**3** Kuwaiti animator lives his dream with Marvel team**8** Egyptians hit by soaring food prices as crisis bites**11** Coral bleaching causing 'unnecessary' fish fights**16** Brazil bids final farewell to football legend Pele

Dubai to 'double' economy

Emirate unveils \$8.7tn plan for next decade • \$7tn in foreign trade eyed

Rain to continue as mercury falls



KUWAIT: Meteorologist Abdulaziz Al-Qarawi said unstable weather marked with intermittent rainfall will continue until Thursday noon, along with winds reaching 50 km/h and low visibility and temperatures. — Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh (See Page 2)

DUBAI: Dubai announced Wednesday a bold plan aiming to boost foreign trade and investment in the United Arab Emirates' financial hub and "double the size" of its economy by 2033. The Gulf emirate's ruler, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum, unveiled in a series of tweets the Dubai Economic Agenda, dubbed "D33", with targets totaling 32 trillion dirhams (\$8.7 trillion).

The plan would "double the size of Dubai's economy in the next decade and consolidate its position among the top three global cities", Sheikh Mohammed said in a post that was accompanied by a marketing video. The objectives would be achieved through "100 transformative projects", he said in Twitter posts using infographics.

The new economic agenda would also add 400 cities to Dubai's list of trading partners, increasing foreign trade in the coming decade by 44 percent to 25.6 trillion dirhams (\$7 trillion). It would also see foreign direct investment in Dubai exceed 650 billion dirhams within 10 years, according to Sheikh Mohammed. The ambitious plan comes as much of the world reels from doom-laden

financial forecasts.

On Monday, the head of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) warned a third of the world's economy would slip into recession in 2023 amid slowing growth in the United States, the European Union and China. But visiting IMF officials in November predicted "robust" economic growth in the UAE, with projected GDP growth of six percent in 2022. Dubai's GDP stood at 307.5 billion dirhams during the first nine months of 2022, according to the government, representing a 4.6-percent increase year-on-year from 2021.

The plan comes days after Dubai dropped a 30 percent tax on alcohol sales in an apparent bid to lure tourists. Dubai attracted more than 12 million international overnight visitors in the first 11 months of 2022 - more than double the 6.02 million who visited during the same period in 2021, according to Dubai's Department of Economy and Tourism. The move to make drinking cheaper comes as the Saudi capital Riyadh pursues a sustained drive to attract foreign visitors and companies, and weeks after gas-rich Qatar raised its profile by hosting the football World Cup. — AFP

News in brief

Mol: IS flag in video from 2020

KUWAIT: Sources at the interior ministry said the latest seizure of drugs by the interior ministry has no connection to the Islamic State group. "In a video where the interior minister is seen thanking officials for seizing the drugs, an IS flag is seen in the background. But it dates back to August 2020, when drugs were found along with the flag, which was displayed along with the seized contraband to highlight the ministry's achievements," the sources said.

Charcoal heater fumes kill man

KUWAIT: Kuwait Fire Force announced one person suffocated to death and another lost consciousness in separate incidents after inhaling carbon monoxide from charcoal heaters. "The central command sent teams from Khairan to deal with first incident. Upon arrival, the door was found shut and the body of an Egyptian man was found, who had suffocated to death," KFF said. "In the second incident in Jabriya, Hawally fire squads found a Filipina domestic worker unconscious," it added.

Kuwait team arrives in Basra

BAGHDAD: The Kuwaiti football team arrived in Basra on Wednesday to take part in the 25th Arabian Gulf Cup (Khaleeji Zain 25), due to kick off on Friday. Iraq Football Association said in a statement association member Rahim Laftah received the Kuwaiti players upon their arrival in the governorate. Kuwait is in Group B with Bahrain, the UAE and Qatar. — KUNA

Trump calls to back McCarthy amid deadlock

WASHINGTON: Donald Trump on Wednesday called for far-right Republicans to end their blocking of the party's candidate to become US House speaker, after a damaging split prevented Kevin McCarthy from securing the key role. Congress was thrown into disarray on Tuesday by the rebels' move to derail McCarthy's candidacy, with the House of

Representatives failing to elect a speaker for the first time in a century.

Rather than celebrating their new control of the lower chamber, the Republican Party has instead been pitched into a drawn-out public fight that put McCarthy's political career on the line. "It's now time for all of our great Republican House Members to vote for Kevin, close the deal and take victory," Trump posted on social media. "Republicans, do not turn a great triumph into a giant and embarrassing defeat." McCarthy needed 218 votes in the House, which flipped to a narrow

Continued on Page 6

Graft pushes Iraq properties out of reach

BAGHDAD: Iraqi telecommunications worker Youssef Ahmed is married with a five-year-old son, but lives with his parents because he is unable to afford his own home amid soaring property prices. "Even if your income increases, it will never be up to the exorbitant prices of houses or land", said 29-year-old Ahmed, who earns a "comfortable" monthly salary of

\$1,000, double the national average.

In oil-rich but corruption plagued Iraq, real estate has become a popular way to launder money, including stolen public funds. Compounded by housing planning failures and an increasing demand, it has pushed prices in the capital Baghdad rapidly out of reach for many ordinary Iraqis. Iraq's banking system remains underdeveloped: Only one in five have bank accounts, according to the World Bank.

"Real estate transactions are done in cash", said economist Ali Al-Rawi, meaning that property sales are a way to "easily and quickly hide money in

Continued on Page 6

Vietnamese boy trapped in shaft declared dead

HANOI: A 10-year-old Vietnamese boy trapped in a buried hollow concrete pillar at a construction site for four days was declared dead on Wednesday. Rescuers in Dong Thap province in the Mekong Delta had been trying to raise the pil-

lar from its 35-m-deep hole and cut out young Thai Ly Hao Nam. The boy fell into the 25-cm-wide shaft of the pillar - sunk as part of a new bridge - on Saturday, apparently while looking for scrap metal.

Doan Tan Buu, deputy chief of the province, said on Wednesday that the boy had died. "He has been trapped in a hollow pillar very deep down... with multiple injuries and not enough oxygen for a very long time," he told journalists at the construction site. "We had prioritized the rescue of the boy. However, the conditions mean it is impossible the boy has survived," he added.

Buu said the announcement of the boy's death was made after consulting with medical experts. Rescuers are determined to bring his body up as soon as possible for burial, but Buu admitted it was a "very difficult task". Vietnam on Tuesday mobilized hundreds of soldiers and engineering experts to try to rescue Nam. A 19-m metal pipe was lowered around the concrete tube in which the boy was trapped to allow them to remove mud and try to lift it out. Rescuers had softened and tried to remove mud and water to reduce pressure around the pillar, but days of effort had failed to pay off. — AFP



WASHINGTON: House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy walks through the rotunda as he arrives at the US Capitol on Jan 4, 2023. — AFP



BAGHDAD: Picture taken on Dec 16, 2022 shows a view of unfinished apartment buildings at a housing complex in the Iraqi capital. — AFP



Local

Kuwait PM invited to World Government Summit

KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah has received an invitation from the UAE Vice President, Prime Minister and Dubai Ruler Sheikh Mohammad bin Rashed Al-Maktoum to participate in the 2023 World Government Summit, due in the UAE in February.

The UAE Ambassador to Kuwait Dr Matar Hamad Al-Niyadi, delivered the invitation, included in a written message addressed from Sheikh Rashed, to His Highness the Prime Minister during a reception at Bayan Palace on Wednesday. Director of His Highness the Prime Minister Office, Hamad Badr Al-Amer, attended the meeting. —KUNA



KUWAIT: HH the Prime Minister receives UAE Ambassador in his office on Wednesday. —KUNA photos



‘Divorce for trivial reasons’: Alarming trend among Kuwait’s young couples

Kuwait recorded 13.7% spike in divorce rates in 2021

By Nebal Snan

KUWAIT: “My husband doesn’t know how to eat with a spoon.” That’s how one unnamed young woman justified her request for divorce only two years following her marriage, according to Dr Samira Al-Dosari, a social psychology consultant. Speaking at an event organized by the ministry of social affairs, she told a crowd of about 50 women that young couples are getting divorced for increasingly trivial reasons.

Speakers Abdulaziz Bomejdad, a lawyer and writer with experience working at family courts in Kuwait, and Dr Hanan Al-Harby, an expert in psychological and social sciences, also weighed in on how to best tackle familial and marital issues. The three panelists agreed that young people must learn how to resolve or even prevent conflicts long before they decide to look for a partner.

The need for educating the youth about spousal conflict management has never been more pressing. In 2021, Kuwait set a new record for divorce rates, with an increase of 13.7 percent compared to the previous year. Dosari said the numbers continue to soar in part because couples are swept up in the fantasy of the big day and are not well-prepared for the responsibilities that come with their new roles.

That’s why she’s a strong advocate for what she called a marriage “license”, – a training program that’s meant to give young people insight into what to expect from marriage and help them acquire the



KUWAIT: An event on familial and marital issues organized by the Ministry of Social Affairs.

skills necessary for navigating any issues they might encounter while living under the same roof. The first five years after tying the knot, she said, are key to building a healthy, long-lasting relationship.

Bomejdad stressed that the responsibility of teaching the new generation all about marriage primarily falls on the shoulders of parents, guardians and families. Government programs should also play a role, he added. Bomejdad suggested that pre-marriage courses be mandated by law as a solution to ensure stable relationships, referencing a previous attempt to do so by the Kuwaiti parliament.

The courses have been discussed in parliament at least as far back as 2014, when MP Saleh Ashour

submitted a bill that would have made them obligatory. The bill was voted down at the National Assembly in 2016, but the women and family affairs committee brought back the courses for discussion a year later. Despite media reports citing a positive response to the proposal from justice ministry representatives in 2017, pre-marriage courses remain an unrealized idea.

Beyond official training, Dosari said finding the perfect match hinges on understanding the personality of your potential partner. But conflicts are bound to happen, said Harby, and identifying the best solution requires keeping calm and locating the root of the problem. Pick your battles, Harby added, because you can’t win every time.



Abdulaziz Bomejdad



Samira Al-Dosari



Hanan Al-Harby

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

Kuwait Times is offering an opportunity for creative, young and ambitious talents to join our team in one of the following vacancies:

1. Videographer & Video Editor
2. PR & Marketing Manager
3. Editor & Reporter

Candidates interested in the job openings can submit their CVs to hr@kuwaittimes.com



KUWAIT: Vehicles move slowly along a street as wet spell continued in Kuwait on Wednesday. — KUNA

Rainy weather to continue in Kuwait until Thursday noon

KUWAIT: Meteorologist Abdulaziz Al-Qarawi said on Wednesday the unstable weather marked with intermittent rainfalls would remain throughout Kuwait until Thursday noon. He indicated in remarks to KUNA that the country would witness some sporadic heavy rain, along with winds reaching 50 km/h and low visibility.

The weather will improve by Thursday noon.

However, it will become cold during the day and severely cold at night. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Interior declared that people finding themselves in trouble due to the unstable weather can call on number 112 for help. The MoI personnel are ready round-the-clock to deal with any situation instantly.

In another statement later, the MoI urged motorists to follow up on the security personnel’s instructions to use alternative roads to avoid puddles or other weather-related hindrances. Keep a distance with the in front, the statement advised. It also advised motorists to abstain from speeding, buckle up and keep children on the back seat. Roads across the country have become slippery due to the rainfalls. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Hawally Governor Ali Al-Asfar with officials of Hawally and Ahmadi municipalities.

Hawally governor warns against building violations

KUWAIT: Hawally Governor Ali Al-Asfar insisted all violations that ruin the reputation of areas in the gov-

ernorate and do not adhere to regulations made by the governorate will not be tolerated. During his meeting with officials of Hawally and Ahmadi municipalities at his office on Wednesday, he stressed the importance of cooperating with all departments to catch all violations that ruin the general aesthetics of areas in the governorate, adding he will always lend a hand of cooperation for admirable work. Asfar appreciated the work and efforts of officials and employees of the municipality.

Local

Kuwaiti animator lives his dream with Marvel team

Ahmad Jamal's storied journey: From a fan of Marvel to be a part of Marvel team



Ahmad Jamal is doing animation.



Ahmad Jamal in Kuwait Times office during the interview.



Ahmad Jamal at Avatar Theme Park



Ahmad Jamal working as Imagineer for Walt Disney on Avatar Theme Park.



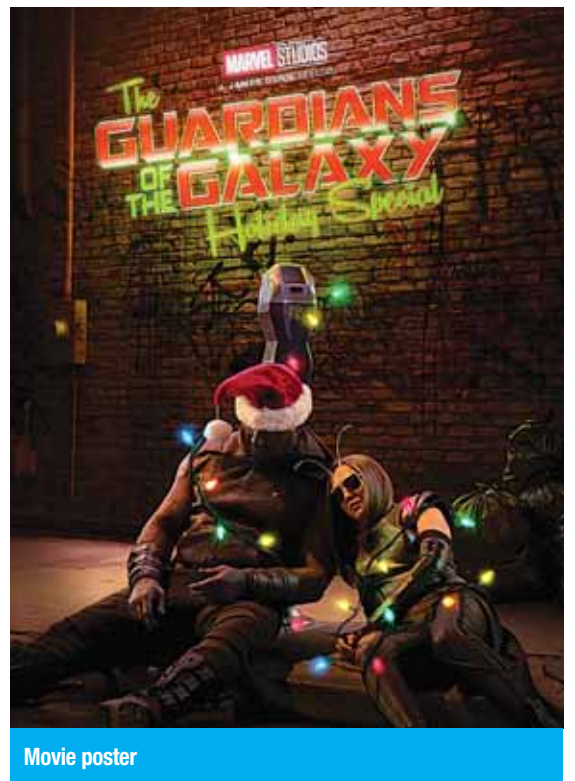
Inside Sony Pictures office



Ahmad Jamal at Sony Pictures Imageworks



Movie poster



Movie poster

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: From being a fan of Marvel to being a part of Marvel's team, Kuwaiti animator Ahmad Jamal was hired by Sony Pictures Imageworks in 2022 as a character animator for a VFX movie, specifically for the Marvel movie 'The Guardians of the Galaxy Holiday Special'. He relocated to Vancouver and joined the James Gunn-supervised animation team for his first dream job as an animator. Kuwait Times spoke with Jamal to learn more.

Kuwait Times: Tell us more about yourself.

Ahmad Jamal: I graduated in Architecture Engineering from Drexel University. I'm a co-founder of a local production company in Kuwait - 'in-visible' VFX and film production house. From my childhood, I was always interested in filmmaking and animation, as my father works as a director of well-known plays. When I was five years old, I went with my father to the Aladdin play, and was fascinated by how the designs were created. That was a step towards what I have become today.

During the pandemic, I decided to do more character animation like Disney and Pixar movies, so I started an online school to learn animation levels up to industry

standards. I took advantage of the lockdown. Then I start applying to a lot of studios and got a lot of rejections.

KT: Can you tell us about your involvement with 'The Guardians of the Galaxy' project?

Jamal: At the beginning of 2022, I received a job offer to work on Marvel movies. I started working as an animator at Sony Picture Imageworks for two ongoing projects - 'The Guardians of the Galaxy Holiday Special', which is out on Disney Plus, and 'Guardians of the Galaxy Volume 3', which will be released this summer in theaters. It's a dream come true to be working there and have my name in the credits of the movies.

I was part of a crew of 20 animators. We are responsible to bring characters Groot and Rocket to life. I had training before I started, then we worked on smaller shots. But they were not small for me, as these shots will be in the movie. It was huge. I watched the first film in college and never thought I will be a part of the latest movie. It is crazy to think about it. Groot was my favorite character, and seeing him come to life in shots I made was worth all the time and effort I spent.

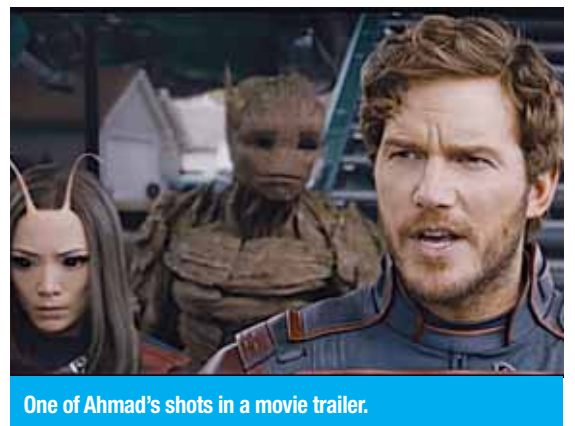
KT: How was the experience? What has it added to your professional work?

of Building and Housing Plans."

Commenting on ENCON3 topics, Eng Bader Al-Salman, president of KFEOCH, said, "Construction projects in general and housing projects in particular are part of social security of any country. The past three years have been devastated by COVID-19, followed by emergence of war. This caused the challenges facing the implementation of building and housing projects to deepen in Kuwait as in many other countries. The decline in the efficiency of logistics services, the lack of workforce, building materials and equipment, and the high cost of this entire have significantly impacted our capabilities. We hope all participants will join efforts during ENCON3 and beyond to discuss these challenges and explore ways to face and overcome them. We also need to overcome all obstacles to complete the implementation of the automated Permits System because of its positive and effective impact on shortening

administrative procedures for obtaining permits, reducing their cost, and speeding up the start of projects," he said.

Eng Al-Salman expressed gratitude to the participating sponsors and companies. Special thanks went to platinum sponsors that included the National Bank of Kuwait (NBK), Kuwait Finance House (KFH), United Real Estate Co (URC), Pan Arab Consulting Engineers (PACE), and Dar SSH International Consultants (SSH). He also commended the golden sponsors, including Soor Engineering Bureau and OHA Engineering Consultant. Al-Salman also welcomed the Participating sponsors, including Aljazeera Engineering Consulting Office, Osama Bukhamseen Design Engineering & Consultants, Nezar Al-Anjari Consulting Bureau, Ministry of Public Works, Ministry of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy, the Central Agency for Information Technology, Kuwait Municipality, Public Authority for Housing Welfare, and Kuwait Fire Force.



One of Ahmad's shots in a movie trailer.

Kuwaitis to represent Kuwait. This is an achievable dream. The skills are there. I would love to have those skills invested and bring Kuwaiti productions to life with the support of the government or the private sector. It will bring back Kuwait to the surface, as it used to be one of the top in the industry.

ENCON3 to discuss housing projects, permit system

KUWAIT: The opening ceremony of the 3rd Consulting Services for the Development Plan Forum (ENCON3) commences at 6.30 pm on January 10. Abzulaziz Al-Mojel, Minister of State for Municipal Affairs, patronizes the event. This was announced in a press release issued by KFEOCH on Wednesday. ENCON3 continues for two more days. It is held under the slogan "Completing the plans of the Electronic Portal for Permits and addressing the Challenges

Ministries continue to credit cash for annual leaves

KUWAIT: The National Assembly affairs ministry has credited cash in exchange for annual leaves, acting ministry undersecretary Ahmad Al-Haifi announced, while the health ministry completed the submission of the names of the first batch of recipients to the Central Bank. "The allowance for cash exchange for employees of the ministry has been credited in their accounts as they met the regulations mentioned in the Civil Service Commission memo and the decisions of the National Assembly," Haifi said. "The ministry has also filled vacancies for leading positions according to the decisions of the CSC with regards to filling these positions. Approvals are awaited from supervisors at the employment affairs of the CSC on decisions previously made," he added.

741 camps removed for violations

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Municipality has announced that it has removed 741 tents for pitching it outside of the specified locations for the 2022/23 camping season. "The general hygiene and public works authority at Jahra and Ahmadi governorates have also warned 261 camps before removal," the Municipality announced. The Municipality has also insisted that residents and citizens must strictly follow rules and regulations in place, especially with violations concerning the flora and fauna of the desert.



KUWAIT: Dr Yasser Abdulrahim in conversation with the team of scientists about the satellite project. — KUNA

Kuwaiti cadres embark on second satellite project

KUWAIT: Having launched the first Kuwaiti satellite (Kuwait Sat-1) into space, the national team is not taking a break, already embarking on a second identical project, designing the second one, Kuwait Sat-2. Dr Yasser Abdulrahim has told KUNA in an interview at his office that he and his team of scientists are in the initial stage of a much harder and complex mission, the making of parts of the second satellite, tentatively to be launched in three years.

The second satellite of the Cube Sat 2 type will be larger than the first one, launched into the space on

Tuesday, marking Kuwait's first endeavor to be among ranks of nations that had made headways in the realm. Dr Abdulrahim said that the planned satellite would examine solar panels, due to be designed and built at Kuwait University and would be equipped with a high definition camera, the Hyper Expected type, that transmits information and not only pictures about the atmosphere levels and the sea contents. A scientist, who was lecturing 35 trainees at a nearby hall, said that personnel of the first project would train their peers who would be involved in the second mission.

He revealed that laboratories in Kuwait had been modified to match specifications of the laboratories at nations of advanced space knowledge and experience, adding that national cadres had taken part in installing and programming cameras attached to the first satellite. Based on this experience, the national team is aspiring to make most parts of the new satellite in Kuwait. "We are up to the challenge and we can make it in the near future

by Allah's will," said Dr Abdulrahim confidently. However, he acknowledged that a lot of technologies are needed to build a full-fledged national industry for satellites production. A single unavailable chip may halt the whole process of making a satellite, he explained. Dr Abdulrahim has also acknowledged that there is lack of know-how as to testing the satellite.

Despite some of the snags, he has affirmed that the confidence is quite high to attain the utter objective, building full scale national satellite sector. Kuwait's first satellite was successfully launched into space on Tuesday, a milestone effort in setting up the country's space industry. "Kuwait Sat-1" was launched onboard the SpaceX Falcon 9 from the US State of Florida's Cape Canaveral, in an endeavor undertaken by Kuwait University and funded by the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences. The launch was the culmination of diligent work over the course of the past three years, aiming to bring Kuwait's space ambitions to fruition. —KUNA



Kuwaitis debut satellite Kuwait Sat-1 blasts into space on Tuesday. —KUNA



Abzulaziz Al-Mojel



Eng Bader Al-Salman

Kuwait Times
Established 1961THE LEADING INDEPENDENT
DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF
ESTABLISHED 1961Founder and Publisher
YOUSUF S. AL-ALYANEditor-in-Chief
ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-ALYANEDITORIAL : 24833199-24833358-24833432
ADVERTISING : 24835616/7
FAX : 24835620/1
CIRCULATION : 24833199 Extn. 353/3561
ACCOUNTS : 24833199 Extn. 125
COMMERCIAL : 24835618P.O.Box 1301 Safat, 13014 Kuwait.
Email: info@kuwaittimes.com
Website: www.kuwaittimes.com

News in brief

**Al-Zakat House aided 16,964
illegal resident families in 2021**

KUWAIT: Al-Zakat House announced on Wednesday that it had provided aid worth KD 24,784 million (approx \$80 million) to 16,964 families of illegal residents in the year 2021. The spokesperson of Al-Zakat House Manal Hussain told KUNA that the cooperation between Al-Zakat House and the Central System for the Remedy of Situations of Illegal Residents facilitated the process of aiding those families. —KUNA

**Kuwait crude prices gain
\$2.22 to \$84.26pb**

KUWAIT: Kuwait crude oil gained \$2.22 during Tuesday's trading sessions to reach \$84.26 per barrel compared with \$82.04pb the day before, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said Wednesday. Brent futures however dropped \$3.81 to \$82.10pb and West Texas Intermediate lost \$3.33 to \$76.93pb. —KUNA

**USD edges up against
Kuwaiti dinar**

KUWAIT: The US dollar on Wednesday rose against the Kuwaiti dinar trading at KD 0.306 and the euro dropped settling at the level of KD 0.323, compared with Tuesday's prices, the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) said in its daily bulletin. The sterling pound rate dropped to the level of KD 0.367 and the Swiss franc fell to KD 0.328. As to the Japanese yen, it remained stable at KD 0.002. The CBK publishes daily average exchange rates that do not necessarily reflect actual prices of currencies for the day. —KUNA

Photo of the day



KUWAIT: A general view of the Sheikh Jaber Cultural Center in Kuwait City. —Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh

Arab, Muslim organizations condemn Al-Aqsa storming

Such acts go against principles of protecting holiness of religious sanctities: Al-Hajraf

RIYADH: A host of regional Arab and Muslim organizations released statements on Tuesday, strongly condemning the Zionist entity's far right minister storming of Al-Aqsa Mosque under heavy protection of Zionist guard.

Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Secretary General Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf denounced these provocative practices, stating that such acts undermine international peace efforts and go against all global principles of protecting the holiness of religious sanctities. Al-Hajraf further asserted the bloc's firm stance by the Palestinian people and cause, as well as supporting all efforts towards a comprehensive and just solution.

In Cairo, Arab League General Director Ahmad Abu Al-Gheit strongly denounced Zionist minister's storming of the Mosque's compound, calling it a sacrilegious act and a provocation of Muslim's feelings. Abu Al-Gheit affirmed that (Benjamin) Netanyahu's government is completely responsible for these extremist practices, and their ramifications on global peace.

The Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) condemned Wednesday the storming of Al-Aqsa mosque under heavy protection. The union, in a statement, denounced these atrocious actions and the continuous Zionist attempts aimed at changing the historical and legal status quo of Jerusalem and the Al-Aqsa mosque. It warned that the continuation of these acts would fuel further tensions, violence and could plunge the whole region into a destructive war.

It reiterated its call to the international community to support the Palestinian people and pressurize Zionist entity's occupation into committing to international legitimacy resolutions, reviving peace negotiations, the two state solution and the Arab initiative for peace. The Union asserted that keeping the peace in the region is intertwined with Palestinian people right to an independent sovereign country with East Jerusalem as its capital.

As for the Jeddah-based Organization of Islamic Cooperation's (OIC) General Secretariat,



Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf



Ahmad Abu Al-Gheit

it vehemently condemned the actions, considering them a blatant breach of international law. OIC urged the international community to take responsibility and put an end to these instability fueling infringements. —KUNA

Divorce, harsh treatment could lead to drug use

KUWAIT: Although Islam strongly forbids the use of alcohol for its dangers and side effects on the behavior of people, many youth still tend to drink alcohol, which may lead them into the world of drugs. Most youth start using drugs with curiosity on the experience, pushing them further into the dangerous world of drugs and crime.

KUNA interviewed a number of experts in the field from "Ghiras", as part of the agency's campaign against drugs, regarding the prevention of drug use, symptoms of a drug addict and therapy stages. In this context, psychiatrist Ali Al-Sultan noted that the biological factor plays a big role in a person's readiness to take drugs.

A child whose parents are drug addicts is 50 percent likely to follow in their footsteps, he explained. Another factor is parents that spoil their kids and provide anything they ask for, as well as those who treat their children harshly and neglect their basic needs, he said. Other things that could lead to addiction are friends with bad influence and youth's willingness to try something new and exciting, said Al-Sultan.

Although addicts realize the risks of taking such substances, they continue doing so by convincing themselves that it can make them happy, more creative and focused and reduce their physical and mental pain, he added. The problems in society and the economic problems and political tensions also play a role in drug use, bearing in mind the lack of a strong law that punishes drug addicts. On her part, Ghiras CEO Mona Al-Saqer said that scientists have categorized drugs into three main types including depressants, stimulants and hallucinogens.

These types have different effects on the psychological and mental state of the user, however, they share the same deterioration of a person and negative side effects. All three affect the brain system, leading to symptoms that show on drug addicts including nervousness, anxiety, depression, aggression, panic attacks, lack of coordination and focus, fast speech, insomnia, a decrease in pain-feeling and paranoia, she added. As for Ghiras' strategy on drug prevention and awareness, Al-Saqer said the project presented its plan to the Cabinet, that relies on international scientific standards on the matter and requires cooperation between the state's bodies.

Speaking on therapy steps for addicts, the CEO noted that the first step to start the healing program is for the drug addict to have the readiness and will to go under therapy. All kinds of addictions can be healed by medicine and psychiatric methods, but the programs and period of time needed to heal differs depending on the substance of addiction and the length of time since the addictions started, she said. The healing program contains four key stages. The first one is medical treatment that focuses on withdrawal symptoms (detoxing the body).

The second stage is psychiatric treatment (individual and group therapy) to promote a better self-image and enhance behavior. The third is rehabilitation to blend in with society and the fourth stage focuses on preventing relapse, said Al-Saqer. Moreover, acting technical guide at the Ministry of Education and approved Ghiras coach Wadha Al-Thuwaini said that divorce and family disputes that lead to the neglect of children can easily push them into the world of drugs, as well as the spread of destructive ideas on social media. Parents can tell if their son/daughter is addicted to drugs once they start showing signs like a deterioration in their educational level, lack in care for hygiene and appearance, continuous sleep, worsening behavior and isolation, she said. —KUNA



Ghiras CEO Mona Al-Saqer

Kuwait's Shihab-Eldin named as member of BAS advisory board

NEW YORK: Former director general of Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS) Dr Adnan Shihab-Eldin was named as member of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists (BAS) advisory board, the bulletin said Tuesday. Shihab-Eldin, who holds a PhD in nuclear engineering from the University of California, Berkeley, took charge of some other positions, including acting secretary general and director of Research at the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), director at International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in Vienna, director of UNESCO's Regional Office for Science & Technology in Cairo, chief of Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR), in addition to head of KFAS.

Speaking to KUNA in a statement, Shihab-Eldin expressed his pride for this post which is a gain of Kuwait and all Arab countries, saying he is the only Arab man named for this prestigious board founded in Chicago in 1945 by Scientist Albert Einstein. He added that the board includes the most outstanding scientists in the world that was emerged from the Emergency Committee of Atomic Scientists was organized in August 1946 to support the educational activities conducted by physicists. Besides, two other persons, Shihab El-Din was appointed to the board whose members provide consultations to the BAS in several fields, he noted. The current board includes 32 high-level members, including 15 Nobel laureates. —KUNA



Adnan Shihab El-Din



Scan & Subscribe KD 20 a year

For Individuals Only



Scan Now

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

Tel: 24833199 Ext: 356-355-353



Myanmar junta chief says will hold elections

Between war and red tape, many Iraqis lack official papers



SAMARA: Mourners gather with priests to lay flowers in memory of more than 89 Russian soldiers that Russia says were killed in a Ukrainian strike on Russian-controlled territory, in Samara. — AFP

Criticism mounts in Russia over strike

Ukrainian deadly missile strike toll rises to 89

MOSCOW: The toll from a Ukrainian New Year's missile strike on a Russian-controlled city in eastern Ukraine rose to 89 on Wednesday, upping pressure on Russia's military leadership. The strike on Makiivka has led to Moscow's biggest admission of loss of life since it sent troops to Ukraine in February 2022 and has been met with anger at home.

The devastation from the strike intensified criticism of army commanders, with even pro-Kremlin commentators suggesting the death toll could be in the hundreds. The deadly strike came after months of discontent towards the military, since the Kremlin launched an unpopular mobilisation drive.

In the early hours of Wednesday, Russia's defence ministry said the death toll had climbed to 89. It announced a commission was working to clarify what happened and vowed that "guilty" officials would be punished. In a video, Lieutenant General Sergei Sevryukov said the tragedy had likely taken place because Russian troops had used cell phones, giving away their location to Ukrainian forces. But some critics have accused the military of trying to shift the blame.

State television military correspondents-whose influence has risen during the offensive-have

accused top commanders of deadly incompetence. The strike also led to a rare public display of grief in some cities, including in the Samara region on the Volga River.

Thousands of people have been killed in Ukraine and millions forced to flee their homes since President Vladimir Putin ordered troops to attack on February 24. Following a wave of Russian strikes on Ukrainian targets, Moscow said Ukraine struck a temporary base in Makiivka at 12:01 am local time on January 1, using US-supplied HIMARS rocket systems.

Putin has not yet commented on the strike, which came shortly after his New Year address in which he hailed Moscow's "heroes" fighting in Ukraine. Kyiv has taken responsibility for the strike and said the toll could be much higher.

'Public dissent'

In a sign that criticism was being taken seriously, the influential head of Russia's state RT television channel Margarita Simonyan welcomed the army's promise that officials "will be held accountable." "I hope that the names of these persons" will be announced, she said.

"It is time to understand that impunity does not lead to social harmony. Impunity leads to new crimes. And, as a result, to public dissent." There have been reports that the servicemen were quartered in an unprotected building which was destroyed because munitions were stored on the premises and detonated in the strike.

The Telegram account Rybar, which has around a million followers, said it was "criminally naive" for the army to store ammunition next to sleeping quarters. The UK's defence ministry said Wednesday that claims of ammunition being stored near where troops slept was a "realistic possibility."

"The Russian military has a record of unsafe ammunition storage," it said in a statement. "This incident highlights how unprofessional practises contribute to Russia's high casualty rate."

'Hero' troops praised

The governor of the Samara region-where some of the servicemen came from-Dmitry Azarov was due to visit the wounded that had been brought to the southern city of Rostov near the Ukraine border.

In comments to local media, he hailed the

"courage" of the troops. "After the shelling soldiers and officers-wounded and with concussions-saved others, pulling comrades from under the rubble," Azarov said. Among the dead were rank-and-file soldiers as well as "representatives of the command staff", he said.

East Ukrainian separatist leader Denis Pushilin also hailed the "heroism" of the troops. "The majority of them, after barely getting out of the building hit by American HIMARS and regaining consciousness, returned back to pull out their comrades," Pushilin said on Telegram.

As Moscow grappled with the aftermath of the Makiivka strike, authorities in Russia-annexed Crimea as well as the southern Rostov region said drones had been shot down over their territories. The governor of the Rostov region Vasily Golubev said the region's air defence systems went off in a village outside the major city of Rostov-on-Don.

In Samara, some 200 people gathered on Tuesday to mourn the Makiivka troops as an Orthodox priest recited a prayer. Ekaterina Kolotovkina, head of a group of army spouses, called for revenge. "We will crush the enemy together. We are left with no choice." — AFP

Biden touts bridge over troubled US

WASHINGTON: Joe Biden has yet to formally announce his re-election bid, but a trip to Kentucky on Wednesday will neatly encapsulate the expected pitch: A Democratic president building bridges-literal and figurative-at a time when Republicans can't even agree among themselves. Biden will cut a relatively serene figure when he flies into Covington, Kentucky, leaving behind the mess of a right-wing rebellion in Republican ranks as the opposition party takes over the House of Representatives and struggles to agree on a speaker.

The Democrat is not just visiting enemy political territory. He will be spending the day with the most senior Republican senator, Mitch McConnell-a gesture near unheard of in today's super-partisan Washington politics. The reason for their get-together has the kind of symbolism that would not look out of place in a political love story: Celebrating the \$1.6 billion replacement of the Brent Spence Bridge-funded in a historic infrastructure spending package that passed with rare Republican support.

McConnell is despised by more liberal Democrats, but his work in getting those

Republican votes to join the other side in the Senate showed that bipartisanship is not entirely dead. And that is fuel for Biden's message that as a veteran former senator and natural centrist he remains the right leader for a country driven to extremes by Donald Trump and his current congressional acolytes. That message got Biden elected in 2020 and will be at the center of a re-election campaign if he does run-something he is widely expected to announce in the coming weeks.

Bridge over troubled country

Asked about the Kentucky trip, Biden played down the aspect of his frenemy relationship with McConnell. "Everybody is talking about how significant it is. It has nothing to do about our relationship," Biden said this week.

He is well aware, though, of the power in reaching out publicly to someone he has debated across the aisle over a decades-long career. As he said at another event they both attended in February, "Mitch, I don't want to hurt your reputation, but we really are friends."

As for the bridge, that and other big projects sprouting around the country thanks to the infrastructure package, will be exhibit number one in the expected re-election effort. Biden wants Americans to see him as a president who gets things done. "It's a giant bridge, man. It's a lot of money," he said, when asked why he was visiting Covington. And bridges, of course, cross divides. "When we think about infrastructure, it is connecting communities," White House



COVINGTON: File photo shows US Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, Republican of Kentucky, arrives at his office in the US Capitol in Washington. —AFP

Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said. "He was clear on the campaign trail that... he's willing to work with Republicans who are willing to continue to deliver for the American people," she said. "It can highlight that we do big, profound things for the country when we work together." — AFP

19 killed in central Somalia car bombings

MOGADISHU: Nineteen people have been killed in twin car bombings in central Somalia claimed by Al-Shabaab, a local militia commander in the Hiran region said. Two cars packed with explosives were simultaneously detonated in Mahas, a town in Hiran where a major offensive was launched last year against the Al-Qaeda-linked militant group.

The attack was claimed by Al-Shabaab, which has been waging a years-long insurgency against the fragile central government, according to the SITE monitoring group.

"Nineteen people, including members of the security forces and civilians, died in the blasts," said Mohamed Moalim Adan, a leader of a community militia allied with the government in Mahas. Abdikarim Hassan, a traditional elder in Mahas, said "nearly 20 people died in the blasts" and most were civilians.

Another community leader, Mohamud Suleyman, said 52 people were wounded and "most were transported to Mogadishu for treatment." Security officials and local leaders said two military bases were targeted in Mahas in retaliation for operations against the militants.

Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility in a statement issued by its media unit, saying fighters had detonated explosives at military bases in Mahas and also attacked another base in Dadan 'Ad, about 17 kilometres (10 miles) away, according to SITE.

"The terrorists, after having (been) defeated, resorted to desperately targeting civilians, but this will not stop the will of the people to continue defeating them," said Osman Nur, a police commander in Mahas.

Somalia's President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud has declared "all-out war" against Al-Shabaab, which has been waging a bloody insurgency against the frail internationally-backed federal government for 15 years.

In July, local clan militias known as "Macawisley" launched a revolt against Al-Shabaab in parts of central Somalia, and Mohamud sent in troops in September to support the fight-back. In recent months, the army and the militias have retaken swathes of territory in the central states of Galmudug and Hirshabelle (where Hiran is located) in an operation backed by US air strikes and an African Union (AU) force known as ATMIS. — AFP

'Brutal' storm bears down on California

LOS ANGELES: Some "brutal" weather was bearing down on California on Tuesday, with forecasters warning torrential rain and widespread flooding this week could prove deadly. The usually parched west of the United States has been walloped by a series of storms over recent weeks that have lashed the coast, bringing near-record rainfall to some parts.

Now a huge system is set to roll in from the Pacific Ocean over Wednesday and Thursday, with meteorologists saying anyone living in its path needs to be prepared. "This will likely be one of the most impactful systems on a widespread scale that this meteorologist has seen in a long while," one

National Weather Service (NWS) forecaster wrote. "The impacts will include widespread flooding, roads washing out, hillside collapsing, trees down (potentially full groves), widespread power outages, immediate disruption to commerce and the worst of all, likely loss of human life."

"This is truly a brutal system that we are looking at and needs to be taken seriously." Parts of northern California are already reeling from a powerful storm that hit on New Year's Eve, causing landslides and power outages, as levees were breached and roadways were flooded.

At least one person is known to have died after being trapped in a submerged car. San Francisco recorded almost 5.5 inches (14 centimeters) of rain on December 31, the second wettest day for the city in recorded history.

Light rain was falling in the region Tuesday, expected to turn heavy on Wednesday, with up to five inches forecast around Sacramento, the NWS said. "A strong storm system & atmospheric river will bring widespread moderate to heavy rainfall &

International

Between war and red tape, many Iraqis lack official papers

Absence of civil status documents obstructs access to basic services

MOSUL: Married for over a decade, Alia Abdel-Razak is one of a million Iraqis deprived of crucial civil status documents, often caught in legal limbo in a country paralysed by bureaucracy and the ravages of war.

The 37-year-old has to overcome countless hurdles just to get her children into school, and she cannot register her family to obtain the food subsidies she and her husband so desperately need.

A mother of four, Abdel-Razak relies on a pro-bono lawyer from aid group the International Rescue Committee (IRC) to help her navigate the labyrinthine processes required to get her papers in order.

Like many others, she struggles with endless red tape — but also the fallout from the country’s gruelling battle to defeat the Islamic State group — to obtain documents like marriage and birth certificates. “I don’t have the means, lawyers want \$300-500. Where can I get this money when I don’t even have enough to eat?” she told AFP.

Her dilapidated Mosul apartment bears witness to her daily struggle, with its bare concrete floors and broken windows patched up with cardboard.

She was married in 2012 and gave birth to her first daughter a year later. But in 2014, IS seized Mosul and declared it the capital of its “caliphate”,

driving out local officials in favour of their own administration.

‘Restricted freedom’

The absence of civil status documents obstructs access to basic services such as “education, healthcare, and social security benefits”, according to the United Nations refugee agency UNHCR.

It can also “lead to restricted freedom of movement, increased risk of arrest and detention”, the agency says. Abdel-Razak’s lawyer has launched a legal process to have her marriage and children officially recognised, with a decision expected in January.

In the meantime, they have scored one small victory — at nearly 10 years old, her firstborn Nazek has just joined school for the first time. But to obtain some of the documents requested by the judge, it took three visits just to get the intelligence services’ seal on some papers. One major hurdle has been the fact that her jailed brother is accused of having ties with IS.

According to the UN, one million Iraqis are living with at least one missing civil status document in a country still struggling to recover five years on from IS’ defeat back in 2017.

Marriage contracts agreed under the jihadist group’s rule have yet to be recognised, along with the children born

out of these unions.

On top of that, many of the civil bureaus that kept such documentation on record were destroyed when IS rose to power or in the years-long battle to drive the jihadists out, according to the spokesman for the Ministry of Migration and Displaced Persons.

In cooperation with the interior ministry, his ministry coordinates mobile missions in camps to allow displaced people to obtain their missing documents, Ali Jahangir said.

IRC communications coordinator, Jordan Lesser-Roy, pointed to the work of non-governmental organisations in raising awareness among state bodies and reducing the waiting time for such paperwork. “You need mayoral approval for these processes... and then of course you need policy change,” she said, calling for budget increases to the Civil Affairs Directorate and for more “mobile missions”.

‘I can’t go anywhere’

In a report published in September, aid groups including the IRC pointed to the added complexities faced by families “with perceived ISIS affiliation”. To obtain a birth certificate, mothers must provide DNA samples from up to three male relatives, and these documents can only be obtained in Baghdad.



MOSUL: Hussein Adnan (L) who lost his ID card while fleeing the battle against the Islamic State (IS) group in 2017, is pictured in the offices of the International Rescue Committee (IRC) in Iraq’s northern city of Mosul. —AFP

They must also provide “evidence of the whereabouts of the child’s father in the form of a death certificate or evidence of incarceration”.

This is “an impossibility for many households where the head of household died or disappeared during the conflict”, according to the report.

Hussein Adnan, 23, lost his ID card while fleeing the battle against IS in

2017. He was subsequently arrested and spent five months in detention before he was declared innocent. He was married and had a son under the jihadist group’s reign.

With the help of an IRC lawyer, Adnan was able to obtain a divorce after having his marriage and his six-year-old recognised, though he has yet to obtain a birth certificate for his son. —AFP

Turkey hosts Syria oppn after outreach to Assad

ISTANBUL: Turkey on Tuesday hosted the leaders of Syria’s opposition in a bid to assuage their concern following its overtures to Damascus. Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu tweeted images of his meeting in Ankara with the opposition Syrian National Council chief Mahmut al-Maslat and other leaders.

The talks came less than a week after the defence chiefs of Turkey and Syria held landmarks negotiations in Moscow-the first such meeting since 2011. “We reiterated our support to the Syrian opposition and people in accordance with UNSC Resolution 2254,” Cavusoglu said in reference to a 2015 United Nations call for a ceasefire and political settlement in Syria.

Ankara became a sworn enemy of Damascus when it began backing rebel efforts to topple President Bashar al-Assad at the start of the Syrian civil war 12 years ago. But Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan-who called Assad a “terrorist” in 2017 — has opened up to the idea of meeting the Syrian leader.

Erdogan has suggested that the talks between the defence chiefs be followed up by a meeting between the foreign ministers that could set up a potential presidential summit. Cavusoglu said he expects to meet his Syrian counterpart Faisal Mekdad in Moscow in the second half of January. But Assad’s regime appears cool to Erdogan’s out-



AL-BAB, SYRIA: Turkey-backed Syrian fighters deploy in vehicles in al-Bab in the northern rebel-held part of Syria’s Aleppo province. —AFP

reach efforts. Some analysts believe that Assad will not agree to meet Erdogan before Turkey holds a general election-now scheduled for no later than June. Erdogan’s foreign policy adviser Ibrahim Kalin said it was “too early to say right now” when the two presidents might meet.

“How all of this unfolds depends on the regime’s attitude,” Kalin told NTV television. “Turkey has extended its hand. We do not think that they will leave this hand hanging.” Erdogan’s hopes for talks with Assad follow calls from Turkey’s main opposition party for Ankara to pull back its troops from Syria and make peace with Damascus. —AFP

US resumes full immigrant visa service in Cuba

HAVANA: Five years after it was closed due to mysterious “sonic attacks” on diplomatic staff, the US consulate in Havana resumes full immigrant visa services for Cubans on Wednesday. The reopening comes amid a record exodus from the communist island to the United States, mainly by undocumented migrants, as Cuba suffers its worst economic crisis in 30 years.

“The United States is working to ensure safe, legal, and orderly migration of Cubans by expanding consular operations in Havana and restarting the Cuban Family Reunification Parole Program (CFRP),” the embassy said in a statement last week. The consulate would open fully for “immigrant visa processing,” though tourist visas remain off limits for now.

The consulate was closed under the Donald Trump administration after diplomatic staff and their families fell ill with symptoms later nicknamed Havana Syndrome. US missions in other countries also subsequently claimed to have been targeted, but the exact nature of the alleged attacks remains a mystery. The closure of the consulate meant that Cubans seeking to travel to the United States faced an expensive administrative obstacle course. They had to travel to a third country, usually Guyana in the north of South America, to submit visa requests.

Reducing nitrogen use key to human, planetary health

PARIS: Better management of nitrogen-rich fertilizers through alternating crops, optimizing use and other measures can yield huge environmental and health benefits, but must boost food production at the same time, researchers warned Wednesday. Reducing nitrogen pollution from global croplands is a “grand challenge,” the group of international researchers said in a study in Nature outlining a dozen urgently-needed reforms.

The intensive use of chemical fertilizers helped fuel the four-fold expansion of the human population over the last century, and will be crucial for feeding 10 billion people by 2050. But the bumper crops of what was once called the Green Revolution have come at a terrible cost. Today, more than half the nitrogen in fertilizers seeps into the air and water, leading to deadly pollution, soil acidification, climate change, ozone depletion and biodiversity loss.

“Given the multiple health, climate and environmental impacts of reactive nitrogen, it has to be reduced in all the mediums such as air and water,” lead author Baojing Gu, a professor at Zhejiang University, told AFP. The benefits of doing so far outstrip the costs, he added.

Nitrogen cycle

The world is naturally awash in nitrogen, which is critical for the survival of all life on Earth, especially plants. Nearly 80 percent of Earth’s atmosphere is nitrogen, albeit in a gaseous form (N2) of little direct use to most organisms. It is made available to plants when microbes that live within plants or soils turn it into ammonia through biological nitrogen fixation. This process funnels some 200 million tons of nitrogen into the soil and oceans every year.

Various forms of the element are eventually transformed and find their way back into the atmosphere

with the help of bacteria, especially in wetlands, and after leaching into the oceans or being burned. But this natural “nitrogen cycle” has been massively imbalanced by the use of some 120 million tons of chemical fertilizer each year, according to the study.

Less than half of that input is actually absorbed by plants, with the rest seeping into the environment and causing a constellation of problems. Researchers led by Gu analyzed over 1,500 field observations from croplands around the world and identified 11 key measures to decrease nitrogen losses while still enhancing crop yields. One such method is crop rotation where a variety of crops are planted on the same plot of land, optimizing the flow of nutrients in the soil.

Benefits outweigh costs

The benefits of slashing agricultural nitrogen pollution are some 25 times higher than the implementation costs of about \$34 billion, they found. For China and India - whose extensive and intensive use of fertilizer make them the world’s top nitrogen polluters - that cost would be about \$5 and \$3 billion, respectively. Nearly half-a-trillion dollars in avoided costs are spread across reduced premature deaths from air pollution, less damage to ecosystem services and increased crop yields.

But the proposed measure could have a negative impact on the fight against climate change. “Basically, the impact of nitrogen management on climate change is neutral, or slightly damages the climate due to the reduction of carbon sequestration in ecosystems,” Gu told AFP. Even with out-sized benefits, advanced nitrogen management has up-front costs that would be beyond the reach of many smallholder farmers without the backing of strong government policies.

A nitrogen-credit-system, for example, could subsidize farmers who adopt advanced nitrogen management techniques, drawing from the economic benefits of reduced nitrogen pollution and increased food supply. To initiate this virtuous circle, a financial budget could be secured by taxing food consumers or enterprises that use farming for commercial food production, or by taxing polluting activities and products. — AFP

Trump calls to back McCarthy...

Continued from Page 1

222-212 Republican majority after last year’s midterm elections. But he failed to bring into line the party rebels, including several high-profile allies of former president Trump, and he was rocked by 19 “no” votes from his own side in each of the first two rounds, rising to 20 in the third.

The House was adjourned on Tuesday and was expected to hold further ballots on Wednesday until someone emerges with a majority - and it is not out of the question that a new candidate could come to the fore. One roadblock to McCarthy’s anointment was the perception by some on his party’s right wing that he is insufficiently loyal to Trump, who is running for the White House again after losing to

Graft pushes Iraq properties...

Continued on Page 6

land and buildings”. Baghdad’s municipality is blunt about the cause of property price rises. “The increase in real estate prices is not linked to the market, it is linked to the mafias and money laundering,” spokesman Mohammed Al-Rabie said. “Poor planning” by previous governments and a lack of investment in housing were also factors, he added.

The violence that devastated Iraq following the US-led 2003 invasion to topple Saddam Hussein meant real estate prices in Baghdad tumbled, or at best stagnated. Many investors preferred to purchase property in the autonomous Kurdish areas of the country’s north, or even in neighboring Turkey. But in recent years, the metropolis of nine million inhabitants has returned to relative stability. Baghdad’s property market is now on the rise.

In the commercial district of Karrada, where old crumbling brick villas stand beside gleaming new build-

ings, the price per square meter once stood at around \$1,200 to \$1,700, said estate agent Samer Al-Khafagi. Today, it goes for \$3,000 - and sometimes as high as \$5,000, Khafagi said. “The market is growing,” he said, noting prices have accelerated over the past year.

In the neighboring Jadriya district, popular among Iraq’s economic and political elite, estate agent Hussein Al-Safar said price increases have been “staggering”. “Strong demand” has pushed per meter prices in the area up to \$4,000, and as high as \$8,000 for commercial properties, he said. A corruption scandal in November, where it was announced \$2.5 billion had been stolen from Iraq’s tax authorities, shone a light on the usually opaque dealings of laundered funds. Prime Minister Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani said recovery of the stolen cash was complicated by the fact it had gone into “the purchase of significant real estate in prestigious areas of Baghdad”.

Sajad Jiyad, a fellow at the Century International think tank, reported that “more than \$1 billion” had been used to buy 55 properties in Baghdad, while another \$1 billion funded “other property, land and other assets”. The government recently announced ambitions to build low-cost housing for Iraq’s poorest citizens, with around one million Baghdad residents estimated to live in informal settlements. — AFP

International

Myanmar junta chief says will hold 'free and fair' elections

Junta marks Myanmar independence with show of force

NAYPYIDAW: Myanmar's junta said it would hold "free and fair" multiparty elections as it marked Independence Day on Wednesday, days after increasing democracy figurehead Aung San Suu Kyi's jail term to 33 years. Swaths of the Southeast Asian country have been engulfed by fighting between junta troops and anti-coup rebels since the military seized power almost two years ago.

The junta, which recently wrapped up a series of closed-court trials of Suu Kyi, is preparing for fresh elections later this year that the United States has said would be a "sham". "Upon accomplishing the provisions of the state of emergency, free and fair elections will be held in line with the 2008 constitution," junta chief Min Aung Hlaing told troops and supporters in Naypyidaw. The junta-imposed state of emergency is due to expire at the end of January, after which the constitution states authorities must set in motion plans to hold fresh elections. The junta chief gave no timetable for any election.

Myanmar's military has made unsubstantiated allegations of massive voter fraud during elections in November 2020, which were won resoundingly by Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy, as a reason for its coup. International observers said at the time the polls were largely free and fair.

The junta-appointed election commission was meeting with political parties for discussions on "the proportional representation electoral system", Min Aung Hlaing said, without giving further details. Analysts say the junta may scrap the first-past-the-post system that saw Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy win sweeping majorities in 2020 and 2015.

Tanks, jets

Tanks, missile launchers and armoured cars rolled through the dawn air to a parade ground in the capital



NAYPYIDAW: Myanmar's military chief Min Aung Hlaing stands in a car as he oversees a military display at a parade ground to mark the country's Independence Day in Naypyidaw on January 4, 2023. — AFP

Naypyidaw in a military display marking 75 years since Myanmar gained independence from Britain. Civil servants and high school students followed the troops, accompanied by a military band as 750 "peace" doves were released to mark the occasion, according to state media. The junta—which regularly marks holidays with prisoner amnesties—later announced 7,012 prisoners would be freed, without specifying whether the amnesty would include those jailed as part of its crackdown on dissent.

Those convicted of crimes including murder, rape, and terrorism would not be eligible, it said, without providing further details. Families later gathered outside Yangon's Insein prison in the hope their loved ones would be freed, local media reported. Junta spokesman Zaw Min Tun did not respond to an AFP request for comment on whether Suu Kyi would be moved from her prison to house arrest as part of the amnesty. "We are still collecting information, and have no details yet for how many political prisoners were

released," said Bo Kyi, joint secretary from local monitoring group Assistance Association for Political Prisoners.

Muted celebrations

Myanmar declared independence from British colonial rule on January 4, 1948, after a long fight championed by General Aung San, the father of ousted civilian leader Suu Kyi. The junta has handed out hundreds of awards and medals to its supporters in the run-up to the event, including to a firebrand monk known for his role in stirring up religious hatred in Myanmar.

Wirathu—dubbed "The Buddhist bin Laden" by Time Magazine in 2013 following deadly communal riots—was awarded the title of "Thiri Pyanchi" on Tuesday, for "outstanding work for the good of the Union of Myanmar". Independence Day is normally marked with festive street games, marches, and gatherings in public parks and spaces. But celebrations of public holidays have been largely muted since the coup as people stay home in protest against the junta.

AFP correspondents said there has been an increased security presence in the commercial hub Yangon, which has been hit by a string of bomb attacks in recent months. Russian President Vladimir Putin, meanwhile, marked the day by sending "sincere greetings", adding that he anticipated the "further development" of relations, according to state-run newspaper Global New Light of Myanmar.

Russia is a major ally and arms supplier of the isolated junta, which has said Moscow's invasion of Ukraine almost a year ago was "justified". Two Sukhoi Su-30 jets and two MiG-29s made a flyby as part of the parade, state media said. More than 13,000 people arrested in the junta's crackdown on dissent remain in detention according to figures published on Tuesday by AAPP. — AFP

Bankrupt S Lanka to hold first polls since crisis

COLOMBO: Crisis-hit Sri Lanka Wednesday announced its first nationwide elections since its president fled and resigned in the face of widespread protests, in what will be a test of popularity for his successor.

Local government polls will be held before the end of February, officials said, after they were delayed by a year due to the pandemic. President Ranil Wickremesinghe, who replaced his deposed predecessor Gotabaya Rajapaksa, faces potential embarrassment in the vote, as he was his party's sole representative in parliament.

Months of acute shortages of food, fuel and electricity since late 2021 led to mass agitation against Rajapaksa's administration which defaulted on the country's \$46 billion external debt in April. The 73-year-old Wickremesinghe, a six-times prime minister, won a parliamentary vote to replace Rajapaksa with the backing of Rajapaksa's SLPP party, but has no popular mandate.

He has reversed tax cuts ordered by his predecessor and raised prices across the board as inflation peaked at a near 70 percent record. Wickremesinghe has also ordered a crackdown against anti-government protests.

At the last local elections in 2018, his United National Party won just 10 percent of the 340 councils, while conceding 231 to the SLPP. He has attempted to stall the polls, saying the bankrupt country cannot afford to spend the 10 billion rupees (\$27.6 million) they would cost, but the independent Election Commission went ahead anyway.

In a brief statement, the Election Commission said nominations for the more than 8,000 councillor positions would be open from January 18 to 21, after which the vote must be held within 28 days. The local polls set for February cannot bring down the current national administration.

Wickremesinghe will gain the power to dissolve the current parliament when it completes half of its five-year term on February 20, but he has shown no indication he wants to go for a snap parliamentary poll. Constitutionally, a presidential election cannot be held till the last quarter of 2024. — AFP

Ex-NATO chief urges democracies to unite during Taiwan visit

TAIPEI: Democracies must join together to resist "advancing autocracies", NATO's former head warned Wednesday during a high-profile visit to Taiwan, which he said must be allowed to decide its own future. Anders Fogh Rasmussen, a former Danish prime minister who served as secretary general of NATO from 2009 to 2014, made the remarks at a meeting with Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen.

"We need to strengthen our fight against, or our attempts to counter, the advancing autocracies," said Rasmussen, founder of the Alliance of Democracies foundation, which hosts an annual democracy summit in Copenhagen.

"The world's democracies represent 60 percent of the global economy, if we can work together, then we are representing a formidable force that will create respect in Beijing and other capitals of autocratic nations".

Taiwan lives under constant threat of invasion by China, which claims the self-ruled democracy as part of its territory to be retaken one day, by force



BEIJING: The national flags of the Philippines and China are seen together near the Tiananmen Gate as Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr visits, in Beijing. — AFP

Beijing, Manila vow to resolve maritime spats

BEIJING: Beijing and Manila on Wednesday vowed to resolve maritime disagreements through consultation, during a visit by Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos to the Chinese capital amid heightened tensions over the hotly disputed South China Sea.

Marcos and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping both called for "friendly consultation to appropriately resolve maritime issues," at a meeting on Wednesday, China's state-owned broadcaster CCTV said.

China and the Philippines are at odds over the South China Sea, with Beijing claiming sovereignty over almost the entire area despite an international court ruling that its claims have no legal basis. The Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia and Brunei have overlapping claims to parts of the sea, and Manila ordered its military last month to boost its presence in the contested waters after a report that China had started

reclaiming several unoccupied land features around the Spratly Islands. Marcos has insisted he will not let China trample on the Philippines' maritime rights in the area, and said before arriving in Beijing that he hoped to address "political security issues of a bilateral and regional nature". Xi on Wednesday told Marcos that China wished to "contribute more positive energy to regional peace and stability" and "promote cooperation on oil and gas development in non-disputed areas," according to CCTV.

The two sides also discussed working together in fields including agriculture and medicine, CCTV reported, and signed a host of agreements for cooperation in infrastructure, fisheries, tourism and other areas. The Philippine government said last week both sides would sign a communication agreement to "avoid miscalculation and miscommunication in the West Philippine Sea", referring to the part of the South China Sea that it claims.

CCTV did not specify if this agreement was among those inked by the leaders on Wednesday. Manila considers it "of primary importance to... strengthen the relationship between China and the Philippines". Marcos said in a meeting earlier on Wednesday with top Chinese legislator Li Zhanshu. — AFP

Top-ranking police in Philippines asked to resign

MANILA: Hundreds of top-ranking police in the Philippines were asked to resign Wednesday as the government seeks to "cleanse" the corruption-tainted force of officers involved in the illegal drug trade. Police have been waging an anti-narcotics campaign launched by former president Rodrigo Duterte and continued by his successor Ferdinand Marcos. Interior Secretary Benjamin Abalos urged all colonels and generals—about 300 in total—to offer "courtesy" resignations after a probe found a "handful" were involved in drugs. They could continue working while their records were assessed by a five-member committee. Those found guilty would have their resignations accepted, Abalos said.

"If you're not involved, there's nothing to worry about," Abalos told a news conference at national police headquarters in Manila. Anyone who did not tender their resignation would be "questionable", he said. Abalos described the approach as radical and a "shortcut" after previous investigations into allegedly corrupt officers took a long time and produced few results.

It is not the first time such drastic measures have been used to clean up the Philippine police force. Former president Fidel Ramos cracked down on police in the early 1990s, ordering all officers over 56 years of age or with more than 30 years of service to resign. The chief of the national police and nine other senior officers resigned as a result.

'The only way'

The latest plan was recommended by police chief General Rodolfo Azurin and other senior officers, Abalos said. Azurin would be among those expected to tender his resignation while his record was checked, he said. "This is the only way to cleanse the ranks in a fast manner," Abalos said.

"It's difficult to fight a war when it's your ally that will shoot you in the back." But Carlos Conde of Human Rights Watch said it was a "preposterous" move and an insult to the memory of the thousands of people killed in the drug war. "It does not serve the cause of justice and accountability—far from it," Conde said.

"What Philippine authorities should be doing is investigate these police officials and file appropriate charges in court if warranted." Police officers have killed thousands of alleged drug dealers and users since mid-2016, but critics say the wealthy and powerful have been largely untouched.

Allegations of police graft and abuse are common in the Philippines, with some officers accused of selling drugs seized in operations. Duterte had pledged to root out deep-seated corruption but repeatedly expressed frustration and anger with the extent of the problem. A security analyst said Abalos was taking a politically safer and less confrontational route to clean up the force.

"If nobody resigns, then he's got all the more justification to start going after corruption via the hard-power route," said Sam Ramos-Jones, director of operations at Philippine Strategic Associates, referring to the courts. While the method would not rid the force of corruption on its own, it could "send the message to lower ranks that what may have been tolerated under previous leadership no longer will be". — AFP



TAIPEI: Handout photo taken and released by Taiwan's Presidential Office on January 4, 2023 show Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen (R) greeting former NATO chief Anders Fogh Rasmussen at the Presidential Office in Taipei. — AFP

if necessary. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has also deepened fears that Beijing might try something similar.

In his remarks to Tsai, Rasmussen said Taiwan had the "right to exist in freedom and peace" as well as the right to decide its own future. President Xi Jinping, China's most assertive leader in a generation, has made clear that what he calls the "reunification" of Taiwan cannot be passed on to future generations.

Last year saw a spike in tensions as Beijing ramped up military pressure and launched its largest war games in decades to protest against a visit by US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi in August. China opposes any official exchanges between other countries and Taiwan and has reacted with increasing anger over visits by Western politicians.

Rasmussen's foundation, which invited Tsai to address its annual democracy summit for three consecutive years from 2020, was sanctioned by Beijing in 2021. In a New Year speech Sunday, Tsai said ramped-up Chinese military activities around Taiwan were "unhelpful" for maintaining relations between the two.

"War has never been an option to solve problems. Only dialogue, cooperation and the common goal of promoting regional stability and development can make more people feel safe and happy," she said. — AFP

THURSDAY, JANUARY 5, 2023

Business



CAIRO: This file long-exposure picture taken on October 24, 2022 shows a view of pedestrians at a street market in Attaba Square in the centre of Egypt's capital Cairo. —AFP

Egyptians hit by soaring food prices

Ukraine war hit Egyptian economy hard amid severe dollar crunch

CAIRO: Public anger has been growing for months in Egypt over a severe dollar crunch and soaring food prices. But for many a money-saving tip from a state body has been the last straw. As families have struggled to purchase household staples, an Egyptian government agency praised an alternative, cheap protein source – “chicken feet, good for the body and the budget”.

The advice drew widespread scorn on social media while lawmaker Karim Al-Sadat slammed it as “divorced from the reality of the crisis”. The anger reflects the hardships of many in the Arab world's most populous nation, which recently had to ask for a \$3 billion loan programme from the International Monetary Fund.

“The bread I used to buy for one Egyptian pound now costs three,” said Rehab, 34, at a Cairo bakery, asking not to be named in full. “My husband makes 6,000 pounds (\$242) a month, which used to last us all month but now runs out in 10 days.” In a country heavily reliant on food imports, prices have also shot up for staples such as cooking oil and legumes, putting the financial squeeze on many of Egypt's 104 million people.

Rationing signs in big supermarkets now warn customers they can each purchase only three bags of rice, two bottles of milk and one bottle of oil. Reda, a 55-year-old civil servant and hospital janitor who provides for her family of 13, said frozen meat had more than doubled in price and is “no longer an option”. “Even with two salaries, there's a lot I just can't buy anymore.”

Scramble for dollars

Egypt's economy was hit hard after Russia's invasion of Ukraine last February unsettled global investors and led them to pull billions out of the North African country. The war sent wheat prices spiralling, heavily impacting Egypt, one of the world's largest grain importers, and piling pressure on its foreign currency reserves. With costs driven up further by soaring global energy prices, official inflation topped 18 percent in November. The central bank twice devalued the pound last year as the foreign

currency crunch saw imported goods worth billions held up at its ports.

Amid the crisis, President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi's government has been looking for foreign currency where it can. Starting this month, tourists will have to pay for train tickets in dollars, said Transport Minister Kamel Al-Wazir. Many banks have limited foreign currency withdrawals and tripled credit card charges. Even the pro-government TV talk show host Amr Adib voiced fury when he urged banks to allow Egyptians abroad to at least “withdraw enough money to take a taxi to the airport so they can come home”.

Suez Canal fund

Egypt has in the past decade tripled its foreign debt to \$157 billion. It has \$33.5 billion in foreign reserves, of which \$28 billion are deposits from its wealthy Gulf allies. The IMF loan program, worth \$3 billion over 46 months, is a drop in the bucket for Cairo whose debt service in 2022-2023 alone amounts to \$42 billion. Ratings agency Moody's ranks Egypt as one of the five countries most at risk

of defaulting on its foreign debt. Egypt's economy has long been dominated by powerful state and military-led enterprises.

“The Egyptian military, on whose support President Sisi is dependent, is the main beneficiary of the debt policy,” said Stephan Roll of the German Institute for International and Security Affairs. External debt has helped “to finance major projects in which they could earn significant money, namely large development projects entrusted to military engineers,” he said.

As such, Roll said, Egypt's foreign debt policy has served to “consolidate the authoritarian regime”. Under IMF pressure, Egypt is now seeking to make headway on some long-delayed privatization schemes. A recent move to create a sovereign fund tied to the Suez Canal raised public fears that Egypt would lose sovereignty over the waterway, a major source of national pride. Authorities were quick to reassure Egyptians that the canal is “not for sale,” while a fund overseen by Sisi himself aims to leverage the canal's revenues to draw in foreign investment. —AFP

CB: Tunisia faces ‘complicated’ 2023 without IMF deal

TUNIS: Tunisia faces a year of low economic growth and runaway inflation, and urgently needs a bailout deal with the International Monetary Fund, its central bank chief said Wednesday. “We need to reach a deal with the IMF as soon as possible to mobilise external finance in the budget” or “2023 will be a complicated year”, Marouane El Abassi told journalists in Tunis.

Tunisia, struggling under debt worth nearly 90 percent of its Gross Domestic Product, reached an agreement in principle with the global lender in mid-October for a bailout package worth around \$2 billion. The IMF's stamp of approval is expected to unlock access to other international sources of credit.

But the North African country's economy is still reeling from the double blow of the COVID pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which has ramped up the price of vital cereal and energy imports. The IMF was originally expected to approve the deal on December 19, but that was delayed.

Asked by AFP, Abassi said the delay had been because the Tunisian budget was not ready. “Now,



TUNIS: Governor of Tunisia's Central Bank Marouane El Abassi speaks during a press conference on January 4, 2023 in Tunis. —AFP

that's done. There's also a law on excessive rates” to stop financial institutions overcharging interest payments, he added.

The IMF has also called for a law restructuring more than 100 state-owned firms, which hold monopolies over many parts of the economy and in many cases are heavily indebted. The law is under discussion and is to be presented to the cabinet, Abassi said, without specifying when. “As soon as it's passed, we will be able to go back to the IMF board,” he said, adding: “The sooner, the better.”

tial foods also rose as reverberations from the war in Ukraine continued to keep high the cost of animal feed, fertilizer and energy.”

Fresh food inflation leapt to 15 per cent for the month from 14.3 per cent in November, while the price of ambient food, such as pasta and tinned food, increased 11 per cent in December against the same month a year earlier. However, non-food shops, such as fashion or homeware retailers, saw inflation slow to 4.4 per cent in December from 4.8 per cent a month earlier due to price cuts.

“Non-food price rises eased as some retailers used discounting to shed excess stock built up during the disruptions to supply chains, meaning some customers were able to bag bargain gifts,” added Ms Dickinson. “The combined impact was that price increases overall plateaued, with the reduction in non-food inflation offsetting the higher food prices.”

“Consumer demand is likely to be weak in Q1 due to the impact of energy price increases and for many, Christmas spending bills starting to arrive,” said Mike Watkins, head of retailer and business insight at NielsenIQ. “So the increase in food inflation is going to put further pressure on household

Abassi defended the central bank's decision to hike its base rate to eight percent, saying it aimed to rein in inflation which he said could hit 11 percent in 2023. Economists have noted that the main sources of inflation in Tunisia are external, particularly spiralling international commodity prices.

But while Abassi admitted the hike could “slow down growth”, he stressed that it was his job to protect the Tunisian dinar. “The bank doesn't have many other tools,” he said. Abassi added that the removal of state subsidies on basic goods, particularly fuels, long demanded by international financial institutions including the IMF, would “raise prices significantly over the next three to four years”.

The Tunisian government on Tuesday presented a three-year development plan that relies heavily on private sector investment, particularly in industry, and boosting phosphate production. The cash-strapped North African country is battling 10 per cent inflation alongside slow growth, high unemployment and shortages of basic goods, exacerbated by the COVID pandemic and the war in Ukraine.

The 2023-2025 plan “puts forward a new model of development” to reset Tunisia's economy and battle poverty, which currently affects around a fifth of the 12 million population, Economy Minister Samir Saïed said. Tunisian authorities are hoping to secure a nearly \$2-billion bailout from the International Monetary Fund they hope will unlock other sources of international financing. —AFP



Elon Musk

Elon Musk loses biggest amount of money in history

SAN FRANCISCO: Tesla chief executive Elon Musk on Tuesday continued to lose wealth at a record-setting pace after a mixed Tesla deliveries report. Musk is now the first person in the world to lose more than \$200 billion, and is projected to lose even more, Bloomberg News reported.

More losses on Tuesday might push Musk further down on the Forbes billionaires list. He is currently in second place ahead of South Asian billionaire Gautam Adani, who leads the Adani Group conglomerate. At the top is Bernard Arnault, owner of luxury goods group LVMH.

Musk's wealth on Tuesday afternoon stood at \$135.6 billion and Adani had \$125.5 billion. The Tesla chief's valuation is being affected by electric vehicle maker's performance in 2022, which ranked among the worst in the benchmark S&P 500 index.

Tesla's shares last traded at \$107.11, and its market value has declined by about \$400 billion since Musk secured financing to buy social media company Twitter. Valued at about \$340 billion, Tesla is still the world's most valuable car maker, even though its production is a fraction of rivals such as Toyota. Tesla delivered 405,278 vehicles in the fourth quarter, short of analysts' estimates of 431,117, according to Refinitiv. For all of 2022, deliveries rose by 40 per cent, missing Musk's 50 per cent annual target. —Agencies



LONDON: Fresh food inflation in the UK leapt to 15 per cent for the month from 14.3 per cent in November.

British food inflation hits record 13.3%

LONDON: Food inflation has accelerated to record levels in the UK, rising to 13.3 per cent in December, up from 12.4 per cent in the previous month. The soaring price of food led to many households experiencing a “challenging Christmas”. There was a slight sign of respite for cash-strapped shoppers, as overall shop price inflation eased slightly to 7.3 per cent for the month, according to the latest data from BRC-NielsenIQ. Although it remains close to record highs, shop price inflation pulled back marginally from 7.4 per cent in November.

“It was a challenging Christmas for many households across the UK,” said Helen Dickinson, chief executive of the British Retail Consortium. “Not only did the cold snap force people to spend more on their energy bills, but the prices of many essen-

budgets and it's unlikely that there will be any improvement in the consumer mindset around personal finances in the near term. “With shoppers having less money to spend on discretionary retail, having paid for their essential groceries, there will be little to stimulate demand across the non-food channels.” —Agencies

Business

‘Fix it’ with money: Nicaraguan migrants run into Honduran graft

Border officials ‘take advantage’ of the plight of desperate Nicaraguans

CHOLUTECA, Honduras: For thousands of Nicaraguans who embark on an odyssey to the United States each year in search of a better life, the first hurdle is dealing with corrupt border agents in neighboring Honduras. Fleeing political and economic turmoil under President Daniel Ortega, dozens depart every day: leaving behind their families, selling off their belongings and entering into debt all for the chance at a new start.

Yesica Centeno, 42, is a trained company administrator, one of vast numbers of Nicaraguans without work or earning paltry wages. She is among dozens of passengers on a bus at the El Guasale border crossing with Honduras. It was a three-hour trip from Managua, the first leg in a two-day or 800-kilometer (nearly 500-mile) journey to Guatemala City.

“It is possible that some of you may have problems with your vaccination certificates or travel documents,” the bus conductor advises passengers. “If this happens, do not argue with the Honduran ‘migra’ (migration agents). Come to find me and I will help you. You already know that everything is solved with money,” said the conductor, who did not want to be named.

Traveling with two children, Centeno, indeed, is informed she cannot enter Honduras due to a problem with her COVID vaccine certificate. “When we arrived at the border with Honduras, we felt ill-treated,” she



CHOLUTECA, Honduras: Nicaraguan migrant Eriselda Soza, 32, uses her cell phone during a journey from the Nicaraguan border to Guatemala in Choluteca, Honduras, on November 23, 2022. — AFP

told AFP after the exchange. “Everything is money... They tell you that for a wrong letter or a number in a document you cannot continue travelling. The only option they give you is to ‘fix it’ with money,” said Centeno.

A quarter of Nicaraguans live in poverty, according to official figures. Central America’s smallest economy has been stuck in a political and economic crisis since 2018, and Ortega has come under fire for increasing

authoritarianism, arresting dozens of political rivals and jailing hundreds of opponents. Border officials “take advantage” of the plight of desperate Nicaraguans, said Centeno.

\$40 each

Twenty of the 36 passengers on the bus end up paying \$40 each to be allowed to enter Honduras, AFP witnessed. For Centeno, the fee was \$120 — \$40 each for her and her two children. Another five passengers had to pay \$100 each for alleged problems with their travel documents. For those who arrive without a COVID vaccine certificate—which is mandatory for entry into Honduras—a “fine” of \$250 opens the door, said one bus passenger, who did not want to give their name.

In total, the officials netted \$1,300 from the passengers, with the bus conductor acting as intermediary. Another 16 buses loaded with Nicaraguan migrants arrived at El Guasale at the same time. According to the US Customs and Border Protection agency (CBP), more than 164,000 Nicaraguans were caught trying to enter the United States without valid travel documents in 2022 — three times more than a year earlier.

‘War on extortion’

Questioned by AFP, Honduran authorities said they

were unaware of irregularities at the border post.

“The National Institute of Migration does not charge for entry into the country, we are against any illegal collection,” spokesman Wilson Gomez said. “If it is established that fees are being charged, the Institute will refer the matter to the public prosecutor’s office for investigation,” he added.

Ortega, who has been in power since 2007, has claimed that US sanctions against his country are to blame for the mass exodus. As well as the president himself, the US has sanctioned more than 30 family members, allies, and companies linked to the government following a brutal 2018 crackdown on anti-government protesters. To get to the United States, where they hope to find asylum and work, the Nicaraguan migrants must cross Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala and then Mexico.

Corruption is a major problem in Honduras. President Xiomara Castro, elected last year, has vowed a “war on extortion” and signed an agreement with the United Nations in New York in December to form a commission to investigate corruption. Her predecessor Juan Orlando Hernandez was extradited to the United States this year on drug-trafficking charges, accused of facilitating the smuggling of 500 tons of cocaine in exchange for millions of dollars in bribes. —AFP



Earth, not concrete, was used to build the Great Wall of China.

Ditching concrete for earth to build a cleaner future

PARIS: It was used to build the Great Wall of China and Spain’s mediaeval Alhambra Palace and now earth is back in vogue as a building material. Climate change has spurred renewed interest in the ancient technique which sees polluting concrete swapped where possible for earth.

For centuries, mud and clay were an abundantly available way to put a roof over one’s head, but earth’s environmental credentials are behind its modern-day resurgence. “A kilo of cement emits a kilo of CO2. Whereas a kilo of earth emits none,” Xavier Chateau of the Navier Laboratory at the French National Centre for Scientific Research said.

“If we could reduce by 25 percent the volume of cement consumed globally it would be equivalent to negating the impact on the climate of all air transport,” he estimated. Known as rammed earth construction, the practice dates at least as far back as the Neolithic era. It involves compacting certain soils into a mold, of sorts, to make building blocks or build up whole walls, layer by layer.

More than two billion people across some 150 countries live in buildings made of earth, according to a 2006 guide on earth building by French authors Hugo Houben and Hubert Guillaud.

Advocates say it can help reduce reliance on concrete, which accounts for about eight percent of global CO2 emissions. Earth also has a high thermal capacity by self-regulating its humidity, is fireproof, non-toxic and can be completely recycled. But it has downsides too, not least the cost, given the need to find builders qualified in ancient techniques.

‘Earth concrete’ hybrid

Confronted with flooding, earth-constructed buildings need protection, as earth also has its weaknesses. A four-storey rammed earth building crumpled in France’s southeastern Rhone region in November, while a house collapsed in the nearby department of Isere on December 22, according to local press reports. Often substances such as lime or straw can be added to the earth to stabilise it and bolster its dura-

bility. French building material firm Saint-Gobain is experimenting with a hybrid system of “earth concrete”, combining excavated earth from construction sites, steel industry waste and hemp. But purists see it as verging on heresy, in a country due to complete a 9,000-seat concert coliseum north of Paris next year using recycled excavated earth.

“It’s not the same material at all,” complains architect Paul-Emmanuel Loiret, who manages La Fabrique outside Paris where blocks and bricks of compressed earth are made from construction rubble. Urging a “complete and rapid decarbonisation” of construction, he complained that EU laws “impose on us materials 10 to 20 times more durable than those which we need.” But, said Chateau: “In Africa, in Burkina Faso or Malawi, it’s become a kind of artisanal savoir-faire to stabilize raw earth with cement at the foot of the building to solve the problem of water” encroachment.

‘Huge demand’

Austria has Europe’s only factory to date making low-energy prefab homes using rammed earth methods. The site, in the western village of Schllins on the Liechtenstein border, creates foundations, floors and walls using chalk, clay, chopped straw, lime or gravel.

A machine pounds the earth which is compacted into a vast casing to produce 40-metre (130-foot) long walls. Once dried and cut to size, the blocks are sent off to be assembled.

“Given the ecological challenge and the problem of energy, huge demand is emerging for this material,” said environmentalist, entrepreneur and former potter Martin Rauch, who built the factory.

Architect Sami Akkach who works with Rauch said they use earth from the surrounding area, building and excavation sites. “It must contain clay, gravel, angular rather than round so it really sticks,” Akkach said. Rauch has several earth-constructed buildings to his name, including his home whose exterior walls include terracotta designed to act as a brake on rain and erosion, a throwback to ancient methods used in Saudi Arabia.

He says the factory boasts Europe’s longest earthen wall-at 67 metres-and he believes the demand is there for more projects using rammed earth.

“The problem is there are not enough artisans and people are still too afraid of this natural material,” he said. He added that hopefully people will realize that “earth structures will last for centuries, if they are built correctly.” — AFP

devastated global air travel. “The extension of suspension seeks to enable the company (to) complete its operational and corporate restructure process,” the Nairobi Securities Exchange said in a statement. The government owns a 48.9 percent stake in Kenya Airways, while Air France-KLM has 7.8 percent.

“I’m willing to sell the whole of Kenya Airways,” Ruto told Bloomberg News last month during his first visit to the United States as Kenyan president.

“I’m not in the business of running an airline that just has a Kenyan flag, that’s not my business,” said Ruto, who reportedly met executives from US carrier Delta Air Lines during the trip.

Kenya Airways’ woes were exacerbated in November when pilots staged a days-long strike that led to hundreds of flight cancellations and thousands of passengers stranded. Kenya Airways shares were

German inflation drops on gas bill subsidy

BERLIN: German inflation eased in December for a second straight month, preliminary data showed Tuesday, as government interventions helped bring down energy prices.

Consumer prices in Europe’s top economy rose 8.6 percent year-on-year, down from 10 percent in November, federal statistics agency Destatis said. The drop, which was bigger than analysts had expected, brings the inflation rate in Germany back to single digits for the first time since August.

The sharp slowdown was partly thanks to a one-off subsidy from the German government covering the December gas bill for households and businesses, Destatis said in a statement. “Due to the December immediate assistance, among other things, the inflation rate was significantly lower than in the previous months,” it said.

For the whole of 2022, German consumer price growth reached 7.9 percent—the highest on record in post-WWII Germany. As in other countries across Europe, Germany’s jump in consumer prices has been fuelled by Russia’s war in Ukraine which has pushed up energy and food prices.

Even though the December inflation rate brings some respite, prices remain “unacceptably high”, said LBBW economist Jens-Oliver Niklasch. And while hopes are growing that Germany has reached peak inflation, government subsidies “can’t be a permanent answer to price pressures”, he added. “The fight against inflation that began last year remains a marathon, not a sprint,” he said.

First LNG shipment

The German government has rolled out a 200-billion-euro (\$211-billion) support package to shield citizens from energy price shocks, including caps on gas and electricity bills throughout 2023. The country, which was heavily reliant on Russian gas before the invasion of Ukraine, has also raced to diversify energy supplies.

Chancellor Olaf Scholz last month inaugurated

Stocks mostly rally but oil slides

NEW YORK: Stock markets mostly extended a New Year rally Wednesday but oil prices slid further as investors weighed China’s reopening moves against its surging COVID cases. Gold prices reached the highest level since June, at \$1,865.12 an ounce, as traders sought safety in the traditional haven commodity. Crude prices slumped 2.6 percent, having plunged more than four percent Tuesday, also owing to a mild European winter and a pick-up in the dollar that makes crude more expensive for holders of other currencies.

In addition, “rising Chinese COVID infections could weigh on demand in the immediate term”, said Warren Patterson at ING Groep. He added that the long-term outlook remained better as growth picked up. China’s shift out of almost three years of zero-COVID has been widely welcomed, but the breakneck speed at which authorities have lifted restrictions has led to an explosion of cases across the



Germany’s first floating LNG terminal in the North Sea port of Wilhelmshaven. The terminal received its first shipment of liquefied natural gas on Tuesday with the arrival of a tanker from the US state of Louisiana, operator Uniper said in a statement.

The ship carried enough gas to supply 50,000 households with energy for a year, it added.

A recent bout of mild winter weather has further boosted Germany’s efforts to conserve gas, easing fears of shortages. The country’s federal network agency said better-than-expected temperatures in late December had helped keep gas storage levels at around 90 percent.



BERLIN: A Berliner compares prices of bread at an outlet in Berlin.

Germany’s inflation slowdown will be closely watched by the European Central Bank, which has sought to rein in soaring prices with a series of aggressive interest rate hikes.

Eurozone inflation is currently running at around 10 percent, five times the ECB’s target. ECB president Christine Lagarde recently said the bank “will succeed” in bringing inflation back down to two percent, setting the stage for further interest rate rises in 2023. —AFP

country, dealing another battering to economic activity.

Analysts said concerns about the impact of the mass outbreak were playing off against optimism that the long-term outlook was positive as infections eventually come down and businesses restart.

Hong Kong led stock market advances Wednesday, while Shanghai enjoyed a second straight day of gains. Tokyo dropped heavily on its first trading day of the year, with Japanese exporters continuing to be hit by a recovering yen. Europe built on a rally Tuesday ahead of Wall Street’s reopening Wednesday and minutes from the Federal Reserve’s December policy meeting, when the US central bank slowed the pace of interest rate hikes but signaled borrowing costs would reach higher than expected. The news scuttled a pre-Christmas rally across world markets, and the minutes will be pored over for clues about policymakers’ plans for this month’s gathering.

There is a broad consensus that the Fed’s tightening measures to tame runaway inflation will tip the United States into recession, while the head of the International Monetary Fund has also warned a third of the global economy will contract this year. —AFP

ment has pumped in millions of dollars to keep it afloat.

Last month, in announcing a new \$447 million loan for Kenya under a 38-month aid program, the International Monetary Fund called for progress on structural reforms in the East African country.

The IMF highlighted that “addressing vulnerabilities” at Kenya Airways as well as the majority state-owned utility Kenya Power was “urgent”. In August, the airline reported a \$81.5 million half-year loss citing high fuel costs, though this was a marked improvement on the \$94.6 million loss in the period the year before. Local media reports, citing a letter from Treasury Cabinet Secretary Njuguna Ndung’u to the IMF at the end of December, said Kenya Airways would get an additional state bailout of about \$280 million in a mini-budget expected this month. — AFP

Shares in Kenya Airways suspended for another year

NAIROBI: Trading in Kenya Airways shares has been suspended for another year, the local stock exchange said Wednesday, as the troubled national carrier battles to return to profitability. Last month, Kenyan President Ruto said the government was ready to sell its entire stake in the airline, which has been languishing deep in the red for years.

Kenya Airways shares have been suspended since July 2020, in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic that

Business

Fears for French baguettes as power prices burn bakers

Bakers alarmed by astronomical electricity bills looming in 2023



BROU, France: In this file photo taken on December 1, 2022, a baker prepares loaves of Baguette bread in a bakery in Brou near Chartres, southwest of Paris. —AFP



PARIS, France: This file photo taken on March 6, 2020, shows baguettes de tradition baked by Taieb Sahal at the Les saveurs de Pierre Demours bakery in Paris. —AFP

BROU, France: Recently described as “250 grams of magic and perfection” by President Emmanuel Macron, the French baguette is at risk from surging energy prices, with some bakers warning they can no longer afford to fire up their ovens. Already struggling with sharp hikes in the price of butter, flour and sugar over the last year and a half, the prized industry is now alarmed by astronomical electricity bills looming in 2023.

“It was absolutely inconceivable to me that a power bill could make me close my shop and stop my life here,” Julien Bernard-Regnard, a distraught baker in the village of Bourgaltroff in eastern France, told AFP by phone. He is still coming to terms with closing his doors for the final time in early December having decided that continuing his business, built up over the last five years, was impossible given the cost of electricity.

“I had to renew my contract at the beginning of September and it increased by three and half times,” he said. His monthly power costs rose from around 400 euros (\$420) a month to nearly 1,500, while shopping around for an alternative supplier brought no relief.

“I’m in lots of online groups with other bakers and on social media. There are bakeries closing every day. Some have bills that are multiplied by 10 or 12. There’s someone else 40 kilometers (25 miles) from me who’s just shut down,” he added. In a country where the availability of crusty daily bread is a political issue fraught with danger for any government, Macron’s cabinet is keen to show it is doing everything possible to safeguard the nation’s 35,000 bread and croissant makers.

State aid

Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne announced Tuesday that bakers with a cashflow problem could ask to delay the payment of their taxes and social charges, while Economy Minister Bruno Le Maire welcomed the national bakers’ federation for talks at his offices. Le Maire acknowledged that the nation’s bread makers were “worried” and some were “in complete despair” just a month after the sector was honored with UNESCO world heritage status.

“At the moment when the French baguette has been given world heritage status by UNESCO, there would be a real paradox in not giving everything possible to

support our bakers who are struggling with the price of electricity and energy in general,” he told reporters. Existing schemes to help the industry, including direct state aid and a mechanism enabling them to demand a reduction in their electricity bill from suppliers, could help reduce the power costs for many businesses by around 40 percent, Le Maire said. “At the moment unfortunately, this is not widely known,” he added at a press conference in which he also criticized energy suppliers for not playing their part. Although France has capped electricity prices for consumers, limiting rises to four percent in 2022 and 15 percent in 2023, no such protection exists for businesses.

Meanwhile, cut-throat competition from supermarkets means bakeries are unable to pass on major price increases to customers.

Loss to community

Bernard-Regnard was dismissive of government pledges and said he was “fed up with the propaganda”, saying that red tape and the complicated application procedure for aid meant he had been entitled to “zero” help. “I’m furious. The life of a baker is hard.

We don’t have a life, no Sundays, no holidays, you don’t see your children grow up, but we do it with passion. At some point though, you have to stop taking us for idiots,” he said.

His biggest regret is letting down his regular clients in Bourgaltroff who now face a drive of 12-15 kilometers to fetch their daily bread. “What makes me most sad is the old people. A lot of them don’t have a driving license and live on their own. They told me that coming to the shop was the ray of sunlight in their day because they didn’t see anyone else,” he told AFP.

Large parts of the French countryside have been in decline for the last half century, with shrinking and ageing populations leading to the progressive closure of shops and local public services.

In many villages like Bourgaltroff, the local bakery is the last surviving business, also selling cigarettes and lottery tickets as well as serving as a meeting place, Bernard-Regnard says his days of waking at 2 am to start his routines and finishing his working day at 8 pm are over-in France at least. “I might go abroad where you are recognized for your true value,” he said. —AFP

US regulators warn banks over crypto risks

NEW YORK: US bank regulators warned Tuesday that crypto assets and exposure present risks to lenders, urging organizations to ensure they manage the dangers.

The joint statement comes after the sudden collapse of cryptocurrency platform FTX-worth \$32 billion before it filed for bankruptcy in November-which sent chills across the sector.

FTX’s disgraced founder Sam Bankman-Fried has since been accused of committing one of the biggest financial frauds in US history, sparking calls for greater oversight. “It is important that risks related to the crypto-asset sector that cannot be mitigated or controlled do not migrate to the banking system,” said the Federal Reserve, Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation and Office of the Comptroller of the Currency.

They added in a joint statement that events of the past year “have been marked by significant volatility and the exposure of vulnerabilities in the crypto-asset sector.”

Banking organizations should be aware of risks such as fraud and scams, along with inaccurate or misleading disclosures, the agencies said. There is also “significant volatility” in crypto-asset markets, and contagion risk in the sector due to connections between parties-including through opaque lending, investing or funding.

The watchdogs said they continue to take a “careful and cautious approach” with crypto activities and exposure at banking organizations. Meanwhile, lenders should “ensure appropriate risk management” such as board oversight and guardrails to identify and manage threats, the statement said.

FTX’s implosion was swift following a November 2 media report on ties between it and Alameda, a trading company also controlled by Bankman-Fried. The report exposed that Alameda’s balance sheet was heavily built on the FTT currency—a token created by FTX with no independent value—and exposed Bankman-Fried’s companies as being dangerously interlinked. —AFP

DHAMAN continues its recruitment drive for hospitals

KUWAIT: Health Assurance Hospitals Company (DHAMAN) announced the continuation of its recruitment campaign to attract and hire medical, administrative, and technical competencies for DHAMAN hospitals in Ahmadi and Jahra governorates, as part of its preparations to complete the activation of its health network expected this year.

In this context, Corporate Director of Communications and Marketing Shuaa Alqati stated that the company has developed an integrated recruitment plan to appoint the necessary medical, technical and administrative staff to operate hospitals from various medical specialties and professional fields in the healthcare sector, stressing that with DHAMAN approaching the stage of actual operation of its health network, it is keen to attracting competencies from inside and outside Kuwait, including new graduates and those with long experience.

Alqati indicated that upon the completion and activation of DHAMAN network, about 7,000 jobs will be created in the health sector during the next five years, and it is expected that citizens will repre-

sent 15 percent of them at the beginning, a percentage that shall gradually increase to reach 25 percent of the total number of staff.

She added that “DHAMAN will complete the required recruitment plan during the current year, as it includes a number of activities and events to introduce the company and its activities, including participation in various job fairs and coordination with universities and governmental and private educational and training institutions to provide suitable job opportunities for young graduates.”

“DHAMAN is also currently coordinating with various embassies and specialized companies to organize recruitment campaigns from abroad and to attract the best competencies and qualified persons to fill the general and specialized medical positions in the hospitals, thus contributing to providing the highest levels of service to patients in DHAMAN hospitals and primary healthcare centers”, Alqati added. She continued to say that DHAMAN is also planning to establish a health academy to train and qualify medical competencies, which will contribute to providing the medical sector with local medical personnel and reduce the size of the current deficit in this sector. She pointed out that the goal of providing and developing job opportunities in the medical sector is one of the most important goals of the company as stipulated by the government in the development plan and in its vision to establish DHAMAN as an

important and essential support for the Ministry of Health in raising health performance indicators and achieving a quantum leap for the healthcare sector in Kuwait, by restructuring health services, and establishing an administratively, medically and technologically modern and advanced health network.

DHAMAN is deemed the first healthcare company in the Middle East created in partnership between the public and private sectors (PPP), and the largest company in Kuwait in terms of the number of individuals covered by health insurance coverage, as it provides the new compulsory health assurance for 1.8 million residents working in the private sector (Residency Article 18 and their families), through an integrated healthcare network of centers and hospitals throughout Kuwait that includes health assurance programs.

Alqati explained that DHAMAN will apply a set of approved standards and controls related to reviewing the qualifications of all applicants and conduct interviews in the coming period, inviting those wishing to join DHAMAN to apply through the company’s employment website (careers.dhaman.co).



Shuaa Alqati

Ant Group gets nod for \$1.5bn fundraising plan

BEIJING: Chinese authorities have given approval to Jack Ma’s Ant Group to raise 10.5 billion yuan (\$1.5 billion) for its consumer finance arm, in a sign that Beijing may be loosening its grip on the fintech giant. An office of the China Banking and Insurance Regulatory Commission in the southwestern city of Chongqing will let the firm raise its registered capital from eight billion yuan to 18.5 billion yuan, according to a notice issued on December 30.

After the deal goes through, Ant-in which ecommerce titan Alibaba has a stake-will have contributed a total of 9.25 billion yuan and control half of its shares. A unit owned by the eastern

city of Hangzhou will become the second-largest shareholder with a 10 percent stake, the notice said.

It added that Ant is required to “complete the relevant statutory proceedings” within six months of receiving the authorization. Chinese authorities have cracked down on major technology firms in recent years, and in 2020 pulled Ant’s planned initial public offering in Hong Kong at the last minute. The listing would have been a world record at the time.

Beijing also hit Alibaba, which Ma co-founded and formerly headed, with a record \$2.75 billion fine for alleged unfair practices. News of China’s agreement to the fundraising sent shares in Alibaba soaring almost nine percent in Hong Kong trading, while other tech firms were also boosted on hopes the sector crackdown could be winding down. JD.com jumped more than six percent and XD was up almost eight percent. Alibaba did not release full sales figures for China’s



HANGZHOU, China: This file photo taken on October 13, 2020 shows the Ant Group headquarters in Hangzhou, in China’s eastern Zhejiang province. Chinese authorities have given approval to Jack Ma’s Ant Group to raise 10.5 billion yuan (\$1.5 billion) for its consumer finance arm. —AFP

Singles Day shopping bonanza in November, a period when consumers typically flock to snap up bargains on its Taobao and Tmall e-commerce platforms. The company said instead that sales were flat from 2021. —AFP

Germany misses 2022 climate target on Ukraine war fallout

BERLIN: Germany used more renewable energy than ever in 2022 but again failed to reach its CO2-reduction goal as Russia’s war in Ukraine prompted a return to more coal and oil use, a think tank reported Wednesday. Europe’s biggest economy

emitted 761 million tons of greenhouse gases last year, just one ton fewer than in 2021 and overshooting the target of 756 million tons, the energy think tank Agora Energiewende said in a statement.

“CO2 emissions are stagnating at a high level, despite significantly lower energy consumption by households and industry,” said Agora’s Germany director Simon Mueller. “This is an alarm signal with regard to climate targets,” he added.

The German government had aimed to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 40 percent by 2020 compared with 1990 levels, but has yet to achieve the feat. For 2022, Germany managed a 39-percent

reduction from 1990 levels, Agora calculated. The setback comes despite a record 4.7 percent drop in energy consumption last year, partly in response to soaring fuel prices because of the war in Ukraine.

But the energy saving gains were wiped out by the government’s decision to burn more coal and oil to make up for the loss of Russian natural gas deliveries, Agora said. The turn to fossil fuels also overshadowed another milestone: renewables accounted for 46 percent of Germany’s power supply mix last year, an all-time high. The increase was mainly down to favorable weather conditions for wind and solar power, Agora said.

Chancellor Olaf Scholz has stressed repeatedly that the return to fossil fuels is a temporary measure sparked by an energy crisis, and that his government remains committed to combating global warming.

Germany still aims to phase out coal-fired power plants by 2030 and become carbon neutral by 2045.

But Agora said Berlin needed to drastically ramp up the expansion of renewables this year. To meet key targets set for 2030, Germany would have to double its solar energy production and more than triple wind power capacity. —AFP

Threatened with extinction

More than 42,100 species, 28% of those assessed on the IUCN Red List, are threatened with extinction; here we introduce a gallery of 18 vulnerable or endangered species

Cuban Crocodile
Crocodylus rhombifer



CRITICALLY ENDANGERED
Location: Freshwater wetlands, Cuba

Yangtze Finless Porpoise
Neophocaena asiaeorientalis



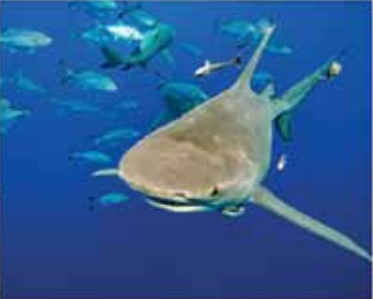
CRITICALLY ENDANGERED
Yangtze River, China

Bali Myna
Leucopsar rothschildi



CRITICALLY ENDANGERED
Bali island, Indonesia

Lemon shark
Negaprion brevirostris



VULNERABLE
Coastal edges of the Atlantic, Caribbean, Gulf of Mexico

Tasmanian devil
Sarcophilus harrisii



ENDANGERED
Tasmania, Australia

Balkan lynx
Lynx lynx ssp. balcanicus



CRITICALLY ENDANGERED
Albania, North Macedonia, Serbia

Titicaca Water Frog
Telmatobius culeus



ENDANGERED
Lake Titicaca, Bolivia and Peru

Egyptian vulture
Neophron percnopterus



ENDANGERED
Central & N. Africa, Middle East, India, Mediterranean

Mountain gazelle
Gazella gazella



ENDANGERED
Israel, West Bank

Pygmy Hog
Porcula salvania



ENDANGERED
India, possibly Bhutan

Large-antlered Muntjac
Muntiacus vuquangensis



CRITICALLY ENDANGERED
Annamite mountain range, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam

Iberian Lynx
Lynx pardinus



ENDANGERED
Spain

Javan Slow Loris
Nycticebus javanicus



CRITICALLY ENDANGERED
Java island, Indonesia

Grand Cayman Blue Iguana
Cyclura lewisi



ENDANGERED
Cayman Islands

Black Crested Macaque
Macaca nigra



CRITICALLY ENDANGERED
Sulawesi and Pulau Bacan islands, Indonesia

Slender-horned gazelle
Gazella leptoceros



ENDANGERED
Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia

Mucuchies' Frog
Aromobates zippeli



CRITICALLY ENDANGERED
Mucuchies, Venezuelan Andes

American manatee
Trichechus manatus



VULNERABLE
West Atlantic, Caribbean, Gulf of Mexico shoreline

Source: IUCN Red List



CORAL BLEACHING CAUSING ‘UNNECESSARY’ FISH FIGHTS

Fish that have lost food due to mass coral bleaching are getting into more unnecessary fights, causing them to expend precious energy and potentially threatening their survival, new research said Wednesday. With the future of the world's coral reefs threatened by climate change, a team of researchers studied how a mass bleaching event affected 38 species of butterflyfish.



In this file photo Orange-spine unicornfish (*Naso lituratus*), also known as barcheek unicornfish or naso tang, swims by a coral reef off the dive spot of Abu Dabbab along Egypt's southern Red Sea coast north of Marsa Alam.

The colorfully patterned reef fish are the first to feel the effect of bleaching because they eat coral, so their "food source is hugely diminished really quickly", said Sally Keith, a marine ecologist at

Britain's Lancaster University. Keith and her colleagues had no idea a mass bleaching event was coming when they first studied the fish at 17 reefs off Japan, the Philippines, Indonesia and Christmas Island.

But when one of history's worst global bleaching events struck in 2016, it offered "the perfect opportunity" to study how it affected the fish's behavior, Keith told



This file photo shows the current condition of the coral on the Great Barrier Reef, off the coast of the Australian state of Queensland.

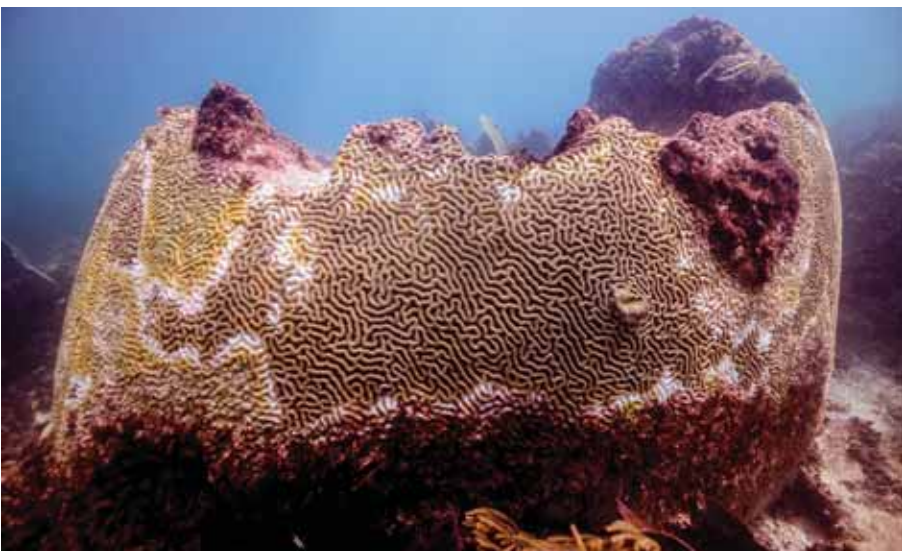
AFP. The researchers returned within a year and were "shocked" to see the devastation of the once beautiful reefs, she said. Donning their snorkels or scuba gear, the team watched the fish "swimming around looking for food that just isn't

there anymore," she added. "There was a bit of crying in our masks."

Losing battle

The bleaching particularly affected Acropora coral, the main food source for the butterflyfish. That "changed the playing field of who's eating what," Keith said, putting different species of butterflyfish in increased competition for other types of coral. When a butterflyfish wants to signal to a competitor that a particular bit of coral is theirs, they point their noses down and raise their spiny dorsal fins. "It's almost like raising your hackles," Keith said. If that fails, one fish will chase the other, usually until the other gives up. "I followed one for about 50 meters (165 feet) once, that was quite tiring, they're very fast," Keith said.

The team observed 3,700 encounters between butterflyfish. Before the coral bleaching event, different species of butterflyfish were able to resolve disputes using signalling around 28 percent of the time. But that number fell to just 10 percent after the bleaching, indicating many "unnecessary attacks," according to the new study in the journal *Proceedings of the Royal Society B*. "Making poor decisions about who to fight, and where to invest their really valuable energy, could be that little bit that tips them over the



This file handout photograph by ADAPTUR shows a coral off-Mexico's Quintana Roo State, affected by a disease known as white syndrome, which is different from coral bleaching, and more deadly.

edge towards actual starvation," said Keith, the study's lead author.

It is not clear if the fish will be able to adapt to the changes brought about by coral bleaching quickly enough, the researchers warned. It could also have knock-on effects between species and up the food chain, she added. Human-driven climate change has spurred mass coral bleaching as the world's oceans get

warmer. Modeling research last year found that even if the Paris climate goal of holding global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius is reached, 99 percent of the world's coral reefs will not be able to recover. At two degrees of warming, the number rose to 100 percent. — AFP



This handout picture through Lancaster University's press office shows butterflyfish swimming on a reef, off the coast of Christmas Island, an Australian external territory.



In this file photo a tourist snorkels over dead coral on the ocean bed in the Straits of Florida near Key Largo, Florida. — AFP photos

Lifestyle | Features



A Toyota sport-utility vehicle modified by Zoox, a subsidiary of Amazon.com, which combines radars, lidar, and cameras to test its software, drives on a road ahead of the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) of Las Vegas, Nevada. — AFP photos



A Motional autonomous driving car is seen at the Aptiv display during set up for the upcoming CES 2023 Consumer Electronics Show.



A Motional autonomous driving car is seen at the Aptiv display during set up for the upcoming CES 2023 Consumer Electronics Show.

AT CES TECH MEGA-SHOW, DRIVERLESS CARS SHOW PROMISE, LIMITATIONS

Crowds of techies will descend on Las Vegas this week for the annual CES technology mega-show, but one innovation may again fall short of long-held hopes: driverless cars. Autonomous vehicles have long been pitched as the new dawn of transportation and the world's biggest tech companies have poured billions of dollars into being ready. Despite steady advances, however, robo-travel has yet to take over the open roads, with even Elon Musk's best-selling Teslas requiring "a fully attentive driver", despite the billionaire's assurances his cars will soon be autonomous.

Waymo, a subsidiary of Google-parent Alphabet, has been offering driverless rides to the general public in Phoenix, Arizona, since 2020, but on very defined roads. Cruise, a unit of General Motors, in June was the first to get approval to carry paying passengers in robo-taxis in San

Francisco, a hilly city with more complicated traffic patterns, but initially only at night and within a limited zone.

In Las Vegas - where close to 100,000 convention goers were expected for the CES expo - unmanned Ubers began hitting the streets last month in a venture with the company Motional, but always with a human on board, just in case. "Any company that removes its safety drivers, that is a big deal," said Bryant Walker Smith, a law professor who specializes in autonomous vehicles at the University of South Carolina.

Several incidents with Cruise's vehicles have been reported and the US road safety agency (NHTSA) has opened an investigation. For experts, the software will be perfected over time and the ubiquity of driverless cars is only a matter of time. "The real big question going forward is scalability. How fast does it take for a company to

replicate in another city like Los Angeles, like Minneapolis where it snows a lot. Are you reinventing the wheel every time or does it get easier?" said Smith.

While many automakers are working on autonomous driving, others have scaled back their ambitions and focused on assistance tools such as speed control, lane changing or parking assistance. US auto giant Ford decided in October to sell its stakes in the autonomous driving company Argo AI, saying it preferred to prioritize less ambitious technologies. Tesla CEO Musk has regularly promised that a fully autonomous vehicle is just around the corner, but his cars still only feature "driving assistance" and not full autonomy that would allow drivers to look away from the road.

'No quick path'

Developing a driverless car is "a mas-

sive cost... without a quick path to profitability," said Jordan Greene, co-founder of the company AEye, which markets a sensor allowing vehicles to better perceive their environment. Autonomous driving no longer depends so much on technological advances as on the motivation of companies to put in the investment required, he said.

"Yes, there are challenges from a technology standpoint but the biggest challenge is the business model," he said.

For Greene, whose company will be present at CES, a number of potential markets will emerge, including for software that motorists remotely update regularly for a fee, much like operating systems for PCs or smartphones. The road hauling sector, which is short of truck drivers, also has an interest in developing autonomous driving solutions for the most frequent journeys, he said. At CES, Austrian firm Holon

plans to unveil an autonomous shuttle bus for public transportation, designed without a steering wheel or pedals.

For Marco Kollmeier, the venture's CEO, failures in the field "are totally overstated" with too much media attention given to the slightest self-driving mishap of a Tesla. "The real use case of autonomous driving is not only for (a) driver to be able to go to sleep while driving," he said. A shuttle like Holon's can "redefine public transportation" by offering on-demand or fixed-route trips. As for whether autonomous vehicles won't face resistance from the general public, AEye's Greene isn't too worried. "This falls under a typical adoption curve," he said. "When I was told I would pay to get into a car with a stranger, I didn't believe it. Now I only take Ubers." — AFP

Five things to watch at CES tech megashow

The world's biggest tech megashow, the Consumer Electronics Show (CES), gets underway in Las Vegas this week, with organizers hoping to recapture the excitement of years past after two years marred by the coronavirus pandemic. Here are some things to look out for in this year's edition.

How big?

In January 2020, more than 117,000 people attended the Las Vegas extravaganza just weeks before Covid-19 would send much of the globe into lockdown. The 2021 edition took place virtually and a hybrid version held last year saw about 40,000 visitors, after a sudden upsurge in the Omicron variant kept attendees away from the Nevada desert.

"People are excited to head back to Las Vegas for CES 2023, and it will rock," said Gary Shapiro, President of the Consumer Technology Association and organizer of the annual jamboree. The organizers are hoping to reach more than 100,000 participants.

Auto show

The presence of auto companies will be the biggest ever this year, with nearly 300 exhibitors grouped in a dedicated hall with keynote events by Stellantis, BMW and other heavyweights. "This year, it's going to feel like you're almost at an auto show," said Kevan Yalowitz, global software & platforms lead at Accenture, the consultancy. Even though the promise of driverless cars is taking longer than expected to materialize on the roads, companies will once again be promoting innovations that mainly involve replacing the human driver.

Another highlight will be software for cars: auto operating systems that can be updated remotely, much like for a laptop or smartphone. These programs could "tweak the user experience (like speed limits or maintenance) at a moment's notice and identify issues that can be addressed without consumers even real-

ly knowing that they were addressed," said Yalowitz.

Meta's metaverse

Last year's CES was dominated by the idea that virtual reality, accessible through a variety of headgear from a wide group of companies, would be the internet of the future. A year later, the blind faith in the metaverse has taken a blow, brought down by the difficulties suffered by Meta, the company formerly known as Facebook, that gambled its future on building a virtual world embraced by all.

Despite Meta's big bet, the metaverse "is still not a mainstream category just yet," said Creative Strategies analyst Carolina Milanesi. However, virtual worlds will continue to be a big part of the CES as Meta and others keep trying to convert the skeptics, she added.

'Connected' revolution

Last year, a quiet revolution took place far from the headlines and experts believe it will make a big difference when it comes to connected devices. A new norm known as Matter was agreed in October meaning that devices built specifically for Amazon's Alexa or Google's Nest are now interoperable-creating a massive opportunity for developers that can innovate and reach the widest possible audience.

"The first version of the standard is out, a handful of products have passed certification, and there are going to be many more on the floor at CES," said Techspontential analyst Avi Greengart. "We will really see the Matter devices come together with door bells, vacuum cleaners and more," he added.

Green tech

The importance of consumer technology in the challenges of climate change has been a recurrent theme at CES, though events rarely draw the crowds of connected automobiles or the latest gaming gadgets. Given the higher priority put on the environment by companies and governments, green tech will be given a bigger place and even its own venue at CES this year. Companies will also tout their sustainable outlook, pointing to recyclable material in products and their low carbon footprint. —AFP



Earable Neuroscience representative Kimi Doan wears the Frenz AI-powered brainband by Earable Neuroscience, during CES Unveiled ahead of the Consumer Electronics Show (CES).



Withings representative Asmirian Albisson displays the U-Scan, during CES Unveiled ahead of the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in Las Vegas, Nevada.



Yukai Engineering representative Hiroko Sato hugs the Fufuly pulsating cushion which imitates deep and slow breathing, at the Consumer Electronics Show.

CES gadgets take aim at snoring, pee and even surgery

Pillows that stifle snores, urine-testing toilets, and "digital twins" for safer surgeries were all on display at a CES gadget fest in Las Vegas Tuesday, ahead of the opening of the consumer electronics extravaganza. Fueled by the pandemic, a rising trend in remote or home healthcare innovations is expected to be one of the major themes at the annual CES gathering. "We are going to see some really interesting health gadgets that monitor or improve your well-being," Avi Greengart, a technology analyst with Techspontential, said of the show.

Snore-silencing pillow

South Korea-based 10Minds showed off a pillow with a built-in microphone that detects snoring, then triggers soundless airbags that change size to gently turn a sleeper's head to a position that makes it easy to breathe quietly. "When you start snoring, right away it detects it," company representative Daehyun Kim told AFP at the CES Unveiled event.

"It even distinguishes your snoring from your dog snoring, or your spouse." The pillow, which syncs with a smartphone app, collects data which is analyzed to identify snoring patterns to hone its response over time, Kim added. "It's (a) very simple solution," Kim said.

Toilet turned lab

Digital health and wellness company Withings was at Unveiled with a U-Scan device that lets people analyze their urine by peeing as they normally might into a toilet. A disk that hangs inside a toilet bowl can house changeable cartridges, one of which monitors a woman's menstruation cycle and another of which measures nutritional health indicators such as vitamin C and ketone levels. "It helps people monitor their metabolic intake to optimize their daily hydration and nutrients," the French company said in a release.



An attendee tries the Bodyfriend Phantom Medical Care massage chair during CES Unveiled ahead of the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in Las Vegas, Nevada. — AFP photos

"It recommends workouts, dietary suggestions, and recipes to achieve identified goals." The in-toilet device syncs wirelessly to a smartphone app. U-Scan can even distinguish between various users based on "an individual's urine stream signature," according to the company. Withings will debut U-Scan in Europe in the second quarter of this year, at a price of 500 euros for a starter kit. It will not be available in the United States until getting approval from the US Food and Drug Administration.

Digital twin

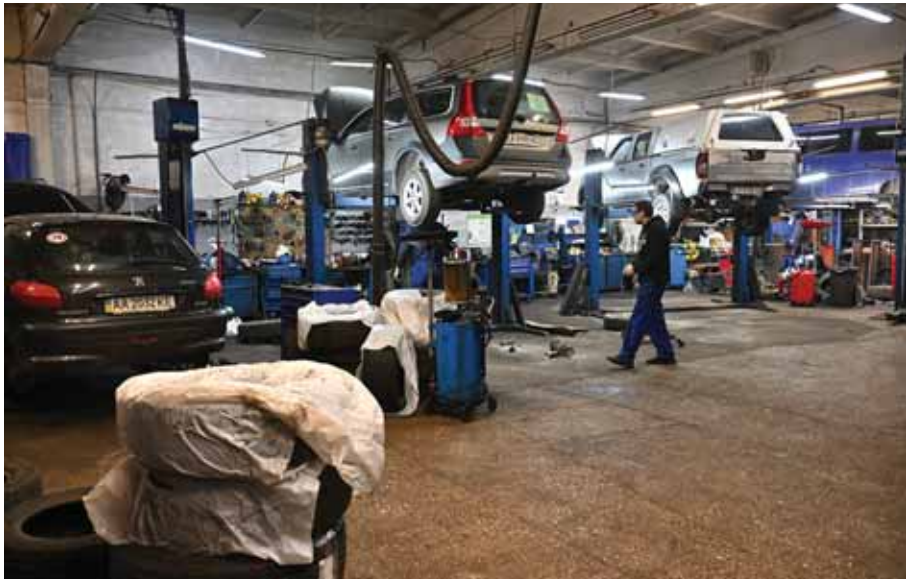
France-based Abys displayed technology that enables surgeons to create "digital twins" of patients using data from X-



Y-Brush, an electric toothbrush that cleans teeth in only 10 seconds, is displayed during CES Unveiled ahead of the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) of Las Vegas.



People arrive to attend CES Unveiled ahead of the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in Las Vegas, Nevada.



Mechanics work with a pickup trucks in a auto repairing shop in Ukrainian capital of Kyiv.



A mechanic works on a van in a auto repairing shop in Ukrainian capital of Kyiv.— AFP photos

Iranian actor Taraneh Alidoosti released on bail

Iranian actor Taraneh Alidoosti, jailed for almost three weeks over her support for the country's protest movement, was released on bail on Wednesday, local media reported. Iran has been gripped by protests since the September 16 death in custody of Mahsa Amini, an Iranian Kurd who was arrested for allegedly violating the country's strict dress code. Iranian authorities say hundreds of people, including members of the security forces, have been killed and thousands arrested in what they generally describe as "riots", accusing hostile foreign powers and opposition groups of stoking the unrest.



Iranian actor Taraneh Alidoosti

Alidoosti, 38, was arrested on December 17 after making a string of social media posts supporting the protest movement-including removing her headscarf and condemning the execution of protesters. "My client was released on bail today", lawyer Zahra Minooee told ISNA news agency Wednesday. Alidoosti has considerable international renown, performing in award-winning films by director Asghar Farhadi, including the Oscar-winning 2016 film "The Salesman". Alidoosti appeared in two of Farhadi's earliest films before he won international renown, "Beautiful City" in 2004 and "Fireworks Wednesday" in 2006.

She then appeared in the 2009 film "About Elly", which earned Farhadi the Silver Bear for best director at the Berlin film festival, before reuniting for "The Salesman". Rights groups and celebrities abroad including hundreds of high-profile figures from the global cinema industry had called for her to be freed. —AFP

Ukraine garage turns beat-up cars into battlefield assets

An auto garage in Kyiv is giving beat-up cars a second life as battle-ready vehicles for Ukraine's military, trying to plug a supply gap as the war with Russia grinds on. The shop formerly specialized in collision repairs, but that changed after Russia invaded in February and volunteers reached out about preparing vehicles to send to the front.

Now its mechanics spend long days working on pickup trucks and buses requested by the military for tasks including transporting weaponry and surveillance drones. "We are not a wealthy country, and the state cannot provide all our soldiers with armored four-wheel-drive vehicles, so pickups are a compromise," Anton Senenko, one of the volunteers coordinating the effort, told AFP. The repair work can make the difference between life and death for soldiers operating in eastern Ukraine, where fighting is currently concentrated, he said.

"Very often, there are breakdowns with cars in peacetime. But in wartime, such a breakdown can lead to a tragedy," he said. "The car won't start, and that's it-the soldiers can no longer escape from the enemy tank." The vehicles are donated or purchased by fundraising Ukrainian volunteers, who often import them from neighboring countries, including Poland, Latvia and Estonia.



A mechanic works on a van in a auto repairing shop in Ukrainian capital of Kyiv.

Harsh terrain
On a recent afternoon, the garage's jumpsuit-clad mechanics were hard at work underneath two elevated vehicles, a Nissan pickup and a Toyota van, which needed engine work. "We don't just change lubricants and filters, we fully prepare the entire machine for the harsh conditions in which it will work on the front line," Senenko said. That often means replacing suspensions and braking systems and can also involve combat-specific modifications like adding a turret or a

mount for a Starlink internet dish.

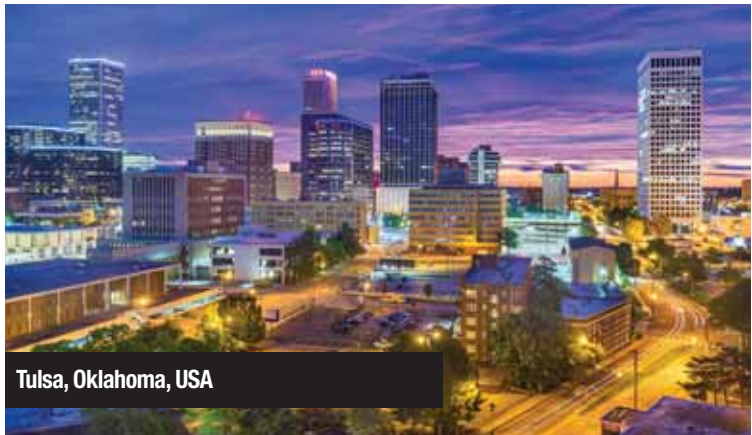
As the fighting evolves, the military's requests have changed. While two-wheel drives were once useful in some hotspots, the rough eastern terrain where fighting is now concentrated requires four-wheel drives, preferably with off-road tires. Soldiers used to request that cars be painted green to blend in with the landscape, but now they prefer grey or black to match the bleak winter conditions. The work has provided an informal military education to garage owner Ruslan

Kulagin, who previously did not have to consider such factors. "This is our contribution to the victory," the 46-year-old said proudly.

Cars in combat

So far, nearly 50 vehicles have been sent to the eastern front-pickups, jeeps and a few buses, Senenko said. The feedback from soldiers has been positive, said Vlad Samoilenko, who works with Senenko to coordinate the project. "When you see that cars last in the field for months, it really warms the soul. It also inspires us," Samoilenko said. Senenko added: "We are very pleased when the fighters themselves write to us and say that the car has already travelled 15,000 kilometers without a single breakdown."

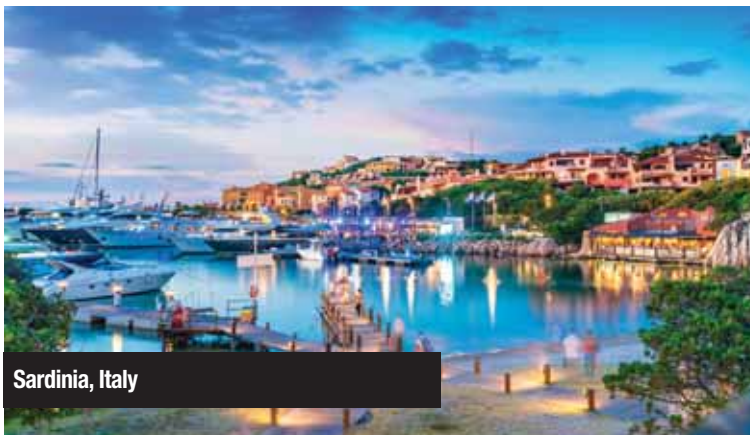
As he spoke, two uniformed soldiers arrived at the garage to pick up a blue 2002 Toyota Hiace van they intended to use to transport a surveillance drone. Imported from Norway, the van had required brake and engine work and smaller tune-ups like an oil change. After inspecting the van, the soldiers posed for a picture with Senenko and Samoilenko, then drove away. Looking on, Senenko, mock-crying, said sending the van into battle was as emotional as "sending a child off to school".—AFP



Tulsa, Oklahoma, USA



Topeka, Kansas, USA



Sardinia, Italy

7 INTERESTING PLACES AROUND THE WORLD THAT WILL PAY YOU TO MOVE THERE

We've all dreamed at least once about packing up our bags and moving to a completely different corner of the planet - whether to enjoy the freedom of a remote job or to simply answer the call of adventure. You'll be glad to know, then, that there are a handful of places around the world that will pay you in some way or the other to do exactly that - and even help you settle into your new home. Here are seven places around the world that offer interesting incentives to relocate there.

1. Tulsa, Oklahoma, USA

For more than four years now, Oklahoma's second city has been encouraging remote workers to pack up and move there through the Tulsa Remote program. If you apply and make the cut, you'll receive a one-time payment of \$10,000 to get you on your feet. You'll also get a desk at 36 Degrees North, a co-working space in central Tulsa, plus a

monthly housing stipend of \$500 for up to one year. The program first started in November 2018 - well before the pandemic - and has been going strong ever since.

2. Albinen, Switzerland

Like the other places on this list, the beautifully picturesque village of Albinen, in the Swiss canton of Valais, is having issues with a decreasing population - which today numbers fewer than 250 souls. The urgency of bringing this figure up is why the Swiss government has started paying people to relocate there. Families who move to Albinen can expect to receive up to 25,000 Swiss francs (almost \$27,000) per adult, and up to 10,000 francs (almost \$11,000) per child. You must be a Swiss citizen or have a permanent residency permit to benefit from the scheme. Additionally, you have to commit to purchasing a house in the commune and make it your main home

for at least 10 years.

3. Sardinia, Italy

One of two island regions off the coast of Italy, Sardinia is known throughout the country and the world for its breathtaking beaches, wild hinterland and unique language and customs, which have stayed vibrant throughout the centuries. Like many rural places in the country, though, numerous Sardinian villages and towns face a depopulation crisis - one that the regional administration wants to tackle head-on with a financial scheme announced last July. Applicants who make their official residence in a Sardinian village with under 3000 inhabitants, or who move there after having purchased a home, can expect a payment of up to €15,000 toward housing expenses.

4. Topeka, Kansas, USA

A pilot program called Choose Topeka is luring those who agree to relocate to and work in the Kansas state capital with a payment of \$15,000 (for those who purchase a home in Topeka) or \$10,000 (for renters). Started in 2020 and still ongoing, the program seeks to help grow the city's flat lining population, as well as fill vacancies in its financial services, publishing, education and government sectors.

5. Vermont, USA

You might be surprised that Vermont-with its lakes, forests, fall colors and ski resorts - would need to lure would-be residents with cash. Yet that's exactly what the state doing. The second-least-populated state after Wyoming, Vermont is seeking to enhance its workforce with a relocation scheme that launched in January 2019. Successful applicants to

the New Remote Worker Grand Program who fulfill all the criteria (on a first-come, first-served basis) can receive help from the state government to cover relocation costs, from renting moving equipment to closing costs for a primary residence or a lease deposit.

7. Presicce-Acquarica, Italy

Located in Salento, Puglia - aka the "heel" of Italy's famous boot, one of the most beautiful parts of one of the most beautiful countries - the small town of Presicce-Acquarica was formed in 2019 through the merger of municipalities



Presicce-Acquarica, Italy

6. Santiago, Chile

The Chilean government is seeking to transform its capital Santiago into an international tech hub by offering entrepreneurs \$40,000 to move to and launch their businesses in the city. Launched in 2010, the program, called Start-Up Chile, offers several variations catering to different kinds of start-ups, including one just for women-led projects. Those selected for the program are granted year-long work visas, as well as a complimentary co-working space and access to a network of contacts. Squeezed between the Andes and the Pacific and boasting a strong and stable economy, Santiago is a pretty appealing place to live and work.

Presicce and Acquarica del Capo. The new town has just under 10,000 inhabitants - a number the local administration would like to see rise. Which is why local authorities are preparing to announce a soon-to-be-launched program aptly called "Welcome to Presicce-Acquarica." Once officially initiated, the program will cater to both individuals and families who choose to move their residence to Presicce-Acquarica, giving them a contribution of up to €30,000 toward the purchase of a house as well as toward any renovations the property might eventually need.

— www.lonelyplanet.com



Santiago, Chile

Sports

‘Happy’ Medvedev breezes through in Adelaide but Sabalenka made to scrap

ADELAIDE: Former world number one Daniil Medvedev locked in an all-Russian Adelaide International quarter-final with Karen Khachanov on Wednesday, while Aryna Sabalenka stormed back to book her place in the last eight. Medvedev, runner-up at the last two Australian Opens, blew away the new year cobwebs with a 6-0, 6-3 romp over Serbian Miomir Kecmanovic.

It came a day after the 2021 US Open champion had to save nine set points against first-round opponent Lorenzo Sonego before the Italian retired hurt. “I think it was a great match. Miomir is a tough opponent, a high-ranked player so there are no easy guys left in Adelaide,” third seed Medvedev said of the 29th-ranked Serb. “I’m not sure there were any (easy opponents) from the first round, so really happy to be through, happy with my level.”

The world number seven dropped just 12 points in a whirlwind 28-minute opening set before closing out the match comfortably. Next up is eighth seed

Khachanov, who eased past Britain’s Jack Draper 6-4, 6-2. Rising Japanese star Yoshihito Nishioka also went through. Having dispatched fifth seed Holger Rune in the first round, he backed up to beat American Mackenzie McDonald 6-4, 6-3.

His reward is a last eight clash with qualifier Alexei Popyrin. The Australian, who stunned second seed Felix Auger-Aliassime on Monday, defeated American Marcos Giron 4-6, 6-4, 6-3. World number five Sabalenka came back from 1-5 down in the first set to fight past dogged Russian Liudmila Samsonova 7-6 (10/8), 7-6 (7/3) and make the quarterfinals. She will meet Marketa Vondrousova for a place in the last four after the Czech player’s dominant 6-0, 6-4 dismissal of Estonian Kaia Kanepi.

“When you’re 1-5 down there’s nothing to lose and you just go for your shots without thinking,” Sabalenka said of clawing back against a player who collected trophies in Tokyo, Cleveland and Washington last year to crack the top 20. “That really helped me to stay in the set,

keep fighting and trying. She’s an incredible player with a huge serve, so (it) was tough.”

She lost to the 20th-ranked Samsonova in three sets in Guadalajara last October before rounding out a stellar season, which included a run to the US Open semi-finals. Sabalenka had a first-round bye but notched a pair of doubles wins alongside Lidziya Marozava to kickstart her Adelaide campaign. Vondrousova was keen to move on from a disjointed 2022 in which she missed six months due to a wrist injury, making her first quarter-final since reaching the last four in Dubai almost a year ago.

“I’m just so happy to be back playing. It was a very tough time when I didn’t play, so yeah, I’m just very happy to be playing at this level,” she said. Russian world number nine Veronika Kedermetova also progressed, beating Canada’s Bianca Andreescu 6-4, 6-0, while Ukraine’s Marta Kostyuk overpowered Kazakhstan’s Elena Rybakina 6-7 (5/7), 6-2, 6-3. — AFP



ADELAIDE: Daniil Medvedev of Russia hits a return against Lorenzo Sonego of Italy at the ATP Adelaide International tournament on Jan 3, 2023. —AFP

Hamlin critical, game won’t be finished this week

NEW YORK: Buffalo Bills safety Damar Hamlin, who suffered a cardiac arrest during an NFL game, remained hospitalized in critical condition Tuesday while the league said the suspended contest would not resume this week. The 24-year-old defensive back collapsed Monday night after receiving a hard hit in the chest while tackling receiver Tee Higgins during the first quarter of the Bills’ game at Cincinnati.

Medical workers restored Hamlin’s heartbeat on the field while working for 30 minutes as players from both teams wept and worried, the horrific scene viewed by a national television audience and a stadium crowd stunned into silence. Hamlin was taken from the stadium in an ambulance and the pivotal contest between playoff-bound NFL clubs, led 7-3 by Cincinnati, was halted. “Damar Hamlin spent last night in the intensive care unit and remains there today in critical condition at the University of Cincinnati Medical Center,” the Bills said in a statement. “We are grateful and thankful for the outpouring of support we have received thus far.”

The NFL announced the Bills-Bengals game would not be completed this week, with no guarantee it would be finished, and said next weekend’s final regular-season games remain as scheduled. “The NFL has made no decision regarding the possible resumption of the game at a later date,” an NFL statement said. “The league has not made any changes to the week 18 regular-season schedule.”

That means the NFL expects the Bills (12-3) to play host to New England (8-8) on Sunday in a game with playoff qualifying and seeding implications. Dorrian Glenn, identified by several US media outlets as Hamlin’s uncle, said his nephew had to be resuscitated twice, once on the field and again after arriving at the hospital. “It’s just heartbreaking seeing him like that,” Glenn said. “We were all in tears. I never cried so hard in my life just to know that my nephew basically died on the field and they brought him back to life... It really was a gut punch.”

Buffalo television station WIVB reported Glenn said doctors had reduced Hamlin’s oxygen levels from 100 percent to 50 percent, a sign his breathing was stronger. “I know he’s fighting,” Glenn said. The NFL Players Association tweeted mental health and counseling information to all players in America’s most violent and most popular sport. “We continue to be in touch with the clubs and NFL to ensure that Bills and Bengals players have every resource available to aid and support them during this time,” an NFLPA statement said.

NFL players and supporters, including US President Joe Biden, hoped Hamlin, who remains sedated, will fully recover. “The President has seen the horrific news. We hope his condition and his health improves quickly,” White House spokeswoman Karine Jean-Pierre said.

‘I was shook up’

Seven-time Super Bowl champion Tom Brady, the 45-year-old quarterback who ended a brief retirement to play this season, tweeted: “Moments like this put into perspective what it means to play this game we love.” “I was shook up,” 39-year-old Green Bay quarterback Aaron Rodgers said on the Pat McAfee Show. “Your football mortality comes right face to face. One of your brothers in the fraternity of the NFL is fighting for his life right now. Whether you are currently playing or done playing, you’re shook about this because you just never thought you would see something like this on the field.”

A GoFundMe page supporting Hamlin’s foundation, which sought \$2,500 for youth charity programs, has more than \$5.3 million in contributions, with family members saying the money will also go to “Damar’s current battle.” “We want to express our sincere gratitude for the love and support shown to Damar during this challenging time,” Hamlin’s family said in a statement. — AFP

Pant to be airlifted to Mumbai for surgery after crash

NEW DELHI: Indian cricketer Rishabh Pant will be airlifted to Mumbai for surgery, the country’s cricket board said Wednesday, nearly a week after he suffered several injuries in a road accident. The national team wicketkeeper-batsman was driving his Mercedes SUV from New Delhi to his hometown Roorkee, a few hours north of the Indian capital, when it crashed into the median before dawn on Friday and immediately caught fire.

The 25-year-old was rescued by a bus driver and conductor on the highway and rushed to a local hospital for treatment before being shifted to an advanced facility in Dehradun. The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) said Pant “will be

brought to Mumbai in an air ambulance” and admitted to a leading private hospital. “Rishabh will undergo surgery and subsequent procedures for ligament tears and will continue to be monitored by the BCCI Medical Team throughout his recovery and rehabilitation,” the BCCI said.

The player had damaged a ligament in his right knee, hurt his wrist, ankle, and had abrasion injuries on his back, the BCCI said in an earlier statement. Pant was “recovering well”, the director of Delhi and District Cricket Association (DDCA) Shyam Sharma told AFP. A maverick batsman, Pant is the mainstay of the Test squad and has played a key role in some of India’s most memorable wins in the last three years.

He also represents Delhi on the domestic circuit and leads the city team in the cash-rich Indian Premier League. Days before the crash, Pant was left out of the squads for the ongoing T20 and ODI tour by Sri Lanka. His omission came days after his match-winning innings of 93 in the second Test against Bangladesh, helping India secure a 2-0 series whitewash. — AFP



DEHRADUN: Members of hospital staff push a stretcher carrying Indian cricketer Rishabh Pant to an ambulance on Jan 4, 2023. — AFP

Dream debut for Mavi as India edge Sri Lanka

MUMBAI: Debutant fast bowler Shivam Mavi led an inspired bowling performance with his four wickets as India edged out Sri Lanka by two runs in a thrilling opening Twenty20 international on Tuesday. Mavi returned figures of 4-22 to help the hosts bowl out Sri Lanka for 160 in a victory target of 163 and lead the three-match series 1-0 in Mumbai. The 24-year-old Mavi was ably supported by fellow pace bowlers Umran Malik and Harshal Patel as they picked up two wickets each.

Axar Patel, a left-arm spinner, held his nerve in a tense last over when Sri Lanka needed 13 for a win and Chamika Karunaratne gave India a scare with his unbeaten 23. The final over witnessed a wide to begin with and ended with two run outs to leave Karunaratne heartbroken and India jubilant. Hardik Pandya, who captained India for the first time at home, praised Mavi, saying: “I have seen him bowling well in the IPL and I just told him to simply bowl. ‘I told him, ‘I am backing you. Even if you get hit, it’s fine.’”

Mavi said: “I was waiting for this moment for the last six years. Had injuries in between and it felt my dream will never come true.” Deepak Hooda (41) and Axar (31) set up victory with an unbeaten 68-run sixth-wicket stand that steered India to 162-5 after being tested by the Sri Lanka bowlers. Ishan Kishan came out attacking as he hit Kasun Rajitha for a six and two fours in a 17-run opening over after the tourists invited India to bat.

NZ fight back after Shakeel’s maiden century

KARACHI: Left-hander Saud Shakeel hit a maiden century Wednesday before New Zealand hit back to keep Pakistan to 407-9 at the close of the third day of the second Test in Karachi. Shakeel was unbeaten on 124 and Abrar Ahmed yet to score after New Zealand took four wickets in the final session for 70 runs, leaving the hosts 42 runs shy of the tourists’ first innings total of 449.

Shakeel has kept his end intact for 488 minutes - batting all day Wednesday, and adding 83 for the fourth wicket with Imam-ul-Haq (83) and 150 for the fifth with Sarfaraz Ahmed (78). But New Zealand spinner Ajaz Patel dismissed Agha Salman (41) and Hasan Ali (four) as Pakistan slumped from 385-5 to 397-9, losing four wickets for just 12 runs off 27 balls. Leg-spinner Ish Sodhi took two wickets in as many balls, dismissing Naseem Shah for four and Mir Hamza without scoring before last-man Ahmed saw out the day.

Shakeel, who has hit 17 boundaries, was lucky to get a life off pacer Tim Southee when Tom Latham grabbed a simple catch at short cover when the batter was on 102. With wickets falling at the other end, Shakeel went into a shell, scoring just 23 runs in the final session. He completed his century before tea when he swept spinner Michael Bracewell for a boundary and then took a sharp single to reach



MUMBAI: India’s captain Hardik Pandya falls while trying to play a shot as Sri Lanka’s wicketkeeper Kusal Mendis watches at Wankhede Stadium on Jan 3, 2023. — AFP

India raced to 26 in the first two overs but the momentum dipped after losing their top and middle-order before Hooda, who hit four sixes in his 23-ball knock and was named man of the match, and the left-handed Axar took charge. Debutant Shubman Gill began with a boundary but soon fell lbw for seven to mystery spinner Maheesh Theekshana. Sri Lanka hit back with disciplined bowling and Karunaratne sent back Suryakumar Yadav after the batsman mistimed one of his audacious scoop shots to be caught at short fine leg. India lost two more wickets and slipped to 77-4 when wrist spinner Wanindu Hasaranga got the left-handed Kishan out for 37. — AFP



KARACHI: New Zealand’s Tom Latham drops a catch by Pakistan’s Saud Shakeel at the National Stadium on Jan 4, 2023. — AFP

three figures in 319 minutes of stoic batting. Sarfaraz was stumped on 78 in the penultimate over before the break, having scored his third consecutive half-century of the series.

Earlier, Haq was snapped-up by wicketkeeper Tom Blundell off fast-bowler Southee after Pakistan resumed on 154-3. On 74 overnight, Haq rebuilt the innings after being involved in skipper Babar Azam’s run-out on Tuesday, but fell in the second hour of the session. He edged a drive to Blundell, but was only given out after New Zealand challenged the turned-down appeal. Haq hit 10 boundaries and a six in his 244-minute knock. The two-match series is tied after the first Test - also in Karachi - ended in a draw. — AFP

US coach admits kicking future wife in 1991 incident

WASHINGTON: US national football coach Gregg Berhalter, his future uncertain after a last-16 World Cup run, admitted Tuesday kicking his girlfriend in a 1991 incident that US Soccer is investigating. After the US Soccer Federation was contacted during the World Cup by “an individual” looking to “bring about the end of my relationship with US Soccer,” Berhalter released a statement with his now-wife Rosalind detailing the matter. “It was a shameful moment and one that I regret to this day,” Berhalter said. “There are zero excuses for my actions that night.”

Berhalter said he was 18 and a college freshman and had dated Rosalind for four months when they were drinking at a bar. “Rosalind and I had a heated argument that continued outside,” Berhalter said. “It became physical and I kicked her in the legs.” Berhalter said the incident from more than three decades ago made a lasting impact. “While the authorities were never involved in this matter, I voluntarily sought out counseling to help learn, grow and improve - one of the most valuable decisions that I ever made,” he said. “To this day, that type of behavior has never been repeated.”

US Soccer said in a statement that it began an investigation into the matter after learning of the allegation against Berhalter on Dec 11, more than a week after the Americans were eliminated by the Netherlands in Qatar. “We appreciate Gregg and Rosalind coming forward to speak openly about this incident,” the statement said. “US Soccer condemns violence of any kind and takes such allegations very seriously.”

US Soccer said it is also looking into “potential inappropriate behavior towards multiple members of our staff by individuals outside of our organization. We take such behavior seriously and have expanded our investigation to include those allegations.” — AFP

Sports

Zain title sponsor of 'Khaleeji Zain 25', Arab Gulf Cup's silver jubilee in Basra

Zain launches 'Eldanya Basra' regional campaign to support tournament



KUWAIT/IRAQ: Zain, a leading mobile telecom innovator in seven markets across the Middle East and Africa, will be the title sponsor of the 25th Arab Gulf Cup silver jubilee edition, entitled "Khaleeji Zain 25", to be held in Basra governorate, Iraq between Jan 6-19, 2023. Zain is a passionate supporter of youth and sports tournaments across the region, and the reintroduction of international football activities to Iraq re-establishes the country's



presence on the regional football map once more. The Arab Gulf Cup was last hosted in Iraq in 1979 when the country won the title, and 44 years later, the tournament triumphantly returns. The competition is held once every two years in one of the member states of the Arab Gulf Cup Football Federation, namely Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the UAE or Yemen.

Supporting this milestone occasion and welcom-

ing the teams and delegations participating in the tournament, Zain launched a campaign entitled "Eldanya Basra", emphasizing the importance of this event and highlighting the joint efforts undertaken to maximize youth empowerment, sports development, and the return of regional competitions to Iraq.

As part of its "Eldanya Basra" campaign running on social media platforms and media channels, Zain released a special song performed by Iraqi artist,

Mahmoud El Turki to reflect Basra's rich cultural background and historic links to the Gulf countries. "Khaleeji Zain 25" is organized and supervised by the Arab Gulf Cup Football Federation in Basra, with live telecast and streaming available on various TV and online media channels. Following the successful hosting of the World Cup in the region, "Khaleeji Zain 25" will bring together fans, officials and the best Gulf players on Iraqi soil in Basra.



CACERES, Spain: Real Madrid's Brazilian forward Rodrygo is challenged by Cacereno's Spanish midfielder Luis Telles during a Copa del Rey match at the Principe Felipe stadium on Jan 3, 2023. — AFP

Rodrygo pays tribute to Pele as Real advance

MADRID: Rodrygo scored the only goal and celebrated by paying tribute to Pele as Real Madrid advanced to the Spanish Cup last 16 on Tuesday with a hard-fought 1-0 win over fourth-tier Cacereno. The Brazilian broke the deadlock after 69 minutes beating two defenders to fire in and celebrated by jumping with an upward fist, the way football great and compatriot Pele used to celebrate his goals. Pele's funeral was held Tuesday in Brazil after his death last week at age 82.

Madrid made their Cup debut in the round of 32 and coach Carlo Ancelotti rested star players including Karim Benzema for the trip to the western Extremadura side who had ousted top flight Girona in the previous round. On Tuesday, Valencia, Villarreal and Espanyol also advanced to the last 16. Espanyol eliminated Celta Vigo 3-1 after extra time in the only top-flight duel, after the match ended 1-1 following regular time.

Sergi Darder scored Espanyol's second with Nico Melamed bagging the winner with two minutes to go after Celta lost Argentine goalkeeper Agustín Marchesín to a second yellow card. First division sides Rayo Vallecano and Getafe were eliminated by second division teams Sporting Gijón (2-0) and Levante (3-2) respectively. Valencia eased past La Nucia 3-0 in a regional derby with Justin Kluivert opening the scoring after three minutes.

Villarreal stormed back past FC Cartagena, who had taken a surprise lead, with the first division side sealing a 5-1 victory with all their goals in the second half. On Wednesday, Barcelona play at Intercity, a third-division team from Alicante, while Atletico Madrid play second-division Real Oviedo. — AFP

Brands League draw held

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: The draw for the second season of Brands League was held under the patronage of the Public Authority for Sport on Wednesday at Al-Hamra Mall. The competition will be from Jan 7-16, 2023, with the participation of 32 teams distributed in eight groups of four teams each, with first and second placed teams qualifying for the round of 16.

The draw was attended by Chairwoman of Salwa Al-Sabah Sports Club Sheikhha Naema Al-Ahmad, Deputy Director General of PAS for sports for all sectors Hamid Al-Hazeem, Hype Trend CEO and

event organizer Abdulrahman Al-Ali, American University of the Middle East representative Tariq Al-Othman, Boubyan Bank representative Thamer Al-Enezi, former Kuwait national team goalkeeper Ahmad Al-Tarabulsi and several other sports dignitaries.

Ali welcomed the guests and participating teams in Brands League-2. "We are proud to announce the continuing competitions of the Brands League in its second season. We aimed at bringing out its best through a strategic partnership with AUM," he said. Othman was pleased for hosting the competition at AUM's field, adding "we will provide all that is necessary to ensure the event's success, as the university is keen on supporting youth in various forms, and sports is the core of our interests".

Hamid Al-Hazeem said PAS' patronage comes out of its interest in enabling youth to practice sports in



KUWAIT: Sheikha Naema participates in the draw.

an ideal competitive environment, as well as PAS' support of all sports activities for various group ages. Thamer Al-Enezi said organizing such

competitions regularly will contribute to spreading sports awareness in the society and cares for youth through various events.

Arsenal held by battling Newcastle as Man Utd cruise

LONDON: Arsenal were held to a goalless stalemate by high-flying Newcastle on Tuesday but still extended their lead to eight points at the top of the Premier League as Manchester United tightened their grip on a top-four place. Everton imploded at home to Brighton, losing 4-1 just days after drawing at champions Manchester City, while Fulham condemned Leicester to a third straight defeat.

Mikel Arteta's men had the better of a fractious encounter at a packed Emirates Stadium but the Spaniard complained his side had been denied two "scandalous penalties" in front of a baying home crowd. Arteta was furious that Arsenal failed in their appeal for a spot-kick in the final seconds of stoppage-time after a cross in the penalty area struck Jacob Murphy's arm. The Gunners boss also complained that Dan Burn was guilty of a shirt pull on Arsenal defender Gabriel in the area earlier in the second half.

Arteta was convinced Arsenal had been denied the chance to score from the spot even though the award of penalties would have been harsh on Newcastle. "Extremely proud of my players. The way we played, dominated the game. We had so many situations. And then had two scandalous penalties," Arteta said. "There were two penalties.



LONDON: Arsenal's English midfielder Bukayo Saka vies with Newcastle United's Brazilian striker Joelinton at the Emirates Stadium on Jan 3, 2023. — AFP

It's very simple. I'm talking about what I've seen. It was two scandalous penalties."

Of the second penalty call, Newcastle boss Eddie Howe added: "Obviously at that stage of the game you're thinking 'God no, the lads have given so much' and that would have been a travesty for us. I didn't think it was a penalty but you just never know." Arsenal, who dropped points for only the third time this season, are eight points clear of

Manchester City, who have a game in hand.

Manchester United hammered Bournemouth 3-0 at Old Trafford - their fourth straight Premier League win - to move level on 35 points with third-placed Newcastle. United, trophyless since 2017, have now won nine of their past 10 games in all competitions as they adjust to life without Cristiano Ronaldo, who was unveiled at his new Saudi club, Al Nassr, on Tuesday. — AFP

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

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

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khalidiya	24848075

Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Sandeep (current name), holder of Indian Passport No. V 7778715 residing in Kuwait hereby declare that henceforth my new name will read as given name Sandeep Kumar and surname Panchal. (C#0881)

I, JOHAR JOHAR, holder of Passport No. Z 2816653 do hereby change my name to JOHAR (as Given name) LOKHANDWALA (as Surname) for all purposes.

I will henceforth be known in the name JOHAR LOKHANDWALA and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents.

I, HAKIMUDDIN, holder of Passport No. S4698016 do hereby change my name to HAKIMUDDIN (as Given name) KAGDI (as Surname) for all purposes. I will henceforth be known in the name HAKIMUDDIN KAGDI and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents. (C#0882)

I, AMATULLAH, holder of Passport No. M 5451208 do hereby change my name to AMATULLAH (as Given name) VOHRA (as Surname) for all purposes. I will henceforth be known in the name AMATULLAH VOHRA and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents. (C#0883)

I, FAKHRUDDIN, holder of Passport No. L4538405 do hereby change my name to Fakhruddin Hussaini Obri for all purposes. I will henceforth be known in the name Fakhruddin

Hussaini Obri and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents. (C#0879) - 04-01-2023

I, DAWOOD MYDEEN JAKIR HUSSAIN holder of Passport No. L 1169867 do hereby change my name to DAWOOD MYDEEN JAHIR HUSSAIN for all purposes. I will henceforth be known in the name DAWOOD MYDEEN JAHIR HUSSAIN and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents. (C#0878) 3-1-2023

Brazil bids farewell to 'King' Pele

Football legend laid to rest in world's tallest vertical cemetery



SANTOS: The coffin of the late Brazilian football star Pele arrives at the Santos Memorial Cemetery after a funeral procession on Jan 3, 2023. — AFP

SANTOS, Brazil: Crying, waving flags and chanting "1,000 goals!", Brazilians flooded the streets Tuesday to say a final farewell to late football legend Pele, widely considered the greatest player in history. After three days of national mourning, President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva led the tributes as streams of fans, politicians and football dignitaries descended on the southeastern city of Santos for the wake and funeral procession of the player known as "The King," who died last week at age 82.

Santos FC, the club where Pele spent most of his storied career, said some 250,000 people had attended his 24-hour wake in the Vila Belmiro stadium, where mourners continued arriving straight through the night. Lula, who took office Sunday in a ceremony that started with a minute's silence for Pele, was visibly moved as he and First Lady Rosangela "Janja" da Silva attended the wake, embracing the player's widow, Marcia Cibeles Aoki, who was in tears. "Goodbye to the King. Rest in peace, Pele," Lula wrote on Twitter. The wake ended with a brief Catholic ceremony, after which 10

state police guards in dress uniform closed Pele's black casket.

RIP, with a view

Draped in the black-and-white flag of Santos FC and the green-and-yellow one of Brazil, the coffin was then placed atop a firetruck and given a massive funeral procession through the city. Huge crowds of fans, some in tears, lined the streets and gathered on balconies to say a last goodbye, chanting "1,000 goals, only Pele!" The procession included an emotional stop at the house where Pele's 100-year-old mother, Celeste Arantes, still lives.

"Dona Celeste," as she is known, has cognitive difficulties, and is unaware her world-famous son has died, according to the family. But Pele's sister, Maria Lucia, who lives with her, appeared on the beige house's balcony surrounded by family. The 78-year-old clasped her hands and tearfully bowed her head to the massive crowd in gratitude. The procession ended at the port city's Memorial Cemetery, near the stadium, where a private funeral

service was held.

Pele was then interred in a 10-storey mausoleum that holds the Guinness World Record as the tallest cemetery on Earth. A spokesman for the cemetery said Pele's embalmed body would rest in his coffin, displayed in the middle of a 200-sq-m replica football stadium with artificial turf, surrounded by gilded images from his glory days. "It's a difficult moment," 33-year-old fan Jonatas Versolato told AFP as the coffin was brought into the cemetery. "Pele was an idol not just to the nation but the entire world. Saying the final goodbye is going to leave a giant hole."

'Global icon'

Born Edson Arantes do Nascimento, Pele is the only player in history to win three World Cups (1958, 1962 and 1970). He scored a world record 1,281 goals during his more than two-decade career with Santos (1956-74), the New York Cosmos (1975-77) and the Brazilian national team. He died Thursday after a battle with cancer. Tributes have poured in from around

the world, with current and former football greats hailing his genius for the "beautiful game," including Brazil star Neymar, France's Kylian Mbappe and Argentina's Lionel Messi. FIFA president Gianni Infantino, who attended the wake Monday, called Pele "a global icon of football" and said the sport's governing body would ask all member countries to name a stadium in the player's honor.

Life-long Santos fan Katia Cruz, 58, who lives a block from the stadium, said she had stood in line for four hours overnight to get into the Vila Belmiro, attending the wake without her husband because he was "inconsolable". "Pele was everything. He was the King. He deserves this," she told AFP. In the latest in an outpouring of tributes, Rio de Janeiro's mayor said the city would rename the street outside the iconic Maracana stadium Pele Avenue. Pele's son Edinho said the family was grateful for the flood of such gestures. But "any homage we can pay to him is small compared to what he represents and the life story he wrote," he said. "I am just so grateful and proud." — AFP

Barreda rides to Dakar stage win; Sanders in lead

HAIL, Saudi Arabia: Spanish rider Joan Barreda won his first stage of this year's Dakar Rally on Wednesday taking the honors in the fourth stage of this year's race with Australia's Dominic Sanders retaining the overall lead. Barreda, on a Honda, timed 16 seconds faster than Chilean team-mate Pablo Quintanilla with the ultra-consistent Skyler Howes of the United States third, 1min 5sec off the pace.

Howes's compatriot Mason Klein was the big loser on two wheels on the 425km special raced around Hail. He led for most of the stage until a fuel intake problem 20km from the finish cost him dearly, losing 12 minutes. As a result he dropped from second overall to sixth. "I had to stop, take the tank off and pour it in the back," he said. "Then I couldn't get the skid plate bolt back in. I

was getting very stressed. It's pretty disappointing because the day was going so well, but at least we made it here."

Sanders - winner of Tuesday's stage - leads Howes by 3min 33sec with Kevin Benavides of Argentina third, 4min 5sec adrift of the Australian. Sanders, though, worryingly for his fans said he was suffering from a sore arm after posting the eighth fastest time, over 10min off the winner. "I think for me now it's just a case of trying to get some recovery and take it easy for the next few days because my arm is pretty sore already and the elbow isn't 100 percent," said Sanders, who fractured his left elbow and wrist when he crashed in last year's race. "We'll take it easy. It's a long race. I'm just trying to calm myself down every day. I said to myself and the family and friends back home that after the year off I'll be happy with a top 10 finish."

Chile's Jose Ignacio Cornejo earned plaudits in stopping to help injured Hero rider Joaquin Rodriguez, who ultimately had to retire from the race. Cornejo had the time lost for his act of selflessness restored by the organizers. — AFP



HAIL, Saudi Arabia: French driver Lionel Baud and co-driver Remi Boulanger ride ahead of Spanish driver Carlos Checa and co-driver Marc Sola Terradellas during the fourth stage of the 2023 Dakar rally on Jan 4, 2023. — AFP

Giannis scores career-high 55 to ignite Bucks

WASHINGTON: Giannis Antetokounmpo scored a career-high 55 points to spark the Milwaukee Bucks in a revenge victory over Washington 123-113 on Tuesday while NBA-best Boston was upset at Oklahoma City. Greek star forward Antetokounmpo, who missed a 118-95 loss Sunday to Washington with knee soreness, added 10 rebounds and seven assists in the triumph, scoring 19 points in the fourth quarter to stomp the Wizards.

Antetokounmpo, who made 20-of-33 from the floor and 15 of 16 free throws, scored 12 straight Bucks points late to snuff a Washington rally attempt. "I'm just trying to make good decisions, try to be aggressive throughout the whole game and at the end of the day, we try to win games," Antetokounmpo said. "We're playing good basketball. We defended really well. And I'm just trying to do whatever I can for the team to get a W."

Antetokounmpo became only the fourth player in NBA history with three consecutive games of at least 40 points, 10 rebounds and five assists, joining Russell Westbrook, Elgin Baylor and Wilt Chamberlain. Antetokounmpo credited extra work on his free throw accuracy with a boost in his recent scoring. "That's what I do, I work," said Antetokounmpo. "A lot of people think my game is boring but I'm just trying to do better, trying to do whatever it takes to help my team win. At the end of the day I've got to get better at the free throw line and I'm just trying to put some extra work there, find my teammates, create some open threes and try to attack in the paint as much as I can."

Milwaukee's Brook Lopez added 21 points and 12 rebounds while reserve Bobby Portis had 17 points and 13 rebounds for the Bucks, several of whom poured water on Antetokounmpo after the game in celebration. "This is what basketball is about," Antetokounmpo said. "This is what winning is about. We have a great team. We play together. We



MILWAUKEE: Giannis Antetokounmpo of the Milwaukee Bucks drives to the basket against Monte Morris of the Washington Wizards at Fiserv Forum on Jan 3, 2023. — AFP

do it on the floor together. That's what Milwaukee is about and I'm glad to be on a team like that." Latvian Kristaps Porzingis scored 22 points to lead the visiting Wizards, who had a five-game win streak snapped.

At Oklahoma City, Josh Giddey scored 25 points and Canadian backcourt partner Luguentz Dort added 23 to lead the host Thunder over Boston 150-117. Jalen Williams and reserves Tre Mann and Isaiah Joe each added 21 points for the Thunder (16-21), who outscored Boston in every quarter. The Celtics saw the NBA's best record drop to 26-12, trimming their lead in the Eastern Conference to a half-game over Brooklyn (25-12) and 1.5 games over Milwaukee (24-13). — AFP