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# Thundershowers, hailstorm lash Kuwait amid cold wave

## MoI urges motorists to be cautious amid turbulent weather



KUWAIT: The ground is packed with hailstones after a hailstorm in Umm al-Haiman on Dec 27, 2022. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat (See Page 4)

By Sajeev K Peter

**KUWAIT:** Heavy rains accompanied by lightning, thunder and hail lashed Kuwait on Tuesday, disrupting movement of pedestrians and vehicles. The rains hit most parts of Kuwait on Monday and Tuesday, as cloudy skies blanketed the country, while motorists endured bumper-to-bumper traffic on rain-soaked roads. Kuwait's meteorological department had forecast heavy but scattered rains accompanied by thun-

der across the country with hail over some areas. Wind speed will exceed 55 km/h, resulting a drop in visibility over some areas, and rough seas, it warned.

The temperature in Kuwait has dropped significantly over the last few days, and according to official forecasts, the mercury can fall to subzero temperatures in remote areas. Kuwait has been affected by weeks of inclement weather, which prompted authorities to advise residents to take precautions in case of rain, and asked people to stay away from areas of

flash flooding and waterlogged roads.

The interior ministry Tuesday urged motorists and sea-goers to be cautious amid the current turbulent weather across the country. In a press release, the ministry urged drivers to follow security authorities' instructions for using alternative routes and avoiding swamped roads, calling on motorists to maintain a safe distance from vehicles in front. It reminded parents to seat children in the backseats.

Meanwhile, authorities in several Gulf countries

also renewed weather warnings of heavy rains that could batter the usually arid region. Dubai Police warned motorists to exercise utmost caution when they drive on waterlogged roads. Gulf countries usually experience mild winters, with the exception of rare and brief episodes of flooding and rain between November and January. Such weather is highly disruptive in the region, where authorities often do not install heavy drainage systems due to the rarity of rainfall.

## AI-powered tech sees big gains in stroke treatment

**LONDON:** Artificial intelligence technology has tripled the number of UK stroke patients recovering to a point where they can perform daily activities, according to new research released on Tuesday. Early stage analysis of over 111,000 suspected stroke patients whose care included use of the technology found it reduced the time between being seen by a doctor and treatment beginning by over 60 minutes, leading to improved results.

The proportion who were able to resume day-to-day activities increased from 16 to 48 percent, the analysis of the Brainomix e-Stroke imaging platform found. The technology, developed by the UK's med-tech solution firm Brainomix, is being used across 11 stroke treatment networks in the UK's state-funded National Health Service (NHS) to diagnose strokes and determine the best treatment.

The platform helps doctors in the interpretation of brain scans and allows them to share the images with specialists worldwide who can access them remotely. "AI has the potential to transform our NHS - delivering faster, more accurate diagnoses and making sure patients can get the treatment they need, when they need it," the UK's health secretary Steve Barclay said in a statement.

Continued on Page 6

## Delivery of Caracal choppers suspended; call to scrap PART

By B Izzak

**KUWAIT:** Head of a parliamentary panel probing alleged corruption in two major defense deals, MP Adel Al-Damkhi, said on Tuesday that acting Defense Minister Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled Al-Sabah has ordered the temporary suspension of the delivery of Caracal helicopters from France. Kuwait has

already taken delivery of most of the 30 Caracals it had ordered at the cost of over \$1 billion, but MPs have repeatedly raised concerns about alleged manufacturing defects in the military helicopters and others claimed corruption in the deal.

Damkhi's statement came after the investigation committee met with the acting defense minister to discuss the allegations surrounding the Caracals and the \$8-billion-dollar deal to acquire Eurofighter warplanes. The investigation was ordered by the National Assembly earlier this month in response to a request by several MPs.

Damkhi praised the cooperation of Sheikh Talal, who is acting for Defense Minister Sheikh Abdullah Al-Ali Al-Sabah. MPs had threatened to grill the defense minister if he did not suspend the delivery

## Jubilant Chinese plan trips abroad

**BEIJING:** People in China reacted with joy and rushed to plan trips abroad Tuesday after Beijing said it would scrap mandatory COVID quarantine for overseas arrivals, ending almost three years of self-imposed isolation. In a snap move late Monday, China said that from Jan 8 inbound travelers would no longer need to quarantine, as it further unwinds hardline virus controls that had torpedoed the economy and sparked nationwide protests.

Infections have surged nationwide as key pillars of the containment policy have been dismantled, while authorities acknowledged the outbreak is "impossible" to track and dis-

continued much-maligned daily case tallies. Still, many Chinese were jubilant to learn of the end of restrictions that have kept the country largely closed off to the world since March 2020. "I felt like the epidemic is finally over... The travel plans I made three years ago may now become a reality," said Beijing office worker Fan Chengcheng, 27.

A Shanghai resident surnamed Chen said it "felt like someone has pressed the button to end the movie", adding that her parents in Britain would be able to visit more easily. "Finally, China's going back to normal," she told AFP. Another Shanghai local, surnamed Du, said a swifter reopening may help the country reach so-called herd immunity more quickly, adding that there was "no way to avoid" the virus in the eastern megacity.

Continued on Page 6



BEIJING: A health worker uses her phone as she waits for people at a nucleic acid testing booth on Dec 27, 2022. — AFP



## Local

# Drug scourge crosses red lines into society's ominous threat

## Promoting sports could help youth to avoid drugs

KUWAIT: Rampant drug abuse among youngsters in Kuwait is posing a perilous threat to society, giving way to growing national pleas for stiffer legislation to prevent a further slip into moral decadence. Given the detrimental effects drug abuse has on society and the national economy alike, concerned bodies in Kuwait have ratcheted up efforts to clamp down on the scourge, which include enacting tougher drug prohibition laws to penalize traffickers who often prey upon vulnerable youth.

According to a local drug abuse prevention center called "Bashayer Al-Khair," which preaches Islamic teachings to fight addiction, the 15-22 year old cohort has been identified as the group most at risk of developing drug-related problems. Citing the widespread availability of "cheap drugs," as the trigger behind a recent surge in violent crime, the center's chief, Sheikh Dr Abdulhamid Al-Ballali pinpointed the drug methamphetamine, commonly referred to as "Shabu" as the most pervasive.

He placed a sizable share of the onus on the parents of drug addicts, saying "neglect" and "peer pressure" are one of the most primary causes of drug abuse in Kuwait, urging parents to shoulder the "moral and legal" responsibility to prevent its spread. According to Justice Ministry's data, there are some 6,000 drug-related cases in Kuwaiti courts, 50 percent of which involve Kuwaitis, running the gamut from manufacturing to the trafficking and seizure of illegal substances. Based on these grim statistics, Kuwaiti state bodies and non-governmental organizations have pledged to take a stand against all forms of drug abuse, using everything at their disposal to eradicate such nefarious activities.



Rushaid Al-Anezi



Fuhaid Al-Ajmi



Talal Al-Jassar

### Promoting sports

Meanwhile, a number of heads of sports federations and clubs in Kuwait agreed that regularly practicing sports for youth could help improve their social behavior, especially avoiding drugs. In separate statements to KUNA on Tuesday, the officials noted that sports give confidence to practitioners and encourage a healthy lifestyle both physically and mentally, as well as boost a person's mood.

In this context, head of Kuwait Weight Lifting Federation Talal Al-Jassar said that practicing weight lifting or other sports in public clubs and national teams differ from practicing in private clubs, as youth in national teams are fully aware of the risks of using steroids and other drugs. Using any type of perform-

ance enhancing drugs could lead the athlete to a long-term suspension from taking part in tournaments, or could sometimes become a permanent suspension, he added.

The federation is continuously cooperating with Kuwait Anti-Doping Agency to test athletes in all local and international tournaments, he said. On his part, head of Kuwait Winter Games Club Fuhaid Al-Ajmi affirmed that the long time spent by players in exercising and playing games in different sports help avoiding the use of drugs, as the main factor for drug use is the big amount of free time for both genders.

Meanwhile, head of Kuwait Basketball Association Rushaid Al-Anezi said that all sports federations are committed to protect their players against the dan-



gers of drugs. He called on officials to spread awareness among youth, sport crews and society on the risks of using steroids. Engaging in sports develops a well-behaved personality that respects laws in children and teenagers, a characteristic that can protect against using drugs, he added. In 2005, Kuwait Public Authority for Sport joined the Copenhagen Declaration, under the World Anti-Doping Agency, signed during the second World Conference on Doping in Sport in 2003. This was followed by establishing the Kuwait Anti-Doping Agency. —KUNA



Dr S Jaishankar



Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah

## Kuwait, India FMs discuss bilateral ties

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and India's External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar held a telephone conversation on Tuesday. The conversation is part of the enhanced high-level political exchanges between India and Kuwait, a press release issued by Indian Embassy, Kuwait said.

During the conversation, both sides touched upon important areas of bilateral relations and exchanged views on the regional and global developments of mutual interest. Incidentally, both Foreign Ministers had previously served as ambassadors of their respective countries to the United States.

Jaishankar fondly recalled his official visit to Kuwait from 09-11 June, 2021 wherein he called on Prime Minister of Kuwait and delivered a letter from India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed to HH the Amir of Kuwait. The official visit culminated in the signing of several memoranda of understanding including one on 'cooperation in the recruitment of domestic Workers'.

Kuwait's foreign minister had earlier paid an official visit to India in March 2021. The Indian External Affairs Minister and Kuwait Foreign Minister also met in Tehran on August 5, 2021 on the sidelines of their visit to Iran to attend the swearing-in ceremony of Iranian president, the release said. Both countries have also elevated the Joint Commission meeting to foreign minister level.

India and Kuwait share warm, multifaceted, dynamic and friendly relations, rooted in strong people-to-people contact. The year 2021-22 marked the 60th anniversary of establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. Commercially, India has consistently been among the top ten trading partners of Kuwait. Bilateral trade for FY 2021-22 stood at \$12.24 billion, registering a growth of 95.3 percent on annual basis. The strong and vibrant million plus Indian community in Kuwait remains a living bridge between the two countries, the release concluded.

## Kuwait humanitarian achievements in 2022

KUWAIT: In 2022, Kuwait carried out a lot of humanitarian activities and initiatives, and made major accomplishments in various domains. The following is a list of such activities and achievements:

**Jan 26:** Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) signed a cooperation agreement with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), to support and implement a relief program for the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh.

**Feb 3:** KRCS launched a medical program to perform surgical operations for Syrian Refugees in Jordan.

**Feb 5:** KRCS launched a campaign, which aims to aid 1,200 Syrian families that took Jordan as a refuge with winter clothes.

**Feb 14:** Kuwait's Al-Salam Humanitarian and Charity Society launched a new campaign with 400 trucks loaded with food and aid to help the Syrian and Yemeni people.

**Feb 22:** KRCS launched a donation campaign for Afghanistan in the Avenues Mall.

**Feb 23:** Kuwait distributed food on 720 orphan families in Sudan.

**Feb 28:** Kuwait Society for Relief launched a campaign for the distribution of nearly 8,100 shipments of drinking water to camps for the displaced in four of Yemen's governorates over the next five months.

**March 8:** KRCS and the UN food agency signed a deal to provide urgent aid some 22 million impoverished Afghans.

**March 10:** KRCS announced that the plane was flying toward Warsaw Airport in Poland was loaded with 33.5 tons of medical and food supplies to the Ukrainian refugees.

**March 30:** Kuwait's Consul to Irbil, Dr. Omar Al-Kandari, announced sponsoring more than a 1,000 in province of Kurdistan, Iraq, as part of "Kuwait by your side" campaign.

**April 19:** A Kuwaiti air force aircraft arrived in Bucharest, Romania, to deliver 40 tons of relief aid to Ukrainian refugees.

**April 24:** The Kuwaiti relief aid society distributed 4,832 food baskets to displaced people in Yemen. April 25: KRCS and Turkey signed an agreement to establish a regional disaster and fire response center in Antalya, Turkey, funded by the Kuwait Finance House (KFH) bank.

**May 28:** Kuwait relief aid society and KRCS signed an agreement to aid the people of Afghanistan.

**June 9:** Kuwait relief aid society set the cornerstone for the college of Islamic science in Irbil, the capital of Iraq Kurdistan. The Kuwait Ministry of Awqaf (endowment) and Islamic Affairs would handle the funding.

**June 20:** Secretary-General of Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) Maha Al-Barjas became on Sunday the first Arab woman to gain position of vice-president of International Federation of Red Cross and Crescent Societies (IFRC) for the region of Asia and Pacific Ocean.

**July 2:** Kuwait Society for Relief delivered 50 vehicles to poor families in Taizz, Yemen.

**July 27:** Kuwait Mercy International launched a relief aid campaign for those affected by violence in the Blue Nile region, southeast of Sudan.

**Aug 6:** KRCS offered urgent medical aid to the Gaza Strip affected by the Israeli aggression and bombardment.

**Aug 10:** KRCS launched a donation campaign for the Gaza Strip.

**Aug 18:** KRCS delivered to the Palestinians 900 large food packages for those affected by the Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip.

**Aug 28:** KRCS offered immediate medical assistance to those affected by floods in Pakistan.

**Aug 30:** KRCS offered relief aid to thousands of Sudanese affected by floods and heavy rainfall in their



BUCHAREST: Kuwait air force aircraft arrived in Bucharest, Romania, to deliver 40 tons of relief aid to Ukrainian refugees in this file photo. —KUNA photos



KRCS distributed winter clothes to Syrian refugee families in Jordan.

country.

**Sept 8:** KRCS sent a relief aid aircraft with 40 tons of foodstuff and medical supplies to people affected by floods and heavy rain in Sudan.

**Sept 15:** Kuwait sent a relief aid convoy with 75 tons of supplies to help those affected by floods and heavy rainfall in Sudan.

**Oct 10:** KRCS and its Turkish counterpart signed a five-million-dollar agreement to aid those affected by Turkey's earthquake.

**Oct 12:** The Kuwaiti-based International Islamic Charitable Organization (IICO) and the Turkish Red Crescent Organization signed an MoU in aiding refugees.

**Oct 16:** IICO distributed food to some 15,300 individuals affected by the floods in Pakistan.

**Oct 17:** IICO distributed food to 4,000 Syrian refugees and poor families in Lebanon.

**Nov 9:** IICO and the Islamic development bank signed a two-million-dollar agreement to aid in the education of Syrian refugees.

**Dec 14:** Al-Najat charitable society continued its winter relief aid campaign for the needy and refugees in 18 countries. Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED):

**Feb 23:** Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) announced a deal with the United Nations Development Program aiming to support a project supplying renewable electric energy for medical centers in Yemen, and is valued at KD 750,000 (\$2.5 Million).

**March 24:** Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development has signed a loan agreement with GCC Interconnection Authority (GCCIA) for KD 35 million (\$115 million).

**April 21:** KFAED and UNICEF signed a 2-million-dollar deal to fund a project geared towards supporting mothers and newborns in Yemen. The two sides also signed a deal to support a water project in the Gaza Strip.

**April 26:** KFAED and Somalia signed an agreement to reschedule loans.

**May 10:** KFAED, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), and KRCS signed a trilateral memo to boost cooperation.

**May 22:** KFAED and Argentina signed a KD-15.2-million (around USD 49.5 million) agreement to water projects in several Argentinean states.

**May 8:** KFAED and Jordan signed a KD-38.3-million loan agreement to fund infrastructure for education in the Kingdom of Jordan.

**June 26:** KFAED and the Kuwait Credit Bank (KCB) renewed a 2002 agreement wherein the latter party issued bonds worth KD 500 million (around \$1.6 billion) to help cover housing needs in Kuwait for the next two decades at an interest rate of two percent.

**Aug 3:** KFAED and Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR) sign MoU to offer consultancy and research services to developing states.

**Nov 3:** The American National Council on US-Arab Relations awarded KFAED with the global development prize for its efforts throughout the globe.

**Nov 29:** KFAED and the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) signed a KD 654,000 grant (around USD

2.1 million) to develop infrastructure in Yemen.

**Feb 10:** Dr Hind Al-Qadeeri won L'Oréal-UNESCO For Women in Science International Awards.

**Feb 24:** Kuwaiti parachutist Ibrahim Al-Rubaian won in the free skydiving sport an unprecedented achievement by performing a jump from a height of 13,000 feet with the largest Kuwait flag stretching 800 square meters during the celebrations of national holidays in Kuwait.

**Feb 26:** Kuwait has set a new Guinness record for raising the biggest Kuwaiti flag (2,742 square meters) on the summit of Oman's Jebel Shams, the highest mountains in the Arab World.

**March 21:** The Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO) in its 8th session for "Arab Poetry Day" honored Kuwaiti poet Sheikhha Dr Suad Al-Sabah, for her distinguished literary and cultural contributions in this domain.

**April 23:** Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI) awarded Kuwait Science Club Diving Center with an excellence certificate for contributions to scuba diving in Kuwait and abroad.

**June 12:** Kuwaiti researchers Dr Nasser Al-Sayegh and Dr Ammar Bahman obtained a patent from the American Patent Office of US Department of Commerce for a device capable of characterizing the physical state of the nano-suspensions dispersed in nano-fluids during the dynamic flow process.

**June 29:** Kuwait University (KU) announced that assistant professor at the college of dentistry Dr. Mohammad Kamal and Otolaryngologist at the Ministry of Health Dr Abdulmohsen Al-Turki won a patent from the American Patent Office for a cast replacing nasal wicks

**July 2:** International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP) has picked Kuwaiti academician Dr Dalal Al-Taweel among 20 women pharmaceutical scientists and pharmacy educators as the first FIPWiSE Rising Stars.

**Aug 11:** The Arab League honored Abdullah Al-Shammari, a Kuwaiti youth who placed third in the 2022 Arab youth excellence prize within the voluntary work category.

**Oct 2:** Kuwaiti Munira Al-Qadiri won an award at a German exhibition for miniature art.

**Oct 3:** Dr Bader Al-Enezi of Kuwait University (KU) won a patent from the US for an invention on water desalination and protecting the environment.

**Oct 9:** Photographer Mohammad Murad won an award at a Spanish natural photography event.

**Oct 12:** The European Union of Medical Specialists (UEMS) chose Kuwaiti academic Dr Mohammad Kamal as the first examiner from outside the European Union during an event in Madrid, Spain.

**Oct 12:** Lama Al-Oraiman won the Emerging Space Leader award, presented by the International Astronautical Federation (IAF).

**Oct 30:** Photographer Mohammad Murad won the highest honorary award in the 2022 Benjamin Mkapa African Wildlife Photography, held recently in Kenya, organized by the African Wildlife Foundation (AWF) and the American Nature's Best Photography (NBP). —KUNA

Local



CEO Eaman Al Roudhan is a key supporter of entrepreneurs and the Zain Great Idea program.

# Empowering digital innovation and shouldering Kuwaiti sports: Zain's top contributions in 2022

Company continues its mission to uplift youth and shed light on local talents

- Zain Official Sponsor of Kuwait Football Association competitions for next 4 years.

- 'Dawri Zain' offers KD 50k of prizes for athletes and fans, biggest prize pool in league's history.

- Zain Great Idea's 7th season takes local entrepreneurs to regional expansion.

- Company supported education, environment, and health programs under its social sustainability vision.

**KUWAIT:** The year 2022 shaped up to be a turning point for Kuwait and the entire world, as most governments and nations started to loosen restrictions on social gathering and lift lockdowns. With normal life returning to its natural course, Zain sought to make a strong comeback by supporting and adopting a wide range of initiatives and projects within the community's most vibrant sectors.

Zain's social efforts and contributions have always stemmed from the company's comprehensive sustainability and social responsibility strategy, which has always centered around building solid strategic partnerships with nonprofits, NGOs, global organizations, and the nation's private and public sectors. Relying on such partnerships, Zain continues to move forward towards its goal of empowering local talents towards showing their creativity, fulfilling their passion, and achieving their aspirations.

As ever, Zain continues to allocate a big portion of its social efforts to enrich the digital innovation ecosystem, empower new entrepreneurs, and support owners of local startups. In 2022, the company continued to show unwavering support to rising talents to provide them with opportunities for sustainable growth and help them put a first step in the business world. In the following report, Zain showcases some of its top programs and projects from 2022:

### Supporting Kuwaiti sports

In November 2022, Zain announced its partnership with the Kuwait Football Association, where it became the Official Sponsor of the KFA's competitions for the next four seasons (2022-2026), including the Kuwaiti Premier League (now known as Dawri Zain) and the First Division League. The company also supports the Amir's Cup, the Crown Prince's Cup, and the KFA Cup (Zain Cup).

Moving forward, Zain's role centers around three main areas: supporting athletes with cash prizes, launching social events and interacting with fans at stadiums, and the first-ever Fantasy Football League in Kuwaiti football's history. Zain offers KD 50,000 of prizes per season, the biggest prize pool ever to be distributed in the Kuwaiti League's history. By dedicating cash prizes for athletes, the company seeks to encourage players to pursue excellence, ultimately elevating the league's performance.

Zain also organizes many social programs and exciting events for fans, including hosting restaurants, cafes, and local SMEs around stadiums to offer their services to fans, especially during big matches like derbies, classics, and finals. The company also presents special competitions, prizes, and giveaways on the stands and on its social media channels. Saving the best for last, Zain unveiled a surprise for fans of Kuwaiti football: the first-ever local Fantasy Football League competition for the Kuwaiti Premier League, through which it aspires to bring Kuwaiti football into the digital era.

Fantasy Football is one of the most popular



Zain's support of the league will contribute to adding enthusiasm and fun.

games in European leagues, and Zain sought to offer Kuwaiti fans the same experience in a 100% local flavor. Zain's Fantasy Football League offers users a thrilling experience to pick their own teams and compete with other players to achieve fantasy league titles. To encourage fans to play, compete, and passionately follow their teams, Zain offers winners with a cash prize pool of KD 10,000.

### Empowering entrepreneurs and enriching digital innovation

Continuing its efforts to empower new entrepreneurs and grow the local digital innovation ecosystem, Zain launched the seventh season of its



Zain continuously supports the achievements of Kuwaiti athletes.



Zain Headquarters

renowned Zain Great Idea tech startup accelerator program in September 2022. The all-new season continues the program's mission to enrich the tech startup ecosystem in Kuwait and further push it forward towards expansion into the MENA region.

Entering its second decade, Zain's program offers an all-new experience for the next generation of entrepreneurs, offering greater flexibility and more freedom for every participant to choose the sessions and programs that best suit their schedules and business needs. Zain also expanded the content and activities of the program to take entrepreneurs to top regional destinations, including Riyadh, Cairo, and Dubai to expose them to the

best experiences and success stories from other entrepreneurs, investors, and accelerators from the region and world.

### Supporting education, environment, and health programs

Throughout 2022, Zain supported a plethora of education, environment, and health programs to achieve its strategic social sustainability vision and contribute to local and global sustainable goals. Zain participated in the special event to celebrate UN Day 2022 under the title: "Youth4Climate: Driving Ambition." The ceremony celebrated the United Nations' 77th anniversary and the 60th year of Kuwait's membership in the UN, and Zain's participation came as part of its long-term strategic partnership with the UN and its own unwavering commitment to tackle climate change.

Zain also continued its strategic partnership with 'Kuwait Codes', the educational coding program for high school students organized by CODED Academy to empower the next generation of young Kuwaiti coders. The initiative, in its second year, aims at creating a technically advanced generation by offering the opportunity for high school students to learn and develop programming skills at four main streams: developing iPhone and Android apps, designing websites, and building video games.

In August, Zain continued its strategic partnership with the Ministry of Interior to organize a special Drug Abuse Awareness Exhibition to showcase the government's untiring efforts to combat drug abuse. Zain's role in this initiative did not stop at the exhibition but extended to launching a comprehensive social media campaign on its official channels, titled #CloserThanYouThink, to share the latest official drug-related statistics from MOI. Zain also sponsored the seventh season of the KON Social Entrepreneurship Program, organized by LOYAC in collaboration with Babson College in Boston.

During its support to the program's past four seasons, Zain received amazing feedback from young ambitious youth who had a keen interest in entrepreneurship in Kuwait. The program continued to empower young students, guide them to discover their potential, and lead them towards success, helping unleash their creativity and fulfill their ambitions. Continuing its support to health programs, Zain sponsored a special event held to celebrate World Diabetes Day organized by Jaber Al Ahmad Hospital's Endocrine and Diabetes Division at the Avenues Mall.

Zain considers itself an active partner of the local health sector and the nation's various institutions to raise social awareness and improve public health, and the company's support to this special initiative came as part of its keenness to support any efforts that contribute to creating a healthy attitude towards chronic diseases within the community, especially diabetes, one of the most widespread diseases in Kuwait.



Zain has always supported the ambitions of youth to empower the next generation of leaders.

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## Basra woos 'Gulf 25' fans

BAGHDAD: People from Iraq's southern province of Basra have welcomed Gulf fans who are going to attend the upcoming 25th football Gulf Cup, dubbed "Gulf 25", which is due in Basra between January 6-19, 2023. The annual championship is widely deemed an opportunity to push forward cooperative relations between Iraq, Yemen and the six member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

Speaking to KUNA in this context, Abu Al-Hasan Al-Eidani, an Iraqi doctor who is interested in sports in general, believed that Gulf 25 would secure an unprecedented opportunity for Gulf young people to come together in Basra, which reflects Gulf history and culture. Voicing much rejoicing over the tournament, Al-Eidani said the Gulf event would unquestionably break a decades-long psychological barrier between the Gulf people and their Iraqi brothers.

"Unlike what is being reported by mass media, Gulf fans are to be most welcome to Basra houses, before hotels," said the young doctor. Anwar Adel, a teacher, said Basra would regard the event as a significant occasion for people from all Gulf countries to strengthen bonds of brotherhood and solidarity following years of estrangement and rupture.

Anwar, 35, said although he is not very interested in sports in general and football in particular, he and so many others were greatly impressed by the inflow of Gulf fans and cheerful atmosphere in Basra. Also speaking to KUNA, he vowed that all Gulf guests would undoubtedly see the most wonderful sentiments of greeting, warm welcome and hospitality in Basra. Sheikh Kathem Al-Sereifi, a chief tribesman of Basra, was quoted as saying that he is so willing and happy to welcome Gulf official delegations and football fans to his spacious house.

He said that all of them would be so welcome to Basra which, he affirmed, enjoys security and stability and is a successful investment destination. Meanwhile, Basra-based Al-Maqal Sport Club, which plays in Iraq Division Three, said it is ready to open its doors for the guests of Gulf countries and serve three meals every day during the days of the major Gulf event. Furthermore, many Iraqi people have aired a lot of posts on social media voicing feelings of greeting and warm welcome for Gulf guests coming to attend the matches of the upcoming 25th football Gulf Cup. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Motorists waded through floodwaters after heavy rainfall in Kuwait as residents play with hell stones on December 27, 2022. People hardly walk through a large puddle of water after heavy rain in Kuwait. The Ministry of Interior on Tuesday urged motorists and sea-goers to be cautious amid the current turbulent weather across the country. In a press release, the ministry urged drivers to follow security authorities' guidelines for using alternative routes and avoiding roads swamped with puddles, calling on motorists to stay fairly apart from the vehicle in front. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



## PAAET graduates 10,000 per year

KUWAIT: The Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET) plays a key role in feeding the domestic work and business market with qualified labor force, graduating more than 10,000 would-be personnel per year. PAAET has been fulfilling this task since its proclamation on December 28, 1982, making up for shortages of the required workforce. At core of its activities is the holding of training courses involving thousands of students per year.

PAAET's colleges, since 1985, have enrolled 259,563 citizens and number of graduates, since 1992, has reached 152,211. Number of the nationals registered in the colleges and the courses, since 1981, has amounted to nearly 163,691 and the whole

figure of the graduates from special courses and faculties, since 1989, has hit 91,020.

Securing a well-educated and trained work force is in the heart of the Kuwait State strategy, new Kuwait 2035, publicized on January 30, 2017, when the national strategists put the wheels on the track toward developing the country and joining ranks of advanced countries. PAAET encompasses a number of colleges and institutes, such as College of Basic Education, College of Business Studies, College of Technological Studies and College of Health Sciences, among many others.

The authority's embryo was the Technical and Vocational Education Department, established in 1972, to supervise technical and vocational education. It had continued to function until 1982 when PAAET was established as an autonomous body to supervise technical and vocational training. Kuwait's economy has been depending on oil and petroleum derivatives for many years. However, the State and



The Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET) Headquarters.

its apparatuses have been seeking to diversify the economy and cut the hinge on the oil. In the Kuwaiti oil and non-oil sectors, the national skilled workforce is a basic entity. —KUNA

## Smoking, addiction and health hazard

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Secretariat General of the Arab Federation for Drug Prevention in cooperation with Kuwait Society for Preventing Smoking and Cancer organized a workshop titled "Smoking and addiction and its relation with health". The workshop was part of efforts to focus on the problem of drug use, which is considered a social deviation that causes much harm to the individual and family, which is the society's nucleus.

This comes as an implementation of strategies to strengthen drug prevention the world is interested in to confront its unprecedented spread. Specialists and studies have proven that smoking is the main gateway to drugs. Several specialists from Kuwait and Egypt participated in the workshop, which was moderated by board member of the Arab Federation for Drug Prevention Dr Hussa Majid Al-Shaheen, who welcomed guests and gave a brief about the federation. She said the federation since its establishment in 1998 has succeeded in achieving many items of its strategy, especially with regards to the youth and adolescents of both genders.

Dr Mariam Abdelmohsen Al-Otaibi, who is in charge of smoking cessation clinic at Kuwait Society for Preventing Smoking and Cancer spoke about the effects of vaping on health, as scientific studies proved that the percentage of lung and respiratory system diseases is higher among e-cigarette smokers, in addition to brain damage, oral diseases and heart problems. She said depression cases increase among vapers 2.4 percent more than non-users, adding that e-smoking is a means of quitting smoking, as reported by the American Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

Deputy Chairman of International Psychological Association, consultant psychiatrist Dr Mohammad Abu Al-Azaem, spoke about psychological health in drug and addiction issues. He spoke about what happens to the brain following drug use, including losing control over actions and the user's detachment from reality, as horrible crimes are committed without any effect on the abuser. "This is what we are afraid of - an increase in crimes in our Arab countries," he said.

Dr Azaem said drugs affect the user's feelings



Dr Hussa Al-Shaheen



Dr Khalid Al-Saleh

and causes mood fluctuations. It makes the individual introverted and isolated, and leads to depression, sadness and nervousness. He said the department concerned with fighting drugs and crime at the United Nations reported that the death percentage due to heroin alone increased to 71 percent in the past 10 years.

Secretary General of the Arab Federation for Drug Prevention Dr Khalid Al-Saleh spoke about the harms caused by smoking, adding smoking is considered a form of addiction by WHO because nicotine is poisonous and reacts with nerve ends in the human body. He said tobacco addiction is a major cause of preventable deaths around the world, adding that WHO said there are more than one billion smokers around the world, and it is expected that more than one million people will die in 2030 due to diseases resulting from smoking.

Dr Saleh emphasized the importance of introducing defensive behaviors in the ministry of education curricula and use modern technologies in fighting smoking, which is a gateway to addiction. Participants agreed on the importance of improving medicines that help reduce withdrawal symptoms among smokers and addicts, because it is a painful stage that can be a motive to continue drug abuse. They also recommended benefitting from modern technologies to re-program the brain.

They recommended having a permanent exhibition to promote awareness against smoking and drugs, in which modern scientific tools are used to explain harms to the human body and be a reference for youth and their families. Participants in the workshop thanked the interior ministry for its efforts to prevent the spread of drugs. They also thanked Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences for supporting activities that aim to protect the society from dangerous scourges such as smoking and drugs.



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PARIS: Protesters react as they hold Kurdish traditional musical instruments while taking part in a demonstration to pay tribute to the Enghien Street shooting victims in Paris. —AFP

# Mystery endures in Paris murder of activists

## New attack has brought 2013 murders back under the spotlight with Kurdish community

PARIS: The unsolved 2013 murder of three Kurdish women activists in Paris has been an open wound for their community, with lingering frustration over France's failure to bring those responsible to justice.

That wound was compounded after Friday's attack in which a white French gunman allegedly killed three Kurds, just minutes' walk from the scene of the slayings nine years ago. The new attack has brought the 2013 murders back under the spotlight with the Kurdish community asking why French authorities have still been unable to fully elucidate the case and say if there were accomplices or backers.

On January 9, 2013, Sakine Cansiz — one of the founders of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) — was murdered along with Fidan Dogan, 28, and 24-year-old Leyla Soylemez. The PKK is blacklisted by Ankara and its Western allies as a terrorist group. They were shot in the offices of the Kurdistan

Information Centre in Paris, just a 10-minute walk away from the Kurdish cultural centre targeted on Friday. Turkish national Omer Guney was charged with murdering the three but died in hospital of brain cancer in December 2016, just before his case came to trial.

The activists' families point to documents they say prove the involvement of Turkey's spy agency (MIT). In 2014, MIT officially denied any role. After Friday's shooting, some in the Kurdish community accused France of failing in their duty to protect them, and some clashed with police at protests.

Demonstrators have drawn parallels between the 2013 murders and the latest attack, with some holding images of the three activists. Some have also accused Turkey of involvement in last week's shooting, but French investigators have not provided any announcements to that effect.

The 69-year-old suspect, who authorities say has admitted racist beliefs, was charged Monday with murder motivated by race, ethnicity, nationality or religion.

### Murky profile

Guney denied involvement in the 2013 killings, and it was surveillance footage that led to his arrest after he was seen entering the crime scene and one of the victim's DNA was allegedly found on his coat.

But the murky profile of Guney, a maintenance worker at Charles de Gaulle Airport, added further complication to the case. Initially police sources said he presented himself as a PKK member, which the group denied, and then he was suspected of being close to ultra-nationalist Turkish groups and accused of infiltrating France's Kurdish community from late 2011 onwards.

The PKK has waged an insurgency against the Turkish state since 1984, at first seeking a Kurdish homeland and then in pursuit of greater political autonomy for Kurds. The group and its supporters defend the PKK as a national liberation movement.

The 2013 murders came as the Turkish state and jailed PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan entered into tentative peace talks to resolve the conflict that has claimed tens of thousands of lives. After the 2015 collapse of a ceasefire, fighting flared again.

Despite MIT's denial, Turkish media published the recording of a conversation between a man believed to be Guney and two Turkish spies as well as a document resembling a "mission order". "His links with Turkish (intelligence) services were proven by several elements in the case," Antoine Comte, a lawyer for the family of one of the activists killed, told AFP this week. — AFP

## Children forced to grow up fast in Ukraine towns

BAKHMUT/LYMAN: Lisa Shtanko, 8, stood on the side of a muddy road watching Ukrainian soldiers pass by, one of only a few children left in a town hit hard by Russia's invasion.

There was hardly any heating or electricity. Most of her friends were long gone. And just that morning a strike had landed outside Lisa's house. "Today I'm

not in a good mood because of the shelling," she told AFP as her father, Viktor Shtanko, looked on.

Children living on the frontline of Russia's invasion of Ukraine have to learn to manage unceasing stress, with experts warning of long-term disorders. The Shtankos' hometown, Lyman, endured four months of Russian occupation that left most of it in ruins and turned the surrounding forests into minefields.

Ukrainian forces regained control of Lyman in October, but fighting continues nearby. "Of course she's scared," said Viktor, a 42-year-old electrician. "There's nothing scarier than death lurking around you. But she's fine with her dad."

The upcoming New Year's Eve and Orthodox Christmas holiday on January 7 could provide some

distraction from the war, but the only toy Viktor will be able to offer will be donated by a humanitarian group. These hardships have spurred most families with children to leave, and many have "no reason to return", said Kostya Korovkin, father of 6-year-old Nastya.

Kostya told AFP he has nowhere to go, meaning Nastya is forced to spend long days in the basement of their building, occasionally wandering out onto streets where only stray dogs roam. Sometimes she heads up to the building's sixth floor, the only place where she can get an internet signal and attend classes online.

In front of the entrance to her building, someone has set up a small Christmas tree and placed candies

on the branches. "But," Kostya said, "there are no children left to pick them."

While Lyman no longer sees active fighting, other towns in the eastern Donetsk region still have the war on their doorstep. Bakhmut, where President Volodymyr Zelensky paid a daring surprise visit last week, has been pounded by a months-long Russian assault that shows no sign of letting up.

At the back of one basement where 20 people have been sheltering for eight months, 14-year-old Gleb Petrov greets visitors with a firm handshake and a serious look on his face. He is the only minor living in the basement, where he spends his days sleeping late, caring for the elderly and watching over a black kitten that has also taken up residence there. — AFP

## Taiwan extends mandatory military service

TAIPEI: Taiwan on Tuesday announced an extension in mandatory military service from four months to one year, citing the threat from an increasingly hostile China. Beijing considers self-ruled, democratic Taiwan a part of its territory, to be taken one day, by force if necessary, and the island lives under the constant fear of a Chinese invasion.

China's sabre-rattling has intensified in recent years under President Xi Jinping, and Russia's invasion of Ukraine has further deepened worries in Taiwan that Beijing might move similarly to annex the island. China's "intimidation and threats against Taiwan are getting more obvious", President Tsai Ing-wen told a press conference after a high-level government meeting on national security.

"No one wants war... but my fellow countrymen, peace will not fall from the sky." "The current four-month military service is not enough to meet the fast and ever-changing situation," she said. "We have decided to restore the one-year military service from 2024."

The extended requirement will apply to men born after January 1, 2005, Tsai added. Mandatory military service used to be deeply unpopular in Taiwan, and its previous government had reduced it from one year to four months with the aim of creating a mainly volunteer force.



TAIPEI: A journalist looks at a poster showing the Taiwanese government's plan to extend mandatory military service during a press conference at the presidential office in Taipei on December 27, 2022. — AFP

But recent polling showed more than three-quarters of the Taiwanese public now believes that is too short. Tsai described the extension as "an extremely difficult decision... to ensure the democratic way of life for our future generations".

"We can only avoid a war by preparing for a war and we can only stop a war by being capable of fighting a war."

### Outgunned

The prospect of a Chinese invasion has increasingly worried Western nations and many of China's neighbours. Xi, China's most authoritarian leader in decades, has made clear that what he calls the "reunification" of Taiwan cannot be passed on to

future generations.

Taiwan and China split at the end of the Chinese Civil War in 1949, and Tsai has said becoming a part of China is not acceptable to the people of the island. Taiwan is a mountainous island and would present a formidable challenge to an invading force, but it is massively out-gunned with 89,000 ground forces compared with China's one million, according to a Pentagon estimate released last month. Beijing also has a huge advantage in military equipment. Taiwan has stepped up reservist training and increased its purchases of warplanes and anti-ship missiles to bolster its defences. But experts have said that is not enough. — AFP

## International

## Kurds seek 'courageous' candidate in Turkey's election

## Thousands of HDP officials and supporters are behind bars

DIYARBAKIR: Bullet marks reveal the spot where a rights lawyer was shot in the head at the height of clashes in the southeastern Turkish city of Diyarbakir between Kurdish militants and security forces in 2015. Much of the Kurdish-majority city of over one million had to be rebuilt after the street battles, in which Tahir Elci, the president of the local bar association, died near a famous mosque.

But the wounds still fester as Turkey heads into an election due by June from which the main pro-Kurdish party could be excluded. Last year, prosecutors called for the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) — parliament's third-largest — to be banned over alleged "terrorism" ties.

And just last week, a top prosecutor asked judges to strip the HDP of government funding, leaving the party's election campaign in limbo. "We have six million voters (in the nation of 85 million) and want a courageous candidate to support the Kurds," said Orhan Ayaz, who was elected Diyarbakir mayor in 2019 but never allowed to assume his post despite winning 72 percent of the vote.

More than 60 other elected HDP officials have suffered the same fate, with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's government accusing them of "terrorism" and appointing ruling

party members to run towns and cities in their place.

## 'Criminalise the HDP'

Thousands of HDP officials and supporters are behind bars, including the party's former co-leader Selahattin Demirtas, an engaging speaker who ran against Erdogan in a 2016 election from jail.

Since the 1990s, nearly a dozen Kurdish parties have either been banned or have dissolved themselves in the face of prosecution. The HDP won 12 percent of the vote in a 2018 election — a share that could become disenfranchised should the party be banned by June.

The government accuses the party of "organic" ties to the PKK, a militia whose decades-long insurgency has seen it designated as a "terrorist" organisation by Washington and the European Union. The Turkish army has launched air strikes against the PKK and its Kurdish allies in northern Iraq and Syria in response to a November bombing that killed six in the heart of Istanbul.

"These terrorism charges serve to criminalise the HDP," Ayaz said. "The PKK is a popular movement born of the pressure suffered by the Kurds. It did not fall from the sky," he added. "We want a political solution. The military way is not a solution, but you need a

democratic system to silence the guns".

## 'Don't be afraid'

The vote of Kurds, often described as the world's largest people without a state, has been decisive in past close Turkish elections. But Ayaz warned that Kurds "will not support a party that does not support us".

Erdogan's Islamic-rooted AKP, in power since 2002, won 30 percent of the vote in Diyarbakir in the 2018. "The Kurds will not vote for their enemy," warned one local businessman on condition of anonymity.

"But they can remain neutral, and that will be enough for Erdogan to prevail." Analyst Mesut Azizoglu said both the government and opposition parties fear being associated too closely with the Kurds heading into the vote.

"The government — all governments, from beginning of the republic to today — are afraid of the Kurds and all their policies are based on this fear", the Tigris Social Research Centre (Ditam) think-tank president said.

"Our message is: Don't be afraid, we don't want to separate from Turkey," said Azizoglu, who is Kurdish. "But opposition leaders don't want to be seen with Kurds, either, and their silence helps Erdogan," he said.



DIYARBAKIR: Orhan Ayaz, former mayor of the People's Democratic Party (HDP) poses for a photograph during an interview in Diyarbakir. — AFP

## 'No Kurdish problem'

Abdullah Zeytun, 34, a lawyer with the Human Rights Association in Diyarbakir, fears rising tensions during the election campaign. "This government does not tolerate the slightest criticism," said Zeytun, who finds himself embroiled in more than a dozen court cases linked to politics.

Huseyin Beyoglu, Diyarbakir's govern-

ment-appointed acting mayor, or kayyum, disagrees. "There has never been a Kurdish problem in Turkey, and certainly not in Diyarbakir" he said, welcoming "competition between parties".

But Naci Sapan, a veteran columnist for the Tigris daily, is pessimistic. "If we compare today to the 1980s, it's worse on all fronts: economic, social, political," he said. — AFP

## Zionist parliament passes laws ahead of Netanyahu return

JERUSALEM: Zionist's parliament on Tuesday passed controversial legislation paving the way for the return of veteran hawk Benjamin Netanyahu as prime minister.

Following his November 1 election win, Netanyahu secured a mandate to form a government backed by ultra-Orthodox Jewish parties and an extreme-right bloc.

Netanyahu will present what analysts have said will be the most right-wing government in Zionist's history to parliament on Thursday.

On Tuesday, lawmakers passed legislation that now allows anyone convicted of offences but not given a custodial sentence to serve as a minister.

Before the law was passed, there had been uncertainty over whether Aryeh Deri, a key ally from the ultra-Orthodox Shas party, would be able to serve as he had previously pled guilty to tax offences. A second law passed allows for two ministers to serve in the same office.

The measure is aimed at the defence ministry, where Bezalel Smotrich, leader of the extreme-right formation Religious Zionism, is to be the minister with control over civil affairs in the occupied West Bank. The Knesset also voted to expand the powers of the national security minister, a portfolio set to be handed to Itamar Ben Gvir, another extreme-right figure.

The morning session also saw Netanyahu ally



JERUSALEM: File photo shows Zionist premier and leader of the Likud party Benjamin Netanyahu addressing supporters at campaign headquarters. — AFP

Yariv Levin resign as interim speaker of the Knesset, ahead of his expected appointment to a ministry.

Rules require that he had not been in the speaker's post for 48 hours before any ministerial appointment.

Netanyahu, who is fighting corruption allegations in court, has already served as premier longer than anyone in Zionist entity, including a 1996 to 1999 stint and a record 12-year tenure from 2009 to 2021.

His incoming government has sparked fears of a military escalation in the West Bank amid the worst violence in the Zionist-occupied Palestinian territory for nearly 20 years. — AFP

## Serbia troops on alert in latest Kosovo tensions

BELGRADE: Serbian armed forces were on "the highest level" of alert, Defence Minister Milos Vucevic said late Monday evening, highlighting the Balkan country's increasingly strained relations with neighbouring Kosovo over recent shootings and blockades. Kosovo declared independence from Serbia in 2008, but Belgrade refuses to recognise it and encourages Kosovo's 120,000 ethnic Serbs to defy Pristina's authority — especially in the north where ethnic Serbs make up the majority.

The Serbian army has been put on heightened state of alert over tensions with Kosovo multiple times in recent years — the last time in November after claiming that several drones entered Serbian airspace from its breakaway province.

On December 10 Serbs in northern Kosovo set up barricades to protest against the arrest of an expoliceman suspected of being involved in attacks against ethnic Albanian police officers.

The blockades have coincided with a rise in reported shootings, the latest coming Sunday evening, according to NATO-led peacekeeping force KFOR. "Serbia's president... ordered the Serbian army to be on the highest level of combat readiness, that is to the level of the use of armed force," Serbia's Defence Minister Milos Vucevic said in a statement late Monday.

He added the President Aleksandar Vucic also ordered the special armed forces to be beefed up

from the existing 1,500 to 5,000, Vucevic said. Serbia's interior ministry also announced "all units (will) immediately come under the command of the chief of general staff".

These orders from Vucic come after army chief General Milan Mojsilovic was dispatched to the border with Kosovo on Sunday. Northern Kosovo has been especially on edge since November when hundreds of ethnic Serb workers embedded in the Kosovo police as well as the judicial branch like judges and prosecutors walked off the job in protest at a controversial decision to ban Serbs living in Kosovo from using Belgrade-issued licence plates.

The policy was scrapped by Pristina but the mass walkouts created a security vacuum in Kosovo. Pristina attempted to schedule December 18 local elections in Serb-majority municipalities — but it was postponed after the announcement caused widespread outrage and the main Serb political party said it would stage a boycott.

Then on December 10, an ex-policeman suspected of involvement in attacks against ethnic Albanian police officers was arrested, outraging ethnic Serbs who erected the barricades that paralysed traffic around two border crossings. Just hours after the barricades were erected, Kosovar police said they suffered three successive firearm attacks on one of the roads leading to the border.

KFOR, which has increased its presence and patrols in the region in recent months, said the latest bout of violence came Sunday, when shots were fired in the direction of Latvian soldiers embedded with the force, Kosovo's defence ministry tweeted. KFOR said it was investigating the incident, and added there were "no injuries or material damage". Serbian Prime Minister Ana Brnabic said last week the situation with Kosovo was "on the brink of armed conflict". — AFP

## Raisi vows 'no mercy' for protesters

TEHRAN: President Ebrahim Raisi said Tuesday Iran would show "no mercy" towards "hostile" opponents of the Islamic republic, gripped by more than 100 days of protests sparked by Mahsa Amini's death. The "riots", as Tehran generally refers to them, were triggered by the Sept 16 death in custody of Iranian-Kurdish Amini, 22, after her arrest for an alleged breach of the strict dress code for women.

Addressing a crowd in Tehran, Raisi accused "hypocrites, monarchists and all anti-revolutionary currents". "The embrace of the nation is open to all those who were lured," said the ultraconservative president at a funeral procession for unidentified soldiers who perished during its eight-year war in the 1980s with neighboring Iraq. "The embrace of the nation is open to everyone, but we will show no mercy to those who are hostile."

Iranian officials say hundreds of people have been killed, including members of the security forces, and thousands have been arrested nationwide. Foreign-based rights groups have put the death toll among protesters at more than 450. Earlier in December, Iran executed two people in



TEHRAN: Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi speaks on Dec 27, 2022 following a funeral procession carrying the remains of 200 Iranian soldiers recovered from former battlefields of the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988). — AFP

connection to the protests. The judiciary has said nine others have been sentenced to death, two of whom have been allowed retrials.

Campaigners say about a dozen other defendants have been charged with offences that could see them receive the death penalty. Iranian officials have accused hostile foreign powers, including the United States and some European countries, of stoking the unrest. They aim "to derail the Islamic society from its high goals" by "spreading rumors and fracturing society", said Raisi. But foreign countries are "wrong" to think that would achieve their goals, Raisi argued, calling their moves miscalculated. — AFP

and texting her family later the same day. The grandmother who has since returned to work said she was "back home and able to walk around two days after having a stroke". Over 85,000 people suffer a stroke in the UK each year.

NHS England director of Transformation Dr Timothy Ferris said the treatment was "harnessing the potential that AI has to support expert staff in delivering life-changing care". "Every minute saved during the initial hospital assessment of people with stroke-like symptoms can dramatically improve a patient's chance of leaving hospital in good health," he said. Brainomix launched as an Oxford University spin-out in 2010. Its e-stroke platform is now used in over 330 hospitals in over 30 countries. — AFP

## Jubilant Chinese plan trips...

Continued from Page 1

Online searches for flights abroad surged on the news, with travel platform Tongcheng seeing an 850 percent jump in searches and a 10-fold spike in enquiries about visas, according to state media reports. Rival platform Trip.com Group said searches for popular overseas destinations rose 10-fold year-on-year within half an hour of the announcement — with users particularly keen on Macau, Hong Kong, Japan, Thailand and South Korea.

But some may face hurdles going abroad, with Japan saying it would require COVID tests on arrival for travelers from mainland China from Friday. Rising cases in China, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said, were "causing growing concern in Japan". Beijing's foreign ministry said Tuesday that countries should uphold "scientific and appropriate" disease controls that "should not affect normal personnel exchanges".

The Chinese announcement effectively brought the curtain down on a zero-COVID regime of mass testing, lockdowns and long quarantines that has roiled supply chains and buffeted business engagement with the world's second-largest economy. "The overwhelming view is just relief," said Tom Simpson, managing director for China at the China-Britain Business Council. "It brings an end to three years of very significant disruption."

An uptick in international trade missions is now expected for next year, he told AFP, although full resumption of business operations is likely to be "gradual" as airlines slowly bring more flights online and companies tweak their China strategies for 2023. The EU Chamber of Commerce in China also welcomed a move that would "potentially boost business confidence" and let executives and workers travel more freely.

All passengers arriving in China have had to undergo mandatory centralized quarantine since March 2020. That decreased from three weeks to one week in June, and to five days last month. The end of that rule in January will also see COVID-19 downgraded to a Class B infectious disease from



BEIJING: A child rides on a sled on a frozen river on Dec 27, 2022. — AFP

Class A, allowing authorities to adopt looser controls. On Tuesday, Chinese immigration authorities announced the gradual resumption starting January 8 of passport issuance for "tourism" or "overseas visits of friends" — suspended due to the pandemic.

And foreign ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said China would "optimize" arrangements for foreign nationals seeking to return to work, conduct business, study abroad or visit relatives. Some entry restrictions will remain however, with China still largely suspending the issuance of visas for overseas tourists and students. Beijing said Tuesday it would "continue to adjust its visa policy for foreigners visiting China in a scientific and dynamic manner in accordance with... the epidemic situation".

China's government and state media have sought to project an image of measured calm as COVID washes across the country. But officials in several cities have said hundreds of thousands of people are estimated to have been infected in recent weeks. Hospitals and crematoriums are overflowing, according to independent reporting by AFP and other media.

The government announced last week that it would effectively stop recording the number of people dying of COVID, while the National Health Commission said Saturday it would no longer publish daily case figures — widely criticized as inaccurate. But some studies have projected around one million people could die in China from COVID over the next few months. — AFP

## AI-powered tech sees big gains in...

Continued from Page 1

"Brainomix is an incredible example of how this can be achieved, using the power of AI to shave lifesaving minutes off one of the most time-sensitive diagnoses in medicine."

Patient Carol Wilson, a teaching assistant, said the prompt diagnosis and treatment she received as a result of the technology meant she was sitting up

## International

# 'Proud and strong': Solo protest against Taliban university ban

Women-led protests have become increasingly rare since Taliban's return



**KABUL:** Marwa, a student speaks during an interview with AFP at her home in Kabul. Marwa was just a few months away from becoming the first woman in her Afghan family to go to university — instead, she will watch achingly as her brother goes without her. — AFP

**KABUL:** An 18-year-old Afghan student endured Taliban taunts and insults at the weekend as she staged a solo protest against the ban on women attending university.

"For the first time in my life, I felt so proud, strong and powerful because I was standing against them and demanding a right that God has given us," Marwa told AFP, asking not to be further identified. Women-led protests have become increasingly rare in Afghanistan since the Taliban's return — particularly after the detention of core activists at the start of the year.

Participants risk arrest, violence and social stigma. But Marwa was adamant. Her sister shot a video of the silent protest with a phone from a car as Marwa held up a poster just metres from the entrance to the Kabul University campus, the country's biggest and most prestigious institution. In their latest assault on women's rights, the Taliban last week banned university education for women, prompting international outrage. Some women have tried to protest the ban, but

they have been swiftly dispersed.

On Sunday, in front of Taliban guards deployed at the Kabul University gates, Marwa courageously carried a placard that read "Iqra", the Arabic word for "read". "They said really bad things to me, but I stayed calm," she said.



**"For the first time in my life, I felt so proud"**

"I wanted to show the power of a single Afghan girl, and that even one person can stand against oppression." "When my other sisters (women students) see

that a single girl has stood against the Taliban, it will help them rise and defeat the Taliban," Marwa said. While the Taliban promised a softer form of rule when they returned to power in August last year, they have instead imposed harsh restrictions on women — effectively squeezing them out of public life.

On Saturday, authorities ordered all aid groups to stop women employees from coming to work. Secondary schools for girls have been closed for over a year, while many women who lost their government jobs are being paid a fraction of their salary to stay at home.

Women have also been barred from going to parks, gyms and public baths. The Taliban say the restrictions are because women are not observing a strict Islamic dress code, including wearing hijabs. The country has become a prison for women, said Marwa, who dreams of becoming a painter. "I don't want to be imprisoned. I have big dreams which I want to achieve," she said. "That's why I decided to protest." — AFP

## South Korea pardons jailed ex-president Lee Myung-bak

**SEOUL:** Jailed former South Korean president Lee Myung-bak received a presidential pardon on Tuesday, cutting short his 17-year sentence on corruption charges, the justice minister said. Lee was on a list of more than 1,300 people who received special pardons "from the perspective of broad national unity through reconciliation, tolerance and consideration", Han Dong-hoon told reporters after a Cabinet meeting with President Yoon Suk-yeol. The 81-year-old Lee, who in June was granted a temporary release from jail due to his age and deteriorating health, is serving 17 years for bribery and embezzlement. It was effectively a life sentence as he was not due for release until 2036, when he would be 95.

The former Hyundai CEO-turned-president was charged with 16 criminal allegations in 2018 and sentenced in 2020. He was found guilty of creating slush funds of tens of millions of dollars and accepting bribes from Samsung Electronics in return for a presidential pardon for its late chairman, Lee Kun-hee, who

was jailed for tax evasion. A self-made man who was appointed head of a major construction firm at age 35 before entering politics, Lee served as president from 2008 to 2013. He steered the country through the global financial crisis and won its bid for the 2018 Winter Olympics, but was criticised by opponents for undermining the nation's democratic standards and freedoms of speech.

The pardons, effective at midnight on Wednesday, mark the second time Yoon has exercised his clemency power since taking office in May. In August, Samsung Electronics executive chairman Lee Jae-yong was among the beneficiaries of Yoon's first pardons.

South Korean presidents have frequently ended up in prison after their time in power, usually once their political rivals have moved into the presidential Blue House. Chun Doo-hwan and Roh Tae-woo, former army generals who served jail terms in the 1990s for corruption and treason after leaving office, received presidential pardons after serving about two years.

Ex-president Roh Moo-hyun killed himself in 2009 after being questioned over graft allegations involving his family. Lee's conservative successor Park Geun-hye was pardoned last year while she was serving 20 years in jail for bribery and abuse of power after being ousted in 2017 over a corruption scandal that prompted massive street protests. — AFP



**TOKYO:** Japan's Reconstruction Minister Kenya Akiba (2nd L) enters the prime minister's official residence surrounded by reporters in Tokyo on December 27, 2022. — AFP

## Japan's PM loses fourth minister in three months

**TOKYO:** Japan's reconstruction minister resigned on Tuesday over alleged financial improprieties, becoming the fourth minister to depart Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's cabinet in just three months. Kenya Akiba, who is under fire over alleged illegal political payments to his aides, wife and mother, told reporters: "I believe there is no illegality in terms of my actions."

But "it is not my wish to see proceedings for the budget and other legislative agendas stall", he added. Shortly after Akiba's resignation, a controversial ruling party member serving as a parliamentary vice minister for internal affairs and communications also stepped down.

Mio Sugita, a right-wing politician frequently accused of divisive rhetoric, has come under fire in recent weeks over comments she made several years ago about same-sex couples and ethnic minorities. The resignations come as Kishida battles some of the lowest approval ratings of his tenure, with local media describing a "domino effect" of departures from his cabinet.

The public has become increasingly disillusioned after a string of scandals involving ministers and revelations about ties between lawmakers and the Unification Church sect. "I feel responsible that a minister has resigned," Kishida told reporters after Akiba's departure.

"We must continue to deal with a mountain of tasks at hand. I want to fulfil my responsibility by continuing the work of politics," Kishida's minister for internal affairs resigned last month over alleged campaign finance irregularities, and his justice minister stepped down in November after reportedly saying his "low-profile" job only generated media coverage when approving death sentences.

In October, the minister for economic revitalisation resigned over allegations of ties to the Unification Church. The sect has been in the spotlight since reports emerged that the man accused of killing former prime minister Shinzo Abe in July resented the organisation over donations his mother made that bankrupted the family.

The church, officially known as the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification, has denied wrongdoing. Approval ratings for Kishida's cabinet have been hovering near the so-called "danger level" of 30 percent, and there has been speculation he could reshuffle his cabinet before the next parliament session opens in January. Kishida said he had no immediate plan to reshuffle his cabinet. — AFP



**SEOUL:** File shows former South Korean president Lee Myung-bak (L) arriving at a court to attend his trial in Seoul. — AFP

## Indian police probe deaths of Russian lawmaker, companion

**NEW DELHI:** Indian police are investigating the sudden deaths of a wealthy Russian politician who reportedly criticised the Ukraine war and his travelling companion at a luxury hotel, authorities said Tuesday.

The body of Pavel Antov, 65, was found Saturday in a pool of blood outside his lodgings in eastern Odisha state, where he was on holiday with three other Russian nationals. His death came two days after another member of the travel party, Vladimir Bidenov, was found unconscious after suffering an apparent heart attack at the same hotel and could not be revived. Police said they were reviewing CCTV footage, questioning hotel staff and were waiting on detailed autopsy reports, but so far there was no sign of foul play. "All possible angles as regards to the deaths of two Russian nationals are being verified," regional police chief Rajesh Pandit told AFP.

Bidenov's heart attack had likely been caused by binge drinking and a possible drug overdose, he said. "So far it seems that Antov accidentally fell from the hotel terrace," he added. "He was probably disturbed by the death of his friend and went to the hotel terrace and likely fell to his death from there."

The officer said Antov and his friends had arrived in the state in mid-December and visited several locations before arriving at their hotel in Rayagada at the start of last week. Two local travel agents accompanying the party had also been questioned, along with the other two Russian members of the holiday group.

Antov was since 2018 a member of a regional parliament 150 kilometres (90 miles) east of Moscow, representing President Vladimir Putin's United Russia party. Before entering politics he founded the food processing enterprise Vladimirovsky Standart and in 2019 he was ranked the richest among all parliamentarians and senior officials in the country by the Russian edition of Forbes magazine.

In June, Russian media published a WhatsApp message attributed to Antov that said a Kremlin missile bombardment on Ukraine was "terrorism". — AFP

## Rohingya refugees get emergency medical treatment

**LAWUENG:** Rohingya refugees received emergency medical treatment after a boat carrying nearly 200 people came ashore in Indonesia on Monday, authorities said, in the fourth such landing in the country in recent months. Each year thousands of the mostly Muslim Rohingya, heavily persecuted in Buddhist-majority Myanmar, risk their lives on long, expensive sea journeys—often in poor-quality vessels—in an attempt to reach Malaysia or Indonesia.

The wooden vessel arrived at around 5:30 pm (10:30 GMT) on a beach in Indonesia's westernmost province of Aceh, said local police spokesman Winardy. "One hundred and eighty-five Rohingya

immigrants landed in Pidie (district). The figure consists of 83 adult males, 70 adult females and 32 children." Winardy, who goes by one name, said in a statement. The refugees were temporarily sheltered at a local facility, with health workers treating those who were sick, Winardy added. Some appeared very weak and thin and were put on drips by medical staff, according to AFP journalists.

A health worker told AFP some were "suffering from severe dehydration. Some children were vomiting." Details on the length and conditions of their journey were not immediately available, but one young arrival said they had set off from Bangladesh.

"We came from a Rohingya refugee camp in Bangladesh in a hope that Indonesia will give us the opportunity of education," 14-year-old Umar Faruq said. Marfan, a leader of a local fishing community on the scene not long after the refugees arrived, said that "some refugees landed in weak conditions". "When they were at the shoreline, locals helped by giving them food," Marfan said. — AFP



**LAWUENG:** Rohingya refugees receive food after being transferred to a temporary shelter following their arrival by boat in Lawueng, Aceh province on December 27, 2022. — AFP

## Seoul apologizes for not downing N Korea drones

**SEOUL:** South Korea's military apologized on Tuesday for failing to shoot down five North Korean drones that crossed their shared border after facing wide criticism over its lack of readiness. Monday's incursion prompted Seoul to fire warning shots and deploy fighter jets and attack helicopters to shoot down the drones, one of which flew close to the capital.

"Yesterday, five enemy drones invaded South Korean airspace, and our military detected and tracked them, but we apologize for not being able to shoot them down," the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) said in a statement.

All of the drones appeared to have returned to the North despite an operation to hunt them down that lasted five hours. The JCS acknowledged that, while the military can counter "attack drones that pose a real threat", there is a limit to their ability to detect and strike smaller spy drones.

"As a result, the military's lack of readiness has caused a lot of concern to the public," it said. South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol said at a Cabinet meeting on Tuesday the incident showed that the military's readiness was "greatly lacking".

Yoon ordered an acceleration of a plan to launch a drone unit to carry out surveillance and reconnaissance operations on North Korea's key military facilities. The plan includes introducing advanced stealth drones.

The incursion was the first time in years that North Korean drones had entered the South's airspace and closely followed a recent flurry of sanctions-busting weapons tests by Pyongyang. — AFP

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 28, 2022

## Business

## Kuwait Central Bank's resilient monetary policy bears fruit

## IMF and global rating agencies laud CBK's prudent policies

**KUWAIT:** The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) said Monday it keeps a close eye on global economic and monetary developments as well as geopolitical trends when making monetary decisions. The CBK adopts a resilient monetary policy that adapts to the requirements of the Kuwaiti economy, according to a CBK press release. In its World Economic Outlook, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) forecast in October that global inflation would rise from 4.7 percent in 2021 to 8.8 percent in 2022.

Accordingly, the CBK had to make its monetary policy more stringent as is the case with the majority of central banks around the globe, the statement noted. The CBK gained praise from international credit rating agencies and the IMF in terms of professional employment of monetary policy and auditing policy tools as well as the success of precautionary measures in strengthening the financial and monetary stability.

The recent IMF mission to Kuwait acknowledged that the CBK was able to contain inflation rate and limit the hikes of prices of food and energy through stringent monetary measures and government subsidies. The central banks worldwide drew up their respective monetary policies and decisions in keeping with technical considerations and local economic data with a view to addressing possible imbalances, maintaining the stability of the exchange rate and the prices of commodities, and ensuring sustainable economic growth.

One of the most prominent characteristics of the Kuwaiti economy is the smallness of its size, which makes it more vulnerable to be affected by the trends of the global economy and the movement of capital. Further, Kuwait's open economic policy relies heavily on oil revenues as the main source of the national income and depends of imports to meet the needs of the domestic market of commodities and services.

The CBK monetary policy, based on provisions of Act 32 (1968), aims to ensure financial stability, free trading in foreign currencies, and a crediting policy geared towards economic growth, the statement went on. The CBK reaffirmed pursuit of monetary policy in institutional frameworks and in keeping with forecasts of economic growth and the needs of the local market.

Regarding the interest rates, the statement noted that the CBK sets the interest rate of the Kuwaiti

dinar (KD) in line with the rates of the world's major currencies in order to minimize the possible adverse impacts on the local economy in case of the existence of unjustifiable margins. The consistency between the KD interest rate and those of the foreign currencies helps maintain the competitive edge of the local currency as a tool of savings and enables the local banks to meet the financing needs of their clients. On the discount rate, the statement said the CBK adopts a phased approach to moving the discount rate to avert any dramatic fluctuations in the interest rates and minimize the costs to the local economic sectors.

Though the discount rate is central in Kuwait, it is not the sole gauge of interest rate for the CBK in its transactions with local banks and regulating the liquidity levels of the banking sector. To compare the stated CBK discount rate with the interest rates of other central banks needs to take stock of the role of interest rates in each economy.

Available data from the world's major economies show that those economies suffer from inflation rates higher than their respective stated interest rates. For example, the US inflation rate is 2.6 percent higher than the Federal Reserve's interest rate, whereas the inflation rate in Kuwait is 0.32 percent lower than the discount rate. In case of including the interest rates on consumer loans and commercial loans with terms of more than one year, the inflation rate will be lower than the interest rates by 3.32 percent and 4.32 percent, respectively.

Dealing with the average economic data of 2022, the statement said the interest rate on KD deposits of local bank clients in Kuwait for one month rose from 1.022 percent in March to 3.285 percent in November. The interest rate for three-month deposits in KD went up from 1.166 percent in March to 3.916 percent in November. The average interest rate of one-month deposits in US dollar went up from 0.242 percent in March to 2.677 percent in November while rate of three-month deposits in USD went up from 0.412 in March to 3.146 percent in November. Accordingly, the margins narrowed between the interest rates of KD deposits and those of USD deposits in the aforesaid period.

Meanwhile, the credit facilities for expatriate residents in Kuwait grew by 9.5 percent from KD 42.8 billion (nearly \$141.2 billion) by the end of November 2021, to KD 46.9 billion (\$154.7 billion)



KUWAIT: The CBK headquarters.

late last November. Affirming the solid financial position of the banking sector, the CBK statement noted that local banks maintained a capital adequacy rate of 18 percent and a high solvency rate. The inflation rate in Kuwait kept slowing down on an annual basis, and declined from 4.71 percent in last April to 3.18 percent in last November at a time when global economies suffer from soaring inflation rates, the statement added.

## Money supply up

Meanwhile, Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) announced Tuesday that the broad money supply (M2) went up 1.2 percent last November to settle at KD 38.2 billion (around \$126 billion). Local banks' private sector deposits increased by 1.3 percent to settle at KD 34.8 billion (around \$114.8 billion), said the CBK's economic research department in a release to KUNA, including statistical tables. Private sector deposits in foreign currency increased by 0.1 percent to reach KD 1.7 billion (around \$5.6 billion), while total local banks claims

on CBK represented by CBK bonds settled at KD 3.6 billion (around \$11.8 billion).

Total local banks' assets rose by 0.5 percent to record KD 84 billion (around \$277 billion), while the net foreign assets increased by 2.7 percent to 10.4 billion (around \$34 billion). Meanwhile, time deposits with CBK decreased last August by around 55.3 percent to reach KD 1.2 billion (around \$3.9 billion), whereas balance of utilized cash credit rose by 0.5 percent to KD 52.3 billion (around \$172.5 billion).

Average interest rate on one-year treasury bonds settled at 4.5 percent in November, while financing of Kuwaiti imports went down 49 percent on a monthly basis to reach KD 581 million (around \$1.9 billion), and US dollar exchange rate against Kuwaiti Dinar settled at 308.5 fils. Narrow money supply indicates total volume of money in circulation including notes, coins and operational money deposits, whereas the broad money supply includes time deposits and saving accounts, as well as liquid money. — KUNA



BAGHDAD: A man counts banknotes at a currency exchange house in Baghdad.

## Iraq PM summons central bank chief as currency slides

**BAGHDAD:** Iraq's premier summoned the central bank governor Tuesday amid worries sparked by a currency drop against the dollar, with lawmakers calling for an extraordinary session of parliament. One US dollar traded at 1,580 Iraqi dinars on the street Tuesday, against the central bank rate of 1,470 dinars, state news agency INA reported. The drop, which began about two weeks ago, has sparked alarm in the media in the oil-rich country, and on Tuesday Prime Minister Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani met the central bank governor to discuss the issue.

The central bank has blamed the slump on "temporary pressures" sparked by the "adoption of new mechanisms to protect the banking sector, customers, and the financial system". Iraq's Association of Private Banks said the rate had risen as a result of changes to the "mechanism" of foreign currency sales due to international requirements. The government has sought to ease tensions, including by ensuring a flow of dollars at the official rate.

Prime ministerial adviser Muzhar Saleh told INA on Sunday said there were "no fears" about Iraq's ability to maintain the exchange rate, noting foreign reserves were at "a high in Iraq's financial history", likely exceeding \$100 billion. Economist Safwan

Qusai said confidence in the dinar had been "shaken" by corruption scandals, with problems sparked by US Treasury restrictions imposed on "financial transfers to certain countries".

Graft, mismanagement and nepotism are rife in Iraq where they have caused widespread public anger. Iraq ranks near the bottom of Transparency International's corruption perceptions index, at 157 out of 180 countries.

Recent measures taken by US authorities to tighten the channeling of dollars to Iran from Iraq have decreased the value of the Iraqi dinar on the black market, traders said on Monday.

In 2004, the Central Bank of Iraq introduced the foreign currency auction as one of its policy tools to achieve monetary stability. Through that auction, the government has succeeded in controlling the exchange rate on the black market.

For years, the official rate for banks and exchange companies was 1,182 dinars, while the rate on the street was around 1,200 dinars. However, the process has been mired with accusations of corruption, money laundering and the channeling of dollars to Iraq's neighbors, Iran and Syria, using forged bills. Both countries are under punishing US sanctions.

Since then, the US has blacklisted a number of Iraqi banks that deal mainly with Iran. The US sanctioned Iraq's Al-Bilad Islamic Bank for dealing with Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps in May 2018. Amid a liquidity crisis due to plummeting oil prices on the international market, Iraq's Central Bank devalued the dinar in December 2020 to 1,460 dinars per dollar for banks and 1,470 dinars for individuals. —AFP

## Markets diverge after China scraps travel quarantine

**NEW YORK/LONDON:** European and Asian stock markets advanced on Tuesday but Wall Street fell after China said it would end quarantines for overseas arrivals, spurring hopes for the revival of the world's second-largest economy. China has abruptly reversed its strict pandemic restrictions even as a surge in infections overtakes the country.

The curbs had torpedoed the economy and sparked nationwide protests. The latest easing will put an end to three years of border controls on January 8, when Beijing downgrades COVID-19 to a Class B infectious disease. People in China have since gone rushing to search for overseas flights, with the reopening set to be a boon for the travel industry. "There is a bit of a buzz in the market because of another move by China to distance itself from the economically damaging zero-COVID policy," said Briefing.com analyst Patrick O'Hare. China's benchmark Shanghai index and the second index in Shenzhen both posted healthy gains, while Tokyo ended a shade higher with Seoul, Singapore and Mumbai also all up.

Paris and Frankfurt were up in afternoon trades. Wall Street fell in early trades following the long holiday weekend. Markets in London, Hong Kong and Sydney were still closed for the holidays.

"Inbound tourism is not a huge economic bounty for China relative to domestic tourism but policy fast-track and early zero-COVID exit means growth could recover enormously," said Stephen Innes of SPI Asset Management. Markets have also been buoyed by fresh data last week that indicated a slowing of US inflation, as well as an uptick in consumer spending. But the news was not definitive and all eyes will be on how the Federal Reserve raises interest rates to balance inflationary concerns alongside the possibility of a recession caused by increased borrowing costs.

## Oil up

Following a holiday for commodities traders on Monday, oil continued its surge after a senior official said Russia could cut up to seven percent of its production next year. Production was also curtailed by freezing conditions in the United States, where more than 1.8 million barrels a day of oil processing capacity in Texas was hit by the extreme weather, according to Bloomberg News.

Both Brent Crude and West Texas Intermediate were up on the supply shortfalls and expectations of renewed demand from China. "The Chinese reopening news could give a helping hand to oil bulls for an extension of the rally to the \$88 pb (per barrel) level," said Ipek Ozkardeskaya, analyst at Swissquote bank. US stocks open lower as Southwest shares dive Wall Street stocks dipped early Tuesday as markets struggled to produce a "Santa Claus" rally while Southwest Airlines shares tumbled on operating difficulties in the wake of a massive winter storm.

In the first session of trading of the week-since the United States observed the Christmas holiday on Monday this year-major indices were in the red, bucking hopes for what is known as the "Santa Claus rally" period. The seven-session stretch over the weeks of Christmas and New Year typically sees stocks drifting higher amid light trading volumes.

Though it doesn't always produce gains, "there is a buzz about the Santa Claus rally period every year, partially because the news flow this time of year is typically light and, well, market participants need something to buzz about," said Briefing.com analyst Patrick O'Hare. About 20 minutes into trading, the Dow Jones Industrial Average was down 0.3 percent at 33,121.58.

The broad-based S&P 500 shed 0.7 percent to 3,819.38, while the tech-rich Nasdaq Composite Index dropped 1.3 percent to 10,359.39. Among individual companies, Southwest Airlines sank 6.1 percent as it continued to cancel a significant number of flights even as bad weekend weather cleared and other carriers resumed normal operations. The US Department of Transportation said in a statement it was "concerned by Southwest's unacceptable rate of cancellations and delays," and vowed to "examine whether cancellations were controllable and if Southwest is complying with its customer service plan." —AFP



SHANGHAI: A man watches the share price monitor at the Shanghai stock exchange.



Business

GCC E-Performance Index 2022

# GCC economies make significant progress in digital transformation

## Kuwait's ICT spending predicted to reach \$10.1 billion by 2024

**KUWAIT/DUBAI:** The latest GCC E-Performance Index 2022 reveals that all countries from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region have performed exceptionally well on five major global indicators, displaying significant progress in digital transformation, according to MENAFN. The report was issued by Orient Planet Research (OPR), an independent unit of Orient Planet Group (OPG), in collaboration with information and communications technology (ICT) expert and independent researcher Abdul Kader Al-Kamli.

The UAE achieved tangible growth in the GCC E-

with a view towards sustainable development and inclusive growth.

Nidal Abou Zaki, Managing Director, Orient Planet Group, said "The GCC countries have taken major strides for an overall digital transformation. The GCC E-Performance Index 2022, highlights the preparedness of the GCC nations to strengthen their global position in the evolving digital world. The countries have expanded their digital sectors in the last decade, investing in digital infrastructure, adopting e-government platforms, and launching technology parks and business incubators.

Though the region is still reliant on oil and gas production and exports, countries are making efforts to diversify their economies. S&P Global projected that non-oil GDP in Gulf countries will reach nearly 37 per cent by 2022 as compared to 29.2 percent in 2012.

The GCC region's ICT development has strengthened the digital economy, enhanced productivity, and created efficient means for direct access to government e-services. A report by Global Data projected Bahrain's spending to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 8.6 per cent from \$1.4 billion in 2019 to \$2.1 billion by 2024. Another report by International Data Corporation (IDC), projects Saudi Arabia to spend \$30.9 billion, with public sector spending reaching \$3 billion by the end of 2022.

About Zaki further highlighted that the GCC E-Performance index reflects the GCC member countries' efforts to achieve overall digital transformation, along with current developments and future avenues that may arise. He stated that trends such as bolstered digital transformation investments, citizen-centric e-government services, multi-cloud strategies, ventures in the metaverse, are setting the scene for a dynamic digital future. Relevant entities, decision-makers and policy-makers can leverage the findings of the index to devise strategies to enhance their digital transition efforts. He emphasized that the GCC nations are gaining momentum in terms of development in technological infrastructures and paving way for economic diversification.

### Strong GCC position

Abdul Kader Al-Kamli, ICT expert and independent researcher, said: "The GCC E-Performance Index reveals the strong position of GCC countries in five top global indexes, with the UAE leading the region. The GCC countries have been at the forefront of digital transformation efforts, and its efficient strategies will reinforce the nation's global position in the sector. There have been tremendous developments in digital innovations in the region, and we can expect an upward trajectory in terms of digital innovation," he said.

Recognizing the plethora of opportunities and challenges posed by Fourth Industrial Revolution, governments across the GCC have prioritized digital transformation keeping it at the core of their economic and social development plans. As a key component of their respective Vision 2030 plans, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait have each launched various significant digital initiatives. The Expo 2020 Dubai became the first World Expo and the Arab world's biggest event to utilize a multi-cloud approach for its infrastructure, leveraging Etisalat IC and AWS.

The GTCI 2021 assesses the capability of countries to grow, attract and retain talent and includes 175 cities from 79 economies around the world. According to the GTCI report, the UAE's key asset is its capability to attract talent that has been boosted by its excellent external openness. The nation also ranks in the top 10 position for the sub-pillar related to access to growth opportunities and has good possibilities for lifelong learning.

### AI readiness

The NRI 2021 ranks 130 countries in terms of network readiness in four key pillars - technology, people,



governance, and impact. According to the NRI report, the UAE performed strong across all pillars, with particular strength in the people pillar. Saudi Arabia improved by one position in the NRI 2021 due to increased performance results in the technology pillar.

The GAR 2021 considers the integration of AI in improving delivery of public services and ranks countries on a total of 42 indicators across the government sector, technology sector, and data and infrastructure. According to the GAR report, the GCC region is one of the most diverse in the world in its Government AI Readiness scores. The report further highlighted Oman for its capabilities to adopt AI, with the nation's upcoming AI strategy that will boost its strengths.

The GII 2022 measures the performance of 132 countries in the innovation sector and monitors latest trends in global innovation. It considers seven categories, which are, institutions, human capital and research, infrastructure, market sophistication, business sophistication, knowledge and technology outputs, and creative outputs, which accounts for a total of 84 indicators.

Lastly, the EGDI ranks 193 UN member nations for their development and progress in achieving a digital government system. According to the EDGI report reveals that currently the UAE Government offers 500 online services for public institutions and users. The report further highlights Saudi Arabia's exceptional performance in various fields of e-government development, reporting a significant improvement economically and socially.

The research team for GCC E-Performance Index calculated the average of each GCC country per indicator on the basis of a unified scale of 0 to 100, keeping in mind that all indicators do not utilize the same scale. The scores were adjusted according to the calculated average, starting from highest value

The GCC E-Performance Index evaluates GCC member countries on several different parameters indicative of growth, which are based on their performance in major global indices. The index highlights the increasing investment by the GCC countries for integration of latest technological solutions across various sectors including healthcare, technology, food services, aviation and education.



The digital transformation journey of the GCC region (Gulf Cooperation Council) is a defining success factor in its bid to carve a niche in a world that is fast transitioning to a technologically driven era.

Performance Index with an average score of 66.22, followed by Saudi Arabia with an average rating of 59.26 and Qatar with 57.63. Oman, Bahrain and Kuwait scored average ratings of 54.02, 53.43 and 51.36 respectively. The report highlights the increased spending on latest technological solutions to achieve digitally inclusive economies. According to a recent report, UAE's ICT spending is estimated to reach \$23 billion by 2024, while Qatar's spending will be around \$9 billion, and Kuwait's spending is predicted to reach \$10.1 billion by 2024.

The GCC countries have increasingly focused on the roles of science and technology in building research development and innovation (RDI) capacity to create national innovation systems (NIS). The World Economic Forum highlighted the unique set of characteristics of the GCC countries that presents numerous opportunities in leveraging emerging technological solutions to create opportunities. The introduction of 5G and associated use cases, such as education, health, government and smart cities, can help mitigate some regional and local challenges, including natural resource management and economic diversification.

GCC countries have constantly implemented innovative strategies to boost digital transformation reflecting the region's competitiveness to secure global positions in technology. The GCC countries are engaging in large-scale transformations and economic diversification strategies to maximize efficiency throughout their economies and digitization will be the key enabler in achieving such goals," he added.

### Network readiness

The GCC E-Performance Index aggregates each country's performance in the top five global indices - The Global Talent Competitiveness Index (GTCI) 2021 by INSEAD, The Network Readiness Index (NRI) 2021 by Portulans Institute, Government AI Readiness Index 2021 (GAR) by Oxford Insights, The Global Innovation Index (GII) 2022 by World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) and UN E-Government Development Index (EGDI) 2022 by the United Nations.

There have been major developments in the UAE with the recent Al-Amal (Hope) Mars mission, which helped raise the profile of technology skills in the GCC.

### First default

Lebanon, with a \$92 billion debt burden equivalent to nearly 170 percent of its gross domestic product, announces in March 2020 that it will default on a payment for the first time in its history. In April, after three nights of violent clashes, then-prime minister Hassan Diab says Lebanon will seek International Monetary Fund help after the government approves an economic rescue plan. But talks with the IMF quickly collapse.

### Catastrophic blast

A massive explosion on August 4, 2020 at Beirut port devastates entire neighborhoods of the capital, kills more than 200 people and injures at least 6,500.

Revelations that the pile of volatile ammonium nitrate that caused one of the biggest non-nuclear explosions ever recorded had been left unsecured in a warehouse for six years, further enraging the Lebanese public.

### Political impasse

Diab's government resigns in the wake of the blast, a little more than seven months after taking office. Diplomat Mustapha Adib is named new premier but bows out after less than a month, and Hariri, who already served as prime minister three times, is named in October.

### One of worst crises

Amid runaway inflation, authorities announce in February 2021 that bread prices will rise further. In June, the World Bank says Lebanon's economic collapse is likely to rank among the world's worst financial crises since the mid-19th century.

### New government

After nine months of political negotiations, Hariri steps aside on July 15 saying he is unable to form a government. Billionaire Najib Mikati, Lebanon's richest man and already twice prime minister, forms a new government on September 10 after a 13-month vacuum.

### Accord with IMF

On January 24, 2022 the IMF launches talks with Lebanese officials. Mikati's government meets for the first time after months of negotiations between rival factions. On February 11 the IMF calls for fiscal reforms to ensure Lebanon can manage its debt load as well as measures to establish a "credible" currency system. On April 7, the lender says it has reached a staff-level agreement to provide Lebanon with \$3 billion in aid over four years. Hezbollah and its allies lose their parliamentary majority in May 15 legislative elections. —Agencies

## Lebanon CB sharply lowers value of pound

**BEIRUT:** Lebanon's central bank on Tuesday stated that it was steeply lowering the value of the pound to 38,000 pounds per US dollar on its Sayrafa exchange platform, in order to ease the currency's depreciation to record lows on the parallel market.

The central bank said it was also opening currency trading at the new rate to all individuals and institutions, via banks, until further notice after the pound lost value due to currency speculation and the smuggling of dollars outside of the country. The Sayrafa platform rate - one of multiple exchange rates in Lebanon including a largely-defunct official rate of 1,500 pounds per dollar - stood at 31,200 on Dec. 23, the last day of trading.

It was trading at more than 47,000 pounds to the dollar on the parallel market, the most widely-used rate, and at exchange houses on Tuesday morning, but currency traders said it had fallen to below 43,000 within minutes of the central bank's announcement.

The pound has lost more than 95 per cent of its value since the financial system collapsed in 2019 in an ongoing crisis that the UN says has left eight in 10 people poor and the World Bank has said is orchestrated by the country's elite. The central bank has regularly issued stop-gap decisions that temporarily ease the currency's fall, but the pound has continued to steadily depreciate long-term as politicians fail to carry out reforms that would unlock an IMF program seen as key to recovering from the crisis.

Lebanon for more than three years has been mired in a deep financial, economic and social crisis, aggravated by a political deadlock. Here is a recap since turmoil broke out in October 2019.

### Protests erupt

Mass protests follow a government announcement on October 17, 2019 of a planned tax on voice calls made over messaging services such as WhatsApp. In a graft-plagued country with poor public services, many see the tax as the last straw, with demonstrators demanding "the fall of the regime". The government of prime minister Saad Hariri scraps the tax the same day. But protests continue over the ensuing weeks, culminating in demonstrations calling for the overhaul of a ruling class in place for decades and accused of systemic corruption. Hariri's government resigns in late October.



## German economy faces gloomy 2023 as energy crisis bites

**BERLIN:** Germany was given a gloomy economic forecast on Tuesday as businesses said they would cut output due to sky-high energy costs. Many companies also expect to cut jobs and scale back investment in 2023, a survey found. It comes amid high inflation spurred on by the war in Ukraine that has wiped out hopes of a smooth post-pandemic recovery.

After Russia cut off gas exports, Germany was forced to pay much higher prices to import energy on the world market. Businesses are pessimistic that prices will return to pre-crisis levels any time soon, said Michael Groemling of the German Economic Institute, which published the findings.

"The consequences of the war in Ukraine are still posing a severe test for the German economy," he said. Out of 49 groups representing different sectors of the economy, 30 said their members would cut production in 2023, while only 13 said it would rise. There were 16 who predicted job cuts and nine who expect more recruitment, while 23 expect a standstill in the labor market. The steel and construction industries face particularly bleak prospects because of their high energy costs. However, the property and finance sectors are also concerned because of high borrowing costs, the

institute said. According to reports, German companies expect only a mild recession in 2023 despite headwinds from the energy crisis, raw material shortages and a tepid global economy, a survey of major associations showed. "The last quarter of 2022 and the start of 2023 are likely to be accompanied by a decline in economic activity," said Siegfried Russwurm, president of the Federation of German Industries (BDI). "However, we expect only a slight slump." There have been growing signs that the German economy could stave off the worst of an economic downturn triggered by a plunge in energy supply from Russia after the Ukraine invasion.

Inflation slowed slightly to 11.3 percent in November from a high of 11.6 percent the month prior as energy prices eased. The German government has predicted the economy will grow by 1.4 percent this year and contract by 0.4 percent next year.

Russwurm warned that growth would remain subdued until 2024 as weak demand around the world hits Germany's export-dependent economy. The Association of German Chambers of Industry and Commerce (DIHK) said there were many indications that supply chain disruptions were gradually easing. "Freight rates for container prices are approaching long-term normal values again, and the congestion outside international ports is slowly easing," said DIHK President Peter Adrian. "If the announced relaxations of China's zero-COVID policy are implemented, it would also be a positive signal for global supply chains," he added. — Agencies

## Business

# The end is nigh? Climate, nuke crises spark fears of the worst

## Greenhouse gas emissions again hit a record despite pushes to renewable energy

WASHINGTON: For thousands of years, predictions of apocalypse have come and gone. But with dangers rising from nuclear war and climate change, does the planet need to at least begin contemplating the worst? When the world rang in 2022, few would have expected the year to feature the US president speaking of the risk of doomsday, following Russia's threats to go nuclear in its invasion of Ukraine.

"We have not faced the prospect of Armageddon since Kennedy and the Cuban missile crisis" in 1962, Joe Biden said in October. And on the year that humanity welcomed its eighth billion member, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned that the planet was on a "highway to climate hell."

In extremes widely attributed to climate change, floods submerged one-third of Pakistan. China sweat under an unprecedented 70-day heatwave, and crops failed in the Horn of Africa—all while the world lagged behind on the UN-blessed goal of checking warming at 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) above pre-industrial levels.

### Biggest risk yet of nuclear war?

The Global Challenges Foundation, a Swedish group that assesses catastrophic risks, warned in an annual report that the threat of nuclear weapons use was the greatest since 1945 when the United States destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki in history's only atomic attacks. The report warned that an all-out exchange of nuclear weapons, besides causing an enormous loss of life, would trigger clouds of dust that would obscure the sun, reducing the capacity to grow food and ushering in "a period of chaos and violence, during which most of the surviving world population would die from hunger."

Kennette Benedict, a lecturer at the University of Chicago who led the report's nuclear section, said risks were even greater than during the Cuban Missile Crisis as Russian President Vladimir Putin appeared less restrained by advisors. While any Russian nuclear strike would likely involve small "tactical" weapons, experts

fear a quick escalation if the United States responds.

"Then we're in a completely different ballgame," said Benedict, a senior advisor to the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, which in January will unveil its latest assessment of the "doomsday clock" set since 2021 at 100 seconds to midnight.

Amid the focus on Ukraine, US intelligence believes North Korea is ready for a seventh nuclear test. Biden has effectively declared dead a deal on Iran's contested nuclear work and tensions between India and Pakistan have remained at a low boil.

Benedict also faulted the Biden administration's nuclear posture review which reserved the right for the United States to use nuclear weapons in "extreme circumstances." "I think there's been a kind of steady erosion of the ability to manage nuclear weapons," she said.

### Charting worst-case climate risks

UN experts estimated ahead of November talks in Egypt that the world was on track to warming of 2.1 to 2.9 C—but some outside analysts put the figure well higher, with greenhouse gas emissions in 2021 again hitting a record despite pushes to renewable energy. Luke Kemp, a Cambridge University expert on existential risks, said the possibility of higher warming was drawing insufficient attention, which he blamed on the consensus culture of the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and scientists' fears of being branded alarmist. "There has been a strong incentive to err on the side of least drama," he said.

"What we really need are more complex assessments of how risks would cascade around the world."

Climate change could cause ripple effects on food, with multiple breadbasket regions failing, fueling hunger and eventually political unrest and conflict. Kemp warned against extrapolating from a single year or event. But a research paper he co-authored noted that even a two-degree temperature rise would put the Earth in territory uncharted since the Ice Age. Using a medium-high scenario on emissions and population growth, it found



A boy walks on a boat left lying on the dried-up bed of a section of Iraq's receding southern marshes of Chibayish in Dhi Qar province on June 28, 2022. —AFP

that two billion people by 2070 could live in areas with a mean temperature of 29 C (84.2 F), straining water resources—including between India and Pakistan.

### Cases for optimism

The year, however, was not all grim. While China ended the year with a surge of COVID-19 deaths, vaccinations helped much of the world turn the page on virus, which the World Health Organization estimated in May contributed to the deaths of 14.9 million people in 2020 and 2021.

"These flights will enable families to reunite, facilitate the restoration of commercial activities, stimulate tourist flow and bring many more opportunities which will serve the society."

Aid has started trickling back into Tigray since the peace deal was signed on November 2, going some way to alleviating chronic shortages of food, fuel, cash and drugs. But the region of six million is still largely without electricity and phone lines, while internet and banking services have only partly been restored.

Mekele was hooked up to the national electricity grid on December 6, and the country's biggest bank, the Commercial Bank of Ethiopia, announced on December 19 that financial operations had resumed in some towns. The war began in November 2020 when Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed sent in troops after accusing the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), the region's ruling party, of attacking army bases. Estimates of fatalities vary widely, with the United States saying that as many as half a million people have died. More than two million people have been displaced and hundreds of thousands to the brink of famine.

Surprising jaded observers, a December conference in Montreal on biodiversity produced a major deal to protect 30 percent of the world's land and seas, with China leading the way. The world has seen previous warnings of worst-case scenarios, from Thomas Malthus predicting in the 18th century that food production would not keep up with population growth to the 1968 US bestseller "The Population Bomb." One of the most prominent current-day critics of pessimism is Harvard professor Steven Pinker, who has argued that violence has declined massively in the modern era.



ADDIS ABABA: Ethiopia's national carrier Ethiopian Airlines said it would resume commercial flights to the war-torn region of Tigray on Wednesday after a shutdown lasting 18 months.

Access to northern Ethiopia is severely restricted and Tigray has been under a communications blackout for more than a year, making it impossible for journalists to independently verify the situation on the ground. —AFP

## Musk says nearly 100 Starlinks 'active' in Iran

SAN FRANCISCO: Nearly 100 Starlink Internet terminals are currently operating in Iran, SpaceX chief Elon Musk said Monday. The tycoon had promised to bring the satellite Internet network to the country in September as Iranian authorities imposed increasingly severe access restrictions, in a move activists called a campaign to limit information about protests that had broken out nationwide.

"Approaching 100 Starlinks active in Iran," Musk tweeted Monday. Starlink has more than 2,000 tiny satellites orbiting just a few hundred kilometers above Earth, providing Internet access to users below. The land-based terminals are then wired up to basic routers that create small wifi spots.

Earlier this year, controversial billionaire Musk gained hero status in Ukraine after sending thousands of Starlink terminals to the country in the days after Russia's invasion. Ukraine now has 20,000 of the small white receivers throughout the country. Twitter head Musk's Monday message was posted in response to a user whose video they said was taken in the "streets of Iran," where there is now "more freedom for the women to choose whether they cover their hair or not."

The post appeared to reference protests that swept Iran and the world after the September death of 22-year-old Iranian-Kurdish woman Mahsa Amini following her arrest in Tehran for an alleged breach of the country's strict dress code for women. Iran has unleashed a crackdown arresting around 14,000 people, according to the UN, and killing 469 protesters according to Norway-based Iran Human Rights (IHR).

The country's top security body in early December gave a toll of more than 200 people killed, including security officers. The authorities had already restricted access to Instagram and WhatsApp—until this autumn the last remaining unfiltered social media services—and then clamped down on apps like the Google Play Store as well as Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) that seek to circumvent local access restrictions. Iranians have long used VPNs to access sites blocked in Iran—even government officials including the foreign minister have Twitter accounts despite the network being blocked in the country. —AFP

## Egyptians warned against illegal foreign currency transactions

CAIRO: Egypt's central bank said on Monday citizens could face as many as three years in prison and a fine of up to 5 million Egyptian pounds (\$120,000) if found guilty of unlawful foreign-currency transactions. The Central Bank of Egypt has increased its monitoring of forex deals after it became aware of illegal practices it says were carried out to destabilize the country's

## Ethiopian Airlines to resume flights to Tigray capital

ADDIS ABABA: Ethiopia's national carrier Ethiopian Airlines said it would resume commercial flights to the war-torn region of Tigray on Wednesday after a shutdown lasting 18 months. The announcement comes a day after an Ethiopian delegation made the first high-level government visit to the rebel-held region since the signing of a peace deal last month.

The airline, the biggest carrier in Africa, said on Tuesday that it would operate daily flights from the national capital Addis Ababa to the Tigrayan capital of Mekele. The schedule will increase in frequency depending on demand, it said in a statement. "We are truly pleased with the resumption," Ethiopian Airlines Group CEO Mesfin Tasew said.

## Tunisia to raise new taxes to close budget deficit

TUNIS: Tunisia's finance minister unveiled a budget Monday aiming to use new tax revenues to claw the deficit back to near five percent of GDP, as the cash-strapped country awaits an international bailout. The 2023 budget comes as the North African country grapples with eye-watering public debt, shortages of goods from sugar to petrol and inflation at nearly 10 percent.

The latest plans aim to cut the budget deficit from 7.7 percent of gross domestic product to 5.2 percent, Finance Minister Sihem Boughdiri told journalists. The state, saddled with a crippling public wage bill and politically sensitive subsidies, is set to take in around 46.4 billion dinars (\$14.8 billion), Boughdiri said. It will need to borrow some 23.5 billion dinars to cover state needs for the coming year, she added.

To find the cash, it will seek more than \$4 billion from overseas as well as some \$3 billion from local banks, according to the fiscal plan. To boost revenues, the government has imposed a new tax of half a percent on real estate assets worth over three million dinars (\$960,000).

Cash payments of over 5,000 dinars will be taxed at 20 percent, while taxes on some professional services such as legal services will be hiked to 19 percent, up from 13 percent. The budget is based on assumptions of 1.8 percent GDP growth,

financial stability in recent weeks. It said it was made aware last week that debit and credit cards owned by Egyptians who had not left the country were being used abroad to withdraw large sums of foreign currency.

It reached its peak last week when \$55 million was withdrawn on one day, the CBE said. The sum was five times the daily withdrawal average recorded by the bank during the most recent financial quarter, it added.

Any sums of foreign currency withdrawn abroad using Egyptian-issued bank cards will be more thoroughly investigated, the bank said. Should card owners be found in a separate location from where their money was withdrawn, their cards will be automatically cancelled and they will



TUNIS: Tunisia's Economy Minister Samir Saied (left) alongside Finance Minister Sihem Boughdiri Nemsia present the country's 2023 finance law during a press conference, in Tunis on December 26, 2022. —AFP

oil at \$89 a barrel and a deal with the International Monetary Fund for a \$1.9 billion bailout loan.

Economy Minister Samir Saied has predicted 2023 would be "a very difficult year" and that inflation would hit 10.5 percent.

Tunisia has no alternative but to reach an agreement with the IMF to get out of its economic predicament, its Minister of Economy said on Monday.

The country faces a difficult year, with an inflation rate expected to reach 10.5 per cent, said Samir Saied. "We are the ones running after the International Monetary Fund, not the other way around, and we need the reforms contained in the new Finance Law," he said. An agreement with the

be investigated by the relevant authorities, the CBE warned.

The CBE said many Egyptian expats are choosing to send remittances home through private and unbanked channels, which violates a 2020 law. Additionally, the bank said it recently learned that some Egyptians are withdrawing foreign currency from banks at home to form disingenuous travel and export companies abroad. They then use the companies to funnel large sums of foreign currency outside Egypt, the bank said. "They come back and submit requests for more foreign currency from Egypt's banking sector despite having accumulated sums of it in foreign accounts," the CBE said.

The bank said the practices will make it look

IMF would open the doors for Tunisia to obtain external loans to finance the 2023 budget.

The country's budget does not contain any financial surplus that would help fill the void in case a crisis similar to that of Ukraine were to take place in the coming year, said Mr Saied. "The only Plan B we have at the moment, instead of the IMF, is the private sector, as it is the only remaining locomotive that can create wealth [in Tunisia] at this point," he said. In October, Tunisia reached a staff-level agreement with the IMF for a new 48-month Extended Fund Facility worth about \$1.9 billion to support the government's economic reform program. The agreement will require approval from the IMF Executive Board. —AFP

more closely at travelers' requests for foreign currency. Because of a recent shortage in dollars, travelers often have to notify their banks ahead of their trips to secure foreign currency. However, the CBE said it has directed banks to facilitate foreign currency requests from travelers leaving the country for medical or educational purposes. The bank warned citizens not to be enticed by financial endeavors that promise to make them quick money through illegal means. Egypt's foreign reserves have hit record lows this year, following economic complications brought on, in part, by the Russia-Ukraine war. The shortage has resulted in the piling up of \$9 billion worth of goods at the nation's ports, a supply slump and a rise in consumer prices. —Agencies

# Flamingos dot Kuwait beaches during spring migration



Thousands of flamingos land in Kuwait at this time of the year. — KUNA photos

Flocks of flamingos are spotted these days dotting Kuwait Bay beaches swooping over the seawaters amid moderate weather. Photographers of Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences and the Environmental Lens Team, under supervision of the Environment Public Authority, have been taking shots of the attractive birds with various kinds of cameras including ones attached to drones. KFAS is involved in the activity as part of "Kuwait Month of Sciences", educating the public about biodiversity and birds' conservation. Thousands of flamingos in this time of the year land in Kuwait during their spring migration. — KUNA



## Fly away home: Eastern Sarus cranes released in Thailand

As the sun came up, 13 Thai Eastern Sarus cranes were released over a rippling reservoir in northeast Thailand, the latest effort to revive the almost-extinct species in the kingdom. More commonly known as Thai cranes, the birds nearly disappeared from the country roughly 50 years ago - they were last spotted in the wild in 1968 - before a collaboration between the Thai government, Nakhon Ratchasima Zoo and United Nations to save them.

A breeding program, using fowl donated by Cambodia, began in 1989, with the first reintroduction in 2011. Sarus cranes are classed by the ICNC as "vulnerable", with an estimated 15,000 remaining in the wild - with the Thai sub-species having been thought to have disappeared from Thailand's wild wetlands. But since 2011, more than 150 captive-bred birds - which can grow to up to six feet and weigh almost seven kilograms - have been released in Buriram province.

"It is the only place where the Thai cranes are able to live and reproduce on their own," said Governor Chaiwat Chuntirapong. The birds were transported in large, specially adapted boxes - their red-feathered heads watching through

and spectators. It was the final moment in a long journey for the researchers, who carefully nurtured the cranes from hatching, gradually introduced them to the wild and then took them to their final flight to freedom.

chipped and tagged, allowing researchers to track them and improve the conservation efforts.

As well as rearing and releasing the cranes, an important part of the program has been educating people about the

Thanachon Kensing. The zoo has established a learning center, teaching tourists and locals about how to better care for the environment the birds need to survive. "Changing villagers' attitudes is difficult," Thanachon admitted. "But if we can com-



A pair of Eastern Sarus cranes are seen after being released at Huai Chorakhe Mak reservoir.

mesh windows - from the Wetland and Eastern Sarus Crane Conservation Center where they were bred to the Huai Chorakhe Mak Reservoir.

The latest flock of 13 cranes were released all at once on Christmas Day. The tall birds loudly honked and clumsily flapped as they unsteadily took to the skies accompanied by cheering children

"The herdsman wears a suit that hides her body and wears a bird's head puppet on her hands to teach the birds everything from feeding to familiarizing them with nature," said Nakhon Ratchasima Zoo researcher Tanat Uttaraviset. As a result of the long process, roughly 60 to 70 percent of the birds survive in the wild, he said. Prior to their release, each bird is micro-



Park rangers and staff from the Zoological Park Organization carry Eastern Sarus cranes via transport boxes in preparation for their release.

species and the environment. Huai Chorakhe Mak Reservoir was chosen partly thanks to its natural proliferation of water chestnuts - an important food source for cranes in the dry season. But their habitat remains threatened by the "widespread invasion of agriculture", said director of Nakhon Ratchasima Zoo

municate with them... this project will be successful," he said. Watching his red-headed charges soar off over the sparkling waters, researcher Tanat had just one hope. "The ultimate goal is to secure the crane population," he said. — AFP



This photo taken on Dec 25, 2022 shows Eastern Sarus cranes that were captive-bred at Nakhon Ratchasima Zoo flying away after being released at Huai Chorakhe Mak reservoir in the eastern Thai province of Buriram. — AFP photos



## Lifestyle | Features

## Webb telescope promises new age of the stars

The James Webb Space Telescope lit up 2022 with dazzling images of the early universe after the Big Bang, heralding a new era of astronomy and untold revelations about the cosmos in years to come. The most powerful observatory sent into space succeeded the Hubble telescope, which is still operating, and began transmitting its first cosmic images in July. "It essentially behaves better than expected in almost every area," said Massimo Stiavelli, head of the Webb mission office at the Space Telescope Science Institute, in Baltimore.

Already scientists say the Webb telescope, now orbiting the sun at a million miles (1.6 million km) from Earth, should last 20 years, twice its guaranteed lifetime. "The instruments are more efficient, the optics are sharper and more stable. We have more fuel and we use less fuel," said Stiavelli. Stability is vital for image clarity. "Our requirement was similar to that of Hubble, in terms of pointing accuracy. And we ended up being seven times better," the mission office chief added.

Public appetite for the discoveries has been fed by the coloring of the telescope's images. Light from the most distant galaxies has been stretched from the visible spectrum, viewable by the naked eye, to infrared - which Webb is equipped to observe with unprecedented resolution. This enables the telescope to detect the faintest glimmers from the distant universe at an unprecedented resolution, to see through the veil of dust that masks the emergence of stars in a nebula and to analyze the atmosphere of exoplanets, which orbit stars outside our solar system.

## 18 petals

"The first year (of observation) is a way to test out the tool for the small rocky planets in the habitable zone that could potentially be like Earth," said Lisa Kaltenegger, associate professor in Astronomy at Cornell University. "And the tests are beautiful. They're spectacular." Webb blasted off aboard an Ariane 5 rocket at the end of 2021, crowning a 30-year project at the US space agency NASA. It took 10,000 people and \$10 billion to put the 6.2-tonne observatory into space.

En route to final orbit, Webb deployed a five-layer sunshield the size of a tennis court followed by a 6.5-metre primary

mirror made up of 18 hexagonal, gold-coated segments or petals. Once calibrated to less than a millionth of a meter, the 18 petals began to collect the light-pulsing stars. On July 12, the first images underlined Webb's capabilities unveiling thousands of galaxies, some dating back close to the birth of the Universe, and a star nursery in the Carina nebula. Jupiter has been captured in incredible detail which is expected to help understand the workings of the giant gas planet.

## More to be revealed

The blue, orange and grey tones of the images from the "Pillars of Creation", giant dust columns where stars are born, proved captivating. Scientists saw the revelations as a way of rethinking their models of star formation. Researchers using the new observatory have found the furthest galaxies ever observed, one of which existed just 350 million years after the Big Bang some 13.8 billion years ago. The galaxies appear with extreme luminosity and may have started forming 100 million years earlier than theories predicted.

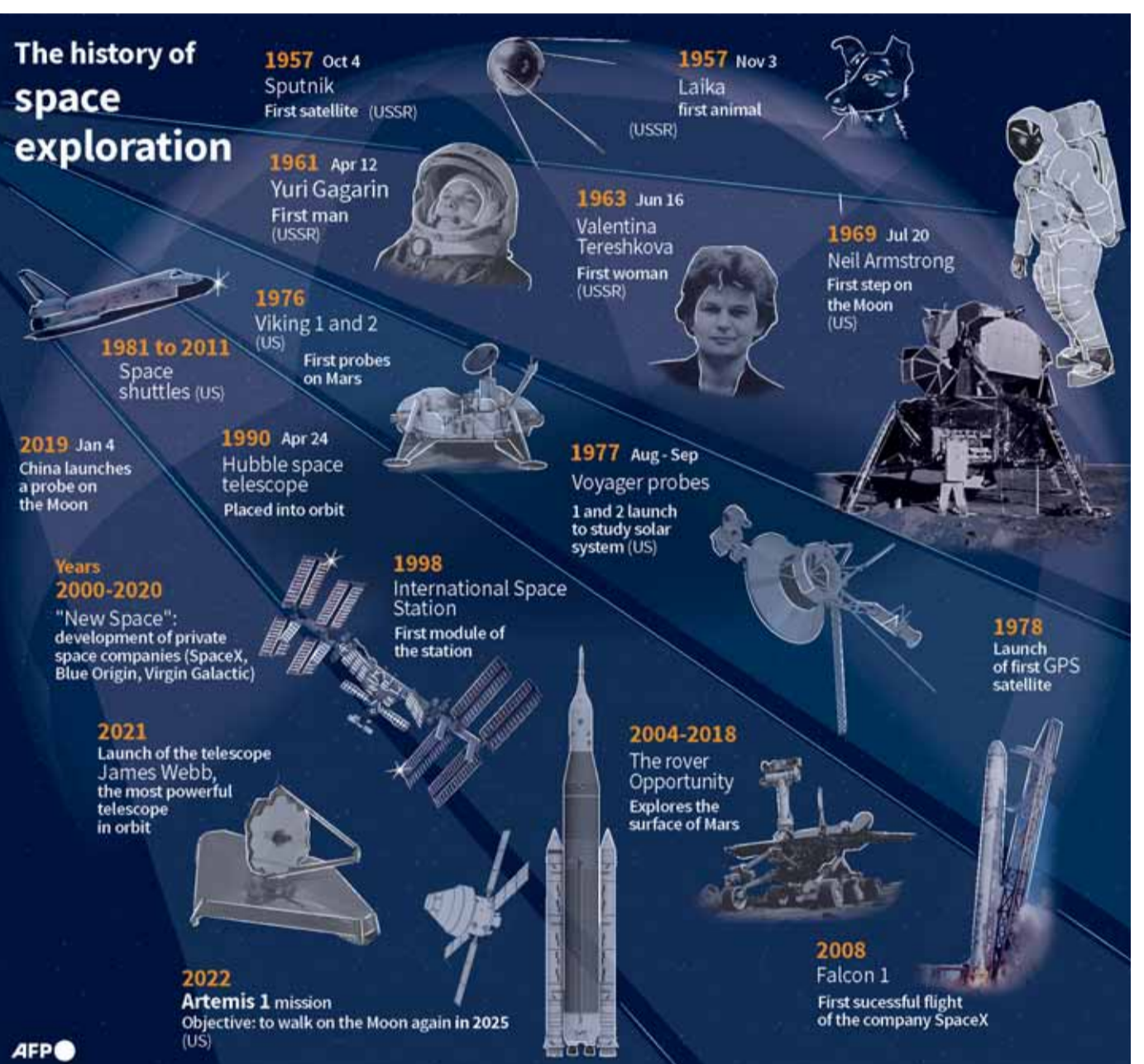
"In the distant Universe, we have an excess of galaxies compared to models," David Elbaz, scientific director for astrophysics at France's Alternative Energies and Atomic Energy Commission, told AFP. Another surprise has been that where Hubble essentially observed irregular shaped galaxies, the precision of the Webb telescope produces magnificent spiral galaxies similar to our own.

This has led to musings over a potential universal model which could be one of the keys to star formation. Webb also opened up a profusion of clusters of millions of stars, which could be the potential missing link between the first stars and the first galaxies.

In the field of exoplanets, Webb honed in on a faraway gas giant called WASP-96 b. Nearly 1,150 light years from Earth, WASP-96 b is about half the mass of Jupiter and zips around its star in just 3.4 days. Webb also provided the first confirmation that carbon dioxide is present in the atmosphere of another exoplanet WASP-39-b. But for Stiavelli, "some of the big things either haven't been observed yet, or haven't been revealed yet". — AFP



This handout composite image by NASA/ESA shows the dawn of a new era in astronomy has begun as the world gets its first look at the full capabilities of the NASA/ESA/CSA James Webb Space Telescope. — AFP



## DRESSING 'REVOLUTION' SEEKS ARTIFICIAL SKIN FOR BURN VICTIMS

Far from the humble sticking plaster, medical firms and researchers are seeking to create the "ultimate dressing" - artificial skin they hope will revolutionise the treatment of severe burns. For the last 18 months, researchers from the French firm Urgo have been working towards achieving this Holy Grail of wound treatment, which would save serious burn victims from the painful and repeated skin grafts they currently endure.

The 100-million-euro (\$106,000-million) "Genesis" project hopes to have a product ready by 2030. Guirec Le Lous, the president of Urgo's medical arm, told AFP that it is a "crazy" project. "Are we capable of designing artificial skin in a laboratory? No one in the world has succeeded," he said. Inside Urgo's laboratory in Chenove, near the eastern French city of Dijon, living cells are being chilled before they can be cultivated.

"You have to be able to recreate all the functions of skin," including protecting against external threats and regulating the temperature, Le Lous said. It must also be relatively easy to make, because artificial skin must be "available for all and at the right price," he said, without revealing the exact technology



An Urgo employee shows the type of severe wounds that could be treated by the artificial skin developed by the French dressing manufacturer as part of the Genesis project at the Urgo site in Chenove, eastern France, on Dec 16, 2022. — AFP photos

or type of cells Urgo is using. Urgo, a family-owned business since 1880, has long made dressings for chronic wounds such as diabetic foot ulcers and venous leg ulcers.

"Since the 2000s, we have worked on

materials that will correct healing problems: dressings have become intelligent, interactive with wounds, allowing them to perform better," Urgo's research director Laurent Apert said. He called the change "a revolution".

## Silver bullet

Urgo is far from alone in pushing the boundaries of what dressings can do. Researchers at the University of South Australia have developed a new kind of dressing that knows when to release nanoparticles of silver, which can break down antibiotic-resistant bacteria. "Our treatment is unique in that it capitalizes on the anti-bacterial properties of silver, but avoids over-exposure, by only activating when infection is present," lead researcher Zlatko Kopecki said in a statement.

This makes the dressing "a much safer and effective treatment for children," he added. Children suffer almost half of burn injuries worldwide, most of them aged between one to five years old, according to research using the World Health Organization's Global Burn Registry.

## 'Night and day'

Another new technique does away with the idea of dressing altogether. For a product from French startup VistaCare Medical, patients put their affected leg into a large device which never touches their wound. Instead the chamber controls the humidity, temperature and other

aspects important to healing. "There is no more dressing. The idea is to put the wound in an enclosure, in a sterile air, VistaCare Medical president Francois Dufay said. "With this system, we provide the wound with what it needs, at the right time."

VistaCare Medical's device is currently used in around 20 French hospitals, but next year the firm plans to apply for approval in the United States for a product to be used in the home. The new developments have shaken up the world of wound healing, long a neglected area of medical research. Isabelle Fromantin, who heads the wounds and healing research unit at the Curie Institute in Paris, said that "compared to 20 years ago, it's night and day in terms of wound care". Along with her team, Fromantin has developed dressings that reduce the odors from necrotic wounds seen in some cancers. However she said that not everything can be achieved by new technologies - healing is a process that varies from person to person, depending on their age and health. "Believing that a dressing will heal you all by itself is utopian," she said. — AFP



An operator performs a manipulation under controlled atmosphere.



An operator counts cells under a microscope in an Urgo laboratory.



Urgo Medical French President Guirec Le Lous poses at the Urgo site in Chenove.



An Urgo employee analyses the structure of a dressing in the research and development laboratory at the Urgo site.



Argentine tattooist Tebi Cobra Vucinovich works on a tattoo of Argentina's forward Lionel Messi kissing the FIFA World Cup trophy on the leg of Ariel Sacchi at Ds Tattoo Shop in Buenos Aires on Dec 23, 2022. — AFP photos



Alma Ocampo receives a tattoo of the FIFA World Cup trophy and the date when Argentina won the third World Cup at Ds Tattoo Shop.



Tattooist Dario Vivas protects the tattoo of Argentina's Lionel Messi kissing the FIFA World Cup trophy on the leg of Nicolas Rechanik at Face Tattoo shop in Buenos Aires.

# MORE THAN SKIN DEEP: FANS LINE UP FOR MESSI TATTOOS



Fans of the Argentine team that claimed football's ultimate prize in Qatar this month are lining up in Buenos Aires for tattoos of victorious captain Lionel Messi and the World Cup trophy. "For the next two weeks, I have (appointments) exclusively related to the World Cup," tattoo artist Esteban Vucinovich told AFP in the capital. "Some had already made an appointment for tattoos of snakes or skulls, but they are changing it to Messi or the Cup. I have two or three appointments a day," he said.

The most requested skin art is of the trophy, said Vucinovich, followed by Messi and then goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez who was crucial in the victory of the Albiceleste in the final against France. Many fans are inspired by the body art of Argentine players such as Angel Di Maria, who has since recently sported a World Cup tattoo on his right leg.

"I got a tattoo of Messi as a gesture of thanks," civil servant Nicolas Rechanik told AFP. "This represents not only what Messi is but also the team that brought us a third World Cup and all the years of effort to



The World Cup fever is leaving its mark on the skin and tattoo artists in Buenos Aires are stepping up their work, as fans are changing the traditional snakes or skulls for Lionel Messi's face or for the Cup lifted by Argentina in Qatar.

reach this goal." Before getting the image of Messi in the team's blue-and-white striped jersey and kissing the trophy indelibly

attached to his left leg, Rechanik already sported the likeness of another Argentine football icon: Diego Maradona. "It's a perfect

representation of what Argentine football is and what it means to be Argentine," he said.

Football fanatic Alma Ocampo, 20, decided to get a tattoo when, to everyone's surprise, Argentina lost its first match of the World Cup to Saudi Arabia. "When everyone lost confidence, I decided that... if Argentina wins, I will get a tattoo of the Cup. And so I did, with the date December 18, 2022" of the final, she said, adding "it hurt quite a bit."

Ariel Sacchi, a physical education teacher, got a tattoo representing all five World Cups that Messi has played in. At the center is an image of the Argentine captain kissing the Cup. "I decided to get Leo (Messi) because he brought the greatest joy to all Argentines," Sacchi said. Not all tattoos are equal, though, and many a fan has been mocked on social media for blundered ink: A fat-faced Messi or misspelt names are among the trending topics. — AFP

## New York artist turns tiny hip-hop street scenes into profitable business

With his nimble fingers and child-like enthusiasm, Danny Cortes re-creates in miniature the hip-hop-infused street scenes of a gritty New York. But what began as a hobby has since brought him fame in the rap community and profitable sales even at Sotheby's prestigious auction house. "We are adults, but we never stopped being kids," the 42-year-old artist tells AFP. "Who doesn't like toys? Who doesn't like miniatures?"



Cortes works on a new miniature at his studio.

As he spoke from his workshop in the Bushwick neighborhood of Brooklyn, he sat among recycled objects found on the streets. On his table was a current project, the tiny replica of a worn and dirty building facade. Near a bricked-in window, a plastic bushel basket had been hung: a poor man's basketball hoop. "This represents



Cortes shows his first miniature of an icebox.

my childhood," Cortes said, putting touches to the model in his preferred medium, polystyrene. "Everything looked like this: abandoned, empty, a lot of drugs in the area."

### From \$30 to \$10,000

One of his recent creations is a modest Chinese restaurant with a battered yellow sign and with its red-and-mauve brick walls covered with graffiti. Standing outside the restaurant - the real one - Cortes, sporting a black jacket and a baseball cap over his round face - smiles as he tells how New York rapper Joell Ortiz, who grew up in the neighborhood, insisted on buying the model, saying, "Yo, I need that." The price?

"Ten thousand dollars," Cortes says, adding that "the first piece I sold was like \$30, and I was so happy that I got \$30."

The artist builds collectibles based on the most banal of urban scenes, "the little things that we pass by every day" and pay no attention to, but which collectively form the unique cityscape that is New York.

### 'It just took off'

One of his first signature works was a rendering of a simple white commercial ice box - the kind that sits outside corner groceries, the words "ICE" in block red letters on its side, and often covered in graffiti, which Cortes reproduces with meticulous detail. His repertoire also includes a classic ice-cream truck like the one in Spike Lee's 1989 film "Do the Right Thing," its musical chimes guaranteed to bring young New Yorkers running.

His work resonates with nostalgia, and he often incorporates tributes to mythical



Cortes holds a miniature of Ho May Kitchen in Brooklyn.

local rappers like Notorious B.I.G. and the Wu-Tang Clan. Cortes was not always an artist - he has worked in sales, construction, and at a homeless shelter. But the pandemic changed his life, pushing him to take more seriously what had been an enjoyable pastime. After he displayed his first creations on social media, his work "just took off," he said.

Artistic label Mass Appeal, which partners with rap legend Nas, commissioned him to do a model of a ghetto-blaster boombox for the cover of a mini album by DJ Premier ("Hip Hop 50: Vol. 1"). In March 2022, four of Cortes' works were sold in a hip-hop auction at Sotheby's. They included an ice-cream truck that went for \$2,200. And he has branched out, building a miniature replica of an Atlanta restaurant for its owner, the rapper 2 Chainz.

### 'A lot of change'

But Cortes' heart remains in Brooklyn. "He has really captured the grimy, gritty atmosphere that was the birthplace for a lot of the '90s style of hip-hop music," said Monica Lynch, former head of Tommy Boy Records and a consultant on the Sotheby's auction. Through his work, Cortes said he wants to document a place where "there is a lot of change," particularly his Bushwick neighborhood. Now a trendy locale favored by artistic types, it is also a symbol of gentrification - but Cortes said he's okay with that. "I think it's good, I think it's safer, even though Bushwick is always gonna be Bushwick," he said. "There are more opportunities." — AFP



Danny Cortes, a street miniature artist, shows his miniature of an icebox in the Brooklyn borough of New York City on Dec 19, 2022. — AFP photos



## Sports

# Nadal, Djokovic kickstart bid for supremacy in Australia

## Djokovic back in Australia a year after being deported

SYDNEY: Novak Djokovic and Rafael Nadal kickstart their 2023 campaigns this week in Adelaide and Sydney respectively, with the superstar veterans and great rivals eyeing up yet more Australian Open glory. With the pair sharing 43 Grand Slam titles between them—Djokovic has 21 and Nadal 22—the scene is set for an epic showdown at Melbourne Park in January. Nadal is the defending Australian Open champion and Djokovic is a nine-time winner.

Djokovic returns Down Under for the first time since being sensationally detained and then deported ahead of the 2022 Australian Open because of his refusal to get vaccinated for COVID-19. He starts his bid for an incredible 10th Australian Open title at the Adelaide International from Sunday, following a troubled and truncated year in which he missed two majors because of his vaccine status.

Djokovic was initially barred from entering Australia before 2023, but a new government in Canberra reversed the ruling and he is now gunning for more silverware at his most successful Grand Slam venue. "Over the years I've been really fortunate to start very strong in Australia and I love playing there,"

said the world number five in Dubai last week, after ending 2022 with a record-equalling sixth ATP Tour Finals crown.

"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." He will face a top-notch field in Adelaide, including Felix Auger-Aliassime, Daniil Medvedev and Andrey Rublev, ranked six, seven and eight respectively. In Djokovic's absence this year, Spanish great Nadal swept past Medvedev to win the Australian Open in an epic five-setter-then backed it up with a 14th French Open.

### 'A lot of hours on court'

Nadal will begin his preparations in Sydney at the United Cup, a new mixed-teams event, where a blockbuster showdown with Australian showman Nick Kyrgios will test his credentials. Eighteen countries will compete in the event across 11 days from Thursday, with Brisbane, Perth and Sydney hosting group games in a round-robin format. Ties comprise two men's and two women's singles matches and one mixed doubles. The finals series will be played in Sydney. World number three Casper

Ruud and Germany's Alexander Zverev, who is returning from a serious ankle injury, will participate.

Top-ranked Carlos Alcaraz will warm up at the Kooyong Classic exhibition in Melbourne from January 10-12 as he battles back from the abdominal injury that shortened his pre-season training block. The 19-year-old Spaniard, a major threat to Djokovic and Nadal, missed the season-ending ATP Finals and Davis Cup Finals with a muscle tear, but is confident he will be ready. "I would say the key is to practise a lot, spend a lot of hours on court," he said this month. "I will be ready and 100 percent heading into Australia."

Italy's Jannik Sinner and world number nine Taylor Fritz, among others, will also use Kooyong to fine-tune. Women's world number one Iga Swiatek will acclimatize in Perth with her Polish teammates at the United Cup on the back of winning the French Open and US Open in 2022. The three-time Grand Slam champion is targeting a first Australian Open title after losing in the semis this year to Danielle Collins, who then crashed to Ashleigh Barty in the final.

Swiatek inherited the top ranking following the shock retirement of Barty in



Serbia's Novak Djokovic

March, and has been dominant ever since. American world number three Jessica Pegula and resurgent French world number four Caroline Garcia, fresh from beating Aryna Sabalenka to win the WTA Finals, also feature at the United Cup.

Four of the other top 10 women begin the year in Adelaide, with second-ranked Ons Jabeur, world number five Sabalenka, world number eight Daria Kasatkina and world number nine Veronika Kudermetova all entered. — AFP



## Burgan Bank sponsors Kuwait Equestrian Tour

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank has sponsored the fourth competition of the Kuwait Equestrian Federation (KEF) Tour for the 2022-2023 showjumping sea-



son, which was held at the Kuwait Riding Center (KRC) venue. The sponsorship falls under the umbrella of the Bank's comprehensive social responsibility program which focuses on promoting and reinforcing the sports culture in Kuwait.

On the first day of the league's third competition, equestrian Abdullah Al-Awadhi was able to take first place, followed by the equestrians Maria Bousharri and Nick Channing in second and third places respectively. On the second day, equestrian Ali Al Kharafi won first place, followed by Antonio Murozoin second and Abdulrahman Al-Fuzeain third.

Speaking about the Bank's sponsorship of the tour, Hessa Hussain Al-Najadah, Senior Manager-Corporate & CSR Communications at Burgan Bank, said: "First of all, I would like to congratulate all the winners of this competition who all continue to be exemplary role models for our younger generations. As a Bank, we are always keen on fostering the wealth of athletic talent we have in Kuwait, especially in the field of equestrianism, considering it is one of our most beloved heritage sports."

She added: "Sports has long been a cornerstone of our community commitment and social responsibility efforts. Which is why we continue to offer our support to aspiring athletes, sports organizations and official national bodies to help elevate the status of sports in Kuwait. It is worth noting that Burgan Bank's sponsorship of the KEF tour began in 2021. The ongoing sponsorship and strategic partnership come as part of the Bank's expansive social responsibility program, a big portion of which focuses on promoting and reinforcing the sports culture in Kuwait."

coming into the game under pressure on a lean run. It was his first Test hundred since January 2020 and as the opposition bowlers tired, he battled the elements and converted it to 200 for only the third time. His wife Candice told host broadcaster Fox: "You'd think by now people would know writing David Warner off is the wrong thing to do."

But it was an exhausting effort, as he passed 8,000 Test runs en route. Chairs had to be brought out for Warner and Smith to rest on in the drinks breaks, with towels draped over their heads and ice-packs on their shoulders. Warner needed treatment for cramp several times and retired in pain after reaching 200 and dropping to his knees, eventually helped from the field by support staff. "The boys were cramping left, right and centre," Smith told reporters. "So, difficult (conditions) but nice to get us to the position where we are now. I think we're in a nice spot."

Australia resumed on 45-1, having lost Usman Khawaja late Monday after taking charge of the opening day, with Green's heroics helping dismiss the visitors for under 200 again. They were all out for 152 and 99 in the first Test in Brisbane, which they lost by six wickets inside two days. Warner began on 32 and showed his aggressive intent with an early boundary off Kagiso Rabada. Nortje was routinely sending down 150 kph (93 mph) rockets, smacking Warner on the head when he was on 47. — AFP

## Arab Masters Tournament 'competitive'

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: The 2nd Arab Masters Tennis Tournament was up to expectations, exciting and competitive. Tunisians Aziz Dougaz and Iskandar Al-Mansouri defeated their Jordanian opponents

Abdallah Shelbayeh and Mousa Al-Kotop 6/3 - 6/3 in the final match of the doubles. Shelbayeh and Benjamin Hassan from Lebanon qualified for the final singles match to be played on Wednesday at Sheikh Jaber Al-Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah International Tennis Complex.

Morocco's team of Yassine Dlimi and Walid Ahouda took third place by default as Egyptians Kareem Mohammad and Mohammad Safwat withdrew due to the injury of Safwat before the start of the match. As for the singles competitions, third Seed Benjamin from Lebanon defeated Dlimi 6/1 - 7/6 in a strong showing. Shelbayeh defeated second ranked Dougaz 4/6-6/2-6/3. The final match was postponed until Wednesday due to bad weather and will be played at 6:00 pm at Sheikh Jaber Complex.

President of Saudi Tennis Federation Areej Al-



Aziz Dougaz and Abdallah Shelbayeh with the chair umpire.



Areej Al-Mutabaqani

Mutabaqani told Journalists the championship in both singles and doubles was of a high caliber and standard due to the participation of the best Arab players, adding that organization of the entire event was excellent. She said participation of several Gulf players will contribute to the improvement of their technical levels and their ranking, adding that it is now necessary to organize bigger events in the region. Mutabaqani said Arab women tennis is on the rise lately as more women are playing at an early age.

Vice President of Arab Tennis Federation Raymond Kattoura confirmed ATF supports all Arab players and the development of their technical and physical abilities through the organization of many Arab championships and including them in international events. Kattoura expressed appreciation of Sheikh Jaber Al-Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah International Tennis Complex, adding "it is considered the best specialized facility in the Middle East and this will allow for organizing the best international tournaments in the future."

## Warner retires in pain after making 200 in 100th Test

MELBOURNE: David Warner battled through searing heat to hit an epic unbeaten 200 in his 100th Test on Tuesday before retiring in pain as Australia consolidated their advantage against South Africa at the Melbourne Cricket Ground. On a scorching day, the hosts were 386-3 at stumps on day two of the second Test, leading by 197 after the Proteas were dismissed in their first innings for 189. Travis Head was not out 48 with Alex Carey on nine.

Steve Smith (85) and Marnus Labuschagne (14) were the only wickets to fall. But worryingly for Australia, Cameron Green, who took 5-27 in South Africa's first innings, also retired hurt after a nasty rap on the finger from Anrich Nortje. Smith and Warner's 239-run partnership took the game further away from South Africa, whose bowlers toiled in temperatures touching 37 degrees Celsius (98.6 Fahrenheit).

Opener Warner, 36, snapped a near-three-year century drought in typically aggressive and gritty fashion, opening three figures for a 25th time after

## Andoo Comanche leads Sydney-Hobart yacht race

SYDNEY: Australian boat Andoo Comanche held a slim lead in the Sydney-Hobart yacht race Tuesday but will need winds to pick up if it is going to challenge the course's record time. About 22 hours after the boats departed Sydney Harbor, Andoo Comanche was leading the three other 100-foot supermaxis—the fastest boats in the blue water class.

The boat, skippered by owner John Winning, was 16 nautical miles in front of perpetual challenger Wild Oats, according to an online race tracker. LawConnect was in third while defending champion Black Jack was at the rear of the supermaxi pack. There were hopes Andoo Comanche could beat the race record time after the fleet took advantage of favorable winds on Monday afternoon, although those conditions lightened overnight.

The race leader will need to make up about 76 nautical miles to challenge the record of one day, 9

hours, 15min and 24sec-set by Comanche under a different skipper in 2017. The Bureau of Meteorology forecast north to north-easterly winds would build throughout Tuesday to about 35 knots, potentially freeing the fleet for a speedy run through the treacherous Bass Strait to the finish line in the Tasmanian state capital.

Comodore of the Cruising Yacht Club of Australia, Arthur Lane, said a record time for the 628-nautical mile race could not be discounted. "It should be an early evening finish because the winds will increase all day today. It will get fast and furious from here on, and I would expect them to be, before midnight, in Hobart," he told Nine News. "They are behind race record at the moment, but the winds are increasing. They are going to be very, very fresh from midday onwards today. So, I think you will find that the record is still quite possible to break."

While the supermaxis can hit high downwind speeds, they must balance it with the need to avoid breakages and sail damage. The Bass Strait, which separates Tasmania from the mainland, can unleash perilous conditions. In 1998, a deep depression proved catastrophic for the fleet. Six sailors were killed, and 55 more were rescued after five boats sank. Race officials said only two of the original 109 boats at sea had been forced to retire to date. — AFP

Sports

# Chargers thrash Colts to clinch NFL playoff berth

## Broncos sack Hackett after big loss to Rams

**LOS ANGELES:** The Los Angeles Chargers are headed back to the NFL playoffs for the first time since 2018 after a 20-3 victory over the Indianapolis Colts on Monday. The Chargers clinched an AFC wild card berth, aided by defeats for the New York Jets, New England Patriots and Las Vegas Raiders earlier in the week. It will be their first post-season appearance under head coach Brandon Staley and with star quarterback Justin Herbert, who was drafted sixth overall in 2020.

"It means a lot for our team," Herbert said of a Chargers side that lost a string of key contributors to injury this season. "We've been through so much this year and for the guys to battle and keep fighting the way they have, it's been great to see," he added in a post-game interview with ESPN. Herbert completed 25 of 31 passes for 235 yards, with one interception. Austin Ekeler ran for two touchdowns and Cameron Dicker kicked two field goals for the Chargers, with Herbert admitting that offensively there is "a lot of room for improvement."

"We can get better," he said. "Just left a lot out there. But I thought the story of the day was the defense. They've done such a great job battling all year and they made plays when they needed to most." While the Chargers may have been less than electrifying offensively, the Colts were worse. Nine days after their historic collapse against the Minnesota Vikings, the Colts gained just 173 yards, their only points coming from a field goal by Chase McLaughlin.

Quarterback Nick Foles, standing in for Matt Ryan, connected on 17 of 29 passes for 143 yards with three interceptions. He was sacked seven times. With games against the Los Angeles Rams and Denver Broncos remaining in the regular season, the Chargers improved to 9-6. They welcomed safety

Derwin James back to their starting lineup after a two-game injury absence, but James was ejected in the first half for a helmet-to-helmet hit on Colts receiver Ashton Dullin. Both were examined for head injuries, Dullin departing the contest with a concussion.

### Hackett fired

Meanwhile, the Denver Broncos fired first-year head coach Nathaniel Hackett on Monday, a day after their embarrassing 51-14 NFL loss to the Los Angeles Rams. The defeat dropped the Broncos to 4-11 and spelled the end to Hackett's tenure after just 11 months. In a statement announcing the move, Broncos owner and chief executive Greg Penner thanked Hackett and indicated support for general manager George Paton. "Following extensive conversations with George and our ownership group, we determined a new direction would ultimately be in the best interest of the Broncos," the statement said.

"This change was made now out of respect for everyone involved and allows us to immediately begin the search for a head coach. We recognize and appreciate this organization's championship history, and we understand we have not met that standard. Our fans deserve much better, and I can't say enough about their loyalty during such a challenging stretch for our team. Moving forward, we will carefully evaluate every aspect of our football operations and make whatever changes are necessary to restore this franchise's winning tradition," the statement said.

Former Baltimore Ravens assistant coach Jerry Rosburg, who was hired in September to aid in-game management decisions, was named interim coach for the remainder of the 2022 season. The Broncos - as well as the reigning Super Bowl champion Rams -



INDIANAPOLIS: Austin Ekeler #30 of the Los Angeles Chargers scores a touchdown against the Indianapolis Colts at Lucas Oil Stadium on December 26, 2022. — AFP

had already been eliminated from playoff contention before Sunday's game in Los Angeles. The Broncos - who have boasted an often impressive defense but one of the league's worst offenses this season - missed the playoffs for a seventh straight year.

That's the longest playoff drought since the Broncos failed to reach the post-season as a young franchise from 1960-76. Against the Rams, the Broncos turned the ball over four times. The Rams,

who had scored 24 points just twice in the season, had 31 on the board before halftime. "That was a bad game," Hackett said Sunday night. "Embarrassing game." The Broncos' struggles are a massive disappointment for the franchise's new ownership group, which hired 43-year-old Hackett on January 27. However, the Broncos scored multiple touchdowns in just two of their first 12 games. After starting 2-1 they lost 10 of their next 11 games. — AFP

## Mbappe, Neymar back for PSG as Ligue 1 reboots

**PARIS:** Normal service is set to resume in France on Wednesday with Kylian Mbappe and Neymar both set to feature for leaders Paris Saint-Germain as they restart their Ligue 1 season, 45 days after it was popped on ice for the World Cup, with a home game against struggling Strasbourg. Lionel Messi, however, will not be on show in round 16 as he is still at home, celebrating Argentina's success in the World Cup final in Qatar.

The club, though, has been buoyed by reports last week that the 35-year-old Messi is set to sign a one-year extension to his contract which expires in the summer. Mbappe, who scored a hat-trick in the World Cup final but still ended up on the losing side as France flunked the penalty shoot-out, reported back to training on Wednesday with Achraf Hakimi, one of the stand-outs in Morocco's run to the semi-finals. Mbappe, Messi and Hakimi were just three of the 14 Ligue 1 players - from eight different clubs - who reached the semi-finals in Qatar.

Neymar, whose Brazil crashed out to Croatia in the quarter-finals, was back on Thursday with compatriot Marquinhos, with both expected to play a role in Wednesday's game at the Parc des Princes. PSG are currently five points clear of second-

placed Lens who they meet in Flanders on Sunday. Lens, meanwhile, will look to keep up the pressure on PSG going into that game when they head down to Nice on Thursday.

Third-placed Rennes have Croatia's Lovro Majer and on-loan Wales defender Joe Rodon back from action in Qatar as they head to Reims on Thursday. "For me, it's a second season that's starting up again, with the same uncertainties, the same unknowns before a first league match of the season," said Rennes manager Bruno Genesio. "We'll see which teams have best managed this." Marseille, who are just one point behind in fourth, host a Toulouse side that is bumping around in mid-table.

### 'Great boy' Tagliafico

Messi is not the only World Cup winner in Ligue 1 — Nicolas Tagliafico has also been enjoying his moment in the sun and will be absent for Lyon's trip to Brest on Wednesday. "Tagliafico has become world champion and I take the opportunity to congratulate him," said Lyon coach Laurent Blanc who took charge in October when Peter Bosz was sacked after a five-match winless run. "He is due to return on January 1 and he is getting married on the 28th. He has a lot to celebrate at the moment. "I hope he will come back in good shape. To be a world champion is not nothing. May he come back quickly."

Lyon are currently eighth in the table, 10 points away from the Champions League places, prompting Blanc to insist that they will need to be busy in the January transfer window if they are to compete.

head injuries are not allowed to continue to play through them.

Although the league and players' union provide personnel tasked with alerting teams to possible head injuries to players, Tagovailoa had been cleared to return to the Buffalo game after he told the medical staff that he stumbled because he had aggravated a back injury. The NFL said its concussion protocols had been followed, but they made changes to ensure any player found by a neutral or team doctor to be suffering from balance, coordination or speech trouble thought to be caused by a neurological issue would be removed from a game.

McDaniel said Tagovailoa, who this month topped fan voting for the 2023 Pro Bowl Games, reported to team doctors on Monday that he was feeling concussion-like symptoms. McDaniel said it had not been determined if Tagovailoa has suffered another concussion or when he might have suffered one. But he must complete the five steps of the protocol and remain symptom free in order to return to play. McDaniel said that during the game "nobody recognized anything with regard to" a possible concussion.

However, a video circulated on social media on



SAINT-GERMAIN-EN-LAYE: Paris Saint-Germain's French forward Kylian Mbappe (center) takes part in a training session at the club's 'Camp des Loges' training ground in Saint-Germain-en-Laye, west of Paris on December 27, 2022. — AFP

"We have to improve the team," he said on Monday. "I am not demanding anything at all. I am telling my owners, my directors, that if we want to achieve our set objectives, we have to improve the squad. That's all." There will also be focus on the relegation zone as bottom side Angers, three points behind Strasbourg, travel to Ajaccio who are only four points and two places above them. — AFP



Tua Tagovailoa of Miami Dolphins

Sunday showed Tagovailoa's head banging into the turf in the first half when he was thrown to the ground on a play. McDaniel said his main concern now is for Tagovailoa's health. "I care very deeply about each and every player," the coach said. "I just want him to get healthy and have peace of mind in that regard. Whatever those circumstances are, you deal with after. It's about the human being and making sure he's squared away." — AFP

## Sheffield Utd down Coventry to boost promotion push

**LONDON:** Sheffield United eased to a 3-1 win against Coventry as a seventh success in eight Championship games boosted the Blades' bid to reach the Premier League. Goals from James McAtee, Ciaran Clark and Tommy Doyle kept Paul Heckingbottom's team in second place in the table but level on points with leaders Burnley. Viktor Gyokeres, who earlier missed a penalty, scored for Coventry midway through the second half at Bramall Lane.

Despite playing the final 13 minutes with 10 men after John Egan was sent off for a second yellow card, United held on for a victory that leaves them eight points ahead of third placed Blackburn. "There will be bumps in the road, so the more we do now, the better we'll be at the end of the season," said Heckingbottom. Sunderland had dented Blackburn's promotion challenge earlier on Monday when Ellis Simms snatched the stoppage-time winner in Sunderland's 2-1 victory at the Stadium of Light. Simms came off the bench in the closing stages to make the decisive intervention as he netted from Dan Ballard's pass.

Ross Stewart's deflected header found his own net in the 18th minute to put Blackburn in front. But the Sunderland striker was celebrating at the other end just four minutes later as he converted a penalty to level the scores. Millwall kept the pressure on in the battle to reach the playoff places with an impressive 2-0 win at Watford. Goals from Andreas Voglsammer and Zian Flemming saw the Lions move just two points behind their fourth-placed opponents.

Watford were reduced to 10 men in the 38th minute when Hassane Kamara was sent off. Norwich's poor form continued with a 2-1 defeat at Luton to remain 12 points off the automatic promotion places in fifth. Bristol City fans chanted for boss Nigel Pearson to be sacked after West Bromwich Albion won 2-0 against his struggling side at Ashton Gate. Chuba Akpom extended Kolo Toure's miserable start to life as Wigan boss as the Middlesbrough striker hit a second half hat-trick in a 4-1 win at the Riverside Stadium.

Akpom took his tally to 12 for the season with his second-half strikes, leaving Wigan in the relegation zone despite the recent appointment of former Arsenal defender Toure. Kaine Kesler-Hayden scored the late winner as bottom of the table Huddersfield earned a surprise 2-1 victory at Preston. Stoke came from behind twice to salvage a 2-2 draw at Rotherham. Ten-man Blackpool remain in the relegation zone and without a win in seven games following a 1-1 draw at fellow strugglers Hull. — AFP

## Dolphins' Tagovailoa in concussion protocol

**MIAMI:** Miami Dolphins quarterback Tua Tagovailoa is back in the NFL's concussion protocol after experiencing symptoms, coach Mike McDaniel said on Monday. The move puts Tagovailoa's status for Miami's game against the New England Patriots next Sunday in doubt. Tagovailoa was sidelined with concussion symptoms in October after he was injured in a game at Cincinnati. However, many critics said he should never have been allowed to play in that game after he appeared to have suffered a head injury against Buffalo on September 25.

In that contest, Tagovailoa's head hit the ground and he appeared to have trouble recovering. He was nevertheless allowed to return to that game. He played at Cincinnati four days later, struck his head on the turf again and was stretchered off. Tagovailoa later confirmed he lost consciousness and couldn't remember leaving the field in Cincinnati. His case prompted the NFL to tighten its concussion protocols to ensure that players with

# Classifieds

### Hospitals & Clinics

Sabah Hospital 24812000  
Amiri Hospital 22450005  
Maternity Hospital 24843100  
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital 25312700  
Chest Hospital 24849400  
Farwaniya Hospital 24892010  
Adan Hospital 23940620  
Ibn Sina Hospital 24840300

Al-Razi Hospital 24846000  
Physiotherapy Hospital 24874330/9

### Clinics

Kaizen center 25716707  
Rawda 22517733  
Adalya 22517144

24846000  
24874330/9

Khaldiya 24848075  
Kaifan 24849807  
Shamiya 24848913  
Shuwaikh 24814507  
Abdullah Salem 22549134  
Nuzha 22526804  
Industrial Shuwaikh 24814764  
Qadsiya 22515088

Dasmah 22532265  
Bneid Al-Gar 22531908  
Shaab 22518752

Qibla 22459381  
Ayoun Al-Qibla 22451082  
Mirqab 22456536  
Sharq 22465401  
Salmiya 25746401

### CHANGE OF NAME

I, ZAINAL ABID, holder of Passport No. I-1170463, do hereby change my name to SAINUL (as Given name) ABIDEEN (as Surname) for all purposes. I will henceforth be known in the name SAINUL ABIDEEN and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my document.

Automated enquiry about the Civild card is 1889988

## Arsenal open up 7-point lead, beat West Ham 3-1

Liverpool make a winning return; Newcastle up to second



LONDON: West Ham United's Polish goalkeeper Lukasz Fabianski jumps to stop the ball during the English Premier League football match between Arsenal and West Ham United at the Emirates Stadium in London on December 26, 2022. — AFP

LONDON: Arsenal opened up a seven-point lead with a 3-1 win over West Ham as the Premier League returned on Monday, while Newcastle climbed up to second thanks to an impressive 3-0 victory at Leicester. Liverpool also made a winning return from the World Cup break by beating Aston Villa 3-1 and Harry Kane bounced back from his heartbreak in Qatar by scoring in Tottenham's 2-2 draw at Brentford. Arsenal's momentum towards a first league title since 2004 could have been disturbed by the six-week mid-season break.

But Mikel Arteta's men passed another test of their resolve after going in 1-0 behind at half-time to Said Benrahma's penalty. Two goals in five minutes from Bukayo Saka and Gabriel Martinelli turned the game on its head at a jubilant Emirates before Eddie Nketiah stepped up in the absence of the injured Gabriel Jesus to seal the points. "I'm delighted with the result and performance," said Arteta. "We scored at the perfect time and the crowd was incredible, also in the moment we conceded the goal. They kept on believing. When we

scored it got loud and we generated the momentum we needed."

### No stopping Newcastle

Newcastle's charge towards a return to the Champions League was also not halted by the break as the Magpies scored twice in the first seven minutes at Leicester. Chris Wood opened the scoring from the penalty spot before Miguel Almiron played a one-two with Bruno Guimaraes and slotted past Danny Ward for his eighth goal in his last eight league games. Joelinton headed home from a corner in the 32nd minute as Newcastle made it six successive league victories—their best run in the competition since 2012. "We can do anything," said Newcastle manager Eddie Howe on the possibility of a title challenge. "The season is still young enough for all possibilities to exist for us. I want the fans to believe we can do anything."

In the first Premier League fixture since mid-November, Tottenham were in danger of a damaging defeat after Vitaly Janelt and Ivan Toney put

Brentford in command. But Kane netted with a 65th minute header to start the Tottenham recovery in his first game since missing a crucial penalty in England's World Cup quarter-final defeat against France. Brentford have not beaten Tottenham since 1948 and their long wait for a victory over the north Londoners goes on after Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg curled home with 19 minutes left.

Tottenham boss Antonio Conte praised England captain Kane for his contribution following his World Cup disappointment. "When he came back he was good. We know the importance of Harry for us, his personality, his character. He's the best player we have. I'm happy that he scored today," Conte said. Tottenham stay fourth in the table, four points ahead of fifth-placed Manchester United in the race to qualify for the Champions League.

### Liverpool too good for Villa

Liverpool closed to within five points of Spurs and with a game in hand to come by inflicting Unai Emery's first league defeat as Villa boss. Mohamed

Salah swept home his 15th goal of the season in a frantic opening with chances aplenty at both ends. The Egyptian then teed up Virgil van Dijk to give Liverpool breathing space before half-time. Ollie Watkins gave Villa hope with a towering header midway through the second half but Stefan Bajcetic's first senior goal secured a third consecutive league win for Jurgen Klopp's men. At the other end of the table, Everton suffered a damaging 2-1 defeat against relegation rivals Wolves as Rayan Ait-Nouri struck in final seconds for the visitors at Goodison Park.

Everton are now just one point above Wolves in the final relegation place. "We are in one (relegation battle)," admitted Everton boss Frank Lampard. "We've got to fight." Fulham won 3-0 at nine-man Crystal Palace, who had Tyrick Mitchell and James Tomkins sent off. Bobby De Cordova-Reid, Tim Ream and Aleksandar Mitrovic scored Fulham's goals. Southampton slipped to the bottom of the table after a 3-1 home defeat against south-coast rivals Brighton. — AFP

## Nets hold off Cavs for 9th straight NBA win

LOS ANGELES: Kevin Durant and Kyrie Irving scored 32 points apiece as the Brooklyn Nets pushed their NBA winning streak to nine games Monday with a 125-117 victory over the Cleveland Cavaliers. Brooklyn edged ahead of the Cavs for third place in the Eastern Conference, withstanding a late Cleveland surge even after Durant fouled out with 1:54 left to play. The Nets were up by 10 when Durant departed after he was whistled for an offensive foul while driving to the basket.

Irving, who played a key role alongside LeBron James in Cleveland's 2016 championship run, had the last word against his former team. Darius Garland's floater cut the deficit to four points with 44 seconds remaining, but Irving made a pair of free throws and Brooklyn's Nic Claxton came up with a big block and the Nets held on. The Nets' nine-game winning streak is their longest since a 14-game streak in the 2005-06 season. They have won 14 of their last 15 games.

In the first half, Durant passed former San Antonio Spurs great Tim Duncan for 15th on the NBA's all-time scoring list as the Nets built a quick lead. "To be able to pass an all-time great, legend - somebody who changed the game - that's something I'll call my folks about tonight," Durant said. "I want to celebrate those small things, but keep pressing forward. I know I've got more to do." The Cavs cut a 13-point deficit to one with 3:54 left in the first half, but the Nets responded

with a vengeance to lead 65-49 at the break. Garland scored 18 of his 46 points in the fourth to keep the Cavs in it, but Cleveland star Donovan Mitchell was held to just 15 points.

TJ Warren added 23 points off the bench for Brooklyn and Royce O'Neale, Claxton and Yuta Watanabe scored 10 each as the Nets became just the second Eastern Conference team to beat Cleveland on their home floor this season. Brooklyn's surge follows a dismal season start, the sacking of coach Steve Nash and the anti-Semitism row that engulfed Irving. Current coach Jacque Vaughn said the secret to the turnaround was simple. "Each day we try to gather as a team and think how we can get better," he said. "It is as simple as 'we're going to try to get a win' that day."

In Detroit, the Los Angeles Clippers dominated overtime to beat the Pistons 142-131. Clippers guard Paul George scored seven of his game-high 32 points in the extra session as Los Angeles came out on top of a back-and-forth battle. It had looked to be going the other way when Detroit pushed their lead to 14 with 3:34 to play and the Clippers took George out of the game. But the Pistons made just two free throws in the remainder of regulation and the Clippers surged - Terance Mann making his first basket of the game to force overtime.

In New Orleans, Naji Marshall scored a career-high 22 points to lead the short-handed Pelicans in a 113-93 victory over the Indiana Pacers. Jonas Valanciunas had 20 points and 12 rebounds and CJ McCollum scored 19 for the Pelicans, who were without leading scorer Zion Williamson as well as Brandon Ingram. The Miami Heat, playing without Jimmy Butler and Bam Adebayo, held on to beat the Minnesota Timberwolves 113-110. Max Strus led the Heat with 19 points and Kyle Lowry added 18. — AFP

## Iran reroutes flight, and orders football legend's family off

TEHRAN: Iranian football legend Ali Daei, who has backed protests following Mahsa Amini's death, said Monday an airplane from Tehran to Dubai had been rerouted and his family ordered off. Protests have gripped Iran since the September 16 death of Iranian-Kurdish Amini, 22, after her arrest in Tehran for an alleged breach of the country's strict dress code for women. Tehran generally calls the protests "riots".

Daei, 53, a former German Bundesliga striker whose 109 goals at international level were long unsurpassed until Cristiano Ronaldo overtook him, is one of Iran's most famous footballers. Daei said his wife and daughter had flown on a Mahan Air flight, taking off from the capital Tehran's Imam Khomeini Airport, headed to Dubai in the United Arab Emirates, ISNA news agency reported.

But the plane was rerouted and made to land on Iran's Kish island in the Gulf, where his family removed, the state news agency IRNA said. Quoting the judiciary, IRNA said that "Daei's wife had pledged to inform the relevant institutions of her decision before leaving the country", following their "association with the groups against the Islamic revolution and rioters and calling for strikes". The IRNA report added that "the flight landed at Kish airport and Ali Daei's wife and daughter got off the plane".

The former Bayern Munich player, who played in Iran's 2-1 World Cup victory against the United States

in 1998, has said he has been targeted by threats after backing the protests triggered by the death of Amini. "My daughter and wife were taken off the flight, but they were not arrested", Daei said, ISNA reported.

"Had they been banned (from leaving), the passport police system should have shown it: no one has given me an answer about this. I really don't know what is the reason for these things". Daei said he was trying to arrange his family's return to Tehran. "Did they want to arrest a terrorist? My wife and daughter were going to Dubai for a few days trip and back", he added. Daei on September 27 used social media to call on the government to "solve the problems of the Iranian people rather than using repression, violence and arrests".

In October, Daei told AFP his passport was confiscated by police upon his return from abroad, before being returned to him a few days later. He said he had not gone to the World Cup in Qatar due to the Iranian authorities' crackdown on the protests. Earlier in December, his jewelry shop and restaurant in Tehran's fashionable north were sealed, with local media reporting they had been ordered shut for "cooperation with anti-revolutionary groups in cyberspace to disrupt peace and business of the market." — AFP



Iran's Ali Daei