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Distractions lead to death

170 killed in road accidents, 3.4 million tickets issued in 10 months

Amir returns home from Italy



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is welcomed by HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and senior officials as he returns home on Dec 28, 2022 following a private visit to Italy. — KUNA

KUWAIT: Traffic police issued up to 3.4 million citations between January 1 and the end of November 2022, while 170 people died in accidents during the same period, according to statistics released by the ministry of interior. Ninety-two percent of traffic accidents in the six governorates were attributed to distraction during driving and eight percent were related to a host of other causes. Total number of accidents linked to lack of focus reached 4,594.

The Capital governorate recorded the highest rate of accidents with 1,262 incidents, Hawally with 1,015, Farwaniya governorate with 669, Jahra with 468 accidents, Ahmadi with 730 and Mubarak Al-Kabeer with 450. Number of deaths during the same period reached 170 - 152 males and 18 females. The highest proportion of deaths was in Jahra with 52 (31 percent), and the lowest in Hawally with 10 deaths, six percent of total fatalities. Ages of the deceased adults ranged between 31 and 40, and the lowest age ranged between a month and 10 years.

Maj Gen Mohammad Al-Otaibi, director general of the penalties division, told KUNA that violations are either registered directly by the traffic police or via cameras, affirming that cameras are installed on all main roads and at various public locations. Most of the accidents happen due to use of mobile phones, he said, advising motorists to keep their



KUWAIT: A policeman monitors traffic in an operations room. — KUNA

vehicle reasonably apart from those ahead. He stressed on the necessity of using seatbelts, abstaining from speeding, not using the mobile phone while driving and keeping children in the backseat, affirming that the regulations are intended to protect motorists. — KUNA

News in brief

First metro line in Dhaka

DHAKA: Bangladesh's sprawling capital inaugurated its first ever metro rail line on Wednesday as authorities work to ease congestion that has throttled growth and inflamed tempers in the gridlocked metropolis. Wednesday saw the start of operations on a section of the first line connecting a neighborhood on Dhaka's periphery with the city center, built with a \$2.8 billion price tag. — AFP (See Page 8)

Reaching for the stars: Architect pursues space dream

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: As a step towards becoming the first Kuwaiti astronaut, multitasking architect Bader Al-Moulah became the first Kuwaiti to train at Aquarius, the only undersea laboratory in the world that NASA uses to train astronauts to simulate life

on the International Space Station. At Aquarius Reef Base, where Moulah finished his training, he raised the Kuwaiti flag into the habitat 14 meters below the surface. This was a crucial turning point in both his ascent to be an astronaut and Kuwait's development in the fields of aeronautical and aerospace research.

"When I was young, I wanted to become an astronaut, but I kept it a secret because people don't take it seriously. I hid this dream, but I was preparing for the moment. I studied engineering to have the needed skills to be an astronaut and I was following up with space news while educating myself on the history of space," he told Kuwait Times. (See Page 3)



Bader Al-Moulah



ZHENGZHOU, China: This aerial photo shows a multi-vehicle collision on Zhengxin Yellow River Bridge. — AFP

One dead in China pile-up

BEIJING: One person died during a highway pile-up involving hundreds of vehicles in central China, state broadcaster CCTV reported Wednesday, with images of the accident showing scenes of chaos. Aerial pictures showed hundreds of passenger cars, vans and lorries - many of which had smashed into one another - piled up on one section of the highway in dense fog near the city of Zhengzhou. — AFP

Winter brings joy to Kuwait

KUWAIT: Kuwait, one of the hottest countries on Earth, was hit by a rare hailstorm that delighted children and their parents, with images of the winter white shared widely on social media Wednesday. "We have not seen so much hail during the winter season in 15 years," Muhammad Karam, a former director of Kuwait's meteorological department, told AFP. Pictures and videos of southern roads partially blanketed in hail and ice spread online to celebrate the rare weather event.

Children donned scarves and raincoats as they scooped up hail in Umm al-Haiman, about 50 km south of Kuwait City. Kuwait's meteorological department said precipitation since Tuesday had reached up to 63 mm but that the weather was clearing up. Karam said he expects the phenomenon to reoccur as climate change disrupts weather patterns.

Kuwait endures blistering summer heat, and scientists predict it could become unlivable in future because of climate change. In 2016, summer temperatures peaked at 54 degrees Celsius. Parts of Kuwait could get 4.5 degrees Celsius hotter from 2071 to 2100 compared with the historical average, the Environment Public Authority has warned. — AFP



KUWAIT: This aerial view shows mist covering skyscrapers in the center of Kuwait City on Dec 28, 2022. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

UAE pushes work for its own citizens

DUBAI: With foreign workers making up the vast bulk of private sector jobs in the United Arab Emirates, the Gulf's second-largest economy wants to boost opportunities for its own citizens. The UAE - like other oil-rich Arab Gulf states - has often used the public sector as an employment vehicle for

its nationals. But times are changing, said 34-year-old Emirati researcher Khalifa Al-Suwaidi, who has himself been looking for a private sector job since quitting a government post in June.

"We've reached a point where we have a diversity among Emiratis in terms of skill sets and expertise," said Suwaidi. "The public sector can no longer accommodate many of those talents". Just 12 percent of the country's more than nine million residents are UAE nationals, with over 90 percent of private sector jobs taken by foreigners, according to International Labor Organization figures.

Suwaidi, author of a forthcoming book titled "UAE after the Arab Spring", said he believed some

employers overlooked his application because they presumed an Emirati would demand the high wages often paid in lucrative government posts. "The private sector needs to be more accommodating," he said. "I've been applying for jobs for a while to no avail."

The government is now strong-arming private firms into hiring local talent, with the aim of ensuring Emiratis make up 10 percent of the private sector workforce by 2026. Next month, firms with more than 50 employees that fail to fill two percent of their skilled jobs with Emiratis face being fined. That has sparked a hiring drive, with recruiters noting

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Local



KUWAIT: His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince receives Minister of Education accompanied by the board members of Abdullah Al-Salem University. —KUNA

Deputy Amir receives Education Minister

KUWAIT: His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received Wednesday at Bayan Palace Minister of Education and Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research Dr Hamad Abdulwahab Al-Adwani, accompanied by the board members of Abdullah Al-Salem University. — KUNA

KUNA chief discusses boosting cooperation with Chinese envoy

KUWAIT: Director General of Kuwait News Agency Dr Fatma Al-Salem on Wednesday received the Chinese Ambassador to the State of Kuwait Zhang Jianwei and discussed means of promoting media cooperation between the two countries.

Dr Al-Salem affirmed during the reception of the Chinese ambassador, held at her office, necessity of boosting this level of cooperation within Kuwait Vision 2035 development strategy and Beijing's "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI), depicting the strategic relations between the two countries in various domains, namely the media sector.

The KUNA chief stressed the necessity of employing the media to be the means of closer

cooperation between the two friendly countries and peoples and cementing the bonds further at diverse levels. KUNA is quite keen on maintaining the cooperation with China, she said, underlining the memo bonding the Kuwaiti news agency with its China counterpart, the Chinese news agency.

The Chinese ambassador said that the media is the third power globally and plays a positive role for developing diplomatic relations among states, affirming Beijing's readiness to expand the cooperation with the State of Kuwait. He also praised KUNA's status, locally, in the Arab world and the globe. The two sides examined the bilateral diplomatic relations, first established in 1971.

Kuwait was the first Gulf country to bond itself with a relationship with Beijing. Ambassador Jianwei congratulated Dr Al-Salem on assuming the post. The meeting was attended by KUNA's deputy director general for editorial affairs Issam Al-Ghanim and the deputy director general for administrative and financial affairs, Mohammad Al-Manna'ei. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Director General of Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) with Chinese ambassador. —KUNA

KAC inks cooperation protocol with KRCS on humanitarian initiatives



KUWAIT: Group photo of senior officials of KAC and KRCS.

KUWAIT: Kuwait Airways signed a joint cooperation protocol with Kuwait Red Crescent Society. KAC Chairman Ali Al-Dakhan and KRCS Chairman Dr Hilal Al-Sayer signed the protocol in the presence of KAC CEO Maan Ruzouqi and several officials from both sides. "Kuwait Airways is pleased to sign the joint cooperation protocol with KRCS and join it in

supporting humanitarian projects and services, as well as relief campaigns the society offers, as this comes as part of KAC seeking to contribute to all that brings benefits to others.

He said KAC is keen on participating in such projects and initiatives as it is an indivisible part of Kuwait society's fabric and seeks to always show its societal role in all that concerns social

responsibility and the necessity to care for humanitarian projects and services. Dakhan said KAC will launch a link on its website for those who wish to donate after the process of booking flights by KD 1, KD 3 or KD 5 to share in supporting humanitarian projects related to KRCS. Dakhan thanked KRCS for its role in contributing to many projects in Kuwait and abroad, and

hoped to strengthen relations in the interest of all parties.

Dr Sayer said he is pleased with the agreement that will effectively contribute to meeting the society's goals of supporting humanitarian projects. He thanked KAC for its societal role and signing the joint cooperation with the society, hoping for more cooperation in the future.



Exchanging the cooperation protocol.

National Guard holds course with Bahraini, Omani counterparts

KUWAIT: Under the sponsorship of Undersecretary of Kuwait National Guard Hashem Al-Rifai, the National Guard Training Institute held the graduation ceremony of the advanced infantry course for officers, in which officers from the Kuwaiti army, the Bahraini National Guard and the Royal Omani Guard participated. The ceremony, which was held in the central hall of Al-Sumoud Camp, was attended by senior leaders of the National Guard.

Rifai conveyed to graduates the greetings of the leadership, represented by HH Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah, Chief of Kuwait National Guard and Deputy Chief Sheikh Faisal Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. He also praised the participation of officers from armies of Bahrain and Oman and their honorable representation of their military institu-

tions, which increases the bonds of cooperation and solidarity between the peoples of the Gulf Cooperation Council as well as achieves good benefits for the training process and boosts skills, spirit of competition and keenness to exchange experiences.

"The performance of the officers confirms the leadership skills they have acquired, and the ability to plan, implement and work with a team spirit," Rifai said. "These results would not have been achieved except for the directives of the leadership to advance efforts to develop education and training by updating our curricula and training methods from advanced military institutions, with which the National Guard concluded cooperation protocols and memorandums of understanding for the exchange of experiences," Rifai added.

He also stressed the interest of the leadership in the National Guard in qualifying cadres armed with knowledge and experience in all fields to push the wheel of development in the National Guard and upgrade its role in protecting the nation's capabilities. "The officers participating in the advanced infantry course for officers carried out the final exercise 'Solid Fortress' with the aim of improving their leadership capabilities in facing tactical and security situations in various circumstances," he concluded.



KUWAIT: Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to Kuwait Malik Muhammad Farooq met with Kuwait Times Managing Editor Mustafa Qamhiya on Wednesday. The ambassador interacted with the editorial staff and toured KT offices. During the visit, Farooq and Qamhiya discussed topics of mutual interest and means of enhancing cooperation between the Pakistani Embassy in Kuwait and Kuwait Times, particularly in media relations.

Markaz shines light on women's empowerment

KUWAIT: Kuwait Financial Centre (Markaz) rounded out its human development activities for the year with a seminar around the theme of career resilience, particularly focused on women empowerment in the asset and wealth management industry. Covering the topics of gender equality and self-preservation regarding career progression, the activity allowed Markaz's staff to engage with one another and explore methods to help ensure a cohesive and healthy work climate.

The workshop was hosted by the guest speaker, Dr Rania Azmi, a member of the Executive Education

Board at the Wharton Business School of the University of Pennsylvania. With more than two decades of experience strategically advising the International Finance Cooperation (IFC), the World Bank Group, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and the Sovereign Wealth Fund of Kuwait, Dr Azmi utilized her years of experience to share insights into the enduring value of gender equality within the workplace.

Throughout the day's events, Dr Azmi explored the importance of resilience— for men and women alike — to collectively flourish and achieve sustainable results within the investment banking and asset management industry. With her extensive international experience as a notable speaker worldwide, she poignantly raised attendees' level of awareness of the key challenges that can disproportionately affect female professionals. "We have always been an avid promoter of all our staff's continual career growth and development.

While there are shared traits that we encourage all our team members embody such as integrity, compassion and empathy, we understand that our team member's identities and experiences are unique, particularly with regard to gender. By gaining a deeper understanding of the crucial value of women empowerment, we at Markaz are on the right track towards realizing the full potential of all our staff, and successfully meeting clients' needs in an increasingly dynamic market," stated Peter Kelly, Executive Vice President of Human Resources, Markaz.

Leveraging her first-hand expertise to pinpoint solutions, Dr Azmi outlined techniques to help persevere through career hurdles and ways active consideration can be shown to team members in an industry traditionally underrepresented by women. By encouraging male colleagues to demonstrate an understanding of women's experiences within the workplace, Dr Azmi affirmed that opportunities can be rebalanced to

the benefit of everyone, the business and its clients included. Markaz's team members who attended the workshop were given the opportunity to present questions to Dr Azmi and participate in an interactive discussion to collectively gain a better understanding of the significance of women's empowerment within the workplace. The closing activity for the 2022 calendar year embodies Markaz's commitment to uplifting its employees, equipping them with the right skills to overcome challenges and establishing pathways for team members to reach their fullest potential.

Markaz's last event of 2022 wraps up a year-long series of activities for its employees, which include a strategic marketing communications masterclass, a training program for its Wealth Management team entitled 'Know Your Client' and a 'Growth Mindset Energizer' summit, amongst others. In October, Markaz held a breast cancer awareness lecture for its female employees, in collaboration with Taiba Hospital.

Local

Kuwaiti astronaut Moulah recounts his 'dream-come-true' experience

'Our dreams are simple to achieve and we want to raise the flag of Kuwait'



Bader with Kuwaiti flag



Moon simulation at HI-SEAS



Moon simulation at HI-SEAS.



Bader at the International Astronautical Congress in 2021.

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: As a step towards being the first Kuwaiti astronaut, the multitasking architect Bader Al-Moulah became the first Kuwaiti to train at Aquarius, the only undersea laboratory in the world that NASA uses to train astronauts to simulate life on the International Space Station. At Aquarius Reef Base, where Moulah finished his training, he raised the Kuwaiti flag into the habitat 14 meters below the surface. This was a crucial turning point in both his ascent to be an astronaut and Kuwait's development in the fields of aeronautical and aerospace research.

"When I was young, I wanted to become an astronaut, but I kept it secret because people don't take it seriously. I hid this dream, but I was preparing for the moment. I studied engineering to have the needed skills to be an astronaut and I was following up with space news while educating myself on the history of space," he told Kuwait Times.

Moulah participated and reached the finals in "The Astronauts" show on Dubai TV, which is considered the first-of-its kind program for potential Arab astronauts, where participants undergo 30 tests and missions that are based on psychological, mental and physical challenges observed by jury member Chris Hadfield, a retired Canadian astronaut and the first Canadian to perform an extravehicular activity in outer space.

"The show allowed me to experience my dream. Seeing the Canadian astronaut Hadfield was a dream come true. Although I was eliminated for my age, I was honored to get a recommendation from him," he pointed out. To keep preparing for his dream, Moulah recently went to the Hawaii Space Exploration Analog and Simulation (HI-SEAS) habitat for simulation of life on the moon, located in an isolated position on the slopes of the Mauna Loa

volcano on the island of Hawaii.

"I lived there for two weeks. We had no communication in order to live the experience that you are on the moon, wearing the full suit and exploring the lava caves of the volcano. I was prepared with the needed medical skills to perform three different surgeries. It was challenging, worrying about every move. It was hard mentally and physically," he said.

Being an astronaut was not the only dream for Moulah - he also accomplished being an Imagineer for Walt Disney, where he won a competition to design part of a place in Disney's animal kingdom. "One of the other dreams was to be an Imagineer for Disney, which I accomplished. Disney inspired me with its movies growing up. As time passed, I graduated from university and started to work for Disney. It was my dream job. I accomplished this dream, so I told myself with luck and work, I can achieve my other space dream as well," he told Kuwait Times.

In late 2019, Moulah started to think about what is needed to have a space center in Kuwait, after his master's thesis about rehabilitating Shuaiba refinery into a space center. "When I got back to Kuwait, I submitted my idea to the government. They liked it, but it did not pass. So I founded 'Ignition', Kuwait's first space and exploration company, with my friends," he said.

"Ignition is the first company to approve scientific research in Kuwait in the space field. We are now organizing educational courses and awareness lectures related to space and building towards a major project to have a Mars analog habitat on Failaka Island. Hopefully, we can get the funding and support from the government," he added.

Moulah indicated that his future project will fund itself later. "For example, we want to do research on Kuwait's environment and how it relates to the habitat, which could benefit people who want to go to Mars. They might send their astronauts to our habi-



Bader Al-Moulah in Kuwait Times



Bader with the Kuwaiti flag at Aquarius Reef Base



At Walt Disney.

at in Kuwait for their research. So we hope to get the support of the Kuwaiti government. Our dreams

are simple to achieve. We want to raise the flag of Kuwait. I see Kuwait is full of potential."

Major events in Kuwait's media, education sectors

KUWAIT: In 2022, Kuwait witnessed many major developments and events in the areas of education, scientific research, culture and media. The following is a list of such major developments and events:

Education, higher education and scientific research

Jan 2: Kuwait Minister of Education Dr Ali Al-Mudhaf announced that schools and universities nationwide will close for a day due to unstable weather conditions.

Jan 20: Research Scientist of Nanotechnology and Advanced Materials Program at Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR), Dr Adel Ismael was awarded the Arab regional award by The World Academy of Sciences (TWAS), for sciences in developing countries for the year 2021.

Feb 7: Kuwait Ministry of Education postponed the start of the new school year 2021-2022 until March 6.

March 7: Kuwait University launched its first campaign to protect the sea environment under the slogan (Clean Seas).

April 7: Kuwaiti inventor Adel Al-Wusais placed first on a GCC level for his desalination and water treatment project during an event held on the sidelines of Expo Dubai.

May 15: Minister of Education and Minister of Higher Education Dr Ali Al-Mudhaf suspended schools for May 17 due to the sandstorm and severe weather conditions.

May 30: The Ministry of Education launched a program to boost education input affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

June 4: Kuwait National Seismic Network, an affiliate entity to the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR), said that a 5- magnitude earthquake hit the southwestern part of Al-Ahmadi.

Aug 2: Kuwait University's College of Engineering and Petroleum obtains ISO of Quality Management certification from the international 'Royal Cert'.

Sept 2: Kuwaiti Engineer Jenan Al-Shehab won a golden medal at the World Cup 2022 for Invention and Scientific Research in Tunisia, in recognition of her invention of electromagnetic cells for wireless power transmission. The US Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) recognizes Shehab's invention.

Sept 12: Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR) and the Saudi desalination public authority signed a MoU on the sideline international conference for the future the desalination industry held in Riyadh.

Sept 20: Kuwait National Seismic Network (KNSN) registered a 3.3-magnitude tremor hitting east of the northern region of Al-Abdali, Kuwait.

Oct 11: Kuwait University's Dr Issa Al-Safran won an international award for developing a digitized system offering solutions for obstacles face in the oil production process.

Oct 24: The Ministry of Education suspended schools in the private and public sectors on October 25 due to the partial eclipse.

Nov 7: The water research center at the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR) earned a patent from the US for inventions in water desalination as well as air cooling and conditioning.

Dec 5: Kuwait National Seismic Network, a KISR affiliate, recorded a three-magnitude in Al-Managesh area.



DUBAI: Kuwaiti inventor Adel Al-Wusais was placed first on a GCC level for his desalination and water treatment project during an event held on the sidelines of Expo Dubai. —KUNA

Media and culture

Jan 12: Kuwait News Agency (KUNA), along with the Emirates News Agency (WAM), elected as Vice Presidents of the Federation of Arab News Agencies (FANA) during its 48th General Assembly conference held in the Saudi capital, Riyadh.

Jan 17: Artist Al-Nabhan wins Sharjah Prize for (Theatrical Creativity).

Feb 15: The Ministry of Information announced the official launch of the national campaign under its slogan (Paradise for All of Us) to celebrate the 31st Anniversary of Liberation and the 61st Independence Days.

March 3: The Mediterranean University in Albania awarded an honorary doctorate to the poet Abdulaziz Saud Al-Babtain, president of the Abdulaziz Saud Al-Babtain Cultural Foundation, for

his distinguished contribution to supporting and promoting a culture of peace in the international community, establishing cooperation mechanisms through the dissemination of culture, education, and dialogue for future generations.

April 8: Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Cultural Center (ASCC) won the Museum Oscar at the 2021 Leading Cultural Destination Awards in Berlin.

June 16: Kuwait handed ancient antiquities to Egypt after they were confiscated by the Kuwaiti customs from smugglers back in 2019.

June 24: Kuwait won gold and silver awards at the 15th Gulf television and radio festival held in Bahrain.

June 30: Albanian President Ilir Meta awarded Kuwait poet Abdulaziz Al-Babtain with the 'Order of Albanian National Flag' for his contributions to spreading Arab culture and promoting world peace via the Abdulaziz Al-Babtain Cultural Foundation.

July 7: UNESCO, during its 9th General Assembly in Paris, France, accredited the Kuwaiti Al-Sadu Handcraft Cooperative Society as a non-government advisory organization.

Sept 9: Kuwaiti actor Abdullah Al-Humoud shared the award for best actor in theater production with Tunisian Osama Kachkar during the Cairo international experimental theater festival.

Oct 20: Minister of Information Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi inaugurated the 22nd Kuwaiti theatre festival.

Nov 16: Munira Al-Qadiri partakes in an artistic light project held during the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar.

Nov 16: The 45th Kuwait International Book Fair opened with the participation of 29 countries and 500 publishing companies.

Nov 20: The National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL) congratulated Kuwaiti poet Mazyad Al-Wasmi for winning the first Al-Raiya poetry contest in Saudi Arabia. — KUNA

Merchants in Souq Mubarakia served notices for violations

Al-Nahedh meets citizens, orders to solve problems



KUWAIT: Minister of Commerce and Industry Mazen Al-Nahedh during the meeting with citizens.



KUWAIT: Commerce Ministry officials issue notices to merchants who flouted rules.

KUWAIT: The commerce and industry ministry has issued a number of notices to violators in Souq Mubarkia for violating the rules and regulations of the ministry. The emergency team that visited the area has initiated legal proceedings against violators.

Meanwhile, Minister of Commerce and Industry Mazen Al-Nahedh met a number of citizens and directed officials to resolve their complaints in accordance with the open-door policy and the ministry's keenness to overcome all obstacles in addressing their transactions and find solutions derived from the law through which they can facilitate them and complete their transactions with ease.

Nahedh listened to the citizens and directed the concerned authorities and specialists to quickly search and resolve complaints and transactions submitted to him in accordance with legal procedures.

Kuwaitization policy will continue: Adwani

KUWAIT: Education Minister Hamad Al-Adwani said the education ministry continues its policy of Kuwaitization and enabling Kuwaitis to join the education and administrative staff, as it agrees with the government's plans to empower national elements, and is in line with the Kuwaiti constitution, which says: "Public office is a national service entrusted to those who hold it. Public officials, in the exercise of their duties, shall aim at the public interest. Aliens may not hold public offices except in the cases specified by law."

"Following the end-of-year exams, several non-Kuwaiti teachers will be dismissed from all school stages in public, special and private schools in specialties where large number of Kuwaitis are available," Adwani said. He said the ministry's plan towards Kuwaitization policy included two paths - the first is quick Kuwaitization of supervisory jobs with regards to heads of departments through deciding specialties to be Kuwaitized based on the number of Kuwaiti candidates on waiting lists.

He said the second path is to terminate services of non-Kuwaiti teachers of specialties where good numbers of Kuwaitis are available according to the needs of each education zone in order to enable Kuwaitis and children of Kuwaiti women to take those jobs. This will reduce the rate of unemployment and provide more job opportunities for Kuwaiti citizens.

He said this plan is for every specialty where the number of non-Kuwaitis form less than 25 percent of the total, and will be totally Kuwaitized. For specialties in which non-Kuwaitis exceed 25 percent, they will be Kuwaitized over more than a year, varying between one specialty to another according to the percentage of Kuwaiti elements and the percentage of non-Kuwaitis in them.

Kuwaiti donations help in educating Palestinians

GAZA: Kuwait's financial donations have been invested for renovating an educational institution and securing winter clothes for Palestinian families in Gaza. The local 'Al-Daraj Zakat Committee' inaugurated the teaching center on Wednesday, simultaneously with the distribution of the clothes to scores of limited income families.

Rami Al-Ashi, the committee director, said in a statement to KUNA 'Doctor Zuhair Scientific Educational Center' was opened after overhauling its sections and re-equipping it, with financial contributions by the Kuwaiti International Islamic

Charity Organization. The center, staffed by highly qualified teachers, will give free additional education to students of all levels and organize computer courses for the youth. It also plans to offer charge-free lessons for orphans, poor children and reasonable-income youth for token fees. Al-Ashi expressed gratitude to His Highness the Amir of the State of Kuwait, Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber

Al-Sabah, and the great Kuwaiti people, noting that Kuwait has been generous in dispatching aid to the enclave in a campaign themed, "Kuwait on your side." He also extended thanks to the Kuwaiti "relief and development convoys society," for supporting limited income families in the strip. The latest humanitarian action by the association was delivering winter clothes to Palestinian students. — KUNA



GAZA: Delivering winter clothes to Palestinian students. —KUNA



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Salam Kuwait Namaste India - 4 at ICSK Khaitan

KUWAIT: What a grand farewell to the year 2022! The most attractive event of the year, Salaam Kuwait Namaste India Season- 4, has scaled new heights of success. As the year comes to an end, ICSK Khaitan unveiled the most magical and sparkling celebration ever on their grand premises. A vibrant combination of colorful events and a beautiful blend of cultures of both India & Kuwait under one roof.

The inaugural ceremony depicted the most exhilarating and vibrant blend of religious values and upholding the cultural heritage of India and Kuwait, respectively. The day started with Islamic prayer followed by the national anthems. After the prayer song, an invocation dance performance was displayed. The school Principal K G Shirsath extended a warm welcome to the chief guest Anchita Kethwa, second secretary of commerce investment and education, Indian Embassy Kuwait. Guest of honour Falah Al-Mutairi, Kuwait Social Studies, Inspector Ministry of Education for their benign presence.

The guests were felicitated along with the board of trustees, ICSK, Chairman Shaikh Abdul Rahman, Vice-Chairman Vinu Kumar Nair, secretary Amer Mohammed, Joint Secretary Agnello Fernandes, principals and vice principals of all other ICSK schools. The inauguration was a very unique one with the rerelease of two doves, symbols of peace representing Kuwait and India, respectively, by the chairman and the chief guest.



The chief guest and the guest of honor stressed on the importance of inculcating the India-Kuwait culture among students. They appreciated the fact that students had preserved their culture by coming up with various creative events on many such occasions.

The excited audience was the major reason that this event was on its toes, right from the curtain raiser to the end of the event. The crowd was impatiently waiting to explore the ocean of activities, waiting to entertain them.

In the later part of the day, Vanitha Vedi, the women's association, the Andhra Pradesh and the Gujarat Association groups were welcomed and felicitated by the principal where they represented their contributions towards Indian cultural development in Kuwait through their cultural programs. Sudhakar Rao, the president of the United Telegu Association was also present on the occasion who organized big Telegu cultural programs. A souvenir named 'Archive' was released in style with the Khaitan band being played in the background. The vice principal proposed a vote of thanks.





US Supreme Court keeps border policy in place

Former Nazi camp secretary, appeals against conviction

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TIANJIN: Picture shows COVID-19 patients on beds at Tianjin Nankai Hospital in Tianjin on December 28, 2022. Cities across China have struggled with surging infections, a resulting shortage of pharmaceuticals and overflowing hospital wards and crematoriums after Beijing suddenly dismantled its zero-COVID lockdown and testing regime. —AFP

China COVID pivot sparks jitters worldwide

Elderly COVID patients lying on gurneys in overflowing hospital emergency wards

BEIJING: Beijing's sudden pivot away from containing COVID-19 has caused jitters around the world, with the United States saying it may restrict travel from China following its decision to end mandatory quarantine for overseas arrivals.

China late Monday scrapped quarantine for inbound travellers from January 8 onwards, dismantling the last remaining piece of its stringent zero-COVID policy and ending some of the world's harshest border restrictions.

The move was greeted with jubilation by Chinese citizens, who rushed to book international flights, triggering a surge in ticket prices. Hospitals and crematoriums across China continue to be overwhelmed by an influx of mostly elderly people.

AFP reporters saw dozens of mostly elderly COVID patients lying on gurneys in overflowing hospital emergency wards in Tianjin, 140 kilometres (87 miles) south-

west of the capital Beijing Wednesday. Medical staff are "pretty much all" expected to continue working despite testing positive for the virus, one doctor said.

Other countries have expressed concerns about the potential for new variants to emerge as China battles the world's biggest surge in infections.

US officials said late Tuesday they were considering COVID entry restrictions on travellers from China, after countries including Japan and India introduced PCR testing on arrival for Chinese passengers.

"There are mounting concerns in the international community on the ongoing COVID-19 surges in China and the lack of transparent data, including viral genomic sequence data, being reported from the PRC," the US officials said, referring to the People's Republic of China.

The United States is "considering taking similar steps" to countries such as Japan and Malaysia, they

added. Taiwan, a self-ruled island that China claims as its own, said Wednesday that it would also screen travellers from the mainland for the virus.

'Predictable and under control'

China's loosening of measures effectively brought the curtain down on a zero-COVID regime of mass testing, lockdowns and long quarantines that has stalled its economy and triggered large-scale nationwide protests. "Currently the development of China's epidemic situation is overall predictable and under control," foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said Wednesday.

"Hyping, smearing and political manipulation with ulterior motives can't stand the test of facts," Wang added, calling Western media reporting on China's COVID surge "completely biased". All passengers arriving in China have had to undergo mandatory centralised

quarantine since March 2020. The period of isolation fell 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, allowing authorities to adopt looser controls. Chinese immigration authorities said Tuesday they will resume issuing passports for tourism purposes from January 8, after years of strict exit controls.

Tracking cases

The winter surge comes ahead of major public holidays next month in which hundreds of millions of people are expected to travel to their hometowns to reunite with relatives. Chinese authorities have said the scale of the outbreak is now "impossible" to track and narrowed the criteria for defining COVID deaths.—AFP

Pope urges prayers for 'very ill' ex-pontiff Benedict

ROME: Pope Francis said Wednesday that Benedict XVI, who in 2013 became the first pontiff to resign in six centuries, is "very ill" and urged people to pray for him. The head of the worldwide Catholic Church later paid a visit to his 95-year-old predecessor at his home in a former convent inside the Vatican.

"I would like to ask all of you to pray a special prayer for Pope Emeritus Benedict," Francis said at the end of his general audience at the Vatican. "Remember him, because he is very ill, asking the Lord to console and support him." Vatican spokesman Matteo Bruni confirmed Benedict's health had worsened "in the last few hours" and said Francis had visited him after his audience.

"In the last few hours there has been a deterioration due to advancing age. The situation at the moment remains under control, monitored continually by doctors," Bruni said at 1030 GMT. Benedict had cited his declining physical and mental health back in 2013 in his decision to become the first pope

since 1415 to stand down as head of the worldwide Catholic church.

The pope emeritus, whose real name is Joseph Ratzinger, has since lived a quiet life, rarely appearing in public. He was the first German pope for 1,000 years. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz "wishes the pope emeritus a good recovery and sends his thoughts to him", said government spokeswoman Christiane Hoffmann.

Georg Baetzing, head of the German Bishops Conference, said his thoughts were with Benedict, while his Italian counterpart, Matteo Zuppi, urged prayers for the ex-pontiff in Italy's churches. The ANSA news agency reported that Benedict had complained of "respiratory problems" before Christmas, but he has long been in fragile health.

In 2018, in a letter sent to Italy's Corriere della Sera daily, Benedict described "the slow withering of my physical forces", saying he was "on an interior pilgrimage towards home". Maltese Cardinal Mario Grech said in 2020 that Benedict "has difficulty in expressing himself".

The ex-pope, who uses a wheelchair, said "the Lord has taken away my speech in order to let me appreciate silence", Grech told Vatican News. In April, Benedict's long-time secretary, Archbishop Georg Gaenswein, told Vatican News the ex-pope was "physically relatively weak and fragile", but "in good spirits". —AFP

US storm death toll passes 50

BUFFALO: The monster storm that killed dozens in the United States over the Christmas weekend continued to inflict misery on New York state and air travelers nationwide Tuesday, as stories emerged of families trapped for days during the "blizzard of the century."

The number of deaths attributed to the winter storm rose to more than 50 after officials confirmed three more fatalities in western New York's Erie County, the epicenter of the crisis. The police department "expects that number to rise," tweeted Byron Brown, mayor of the lakeside county's biggest city Buffalo, which has been paralyzed for five days by chest-deep snow banks and power outages. Kathy Hochul, New York state's governor and a Buffalo native, described the storm aftermath as resembling "a war zone." "Certainly it is the blizzard of the century," Hochul told reporters Monday. —AFP

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International

'War is not over': Tensions simmer over Karabakh road blockade

Yerevan accuses Azerbaijan of orchestrating demonstrations

LACHIN CORRIDOR: Ruzan Hovhannisyan fears that she will have to ring in the New Year without her family in the breakaway region of Nagorno-Karabakh due to a blockade by arch-enemy Azerbaijan. The mood in the Armenian-populated breakaway territory has been anything but festive.

The region of around 120,000 people is running short of food, medicines and fuel, and Armenian authorities have accused Azerbaijan of orchestrating a full-blown humanitarian crisis in Karabakh in the latest spike in decades-long tensions between the two ex-Soviet nations.

Since mid-December Azerbaijanis have been blocking a road to protest what they claim is illegal mining causing environmental damage in Karabakh. Baku claims the protests are spontaneous but Yerevan accuses Azerbaijan of orchestrating the demonstrations in order to push Armenians to abandon the disputed territory.

"My whole family is in Stepanakert," Hovhannisyan said, referring to Karabakh's main city. "How can I eat if my loved ones go to bed hungry?" Azerbaijan is playing with the lives of ordinary people," she added. Earlier this month the 39-year-old woman went to the Armenian capital Yerevan on a work trip, but is now unable to return home. Another Stepanakert resident, Ashot Grigoryan, described the situation as "very serious."

"I went to a store, everyone gets just half a kilo of sugar," the 62-year-old told AFP. "The shelves are

nearly empty, it's good that there is still bread." Azerbaijan and Armenia fought two wars over Karabakh. When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, ethnic Armenian separatists in Karabakh broke away from Azerbaijan. The ensuing conflict claimed around 30,000 lives.

Another flareup in violence in 2020 claimed more than 6,500 lives and ended with a Russian-brokered truce that saw Yerevan cede territories it had controlled for decades. Now Armenians are accusing Azerbaijani authorities of waging a war of a different kind and seeking to push Armenians to leave Karabakh for good. "We understand that the war is not over," said Grigoryan.

'How can we live together?'

On Sunday, Stepanakert's main Renaissance Square was flooded with thousands of people protesting the blockade. The United States and France have urged Azerbaijan to "allow free movement along the Lachin corridor."

Since December 12, Azerbaijani activists have been blocking the Lachin corridor, the only land link to Armenia, to protest what they claim is illegal mining. Dozens of Azerbaijani activists have set up tents several kilometres from Stepanakert.

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has accused the Russian peacekeepers deployed along the Lachin corridor of failing to prevent the "illegal blockade." On a visit to the scene on Monday, an AFP



LACHIN: Azerbaijani servicemen stand guard at a checkpoint at the Lachin corridor, the Armenian-populated breakaway Nagorno-Karabakh region's only land link with Armenia, as Azerbaijani environmental activists protest against what they claim is illegal mining. —AFP

reporter saw activists hold placards that read "Stop ecological crimes." The activists denied blocking the road. "Our sole demand is that the illegal use of our natural resources be stopped," one of the activists, Jamila

Mamedova, told AFP. She said the activists allowed the movement of humanitarian aid but admitted that there had been no movement of civilian transport from or to Armenia since the start of the protests. —AFP

Kosovo shuts main border crossing with Serbia

BELGRADE: Kosovo closed its biggest border crossing with Serbia, police said Wednesday, after Serbs set up more barricades on their side in one of the worst regional crises in years. Kosovo declared independence from Serbia in 2008, but Belgrade has refused to recognise it and encouraged Kosovo's 120,000 ethnic Serbs to defy Pristina's authority—especially in the north where ethnic Serbs make up the majority.

The latest trouble erupted on December 10, when ethnic Serbs put up barricades to protest the arrest of an ex-policeman suspected of being involved in attacks against ethnic Albanian police officers—effectively sealing off traffic on two border crossings.

After the roadblocks were erected, Kosovar police and international peacekeepers were attacked in several shooting incidents, while the Serbian armed forces were put on heightened alert this week. Late Tuesday, dozens of demonstrators on the Serbian side of the border used trucks and tractors to halt traffic leading to Merdare, the biggest crossing between the neighbours—a move which forced Kosovo police to close the entry point on Wednesday.

"Such an illegal blockade has prevented the free movement and circulation of people and goods, therefore we invite our citizens and compatriots to use other border points for circulation," Kosovo police said in a statement.

Pristina also asked NATO-led peacekeepers to clear the barricades that were erected on Kosovo



MITROVICA: Pedestrians walk past a new road barricade set up in the divided town of Mitrovica on December 28, 2022. —AFP

soil. Serbian Defence Minister Milos Vucovic on Wednesday said Belgrade was "ready for a deal", but did not specify other details.

Vucovic described the roadblocks as a "democratic and peaceful" means of protest and added that Belgrade has "an open line of communication" with Western diplomats on resolving the issue. "We are all worried about the situation and where all this is going... Serbia is ready for a deal," Vucovic told state-controlled public broadcaster RTS.

Northern Kosovo has been on edge since November when hundreds of ethnic Serb workers in

the Kosovo police as well as the judicial branch, including judges and prosecutors, walked off the job.

They were protesting a controversial decision to ban Serbs living in Kosovo from using Belgrade-issued vehicle licence plates—a policy that was eventually scrapped by Pristina. The mass walkouts created a security vacuum in Kosovo, which Pristina tried to fill by deploying ethnic Albanian police officers in the region.

The EU and several international ambassadors this week condemned four recent attacks against journalists who were covering the flare-up. —AFP

Former Nazi camp secretary appeals against conviction

BERLIN: A 97-year-old former Nazi camp secretary has filed an appeal against her conviction of complicity in the murder of more than 10,000 people, a German court said Wednesday. Irmgard Furchner was the first woman in decades to be tried in Germany for Nazi-era crimes.

She was last week handed a two-year suspended sentence for her role in what prosecutors called the "cruel and malicious murder" of prisoners at the Stutthof camp in occupied Poland. But her defence, as well as a co-plaintiff, have since "filed an appeal to the Federal Supreme Court against the judgment of the regional court of Itzehoe," said a spokeswoman for the court in a statement.

The legal challenge could only question if the sentence had been based on a violation of the law, said the spokeswoman. The supreme court would examine if "proceedings have been conducted properly and substantive law has been applied correctly," she said, adding that evidence would not be taken again.

Pending the appeal, the verdict was not legally binding, she added. Furchner had expressed regret as the trial drew to a close, telling the court she was "sorry about everything that happened". Between June 1943 and April 1945, Furchner took the dictation and handled the correspondence of camp commander Paul Werner Hoppe while her husband was a fellow SS officer at the camp. An estimated 65,000 people died at the camp near today's Gdansk, including "Jewish prisoners, Polish partisans and Soviet Russian prisoners of war", prosecutors said. Delivering the verdict, presiding judge Dominik Gross said that "nothing that happened at Stutthof was kept from her" and that the defendant was aware of the "extremely bad conditions for the prisoners". —AFP

UAE pushes work for its...

Continued from Page 1

a "flood of vacancies" from companies - many of which won't be able to meet their targets.

"It's going to be a tough run," said Hamza Zaouali, the founder of recruitment agency Iris Executives, but noting it was "not possible" for the UAE government to keep growing and hiring. "The more sustainable way is to make sure the economy continuously absorbs, trains and works with Emiratis," Zaouali said.

It is part of a wider trend, said Eman Alhoussein, a non-resident fellow with the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington. The UAE is joining "a larger push in the Gulf to change the dynamics of state-society relations" and wean citizens away from government jobs, she said. "Gulf states want citizens to alter their expectations, give back to the state and accept jobs with longer hours and perhaps reduced income," Alhoussein said.

In November, the UAE's Minister of Human Resources and Emiratization, Abdulrahman Al-Awar, said that more than 14,000 Emiratis had entered the job market in 2022, with an average of 100 finding jobs each day. The government also announced a salary support scheme that provides Emiratis in the private sector with up to AED 7,000 (\$1,900) extra if monthly wages are less than AED 30,000. There is no national minimum wage for Emiratis, but in Sharjah, one of the

country's seven emirates, they are entitled to a monthly minimum of AED 25,000.

The UAE, a top regional hub for multinational companies, ranked among the 10 richest countries in the world in 2020, according to the United Nations. In 2022, it boasted a per capita GDP of more than \$47,000, higher than Britain and France, according to the International Monetary Fund. It has one of the lowest unemployment rates in the Middle East, but data on nationwide joblessness among Emiratis is not publicly available. In the UAE's financial hub Dubai, Emirati unemployment rose from 2.5 percent in 2012 to 4.2 percent in 2019, according to the Dubai Statistics Center.

Mira Al-Husseini, an Emirati researcher at the University of Oxford, said "discontent" has been brewing, especially after laws capping foreign ownership of firms at 49 percent were scrapped last year. "In the past, Emiratis who were not keen to join the private sector had the option to wait for a public sector job, start their own business, or become the 51 percent local partner in a business," she said. "The drying up of these multiple sources... has narrowed down the options available."

Debate on the issue shot to attention this month after an advertisement inviting Emiratis to apply for a "sandwich maker" job at the Subway restaurant chain sparked social media criticism, prompting a government probe in the "contentious" post. "The lack of administrative, financial and technical jobs has led to 'sandwich maker'... Oh, what an age!" read one popular Twitter post. —AFP

2022 set to be UK's hottest year on record

LONDON: British experts on Wednesday said 2022 was set to be the UK's warmest on record after a year of heatwaves and minimal rainfall. The findings come as communities across the globe reel from a catalogue of extreme weather this year including soaring temperatures and drought across Europe that saw crops wither and forest fires ravage swathes of land.

This year had the "highest annual average temperature across the UK, exceeding the previous record set in 2014 when the average was 9.88 degrees Celsius", the Met Office, the UK's meteorological authority, said in a statement. Since 1884 in the UK, each of the 10 years recording the highest annual temperature have occurred from 2002, according to the forecasting body.

"2022 is going to be the warmest year on record for the UK. While many will remember the summer's extreme heat, what has been noteworthy this year has been the relatively consistent heat through the year," said Mark McCarthy, head of the Met Office's National Climate Information Centre. Every month except December had been warmer than average, he said. "The warm year is in line with the genuine impacts we expect as a result of human-induced climate change. Although it doesn't mean every year will be the warmest on record, climate change continues to increase the chances of increasingly warm years over the coming decades," he added.

Most of England and Wales experienced drought this summer after exceptionally high temperatures and heatwaves as well as little rainfall. Similar conditions were seen across northwest Europe. France also expe-



LONDON: In this file photo taken on July 16, 2022, people look out toward the Old Royal Naval College and the Canary Wharf financial district, past the sun-scorched grass in Greenwich Park. — AFP

rienced the hottest year since records began, the country's national weather service said in November.

In July, England also smashed its all-time temperature record when the mercury topped 40 degrees Celsius for the first time ever, while July was the driest on record across the south. The parched conditions notably saw the source of the River Thames drying up and shifting several miles downstream. Satellite imagery showed the nation's traditionally green and lush countryside turning to various shades of yellow and brown, as huge swathes of southern, central and eastern England dried out.

The Met Office said all four of the UK's seasons in 2022 were in the top 10 warmest on record. Winter was the eighth hottest, spring the fifth, summer the fourth and autumn the third. McCarthy said temperatures had been above the 1991-2020 long term average for a large proportion of the year, adding that this "is something that we can anticipate as we become increasingly

affected by climate change".

"Met Office science has shown that the temperatures witnessed in mid-July would have been extremely unlikely in the pre-industrial period - the era before humanity started emitting lots of greenhouse gases from burning fossil fuels," he said.

Climate scientists overwhelmingly agree that carbon emissions from humans burning fossil fuels are heating the planet, raising the risk and severity of droughts, heatwaves, and other extreme weather events. Analysis by an international team of researchers released in July found climate change caused by human activity made this year's UK heatwave at least 10 times more likely to occur. Rebecca Newsom, head of politics at Greenpeace UK, said the findings were disappointing. "These aren't the kind of records you want to be breaking," she said. "I'm sure most of us would rather see record-breaking investment in the renewable technologies that'll get us out of this mess," she added. —AFP

International

Eye-for-an-eye sharia justice returns to Afghanistan courts

'I have witnesses who can prove that we have agreed on compensation'

GHAZNI: Kneeling in front of a turbaned judge in a tiny room at the Ghazni Court of Appeal in eastern Afghanistan, an old man sentenced to death for murder pleads for his life. The 75-year-old admits to having shot dead a relative-out of revenge, he says, because of rumours he had sexual relations with his daughter-in-law.

Under eye-for-eye sharia punishments, officially ordered by the Taliban's supreme leader for the first time last month, he faces public execution with the sentence to be carried out by a relative of his victim.

"We have made peace between the families," the old man pleads. "I have witnesses who can prove that we have agreed on compensation." AFP had rare access to a court in Ghazni to see how sharia justice is being administered since the Taliban returned to power in August last year.



GHAZNI: In this photo taken on November 28, 2022, head of the penal court Mohammad Mobin (2nd L) listens to a man (2nd R), who has been sentenced to death for murder, during a hearing at the Ghazni Court of Appeal in Ghazni, eastern Afghanistan. — AFP



Ghazni have shunned Western style courtroom

Hundreds of millions of dollars were spent building a new judicial system after the Taliban were overthrown in 2001 — a combination of Islamic and secular law, with qualified prosecutors, defence lawyers and judges.

Many women were recruited into the system, overseeing cases involving hardcore Taliban militants as well as bringing more gender balance to family courts. All that has been scrapped by the Taliban, with trials, sentences and punishments now overseen by all-male clerics. Islamic law, or sharia, acts as a code of living for Muslims worldwide, offering guidance on issues such as modesty, finance and crime. However, interpretations vary according to local custom, culture and religious

school of thought.

Taliban scholars in Afghanistan have employed one of the most extreme interpretations of the code, including capital and corporal punishments little used by most modern Muslim states. The difference between the system of the former government and today "is as big as the earth and the sky", says Mohiuddin Umari, head of the Ghazni court, between sips of tea.

'God guides us'

Officials in Ghazni have shunned the use of its formal Western-style courtroom, and proceedings instead take place in a small side room, with participants sitting on a carpeted floor. The cramped room, heated by an old wood stove, has a bunk bed in a corner, on which religious books and a Kalashnikov rifle are placed.

Targeted

Most cases of kidnapping in South Africa are a side-effect of carjacking, robberies and rapes. But, say crime experts, an increasing number of victims are now being targeted directly. In one of the most high-profile cases, four sons of a South African businessman, aged between six and 15 years, were kidnapped Hollywood-manner while on their way to school.

In such cases, ransom demands can run into the millions of rand (tens of thousands of dollars). Kidnappers sometimes brazenly demand that the ransom be paid into "foreign bank accounts via Bitcoin or via money exchanges in Dubai," said Abramjee.

But in other cases, the victim is simply killed after his bank account has been emptied. One such fatality was Kevin Soal, a businessman in his late 60s with a passion for horse racing. His luxury car was found abandoned in a township on the outskirts of Pretoria days later. Soal's body was discovered afterwards in a nearby area with gun wounds police investigators reportedly say were consistent with an execution-style killing. Large amounts of money had been withdrawn from his account, said a police source.

Police and private detectives are investigating the case. On November 23, at a press conference where he unveiled the country's dismal crime figures for 2022, Police Minister Bheki Cele singled out kidnapping for special action. Sporting a fedora hat almost echoing the fashion style of 1920s US crimebuster Eliot Ness, Cele ordered his force to "deal decisively with these most feared crimes".

Foreign gangs

Analysts say kidnappings have fuelled by the involvement of foreign crime groups suspected to be operating from Mozambique and Pakistan, among others countries. Indian business people, Pakistani, Somalians and Ethiopians are among those increasingly being targeted, according to Abramjee. A Somali businessman was recently snatched from a Johannesburg hotel lobby, he said. Muslim families of Indian origin, who are rumoured to hold large funds abroad, are especially at risk, said a police source. Police last year set up a special unit and officials recently said they were "closing in on several syndicates" responsible for kidnapping for ransom cases. — AFP

The young judge, Mohammad Mobin, listens impassively before asking a few questions. He then orders another hearing in a few days-giving the old man time to gather witnesses who can testify that the families have agreed to what he says.

"If he proves his claim, then the judgement can be revised," Mobin says. If not, "it is certain that the qisas (an eye-for-an-eye) enshrined in the sharia will apply". Mobin, surrounded by thin, hand-written files held together by string, has been at the appeals court since the Taliban's return in August 2021.

He says around a dozen death sentences have been handed down in Ghazni province since then, but none has been carried out-partly because of the appeals process. "It is very difficult to make such a decision and we are very careful," the 34-year-old tells AFP.

"But if we have certain evidence, then God guides us and tells us not to have sympathy for these people." If the old man's appeal fails, the case goes to the Supreme Court in Kabul, and finally to supreme leader Hibatullah Akhundzada, who validates all capital sentences. That was the case earlier this month in the western city of Farah when the Taliban carried out their first public execution since returning to power-an act widely condemned by rights groups and foreign governments and organisations.

'Showing transparency'

Ghazni court head Umari insists the sharia system is much better than the one it replaced, even while conceding that officials need more experience. Afghanistan was ranked 177th out of 180 of the most corrupt states in 2021 by the NGO Transparency International and its courts were notorious for graft, with cases held up for years.

"The Islamic Emirate is showing transparency," says Umari, using the Taliban's designation for Afghanistan. Many Afghans say they prefer their chances in sharia courts with civil cases, arguing they are less prone to the corruption that bedevilled the system under the previous Western-backed government. However, jurists argue that criminal cases are more prone to a miscarriage under the new system. "Some cases, if decided quickly, are better," says a now-unemployed prosecutor, who asked not to be identified for fear of retribution. "But in most cases, speed leads to hasty decisions."

Umari insists all verdicts are thoroughly reviewed, adding "if a judge has made a mistake we investigate". But the old man in Ghazni who was sentenced to death says he had no lawyer, and his appeal lasted less than 15 minutes. "The court should not have sentenced me to death," he says. "I have been in prison for more than eight months. They (the family) have agreed to spare me," he adds, clasping a string of prayer beads in his handcuffed hands. — AFP

Ransom kidnappings add to S Africa's crime woes

JOHANNESBURG: From an eight-year-old snatched on her way to school to a wealthy businessman who was abducted and murdered, South Africa is experiencing a surge in kidnappings for money. During the festive season, police have been warning parents to be vigilant around beaches and shopping malls-potential hotspots for child abduction. "They should take extra care of their children," said Robert Netshunda, police spokesman in the southeastern province of KwaZulu-Natal. "Children go missing and a crime of kidnapping is a reality," he told AFP.

South Africa has long had a reputation for violent crime and is often described as one of the most dangerous countries in the world outside a war zone. But kidnapping for ransom or extortion "is comparatively new", noted Jean-Pierre Smith, a Cape Town municipal security councillor.

The phenomenon started to rise in 2016 and is now experiencing explosive growth, according to the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organised Crime (GI-TOC), a non-profit. Police recorded more than 4,000 cases between July and September, a two-fold increase on the same period last year.

The number of kidnappings today are "the highest ever in the history of South Africa," anti-crime activist Yusuf Abramjee told AFP. "It has become an established and lucrative criminal practice," GI-TOC said in a report in September. Last month, the country was stunned when eight-year-old Abirah Dekhta was kidnapped on her way to school near Cape Town by five gunmen in two cars. Missing-person posters showed a thin girl wearing a pink dress and matching headscarf.

She was freed during a spectacular police raid following a tip-off. Dekhta had been held in a shack in the impoverished township of Khayelitsha, one of the largest in the country, guarded by seven men, police said. Her captors recently appeared in court, seeking bail.

US Supreme Court keeps border policy in place

WASHINGTON: The US government's two-year-old policy of invoking COVID-19 precautions to turn away hundreds of thousands of migrants at the Mexican border will remain in place for now, the Supreme Court ruled Tuesday. The decision to uphold the controversial rule known as Title 42 delayed a looming political crisis for President Joe Biden, as thousands waited at the southern border in expectation the policy was about to end. But the conservative-dominated high court accepted a petition from 19 states warning of a surge of migrants should the policy introduced under former president Donald Trump in March 2020 be lifted as ordered by a lower court.

The Supreme Court said Title 42 — which allows the swift expulsion even of people who might qualify for asylum-would remain in place pending its ruling on the issue, and that it would hear the case in February. "The states contend that they face an immigration crisis at the border and policymakers have failed to agree on adequate measures to address it," the court said in its 5-4 ruling. "The only means left to mitigate the crisis, the states suggest, is an order from this Court directing the federal government to continue its COVID-era Title 42 policies as long as possible."



CIUDAD JUAREZ: Venezuelan and Nicaraguan migrants are transferred by agents of the Border Patrol after crossing the Rio Grande river from Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua state, Mexico to El Paso, Texas, US to ask for political asylum. — AFP

'Broken' system

The ruling could give the Biden administration, which had conceded that Title 42 was wrong and prepared for a surge of asylum-seeking migrants, until May or June before a final decision. Departing the White House for vacation Tuesday night, Biden told reporters that ending Title 42 was "overdue," but the administration would heed the court's decision until a final ruling is made, likely in June.

"In the meantime, we have to enforce it," Biden said. White House spokeswoman Karine Jean-Pierre said earlier in the day the administration would prepare for the next hearing. "We are advancing our preparations

Pakistan court frees rapist after deal to marry victim

PESHAWAR: A Pakistan court freed a rapist after he married his victim in a settlement brokered by a council of elders in the northwest of the country, his lawyer said Wednesday. The decision has outraged rights activists, who say it legitimises sexual violence against women in a country where a majority of rape goes unreported.

Dawlat Khan, 25, was sentenced in May to life imprisonment by a lower court in Buner district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province for raping a deaf woman. He was released from prison on Monday after the Peshawar High Court accepted an out-of-court settlement agreed by the rape survivor's family.

"The rapist and the victim are from the same extended family," Amjad Ali, Khan's lawyer, told AFP. "Both families have patched up after an agreement was reached with the help of local jirga (traditional council)," he added.

Khan was arrested after his unmarried victim delivered a baby earlier this year, and a paternity test proved he was the child's biological father. Rape is notoriously difficult to prosecute in Pakistan, where women are often treated as second-class citizens.

According to the Asma Jahangir Legal Aid Cell-a group providing legal assistance to vulnerable women-the conviction rate is lower than three percent of cases that go to trial. Few cases are reported because of the associated social stigma, while lapses during investigations, shoddy prosecutorial practices, and out-of-court settlements also contribute towards abysmal conviction rates.

"This is effectively the court's approval of rape and facilitation of rapists and rape mentality," Imaan Zainab Mazari-Hazir, a lawyer and human rights activist, said of the Peshawar court decision. "It is against the basic principles of justice and the law of the land which does not recognise such an arrangement," she told AFP.—AFP

News in brief

Fuel tanker blast

JOHANNESBURG: The death toll from a fuel tanker explosion near Johannesburg last weekend has climbed to 26, a local official said on Wednesday, after eight more people died in the previous 48 hours. "In terms of numbers, the police has now confirmed that we are standing at 26. So we have lost 26 people out of the tragedy," the prime minister of Gauteng province, Panyaza Lesufi, said during a visit to comfort families of the victims. A truck carrying liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) got stuck under a bridge in Boksburg on Saturday, causing a leak and explosion that initially killed 10 people and badly damaged a nearby hospital. Eight more people subsequently died from severe burns and other injuries, the health authorities reported on Monday, and eight more died afterwards. Videos on social media showed a huge fireball emerging from under the bridge, which the tanker appeared to have been too high to go under. It was carrying 60,000 litres (nearly 16,000 US gallons) of LPG, which is widely used for cooking.

Car smashes into carnival

PORT HARCOURT: Seven people were killed and more than two dozen injured when a car ploughed into a popular carnival at Calabar in southeast Nigeria, the local head of highway security said. "The incident occurred when a Toyota Camry car lost control and rammed into (a) crowd of onlookers," Maikano Hassan, the local commander of the Federal Road Safety Corps, said in a statement. Seven people died and 29 were injured on Tuesday, some of them critically, according to the statement. The injured included three girls and two boys. The incident happened as the crowd were watching a motorcyclists' parade in front of a mosque in the district of Bogobiri. Calabar, the capital of Cross River state, hosts one of West Africa's most prestigious carnivals each December. The official site says that the event draws nearly two million revellers annually.

Police officer fatally shot

MONTREAL: Canadian police officer was killed on Tuesday after being shot while investigating a traffic accident about 100 kilometers south of Toronto, authorities said. "It is with an extremely heavy heart that I regretfully advise that (Ontario Provincial Police) Provincial Constable Grzegorz Pierzchala was killed today while courageously serving in the line of duty," Commissioner Thomas Carrique said on Twitter. Pierzchala "was investigating a motor vehicle collision when he was shot and killed this afternoon" in the small town of Hagersville in southern Ontario, the provincial police said in a statement. The officer was 28 years old, and had been on the job for a little more than a year. He died in hospital after the shooting. Two suspects have been taken into custody, police said in a press conference. On Tuesday evening, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau offered his condolences at the "heartbreaking news". Though it sees far fewer shootings than its neighbour the United States, Canada has experienced an upsurge in gun violence in recent years. The shootings prompted the government to implement a ban on the sale, purchase or transfer of handguns, which went into effect on October 21, 2022. — AFP

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 29, 2022

Business

Kuwait's KPI, Oman's OQ and Saudi SABIC ink project development deal

Deal aims at jointly developing petrochemical complex in Oman's Duqm special zone



KUWAIT: OQ executive director Talal Al-Awfi, SABIC's executive director Abdulrahman Al-Fageeh and KPI's CEO Shafy Al-Ajmi during the signing of the deal.

KUWAIT: Oman Oil Company (OQ), chemical manufacturing company (SABIC), and Kuwait Petroleum International (KPI), signed a project development deal for a jointly owned petrochemical complex in Omani special economic zone, Duqm.

The agreement aims to develop a petrochemical complex with a steam cracker, derivatives unit and a Natural Gas Liquids (NGL) extraction facility, as reported by a joint statement. The partners confirmed that they will conduct necessary research and utilize their technical and commercial expertise to develop a unique project that is profitable and globally competitive. The deal was signed by OQ executive director, Talal Al-Awfi, SABIC's executive director Abdulrahman Al-Fageeh and KPI's CEO Shafy Al-Ajmi. Al-Awfi stated that OQ is proud to be part of this monumental deal, especially as it comes in conjunction with Oman's 52nd National Day, and the near completion of the OQ8 Duqm refinery. The agreement, Al-Awfi commented, also goes in line with Oman Investment Authority objectives of attracting foreign investments, and achiev-

ing Oman 2040 vision through diversification of the economy.

On his part, Al-Fageeh underlined that this agreement enables the delimitation and assessment of ambitious and sustainable growth opportunities by bringing together the capabilities, expertise and technologies of the partners. He added that involvement in this project is consistent with the company's growth strategy and Saudi 2030 vision objectives of developing a stronger downstream business, and addressing challenges in the petrochemicals industry such as carbon neutrality and providing diversified and sustainable products.

KPI's Al-Ajmi commented that they are pleased to work with OQ and SABIC on this pioneering project which supports Kuwait Petroleum Corporation's 2040 strategy for growth in the petrochemical industry, and enhances integration between the refining and petrochemical sectors. The project aims to employ the use of latest technologies in the field to minimize carbon footprint, incorporate circular economy aspects and commit to

high environmental standards. This would support the region's development aspirations, maximizing socio-economic impacts, as well as add value to these companies.

Petrochemicals demand is expected to continue its growth path as living standards and human development improve, particularly in growing markets close to Oman. The project intends to monetise NGLs and other feedstocks from OQ and KPI's joint venture refinery, OQ8 in Duqm, to manufacture petrochemical products targeting growing markets linked to energy transition, clean technologies, mobility, construction, durable goods, healthcare and packaging amongst others.

The project intends to deploy state-of-the-art technologies to minimise carbon footprint and incorporate circular economy aspects and commit to high environmental standards. This mega project would support the region's development aspirations, maximizing socio-economic impacts as well value addition to these companies. In addition, the project would also benefit from the excellent location of

Duqm being close to markets and taking advantage of the infrastructure which has been developed in the area, as OQ continues in its strategy to help develop SEZAD as manufacturing and logistics hub in line with vision 2040.

SABIC is a global diversified chemicals company, headquartered in Riyadh, manufacturing on a global scale in the Americas, Europe, Middle East and Asia Pacific. It makes distinctly different kinds of products: chemicals, commodity and high performance plastics, agri-nutrients and metals.

KPI is the international downstream subsidiary of Kuwait Petroleum Corporation, ranked as one of the world's largest national oil companies. Established in 1983, KPI operates over 4,700 service stations across Europe under its brands, Q8, Q8Easy and Tango, and provides over 70 airlines with jet fuel in major airport hubs. It also runs two state-of-the-art lubricant blending plants in Belgium and Italy under the brand Q8Oils and owns shares in three joint venture refineries in Italy, Vietnam, and Oman. —KUNA and agencies

Bangladesh opens first metro line in congested capital

DHAKA: Bangladesh's sprawling capital inaugurated its first ever metro rail line on Wednesday as authorities work to ease congestion that has throttled growth and inflamed tempers in the gridlocked metropolis. Dhaka is one of the world's most densely populated cities, and daily commutes along its car-clogged roads are a source of constant frustration for its 22 million people.

Local researchers say the capital's economy loses upwards of \$3 billion each year in lost work time due to traffic jams, often worsened by regular street protests and monsoonal downpours.

The new elevated train network has been in development for nearly a decade and is slated to grow to over a hundred stations and six lines crisscrossing the city by 2030. Wednesday saw the start of operations on a section of the first line connecting a neighborhood on Dhaka's periphery with the city centre, built with a \$2.8 billion price tag and largely funded by Japanese development funds.

"This metro rail is also another matter of pride for us," said Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at a



DHAKA: Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina (left) attends an inauguration ceremony of the metro rail service in Dhaka on December 28, 2022. —AFP

ceremony to mark the first service. "We promised to eradicate traffic jams from Dhaka," she added. "With the six metro rail lines, we will be able to do so."

The line is expected to carry 60,000 people each hour when it is fully operational and its opening has been keenly anticipated by commuters. "We

are counting on it. It will reduce public suffering," Mostafizur Rahman, who spends nearly three hours riding a bus to work each morning, told AFP.

Hasina used the opening ceremony to commemorate six Japanese rail engineers working on the project who were killed during an attack on a Dhaka cafe by Islamist extremists in 2016. —AFP

living crises because wages are not keeping up with inflation, forcing households to make difficult choices in their spending. Central banks have played catch-up. They started to raise interest rates this year in an effort to tame galloping inflation-at the risk of tipping countries into deep recessions, since higher borrowing costs mean slower economic activity. Inflation has finally started to slow down in the United States and the eurozone.

Careful spending

Consumer prices in the Group of 20 developed and emerging nations are expected to reach eight percent in the fourth quarter before falling to 5.5 percent next year, according to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. The OECD encourages governments to provide aid to bring relief to households. In the 27-nation European Union, 674 billion euros (\$704 billion) have been earmarked so far to shield consumers from high energy prices, according to the Bruegel think tank. Germany, Europe's biggest economy and the most dependent on Russia energy supplies, accounts for 264 billion euros of that total.

One in two Germans say they now only spend on essential items, according to a survey by EY consultancy. Rising interest rates have also hurt consumers and businesses.

Stocks waver in year-end trading

NEW YORK: Stock markets diverged on Wednesday as investors looked for a traditional "Santa Claus rally" to close the year. The "Santa Claus rally" is a seven-session stretch over the weeks of Christmas and New Year that typically sees stocks drifting higher amid light trading volumes.

London, back after a four-day Christmas break, was up 0.8 percent from its Friday close, but Paris and Frankfurt sputtered. Wall Street, however, opened higher after a mixed session the previous day as the yield on the 10-year US Treasury note-a proxy for Federal Reserve interest rates-fell.

Tech companies are more sensitive to higher rates. Investors also worry that rising borrowing costs will tip the economy into deep recession. "Checking in on Santa Claus, he hasn't left the building but he seems somewhat stuck in a revolving door," said Briefing.com analyst Patrick O'Hare.

AvaTrade analyst Naem Aslam cautioned that "trading volume continues to remain on the low side" with many investors away for an extended holiday. China's moves to reopen also revived inflation worries. Beijing has abruptly reversed tight pandemic curbs that kept the world's second-largest economy isolated since 2020.

On Monday, Beijing announced it was ending quarantine measures for overseas arrivals from January 8, the latest move to loosen its zero-COVID regime, after it dropped mandatory testing and lockdowns earlier this month. China's scrapping of curbs has spurred hopes for its economic revival.

"The good news is that inflation subsides as China reprises its role as a supplier of low-cost goods globally and supply chain bottlenecks ease," said analyst Stephen Innes of SPI Asset Management. However, he also warned that China's accelerating demand would push up prices for commodities, in turn further fuelling global inflation. Meanwhile, Hong Kong stocks jumped as investors digested the Covid news from Beijing on the first trading day after the Christmas break.

Hong Kong chief executive John Lee also announced a further easing of the city's remaining Covid measures. Oil traders also remain on tenterhooks after Moscow on Tuesday banned exports to countries complying with a price cap on its crude, briefly lifting the market. The price ceiling of \$60 per barrel agreed by the European Union, G7 and Australia came into force in early December and seeks to restrict revenues for Russia, amid its ongoing war on Ukraine. —AFP

World economy faces more pain in 2023 after grim year

NEW YORK: This was supposed to be the comeback year for the world economy following the Covid pandemic.

Instead, 2022 was marked by a new war, record inflation and climate-linked disasters. It was a "polycrisis" year, a term popularized by historian Adam Tooze. Get ready for more gloom in 2023.

"The number of crises has increased since the start of the century," said Roel Beetsma, professor of macroeconomics at the University of Amsterdam. "Since World War Two we have never seen such a complicated situation," he told AFP. After the COVID-induced economic crisis of 2020, consumer prices began to rise in 2021 as countries emerged from lockdowns and other restrictions.

Central bankers insisted that high inflation would only be temporary as economies returned to normal. But Russia's invasion of Ukraine in late February sent energy and food prices soaring.

Many countries are now grappling with cost-of-



Both the US Federal Reserve and European Central Bank began to slow the pace of their rate hikes in December, but signalled they still need to go higher to get a grip on inflation. Economists expect Germany and another major eurozone economy, Italy, to fall into recession. Britain's economy is already shrinking. Rating agency S&P Global foresees stagnation for the eurozone in 2023. But the International Monetary Fund still expects the world economy to expand in 2023, with growth of 2.7 percent. The OECD is forecasting 2.2-percent growth. The easing of COVID curbs in China is raising hopes for the revival of the world's second-biggest economy and major driver of global growth. —AFP

Business

Southwest Airlines faces storm of criticism over holiday chaos

Chaos at US airports as over 10,000 flights cancelled over Christmas holiday

NEW YORK: More than 10,000 flights cancelled over the Christmas holiday, chaos at airports across America: Southwest Airlines found itself in the hot seat Tuesday as the airline behind the lion's share of the weather-linked travel mayhem. The Dallas-based, domestic-focused carrier, which has historically enjoyed a strong reputation with consumers, drew withering expletive-filled rebukes on social media, where labor leaders also highlighted horror stories from stranded airline employees. "It's a complete meltdown," said Mike Sage, who had planned to fly back to Florida on Monday after visiting Connecticut to tend to his kayaking business.

After Southwest's phone and Internet system "collapsed," Sage drove to the airport, waited in line for two hours and finally obtained a replacement ticket for Saturday from Southwest. But it came with a warning, Sage recounted to AFP. "When (the attendant) handed me the ticket, she looked me in the eyes and said: 'If I were you, I would not count on this flight either. I would book with another airline. We have crews stranded all over, pilots sleeping on the floor in airports.'"

At issue is Southwest's performance in the wake of a brutal winter storm that began ahead of Christmas, wreaking havoc with holiday travel networks and causing some 50 fatalities. But while operations had largely returned to normal at American Airlines and United Airlines by Tuesday, Southwest canceled more than 2,500 flights, or nearly two-thirds of planned departures, according to tracking website FlightAware.

That's on top of some 8,150 flights canceled over the prior five-day stretch, according to the website.

The debacle weighed on company shares and drew attention in Washington, with Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg calling it an "unacceptable situation" on CNN. "The rate of cancellations and delays on Southwest Airlines is unacceptable and dramatically higher than other US carriers," the Department of Transportation said in a statement to AFP.

The agency said it expects the airline to compensate travelers for incurred losses as well as "do right" by their pilots, flight attendants and other staff, and threat-

ened to take action against Southwest if it doesn't comply. President Joe Biden retweeted the agency's statement, and Senator Maria Cantwell, a Washington state Democrat who chairs the Senate Commerce Committee, vowed to follow up. "The problems at Southwest Airlines over the last several days go beyond weather," said Cantwell. "The Committee will be looking into the causes of these disruptions and its impact to consumers."

System overload

Southwest has apologized for the debacle, describing the inconvenience to customers as "unacceptable." "We were fully staffed and prepared for the approaching holiday weekend when the severe weather swept across the continent," said a company statement Monday. "As we continue the work to recover our operation, we have made the decision to continue operating a reduced schedule by flying roughly one third of our schedule for the next several days."

Airline officials have acknowledged that outdated systems contributed to the problems. Southwest Chief Executive Bob Jordan alluded to a "lack of tools," adding in a December 25 message to employees that the airline is "in the process of upgrading some of those systems," according to the Wall Street Journal.

Unions pointed to chronic underinvestment as a driver of the problems. Lyn Montgomery, president of TWU Local 556, which represents Southwest flight attendants, posted to Twitter screenshots of flight attendants waiting for more than seven hours to receive assignments and get hotel information.

In a press release titled "Southwest Airlines Ruins Christmas for Flight Attendants," the TWU said the holiday nightmare "points to a shirking of responsibility over many years for investing in and implementing technology that could help solve many of the issues that plague flight attendants and passengers alike." The TWU, along with the Southwest Airlines Pilots Association (SWAPA), has been mired in labor negotiations with Southwest on a new contract.



BURBANK, US: A Southwest Airlines employee sorts through unclaimed luggage at Hollywood Burbank Airport in Burbank, California, on December 27, 2022. — AFP

SWAPA members picketed Southwest management outside the New York Stock Exchange earlier this month during an investor day at which executives reinstated the investor dividend "instead of focusing on the frontline employees directly responsible for the record revenues," the association said in a statement. At the meeting, Jordan and other Southwest executives highlighted investment in a new computer system for revenue management and Jordan also expressed confidence the company would settle on contracts with unions. Reinstating the dividend was a priority to "restore value to our shareholders," said Jordan, who

added that reviving share buybacks would have to wait. "We need to invest in our people," he said. "For right now, that's getting contracts done and investing in them." Market analysis website Briefing.com said in a note that the costs for Southwest of the holiday problems "will likely be material, at least in the near-term" in higher expenses and refunds for consumers. "However, we doubt that this debacle-as bad as it has been-will have a real lasting effect on Southwest," said Briefing, adding that consumers' negative feelings "will eventually fade." Shares of Southwest fell 6.0 percent to \$33.94. — AFP

Bahrain GDP grew 4.20% in Q3 2022

MANAMA: Estimates of national accounts released by the Information and eGovernment Authority (iGA) revealed that Bahrain's economy continued to grow at impressive rates in the current year. While the Kingdom's GDP increased by 5.5 percent annually through the third quarter (January to September) at constant prices, the non-oil sector increased by 7.2 percent yearly through the same period in 2022.

The third quarter of this year saw both the non-oil sector increase by 4.9 percent and the gross domestic product (GDP) record growth at constant prices of 4.20 percent on an annual basis. The report also compared the third quarter of 2022 to the third quarter of 2021 in terms of how the various economic sectors performed. The hotels and restaurants sector continued to record the highest growth rates. Among non-oil sectors, an annual growth of 14.7 percent was seen at constant prices. Following it were the transportation and communications sector, which saw an annual growth of 8.0 percent, and the real estate activities and business services sector, which also saw an annual growth of 6.8 percent. 5.9 percent at constant price growth is seen in the trading sector. 5.0 percent more manufacturing was produced.



MANAMA: Bahrain's GDP increased by 5.5 percent annually through the third quarter (January to September).

Saudi Arabia raised electricity output by 3.35% in 2021

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia's total production of electricity jumped to 358,637 gigawatts per hour by the end of 2021. This marked an increase of 11,609 gigawatts, equivalent to 3.35 percent, compared to 2020, when production was about 347,028 gigawatts, according to recent figures released by the General Authority for Statistics (GaStat). The total residential consumption of electricity accounted for about 142,484 gigawatts per hour, and this figure marked an increase of 3.5 percent, equivalent to 4825 gigawatts per hour, compared to the previous year.

With regard to the distribution of consumption among various sectors, the residential sector accounted for about 47 percent of the total electric energy consumption in 2021, which is equivalent to 142,480 gigawatts per hour, and it was followed by the industrial sector by 19 percent, commercial sector by more than 15 percent, and the government sector by about 13 percent. The per capita share of electrical energy consumed in 2021 increased by 7 percent, reaching 8840 kilowatts per hour, compared to 8260 kilowatts per hour in 2020, the report pointed out. — Agencies



LONDON: Some of the UK's biggest banks are prepared to put in place measures to help mortgage holders struggling to make payments.

UK banks to help households meet mortgage payments

LONDON: Some of the UK's biggest banks are prepared to put in place measures to help mortgage holders struggling to make payments. The move comes after the UK's major banks had talks with Chancellor Jeremy Hunt earlier this month to come up with a coordinated approach to deal with late payments and refinancing.

"We expect every lender to live up to their responsibilities and support any mortgage borrowers who are finding it tough right now," Hunt said at the time. The so-called forbearance measures are aimed at allowing the major lenders more flexibility when it comes to finding re-financing options for their customers. The measures were used after the 2008 financial crisis to avoid an avalanche of home repossessions. For example, some measures allow mortgage lenders to switch their customers to interest-only or lower fixed-rate deals without the customers having to retake an affordability test.

According to the banking industry body UK Finance, 1.8 million mortgage holders in Britain will come to the end of their fixed-rate deals in 2023, as inflation and higher interest rates squeeze household budgets. "Escalating cost-of-living pressures coupled with materially higher interest rates than when households took out their current mortgage mean many customers, particularly among lower-income households, will have materially less 'wiggle room' left over in their household budgets after refinancing. This affordability challenge means these customers may find their remortgaging options more limited on the open market," UK Finance said.

European rail start-up aims for night train revival

BERLIN: A European sleeper train start-up has announced it will launch its first route between Berlin, Amsterdam and Brussels in May 2023. The more than 10-hour service will initially run three times a week and is intended to put overnight travel "back on the map" after years of decline.

The launch was pushed back from summer 2022 after setbacks including a lack of available rolling

The forbearance measures enable the banks to sidestep the affordability challenge and offer their struggling customers financial lifelines in the shape of internal product transfers (PTs). "The widespread availability of internal product transfers, which are not subject to the same stringent affordability tests, will mean the majority of customers will be able to find a new deal," UK Finance added. Repossession is often the last resort for mortgage lenders, given the associated costs and the time it takes. The average time it takes to repossess a house in the UK is about two years.

The UK's main mortgaging banks, Barclays, HSBC, Lloyds and NatWest, are making provisions for an increase in bad and underperforming mortgage debts in their full-year results, which are due out in February. But the number of people who will struggle to pay their mortgages next year is not expected to be anything like as high as it was during the 2008 financial crisis. Much of that is down to the fact that the rules on mortgage lending were tightened considerably after the crisis, when almost 400,000 home loans in the UK were in arrears.

"We expect the vast majority of borrowers to still be able to keep up with their mortgage payments. The number of customers in arrears is forecast to rise from the 80,000 seen at the end of September 2022 to a little under 100,000 by the end of 2023," UK Finance said. What has also changed is the loan-to-value environment. A growing sense of prudence on the part of the mortgage lenders has meant that cash is no longer splashed about. The UK's largest mortgage lender, Lloyds Bank, said just 4 per cent of its lending was above 80 per cent loan-to-value. All of this will happen against a subdued housing market in 2023. According to the data company, Moneyfacts, the average five-year fixed-rate mortgage is currently 5.6 per cent, well above the 2.66 per cent average in January this year. — Agencies

stock. The operator, European Sleeper, said tickets will go on sale in February, with the first train scheduled to depart on May 25. A typical train will leave Brussels at 7pm, stop in Amsterdam at 10.30pm and arrive at Berlin's main station shortly before 7am.

In the other direction, it will leave Berlin around 11pm, reach Amsterdam at 6.30am and arrive in Brussels at 9.30am. The start-up, which was founded by Dutch and Belgian operators, plans to extend the route eastward to Dresden and Prague by 2024. It said tickets would start at €49 (\$52) for a seat in a compartment, rising to €79 (\$84) for a bunk bed and €159 (\$169) for a private sleeping car.

The company raised €2 million (\$2.1 million) from investors to buy the rolling stock it needed.

Burgan Bank's board approves new decisions

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank announced on Wednesday that the Board of Directors, in its meeting held on December 27, 2022, approved the request from Masoud M J Hayat, to no longer renew his contract and depart his current position as Group Chief Executive Officer.

Hayat will continue in his role for the remainder of the contract period, until April 10, 2023. In the same meeting, the Board of Directors also accepted the resignation of Raed Abdullah Al-Haqhaq, from his current position as Deputy Group Chief Executive Officer and Chief Executive Officer - Kuwait. Al-Haqhaq will continue in his role until February 28, 2023.

The bank noted that the board's acceptance of both requests came in line with Hayat's and Al-Haqhaq's wishes. In a comment on the departures, Chairman of Burgan Bank, Sheikh Abdullah Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, said in a press statement: "Mr Hayat's departure comes after a long, notable career spanning many decades in the financial sector. During this time, he has held numerous leadership positions at both the executive manage-



ment level and as a member of the Board of Directors at various companies and banks within the KIPCO Group, including Burgan Bank. Al-Haqhaq's resignation also comes after a successful career in the banking sector, working his way up the ranks at Burgan Bank to reach the position of Deputy Group Chief Executive Officer and Chief Executive Officer - Kuwait. On behalf of myself and the entire Board of Directors, I can only express to both Hayat and Al-Haqhaq my sincerest gratitude and appreciation, and we wish them all the best in their journeys and careers. We also remain confident in the Bank's Executive Management team to maintain our growth momentum and continue our journey of success."

In the bank's statement, Hayat and Al-Haqhaq both expressed their gratitude to the Bank's Chairman and its Board of Directors for their trust and understanding. They also thanked Burgan's Executive Management team and all employees across the organization for their support throughout their leadership tenure, wishing the Bank continued success and prosperity.

A daily service will be introduced as soon as possible, it said. The sleeper train business has long suffered at the hands of low-cost air and bus travel, with many routes closed since the 1980s.

Germany's main rail company ended its City Night Line service in 2016 while French operator SNCF closed all but three routes. However, there is some enthusiasm among policymakers for a sleeper train renaissance in Europe. It is motivated not just by romantic allure but by the lower emissions involved when passengers switch from air to rail. An overnight route from Vienna to Brussels reopened in 2020 while an Austrian operator is opening new routes to Italy in 2023. But new high-speed lines have been higher on the EU's recent agenda than sleepers, disappointing night train enthusiasts. — Agencies

Business

Dubai airport expected to handle 2m passengers over 'busy' holiday season

World's busiest airport caps off strong recovery in 2022

DUBAI: Dubai International Airport retained its position as the world's busiest for international passengers. Dubai International Airport expects to handle about two million passengers over the busy holiday season, capping off a strong recovery in 2022 and edging closer to pre-coronavirus daily traffic numbers. As many as 245,000 passengers are expected to pass through the hub, known as DXB, daily between December 27 and January 3, operator Dubai Airports said on Tuesday.

"DXB will remain exceptionally busy over the remainder of the holiday season and well into the New Year," Dubai Airports said. "December has been exceptionally busy for DXB due to a combination of factors, including the seasonal influx of visitors, the recently concluded World Cup football event in Doha and the strength of Dubai's position as one of the world's most popular tourist destinations."

The airport retained its position as the world's busiest for international passengers in December, ahead of major hubs such as London's Heathrow and spurred on by the rebound of Emirates airline.

Dubai International Airport had 4.6 million seats in December, an increase of 8 percent from November and slightly more than a million seats than the next busiest airport, Heathrow, aviation consultancy OAG said in its monthly World's Busiest

Airports report.

The airport handled 18.5 million passengers in the third quarter, more than doubling year on year, according to data by Dubai Airports.

This was the first time that quarterly traffic reached pre-pandemic levels since 2020, with the figure higher than the 17.8 million passengers who travelled through the airport in the first quarter of 2020 before the onset of COVID-19. The airport's average monthly traffic exceeded six million throughout the third quarter. Safety measures by the emirate's government, cooler weather, a growing list of tourist attractions and people's desire to travel after two years of lockdowns are among other factors making the city an attractive destination for visitors, Dubai Airports chief executive Paul Griffiths said in an interview last month.

The recovery at the airport, which serves as the hub for Emirates airline, continued, with strong travel demand registered during the peak summer season as international borders reopened and coronavirus restrictions were eased. The airport benefited from smooth operations, compared with some major European airports that were left reeling from delays that caused widespread disruptions as demand increased after the pandemic.

Dubai Airports expects 64.3 million passengers



to travel through the airport in 2022, about 3 percent more than its last annual forecast in August of 62.4 million passengers, after a strong third quarter and expectations of surging volumes in the last

three months of the year. The busy December period prompted Dubai Airports to issue a travel alert urging passengers to plan their trips to and through the airport to beat the holiday rush. —Agencies

Spain axes VAT on basic foods to ease inflation pain

MADRID: The Spanish government on Tuesday announced a new package of measures worth some 10 billion euros (\$10.6 billion) to alleviate the cost of living, including axing the value-added tax on basic foodstuffs. The new package was announced at an end-of-year news conference by Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez.

"For six months, we will reduce VAT on all basic foods from 4.0 percent to 0.0 percent," he said of a list including bread, milk, eggs, cheese, fruit and vegetables, and cereals. VAT on oil and pasta would also be reduced from 10 percent to five percent, he added. Sanchez also unveiled a one-off payment of 200 euros to "families with incomes lower than 27,000 euros" to offset food prices, that will cost some 4.2 million euros.

The new aid plan is the sixth package of measures aimed at responding to the "economic and social consequences" of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. It raises to 45 billion euros the overall amount released by Spain's government to help those struggling with soaring inflation and runaway food and energy prices.

But Sanchez said the 20 cent discount per litre of fuel, which had been available for all consumers, will now be limited to "the most affected sectors" such as lorry drivers, farmers, shipping companies and fishermen. Spain's efforts to address soaring inflation have borne fruit in recent months, with the figure falling from a record 10.8 percent in July to 6.8 percent in November.

However, food prices have remained stubbornly high, rising by 15.3 percent year-on-year in November. Sanchez also extended by six months the discount on electricity and gas prices and said the ban on cutting energy supplies to vulnerable households would remain in place throughout 2023.

Likewise, the 50 percent discount on season ticket prices for urban public transport will be extended for the first half of 2023, he said. —AFP



MADRID: Spain's Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez addresses an end-of-year press conference following a cabinet meeting, at La Moncloa Palace in Madrid, on December 27. —AFP

Oil prices little changed as Russia unveils export ban

MOSCOW: Russia on Tuesday banned oil sales to countries and companies that comply with a price cap agreed by Western nations, briefly helping to lift crude prices.



Jazeera Airways unveils upgrades at Kuwait's T5

KUWAIT: Following the record number of passengers of 1.1 million flown during the summer period from July to August, Jazeera Airways on Wednesday announced the completion of a series of expansions and upgrades at its Terminal 5 at Kuwait International

As AI rises, lawmakers try to catch up

PARIS: From "intelligent" vacuum cleaners and driverless cars to advanced techniques for diagnosing diseases, artificial intelligence has burrowed its way into every arena of modern life. Its promoters reckon it is revolutionizing human experience, but critics stress that the technology risks putting machines in charge of life-changing decisions. Regulators in Europe and North America are worried. The European Union is likely to pass legislation next year—the AI Act—aimed at reigning in the age of the algorithm.

The United States recently published a blueprint for an AI Bill of Rights and Canada is also mulling legislation. Looming large in the debates has been China's use of biometric data, facial recognition and other technology to build a powerful system of control. Gry Hasselbalch, a Danish academic who advises the EU on the controversial technology, argued that the West was also in danger of creating "totalitarian infrastructures". "I see that as a huge threat, no matter the benefits," she told AFP. But before regulators can act, they face the daunting task of defining what AI actually is.

'Mug's game'

Suresh Venkatasubramanian of Brown University, who co-authored the AI Bill of Rights, said trying to define AI was "a mug's game". Any technology that affects people's rights should be within the scope of the bill, he tweeted. The 27-nation EU is taking the more tortuous route of attempting to define the sprawling field. Its draft law lists the kinds of approaches defined as AI, and it includes pretty much any computer system that involves automation.

The problem stems from the changing use of the term AI. For decades, it described attempts to create machines that simulated human thinking. But funding largely dried up for this research—known as symbolic AI—in the early 2000s. The rise of the Silicon Valley titans saw AI reborn as a catch-all label for their num-

"The supply of Russian oil and oil products to foreign legal entities and individuals is prohibited if the contracts for these supplies directly or indirectly" are using a price cap, a presidential decree said. The decree will be in effect from February 1 until July 1.

It added that the ban may be lifted in individual cases on the basis of a "special decision" from Russian President Vladimir Putin. The price ceiling of \$60 per barrel agreed by the European Union, G7 and Australia came into force in early December and seeks to restrict Russia's revenue while making

ber-crunching programs and the algorithms they generated. This automation allowed them to target users with advertising and content, helping them to make hundreds of billions of dollars. "AI was a way for them to make more use of this surveillance data and to mystify what was happening," Meredith Whittaker, a former Google worker who co-founded New York University's AI Now Institute, told AFP. So the EU and US have both concluded that any definition of AI needs to be as broad as possible.

'Too challenging'

But from that point, the two Western powerhouses have largely gone their separate ways. The EU's draft AI Act runs to more than 100 pages.

sure Moscow keeps supplying the global market.

Oil prices initially jumped on the announcement and analysts pointed to expectations for stronger demand due to reopening actions by China after lengthy COVID-19 restrictions. But most of the gains in oil prices had evaporated by the end of the trading session. Analysts have noted that Moscow's move will not impede deliveries to India, China and other importers that did not join the price cap.

The Russian action "should not come too much as a surprise for the market really, given what we heard from them over the recent months," said Matt

service team at T5 available around the clock to assist passengers, and a newly built customer service centre at Jazeera's head office near the airport.

Speaking on the significance of these upgrades Rohit Ramachandran, CEO Jazeera Airways said: "We witnessed a tremendous demand for travel during the summer after two years of restrictions due to the pandemic, which delayed previously planned expansions at T5. Now that the expansion program has been completed our passengers can really benefit from the convenience of flying from T5. Travelers can get from check-in to their gate in less than 10 minutes."



Among its most eye-catching proposals are the complete prohibition of certain "high-risk" technologies—the kind of biometric surveillance tools used in China. It also drastically limits the use of AI tools by migration officials, police and judges. Hasselbalch said some technologies were "simply too challenging to fundamental rights".

The AI Bill of Rights, on the other hand, is a brief set of principles framed in aspirational language, with exhortations like "you should be protected from unsafe or ineffective systems". The bill was issued by the White House and relies on existing law. Experts reckon no dedicated AI legislation is likely in the United States until 2024 at the earliest because Congress is deadlocked. —AFP

Smith of Kpler. "It'll tighten things up a bit, but not too much." Brent oil futures for delivery in February ended up 0.5 percent at \$84.33 a barrel.

US benchmark West Texas Intermediate for delivery in February slipped less than 0.1 percent to \$79.53 a barrel. Introduced alongside an EU embargo on seaborne deliveries of Russian crude oil, the cap aims to ensure Russia cannot bypass the embargo by selling its oil to third countries at high prices. Russia has said the cap will not affect its military campaign in Ukraine and expressed confidence it would find new buyers. —AFP

Japan cinema 'must change' to help young directors: Kore-eda

Acclaimed director Hirokazu Kore-eda fears that Japan's underfunded, inward-looking cinema industry is putting off young talent, so he's taken matters into his own hands by mentoring up-and-coming filmmakers for a new Netflix series. Kore-eda, whose 2018 film "Shoplifters" won the Palme d'Or at Cannes, told AFP that complacent attitudes and poor working conditions are holding Japan back in cinema and TV while its neighbor South Korea powers ahead internationally.

"Our filmmaking environment must change," he said in an interview, calling for an end to the low pay, long hours and insecurity faced by those trying to hone their skills. "Throughout my career, I've been able to focus solely on improving my own filmmaking. But now, when I look around me, I see that young people are no longer choosing to work in film and television."

To help tackle the issue, the director of "Broker" and "Our Little Sister" collaborated with three younger proteges to make a new Netflix series set in tradition-steeped Kyoto. The nine-episode manga adaptation, "The Makanai: Cooking for the Maiko House", tells the tale of a tight-knit community of kimono-clad apprentice entertainers known as maiko.

Kore-eda, 60, said he also learned many things from his mentees while working as showrunner for the series, to be released worldwide on Jan 12. "It's more like - I want to steal something from these three," he joked, complimenting the quality of their art and "knowledge of equipment that's far deeper than mine."

'Looking inward'

While Japanese anime is booming on Netflix and other streaming services, the nation's live-action offerings have been overshadowed by South Korean megahits such as "Squid Game" and the Oscar-winning movie "Parasite". To become a global cultural powerhouse, the South Korean government has spearheaded efforts to launch a blitz of pop-culture exports in the past two decades, Kore-eda said. "All the while Japan has been looking inwards," with little incentive to market its films and TV shows overseas thanks to the flourishing domestic market. "That's one big reason why we see a gap," he added.

After the success of "Shoplifters", about a family of small-time crooks who take in a child they find on the street, the director branched out into languages other than Japanese. He has previously said that making French film "The Truth", released in 2019, and the recent South Korean title "Broker" sharpened his per-



Japanese director Hirokazu Kore-eda poses during a photo session following an interview in Tokyo on Dec 9, 2022. — AFP

spective on what the industry lacks at home.

This year, Kore-eda and other directors argued that Japan needs an equivalent of France's state-run National Centre for Cinema to more robustly fund the industry and improve working conditions. A 2019 Japanese government survey found over 60 percent of employees and 70 percent of freelancers involved in filmmaking in Japan were unhappy with their low pay, grueling hours and the uncertain future of the industry.

#MeToo campaigning

Hiroshi Okuyama, one of the three directors who worked with Kore-eda on the new series, said he and his peers no longer see their vocation as a viable source of income on its own. "Filmmakers of my generation, myself included, are resigned to the reality that we can no longer make a living solely by making movies," the 26-year-old told AFP, sitting alongside the two others, Megumi Tsuno and Takuma Sato.

Kore-eda is also an active campaigner against sex-

ual harassment in the film world, and in March he and others stood in solidarity with actors who came forward with stories of being assaulted by a male director in Japan. Those accusations morphed into a social media campaign resembling #MeToo, and in July, the Directors Guild of Japan issued a statement vowing to eradicate harassment - described by Kore-eda as a "big step forward".

But he is calling for a system to protect victims who speak out, because harassment still tends to be "treated as a matter of a person's poor character, with little awareness yet that this is a more structural problem". When he's not campaigning, Kore-eda is busy thinking about his next projects, saying he wants to focus on immigration, abandonment and even work that resembles an "epic poem". All in all, "there are too many things I want to do." — AFP

'Avatar' stays atop N America box office

Pulling in an estimated \$90 million, "Avatar: The Way of Water" has blown away the competition even as a massive storm kept millions at home over the four-day Christmas weekend, industry watcher Exhibitor Relations said Monday. The James Cameron sci-fi sequel has now earned 20th Century \$287.7 million domestically, becoming the fifth highest-grossing film of 2022.

But while analysts said it had exceeded expectations on a storm-depressed weekend, three new releases produced far more modest returns. Universal's family-oriented "Puss in Boots: The Last Wish", a computer-animated spin-off of the "Shrek" franchise, took in \$17.5 million for the Friday-through-Monday period.

Sony's biopic "Whitney Houston: I Wanna Dance With Somebody" earned just \$6.8 million. English actress Naomi Ackie portrays the late superstar. And comedy-drama "Babylon," helmed by Oscar-winning director Damien Chazelle, opened with a mere \$5.3 million despite a cast including Brad Pitt and Margot Robbie. Variety.com called that an "especially terrible start."



But David A Gross of Franchise Entertainment Research suggested that the over-the-top epic can expect a boost "if it picks up big awards nominations," as many expect. Fifth place for the long, cold weekend went to "Black Panther: Wakanda Forever," at \$5.3 million. Its domestic total is now \$428 million.

Rounding out the top 10 were: "Violent Night" (\$4.3 million) "The Whale" (\$1.5 million) "The Menu" (\$1 million) "The Fabelmans" (\$900,000) "Strange World" (\$675,000). — AFP



Celestin, son of Van Moeseke, reads a book in his living room.



Arthur, son of Van Moeseke, works in his room.— AFP photos

Belgian families don gloves for house-heating research

Outside the family home, frost covers the ground and temperatures in the damp Belgian winter have plunged below freezing. Inside the 200-square-metre house it is slightly warmer - the thermostat reads 14.5 Celsius - but the family of six is wrapped up warm. Geoffrey Van Moeseke, an architect engineer from Louvain-la-Neuve, is putting his family through their third consecutive winter as "SlowHeat" pioneers.

The idea cooked up by academics is to save on the cost and the environmental toll of gas heating, by using directed heat where it's needed and leaving the unoccupied parts of the house chilly. "Heat the bodies, not the walls" is the project's motto, and that starts with appropriate winter clothing. "Right now, I'm wearing a classic cotton sweater and an old, fairly warm jacket," Van Moeseke said.

"Underneath, I have two more layers: a T-shirt and technical sports clothing," he explains. For the feet, it's socks and "old, padded slippers which are extremely warm". The second part of the project's advice is the use of electric radiant heaters, which provide intense and easy-to-direct heat.

Heated capes

Van Moeseke owns two, which he runs for only two hours a day - one in the living room and one in his son's bedroom, the coldest room in the house, hovering around 12C. These heaters can be placed on desks and warm only the person sitting in front of them, creating a bubble of comfort without wasting heat on unused parts of the room. On the researchers' website is a third suggestion: Electrically heated capes and neck warmers, which they claim pay for themselves in a month with reduced heating bills.

As they work on their research, the SlowHeat team sometimes wear fingerless gloves to type or use heated mouse mats. When the project began in September 2020 many of their colleagues told them they were mad. But this winter's energy crisis, soaring gas bills triggered

by the war in Ukraine plus suddenly cold temperatures has sparked renewed interest in the project.

"We wondered what would happen if all of a sudden we ran out of gas," explained Denis De Grave, research assistant at the University of Louvain. "At the beginning, we were taken for crazy," admitted Gregoire Wallenborn, researcher and teacher at the Free University of Brussels, bundled up in a big jacket and with a woolly hat screwed on his head.



Belgian PhD in architectural engineering Geoffrey Van Moeseke plays in his living room with his son in Louvain-la-Neuve on Dec 10, 2022, as he takes part to a scientific project entitled "SlowHeat" where the principle is to turn down heat and "heat the body not the room".

In his apartment in Brussels, the average temperature fluctuates between 12 and 14C. While gas and electricity bills are rising steeply, Van Moeseke only pays, on average, 70 euros (\$74) per month for heating. Needless to say, before submitting themselves as guinea pigs in their own experiment, the SlowHeat researchers had to convince their families.

Rethink habits

"I brought in the project little by little," Van Moeseke said. "It was more difficult the first winter than the second, which shows that we adapt to new habits over

time." His youngest child, 11-year-old Celestin, wears a woollen sweater - and shorts with bare legs. "The first winter was harsher, we were used to a warmer temperature, but I got completely used to it. I think it's hot here," Celestin smiled.

Not everyone adapted so readily. Some really feared the cold or worried that friends and families would not visit, and that roommates and relatives would complain. It was a while before Van Moeseke got used to operating a small



Geoffrey Van Moeseke and his son playing in their living room.

set of pedals under his desk to keep active. More ideological doubters see the project as an ultimatum to embrace poverty, but the researchers insist the project is not a one-size-fits-all solution, but rather a chance to rethink our habits.

"The objective is absolutely not to tell people: you are going to be cold," explained Amelie Anciaux, sociologist at the University from Leuven and member of SlowHeat. "The idea is to keep the same level of comfort but with a few degrees less." — AFP

Musician 'Jo Mersa' Marley, grandson of Bob Marley, dies at 31

Musician Joseph "Jo Mersa" Marley, grandson of Bob Marley and a well-regarded reggae artist in his own right, has died at the age of 31, US media reported. A representative of Jamaican-born Marley confirmed his death to Rolling Stone, but did not give a cause. WZPP Radio in Miami, where the artist spent much of his life, reported that he was found in a vehicle after suffering an asthma attack on Tuesday.

Jamaican Prime Minister Andrew Holness said in a tweet that he was "deeply saddened" by news of the death, and offered his condolences to Marley's parents, Stephen and Kerry. "My heartfelt sympathies to Joseph's friends and associates and to the Reggae music fraternity and fans everywhere," he added, calling Marley's passing "a huge loss to the music as we look to the next generation."



Jo Mersa Marley

Marley released his debut album "Comfortable" in 2016, following it up with "Eternal" in 2021. In a 2014 interview with Rolling Stone, Marley described growing up surrounded by musicians, including his father and his uncle Ziggy. "It was a very magical thing, seeing those people come around to the house and how the whole work process would happen," he said at the time. "I would come home and try to do homework, but I'd end up getting distracted and go peek in the studio."

He also said that despite his musical pedigree, he had wanted to chart his own path. "I am one of the new generation of Marleys, but I am still experimenting at the same time," he told the outlet. "My plan is to do something new with my roots." WZPP reported that Marley is survived by a wife and daughter. — AFP

China approves first foreign video games since crackdown

Chinese regulators approved 44 new foreign video game titles Wednesday, the first to be allowed to hit the market since an industry crackdown to rein in minors' gaming habits swept the sector last year. Beijing moved against the country's vibrant gaming sector last August as part of a sprawling crackdown on big tech companies, including a cap on the amount of time children could spend playing games.

Officials also froze approvals of new titles for nine months until April, but a growing number of domestic titles have been approved since then. China's gaming regulator, the National Press and Publication Administration, on Wednesday said it had approved 44 new imported games in December including Nintendo's Pokemon Unite. It separately approved 84 new domestic titles. The body normally approves foreign titles in batches a few times per year. The last foreign game approvals to be handed out were in June 2021.

Earlier this month, China granted homegrown tech giant Tencent its first video game license in 18 months, ending a dry spell that had threatened its position as the world's top game maker. China's video game market shrank more than 19 percent year-on-year in November, according to a Wednesday report by Chinese gaming consultancy Gamma Data.

The approval signals a relaxing of China's strict attitude towards tech companies, although games are still censored for politically incorrect themes. During the crackdown, hundreds of game makers pledged to scrub "politically harmful" content from their products and enforce curbs on underage players to comply with government demands. Restrictions announced last year but still in effect allow players under the age of 18 to play for up to three hours a week. — AFP



Children use flashlights as they attend a meeting of their literature club in a public library during a power outage in Irpin, northwest of Kyiv, on Dec 23, 2022, amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine.



People walk past a Banksy graffiti on a wall of a heavily damaged residential building in Irpin.



Children play in front of the public library in Irpin.— AFP photos

LIBRARY OFFERS REFUGE AND RECOVERY IN WAR-SCARRED UKRAINE TOWN

Hundreds of laptop-toting professionals and students line up outside the public library in the Ukrainian town of Irpin, desperate to get plugged in and online amid the latest energy blackout.

The library, on the ground floor of a nine-storey apartment block in the town centre of the Kyiv suburb, has become the locus and a symbol of a tentative

Nicholas to greet and take pictures with children. It is providing a touch of normalcy to a town that, because of its location in the pine forests on Kyiv's northwestern edge, bore the full force of Russia's advance on the capital in the war's first weeks.

"As soon as the library reopened, we gave people the opportunity to recharge

proudly, its photocopier was the only one in town. "We are in the heart of the town, on the central square, and we were always popular," she said.

"When there was no internet, our halls were filled with readers." Not even during the pre-internet era, however, was the library the hive of activity it has become today — a reflection of just how badly the

the Russians fled, when some houses in her neighbourhood were still ablaze.

With winter conditions worsening, maintenance workers are now focussed on repairing buildings that sustained only light damage, saving for later those that require more extensive rehabilitation.

Excavators, meanwhile, were still clearing the rubble of buildings that are

entrance somewhat sheepishly, mindful she had three overdue books — checked out before the war — that she still had not finished.

But the library was the only place where Maria could meet Saint Nicholas.

"We received some sweets, and that's why we come with our children on this occasion, in order to lift our spirits," she said. They lingered well after an air raid siren prompted other mothers and children to leave and seek shelter.



People work with their laptops in the public library.

recovery following the horrors of Russian occupation. Once inside, Irpin residents jostle for seats in the area newly designated as the town's first free co-working space, sometimes spilling over into the children's books section.

With much of Irpin still in ruins, the library is also functioning as an alternative classroom for displaced schoolteachers, a makeshift office for psychotherapists or even a base for the town's Saint

their phones. We gave people the opportunity to stay in warm conditions while watching the city rebuild," said Yevgenia Antonyuk of the Irpin city council. "What happens in the library touches all aspects of people's lives."

Wreckage and ruin

Olena Tsyganenko, 75, has been head of the Irpin library for four decades, ever since the days when, as she recalls



A man dressed as a Saint Nicholas and a woman dressed as an angel greet children at the public library in Irpin.

rest of Irpin has suffered.

After a month-long battle marked by heavy urban combat, Russia pulled out of Irpin in late March, leaving behind hundreds of dead civilians, according to official estimates. Once leafy parks were strewn with bodies and barely a building had escaped the violence unscathed.

"It seemed to me there was no one but us in the city," said resident Victoria Voskresova, recalling the first weeks after

no longer standing. The library got off much easier — only some windows were broken — and now offers a refuge from the misery elsewhere. On a recent morning, as young professionals sipped cappuccinos and tapped away at their keyboards, teachers taught a group of middle-schoolers about "the musical culture of Ukraine".

With her 7-year-old daughter Maria in tow, Voskresova approached the

'Invincibility'

Ukrainian officials have tried to encourage Irpin on its road to recovery, designating it as a "Hero City", an acknowledgement of the resolve it demonstrated during Russia's advance.

A mural by the elusive British artist Banksy also honours Irpin's resistance. Placed on a pockmarked building with burnt-out balconies, it depicts an injured gymnast in a neck collar performing a ribbon routine. Yet these high-profile odes to Irpin pale in significance to the daily work of the library in boosting public morale.

Last week, the library hosted a book launch for Sergey Martyniuk, who fought to defend Irpin and then wrote about the experience in a collection titled "13 Poems, or The Battle for Irpin Changed the World".

"Irpin is really recovering now," Martyniuk told AFP after the event, crediting the library with reinforcing the town's "invincibility". He added: "I think that the people who have returned should be given the opportunity to work and feel like normal Ukrainians." — AFP

Reinventing himself as a brewer at age 62 would never have occurred to Poul Erik Vestergaard, but Denmark's controversial cull of the country's minks over COVID fears forced him to change course. Authorities ordered the slaughter of the Nordic country's farmed mink population in Nov 2020 following the discovery of a mutated strain of the coronavirus. After a two-year ban, Denmark will once again allow mink farming from January 2023.



In this file photo taken on Nov 6, 2020, mink look out from their cage at a farm near Naestved, Denmark.

But for Vestergaard, his mink-raising days are over. "The farm can be used for other things. That's my view. It's over now. It just has to go," the veteran farmer tells AFP at a 100-hectare farm that will become a microbrewery. Most of the some 1,000 farms in the Scandinavian country, once the world's leading exporter of mink fur, have made the same choice, leaving "ghost farms" across the plains of western Denmark, where the husbandry was focused.

As he walks through the now empty buildings - facilities that must be kept intact until the state has assessed their exact value - the former farmer says he isn't bitter. In 1986, he bought his father's farm - then dominated by dairy cows - and started breeding minks with 50 females until the business prospered with the help of his son, who joined him in 2006. He had planned to gradually pass the torch.

That was until Denmark imposed a nationwide cull of the animals, over fears of a mutated coronavirus strain that was believed to jeopardize the effectiveness

After COVID cull, Danish mink farmers find new careers

of vaccines. It later emerged that the government lacked the legal mandate to demand the cull, causing a political scandal from which the country is still reeling. With no cases among his minks, Vestergaard was able to sell all his furs. But faced with his business disappearing overnight, the Danish farmer found himself at a loss.

Martin, his son, returned to his job as an electrician, while exploring his passion for brewing, in his kitchen with a childhood friend, Thomas. "They had this hobby, and they were close to taking it to the next level," the former breeder explains. "It's going to be exciting: A new chapter," he says. They received grants totaling one million Danish kroner (\$143,000) to convert their mink farm into a new business.

Brewing, baking and strawberries

Out of 200 applicants, about 60 entrepreneurs have received similar grants under a program set up by the local government in Jutland in western Denmark. Others are pursuing baking, farming



Poul Erik Vestergaard poses at the site of his former mink farm in Holstebro, Denmark, on Nov 28, 2022. — AFP photos

strawberries or setting up farms dedicated to education. "It's actually a very popular scheme," says Bent Mikkelsen, who is in charge of the plan set up by the

Midtjylland region. He estimates that today all the former farmers who have not retired are working again, describing them as a very "entrepreneurial group".

Together with their partner Thomas Jeppesen, Poul Erik and Martin have bought nine mahogany barrels along with the equipment necessary to set up a microbrewery. "In the spring, we will start up the brewery," says Jeppesen, who works in IT. "The plan is Martin and me will make the brew. After that, Poul Erik will bottle it and put labels around the bottles," he explains. To keep up with costs with the recent spike in electricity prices, they plan to install solar panels once they receive their compensation. And for the time being, a return to mink farming is out of the question. "I don't believe that the government is going to let it grow up again," Martin says.

Mink holdouts

A handful of enthusiasts, however, intend to resume breeding in the country, which was a world heavyweight, along with China, in a sector reviled by animal rights activists. "Three-four farms are starting up again after January 1. All of them are in Jutland," says Louise Simonsen, president of one of Denmark's mink industry associations, Danske Mink. One of the farmers has already bought about 2,000 minks, but it will be a slow and difficult start to rebuild, according to industry representatives. "For the first one or two years, no cashflow is to be expected," Simonsen says. "But it is a heartfelt work for them." — AFP



Thomas Jeppesen (R) and Martin Vestergaard, childhood friends and now business partners, pose at the site of the former mink farm in Holstebro.

Lifestyle | Features



This photo taken on December 22, 2022 shows Lalita "Nan" Putchim, marine biologist and specialist in coral biology from Thailand's Department of Marine and Coastal Resources, taking a photo of an outbreak of yellow-band disease on coral formations off the coast of Samae San island in Sattahip district in the coastal Thai province of Chonburi. — AFP photos



Photo shows an outbreak of yellow-band disease on a coral formation.



Photo shows coral samples infected with yellow-band disease.

YELLOW-BAND DISEASE RAVAGES THAI CORALS

Underneath the calm turquoise waters off eastern Thailand, a rapidly spreading disease is killing corals over vast stretches of the sea floor, and scientists fear it may be getting worse because of climate change. Yellow-band disease - named for the color it turns corals before destroying them - was first spotted decades ago and has

like this before," said marine scientist Lalita Putchim, of Thailand's Department of Marine and Coastal Resources. "Everywhere we went we saw it, and we expect to see more of it as we go."

Scientists believe overfishing, pollution and rising water temperatures because of climate change may be making the reefs more vulnerable to yellow-band disease.

amounts of life, and its death could eventually impact humans too, she added. Thai scientists are hoping their investigation into this outbreak will help find a way to stop or cure yellow-band disease. On one research trip near Samaesan island in Chonburi district, Lalita and her team donned diving gear on a boat before heading underwater.

They photographed infected corals, taking measurements and photographs while harvesting samples to study later. Thai marine authorities are using social media to track reports of infected reefs, and have also asked the public to report any sightings of affected corals. Thai researchers have also been aided by local volunteers, as well as business owner Thanapon Chaivanichakul, who collected underwater photographic evidence. "I was shocked when I first saw it," Thanapon told AFP, using a series of expletives to describe the disease.

The disease is also a threat to the livelihoods of many in the area. Choopan Sudjai, the owner of a sightseeing boat, relies on the income from tourists who come to see the area's natural beauty - especially the coral reefs. "Now that the coral has been infected and will be destroyed, what will we do in five years?" said the 55-year-old. "It feels as if our own home has been destroyed." — AFP



A pufferfish is seen off the coast of Samae San island.

caused widespread damage to reefs in the Caribbean. There is no known cure.

But it was detected for the first time off Thailand's eastern coast just last year, near the popular tourist city of Pattaya, and has already spread over roughly 600 acres of the sea. "I haven't seen anything

The disease's impact cannot be reversed, unlike the effects of coral bleaching. "When the coral is infected with this disease, it just dies," Lalita said.

The loss of corals could have a devastating impact on the ecosystem - the reef is "like a forest", sustaining massive



Marine biologists from Thailand's Department of Marine and Coastal Resources get ready to collect data on the outbreak of yellow-band disease off the coast of Samae San island.

In Uruguay, an effort to save horses from foreign plates

Among a motley collection of rescued farm animals, four horses graze peacefully on a farm outside the Uruguayan capital Montevideo, blissfully unaware they had narrowly escaped the chopping block. Uruguay, a country where horses are not considered food but companions, has seen a rise in equine meat exports, prompting efforts to rescue horses destined for slaughter.

In 2020, the small South American nation was the seventh-largest exporter of horse meat, according to the OEC economic data site, with Belgium, Russia, France and Japan among the top importers. Most of Uruguay's tens of thousands of race, sports and work horses end up on someone's plate somewhere else in the world after they become injured, old, or their owners simply cannot care for them anymore.

Uruguayan horses are not bred for meat, but used in racing or dressage and on farms - often by cattle-breeding gauchos who prefer to travel the grassy plains on horseback rather than by car. In Pan de Azucar, some 115 km east of Montevideo, horses destined for slaughter are finding a second chance on the farm of Juan Pablo Pio. For now, he is playing host to four horses that were



Pio poses with a Japanese hen, one of his adopted pets at his ranch.

bought by the NGO Santuarios Primitivo, who took the animals from a truck headed for one of Uruguay's three equine slaughterhouses, and them brought to his farm.

"They have come to live what is left of their lives here," said Pio, who described his mission as "doing things because they are right and not because they are profitable." "Their only mission... is to exist," he added of the four-footed newcomers. Pio also has a rescued chicken,



A handler rides a horse during an auction held in San Ramon, Canelones Department, Uruguay, on Oct 21, 2022.

a donkey, a pig and a cow.

Fattened up

Santuarios Primitivo was created three years ago by Pablo Amarin y Martin Erro, friends with ties to the equestrian world. Since then, they have saved some 250 horses and found new homes for them on dozens of farms across the small South American nation. Amarin told AFP that his team contacts herdsmen

who gather unwanted horses from around Uruguay to be fattened up and sold for slaughter.

"We tried to go to the slaughterhouses, but they wouldn't open their doors for us to buy (horses) from them," he said. "So, we turned our attention to... the 'tropicaleros'. When we have money or space to buy and adopt horses, we talk to the herdsmen and tell them: 'When the next shipment comes in, we want five horses for ourselves'." Many of the herdsmen are happy to help, said Amarin, and sometimes even ask the rescuers to take a particular horse that they had grown fond of from among the condemned.

'Noble animal'

Uruguay is cattle country: Beef is its main export commodity and there are more than three cows for each of the country's 3.5 million inhabitants - the highest number per capita in the world. As for horses, there is one for every seven inhabitants, according to the Uruguayan Equine Veterinary Association - about half-a-million. In 2021, the country slaughtered 58,152 horses, according to Uruguay's INAC national meat institute - up 61 percent from 2020 and the highest number by far in a decade.

Uruguay's horse meat export volume rose percent in 2021, valued at some \$28.8 million, said the INAC. In 2022, exports rose further still. Beef is cheap in Uruguay, and for an Uruguayan to eat horse meat would be sacrilege. But the

fact that their horses are being eaten abroad is an uncomfortable open secret. "The horse carries symbolic value in our culture," anthropologist Gustavo Laborde told AFP.



Santuarios Primitivo NGO cofounder Pablo Amarin gestures during an interview at an animal shelter farm in Pan de Azucar.

In Uruguay, it is said that "the country was made on horseback," he added. Yet as much as the horse is regarded as a "noble animal," there was an element of "hypocrisy" in balking at horse meat while turning a blind eye to the animals' often tough working lives after which "the vast majority of horses end up in the refrigerator" anyway, said Laborde. — AFP



A horse rescued by Santuarios Primitivo NGO is seen at a farm after being adopted.



Juan Pablo Pio caresses a horse, one of his adopted pets, at his ranch in Pan de Azucar, 115 km east of Montevideo on Sept 16, 2022.



Horses wait to be auctioned during a sale in San Ramon.— AFP photos

Sports

Australia eye victory after Carey century in second South Africa Test

Carey and Green piled on the misery in a 117-run partnership

MELBOURNE: Australia closed in on winning the second Test and the series against South Africa on Wednesday after Alex Carey struck a maiden century to leave them in a commanding position. The hosts declared at tea on 575-8 on day three with an ominous lead of 386 after South Africa were bowled out in their first innings for 189.

In reply, the Proteas were 15-1 when play was abandoned early at the Melbourne Cricket Ground due to persistent drizzle. Their bid to save the Test, and the three-match series after losing the opener in Brisbane, got off to a horror start with under-pressure skipper Dean Elgar caught by Carey off Pat Cummins without scoring in the second over.

Theunis de Bruyn, who was dropped by David Warner on three, was not out six alongside Sarel Erwee on seven. Wicketkeeper Carey, playing in his 14th Test, was superb in reaching three figures for the first time before he was caught and bowled by Marco Jansen for 111.

At the declaration, a battling Cameron Green was not out 51 despite a fractured finger, alongside Mitchell Starc on 10. "It was nice to be able to consolidate from our start from yesterday," Carey, only the second wicketkeeper to make a Test century at the MCG after Rod Marsh, told reporters.

"This one's really special, obviously it's a big moment. But it's also great to help the Australian cricket team be in a strong position. That's what we play for, to win games." Carey and Green piled on the misery in a 117-run partnership after South Africa gave themselves a glimmer of hope with early wickets, including Warner first ball after he

resumed on 200.

Australia began on 386-3 with Travis Head on 48 and Carey on nine after a herculean unbeaten double century from Warner in his 100th Test in gruelling heat on day two. The veteran opener retired exhausted with severe cramp after making his third Test double ton, but he returned to the crease when Head was out for 51.

He told host broadcaster Fox before play began that he had a "rough night's sleep". "I probably woke up six or seven times," he added, and was bowled first ball by an Anrich Nortje yorker as Australia lost three wickets for five runs.

Green ruled out of bowling

Temperatures were much cooler than the 37 degrees Celsius (98.6 Fahrenheit) on Tuesday, with conditions overcast and humid—generally favourable to the bowlers. And the ever-dangerous Anrich Nortje took advantage, bowling Head in the third over before snaring a bewildered Warner next ball.

"In general it has been a tough three days for us as a bowling unit," admitted Proteas bowling coach Charl Langeveldt. "Kagi (Rabada) wasn't on song and a few of the other guys in periods didn't bowl well as a unit. It's important for us to get the consistency going, but it hasn't been there for us in this game."

"We have to take it hour by hour tomorrow and just try and get runs and see where it goes from there," he added. Pat Cummins fell to the third ball he faced when South Africa successfully reviewed a caught behind decision off Rabada's bowling that was initially denied by the umpire.



MELBOURNE: Australia's David Warner (R) drops a catch from South African batsman Theunis de Bruyn (L) on the third day of the second cricket Test match between Australia and South Africa at the MCG in Melbourne on December 28, 2022. —AFP

Carey was joined by Nathan Lyon and they steadied the ship with the spinner making an entertaining 25. Ahead of play, Green, who took 5-27 in South Africa's first innings, was ruled out of bowling again in Melbourne—and the third Sydney

Test—with a fractured finger, but he bravely came out to bat. After a slow start, he began playing his shots in an admirable supporting role to Carey, who counter-attacked after the early wickets fell to consolidate Australia's advantage. —AFP

News in brief

Shiffrin lands slalom double

SEMMERING: Mikaela Shiffrin overcame her nerves to complete an outstanding double as she won her second giant slalom in successive days in Semmering on Wednesday. The 27-year-old American, who tops the overall standings, now has 79 World Cup wins to her name, just three shy of the women's record of 82 victories set by compatriot Lindsey Vonn. She is also on track to pass the overall record of 86 World Cup victories set by the Swedish great Ingemar Stenmark. Despite several errors, Shiffrin edged the Swiss skier Lara Gut-Behrami, who had topped the first run, by 0.10 seconds. Italian Marta Bassino finished third, 0.47sec behind the winner, to claim her sixth consecutive podium in giant slalom. "I got in a good rhythm at the top and tried to carry the momentum for the bottom but it's not easy," said Shiffrin who admitted to having been "more nervous" than on Tuesday. "It was very dark and it was very bumpy these two days. I just tried to push," she said. "It's easier when I expect it's going to be difficult, I can push harder instead of going back." With five wins in 11 starts this winter, the American already has as many victories as all of last season and is now showing the kind of form that brought her 40 wins in three seasons between 2016 and 2019.

Japan coach staying on

TOKYO: Japan coach Hajime Moriyasu will stay in his job after leading the Samurai Blue to the last 16 at the World Cup in Qatar, the Japan Football Association said Wednesday. There had been speculation about his future after a rollercoaster performance by Japan, who again failed to reach the quarter-finals but produced stunning wins against Germany and Spain. "This is really the happiest job", Moriyasu said of his reappointment. "It's a job that gives me a chance to compete on a global stage with the pride of being Japanese. That's why I decided to accept the offer", he said. It was the fourth time Japan had exited at the first knock-out stage and denied them a much-coveted quarter-final debut in their seventh straight World Cup appearance. Moriyasu becomes the first Japan coach to stay on after a World Cup. The 54-year-old's new contract will run "until the next World Cup", said Japan Football Association head Kozo Tajima, who lauded Moriyasu for "elevating the international status of Japan's football". After the heartbreak of their exit in Qatar, Moriyasu insisted Japan are on the right path.

Penaud to leave Clermont

BORDEAUX: France winger Damian Penaud will leave Clermont to join Top 14 rivals Bordeaux-Begles on a three-year contract at the end of the season, Bordeaux announced on Wednesday. The 26-year-old son of former international fly-half Alain Penaud has scored 21 tries in 37 international. Last month he ran in three tries during France's three victories over Australia, South Africa and Japan which resulted in him being voted best player of the autumn internationals, ahead of Italian full-back Ange Capuozzo and New Zealand number eight Ardie Savea. With Penaud also wanted by Toulouse - their coach Ugo Mola described him as "extraterrestrial" after the Autumn Tests - his signing marks a considerable coup for Bordeaux-Begles who are currently seventh in the Top 14. "We are very happy to announce the arrival of Damian at UBB for the next three seasons," said club president Laurent Marti in a statement. "His choice to come to Bordeaux is indicative of the attractiveness of the club, our ambition and our determination to continue to grow." —AFP



KUWAIT: Group photo of athletes and officials upon arrival in Kuwait.

Kuwait wins 7 medals at Oman Paralympic meet

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Tomooh Sports Club athletes returned from Oman with seven medals (2 gold, 3 silver and 2 bronze) after participating in Oman Paralympic International Athletics meet.

The delegation was received by Deputy Director General of Public Authority for Sports Hamid Al-Hazeem, Deputy Chairwoman of Tomooh club Huda Al-Khaldi, board members and athletes parents.

Hamid Al-Hazeem congratulated the athletes and the club's board of directors, and conveyed greetings of Information and Culture Minister, State Minister for Youth Affairs Abdelrahman Al-Mutairi and PAS Director General Mahmoud Abul, who are extending all types of support for this group to present their best abilities and enable them to continue their achievements.

Al-Hazeem lauded the athletes achievements and

Williamson, Latham punish fumbling Pakistan in 1st Test

KARACHI: Kane Williamson and Tom Latham hit contrasting hundreds Wednesday to propel New Zealand to 440-6 at the close on the third day of the first Test against Pakistan in Karachi. Williamson survived two stumpings and a leg-before decision before knocking an unbeaten 105, while Ish Sodhi was on one, with the tourists leading by two runs.

Williamson's 25th Test century is his first in international cricket since he racked up 238, also against Pakistan, in Christchurch in January last year. He built on a solid foundation laid down by openers Latham, who cracked 113 en route to his 13th Test century, and Devon Conway, who fell for 92.

With the National Stadium pitch likely to take spin on the last two days, New Zealand will look to press home their advantage in the first Test of the two-match series, their first in Pakistan since 2002. Williamson pushed fast bowler Mohammad Wasim for a sharp single to complete his hundred, a fifth against Pakistan.

In all he has batted for 356 minutes, cracking 11

boundaries. But Pakistan were left ruing missed chances as wicketkeeper Sarfaraz Ahmed fumbled two stumpings with Williamson on 15 and 21 — spinner Nauman Ali the unlucky bowler on both occasions.

Williamson added a solid 90 for the fifth wicket with Tom Blundell, who fell to Wasim after scoring 47. Pakistan's spin duo of Nauman and Abrar Ahmed took two wickets in the post-lunch session, with Henry Nicholls falling for 22 and Daryl Mitchell scoring a robust 47-ball 42. Ahmed, who has figures of 3-143, also had Michael Bracewell for five.

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Buresli speaking to journalists upon arrival in Kuwait.

and the 100m bronze of the T20. Hassan Sameer won the bronze medal of the 200m in the T36 category.



KARACHI: New Zealand's Henry Nicholls plays a shot during the third day of the first Test match between Pakistan and New Zealand at the National stadium in Karachi on December 28, 2022. —AFP

beating the New Zealand record against Pakistan of 181 set by openers Mark Richardson and Matthew Bell at Hamilton in 2001. Conway was trapped leg-before by Nauman for 92 after striking 14 boundaries in his fifth Test half-century.

The Pakistan camp has been hit by viral flu with skipper Babar Azam not taking the field in the first session and Agha Salman missing for the entire day. —AFP

Sports

Pressure rising as Barca must cope without Lewandowski in derby

Polish striker is division's top scorer but suspended for three league games

BARCELONA: Robert Lewandowski has taken La Liga by storm but Barcelona coach Xavi must cope without him during a busy January period, starting with a Catalan derby against Espanyol on Saturday.

The Polish striker is the division's top scorer but is suspended for three league games after being sent off in Barcelona's final match before the World Cup.

Despite being reduced to 10 men, Barcelona came from behind to beat Osasuna and move two points clear of champions Real Madrid, who are second after 14 games each. Xavi has three options to pick from up front, with Ferran Torres, Ansu Fati and Memphis Depay vying for a start, although none of the three are natural centre forwards.

Meanwhile winger Ousmane Dembele, World Cup runner up with France, returned to training with Barcelona on Monday and could be involved against Espanyol. After Barca's disappointing Champions League group stage elimination, moving top ahead of the World Cup was an important morale boost for the Catalans. The coach is under pressure to win trophies in his second season at the helm after finishing the previous campaign trophyless.

Barcelona spent big in the summer, signing Lewandowski, Brazil winger Raphinha, France defender Jules Kounde and other players, making controversial financial sacrifices to do so. Lewandowski's arrival seemed to be paying instant dividends but after Barcelona were beaten twice by his former side Bayern Munich in Europe, pressure on them has risen. "I am aware that we need to win titles this sea-

son," Xavi told Barca TV last week. "The pressure is mainly on me. And I accept it. I thrive on challenge and one needs to be brave."

Barcelona's first chance to lift silverware this season comes in mid-January with the Spanish Super Cup. However they must face Espanyol and Atletico Madrid in La Liga before that, along with Intercity in the Copa del Rey. Crosstown rivals Espanyol are fighting for survival at the other end of the table, 16th and only one point clear of the drop zone.

Coach Pablo Machin is likely to select Martin Braithwaite in attack against his former side, after a sour parting of ways last summer.

The Danish forward said he thought Xavi did not believe in him and has a chance to prove his point on Saturday. Xavi preferred to rely on Torres, Fati and Depay as back-ups for Lewandowski instead of Braithwaite—so further scrutiny will fall on his derby line-up selection.

Player to watch: Borja Iglesias

Real Betis striker Borja Iglesias will be out to make his mark when his team host Athletic Bilbao on Thursday. The Spaniard is on eight goals, tied with Real Mallorca's Vedat Muriqi as the second top goalscorer in La Liga, and he can try and cut the distance on leader Lewandowski, who has 13. Furthermore, it is Iglesias's first opportunity to impress new Spain coach Luis de la Fuente, after predecessor Luis Enrique did not take him to the World Cup. —AFP



SANT JOAN DESPI: Barcelona's Polish forward Robert Lewandowski (C) and teammates take part in a training session at the Joan Gamper training ground in Sant Joan Despi, near Barcelona. —AFP



SYDNEY: This handout photograph released by Rolex shows yacht Andoo Comanche crossing the finish line in the Sydney to Hobart yacht race. —AFP

Andoo Comanche wins Sydney-Hobart, misses race record

SYDNEY: Australian supermaxi Andoo Comanche secured a fourth line honours victory in the gruelling Sydney-Hobart ocean race Wednesday, but fell short of setting a new course record. The 100-foot yacht, skippered by John Winning Jr, triumphed in a nail-biting finish in the early hours of Wednesday after leading the blue water classic for much of the race.

It completed a quartet of line honours wins for the boat in the prestigious event since 2015 under a third different owner. Andoo Comanche crossed with a time of one day, 11 hours, 56 minutes and 48 seconds—about 20 minutes in front of rival supermaxi Law Connect—and just under three hours short of its own record.

The current race record of one day, nine hours, 15 minutes and 24 seconds was set by the same Comanche boat under a different skipper in 2017. Winning Jr was part of the team that won the event in 2016, but said it was something special to

skipper his own crew.

"To do it in a campaign that I was part of putting together is really quite exceptional," he told national broadcaster ABC. Last year's defending champion Black Jack crossed third, followed by Wild Oats, which fell behind after tearing one of its sails earlier in the race.

The 109-strong racing fleet set off from a sun-splashed Sydney Harbour on Monday afternoon, charting their way through the 628-nautical mile course (1163km) to Hobart. Favourable weather early in the race raised the prospect of toppling that mark, but the strong winds faded as the boats barrelled towards the finish line in Hobart.

The Bass Strait, which separates Tasmania from the mainland, can unleash perilous conditions. A deep depression proved catastrophic for the fleet in 1998, when six sailors were killed and 55 more were rescued after five boats sank.

Race officials on Tuesday evening said only three of the starting fleet had been forced to retire so far. One of them, 40-foot yacht Yeah Baby, withdrew less than four hours into the race after reportedly colliding with a massive sunfish.

Dozens of smaller yachts were still in the water Wednesday morning, competing for the handicap prize, which compensates for boat size. —AFP

France's Garcia eyeing Slam title

PERTH: French United Cup teammates Caroline Garcia and Alize Cornet spent Christmas at 39,000 feet in their haste to get to Perth for Thursday's start of the ATP-WTA United Cup. The pair made sure to arrive in Western Australia in good time for the

kickoff of the inaugural mixed teams event, with the French facing Argentina in their opening tie as they warm-up for the Australian Open in January.

"I had to leave really early from France," the 36th-ranked Cornet, who considered packing in her career last season but opted against it, told reporters. "I spent Christmas on the plane with Caroline." World number four Garcia, who won the WTA Finals last month in Texas following a breakthrough US Open semi-final, will be starting a season ranked inside the top 10 for only the second

Nadal ready for Djokovic challenge in Australia

SYDNEY: A "highly motivated" Rafael Nadal welcomed rival Novak Djokovic's much-anticipated return to the Australian Open as "good for tennis" Wednesday, while brushing off suggestions this may be his last tilt at the season-opening Grand Slam.

The 36-year-old Spanish great, who recently became a father, is beginning his new season at the United Cup, a new mixed-teams event starting Thursday in Sydney, Brisbane and Perth. It will provide a warm-up for his defence of the Australian Open title next month at Melbourne Park, where he swept past Russian Daniil Medvedev to win this year in an epic five-setter.

That victory came after arch-rival and nine-time Australian Open winner Novak Djokovic was detained and deported ahead of the tournament after refusing to get vaccinated for COVID-19.

Australia has since lifted its requirement for visitors to show proof of vaccination against COVID. The Serb arrived back in the country on Tuesday for the first time since being turfed out. Nadal, who has a record men's 22 Grand Slam titles to Djokovic's 21, said he was happy to see his superstar rival back.

"Novak is here, good for tennis, good for probably the fans," the world number two said in Sydney. "Let's see, no? Best players on court always win." Fifth-ranked Djokovic will begin his quest for an incredible 10th title at Melbourne Park at the Adelaide International from Sunday.

Nadal backed up his Australian Open win this year with a 14th French Open but struggled with injury after withdrawing from the Wimbledon semi-final with an abdominal tear in July. Despite a poor second half of the year, Nadal said he was raring to go again with a clash first up at the United Cup against British world number 14 Cameron Norrie ahead of a



SYDNEY: Rafael Nadal of Spain attends a practice session at the Tennis Centre in Sydney on December 28, 2022, ahead of the United Cup tennis tournament. —AFP

blockbuster showdown with Australia's Nick Kyrgios.

"The highest motivation to try to start well. It's always important to start well for me, for the confidence," he said. "The last few months haven't been easy for me. Main thing for me now is recover the positive feelings on court, being competitive. I hope to, I am ready to make that happen, but let's see."

Nadal played his first Australian Open in 2004. He is now a father, and with a history of injuries he was asked if this could be his last trip to Australia. "As a professional, you never know, hopefully not," he said.

"I mean, when you are at the age of 36, you never know when it's going to be the last one. It's obvious, but I don't like to talk about that because I am not in that mood now. "I'm just focused on trying to play at the highest level possible and give myself possibilities to keep being competitive, to fight for anything. That's my goal now. "I'm not thinking about it being my last time here. I am happy doing what I am doing. I'm looking forward to keep doing this." —AFP

Open in September—losing in straight sets to Tunisian Ons Jabeur—was a career breakthrough.

"It gave me a lot of confidence that I'd not had before. But the dream remains to win a Grand Slam. "There are still another few steps to go, but maybe it is possible now." Cornet said the Perth ambience brought back good memories of when she won the mixed-teams Hopman Cup for France in 2014.

"This court is a lucky charm and I hope it will be one for the team, we really hope to go far in the tournament," she said. —AFP

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

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

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	24848075
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

CHANGE OF NAME

I, ALI ASGAR S/o JAKIR HUSSAIN, do hereby change my name to **ALI ASGAR MAIMOON S/o ZAKIR HUSSAIN MAIMOON** for all purposes.

(Address: 13 Sector-A, Slice-3, Scheme No. 78, Aranay Nagar, Indore (M.P.). I will henceforth be known in the name **ALI ASGAR MAIMOON** and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents. (C# 0876) 29-12-2022

EMERGENCY 112

Manchester United make bright start without Ronaldo

'We are looking for a striker because games are coming every three days'

MANCHESTER: Manchester United made a positive start to life without Cristiano Ronaldo as Marcus Rashford and Anthony Martial stepped out from the Portuguese's shadow to score in a 3-0 win over Nottingham Forest on Tuesday.

But manager Erik ten Hag is still targeting a striker to replace Ronaldo in the transfer market to make the Red Devils more clinical in the final third. Ronaldo's rollercoaster second spell at Old Trafford came to an end during the World Cup break after an explosive interview in which he took aim at Ten Hag and the club's owners.

On the field, his influence had already waned since the Dutch coach took charge at the start of the season. Rashford has been a player transformed under Ten Hag and carried his fine form for England at the World Cup into the Premier League's return.

"Our players performed really well in the World Cup, I was happy to see that and now they continue," Ten Hag told Amazon Prime. "They have to stay on that level, keep going and progress from game to game."

A brilliantly worked corner opened the floodgates for United as Christian Eriksen picked out an unmarked Rashford inside the area to sweep into the top corner. Forest were without their first choice goalkeeper Dean Henderson as he is on loan from United and his understudy Wayne Hennessey was culpable when the home side doubled their lead just three minutes later.

Rashford's burst down the left and teed up Martial at the edge of the box, but the Frenchman's strike should not have had enough power to beat the Welsh international goalkeeper. United were also short handed at the back with Lisandro Martinez absent following Argentina's World Cup celebrations, Diogo Dalot injured and Harry Maguire still feeling the aftereffects of an illness.

As a result Raphael Varane was forced into starting just nine days after playing 113 min-

utes for France in the World Cup final, while Luke Shaw lined up as a centre-back in a back four for the first time.

But Forest did little to test a makeshift backline as they remain with just one goal away from home in the league all season. Steve Cooper's men did have the ball in the net shortly before half-time, but Willy Boly's effort was ruled out for offside after a lengthy VAR check.

Gakpo no go

The home side should have added more than one goal in the second half, leading Ten Hag to repeat his call for a new striker. United appear to have already missed out on one target with Cody Gakpo set to join rivals Liverpool from PSV Eindhoven.

"We are looking for a striker because games are coming every three days," added Ten Hag. "It's tough and we want to play in all the leagues. Hopefully we can keep going till the end of the season, so we need numbers in the squad."

Antony fired straight at Hennessey after fine play from Rashford and Bruno Fernandes gave the Brazilian a clear sight of goal. Hennessey also stood firm to block from Martial and Rashford from close range, but United finally got the third goal they deserved three minutes from time.

The imperious Casemiro strode forward to win possession and picked out his Brazilian compatriot Fred to slot into the far corner. Victory takes United to within one point of the top four and with a game in hand to come on fourth-placed Tottenham. Forest remain rooted in the relegation zone, but just one point adrift of safety. — AFP

Luka Doncic rewrites NBA record book



WASHINGTON: Shake Milton #18 of the Philadelphia 76ers dribbles the ball during the game against the Washington Wizards on December 27, 2022 at Capital One Arena in Washington. — AFP

LOS ANGELES: Dallas star Luka Doncic rewrote the NBA record book on Tuesday with a stunning 60-point triple-double, carrying the Mavericks to a wild 126-121 overtime victory over the New York Knicks.

Doncic added 21 rebounds and 10 assists, becoming the first player in NBA history with a triple-double featuring at least 60 points and 20 rebounds.

He's just the second player, after James Harden, to score 60 points in a triple-double, with Harden scoring 60 points with 10 rebounds and 11 assists in a game for Houston in 2018.

"He's special," Mavericks coach Jason Kidd said of Slovenian star Doncic, who also had two steals and a blocked shot in the contest.

"For a player to do something that's never been done before—it's hard to do," Kidd said. "There's been some great players before him."

Doncic posted his career-high in rebounds and notched his seventh triple-double of the season to help Dallas rally for the win.

The Knicks, led by 33 points from Quentin Grimes, were up by nine with 33.9 seconds remaining in the fourth quarter, but Dallas out-scored them 12-3 to close the period.

Doncic tied it up with one second remaining, coming up with the rebound of his own intentionally missed free throw and rising through a crowd of players to drain a game-tying jump shot.

"I think it was just kind of lucky," the 23-year-old said. "I just threw it up."

Doncic scored seven of the Mavericks' 11 points in overtime as they sealed the win, and departed the court to a massive ovation from the Dallas crowd.

Earlier, the Washington Wizards withstood a 48-point performance from Philadelphia's Joel Embiid to halt the 76ers eight-game NBA winning streak with a 116-111 triumph on Tuesday. The Boston Celtics shook off a slow start to rout the Houston Rockets 126-102, pushing their league-best record to 25-10 with a third straight win.

Meanwhile, LeBron James and the Los Angeles Lakers snapped a four-game skid with a convincing 129-110 victory over the Magic in Orlando. In Washington, Kristaps Porzingis scored 28 points and grabbed 12 rebounds for the Wizards, who led the Sixers by as many as 16 in the third quarter.

They were up by 11 early in the fourth, but the Sixers slashed the deficit to one on Embiid's alley-oop dunk with 2:59 to play. Porzingis responded with a three-pointer, and the Sixers wouldn't get the gap below three points the rest of the way.

It was 111-108 when Embiid fell and lost the ball out of bounds, the Wizards quickly pushing the lead back to six points. Embiid's three-pointer saw Philadelphia pull within 114-111 with six seconds left.

But Deni Avdija made a pair of free throws, Porzingis blocked Embiid's final attempt and the Wizards escaped with the win. "It would have been great to steal the game tonight, but they deserved it so much more than us," 76ers coach Doc Rivers said. "They played so much harder."

"I'm just disappointed with how we approached the game tonight," Rivers said. Bradley Beal added 19 points for Washington before he left the game late in the fourth, appearing to hurt himself in a collision with Embiid.

Kyle Kuzma and Rui Hachimura scored 14 points each for the Wizards. James Harden scored 26 points and handed out 13 assists for Philadelphia.

In Boston, Jaylen Brown scored 39 points and Jayson Tatum added 38 to lead the Celtics, who were also buoyed by 11 points and 15 rebounds from Robert Williams. The Rockets battled to keep it close, but Brown caught fire in the third quarter, scoring 14 points as he appeared to be energized after he was sent to the court by a flagrant foul by Kevin Porter.

The Celtics pushed the lead to 17 early in the fourth and cruised home. The Lakers, who had lost four straight since star Anthony Davis was sidelined with a foot injury, got a much needed win in Orlando. — AFP



MANCHESTER: Manchester United's English striker Marcus Rashford celebrates after scoring his team first goal during the English Premier League football match between Manchester United and Nottingham Forest on December 27, 2022. — AFP

Chelsea ease past Bournemouth 2-0

LONDON: Chelsea manager Graham Potter praised the Blues' reaction to a poor run prior to the World Cup as they eased past Bournemouth 2-0 on Tuesday to end a five-game winless streak in the Premier League.

Kai Havertz and Mason Mount struck inside the first 24 minutes to get Chelsea back in the hunt for a place in next season's Champions League.

Victory took Chelsea up to eighth and within six points of the top four.

"You have to use breaks as best you can," Potter told Amazon Prime. "Evaluate and reassess and get injured players back. We used it as best we could even with players coming back at different times."

However, victory came at a cost as defender Reece James limped off on his return from the knee injury which kept him out of England's World Cup campaign. James cruised through the first half but called for a substitution early in the second and looked disconsolate as he pointed to his knee before going to ground.

"You can see his quality. It's a blow for us," added Potter. "I'm not sure on the state of the injury. It's too early to say."

Potter, aiming to avoid overseeing a fourth consecutive Chelsea league defeat for the first time since 1998, handed Denis Zakaria his Premier League debut.

The Swiss midfielder broke forward well to drive Chelsea up the pitch in the first half, while the effervescent attacking duo of Raheem Sterling and Christian Pulisic led the Bournemouth defence on a merry dance.

Sterling provided the opener with an incisive low cross to the back post where Havertz slid in to convert in the 16th minute.

Mount doubled the lead with a well-taken drive from the edge of the box as Chelsea stepped up another gear before Pulisic had another goal disallowed for a foul by Havertz in the build-up.

After three games in all competitions without scoring a goal, the Blues were determined to end their disappointing streak and get their season back



LONDON: Chelsea's Spanish defender Marc Cucurella (C) jumps to head the ball during the English Premier League football match between Chelsea and Bournemouth at Stamford Bridge in London. — AFP

on track. Bournemouth goalkeeper Mark Travers did well to deny James after a dynamic burst forward, then made an even better save to foil Sterling before the break to keep his team in the game.

Havertz fired wide and Mount forced Travers into a smart low stop as Chelsea tried to put the game out of sight.

In the end they didn't need to as Bournemouth failed to threaten other than Jaidon Anthony's

late free-kick that was beaten away by Kepa Arrizabalaga. "We won't be measured on games at Chelsea," said Bournemouth boss Gary O'Neil. "You need everything to go for you. The response to being 2-0 down, they showed incredible belief we could get something from the game." A fifth defeat in six league games leaves Bournemouth just three points above the relegation zone. — AFP