in energy markets in particular remains a risk factor for local equities. The Saudi stock market maintained a stable performance this week while oil prices recovered. As such, energy prices could lead local equities' direction in the next trading session. Overall, the stock market could find some support in strong local fundamentals. The stock market in Oman saw a tumultuous week as traders moved to secure their gains. However, sentiment remains optimistic as shown by Thursday's surge.

In this regard, the main index could record another bout of gains next week. The Egyptian stock market closed the week on a decrease and could see a negative performance next week after the central bank aggressively raised its interest rates.—AFP



TOKYO: People look at clothing for sale in the popular shopping area of Ueno in Tokyo on December 23, 2022. — AFP

Japan inflation at 3.7% in November

TOKYO: Prices in Japan rose at their fastest pace since 1981 in November, data showed Friday, fuelled in part by higher energy costs. Core consumer prices, which exclude volatile fresh food costs, climbed 3.7 percent last month compared to a year earlier, data released by the internal affairs ministry showed. Prices jumped the most for processed food items and were also higher for electricity and durable goods like air conditioners.

The November figure is well below the sky-high levels that have sparked concern in the United States, Britain and elsewhere, but far exceeds the Bank of Japan's long-term goal of 2.0 percent.

Even excluding fresh food and energy, the index was up 2.8 percent. "Although low by international standards, Japanese consumer price inflation at three percent to four percent is high enough to feel uncomfortable with stagnant wage growth," wrote Sarah Tan, economist at Moody's Analytics, in a note. The headline core consumer price index (CPI) has risen consistently since the beginning of the year, putting pressure on the Bank of Japan to tweak its longstanding monetary easing policies.

The US Federal Reserve and other central banks have sharply hiked interest rates this year to tackle

inflation. But Japan, which since the 1990s has swung between periods of sluggish inflation and deflation, has gone against the grain and continues to keep interest rates at ultra-low levels as it tries to kickstart its economy.

The Bank of Japan says it sees the recent price increases as temporary and that there is no reason to change course yet. The starkly different approaches taken by the BoJ and the Fed have driven down the value of the yen against the dollar this year from about 115 yen per dollar in March to as low as 151 yen. The currency has recovered somewhat, helped by government interventions. This week, the Japanese central bank delivered a shock tweak to its ultra-easy monetary policy, prompting the yen to strengthen rapidly.

While the adjustment falls short of a rate hike, analysts said it could help arrest the yen's declining value. Koya Miyamae, senior economist at SMBC Nikko Securities, said prices were likely to continue rising in the short term. "The core CPI rose in November due to rises in food prices and gas. The index will likely rise further, nearing or potentially rising above four percent in December," he told AFP.

"But core CPI will remain above two percent next year, while the pace of the rise in wages is not catching up with inflation," he added. Most analysts expect price rises in Japan to peak around the end of the year or early 2023. "Inflation will likely average four percent in December given delayed pass-through of higher producer prices," Tan said. "It is expected to decline in 2023 as policy support kicks in," with global inflation also moderating as commodity prices temper and supply chain disruptions are fixed. — AFP



KYIV: Ukrainian farmers have struggled with a lack of manpower and trucks, unexploded munitions and mines in their fields.

Ukraine estimates grain harvest fell around 40%

KYIV: Ukraine estimates its grain harvest fell by around 40 percent year on year due to the Russian invasion, a representative for the country's industry told AFP Friday. "We expect a grain harvest of 65-66 million tonnes" by the end of the year, the head of the Ukrainian Grain Association Sergiy Ivashchenko said, following a record harvest of 106 million tons last year.

"The main reason is the war," which immediately led to fuel shortages and hindered sowing, Ivashchenko said. Ukraine is a major exporter but Russia's invasion in late February stopped shipments

Saudi Ports to build \$27m logistics park at Dammam port

DAMMAM: The Saudi Ports Authority, popularly better known as Mawani, is building a logistics park and re-export zone at Dammam's King Abdulaziz Port with an investment of more than \$27 million as the Arab world's largest economy focuses on diversification.

The unit, covering an area of more than 100,000 square meters, will have a handling capacity of 300,000 TEUs (20-foot equivalent units) and will support inland freight transportation between the central and eastern regions and the rest of the kingdom, the Saudi Press Agency reported on Friday.

The park will be built in partnership with Medlog, the logistics arm of the Mediterranean Shipping Company. "The latest deal runs parallel with the goals of the National Transport and Logistics Strategy to position Saudi Arabia as a global logistics hub connecting three major continents besides fitting perfectly with Mawani's pivotal role in building a booming and sustainable maritime sector ... while fulfilling key strategic outcomes, such as expanding the number of world-class logistics parks and re-export centers to 30," the SPA said. The agreement comes as Saudi Arabia continues to diversify away from oil with new projects spanning sectors including tourism and hospitality, infrastructure, real estate, and entertainment. Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth fund, the Public Investment Fund, is injecting billions of dollars into the economy to develop projects and spur growth. "Thanks to its proximity to Jubail Industrial City and major urban centers in the eastern region, the logistics facility is primarily-located to deliver competitive and cost-efficient services to the local market," the SPA said.

In the last two years, Mawani had struck partnerships worth more than 2 billion riyals with national and international giants to establish six modern logistics parks that have the potential of creating more than 6,000 direct and indirect job opportunities, according to SPA. In October, Mawani signed two contracts worth 642 million riyals to deepen and build berths at the Jeddah Islamic Port. It is also partnering with DP World to build a "port-centric" logistics park at the Jeddah Islamic Port with a total investment of more than 500m riyals. — Agencies

and blocked 20 million tonnes of grain in Ukraine's ports.

"Ports were blocked... this broke a cycle" by cutting farmers' source of income, Ivashchenko said.

"That, and of course the war, meant farmers did not have enough money to buy fertilisers, their yield decreased," he explained. A landmark deal signed in July and brokered by the UN and Turkey established a safe shipping corridor for exports to resume.

"The occupation of several regions, fighting in the fields, and the destruction of infrastructure" still crippled production, Ivashchenko said. "We usually sowed grains over about 25 million hectares. This year we only harvested over 18-19 million hectares," he said. The landmark deal was extended for 120 days in November after intense negotiations with Russia, which temporarily pulled out of the agreement. Overall, 580 ships transporting around 15 million tons of cereals have left Ukrainian ports since then, according to the country's authorities. — AFP

Business

Kamco Invest hosts workshop on global market challenges, inflation

Exclusive workshop held in collaboration with IQAM Invest

KUWAIT: Kamco Invest, a regional non-banking independent financial powerhouse with one of the largest AUMs in the region, hosted a joint exclusive workshop in collaboration with IQAM Invest, a modern fund manufacturer with more than 30 years of market experience, to share their views on the changing paradigms in economic policy and the threat of persistent inflation. The workshop was attended by qualified investors including institutional, family offices and high net worth individuals.

Key topics discussed during the workshop included the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, Russian-Ukrainian war, the monetary and fiscal measures taken by the central banks of key developed markets to combat inflation, and the ability to navigate the tumultuous market environment in the face of uncertainty.

Faisal Al-Othman, Director of International Investment Services at Kamco Invest gave the opening speech at the event, welcoming Dr Ulrich Neugebauer, Speaker of the board and Head of Quantitative Investments at Deka Investment and Chairman of IQAM, and Dr Thomas Steinberger, Managing Director and Chief investment Officer of IQAM Invest.

Al-Othman gave a summary of Kamco Invest's achievements through its various pillars, Asset Management, Investment Banking, and brokerage. He described the important role that Kamco plays in providing the necessary tools and opportunities to navigate the current and upcoming environment through clearly defined objectives that are met through careful opportunity selection.

Al-Othman noted that the firm's inhouse managed strategies are clearly ranked at the top of its peers when compared on both a short-term and long-term basis. The firm's mutual fund business has among the longest track records in the region and its real estate transactions offer the best-in-

class opportunity sets for clients to consider. While Investment Banking is clearly one of the most active across debt and equity capital markets regionally.

Kamco Invest firmly relies on its key partners globally to provide solutions to its clients. It not only sources the best opportunity sets but also relies on the most pertinent information to assist clients in making the soundest investment decisions in the face of such challenges experience in the markets today. This workshop is a part of Kamco Invest's initiative in sharing this knowledge with investors regionally.

Al-Othman introduced the team from IQAM who then went on to deliver their comprehensive presentation. Dr Neugebauer provided a brief overview on Deka Investment and IQAM Invest, which are members of Deka Group, the central financial solutions provider for German savings bank. They provide all quantitative solutions required by Deka Group and its various subsidiaries and investors catering mostly to institutional clients of the Group on a customized solutions basis. Deka Group manages approximately \$370 billion on behalf of its clients and various stakeholders.

Dr Steinberger proceeded to deliver a presentation on the present state of the markets taking into account key economic indicators such as inflation, interest rates, and volatility in major developed market currencies and indices. A global rise in inflation driven by rising commodity prices due to geopolitical tensions has certainly presented pressure on markets that forced central banks to take desperate measures. These measures were described through IQAM's presentation and then followed by a detailed description of the causes and effects of these measures.

IQAM truly believes that relief from current and upcoming economic stress will not be felt before



KUWAIT: Faisal Al-Othman gives the opening speech at the event.

2024 due to the severity of persistent inflation and continued geopolitical tensions. Despite these uncertainties developed market economies seem stronger during this recession than recessions of the past. IQAM offered five major recommendations that investors can resort to during these stressful times which include diversification geographically and by asset class, focusing on real assets such as real estate, and adopting long/short strategies (hedge funds) in addition to measurable risk and choosing the appropriate time for market participation.

All of the recommended measures are ones that Kamco Invest employs in assisting clients to navigate their portfolios during these distressful times. The Company offers its clients access to the best

of breed opportunities from within the region and internationally through its well-established advisory service.

Al-Othman concluded by thanking the representatives from Deka Investment and IQAM Invest for their time and availability to share their thoughts on the subject. Strategies offered by Deka Group subsidiaries are a testament to the level of quality and sophistication that Kamco Invest demands on behalf of their clients. This is how Kamco Invest remains competitive across their products and services, regionally and globally as it is consistently ranked among the top performers regionally through their products and consistently invest in the best of breed managers and strategies globally.

KIPCO assigned 'BB' rating with Stable Outlook from Fitch

KUWAIT: Fitch Rating has assigned KIPCO - Kuwait Projects Company (Holding) - a Long-term Issuer Default Rating of 'BB' with a Stable Outlook. In its commentary, Fitch's key rating drivers included the improved asset value diversification and a substantial increase in gross asset value that came as a result of the successful completion of the merger with Qurain Petrochemical Industries, KIPCO's active role in the operation of its portfolio companies, and an uplift from maintaining a medium level of overall dividend diversification driven by strong sector diversification.

Fitch also noted that the company's near-term refinancing is manageable due to KIPCO's track record, performing operating assets and established relationship with capital and banking markets. Eman Al-Awadhi, Group Senior Vice President - Corporate Communications & Investor Relations at KIPCO, said:

"We are pleased to have been rated 'BB' with a Stable Outlook by Fitch Rating. The rating underscores KIPCO's strong and diversified portfolio of performing investments, balanced and diversified revenue streams and proactive and well-managed refinancing of near-term debt maturities. Kuwait Projects Company (Holding) - KIPCO - is a holding company that focuses on investments in the Middle East and North Africa. Its strategy of acquiring, building, scaling and selling companies in the MENA region has worked successfully for over 30 years. KIPCO's main business sectors are financial services, media, real estate and industry. KIPCO's financial service interests include holdings in commercial banks, insurance companies, asset management and investment banking."



Eman Al-Awadhi

South Africa's Eskom warns of long power crisis

CAPE TOWN: Beleaguered electricity firm Eskom warned South Africans on Friday to brace for a prolonged electricity crisis as it struggles to power up the continent's most advanced economy. While it hopes to spare the country rolling blackouts on Christmas Day, the state-owned company warned the first three months of next year will be difficult.

"We are going to have a challenging period over the next three months," Eskom chief operating officer Jan Oberholzer told a media briefing.

"It's going to be a difficult period." South Africa has endured electricity shortages for the past 15 years, but power cuts reached new extremes this year, which Eskom blames on sabotage, crime and ageing power stations. —AFP

US manufactured goods orders slump

WASHINGTON: Orders for big-ticket US manufactured goods dropped more than expected in November, bogged down by a sharp decline in the aircraft segment, according to government data released Friday. Durable goods orders dropped 2.1 percent to \$270.6 billion after three consecutive monthly increases, the Commerce Department said in a statement.

This was largely due to a slump in new orders for aircraft, which analysts note is a highly volatile component. Orders for non-defense aircraft and parts plunged 36.4 percent from October to November, data showed. But excluding transportation, new orders held firm, with a 0.2 percent rise.

Meanwhile, demand was boosted by orders in the defense sector. "The data point to weakening momentum in business investment but positive equipment spending so far in the fourth quarter," said Rubeeela Farooqi of High Frequency Economics in a note. "A moderation is likely, going forward, on a continuing shift in demand from goods to services and in response to higher interest rates," she said, referring to borrowing costs after the central bank's

'We will succeed' in taming inflation, vows Lagarde

FRANKFURT: The European Central Bank "will succeed" in bringing down sky-high inflation, president Christine Lagarde said in a holiday message on Friday, as the eurozone braces for more interest rate hikes in 2023. Eurozone consumer prices soared to a record high this year after Russia's invasion of Ukraine sent energy and food costs surging.

Inflation in the euro area slowed in November for the first time in a year and a half, but at around

10 percent was still five times higher than the ECB's target.

"I know that high inflation hurts everyone, especially the poor," Lagarde said in a video message ahead of the Christmas and New Year's holiday season. "I promise that we will do our utmost to bring inflation down," she said. "And we will succeed." Like other central banks around the world, the ECB has responded to runaway inflation by aggressively lifting interest rates in recent months.

Following last week's hike of half a percentage point, the ECB's three key rates now stand 2.5 percentage points higher than at the start of the year. "We are raising interest rates and we will raise them further, at a steady pace, until they are at a level which ensures a timely return of inflation to our two-percent medium-term target," Lagarde said.

Monthly data can be volatile, and economists have cited a lack of existing inventory as a reason that buyers are turning to new properties. But the median sales price of new homes sold in November dropped to \$471,200, from \$484,700 in the month prior. The market for new homes is smaller than that of existing homes in the United States, which has seen sales decline for a record 10 straight months. Analysts do not expect the current trend to last, given that higher mortgage rates continue to batter affordability.



WASHINGTON: Orders for big-ticket US manufactured goods dropped more than expected in November, bogged down by a sharp decline in the aircraft segment, according to government data released Friday.

The popular 30-year fixed-rate mortgage averaged 6.3 percent as of mid-December, according to home loan finance company Freddie Mac, nearly double the figure a year ago. "Existing home supply finally appears to be trending sharply upwards" as well, said Ian Shepherdson and Kieran Clancy of Pantheon Macroeconomics in a recent report. "The mortgage applications numbers suggest that new home sales will quickly drop... if existing home supply continues to rise," the report said. —AFP

Lagarde told reporters last that week that the eurozone would see more 50-basis point increases "for a period of time".

The ECB chief also used her end-of-year message to welcome EU member Croatia to the eurozone. "I'm really happy that our euro-family is expanding," Lagarde said. "Croatia will be the 20th member to join the euro area on January 1, something I will certainly be celebrating as we ring in the new year." —AFP



Christine Lagarde

Bankman-Fried freed on bail over fraud charges

NEW YORK: FTX co-founder Sam Bankman-Fried was released on \$250 million bail Thursday while he awaits trial on criminal fraud charges over the spectacular collapse of his crypto exchange.

US magistrate judge Gabriel Gorenstein made the ruling during Bankman-Fried's arraignment hearing in federal court in Manhattan following his extradition from the Bahamas. Bankman-Fried, who recently claimed to have only \$100,000 left in the bank, will have to live at his parents' home in Palo Alto, California, which has been put up as collateral under the terms of release, the judge ruled.

Bankman-Fried, who entered the courtroom in shackles and appeared unshaven, did not enter a plea.

He looked down as the judge reviewed the indictment's eight criminal counts and made only a brief statement to accept the conditions of bail. The parents, Stanford Law professors Joseph Bankman and Barbara Fried, sat silently throughout the 40-minute hearing.

Bankman-Fried was later seen leaving the court carrying a brown paper bag.

Under the deal, the 30-year-old ex-billionaire, once touted as a possible future Warren Buffett, will be subjected to electronic monitoring. FTX and its sister trading house Alameda Research went bankrupt last month, dissolving a virtual trading business that at one point had been valued by the market at \$32 billion.

Prosecutors allege Bankman-Fried cheated investors and misused funds that belonged to FTX and Alameda Research customers. The plane carrying Bankman-Fried from the Bahamas, where FTX is headquartered, arrived in the United States late Wednesday after he waived his right to challenge the US government's extradition request. Gorenstein determined that Bankman-Fried posed minimal risk of flight because he did not challenge extradition and has no prior convictions, accepting a recommendation from prosecutors.

Dramatic collapse

Nicolas Roos, an Assistant US Attorney in the Southern District of New York, described Bankman-Fried's alleged schemes as of "epic proportions," with the government already



NEW YORK: FTX founder Sam Bankman-Fried leaves court following his arraignment in New York City on December 22, 2022. —AFP

holding "very strong" evidence from more than a dozen cooperating witnesses and encrypted text messages. But Roos recommended bail with "highly restrictive" conditions in light of the defendant's lack of criminal history and the fact that he had voluntarily agreed to be extradited.

Defense attorney Mark Cohen told Gorenstein that Bankman-Fried "voluntarily" came to New York.

"He wants to address these charges," Cohen said. "We think that's a very compelling factor." Federal prosecutors last week charged Bankman-Fried with conspiracy, wire fraud, money laundering and election finance violations. He "was orchestrating a massive, years-long fraud, diverting billions of dollars of the trading platform's customer funds for his own personal benefit and to help grow his crypto empire," they said. —AFP



A Christmas tree and House of Blackheads are seen during Winter Solstice celebration at Riga Town Hall Square on Dec 21. — AFP photos



People wearing folk and pagan masks are pictured during the Winter Solstice celebration.

Let it burn, let it burn! Christmas tree's fiery origins



Dressed in pagan folk costumes, Latvians gather on a square in the center of Riga for a ceremony that some historians see as the ancient precursor to the Christmas tree tradition. But these colorful revelers celebrating the winter solstice have not come to decorate a tree, but to burn one. After dragging a tree trunk by rope through the streets of the Baltic capital, the wild looking bunch then put it on a bonfire.

In mediaeval times, people would put the trees in their homes ahead of solstice before dragging them off to their fiery end. "The tree stump symbolizes everything that went wrong this year,"

said Liga Lukashunas, one of the celebrants and head of Riga's Ritmus cultural center. "We gather all our bad thoughts, wrongdoings or health troubles into these logs which then go up in smoke, allowing the upcoming year to have a fresh start."

First mediaeval trees

Near to where the ceremony finished, a plaque on the ground claims to be the spot where the world's first decorated Christmas tree was put on show in 1510. The Baltic pagan tree-burning tradition was initially picked up by German traders, who developed the Christmas

tree into its modern form and helped to spread it through the Hanseatic League ports along the Baltic.

According to historical records, the original tree in 1510 was decorated by the merchants' guild in Riga with artificial roses. The merchants then danced around it before setting it on fire. The first historical record of a Christmas tree in its current form comes from 1476 when one was installed in a house belonging to the city's Schwarzhaeupter organization of foreign merchants.

The event was described by historian and linguist Guna Pitkevica in "The Great Christmas Book". They "embell-

ished an evergreen tree in their Schwarzhaeupter House with decorations and sweets, carrying it out on the street after Christmas was over, to burn it down," she said. By ancient custom everyone in Latvia today is entitled to cut down their own fir tree for Christmas in state forests, which cover approximately one third of the country's territory. Aida Rancane, founder of the folk band Grodi, said winter solstice ceremonies symbolized "the everlasting rebirth of nature and the world around us, allowing people to renew themselves." — AFP



People wearing folk and pagan masks perform with music instruments.



People stand around a fire during the Winter Solstice celebration.

#saltlife: Turkish celebrity chef at center of probe

Celebrity chef and social media meme Nusret Gokce - better known as "Salt Bae" - has turned his singular way of seasoning a steak into global fame and outsized wealth. The 39-year-old Turkish fitness fanatic first gained renown a decade ago with YouTube videos showing him pouring salt on a cut of meat down his bare arm with an overtly sexual pout. His 50 million Instagram followers can now see him posing in his trademark dark glasses and slicked back hair with the FIFA World Cup and some Argentinian foot-

ball stars.

How Salt Bae actually got to touch the golden trophy after Argentina's win over France is the focus of a formal FIFA probe. Viral social media images show the diminutive chef trying to fight his way through a swarm of security personnel towards Argentina's captain Lionel Messi on the pitch after the match. One clip shows Messi seemingly brushing away Salt Bae and attempting to walk away.

But a picture subsequently posted on Salt Bae's Instagram account shows him clasping Messi's hand and gesturing triumphantly towards the camera. "You're the man, Messi," Salt Bae wrote next to the photograph in Turkish. The picture included the hashtag #saltlife. That life is being chronicled by smartly-dressed social media assistants that Salt Bae hires to follow him around and record his every step.

Gold leaf steak

Salt Bae's carefully crafted persona revolves around machismo and phenomenal endurance and skill. The chef generally does not speak. He occasionally growls a satisfied but barely distinguishable word following a long night that he crowns with a cigar puffed after performing a few acrobatic tricks with a golden lighter. His juggling acts with a razor-sharp knife and huge slabs of very expensive meat made his career - launched in a lowly butcher shop on the Asian side of Istanbul.

Salt Bae told AFP in 2020 that he still views the Turkish megalopolis as the "capital of the world". But he now heads a global chain stretching from Las Vegas to London that serve \$1,000 gold leaf steaks to a clientele made up of fellow trendsetters and celebrities. Salt Bae can still occasionally be seen jogging around Istanbul's more upscale neighborhoods with impressive weights strapped around his bulging calves and arms.

His attention to his own physique is part of the chef's peculiar charm. His early morning workouts are chronicled in great detail and include endless flexes of his biceps for the camera. But this self-aggrandizement is laced with boundless irony that shines through when he happily posts some of the most scathing reviews of his food and general behavior.

Critics have roundly panned his London Nusr-Et outpost - one of 22 he now has around the world. The Guardian's food critic called it "a ludicrous restaurant". GQ magazine agreed that the steak Salt Bae serves in New York is "mundane, somewhat tough and rather bland". "It does not matter," GQ added. "One does not visit Salt Bae for steak alone any more than one goes to Mass for the wafers." — AFP



Nusret Gokce - better known as "Salt Bae" - poses with Lionel Messi and the World Cup trophy.

Canadian polar bears disappearing fast

Polar bears are disappearing fast from the Western part of Hudson Bay, on the southern tip of the Canadian Arctic, according to a new government survey. The number of female bears and cubs in particular has seen a dramatic decline. Researchers have flown over the region - which includes the town of Churchill, a tourist destination touted as the "polar bear capital of the world" - every five years to count the number of bears and extrapolate population trends.

During the last survey in late August and early September 2021, the results of which were released earlier this month, they spotted 194 bears and, based on that count, estimated a total population of 618 bears, down from 842 five years earlier. "Comparison to aerial surveys estimates from 2011 and 2016 suggests that the WH (Western Hudson Bay population) may be decreasing in abundance," the study said.

It also "revealed significant declines in the abundance of adult female and subadult bears (cubs) between 2011 and 2021". "The observed declines are consistent with long-standing predictions regarding the demographic effects of climate change on polar bears," the researchers said. They also cited possible displacements of bears to neighboring regions and hunting for the population decline.

The bears' sea-ice habitat has been disappearing at an alarming rate, with

the far north warming up to four times faster than the rest of the world. The sea ice has become less thick and is breaking up earlier in the spring as well as freezing later in the fall. The bears rely on the ice for foraging for seals, movement and reproduction.



A polar bear snorts after swimming behind a pod of beluga whales passing near the shoreline of Hudson Bay near Churchill on Aug 9, 2022. — AFP

Since the 1980s, the ice pack in the bay has decreased by nearly 50 percent in summer, according to the US National Snow and Ice Data Center. A report published two years ago in the journal Nature Climate Change suggested this trend could lead to the near-extinction of these animals, noting there were 1,200 polar bears on the western shores of Hudson Bay in the 1980s. — AFP



A detailed miniature of a historical gate.



Miniature of the Southern mosque in Al-Quds.



Clock Tower in Safad city which dates back to the Ottoman era.



Two Palestinian architects at the workshop.— KUNA photos

Gazan team succeeds in protecting antiquities

A 50-member engineering team hailing from the Gaza Strip succeeded in recreating and digitizing 25 detailed miniatures of antiquities and history to safeguard their history against the evils of Zionist aggression. The team was able to obtain the original blueprints of Palestinian buildings and landmarks as well as locations that might be under the threat of Zionist bombardment. The team hoped that an information bank of all Palestinian historical sites, antiquities and locations will be created to protect them for future generations. — KUNA



The Shehwan's family residence which was built in 1917.

'Armed with English': Ukraine soldiers take language lessons

When Olena Chekryzhova followed in her grandmother's footsteps and began teaching English, she never dreamt the job would lead to a months-long stay at a frontline military base. But that has become her new reality as Ukrainian soldiers scramble to learn English - military terms especially - so they can make the most of combat aid from Washington and elsewhere against Russian forces.

Donated supplies like HIMARS rocket systems have already been a battle-front game-changer, and President Volodymyr Zelensky's lightning visit to Washington this week yielded further pledges - including, for the first time, the Patriot missile defense system. Soldiers have found, however, that training materials for this equipment are available mainly in English, which is often also necessary to communicate with foreign volunteer fighters they encounter in the field.

To help topple the language barrier, 35-year-old Chekryzhova has traded in her quiet life of classroom conjugation to give crash courses to the armed forces. The work has included a five-month stint at a base in the eastern



Olena Chekryzhova

industrial Donetsk region, where she lived alongside soldiers and took part in training sessions. "Some people think I'm crazy," she told AFP at the facility in Kyiv where she is currently stationed.

But she added, "I think that teaching English in this case is the small contribution that I can do for my country, for the people of my country and for the military, who are protecting us from this terrorist attack."

Fighting words

Nearly all Ukrainian soldiers had at least some English instruction in school, but it was not always useful - especially for the older ones. "It was back in Soviet times, and this English I learned at school is like nothing, basically," said 50-year-old Igor Soldatenko, one of Chekryzhova's students in Kyiv.

"The whole system was inadequate, as I see now. We were just learning texts without understanding them... Nobody could use it in real life."

The recent lessons, by contrast, have been more practical - giving him words like "wounded", "semi-automatic" and "cache" as well as phrases such as "killed in action". The learning goes both ways, with Chekryzhova gaining a new understanding of tactics and strategy - and an appreciation of the trials of military life. While in Donetsk, she grieved along with soldiers who lost comrades - some of whom she taught directly - in fighting in her hometown of Bakhmut, a target of incessant Russian assault in recent months.

"For me it's a double pain. Because on the one hand it's my hometown, and on the other hand it has now become the grave of my students," she said. During a recent one-hour conversation lesson in Kyiv, the only time Chekryzhova's students slipped briefly into Ukrainian was when discussing those they have lost. But despite fighting back tears, 36-year-old soldier Yuriy Kalmutskiy insisted on completing his idea in English, even if it was somewhat broken. "I lose a lot of friends... It was my circle of close people, and I lose... they. I lose them," he said. "It's very hard."

Help win the war

As they work towards ultimately mastering English, Chekryzhova's students told AFP they drew some inspiration from Zelensky's journey with the language. "A few years ago, he (had) awful English. Everybody knows this," Kalmutskiy said. "But he learned." That progress came in handy on Wednesday when Zelensky addressed the US Congress in English, declaring that "Ukraine is alive and kicking" while appealing for more aid.

Yet while individual students have made similar strides, Chekryzhova told AFP she is struggling to scale up her program to reach even more. International organizations have so far rebuffed her requests for funding, saying they can't be seen giving money to the military. "They say they would like to help children, they would like to help animals, the elderly, maybe some internally displaced people or people who are abroad," she said.

Her students scoffed at this approach, and Chekryzhova said she has little interest in dealing with "puppies and kittens or some nice old ladies". All said they were convinced studying English would help them win the war while furthering Ukraine's military integration with Western and other countries. "So," Chekryzhova said as the lesson drew to a close. "Are you armed with English?" "Yes," Soldatenko responded. "Yes, I think so." — AFP



Ukrainian servicemen Ihor Soldatenko and Yuriy Kalmutskiy attend a lesson of English with teacher Olena Chekryzhova at a military facility in Kyiv on Dec 21, 2022, amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine. — AFP photos

Palestinian makes eggboxes by recycling paper waste

Palestinian Akram Lamour, who hails from Khan Younis in southern Gaza, has established a factory for recycling paper waste to make eggboxes. He collects secondhand books and other paper waste to make the egg cartons, at a rate of 3,000 pieces a day, making up for the shortage of these containers that cannot be imported due to the Zionist siege.



Akram Lamour, owner of the factory.— KUNA photos



Processing crushed paper waste to make eggboxes.



The Palestinian factory produces 3,000 egg cartons a day from paper waste.



Actress and President of the Mexican Academy of Film Arts and Sciences Leticia Huijara poses for a picture during an interview in Mexico City on Dec 13, 2022. — AFP photos

DESPITE 'PINOCCHIO' SUCCESS, DEL TORO FEARS FOR MEXICAN CINEMA

Despite his international success, including a new adaptation of the classic puppet tale "Pinocchio," Oscar-winning Mexican director Guillermo del Toro fears that his country's cinema industry is facing "systematic destruction". Del Toro's animated version of "Pinocchio", in which an elderly woodcarver and his living puppet find themselves in 1930s fascist Italy, was the most watched film on streaming platform Netflix in the week of Dec 12-18.

Its debut on Dec 9 came a week before the release of "Bardo," an autobiographical tale of a journalist-filmmaker returning home after years in Los Angeles, by fellow Mexican Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu. Mexican actors have also enjoyed recent success in Hollywood, including Tenoch Huerta, the rising star of the sequel to "Black Panther," the first major Black superhero movie.

Del Toro, Inarritu and Alfonso Cuaron represent a golden generation of Mexican filmmakers who have won the best director trophy at the Oscars five times since 2013. Del Toro's fantasy



A woman poses for a photo next to an advertisement for the movie Pinocchio by Mexican director Guillermo del Toro at the Cineteca Nacional in Mexico City on Dec 16, 2022.



A man is seen next to photographs of actors from the "Golden Age of Mexican cinema" at the Churubusco studios in Mexico City on Dec 16, 2022.

romance "The Shape of Water" earned best picture and best director at the 2018 Oscars. The following year Cuaron scooped three golden statuettes for "Roma" - an intimate black-and-white movie about a family in turmoil in 1970s Mexico City.

'Brutal' destruction

But in stark contrast to the international acclaim for the trio, dubbed "The Three Amigos", del Toro has now warned that the country's film industry is facing "unprecedented" challenges. "The systematic destruction of Mexican cinema and its institutions - which took decades to build - has been brutal," he tweeted recently. Del Toro highlighted an announcement by the Mexican Academy of Cinematographic Arts and Sciences that next year's Ariel Awards - the coun-

try's equivalent of the Oscars - were postponed until further notice due to a "serious financial crisis".

The organization said it regretted that "the support of public resources has decreased considerably in recent years. "The state, which was the motor and support of the academy for a long time, has renounced its responsibility as the main promoter and disseminator of culture in general and of cinema in particular," it added. Del Toro even offered to pay for the Ariel statuettes out of his own pocket.

"He's a generous colleague, an artist who is always aware of what is happening not only with Mexican cinematography but with the arts in general in the country," said Academy president Leticia Huijara. She would, however, prefer an agreement with the state. In the mean-

time, the Ariels have been postponed, Huijara confirmed to AFP.

Promoting Indigenous film

Maria Novaro, the general manager of the Mexican Film Institute (Imcine), a government agency, thinks the warnings are exaggerated. "Del Toro says that there is no more Mexican cinema in the year when there have never been so many productions," she said, hailing a "record" 256 films in 2021. "And 56 per cent received support from public money. Imcine devotes 900 million pesos (\$45 million) a year to financing Mexican cinema," said Novaro. "It's good that Netflix produces a lot of content in Mexico. But it does not replace what Imcine does," she added.

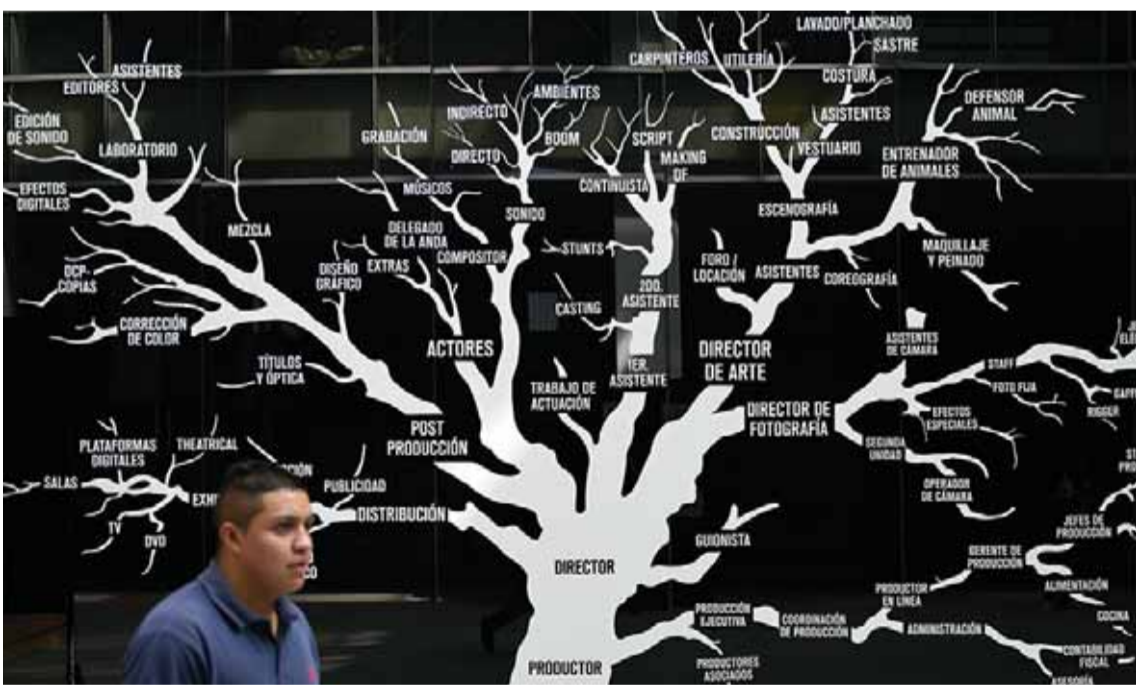
Mexican cinema enjoyed a golden age between the 1930s and 1950s, fea-

turing movie stars such as Dolores del Rio and Pedro Armendariz. But the industry went through a quiet period before enjoying a revival, helped in recent years by the success of "The Three Amigos". Mexican cinema has now become decentralized and diversified, according to Novaro, mirroring President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador's priorities to help impoverished and Indigenous Mexicans.

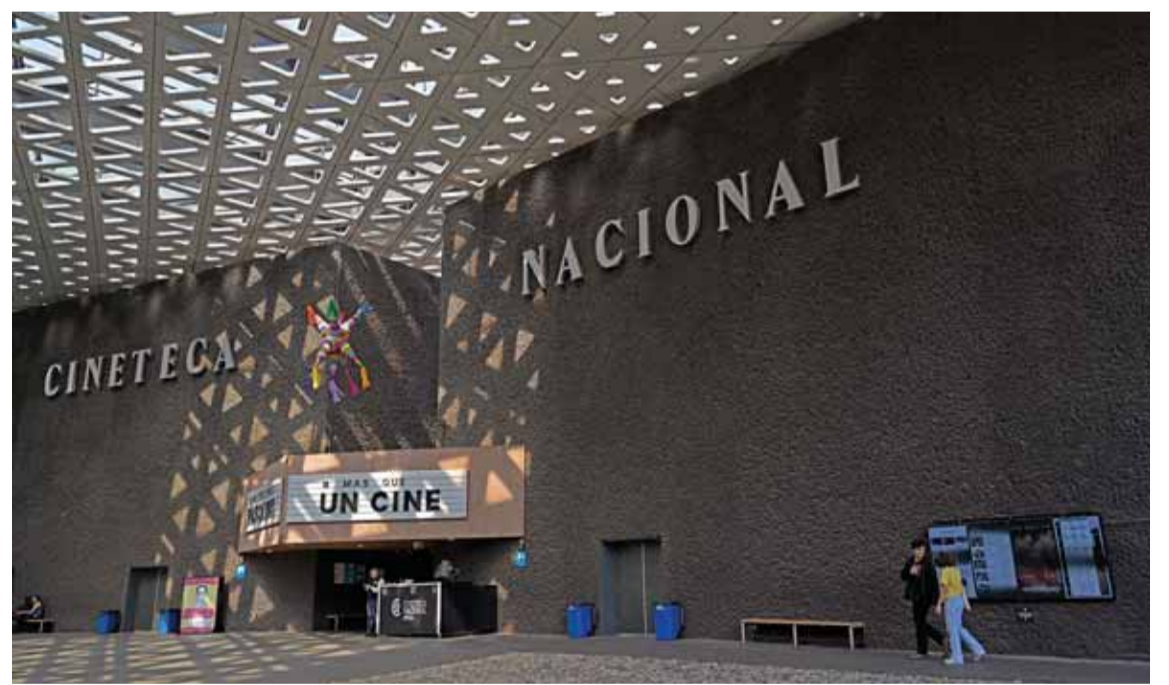
Since 2019, there has been a program to encourage indigenous and Afro-descendant cinema, with 56 such films in production, Novaro said. "Films are starting to come out that tell about migration from the perspective of indigenous migrants themselves," she added. — AFP



A man looks at a statuette of the character Geppetto from the movie Pinocchio exhibited at the Cineteca Nacional.



A man walks past a mural at Churubusco studios.



View of the Cineteca Nacional in Mexico City.

US judge says film fans can sue over misleading trailer

Movie fans disappointed that their favorite actor was cut from a film after appearing in the trailer can sue the studio for false advertising, a US judge has ruled. Two film buffs say Universal Pictures tricked them into renting 2019 flick "Yesterday" because the trailer featured actress Ana de Armas. Peter Michael Rosza, 45, of San Diego, and Conor Woulfe, 39, of Maryland, say they forked over \$3.99 each to watch the Richard Curtis comedy on Amazon Prime, only to discover that de Armas had not made the final cut.

A class action suit filed earlier this year alleges fans had been led to expect the Cuban "No Time To Die" star would feature prominently. However, they "did not receive

a movie with any appearance of Ana de Armas at all," says the suit, reported by US media on Friday. Accordingly, "such consumers were not provided with any value for their rental or purchase," the suit added.

Universal had asked US District Judge Stephen Wilson to throw out the complaint, arguing that trailers are protected by the First Amendment of the US Constitution, which guarantees free speech. But in his

ruling on Thursday, Wilson rejected the studio's argument, saying trailers are commercial speech and subject to laws around honest advertising. "At its core, a trailer is an advertisement designed to sell a movie by providing consumers with a preview of the movie," the judge wrote.

AFP could not immediately reach a representative for Universal. The suit is claiming at least \$5 million on behalf of disappointed fans. Lawyers will convene again for the case on April 3. Danny Boyle's "Yesterday" tells the story of a musician, played by Himesh Patel, who is thrust into an alternative reality where The Beatles do not exist. He achieves global megastardom by releasing the Fab Four's back catalogue as his own. De Armas, 34, who also appeared in "Knives Out" in 2019, was originally cast in the movie, and appeared in the trailer and certain advertising, but her role did not make the final version, according to the suit. —AFP



Ana de Armas

The Sun 'regrets' publishing Meghan 'hate' article

British tabloid The Sun on Friday said it regretted publishing a column by former Top Gear host Jeremy Clarkson about Prince Harry's wife Meghan after a huge backlash. In the article for The Sun last week, Clarkson wrote that he "hated" Meghan and 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".

A record number of complaints against the column - more than 20,000 - was made to the UK Independent Press Standards Organization (Ipso) and many high-profile figures criticized the piece, including author Philip Pullman and London Mayor Sadiq Khan. The article had

been written in response to the couple's recent Netflix docuseries "Harry & Meghan" but has since been removed from the newspaper's website.

"We at The Sun regret the publication of this article and we are sincerely sorry," The Sun said in a statement on its website. It added the article would also be removed from its archives. The Sun had already removed the article on Monday from its website at the request of Clarkson who said on Twitter he made "a clumsy reference to a scene in Game of Thrones and this has gone down badly with a great many people". He added: "I'm horrified to have caused so much hurt and I shall be more careful in future."

In one of the most famous scenes in Game of Thrones, a female character makes a "walk of shame" where she is forced to walk down the streets naked as people throw rubbish at her. "Columnists' opinions are their own, but as a publisher, we realize that with free expression comes responsibility," The Sun said. —AFP

Sports

Ovechkin becomes the second highest scorer in NHL history

Ovechkin surpasses Howe with 802nd career goal

Boxing chiefs blast 'persecution' in Olympics future row

PARIS: Boxing chiefs claimed they are victims of "persecution" and "extortion" as their sport faces being axed from the Olympic program. Olympic bosses upheld a ban on the International Boxing Association (IBA) earlier this month, insisting that the "drastic change of culture" requested in order to lift a suspension had not been implemented.

The IBA was suspended by the International Olympic Committee in 2019 for multiple corruption scandals, meaning boxing risks disappearing as an Olympic sport from the Paris Games in 2024. Boxing only went ahead in the COVID-delayed Tokyo Olympics after the IOC stepped in to ensure the qualification criteria. However, the IBA, whose president is Umar Kremlev of Russia, blasted their critics on Friday.

"The Olympic Games are a global sporting asset that cannot be a tool of extortion of the International Sports Federations for purely political reasons," the IBA said in a statement. The IBA has also come under fire for its governance, financial transparency and sustainability. Their major backer has been Russian energy giant Gazprom in a deal worth a reported \$50 million. "It is clear that the persecution of IBA athletes will continue until ultimate control of boxing and its leadership has been achieved," added the IBA statement.

"The discrimination against you (the athletes) and IBA's leadership and partners based on citizenship, directly contradicts the Olympic Charter, and only highlights the issue of athletes and sport being manipulated for geopolitical purposes." It added: "With that said, with the threat of boxing being removed from the Paris 2024 program, the IBA will continue to reach out to the senior leadership of the IOC to work towards a de-escalation of this current development and with a view to LA 2028." —AFP

WASHINGTON: Alex Ovechkin surpassed Gordie Howe to become the second-highest scorer in NHL history with his two goals against the Winnipeg Jets on Friday, taking his career tally in the league to 802. Ovechkin equaled Howe's total of 801 goals with a wrist shot with 1:28 left in the first period, and was mobbed by his Washington Capitals teammates as he celebrated. The Russian added his second goal late in the third period with another wrist shot after being set up by Evgeny Kuznetsov to secure a 4-1 win with his 22nd goal of the season.

After Ovechkin's teammates all came on the ice to celebrate with him, there was a video message of congratulations from Mark Howe, son of Gordie, and himself an NHL Hall of Famer, before Ovechkin then took a spin around the ice to acknowledge the cheers of the crowd. Wayne Gretzky, who retired in 1999, tops the all-time goals list with 894. Canadian Howe was the first ever to reach 800 goals in February 1980 and finished his career with one more.

Ovechkin, 37, became the second-highest NHL scorer in his 1,310th career game, surpassing Howe's record in 457 fewer games played. "Every milestone, it's a special moment, I think, for the whole organization, for me and, obviously, for my family," Ovechkin said. "It is nice to get it done at home in front of our house, family and friends and fans obviously," he added. "It is a tremendous feeling obviously, we just have to keep going and we will see what will happen," said the Russian. Washington won the game 4-1. —AFP



WASHINGTON: Alex Ovechkin #8 of the Washington Capitals celebrates with teammates after scoring career goal #802 in the third period against the Winnipeg Jets at Capital One Arena on December 23, 2022. —AFP



Benjamin Hassan



Kuwaitis shine at Arab Masters Tournament

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: The 2nd Arab Masters Tennis Tournament's Singles Groups stage was concluded on Saturday, as first and second (of each group) cruised to the quarter-finals, while the 8th round will take place on Sunday. The tournament will come to a close on Tuesday with the Singles final. In the doubles competition, Walid Ahouda and Yassine Dlimi (Morocco); Abdallah Shelbayeh and Mousa Al-Alkotop (Jordan); Aziz

Dougaz and Iskandar Almansouri (Tunisia); Kareem Maamoun and Mohammad Safwat (Egypt) qualified for the semi-finals, and the Doubles final match will be played on Monday.

Fourth day's Singles competition was competitive and exciting. Kuwaiti players Ali Al-Shatti and Bader Al-Abdallah beat Syria's Yacoub Makzoume and Saudi Arabia's Ammar Al-Hogabani. Kuwait's Essa Qabazard lost to Tunisian Mohamed Oukaa (in the third group) 5/7, 3/6 while Yaqoub Mohammad lost to Jordan's Abdallah Shelbayeh 1/6, 2/6. Lebanon's Hassan Ibrahim defeated Saudi Arabian Saudi Al-Hogabani 6/0, 6/0.

In the first group, Yassine Dlimi (from Morocco) defeated Mohammad Al-Awadhi 6/0, 6/0 as Iskandar Al-Mansouri (Bahrain) beat Bahrain's Fares Abdel Kareem 6/0, 6/0. The second group saw Mohammad Safwat (Egypt) defeat Jordan's Mousa Alkotop 7/5, 6/2; Benjamin Hassan (Lebanon) overpowered Toufik

Sahrali (Algeria) 6/3, 6/0, while Aziz Dougaz (Tunis) beat Rayan Dylan (Algeria) 6/3, 6/2.

Tournament referee Abdelraouf Abdelsalam said the fourth day's matches were held indoors due to the rain. He said the Sheikh Jaber Al-Abdallah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah International Tennis Complex is ideal for international competition for several reasons including a sufficient number of indoor courts that can be used when necessary. He lauded the Kuwaiti chair umpires and line judges for their excellent performance.



Abdelraouf Abdelsalam



DUBAI: Serbia's Novak Djokovic plays the ball to Austria's Sebastian Ofner during the 2022 World Tennis League exhibition match at Dubai's Coca-Cola arena in the United Arab Emirates, on December 23, 2022. —AFP

Djokovic hopes for warm welcome in Australia

DUBAI: Novak Djokovic is hoping he will receive a warm welcome from the public when he returns to the Australian Open next month, now that the drama surrounding his vaccination status and deportation is officially behind him. A nine-time champion at Melbourne Park, Djokovic was unable to compete in the opening Grand Slam of the season in 2022 after he was deported from Australia over fears he would incite anti-vax sentiment.

As a result of his deportation, Djokovic was banned from entering Australia again but that decision has been reversed and the world number five is pleased he will get the chance to vie for a 10th title in Melbourne and a men's record-equalling 22nd major crown overall. "I always ask the best from myself so let's see. Over the years I've been really fortunate to start very strong in Australia and I love playing there," Djokovic told reporters at the World Tennis League in Dubai on Friday.

"After obviously what happened earlier this year, hopefully I can have a decent reception there and hopefully that can help me play some good tennis." The 35-year-old Djokovic was unable to compete in two of the four majors this year as his vaccination stance meant he was also forced to sit out the US Open.

However, he finished his 2022 campaign with a bang, winning titles in Tel Aviv, Astana and the ATP Finals in Turin, as well as reaching the final of the Paris Masters. He also picked up trophies in Rome and Wimbledon and tallied up a 42-7 win-loss record throughout the season. The Serb had mentioned in the past he would like to play into his 40s. Asked if he still felt that way, Djokovic said: "I would like to play as long as I possibly can. I don't have really any number in my head." —AFP

La Rochelle waste chance at second in Top 14

PARIS: Ronan O'Gara said his La Rochelle team were "asleep" as they missed out on the chance to go second in the French Top 14 table on Friday as they lost 12-8 at home to Bordeaux-Begles. A win would have sent the Champions Cup holders above Racing 92 but two second-half penalties from France fly-half Matthieu Jalibert helped took the visitors up to seventh.

"The atmosphere wasn't there, the team weren't there, everyone was asleep," La Rochelle director of rugby O'Gara told reporters. "I have to put my hand up too, I choose the team. It's a huge disappointment," he added. O'Gara continued to watch on from the stands with his ban for unacceptable behavior towards match officials running until late January with his assistant coaches giving sideline instructions.

The former Ireland fly-half's outfit, who had lost just once at home since January, led 3-0 at the break in wet conditions near the Atlantic coast thanks to Pierre Popelin's penalty. France scrum-half Maxime Lucu responded just after the break with a shot at goal before Tani Vili slotted a drop goal on the hour mark and Jalibert added a penalty four minutes later to make it 9-3 to Bordeaux-Begles. La Rochelle reacted as prop Samuel Lagrange crossed from a rolling maul but South Africa winger Dillyn Leyds missed the conversion to give his side the lead with five minutes left.

Les Bleus' Jalibert then made sure of the first away win of the season for his side, who saw coach Christophe Urios leave his position in November, with a second effort at the posts as the clock turned red. Elsewhere, future Brive coach Patrice Collazo watched on from the crowd as Abraham Papali'i scored an 89th-



LA ROCHELLE: La Rochelle's French Number 8 Gregory Alldritt (center) runs with the ball during the French Top 14 rugby union match between Stade Rochelais (La Rochelle) and Union Bordeaux-Begles (UBB) at The Marcel-Deflandre Stadium on December 23, 2022. —AFP

minute try to claim their first win since October 1 as they edged Clermont 20-16. Collazo, who has had spells in charge of La Rochelle and Toulon, starts his job on Monday by taking over from the sacked Jeremy Davidson.

'Leader' Tedder

Perpignan's South African full-back Tristan Tedder left the field on a stretcher after a tackle before the Catalans, 13th in the table, lost 38-10 at champions Montpellier. "When you have your gameplan leader not moving while on the floor after two minutes, it's not an image that comforts you," Perpignan head coach Patrick Arlettaz said. "It's not easy to digest, but it doesn't explain our defeat," he

added. France under-20s captain Emilien Gailleton, aged just 19, crossed for his sixth and seventh tries of the season as Pau drew 22-22 with Bayonne.

Later, record 21-time champions Toulouse beat Castres 22-15 as France full-back Melvyn Jaminet kicked 17 points on his return for the home side from an ankle injury that had kept him sidelined since October. On Christmas Eve, Stade Francais head across Paris to Racing 92 in the French capital's derby with the visitors' Samoa prop Paul Alo-Emile returning to the top-flight after taking nine months out with depression. On Thursday, Wales fly-half Dan Biggar kicked 11 points on his Top 14 debut to help new club Toulon to beat Lyon 21-3. —AFP

Sports

Police probe coin attack; girl suffers head injuries

Man City knock out holders Liverpool in League Cup thriller

MANCHESTER: Police said they had launched an investigation after a 15-year-old female Manchester City fan suffered head injuries during Thursday's League Cup tie against Liverpool at the Etihad Stadium. Daniel Cornwell told the Daily Telegraph his teenage daughter had been left with "a scar for life" following the "horrible" incident after being hit by a full plastic pint pot "weighted with coins" thrown from the Liverpool section at the Etihad.

A Greater Manchester Police (GMP) spokesman said: "A 15-year-old girl was treated for head injuries and we will be investigating." The incident followed ugly scenes that have marred recent encounters between the English football heavyweights. Their October match at Anfield saw City fans accused of making abusive chants about the 1989 Hillsborough disaster that led to the deaths of 97 Liverpool fans. City claimed manager Pep Guardiola had coins thrown at him and that their team bus was attacked as it left Anfield.

There were several other incidents of disorder on Thursday, with GMP match commander, Superintendent Gareth Parkin, saying: "We are aware of a number of objects, including coins and a smoke bomb, that were thrown during the match. We will be investigating the incidents and reviewing CCTV from the night. Clearly throwing objects in a confined area can be dangerous, and have serious and sometimes devastating consequences."

In a joint statement, City and Liverpool condemned the "wholly unacceptable" incidents. "Manchester City, Liverpool and the chairs from our supporter groups have worked together in recent weeks to remind fans of our expectations and both clubs would like to thank the vast majority of fans for their behavior at last night's match at the Etihad Stadium," the statement said. "It is however hugely disappointing that there were a number of incidents that are wholly unacceptable. These incidents will be fully investigated, reported to the police and the individuals who are found to be responsible will be subject to the sanction process of their respective clubs."

League Cup thriller

Meanwhile, Nathan Ake's header proved decisive as

Manchester City knocked holders Liverpool out of the League Cup in a dramatic 3-2 win at the Etihad Stadium. This last-16 clash marked the return to competitive action of two of English football's heavyweights following the World Cup break with City's Kevin De Bruyne the outstanding player in a high-class field. Premier League champions City twice led through Erling Haaland and Riyad Mahrez, only for Liverpool to waste little time in drawing level thanks to goals from Fabio Carvalho and Mohamed Salah.

But after Ake made it 3-2 shortly before the hour mark, the visitors were unable to fashion a third equalizer. "After the World Cup and a long time of not playing, both teams were incredible with high level and intensity," City manager Pep Guardiola told Sky Sports. "Liverpool are so difficult, when they play good they destroy you."

'De Bruyne fire'

He added: "Kevin played with a fire inside of him. He had to find it. What a player. How many years he's been coming here? Eight years? He's an absolute legend." Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp had no qualms in saying City are a "super, super, super side who do things extremely well," but still lamented his team's defending.

"The goals we conceded were completely unnecessary... We played a good game but not good enough to beat City tonight. There's a lot we can build on and we can take into the next games and that's what we'll do." Guardiola named six World Cup players in his starting XI. Ake, Manuel Akanji, Aymeric Laporte, Rodri, Kevin De Bruyne and Ilkay Gundogan were all involved from the kick-off.

Liverpool boss Jurgen Klopp, whose side pipped Chelsea 11-10 in a marathon penalty shoot-out at Wembley in February as the Reds won the League Cup for a record ninth time, also named a strong side. The German's forward line included Salah, making his first appearance in the League Cup outside of finals since October 2020, Darwin Nunez and Carvalho. Haaland and Cole Palmer both missed the target when well-placed to score early on but it was not long before the Norway star made amends.

Haaland, seemingly given a free run against away to Leicester on Monday.

The Magpies last won a major domestic trophy in 1955 and such is the northeast club's desire to end that drought, Howe used all five of his players who had been in Qatar during a hard-fought 1-0 win over Premier League rivals Bournemouth that secured a place in the last eight of the League Cup. Champions League qualification also remains a real possibility, with Tottenham and Manchester United, fourth and fifth respectively, snapping at Newcastle's heels.

'World class' Kane

United, given their status, may be under most pressure to achieve a top-four finish, although manager Erik ten Hag said: "I think also for the manager of Chelsea (Graham Potter), of Newcastle (Eddie Howe), all those clubs invest a lot in their squad. So for every manager it's a big pressure to get into the Champions League, that's clear." Tottenham travel to Brentford with manager Antonio Conte confident Harry Kane will have put his World Cup heartache behind him.

Kane's missed penalty late on against Spurs team-mate Hugo Lloris was a key moment in England's 2-1 quarter-final loss to France. "No, honestly (I am not worried) because we're talking about a world class striker," Conte said. Liverpool will try to kickstart their season again away to Aston Villa on Monday. Bottom of the table Wolves begin their quest for top-flight survival under new manager Julen Lopetegui when the former Spain and Real Madrid coach, who oversaw a midweek League Cup win over Gillingham, makes his Premier League debut away to Everton.

"For me, the only aim in front is the next match," said Lopetegui, who replaced the sacked Bruno

said a statement on the club's website. Cohen spent his entire career with Fulham, playing 459 games for the Cottagers from 1956-1969 before a knee injury cut short his career at 29. He later worked in the club's hospitality suites. Cohen's contribution to Fulham was recognized when his statue was unveiled at Craven Cottage in October 2016. He said at the time: "I find it absolutely wonderful that they even thought I was worthy of (a statue). Especially as it was alongside Johnny Haynes, the greatest name in Fulham's history."

"To be alongside him, it was rather unbelievable. It was great to think that not only the club but the supporters had wanted to put a statue of me there." Cohen was a campaigner and fundraiser for research into cancer, which claimed the life of England's 1966 captain Bobby Moore and dementia, which affected



MANCHESTER: Manchester City's Norwegian striker Erling Haaland (right) scores the opening goal during the English League Cup fourth round football match between Manchester City and Liverpool, at the Etihad stadium in Manchester. —AFP

Liverpool's defense, turned in De Bruyne's near-post cross in the 10th minute after getting in front of Joe Gomez to score his 24th goal of the season. Liverpool, however, were level within 10 minutes when Carvalho finished from a James Milner cross after the former City midfielder was allowed too much room in the penalty area. The visitors made two changes at half-time, Fabinho and Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain coming on for novice midfielder Stefan Bajcetic and Carvalho. But Liverpool fell behind again before either of the two substitutes could get into the game.

Only 76 seconds into the second half Mahrez fired home from the right side of the penalty area following a cross by Rodri. City's lead, however, evaporated just over a minute later as Nunez sprinted past Laporte

down the left, with Salah making light of a mediocre centre to draw Liverpool level at 2-2. But a rollercoaster contest then saw City go ahead for the third time when, after a quickly-taken corner, Ake powered in a 58th-minute header from a superb pinpoint cross by the outstanding De Bruyne.

Oxlade-Chamberlain went down in the penalty after a collision with Ake in the 69th minute but David Coote denied the Reds a spot-kick and, with VAR not in use, the referee's decision stood. Liverpool, however, had an excellent chance to make it 3-3 when a superb ball from Naby Keita left the inside Nunez free down the right touchline. But after sprinting clear of the City defense, Nunez, albeit from an acute angle, pulled his shot wide of the far post. —AFP

Arsenal urged to seize title chance as EPL returns

LONDON: Mikel Arteta has urged leaders Arsenal to carry on from where they left off by winning their first Premier League title since 2004 when English football's top-flight resumes after the World Cup break. The Gunners were in superb form, with 12 wins from 14 matches, when the league was paused in unprecedented fashion to allow for the first World Cup held in a northern hemisphere winter to take place in Qatar.

All season long, fans and pundits have been debating whether the break will be a help or a hindrance to clubs' ambitions, with Arsenal now without Gabriel Jesus after he was sent home early from the World Cup with a knee problem sustained in Brazil's shock defeat by Cameroon. Arteta, however, was in buoyant mood ahead of his side's return to Premier League action against London rivals West Ham at the Emirates on Monday.

"You know, I want the team to play a certain way, and the more consistent we are on that the more we are going to win," he told Sky Sports. "There is excitement, and we should be excited and we should be embracing the opportunity that we have ahead of us." Arsenal are currently five points clear of reigning champions Manchester City. City will be the last of the title contenders in action during the Boxing Day holiday round of fixtures when they travel to strugglers Leeds on Wednesday. Saudi-backed Newcastle, riding high in third place, are

England World Cup winner Cohen dies

LONDON: George Cohen, the right-back in England's 1966 World Cup-winning team, has died aged 83, his former club Fulham announced on Friday. The 37-times capped defender played every minute of the victorious campaign on home soil that culminated in a 4-2 extra-time win over the then West Germany to give England their first and only World Cup title. "Everyone at Fulham Football Club is deeply saddened to learn of the passing of one of our greatest ever players - and gentlemen - George Cohen MBE,"



Arsenal's Spanish manager Mikel Arteta

Lage. Fulham's match against Crystal Palace on Monday will be their first game since the death of club great and England 1966 World Cup-winner George Cohen at the age of 83. Premier League chiefs announced there will be a moment's applause before all top-flight matches between Boxing Day and December 28 in honour of Cohen, with all players and officials wearing black armbands as a mark of respect.

Fixtures (1500 GMT unless stated): Monday: Arsenal v West Ham (2000 GMT), Aston Villa v Liverpool (1730 GMT), Brentford v Tottenham (1230 GMT), Crystal Palace v Fulham, Everton v Wolves, Leicester v Newcastle, Southampton v Brighton. Tuesday: Chelsea v Bournemouth (1730 GMT), Manchester United v Nottingham Forest (2000 GMT). Wednesday: Leeds v Manchester City (2000 GMT). —AFP

several members of the team in later life including Manchester United great Bobby Charlton. Cohen, who spent decades suffering with bowel cancer, announced in 2017 he would be donating his brain for scientific research upon his death.

'Supreme athlete'

He was not the only world champion in his family, with nephew Ben Cohen a winger in the England side that won the 2003 Rugby World Cup - a match that also went to extra-time. Alan Mullery, who played alongside Cohen at Fulham, told Sky Sports News: "He was a supreme athlete, there were very few players George could not outrun completely - he did half my running up and down the wing."

"When he tackled people, he hit them hard and was

Rashford signs new Man United deal

LONDON: Manchester United attacker Marcus Rashford has signed a contract extension keeping him at the club until 2024, the English outfit announced on Saturday. The new contract on a reported £250,000-a-week plus bonuses, makes him the highest-paid English player in the Premier League, according to the Independent newspaper. The 25-year-old agreed a new deal alongside Diogo Dalot, Fred and Luke Shaw with the four players' current contract up at the end of the season. The England forward came through United's academy and was part of his country's squad that reached this month's World Cup quarter-finals.

"We want to develop, we want to support those players and we want them to keep in our process," United coach Erik Ten Hag said. "We want to construct a team for the future, so for longer years, and those players have to be part of it," he added. Portugal right-back Dalot, 25, joined the 20-time league champions in 2018, 27-year-old England left-back Shaw arrived four years earlier and Brazil midfielder Fred, who turns 30 in March, moved from Shakhtar Donetsk four seasons ago. Ten Hag's side, fifth in the table, return to Premier League action following the World Cup break on Tuesday as they host Nottingham Forest. —AFP

an outstanding right-back. "Everybody loved George. He was a proper gentleman and became a very clever businessman." Cohen's death means that of the England starting side who won the World Cup final - no substitutes were permitted in 1966 - only hat-trick hero Geoff Hurst, 81, and Charlton, 85, are still alive. "Very sad to hear my friend and England teammate George Cohen has died," said Hurst on Twitter.

"Everyone, without exception, always said that George was such a lovely man. He will be sadly missed, my heartfelt thoughts are with George's wife Daphne and his family." The Premier League, paying tribute to Cohen, said there would be a moment's applause before all top-flight matches between Boxing Day and December 28, with all players and officials wearing black armbands as a mark of respect. —AFP

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

Sabah Hospital	24812000	Kaizen center	25716707
Amiri Hospital	22450005	Rawda	22517733
Maternity Hospital	24843100	Adaliya	22517144
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700	Khaldiya	24848075
Chest Hospital	24849400	Kaifan	24849807
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010	Shamiya	24848913
Adan Hospital	23940620	Shuwaikh	24814507
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300	Abdullah Salem	22549134
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000	Nuzha	22526804
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9		

Clinics

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, ABDUL KHADER holder of Indian Passport No. Z3284430 having permanent address Telangana India 500005, residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as under: Given name: Abdul Khader

Omer and Surname: Bawazeer.

I, Shaik Ahmed, R/o : 18-12-418/o/72/a/1, Hafez Baba Nagar, Omer Colony, Bandlaguda, Hyd, 05.T.S. has changed my name as Omer Abdallah Bawazeer. (C#2823)

I, Ahla Haroon Rasheed D/o Haroon Rasheed from India, Kerala, Thrissur, 680616 have changed the surname of my minor daughter from ZAIRA FEDIL KAREEM (of Passport No. V9363964) to ZAIRA SHAAZ AHLA and she shall hereafter be known as ZAIRA SHAAZ AHLA. (C#2824) - 23-12-2022

Boston Celtics return to the top of Eastern Conference standings

Brown lifts Celtics; Bucks lose to Nets



BOSTON: Jaylen Brown #7 of the Boston Celtics drives to the basket during the game against the Minnesota Timberwolves on December 23, 2022. — AFP

MIAMI: Jaylen Brown scored 36 points as the Boston Celtics returned to the top of the Eastern Conference standings with a 121-109 win over the Minnesota Timberwolves on Friday. The Celtics (23-10) moved above Milwaukee (22-10) into first place after the Bucks fell to a 118-110 loss to the Brooklyn Nets.

Brown scored 23 of his 36 in the fourth quarter as Boston picked up just their second win in seven games, outscoring the Timberwolves 33-23 in the last quarter. Jayson Tatum scored 30 points for the Celtics, the 17th time he and Brown have both scored 30 or more in the same game. Brown had missed his first seven 3-point attempts and the momentum shifted when he sank three early in the fourth.

"You have just got to play through it," said Brown. "This game will take you high and then take you low. I stayed with it and I was able to get over the hump," he added. "It was super important to get this win, we have been in a little rut, it felt good to get back on the winning side." The top spot is up for grabs again on Sunday when the Celtics host the Bucks, who will be looking to bounce back from their loss at Brooklyn. Kevin Durant scored 24 points and Brooklyn managed to stop Milwaukee's star Giannis Antetokounmpo from scoring in the fourth quarter.

"I think we were locked in all night on both sides

of the ball, it was a great team win," said Durant. The Nets, fourth placed in the East, have now won eight in a row and have a 19-7 record since Jacques Vaughn took over from Steve Nash as head coach. The Philadelphia 76ers completed a seven-game homestand sweep beating the Los Angeles Clippers 119-114. Joel Embiid scored 44 points and James Harden provided a career-best 21 assists as part of a triple-double.

Kawhi Leonard top-scored for the Clippers with 28 points, with Paul George adding 22 but only five in the second half. It is the first time since the 1977/78 season that the 76ers swept a seven-game homestand and it has seen them improve to a 19-12 record and rise to fifth in the East. DeMar DeRozan's jumper in the final second clinched a 118-177 win for the Chicago Bulls over the New York Knicks. RJ Barrett had a season-high 44 points for the Knicks while Zach LaVine led the Bulls with 33 points.

The Orlando Magic picked up their eighth win in nine games with a 133-113 win over the struggling San Antonio Spurs. Orlando welcomed back Wendell Carter Jr and Gary Harris after lengthy injury absences-both entering from the bench. Cole Anthony top scored with 23 points off the bench, while German Franz Wagner added 21 points. Nikola

Jokic had 29 points and 11 assists as the Western Conference leading Denver Nuggets beat the Portland Trailblazers 120-107.

It was the third win in a row and sixth in the last seven for Denver who had Michael Porter Jr back in the team after missing 13 games with a heel injury. Porter scored 18 points and grabbed five rebounds. Jamal Murray, still managing his return from knee surgery, had 25 points, 12 assists and eight rebounds. The Memphis Grizzlies are level on 20-11 with Denver after they beat the Phoenix Suns 125-100 with 24 points and ten rebounds from Jaren Jackson Jr Brandon Clarke was 10 of 10 from the free throw line as he put up 24 points from the bench.

Third-placed New Orleans Pelicans recovered from a nine-point fourth-quarter deficit to earn a 128-125 overtime win over the Oklahoma City Thunder. In the absence of leading scorer Zion Williamson, Trey Murphy III top scored with 23 points. The Washington Wizards (13-21) had lost ten of their last 11 outings but enjoyed a surprise 125-111 win at the Sacramento Kings (17-14) with Kyle Kuzma scoring 32 points. LeBron James scored 34 points but the Los Angeles Lakers dropped to 13-19 with a 134-130 loss at home to the Charlotte Hornets. — AFP

Pakistan and NZ seek revival after England battering

KARACHI: Pakistan and New Zealand (NZ) will hope for a reversal of fortune in the two-match Test series starting in Karachi from Monday after both were whitewashed 3-0 by England in their last series. New Zealand were scuppered in England in May as the home team under head coach Brendon McCullum and skipper Ben Stokes introduced the aggressive "Bazball" style of cricket that is revolutionizing the sport. The never-say-die style also saw England inflict a first-ever 3-0 series defeat on Pakistan this month.

Since then, the Pakistan Cricket Board has undergone a revamp, with Ramiz Raja removed as chairman and chief selector Mohammad Wasim sacked. Skipper Babar Azam is also under scrutiny after losing an unprecedented four home Tests.

on the trot. Azam vowed his team would seek a quick turnaround. "There have been difficult times in the last series," said Azam, who has had to lead a side hard-hit by injuries. "With new players it's different because when the opposition attacks them, it places a sharper kind of pressure on them," he said. "It takes time to get used to that." Spearheads Shaheen Shah Afridi and Haris Rauf will miss both the New Zealand games, having still not recovered from injuries, but Naseem Shah is available after missing the last two Tests.



Pakistan's Babar Azam

Kamran Ghulam, who has accumulated runs in domestic matches, replaces the retiring Azhar Ali. Since winning the inaugural World Test Championship final against India last year, New Zealand have won just two of nine matches, but will be skippered by fast bowler Tim Southee.

Spin battle

Head coach Gary Stead, however, believes the first Test will be a spin battle. "But we also saw signs of reverse swing... so for us, honing our skills in those areas is important," he said. Pakistan will hope mystery spinner Abrar Ahmed, who took 17 wickets in his first two Tests against England, will also hurt New Zealand on grounds where the visitors have won just twice in 19 attempts. Left-arm Ajaz Patel-one of only three bowlers to take 10 wickets in a Test innings-is the key for New Zealand, who also have leg-spinner Ish Sodhi and spinning all-rounder Michael Bracewell. The second Test scheduled for Multan from January 3 might be moved to Karachi because of foggy weather. — AFP

Rangers edge Ross County



John Lundstram

GLASGOW: John Lundstram's first-half goal proved decisive as Rangers won 1-0 at Ross County on Friday to stay on the coattails of Scottish Premiership leaders Celtic. But following a pair of 3-2 comeback wins over Hibernian and Aberdeen respectively in Michael Beale's first two games as Rangers manager, this was a far more tame contest.

Lundstram scored the only goal of the game in the 35th minute at Dingwall when Fashion Sakala squared the ball to the midfielder who, from 20 yards, had time and space to let fly with a left-footed shot low past County goalkeeper Ross Laidlaw. Victory saw Rangers close to within six points of reigning champions Celtic but their arch Glasgow rivals will restore their nine-point lead at the top of the table with victory at home to St Johnstone.

Elsewhere, former Motherwell midfielder Liam Polworth's long-range shot earned 10-man Kilmarnock an unlikely point as the visitors came from two goals down to draw 2-2 at Fir Park. Kilmarnock appeared destined for defeat after falling behind to goals from Kevin van Veen and Callum Slattery before Alan Power was sent off in the 68th minute. Paul McGinn's own-goal got Killie back into the game five minutes later and they did not have to wait long for an equalizer, with Polworth's 75th-minute strike sealing a draw. A share of the points left Motherwell in ninth place, with Kilmarnock tenth in the 12-team Premiership. — AFP