

## Iran executes 'British spy'

Outrage after dual national hanged despite warnings by West

### Smart cams aim to boost road safety

**KUWAIT:** Smart traffic cameras have been recently installed along Kuwait's roads to enhance safety of people, namely motorists, a ranking official of the ministry of interior said. Lt Gen Tawheed Al-Kandari, Director General of Relations and Security Information, said in a statement to KUNA that these high-sensitivity cameras can detect mobile phone usage while driving - a main cause of accidents - in addition to speed limit and traffic light violations. Illegal turns are also caught by the new cameras. Kandari affirmed that application of the state-of-art cameras will



Tawheed Al-Kandari

Continued on Page 6

**PARIS:** Iran said Saturday it executed a British-Iranian dual national after he was sentenced to death for spying for the United Kingdom, drawing strong condemnation from Britain and international rights groups. Alireza Akbari, 61, was hanged after being convicted of "corruption on earth and harming the country's internal and external security by passing on intelligence", the judiciary's Mizan Online website said. It did not say when or where the execution took place.

Mizan said Akbari, who had been arrested more than two years ago, had been a spy for Britain's MI6 secret intelligence agency and had received around \$2 million for his services. British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said he was "appalled" by the execution. "This was a callous and cowardly act, carried out by a barbaric regime with no respect for the human rights of their own people," Sunak tweeted, adding his thoughts were with "Alireza's friends and family".

UK Foreign Secretary James Cleverly warned on Twitter that the execution would not go unchallenged, before announcing sanctions on Iran's prosecutor general to underline Britain's "disgust" at Akbari's execution. France condemned the execution "in the strongest terms" and said it cannot go "unanswered". Iran summoned the British ambassa-

dor to protest what it described as "unconventional interventions", after the UK said it would summon Tehran's envoy.

News of the hanging came only hours after the United States had joined its ally Britain in calling for Iran not to go ahead with the execution. US diplomat Vedant Patel said on Friday that Washington was greatly concerned by reports Akbari had been "drugged, tortured while in custody, interrogated for thousands of hours and forced to make false confessions". Amnesty International called the execution "abhorrent". It tweeted that Akbari had been subjected to "torture and other ill-treatment" such as being "forcibly administered chemical substances and being held in prolonged solitary confinement".

Media outlets in Iran, which does not recognize dual nationality for its citizens, had broadcast a video this week in which Akbari appeared to speak of his contacts with Britain. BBC Persian this week aired an audio message it said was from Akbari in which he said he was tortured and forced to confess on camera to crimes he did not commit. "I was given new clothes and asked to dye my hair to be released but then I was taken to a film studio and threatened with a gun to falsely confess," a man is heard saying in the recording.

Mizan Online, citing the intelligence ministry, said



Alireza Akbari

Akbari had become a "key spy" for MI6 due to "the importance of his position". Akbari, a veteran of the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war, was arrested between March 2019 and March 2020, state media said. He was once identified by the government's official Iran newspaper as a former deputy defense minister under Ali Shamkhani, who currently heads Iran's Supreme National Security Council. Akbari had also been an adviser to the navy commander and headed a division at the defense ministry's research center, state media said.

Continued on Page 6

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ  
إِنَّمَا النَّفْسُ الْبَاطِنَةُ الرَّحْمِيَّةُ الْوَالِدِ الْأَبِيَّةِ الْكَافِرَةِ وَأَبُو جَدِّهَا  
سَدَدُ اللَّهِ الْعَمَلِيَّةُ

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## Local



KUWAIT: A group photo of KEPS officials with visitors during the open day on Saturday. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



A man uses a telescope to watch birds.



Children draw birds during the event.



Volunteers clean the beach in Sulaibikhat.



Children watch birds through a telescope.

# KEPS holds open day to count birds at Sulaibikhat beach

## Kuwait, an important migratory destination, receives over 416 species of birds

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: Kuwait Environment Protection Society (KEPS) organized on Saturday an open day to count birds at Sulaibikhat beach. The event aims at raising public awareness and concern over crucial components of migratory bird conservation. During the event, Kuwait Environment Protection Society Chairperson Wajdan Al-Ugab said: "The society annually holds this event to stimulate interest in local birds and migratory birds in Kuwait. Kuwait is considered one of the most important spots for migratory birds in the world, as Kuwait receives more than 416 species of birds."

She pointed out KEPS aims to explain to all segments of society how birds are related to the environment of Kuwait and its people. "For example, the way flamingos feed and the movement they make churns the soil of the seabed, thus mixing nutrients with water, which is the main reason why Kuwait Bay marine environment is rich in fish and shrimp. These birds restore the health of Kuwait Bay in this way, and we thus attain food security," she said.

"The increase or decrease in birds gives us a clear picture of how Kuwait is an attractive habitat in which there is safety, no human activity, excellent nutrition and no overfishing, in addition to climate stability," added Ugab.

Mohammad Shah, head of the team for monitoring birds at KEPS, said this event was held in conjunction with International Day of Counting Birds,



Mohammed Shah

which held annually in January. "We gather participants to see the birds, count them and write reports to educate the community. This year we expanded the event for the first time and added a bird photo exhibition. Also, we organized a workshop for children to draw birds and learn about their importance to the environment, in addition to a beach cleaning campaign as well as a live show by a drone of the birds flying around," he said. Shah revealed that last year, the Kuwait Environment Protection Society counted 5,000 Socotra cormorants, noting that this year in Kuwait,



Wajdan Al-Ugab explains to Holtznider about the migratory birds that visit Kuwait every year.

they exceeded 10,000.

Regarding the beach cleaning campaign, Romanian Ambassador to Kuwait Mugurel Stanescu said: "I'm thrilled to be here today to see the bird observation. We are participating today in the beach cleanup campaign. People have to be aware of the environment; they should learn how to pick up their trash. Kuwait provides trash bins everywhere. It is something we will leave for our children and the future generations." He added: "It's affecting me personally, since I'm very keen on recycling and happy to see such a campaign for a



Romanian Ambassador Mugurel Stanescu watches the birds.

better future for Kuwait."

Charge d'Affaires at the US Embassy James Holtznider said: "It's great to see this part of the beauty of Kuwait's natural habitat of birds and animals. I don't think people understand the important role Kuwait plays as a place for migratory birds. Kuwait has to keep the environment clean." He also praised Kuwaiti photographers. "Kuwait has one of the best wildlife photographers in the world. You often see their work in National Geographic and natural exhibits. The embassy is keen to cooperate with and support such events."



Photographs of birds displayed during the exhibition.



Charge d'Affaires at US Embassy Kuwait James Holtznider observing birds with his family.



Migratory birds fly over Sulaibikhat beach.



Local

# Zain platinum sponsor of Engineering Design Exhibition

Company presents its annual award for most innovative projects



KUWAIT: Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah honors Waleed Al-Khashti in the presence of Dr Hamad Al-Adwani, Dr Suad Al-Fadhli, and Dr Duaij Al-Rukaibi.



KUWAIT: Al-Khaled with Al-Khashti, Al-Musaibeh and Al-Rukaibi at Zain's booth.

KUWAIT: Zain, Kuwait's leading digital service provider, announced its platinum sponsorship of the 42nd Engineering Design Exhibition and the annual Zain Award for Innovation and Excellence. The event, organized by Kuwait University's College of Engineering and Petroleum (CEP), was held under official support from the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS) at Sabah Al-Salem University City in Shadadiya under the patronage of Deputy First Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

Zain took part in the event's opening ceremony at the Conferences Center, attended by the event's patron Deputy First Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Minister of Education and Minister of Higher Education and Research Dr Hamad Al-Adwani, Minister of Public Works and Minister of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy Amani Bugamaz, and Minister of State for National Assembly Affairs and Minister of State for Housing and Urban Development Ammar Al-Ajmi.

The event was also attended by Acting Director of Kuwait University Dr Suad Al-Fadhli, KFAS Director General Dr Khalid Al-Fadhel, Acting General Secretary of Kuwait University Al Musaibeh awarding the first place winners in Zain's Innovation and Excellence Award.

Dr Fayez Al-Dhafiri, CEP Acting Dean Dr Ayed Salman, Director of the CEP Engineering Training

Center and Graduates Dr Duaij Al-Rukaibi, Zain Kuwait's Chief Corporate Affairs and Relations Officer Waleed Al-Khashti, as well as Kuwait University officials and faculty, private sector engineering firms, and engineering heads of government institutions.

Zain continues to strategically support this exhibition and sponsor the annual award as part of its commitment towards developing and nurturing innovation in the nation. The company is keen on supporting and encouraging various student activities under its Corporate Sustainability and Social Responsibility strategy, which seeks to contribute to the development of the education sector by partnering with academic organizations to invest in education, which the company considers an essential element of the further progress of national economy. The Engineering Design Exhibition is the nation's top engineering gathering, featuring engineering design projects from across CEP's scientific majors. The event creates an inclusive ecosystem that encourages students to research, develop, and innovate, ultimately aiming at opening new horizons for a sustainable future in Kuwait.

The exhibition witnessed the participation of many projects from across the college's departments, as well as the presence of hundreds of students, who showcased their final projects to visitors. The Zain-sponsored annual Innovation and Excellence Award highlighted the most creative and innovative projects as per the standards outlined by



KUWAIT: Al-Musaibeh awarding the first place winner in Zain's Innovation and Excellence Award.

the College of Engineering and Petroleum.

Zain's support to the event springs from the company's core Corporate Sustainability and Social Responsibility strategy. Zain believes that supporting the various educational programs and initiatives provides young people with skills and tools necessary to help them highlight and develop their poten-

tial, ultimately contributing to Kuwait's progress.

As a leading national company, Zain firmly believes in the importance of contributing to the progress of the education sector and looks to empower and prepare the nation's youth for the important roles they will play in the further progress of the country.



KUWAIT: Minister of Health Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi opens the Fifth Best of ASH Conference.



## MoH conference on blood diseases

KUWAIT: Minister of Health, Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi opened the Fifth Best of ASH Conference on the latest developments in blood diseases. The conference was held Saturday with the participation of 16 lecturers from different countries of the world. It was organized by the Department of

Hematology at the Kuwait Cancer Control Center (KCCC) of the Ministry of Health.

KCCC Director Dr Hadeel Al-Mutawa and event manager Dr Ahamad Al-Hurajji were also present during the conference.

## KUNA concludes anti-drugs campaign

KUWAIT: Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) concluded on Saturday its awareness campaign against narcotics themed "drugs kill you" launched on December 11. KUNA Director General Dr Fatma Al-Salem said in a statement that the news agency has undertaken the responsibility of solidifying the society against the scourge by enhancing awareness of its dangers particularly among the youth.

She also noted that KUNA's campaign was carried out simultaneously with "a vicious war waged" against the menace by relevant public and private institutions and authorities. Dr Al-Salem lauded the personnel who had been involved in the campaign, noting that KUNA had broadcast diverse interviews, reports and news features about the subject.

KUNA is keen on backing up all efforts at diverse levels against drugs that are destructive to the society and shedding light on the state efforts in combating the harmful and illegal materials and substances. The news agency had broadcast diverse items, pictures and sketches about the combat against drugs warning the public of their detrimental impact. —KUNA

## Drug menace affects state's development plans: Ghiras CEO

KUWAIT: The spread of drugs and addiction has a negative impact on the state's plans for overall development, said the Ghiras National Awareness Project for Drugs Prevention on Friday. Ghiras CEO Dr Ahmad Al-Shatti told KUNA that the increasing interest by the Kuwaiti leadership and people in curbing the spread of drugs was an essential step into beating this social ailment.

The recent efforts launched by the government is heading in the right direction because there was surely no development if drugs were involved, he affirmed.

## Thai embassy to host seminar on medical tourism

KUWAIT: As one of the top medical hubs of the world, Thailand is now strengthening the country's position with more varieties of advanced medical centers, specialized medical experts, world-renowned hospitality and attractive tourist destina-

Al-Shatti called for coordinating efforts both politically and legislatively towards protecting society from narcotics and addictive substances, noting that Ghiras was preparing proposals for the government and parliament to boost efforts against illicit drugs. The matter should not be restricted within the borders of Kuwait, it should be expanded in a regional and international way to boost global efforts against narcotics, Al-Shatti affirmed. He commended Kuwait for continuing to launch awareness campaigns, saying that the country was considered a pioneer in this regard. —KUNA



Dr Ahmad Al-Shatti

tions offered to people around the world to enjoy the best medical treatment and tourism in the country.

To emphasize the importance of cooperation between Thailand and Kuwait in the area of medical tourism and to celebrate the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations between both countries this year, the Royal Thai Embassy, Kuwait will organize the seminar "Sawasdee Good Health: Seminar on Medical Treatment and Tourism in Thailand" in the popular annual medical exhibition of Kuwait, "KUWAIT MEDICA 2023" event, at Badriah Ballroom, Jumeirah Messilah Beach Hotel on Thursday (19 January 2023) at 10.15- 12.45hrs.

### News in brief

#### Traffic issues rules for delivery firms

KUWAIT: The traffic department began implementation of delivery company rules following the end of the grace period. The conditions include wearing a uniform with the helmet; affixing the company sticker on the vehicles; residency permit of the deliveryman must be for the same company; holders of article 20 residency permits are not allowed to work as deliverymen. The department said legal action will be taken against noncompliance.

#### Suffocation from carbon monoxide poisoning

KUWAIT: A person was taken to Jahra Hospital after suffering from suffocation due to a burning charcoal heater. Police received a call from Matraba, where police discovered five people had placed the coal heater inside their room. Fire Force had warned against going to sleep while a charcoal heater is burning, due to the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning.

#### Al-Fajam appointed as new PAAET director

KUWAIT: A source said Dr Hassan Al-Fajam was appointed Director of the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training. The source said there are plans to permanently fill vacant leading positions in the educational sectors according to qualifications before the start of the second school term.

#### Kuwait oil price up

KUWAIT: Kuwait oil price rose by \$1.47 to \$83.17 pb in Friday's trading sessions, compared with \$81.70 pb Thursday, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said Saturday. Brent crude oil futures moved up by \$1.25 settling at \$85.28 pb and the West Texas Intermediate crude oil moved up by \$1.47 trading at \$79.86 pb. Kuwait oil price increased \$2.71 to stand at \$81.70 per barrel in Thursday's trade compared with \$78.99 pb on Wednesday, the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said on Friday. Brent crude in the global market rose \$1.36 to reach 84.03 per barrel, while the West Texas Intermediate increased 98 cents to stand at \$78.39 pb. —KUNA



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## News in brief

## 137 KFF officers promoted

**KUWAIT:** The General Fire Force announced that the First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Interior and Acting Minister of Defense Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah directed a promotion for 137 officers in the fire brigade who meet the conditions for promotion. The force said in a press statement on Friday that this comes in appreciation from Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled for the sincere efforts of these officers in protecting lives and property and achieving community security. It indicated that the promotions included 65 officers from the rank of major to Lieutenant Colonel and 72 officers from lieutenant colonel to colonel. —KUNA

## New GCC chief congratulated

**RIYADH:** Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf congratulated UAE Minister of Industry and Advanced Technology Dr Sultan Al-Jaber on appointment as President-Designate for the 28th Conference of the Parties (COP28) which Dubai will host next November. In a press statement on Thursday, Dr Al-Hajraf wished Dr Al-Jaber, also UAE Special Envoy for Climate Change, all success in his mission to steer discussions towards more cooperation and integration to tackle the climate issue. UAE Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Presidential Court Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan announced today the appointment of Dr Al-Jaber as COP28 President-Designate upon directive of President UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan. Al-Hajraf hailed that the UAE's hosting of the COP28 is a source of pride for the GCC countries and their peoples. He added that the conference is being held at a delicate time, given many countries suffering from the negative impacts of climate change, the loss of biodiversity and the challenges facing energy, food and water security. —KUNA

## Photo of the Day



**KUWAIT:** A rainbow appears after heavy rainfall above the Sulaibikhat beach in Kuwait on January 14, 2023. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

# Innovative minds stir KU's 43rd Engineering Design Exhibition

## Around 296 students present 78 innovative projects

**KUWAIT:** After years of accumulating knowledge, honing skillsets and sharpening creative capabilities, efforts of Engineering Students at Kuwait University culminate in a final project proudly displayed at the Engineering Design Exhibition. Students enrolled in the engineering design module examine the world around them and provide creative and practical solutions to societal issues.

Around 296 students presented 78 innovative projects at the exhibition's 43rd edition, hosted at Sabah Al-Salem University City on January 9. Electrical engineering students Dana and Rabaa Al-Mutairi shared a deep concern for the growing number of road accidents endangering the lives of motorcycle drivers, and the two took it upon themselves to devise an effective way to better protect road-goers. After much deliberation, Dana and Rabaa created a lightweight piece equipped with lights and warning notifications and which could be attached to the drivers' helmets.

The piece, Dana explained, "Measures distance between the motorcyclist and other approaching vehicles and sounds a warning to the driver in case of closing distance," Rabaa went on to add that driver is also able to use the piece to pinpoint his location and send it to concerned authorities in case of an emergency. Dana and Rabaa came up with a low cost, effective and easily operated device that could potentially save lives. As for chemical engineering students Hasan Ali, Mane Al-Randi, Sarah

Al-Sayegh and Fatima Dashti, they racked their brains trying to arrive at an idea for their final project. The group soon realized that the Middle East region is completely devoid of an acetone-manufacturing factory, a multi-purpose chemical compound used in detergents, cosmetics, and relied upon by many industries. The four agreed to work towards the first acetone-manufacturing factory in the area and used this idea as the blueprint for their project. A group of civil engineering students, of the environmental engineering discipline, was set upon finding solutions for Kuwait's environmental issues.

One student relayed to her collaborators that Qaruh Island, the farthest from Kuwait's shores, has been suffering from environmental issues eating away at it for the past 20 years. She told them that the island, once home to vibrant coral reefs, lost

much of its sea life and its size due to the deterioration of the marine environment around it. The group of five designed a project restoring life to the withering island with a concrete structure surrounding it.

The structure will help regrow coral reefs, explained the students, adding that rehabilitating Qaruh will require around 1,500 concrete domes. Each concrete dome is 71 centimeters high, with a 73 cm diameter, and is comprised of cement and fly ash, an eco-friendly substance. The first stage of the project establishes a factory to cover Qaruh's need of the concrete domes, and then expands to export such domes to countries suffering from the very same conundrum. These exhibited projects are a testament to students' innovative capabilities, and are a step closer to the future ahead. — KUNA



**KUWAIT:** Part of the acetone factory, the process of separating hydrogen from acetone and condensing it.

## Halfway house integral part of drug rehab process: Kuwait official

**KUWAIT:** The halfway house of the Kuwait addiction treatment center is an integral facility that helps in the rehabilitation from narcotics and substance abuse. Opened in 2010, the halfway house recovering addicts to face their demons and learn necessary social and psychological skills would enable them to reintegrate into society.

Head of the psychiatric service at the halfway house Yaqoub Al-Shatti told KUNA that the facility received those in advance stages of recovery and treatment, which previously involve steps such as withdrawal symptoms and so on. The first two months in the house involved intensive psychiatric treatment for provided by medical professionals, followed by a decrease in psychiatric treatment and reoccurring visits to facilities situated in Fintas area, which usually takes around two to three months. The whole process would be done according to various methods including the 12-step program, he indicated.

Developed in the 1930s, the classic 12-step program was aimed at riding individuals from addiction,

namely alcohol. It is a lifestyle based on principles simply written in a digital mode from one to 12. The healing process at the halfway house also includes efforts and attempts to fix the patients' social, familial, and professional relations as much as possible, affirmed Al-Shatti.

In 2017, the Health as well as the Awqaf (Endowment) and Islamic Affairs ministries signed a cooperation protocol in which the latter would provide a fully furnished, serviced, and staffed building to house residents of the halfway home, indicated Al-Shatti. He noted that residents were permitted to leave the facility during certain times and dates as well being allowed to sleep at their family houses on occasion. On the data connected with the success of the project, Al-Shatti revealed that the Ministry of Health was the only authority able to give specific numbers, however, he said that there were many residents who left the house some years ago and are still paying visits to the facility as friends of the halfway house. — KUNA



## School counselors have role in battling narcotics: Specialists

**KUWAIT:** Schools counselors across the country have a vital role in addressing students' problems especially when it comes to narcotics addiction and trafficking, said specialists on Saturday.

Mariam Al-Aamiri, an intermediate school counselor, told KUNA that students were under tremendous amount of pressure and they often fall prey to drug traffickers. She noted that with diligent work, a counselor could become the very first line of defense for students against the evils of narcotics. Whether it was familial disputes, lack of psychiatric

well-being, or plain curiosity, all these factors could become red flags that counselors must be recognized to prevent damage, Al-Aamiri said.

Parents and families are equally responsible for the students' welfare, and if there were any problems, it should be dealt with discretely and professionally, she added.

Similarly, Ebtisam Al-Majed, senior school counselor at another intermediate school, affirmed that prevention was far better than focusing on finding the cure. Awareness campaigns must begin from schools themselves, she stressed, saying that it was important to report suspicious cases of substance abuse and handle the situation with utmost care. When seeking treatment, students and their guardians are assured privacy, revealed Al-Majed, adding that providing humane treatment and a helping hand was key to a successful recuperation. — KUNA



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Japan PM tells Biden that new era requires more military muscle

## Lebanese protest arrest of blast victim's brother

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KREMINNA: Ukrainian servicemen stand near a tank on the frontline near Kreminna, Lugansk region, amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine. —AFP

# UK sending heavy tanks to Ukraine

‘Western tanks will not only strengthen us on the battlefield, but also send the right signal’

LONDON: British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak on Saturday pledged to provide Challenger 2 tanks to Ukraine, making it the first Western country to supply the heavy tanks Kyiv has been calling for. The pledge saw a swift reaction from Russia which warned it would only “intensify” the conflict. “Bringing tanks to the conflict zone, far from drawing the hostilities to a close, will only serve to intensify combat operations, generating more casualties, including among the civilian population”, the Russian embassy in the UK said.

Sunak said the tanks were a sign of the UK’s “ambition to intensify our support to Ukraine”, according to a readout of a phone call with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. Ukraine’s European allies have sent Kyiv more than 300 modernised Soviet tank since Russia invaded in February 2022.

But they have so far held off on dispatching the Western-made heavy tanks that Ukraine has repeatedly requested to

push forward against Russian invaders. Zelensky thanked the UK on Twitter for making decisions that “will not only strengthen us on the battlefield, but also send the right signal to other partners”.

### Heavy losses

Ukraine’s forces have taken heavy losses in the battles of Soledar and Bakhmut in recent months and have called on the country’s allies to give it more support. Russia said on Friday its forces had wrested control of the war-scarred town of Soledar in east Ukraine, its first claim of victory in months of battlefield setbacks, although Ukraine said fierce fighting was still under way.

“To win this war, we need more military equipment, heavy equipment,” Andriy Yermak, head of Ukraine’s presidential office, said. Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba also said that he had spoken with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and “emphasised the need” for

Ukraine to receive Western-type tanks.

Sunak’s formal offer follows reports that he was preparing to sign off on sending four British Army Challenger 2 main battle tanks to eastern Europe immediately, with eight more to follow shortly afterwards. The prime minister’s office has not yet confirmed the exact number of tanks it will send to Kyiv.

### Seize the moment

A Downing Street spokesman said Sunak and Zelensky agreed on the “need to seize on this moment” after Ukrainian victories had “pushed Russian troops back”. “The Prime Minister outlined the UK’s ambition to intensify our support to Ukraine, including through the provision of Challenger 2 tanks and additional artillery systems,” the spokesman said.

The issue of heavy tanks has long been a key one for Kyiv and many experts see providing Ukraine with modern tanks as a vital building block in its

ability to win against Russia. Germany has been especially hesitant of supplying heavy tanks.

It has delivered powerful mobile artillery and air defences but remains fearful of an escalation with Moscow if its tanks face off directly against their Russian opposite numbers. The Downing Street spokesman added that Sunak and Zelensky “welcomed other international commitments including Poland’s offer to provide a company of Leopard tanks”.

“The Prime Minister stressed that he and the whole UK Government would be working intensively with international partners to deliver rapidly the kind of support which will allow Ukraine to press their advantage, win this war and secure a lasting peace,” he said.

The UK announcement comes ahead of next week’s meeting of the Ukraine Defence Contact Group, which coordinates arms supplies to Kyiv, at Ramstein Air Base in Germany. —AFP

## Bolsonaro to be investigated in Jan 8 riot probe

BRASILIA: Brazilian far-right ex-president Jair Bolsonaro will be included in an investigation into the origins of the January 8 sacking of government buildings in Brasilia, a Supreme Court judge announced Friday. The probe of the former leader comes at the request of the office of the prosecutor general (PGR), which cited a video Bolsonaro had posted “questioning the regularity of the 2022 presidential elections.”

By doing so, “Bolsonaro would have publicly incited the commission of a crime,” the PGR said in a statement. Thousands of so-called “bolsonaristas” invaded the seats of government in Brasilia Sunday, breaking windows and furniture, destroying priceless works of art, and leaving graffiti messages calling for a military coup in their wake.

The Bolsonaro video was posted online two days after the violent storming of the presidency, Congress and Supreme Court and later deleted. The PGR explained that even though the video came after the uprising, it may serve as “a probative connection” that justified “a global investigation of the acts performed before and after January 8, 2023 by the defendant.”

Supreme Court Judge Alexandre de Moraes made the announcement Friday green-lighting Bolsonaro’s inclusion in the probe into what the PGR said was the “instigation and intellectual authorship” of the rioting. In a note seen by AFP Friday, Bolsonaro’s defense denied any involvement by the ex-president.

Bolsonaro “never had any relationship or participation in these movements,” the note said, blaming the violence on “infiltrators.” Bolsonaro had for years sought to cast doubts on the reliability of Brazil’s internationally praised election system, and had suggested he would not accept a defeat.

He never publicly acknowledged new President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva victory, and left for the United States, where he remains, two days before his successor’s inauguration.

### ‘Collusion’

As they move to identify the masterminds and financiers of the violent uprising that invited many parallels with the January 6, 2021 storming of the US Capitol, Brazilian authorities on Friday also tightened the screws on a former Bolsonaro minister. Anderson Torres, who was Bolsonaro’s last justice minister, is wanted under a Supreme Court warrant for alleged “collusion” with the rioters. He also stands accused of “omission” in his most recent job as security chief for the capital Brasilia which was the target of the destructive ire of protesters. He was fired after the violent revolt against leftist Lula.

Like his former boss Bolsonaro, Torres was in the United States when the riots erupted, and is expected back in Brazil any day. Lula’s new justice minister Flavio Dino, who replaced Torres, said Friday the authorities would give Torres until Monday to present himself. If he fails to show up, “through international mechanisms, we will launch the procedures for extradition next week, since there is an arrest warrant,” Dino told reporters in the capital.

The minister also confirmed the discovery at Torres’ home of a draft decree proposing emergency steps for the possible “correction” of the October election that Bolsonaro lost to Lula by a razor-thin margin. —AFP

## Peru president insists ‘I will not resign’

LIMA: Peruvian President Dina Boluarte has insisted she will not step down, after another day of protests and roadblocks across the country saw calls for her resignation and the arrest of a trade union leader with alleged links to Maoist rebels. Supporters of ousted president Pedro Castillo have marched and barricaded streets throughout the South American country since December, demanding new elections and the removal of Boluarte.

“Some voices that have come from the violent and radical factions are asking for my resignation, provoking the population into chaos, disorder and destruction,” Boluarte said in an address on state TV Friday night. “I will not resign. My commitment is with Peru.”

Boluarte lamented that the protests have at times turned violent, as at least 42 people have been killed in clashes with security forces, including a police officer burned alive in a vehicle. Hundreds more have been injured.

“I cannot stop reiterating my regret for the deaths of Peruvians in these protests,” she said. “I apologize for this situation.” But she rejected the possibility of calling a constitutional assembly as demanded by protesters, pointing to the difficulties Peru’s neighbor Chile has had in drafting and approving a new constitution. “That cannot happen overnight,” Boluarte added. Earlier on Friday—the tenth consecutive day of unrest, after a new-year lull—police announced the arrest of Rocio Leandro, a union leader from the Ayacucho region.

Leandro, who has alleged links to Maoist rebels, is accused of financing protests and recruiting demonstrators. Police spokesman Oscar Arriola claimed his arrest proved that remnants of the Shining Path Maoist rebels were involved in the protests. He said Leandro was a former Shining Path member known as “Comrade Cusi.”

### Roadblocks and border closures

The head of US diplomacy for Latin America, Brian Nichols, wrote on Twitter that Washington is “deeply concerned about ongoing violence in Peru & saddened by the injuries & deaths.” “We support peace on all sides & the gov’t’s stated commitments



AREQUIPA: Demonstrators hold a blockade in the Pan-American highway at La Joya to demand the resignation of Peruvian President Dina Boluarte in Arequipa, Peru. —AFP

to address the challenges gripping the country,” he added. The head of a delegation from the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), Guatemalan lawyer Stuardo Ralon, called for an “impartial and effective” investigation into allegations of excessive force by authorities.

He also noted “a strong stigmatization by racial and regional ethnic factors, particularly in the messages reproduced by some authorities who have referred with generalizations towards all indigenous and peasant people as terrorists.” Protestors blocked roads in the capital Lima, and in several regions in the historically marginalized south.

A protest in the border city of Tacna, 1,200 kilometers (750 miles) southeast of Lima, led neighbor Chile to temporarily close the crossing between the two countries. The city of Arequipa in the south—the second-largest in the country and one of Peru’s main tourist hotspots—had been practically blocked off from all transport links with the neighboring regions of Cusco and Puno.

Several regional governors and professional associations, including lawyers and teachers, joined the

calls for Boluarte to resign. “How many more deaths will Dina Boluarte’s presence in the presidency cost?” asked Puno governor Richard Hancco, whose area has become the epicenter of clashes between protesters and security forces.

That region, close to the border with Bolivia, was where 18 people died following violent clashes on Monday night.

### Ministers resign

Opposition legislator Susel Paredes told local radio that time was running out for Boluarte and that the resignation of labor minister Eduardo Garcia on Thursday was “the beginning of the end” for the president.

Two other ministers resigned Friday: The heads of the interior ministry and the Ministry of Women. Peru has been riddled with political instability in recent years. Boluarte, 60, is the sixth person to hold the presidency in five years. Castillo, who was being investigated in several fraud cases during his tenure, has been remanded in custody for 18 months, charged with rebellion. —AFP



## International

# 'Disastrous' flood warning in California as another storm hits

## 'The entire city of Salinas is in danger of flooding'

LOS ANGELES: Disastrous flooding could hit parts of California this weekend, forecasters warned Friday, as the eighth storm in succession barreled in over land already too waterlogged to soak up any more rain.

The most populous US state has been pummeled by near-record downpours over a very wet three weeks, which have already caused flooding, landslides and widespread power outages. At least 19 people are known to have died as communities struggle to cope with the constant deluge.

On Friday yet another system moved in, with forecasters warning the Monterey Peninsula could be cut off and the whole city of Salinas-home to 160,000 people-flooded. "The entire lower Salinas Valley will have disastrous flooding," the National Weather Service said.

"The entire city of Salinas is in danger of flooding. Most of Castroville will flood. All roads near the Salinas River will be flooded and impassable. 90,000 acres or more of agricultural land in the Salinas Valley will have disastrous flooding. "Many roads, homes and agricultural land areas in the Salinas Valley will have major flood damage." The Salinas River, already swollen by weeks of torrential rain, was expected to peak some time Friday, breaching its banks in a flood that could last until Sunday.

Kelley O'Connell said the bursting of a levee near her home had worried her. "If they release water from the dams or we get more rain, we're just a field away," she told the San Francisco Chronicle as she collected sandbags.

Evacuation orders and warnings were widespread, with forecasters saying major roads could become impassable-including highways that link the Monterey Peninsula with the rest of the county. "Residents both on the peninsula

and in the Salinas area should expect to be cut off for two to three days," Monterey County officials said earlier this week.

Monterey County Sheriff Tina Nieto told reporters Thursday that floodwater could strand people. "This is a slow-moving event" and not all places will be impacted at once, she said. "The river crests at different times."

Resident John Guru said he was taking no chances, with four days' supplies at home and two days' worth in his car in case he is caught out on the road. "I'm not sure how bad it's going to be," he told the Monterey Herald. "I will find a place if needed and do whatever it takes," he said, adding: "This is crazy, I was not anticipating anything like this."

### Snow

Workers have rushed out in between storms to clear up some of the mess left behind, shoveling mud from roads even in the heart of Los Angeles. Crews have cut up felled trees, and heavy machinery have been drafted in to move rockslides.

Hundreds of thousands of homes and businesses have been left without power at various times-sometimes repeatedly-as rickety infrastructure has taken a battering. And it's not over yet, forecasters say.

"The ongoing unsettled weather in the West associated with the active Atmospheric River pattern unfortunately continues into this weekend with another couple rounds of heavy precipitation forecast," the NWS said.

Over the mountains, that precipitation was falling as snow, with more than three feet (a meter) expected in the Sierra Nevada range, making travel dangerous or impossible, even as thousands of skiers and snowboarders head for fresh powder over the Martin Luther King, Jr Day holiday weekend.



MERCED: Residents look towards a flooded roadway in Merced, California, as an "atmospheric river". Relentless storms were ravaging California again, the latest bout of extreme weather that has left dozens dead. —AFP

Jr Day holiday weekend.

Among those who have died in the last three weeks were drivers who were found in submerged cars, people struck by falling trees, a husband and wife killed in a rockfall, and people whose bodies were discovered in floodwaters. Winter storms are not unusual in California, where most of the annual rain comes in a fairly concentrated period.

But global warming, driven by the industrial era's unchecked use of fossil fuels, is supercharg-

ing storms, making them wetter and wilder. At the same time, the western United States is aridifying, with much of the region in its 23rd year of drought. Hydrologists say the recent rains are helping-California has received an average of almost nine inches (23 centimeters) of rain since late December-but are not a fix. "A few weeks of storms is not enough in this drought for California, but it certainly is nice. It's certainly making a good dent," Jay Lund, director of University of California, Davis, told the Chronicle. —AFP

## Zionist forces kill two Palestinians

RAMALLAH: Two Palestinians were killed Saturday during a Zionist army raid in the occupied West Bank, the Palestinian health ministry said. The two young men were shot dead by Zionist forces "during an assault on the village of Jaba, south of Jenin" in the north of the West Bank, the ministry said.

No further details were provided on the circumstances surrounding their deaths. The Islamic Jihad militant group condemned the killings in a statement, describing the two men as "heroic martyrs" belonging to the group.

It said they were killed while trying to intervene against the "occupation forces which were carrying out a cowardly assassination operation". The Zionist army said in a brief statement that it had launched "counterterrorism activity" near the village, during which "suspects shot live fire" at them from a passing vehicle. "The soldiers responded with live fire. Hits were identified," it said, adding that no Zionist soldiers were reported injured. An AFP photographer saw a white car in Jaba with its windshield riddled with bullets on the driver's side. The vehicle had crashed into a building under construction and its rear was completely gutted.

The Palestinian health ministry named the two young men killed as Ezzedine Bassem Hamamra,



JABA: Onlookers surround a bullet-riddled car in which two Palestinians were reportedly killed by Zionist troops in Jaba near the West Bank town of Jenin, on January 14, 2023. —AFP

24, and Amjad Adnan Khaliliya, 23. A third Palestinian, 19-year-old Yazen Samer Jaabari, died of his injuries after he was shot by Zionist forces earlier this month, the ministry said.

He was wounded during an Zionist army operation on January 2 in the village of Kafr Dan, near Jenin, in which two other Palestinians were killed, according to the official Palestinian news agency Wafa. The latest deaths bring up to 12 the toll of Palestinians killed this year during violence in the West Bank, occupied by Zionist entity since 1967.

Zionist forces have launched near-daily raids in the West Bank following a wave of deadly attacks in Israel last year. The surge in bloodshed last year saw at least 26 Zionists and 200 Palestinians killed across Israel and the West Bank, according to an AFP tally. More than 150 of the fatalities were in the West Bank. —AFP

## Lebanese protest arrest of blast victim's brother

BEIRUT: Activists gathered in front of a police station in the Lebanese capital Saturday to protest the arrest of the brother of a victim of a deadly 2020 blast, witnesses said. William Noun-whose brother, a fireman, was killed in the August 2020 Beirut port blast-was arrested Friday over remarks made during a television programme, a judiciary source told AFP.

The young man is a leading figure among families of the blast's victims who have been calling for the continuation of a probe into the tragic event, on hold for over a year. Noun's arrest sparked protests Friday night, as his relatives and other victims' families, along with activists, cut off roads in the capital.

Known for his outspokenness, he had threatened during televised remarks Thursday to "blow up the palace of justice" to protest moves to replace the judge investigating the blast. Embattled judge Tarek Bitar has faced an endless series of complaints against him, part of a campaign led by Shiite group Hezbollah and its allies seeking to block his probe into the blast.

On Tuesday, relatives of the victims, including Noun, threw stones at the palace of justice in Beirut, where they gathered again on Thursday in a protest over Bitar's possible replacement.



BEIRUT: File photo shows Lebanese activist William Noun (C), whose brother was killed in the massive port explosion in Beirut in August 2020, during a demonstration outside the residence of the minister of interior in the Lebanese capital against the authorities' lack of action to achieve justice for the victims of the bombing. —AFP

Demonstrations were also held on Saturday in front of the police station where Noun was being held, according to witnesses.

"This is an attempt to intimidate but it won't work," Noun's lawyer, Ralph Tannous, told Lebanese television. "This is a political move, not a judicial one." MP and lawyer Melhem Khalaf meanwhile told AFP, "I wish they would implement with the same enthusiasm all the warrants issued by the judicial investigator" over the port blast.

He described the replacement of the investigator as a "distraction from all the abnormalities that are happening in the country". The 2020 disaster, one of history's biggest non-nuclear explosions, killed more than 200 people and decimated vast areas of the capital after a stockpile of haphazardly stored ammonium nitrate caught fire. —AFP

## Iran executes 'British...'

Continued from Page 1

Mizan said he had retired a decade ago and moved to "research and business activities in the private sector". Prominent Iranian lawyer Saeid Dehghan said on Twitter that Akbari's sentencing and execution were "political". Dehghan noted his execution comes amid moves in the British parliament to list Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps as a terrorist group over its role in a deadly crackdown on protests.

Mahmoud Amiry-Moghaddam, director of Oslo-based group Iran Human Rights, made a similar

observation. "The fact that Iran carried out the execution while the UK and EU are considering putting the IRGC on terror lists shows it is part of the Islamic republic's policy of hostage diplomacy," he told AFP. Amnesty International says Iran is the world's most prolific user of the death penalty after China.

Another dual national also facing the death penalty is Swedish-Iranian citizen Ahmadreza Djalali, who has been held since 2016 and was sentenced the following year to death on espionage charges that his family vehemently denies. Iran has been rocked by protests that erupted over the Sept 16 death of Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old Iranian Kurd, after her arrest for an alleged breach of the country's dress code for women. Eighteen people have been sentenced to death in connection with the protests, according to a count compiled by AFP from official announcements. Four of them have been executed. —AFP

His peer at the Faculty of Law, Dr Abdulaziz Al-Enezi, expressed his belief that motorists must adhere to ethics and sense of responsibility toward peoples' safety, rather than being solely concerned with paying fines. Nevertheless, the use of such cameras will be helpful to enhance traffic safety and instill a sense of fear among the drivers from breaking the law.

The interior ministry recently announced installing the sixth-generation cameras on roads and some public locations to monitor the illegal use of the mobiles while driving, failure to use the seatbelt, illegal turns or driving wrongly on main roads. Ministry statistics show the total amount of traffic violations from Jan 1 till the end of November in 2022 amounted to 3.4 million. Accidents claimed 170 lives, it said, noting that lack of attention by drivers is the prime cause of accidents. —KUNA

## Smart cams aim to boost road...

Continued from Page 1

help in reducing accidents that inflict human and material losses.

Meanwhile, Dr Badr Al-Rajhi, a law professor at Kuwait University, said the cameras will deter violators and reduce the number of accident victims. Adherence to laws is the "guarantee for our traffic security and safety on the roads", Dr Rajhi said. He concurred that using mobile phones while driving has proven to be the prime cause of accidents, advising drivers and riders to buckle up.

## US freedom at stake? Gas stove debate sets Republicans aflame

WASHINGTON: Talk of a possible ban on gas cooking in the United States due to health fears has become the latest rallying cry for US Republicans, joining other more established lines of attack such as gun rights. The noisy debate was sparked by Richard Trumka Jr, a member of the US Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), saying that a ban could not be ruled out due to the "hidden hazard" of gas stove emissions.

"Any option is on the table. Products that can't be made safe can be banned," he told Bloomberg News this week following new research showing an increased risk of asthma in homes using gas-burning stoves. Republican elected officials quickly seized on the comments as evidence of Democrats' supposed wish to undermine American freedoms. "Gas stoves are the next thing the Biden Administration is coming after in their latest power grab," wrote Jeff Duncan, a US Representative from South Carolina.

"Democrats are coming for your kitchen appliances," echoed Senator Tom Cotton of Arkansas. "Their desire to control every aspect of your life knows no bounds-including how you make breakfast." Some pointed to the supposed superiority of gas stoves - "electric stoves are garbage," tweeted conservative commentator Matt Walsh - while others pointed to the high cost of modern alternatives, such as induction burners.

Like many others, Republican firebrand Matt

Gaetz shared a video of a gas stove burning. The representative from Florida wrote: "You'll have to pry it from my COLD DEAD HANDS!" - echoing a famous remark shouted by late actor and gun lobby president Charlton Heston while raising a musket over his head. About 35 percent of US homes have gas stoves.

### Potential 'health risks'

To try and tamp down the rising temperature, the White House and CPSC spoke out against any possible ban. "The president does not support banning gas stoves," said White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre. "And the Consumer Product Safety Commission, which is independent, is not banning gas stoves," she added. The chair of the five-member CPSC, Alex Hoehn-Saric, a Biden appointee, took to Twitter to "set the record straight". "To be clear, I am not looking to ban gas stoves and the CPSC has no proceeding to do so," he wrote.

He did however add that the commission "is researching gas emissions in stoves and exploring new ways to address health risks," and would seek public input on "reducing any associated risks". Recent peer-reviewed research - which has received some pushback from academics-says that 12 percent of childhood asthma cases in the United States and Europe could be attributed to indoor gas stoves.

But Republicans say their position is not up for debate. "God. Gums. Gas stoves," tweeted Ohio's Jim Jordan, who leads the Judiciary Committee in the newly-Republican-controlled US House of Representatives. The debate "exemplifies the silliest tendencies of American politics," said the Atlantic Magazine. "A big nothing can morph into a huge controversy for no good reason at all." —AFP



## International

# China reports almost 60,000 COVID-related deaths in a month

## Millions of elderly in China are not fully vaccinated

BEIJING: China's health authorities reported on Saturday almost 60,000 COVID-related deaths in just over a month, the first major death toll released by the government since it loosened its virus restrictions in early December. China has been widely accused of underreporting its number of coronavirus fatalities since the abandonment of its zero-COVID policy.

Only a few dozen deaths had been recorded officially in December before Saturday's announcement, despite evidence of crematoriums and hospitals being overrun. But a National Health Commission (NHC) official said on Saturday China had recorded 59,938 COVID-related deaths between December 8, 2022, and January 12. The figure refers only to deaths recorded at medical facilities, with the total number likely to be higher.

The data includes 5,503 deaths caused by respiratory failure directly due to the virus, and 54,435 deaths caused by underlying conditions combined with COVID, Jiao Yahui, head of the NHC's Bureau of Medical Administration, told a news conference.

Health officials insisted Wednesday it was "not necessary" to dwell on the exact number. Beijing revised its methodology for categorising COVID fatalities last month, saying it would count only those who die specifically of respiratory failure caused by the virus.

This was criticised by the World Health Organization, which said the new definition was "too narrow". WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said the organisation was continuing to "ask China for more rapid, regular, reliable data on hospitalisation and deaths, as well as... viral sequencing".

Beijing, however, has insisted it has been transparent with the international community about its data,



FENGYANG: Picture shows COVID-19 patients being treated at Fengyang People's Hospital in Fengyang county, east China's Anhui Province.

urging the WHO to "uphold a scientific, objective and just position".

### Elderly at risk

Health officials said Saturday the average age of those who had died was 80.3 years, with more than 90 percent of fatalities above 65 years old. Most suffered from underlying conditions, they said. Millions of the elderly in China are not fully vaccinated, with President Xi Jinping's government criticised for not prioritising immunisation campaigns

among the country's most vulnerable citizens. Officials also suggested on Saturday that the peak of the current wave might have passed. Just under 2.9 million patients visited fever clinics on December 23, they said, but the figure had dropped to 477,000 nationwide on January 12.

They said the number of severely ill patients in hospitals was still high but that the peak appeared to have been in early January. The priority, they said, was to monitor the situation in rural areas and focus on early detection and treatment for the most vulnerable. — AFP

## Japan PM tells Biden that new era requires more military muscle

WASHINGTON: Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida pledged Friday alongside US President Joe Biden to modernize his country's military, warning that Russia's invasion of Ukraine had opened a dangerous new era and could embolden China. Welcoming Kishida at the White House, Biden hailed the Japanese government's announcement last month that it will double defense spending over the next five years and develop new capabilities.

"Let me be crystal clear: the United States is fully, thoroughly, completely committed to the alliance and more importantly to Japan's defense," Biden said. Japan has been officially pacifist since its defeat in World War II but has been shedding past sensitivities as China rapidly expands its military and North Korea relentlessly tests missiles.

In a speech after his White House meeting, Kishida cast his defense strategy as a historic turning point in the US-Japan alliance in the same league as the mutual defense treaty of 1960. "Russia's aggression against Ukraine has marked the complete end of the post-Cold War world," Kishida said at Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies.



WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida walk through the colonnade of the White House in Washington, DC, on their way to the Oval Office. — AFP

"If we let this unilateral change in the status quo by force go unchallenged, it will happen elsewhere in the world, including Asia," Kishida said, in likely a veiled allusion to fears of a Chinese invasion of Taiwan. The relationship with China, Kishida said, "is the most critical challenge for both Japan and the United States."

### 'Major shift' on Russia

Japan has joined Western powers in imposing sanctions on Russia and has provided humanitarian, although not military, aid to Ukraine since President Vladimir Putin invaded in February 2022. Kishida called it a "major shift" in Japan's policy toward Russia following marathon but unsuccessful talks to resolve a dispute over islands seized by Soviet troops shortly after Tokyo's surrender in 1945.

Kishida was visiting Washington at the end of a tour of Group of Seven nations as Japan starts its year leading the elite club of industrial democracies, in which the country is proud to be the only non-Western member.

"Japan's participation in the measures against Russia transformed the fight against Russia's aggression against Ukraine from a transatlantic one to a global one," Kishida said. Biden in the Oval Office meeting hailed Japan's firmness on Ukraine.

"We're stepping up to hold Putin accountable for his unprovoked war in Ukraine and I want to thank you, thank you for your strong leadership on this from the first conversation," Biden said. As part of its new defense policy, Japan is going on a shopping spree and is looking to buy hundreds of Tomahawk cruise missiles, which currently are only in the arsenals of the United States and Britain.

Japan will also for the first time develop a "counter-strike" capability—being able to hit launch sites for missiles that threaten it.

In talks this week between the Japanese foreign and defense ministers and their counterparts, the two countries also agreed that attacks in space could invoke their mutual defense treaty amid rapid Chinese work on satellites. "Our security alliance has never been stronger," said a joint statement by Biden and Kishida.

"The two leaders reaffirmed that the alliance remains the cornerstone of peace, security and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific." They also renewed a call to maintain "peace and stability" in the Taiwan Strait.

China under President Xi Jinping has been increasingly forceful on Taiwan and staged major military exercises in August after a defiant visit to the self-governing democracy by Nancy Pelosi, then the speaker of the US House of Representatives. Japan is also planning to enter joint exercises with the United States and Australia and has coordinated diplomacy as part of the four-way "Quad" that also includes India. — AFP



LEDNICE: A woman in traditional costume of Podluzi (area in south Moravia) vote at the polling station during the Presidential election in Lednice, 60 km south of Brno, South Moravia, Czech Republic. — AFP

## Three frontrunners as Czechs vote for new president

PRAGUE: Polling stations reopened for day two of Czech presidential polls Saturday with a billionaire, a general and an academic leading in the first of a likely two-round vote seen as too close to call. The winner will replace Milos Zeman, an outspoken and divisive political veteran, following a period marked by the country's 2022 EU presidency as the war in Ukraine raged. The victor will face record inflation in the central European country of 10.5 million people, as well as bulging public finance deficits related to the war in Ukraine. Polling stations will close at 2:00 pm (1300 GMT) on Saturday, with first-round results expected later in the day.

Unless a candidate wins more than 50 percent outright—which is considered unlikely—the two top-placed contenders will go head-to-head in a second round on January 27-28. "If you asked me to place a bet (on the result), I wouldn't," Metropolitan University Prague political scientist Petr Just told AFP.

Populist ex-prime minister Andrej Babis, retired general Petr Pavel and university professor Danuse Nerudova are vying to become only the fourth president since the Czech Republic was founded in 1993 following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Casting his ballot at a school in Prague, voter Ivan Andrys said the next president should be impartial and act in lockstep with the government on foreign policy, something Zeman often failed to do.

"Of course, he or she must not give (in) to pressures... whether political or economic," Andrys said. Business tycoon and former prime minister Babis, 68, is the fifth wealthiest person in the Czech Republic, according to Forbes magazine.

Pavel, 61, is a former paratrooper who was decorated as a hero of the Serbo-Croatian war during which he helped to free French troops from a war zone. He went on to become the chief of the Czech general staff and chair of NATO's military commit-

tee. Nerudova, the youngest frontrunner at 44, has a strong focus on social issues and is counting largely on the backing of younger voters.

### 'More of a diplomat'

Voting in his home village of Cernoucek, north of Prague, Pavel said the main goal was to restore the dignity of the presidential office after Zeman's 10 years in office. "We should also establish normal communication and try to achieve results not through confrontation but by cooperation," he added.

Babis, voting in Pruhoonice just south of Prague, said he was counting on his political experience to carry him to victory. "I know most presidents. And my advantage is that I know what all ministries are dealing with," he added.

Nerudova relished the experience as she voted in the southern town of Kurim. "For me, it is already a success because no woman has been in this position before and I am glad that it will serve as an example to all young people that it makes sense to get involved," she said.

Polls suggest that both Pavel and Nerudova would beat Babis if they face him in the second round. Five candidates—two senators, a far-right lawmaker, a former university rector and an entrepreneur—trail behind the top three favourites.

The Czech president's role is largely ceremonial, but the head of state names the government, picks the governor of the central bank and constitutional judges, and serves as top commander of the armed forces.

But Zeman, a controversial politician who once confessed to a daily diet of six glasses of wine and three shots of spirits, repeatedly exploited loopholes in the constitution to increase his influence. Following a busy Friday at polling stations, Saturday morning was much slower in turnout with the odd dog-walker or shopper showing up in a school in central Prague.

Voter Anna Nina Schumannova said she expected the new president "to be more of a diplomat" than Zeman. "He or she should be reliable, think of all the people, make our country flourish and develop, ensure peace and make our children happy," she said. — AFP

Pell, who died in Rome aged 81, was a towering figure in the Catholic Church but deeply divisive at home in Australia, where he had been accused of molesting two teenage choir boys while archbishop of Melbourne. From humble beginnings, Pell climbed the ranks to become one of Pope Francis's most trusted advisers inside the Vatican.

He was also the highest-ranking Catholic to be imprisoned for child sexual abuse, spending 12 months in prison before his convictions were quashed on appeal. Pell died of heart complications related to a hip surgery he underwent in a Rome hospital on Tuesday, according to the Vatican's official news website.

## Myanmar air strike kills 5

BANGKOK: A mother and her toddler were among five people killed in a military air strike in Myanmar's east, Karen rebels and an aid group said Saturday. Myanmar has been in turmoil since Aung San Suu Kyi's civilian government was toppled in a military coup almost two years ago, ending the southeast Asian nation's brief period of democracy.

Four junta fighter jets dropped eight bombs on villages in Hpapun district on Thursday afternoon, killing five people, the Karen National Union said in a statement. Another four people were wounded, the ethnic rebel group said. The Karen live largely in Myanmar's east near the border with Thailand. The Myanmar junta was contacted for comment but did not respond. Christian aid group the Free Burma Rangers said its staff arrived at Lay Wah village in Hpapun hours after bombs destroyed two churches and a school.

"Some villagers had come back and they showed us the mangled bodies of the five who had been killed," the group said in a statement. "A mother and her baby were instantly killed." A Baptist pastor and a Catholic priest were among the dead, the Free Burma Rangers statement said. The toddler was almost three.

Villagers had fled into the jungle before the air strikes, the group said, and fatalities would have been much higher had children still been in their classrooms. "We saw shrapnel-damaged homes and roofs blown off," it said. A Karen National Liberation Army spokesman told AFP there had been another air strike on Friday. "We will continue to see these types of incidents because we don't have air defence systems," he said. More than 2,700 civilians have been killed since the military grabbed power in February 2021, according to a local monitoring group. — AFP

## HK gangster arrested

HONG KONG: A self-professed Hong Kong gangster has learned the benefits of keeping a low profile after a viral video of him exiting a Porsche to berate a minibus driver led to his arrest for cocaine possession.

The 35-year-old appeared in court on Saturday after the clip capturing their traffic dispute helped police track down the wanted fugitive. It shows the man getting out of the sports car and shouting profanities at the driver while claiming to be a triad member—an offence in Hong Kong. He bashes the window of the vehicle while knocking the glasses off the driver's face and waving a stick. But his fit of road rage has cost him dearly after police busted him and three others on Thursday for drug possession, with officers seizing 1.7 kilograms (3.7 pounds) of suspected cocaine. "This man disregarded the safety of other road users and further disregarded law and order by publicly claiming to be a triad member," Chief Inspector Wong Chi-tang told reporters. He added that police made the arrest after identifying the man from the video.

Meanwhile, the victim of the man's outburst has been dubbed the "most educated minibus driver" in Hong Kong after it was discovered he holds a master's degree in transport planning and had quit a lucrative job to serve commuters from behind the wheel. — AFP

His body will be returned to Australia and buried in the crypt of St Mary's Cathedral in Sydney, church officials said. But an Australian state leader has ruled out a taxpayer-funded memorial for Cardinal Pell, saying it would be "deeply distressing" for sexual abuse survivors. Premier Daniel Andrews on Thursday said Pell's legacy had been permanently tainted.

"We will never ever forget victim-survivors of institutional child sexual abuse at the hands of the Catholic Church," he told reporters. State funerals are reserved for high-profile figures who have made significant contributions to Australian public life. — AFP

## Funeral held for cardinal Pell

VATICAN CITY: Several dozen people including bishops, cardinals and archbishops turned out for the funeral of the controversial Cardinal George Pell in the Vatican on Saturday. The ceremony in St Peter's Basilica was led by Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re, with Pope Francis arriving in a wheelchair for the last few minutes.



SUNDAY, JANUARY 15, 2023

# Business

## Focus on emissions: UAE's climate talks and oil boss

'Less-polluting fossil fuels to remain part of energy mix'



ABU DHABI: UAE's Minister of Energy and Industry Suhail Al-Mazrouei (left) and Minister of State for Energy Affairs Saad Sherida Al-Kaabi, attend the opening session of the Atlantic Council Global Energy Forum, in the capital Abu Dhabi, on January 14, 2023. — AFP photos



ABU DHABI: United Arab Emirates' Minister of State and CEO of the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC), Sultan Ahmed Al-Jaber, addresses the public at the opening session of the Atlantic Council Global Energy Forum, in the capital Abu Dhabi, on January 14, 2023.

ABU DHABI: The president of this year's COP28 climate talks, who heads a major oil company, on Saturday urged a focus on lower emissions to reduce global warming, warning that energy needs were set to accelerate. Sultan Al-Jaber, the United Arab Emirates' special envoy for climate change and CEO of oil giant ADNOC, said less-polluting fossil fuels would remain part of the energy mix, along with renewables and other solutions.

"As long as the world still uses hydrocarbons, we must ensure they are the least carbon intensive possible," Al-Jaber told the Global Energy Forum in Abu Dhabi, two days after his unveiling as COP president. "We're working with the energy industry on accelerating decarbonisation, reducing methane and expanding hydrogen.

"Let's keep our focus on holding back emissions, not progress." Al-Jaber's nomination on Thursday prompted protests from climate activists concerned that a senior figure from the oil industry has little incentive to reduce the use of hydrocarbons. The Gulf monarchy argues that oil remains indispensable

to the global economy and is pushing the merits of carbon capture-removing carbon dioxide, the main greenhouse gas, as fuel is burned or from the air.

Al-Jaber said the UAE would organize this year's United Nations climate summit with "humility, a clear sense of responsibility and a great sense of urgency". He said the world's population, currently eight billion, was on course to reach 9.7 billion by 2050 and would need "50 percent more energy than what is available today".

### 'Living in a dream'

"We are way off track. The world is playing catch up when it comes to the key Paris goal of holding global temperatures down to 1.5 degrees (Celsius)," he said.

"And the harsh reality is that in order to achieve this goal, global emissions must fall 43 percent by 2030." COP27, held in Egypt in November, concluded with the adoption of a hotly contested text on aid to poor countries affected by climate change, but failed to set new ambitions for lowering green-

house gas emissions. The UAE, a leading crude producer and one of the world's biggest polluters per capita, will host the next edition in Dubai in November and December. It had the largest contingent of oil and gas lobbyists at last year's talks.

At the Global Energy Forum, whose audience included US climate envoy John Kerry, Qatar's Energy Minister Saad Sherida Al-Kaabi accused critics of "demonising" oil and gas companies.

"If I can just be a little bit blunt... the community that was driving the green (agenda) was living in a dream that they realise they can't achieve," said Kaabi, who is also the chief executive of state gas firm QatarEnergy.

"It's very important that we achieve these goals but we need to be realistic about what we can achieve," he added. "We can't be driven by just the agendas of people wanting to be elected."

Products as varied as coolers and clothing rely on hydrocarbons, Kaabi said. "I know we need to do a lot of work there but let's not forget the reality of what we need." — AFP

## Europe will return to Russian gas: Qatar energy boss

ABU DHABI: European countries will eventually resume higher imports of Russian gas, Qatar's energy minister and gas company CEO predicted on Saturday, warning that market volatility could last for years. Russian gas exports to Europe plunged after Moscow's invasion of Ukraine but Saad Sherida Al-Kaabi, head of QatarEnergy, said the situation could change in the future.

"The Europeans today are saying there's no way we're going back" to Russian gas, he told the Global Energy Forum in Abu Dhabi. "We're all blessed to have to be able to forget and to forgive. And I think things get mended with time... they learn from that situation and probably have a much bigger diversity.

"But Russian gas is going back, in my view, to Europe." Gas exports by Russian energy giant Gazprom to the European Union and Switzerland fell by 55 percent last year, the company said this month. Europe was previously Gazprom's main export market but supplies were drastically reduced because of sanctions following the Ukraine invasion last February.

A mild winter has spared European countries from having to plunder their gas stockpiles, but Kaabi warned it would be harder this year to replenish back-up supplies. "Luckily they haven't had a very high demand for gas due to the warmer weather. The issue is what's going to happen when they want to replenish their storages this coming year, and there isn't much gas coming into the market until '25, '26, '27," he said. "So I think it's going to be a volatile situation for some time." — AFP



Saad Sherida Al-Kaabi

## China imports, exports plunge in December

BEIJING: China's exports in December fell at their fastest pace since 2020, according to official data Friday, owing to a drop in global demand and after health restrictions hit economic activity at home. The world's second-largest economy is still reeling from the effects of years of its zero-COVID policy, which hammered businesses and supply chains, and dampened consumption. China began lifting most of the hardline measures at the beginning of last month, but the country has since seen a massive spike in COVID-19 infections.

Exports fell 9.9 percent year-on-year to \$30.6 billion, China customs said, their second consecutive month of decline and the biggest fall since the early days of the pandemic in 2020. That followed a fall of 8.7 percent in November. Exports had been the main driver of China's economy since 2020, when the global shutdown led to strong demand for Chinese goods such as medical products, and then as the rest of the world reopened.

The uncertainties linked to COVID and the economic slowdown in China are having an impact on



LIANYUNGANG, China: This photo taken on January 13, 2023 shows an aerial view of cranes and shipping containers at Lianyungang port in China's eastern Jiangsu province. — AFP

the need for foreign products. Imports were down again in December, sinking 7.5 percent, following a 10.6 percent drop the previous month. Both imports and exports dropped much more than forecast in a survey of economists by Bloomberg.

For all of 2022, the Asian giant's exports rose 7.0 percent, compared with a 29.9 percent jump in the previous year. Imports for 2022 were up 1.1 percent, against a 30.1 percent rise in 2021 when activity in China was recovering from the first wave of the

pandemic. China's trade surplus in December nevertheless reached \$78 billion, but still well below July's record \$101.2 billion. China will unveil its 2022 economic growth figure on Tuesday, along with a host of other indicators. The previous year gross domestic product grew more than eight percent. Beijing had set itself a growth target of around 5.5 percent for 2022, but that has been undermined by the stifling zero-COVID health policy that was in place for most of the year. — AFP

## Sri Lanka to cut army by half after financial crisis

COLOMBO: Bankrupt Sri Lanka will drastically slash its military, the defence ministry said Friday, as the government works to overhaul its shambolic finances after an unprecedented economic crisis.

The island nation is still reeling from months of food and fuel shortages that made daily life a misery for its 22 million people last year. President Ranil Wickremesinghe has hiked taxes and imposed harsh spending cuts to smooth the passage of an expected International Monetary Fund bailout following a government debt default.

Sri Lanka's armed forces are next on the chopping block, with the defence ministry announcing it would retire 65,000 soldiers from its 200,000-strong army over the year. The cuts make up the lion's share of plans to downsize Sri Lanka's land forces to 100,000 by the end of the decade.

"The overall aim of the strategic blueprint is to broach a technically and tactically sound and well-balanced defense force," a ministry statement said. Sri Lanka's armed forces remain bloated more than a decade after the end of the country's traumatic ethnic civil war.

Nearly 400,000 people served in the military at its peak strength in 2009, the year government forces crushed the Tamil Tigers separatist movement during a no-holds-barred offensive that saw thousands of civilian casualties. Defense accounted for nearly 10 percent of public spending last year, and according to expert analysts, pay for security force personnel makes up half the government's salary bill.

Sri Lanka warned this week it had barely enough revenue to pay public employees and pensions despite huge tax hikes at the start of the year. The economy shrank an estimated 8.7 percent last year as the public endured lengthy blackouts, long queues for petrol, empty supermarket shelves and runaway inflation. The crisis peaked in July when protesters angered by the crisis stormed the official residence of then-president Gotabaya Rajapaksa, who briefly fled the country and tendered his resignation from abroad. — AFP

## Ericsson books \$220m for US fines on Iraq claims

STOCKHOLM: Ericsson said it had earmarked \$220 million to cover potential US fines over suspected bribes to the Islamic State group in Iraq, a case that has weighed over the Swedish telecoms group for months. The company acknowledged in February that some employees may have bribed IS members for road transport through areas controlled by the jihadists in Iraq between 2011 and 2019.

The US Department of Justice is investigating if Ericsson violated its Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA), which can be applied to foreign firms that file regulatory reports in the United States. "Ericsson has not reached a resolution with the DOJ regarding these alleged breaches and discussions are ongoing," a company statement said. It had already agreed in 2019 to pay \$1 billion in penalties



to US authorities to close corruption cases in Djibouti, China, Vietnam, Indonesia and Kuwait. The provision for the latest potential US fine, of 2.3 billion kronor, will be booked in the company's fourth-quarter 2022 financial results. Investors appeared relieved, with Ericsson shares climbing around six percent on the Stockholm stock exchange to 67.66 kronor. The alleged Iraq bribes were revealed by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ), based on an internal Ericsson investigation from 2019 that was never made public. — AFP



Business



The Burgan Bank team with the cast and crew of the Kanz show.



The Burgan Bank team.

# Burgan Bank crowns its first millionaire with KD 1,500,000 prize, holds show

Every legend has its origin, and the legend of Kanz has its origin rooted in Burgan

KUWAIT: In an impressive Kuwaiti production, Burgan Bank crowned its first millionaire, with a unique musical performance and an unprecedented prize draw. Kaid Fakhruddin and/or Salim Kalimuddin (joint account), were the ultimate lucky winners who walked away with the KD 1,500,000 prize in the first Kanz account annual mega draw. The draw was hosted at the drama theatre of the Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmed Cultural Centre (JACC), under the supervision and in the presence of a representative from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

It serves to note that the musical, *Kanz Burgan*, reflects the Bank's commitment to delivering a valuable message to its customers and people of Kuwait: within an artistic context that revives elements of Kuwaiti heritage with a modern twist. The theatrical performance was met with a huge public turnout, which included the Bank's senior management, high-profile figures, VIP guests, prominent Kuwaiti journalists, media icons, as well as a number of artists from across the art community in Kuwait. As the act unfolded, the audience were swept away by the epic tale of "The extraordinary journey and a legendary treasure hunt with *Kanz Burgan*", which culminated in an emotional musical number in the finale entitled "Dream", performed by Mutref Al-Mutref and written and composed by Bashar Al-Shatti.

The play told the tale of the Burgan treas-



Unveiling the name of the very first Kanz millionaire.

ure that rests, hidden away from sight in the folds of Burgan's dunes and rich landscape, awaiting its rightful owner to claim it. The audience tread on the heels of Najm, the play's young protagonist, who follows the legend and heads to Burgan in search of the buried treasure. The theatrical act is a first-of-its-kind for Burgan Bank, as the Bank continues to innovate in the way it communicates its values with the community. This time Burgan Bank chose to deliver its message through a musical that reminded its audience of the necessity of believing in one's dreams, and going the extra mile to turn them into reality. This is the same reality that came true for the Kanz account customers who believed in, someday, becoming a millionaire.

The musical was written and directed by Ahmed Mohamed Al-Awadhi, and starred an

elite group of Kuwaiti performers, including Yaqoub Abdullah, Ghourour Safar, Ahmed bin Hussein and Wadha Al Roumi, with a finale performance performed by Kuwaiti singer Mutref Al-Mutref, written and composed by singer-songwriter Bashar Al-Shatti. The show also featured sound production by Rabih Al-Sidawi, set design by Briza Al-Roumi and Hammoud Al-Amiri, lighting by Abdullah Al-Nassar, costume design by Hessa Al-Abad and decoration by Muhammad Behbehani.

Speaking on the highlights of this event, Nasser Mohammad Al-Qaisi, Chief Retail Banking Officer at Burgan Bank, stated: "On behalf of the Burgan Bank family, I would like to congratulate our first millionaire, Kaid Fakhruddin and/or Salim Kalimuddin, on becoming the winners of the KD 1,500,000

annual Kanzmega draw prize. Under the Bank's motto, *Driven by You*, we are proud to be the first Kuwaiti bank to present such a novel approach to draws. This event underscores our commitment to our customers and our wider community, as we continuously seek to push the boundaries of what we consider to be our best, to deliver a holistic experience that's elevated and satisfactory to our customers. Our Kanz account is regarded as one of the best draw accounts of its kind in the market, promising customers plentiful chances all year long to win prizes that range between KD 1,000 and KD 1,500,000. At its core, the Kanz account aims at promoting and instilling the savings culture among the Bank's customers, which comes in line with Burgan Bank's unwavering commitment to continuously improving its offers and rewarding its customers with next-level experiences."

Kholoud Rida Al-Feeli, Group Head - Marketing and Communications at Burgan Bank, commented: "We are proud to crown our first millionaire as part of the *Kanz Burgan* play, which marks a quantum leap that's fitting of the Bank's leading position and its first millionaire. In accordance with our strategy and our commitment to social responsibility, we made sure that all the talents involved in this theatrical piece of work, whether on-stage or back, were all young Kuwaiti artists. This stems from our faith in these young people's abilities to deliver a high-quality and memorable original show.

We are proud to say that the musical's 630 tickets sold out within an hour from the show's announcement on social media and JACC's platform - a truly impressive feat."

"In response to public demand, the performance was livestreamed on the Bank's social media channels with topnotch cinematic direction, garnering over a million views," Al-Feeli added. "I wish to genuinely thank everyone who turned this musical into a success from the media production company, Partners, to the entire technical staff, and of course, our own Burgan Bank team."

Ahmed Al-Awadhi, playwright and director, commented: "We are very grateful to Burgan Bank for presenting us with this special opportunity to soar freely in the skies of artistic creativity. Besides legacy and originality, creativity and novelty have always been core values that reflect the Bank's personality."

Bashar Al-Shatti said: "It delights me to express our pride at Partners for being part of this exceptional mega event. Part of what makes us who we are is our enthusiasm towards coming up with brand new ideas and working tirelessly to bring them to life, at the highest possible quality. That's why we turned to our national Kuwaiti heritage for inspiration, drawing on its values and wealth. Everything from the narrative progression to the song aimed at entwining the old with the new, in a grounding way that inspires pride in our collective past, as well as faith in a bright future that's weaved in dreams and hopes."

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## Business

## Big US banks report mixed earnings

## Executives point to 'mild recession' amid high inflation, interest rates

WASHINGTON: Major US banks reported mixed fourth-quarter results Friday as executives pointed to the rising odds of a "mild recession," with inflation and interest rate hikes challenging households and businesses. The biggest US bank, JPMorgan Chase, set aside \$1.4 billion in fresh reserves in case of loan defaults, noting that its "central" scenario is "a mild recession" with somewhat higher unemployment.

Bank of America accounted for \$403 million in possible bad loans as Chief Executive Brian Moynihan alluded to an "increasingly slowing economic environment," while Citigroup reserved \$640 million and Wells Fargo \$397 million for similar purposes.

Citigroup Chief Financial Officer Mark Mason described the outlook as "a rolling country-level recession rather than a simultaneous global downturn." But Mason cited the moderate winter thus far in Europe as an ameliorating factor in the outlook, while noting that credit card delinquencies are still coming in at exceptionally low levels, a sign of consumer resilience.

"Our base case is still a mild recession in the latter part of 2023," he said in a briefing with reporters, calling the outlook "very manageable." Bank shares initially tumbled on the reports, but reversed course in the middle of the session. All four banks finished solidly higher.

## 'We remain vigilant'

Briefing.com analyst Patrick O'Hare noted that JPMorgan Chief Executive Jamie Dimon has warned last year of a potential economic "hurricane." "The banks are bracing for at least a mild recession, but it's not a hard landing," O'Hare told AFP. The addition of reserves in the fourth quarter reflects a shift from the year-ago period when

many of the banks released reserves, boosting profits. At JPMorgan, profits came in at \$11.0 billion, up six percent from a year ago, while revenues rose 18 percent to \$34.5 billion. The biggest lift to earnings came from a whopping 48 percent rise in net interest income, offsetting the drag from lower investment banking results and elevated expenses.

Dimon praised the company's performance, saying the "US economy currently remains strong with consumers still spending excess cash and businesses healthy." But he pointed to war in Ukraine, persistent inflation and tightening Federal Reserve policy as headwinds, adding that "we remain vigilant and are prepared for whatever happens," according to a JPMorgan press release.

While charge-offs for loan losses were abnormally low in 2022, JPMorgan forecast a return to historic levels by mid-2023. Dimon, who has warned for months about major macroeconomic obstacles that could lead to a mild or severe recession, said his views had not changed.

"We don't know the future," Dimon told reporters. "I'm simply pointing out that there are geopolitical uncertainties, which are real and we just have our eyes focused on it."

"We hope they go away. They may not," he added at a briefing. At Bank of America, profits came in at \$6.9 billion, up two percent from a year ago on an 11 percent jump in revenues to \$24.5 billion.

The results included a 33 percent rise in charge-offs to \$689 million compared with the prior quarter.

Chief Financial Officer Alastair Borthwick described overall asset quality as "strong with loss rates increasing modestly off recent historic



LOS ANGELES: In this file photo, the buildings of Bank of America and Wells Fargo in downtown Los Angeles. Major US banks reported mixed fourth-quarter results Friday as executives pointed to the rising odds of a "mild recession," with inflation and interest rate hikes challenging households and businesses. —AFP

low." For Citigroup, fourth-quarter profits fell 21 percent to \$2.5 billion, while revenues climbed 6.0 percent to \$18 billion.

Wells Fargo reported a 50 percent drop in fourth-quarter earnings to \$2.9 billion, due largely to a \$3.3 billion hit related to regulatory problems. The bank in December agreed to pay \$2 billion to compensate customers and \$1.7 billion in

civil fines, under a Consumer Financial Protection Bureau settlement. Wells Fargo reported revenues of \$19.7 billion, down 5.7 percent from the year-ago period. JPMorgan Chase finished up 2.5 percent at \$143.01, while Citigroup rose 1.7 percent to \$49.92. Bank of America advanced 2.2 percent to \$35.23 and Wells Fargo jumped 3.3 percent to \$44.22. —AFP

## OpenAI, creator of ChatGPT, casts spell on Microsoft

PARIS: The hottest startup in Silicon Valley right now is OpenAI, the Microsoft-backed developer of ChatGPT, a much-hyped chatbot that can write a poem, college essay or even a line of software code. Tesla tycoon Elon Musk was an early investor in OpenAI and Microsoft is reported to be in talks to up an initial investment of \$1 billion to \$10 billion in a goal to challenge Google's world-dominating search engine.

If agreed, the cash injection by the Windows-maker would value OpenAI at a whopping \$29 billion, making it a rare tech-world success when major players such as Amazon, Meta and Twitter are cutting costs and laying off staff.

"Microsoft is clearly being aggressive on this front and not going to be left behind on what could be a potential game-changing AI investment," said analyst Dan Ives of Wedbush Securities. Before the release of ChatGPT, OpenAI had wowed tech geeks with Dall-E 2, a software that creates digital images with a simple instruction. Microsoft, which makes no secret of its AI ambitions, has integrated Dall-E 2 into several of its applications and now, according to a report in Bloomberg, the tech giant wants to graft ChatGPT to its Bing search engine to take on Google.

Since ChatGPT was introduced in November, the prowess of this chatbot has aroused the curiosity and fascination of internet users. It is capable of formulating detailed and human-like answers on a wide range of subjects in a few seconds, raising fears that it is vulnerable to misuse by school cheats or for disinformation.

## 'Not cheap'

The dizzying success is due in part to OpenAI's clever marketing strategy in which it made its research accessible to non-experts, said AI specialist Robb Wilson, founder of OneReach.ai, a software company. "Having this technology available to technologists was one thing. Offering it in a chat user interface and allowing non-developers to start playing with it ignited a conversation," he said.

Founded in late 2015, OpenAI is led by Sam Altman, a 37-year-old entrepreneur and former president of startup incubator Y Combinator. The company has counted on the financial support of prestigious contributors from the start, including LinkedIn co-founder Reid Hoffman, investor Peter Thiel and Musk. The multi-billionaire served on OpenAI's board until 2018, but left to focus on Tesla, the electric vehicle company.

The startup also relies on a team of computer scientists and researchers led by Ilya Sutskever, a former Google executive who specializes in machine learning. OpenAI, which did not respond to AFP's inquiries, had about 200 employees by 2021, according to a query made directly on ChatGPT.

For now, despite the excitement generated by ChatGPT, the company has yet to find a path to financial independence. Founded as a nonprofit, the startup became a "capped for-profit" company in 2019 to attract more investors and this week co-founder Greg Brockman said that a paid version of ChatGPT was in the works. The search for funding seems necessary for a company with exorbitant expenses.

In a Twitter exchange with Musk in early December, Altman acknowledged that each conversation on ChatGPT costs OpenAI several US cents. —AFP

## Full brunt of financial tightening yet to come: IMF

WASHINGTON: Countries have yet to see the full impact of tightening financial conditions, IMF chief Kristalina Georgieva said Thursday, warning that central banks have some way to go in their inflation battle. Global growth is expected to slow further this year, as central banks including the US Federal Reserve have raised interest rates to cool surging prices.

While sectors like housing have been reeling in the United States for example, the labor market remains strong with low joblessness. "As long as people are employed, even if prices are high, consumers spend.... But we all know that the impact of tightening financial conditions is yet to bite, in terms of unemployment," Georgieva told reporters in a briefing on the world economy.

"Inflation remains stubborn, and in that sense, the job of central banks is not yet done," she said.

This suggests central banks may need to continue hiking interest rates, walking a fine line between easing demand and avoiding tipping economies into recession. Doing so comes with risks, and Georgieva stressed the need to watch how tightening conditions hit the labor market and possibly translate into "more tensions between employers and workers."

## Yellen: US eyes crucial measures to avoid default

WASHINGTON: The US Treasury Department said Friday it will likely begin "extraordinary measures" next week to prevent a default on government debt, setting up a high-stakes showdown in Congress over raising the nation's borrowing limit. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, in a letter to congressional leadership, said that the United States was projected to reach its legal borrowing limit-set at \$31.4 trillion-as soon as next Thursday.

It would therefore need to "start taking certain extraordinary measures" to prevent a default.

Any such measures would only help for a limited time, likely no longer than six months, she warned. Congressional lawmakers have found themselves gridlocked over raising the debt limit, with some Republican policymakers pushing for it to be used as leverage in hopes of gaining spending cuts.

If the Democratic-controlled Senate and Republican-controlled House cannot come to an agreement, the world's largest economy could risk defaulting on its debt. "Failure to meet the government's obligations would cause irreparable harm to the US economy, the livelihoods of all Americans, and global financial stability," Yellen warned. "It is

## At Davos, war, climate and 'de-globalization'

DAVOS: The world's political and business elites will gather for the annual Davos summit next week to promote "cooperation in a fragmented world", with war in Ukraine, the climate crisis and global trade tensions high on the agenda. For half a century, the World Economic Forum in the Swiss Alps has brought together executives and policymakers to sing the praises of globalisation, but that process is seen as unwinding as new fault lines harden around the world.

The COVID-19 pandemic, growing US-China hostility and Russia's invasion

of Ukraine have led some politicians and experts to even speculate about "an end to the era of globalisation", which began in earnest in the decade after the first Davos meeting in 1971.

The agenda for this year's meeting in the snow-deficient Alps, starting next Monday, reflects this gloomy reality. "There's no doubt that our 53rd annual meeting in Davos will happen against the most complex geopolitical and geoeconomic backdrop in decades. So much is at stake," said Borge Brende, a former Norwegian foreign minister who is now president of the meeting.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and UN chief Antonio Guterres are among the most prominent figures attending the forum, alongside nearly 400 government ministers and policymakers, 600 CEOs and a smattering of celebrities, including actor Idris Elba.

Governments have been quick to provide policy support thus far, adding a buffer between consumers and surging food and energy costs, but this policy space is "shrinking," she cautioned.

## Bottoming out

The International Monetary Fund also expects the global slowdown to "bottom out" towards year-end, and for the world economy to trend towards a higher growth trajectory in 2024, Georgieva said. The IMF maintains that a "global recession can be avoided" even if some countries see downturns. But this is subject to an absence of negative shocks like growing social unrest and spillovers between countries, climate events, or a worsening in Russia's invasion of Ukraine. "We are now in a more shock-prone world," she said. While tighter financial conditions will have a "dramatic" impact on countries with high debt levels, Georgieva said the IMF does not see a "systemic debt crisis on the horizon." She added that a new global sovereign debt roundtable is set to meet for the first time in February, on the sidelines of a Group of 20 finance officials meeting, bringing key creditors and private finance together.

## 'Stay the course'

Weighing in on specific countries, Georgieva noted that China needs to "stay the course" in reopening from nearly three years of a strict zero-COVID policy that has battered business activity.

China's rebound from its latest surge in coronavirus cases since recently lifting lockdowns, quar-

antines and mass testing would have significant implications globally, she said. The world's second biggest economy used to deliver up to 40 percent of world growth. "What is most important is for China to stay the course, not to back off from that reopening," Georgieva said. If so, it could turn into a "positive contributor" to average global growth by mid-year or thereabouts, she added. Meanwhile, Georgieva expressed optimism over "remarkable" market resilience in the United States, with COVID-era support helping consumer demand in the world's biggest economy. "It gives some... expectation that the US would avoid falling into a recession," she said, adding that a potential downturn will likely be very mild. "For now, the dynamic seems to be more indicative for a soft landing," she said. —AFP

therefore critical that Congress act in a timely manner to increase or suspend the debt limit," she urged. House Speaker Kevin McCarthy told reporters on Thursday that "we've got to change the way we are spending money wastefully in this country." But the White House rebutted that raising the debt ceiling was not up for "negotiation." President Joe Biden's press secretary, Karine Jean-Pierre, said the process was not meant to be "political football."

White House deputy press secretary Andrew Bates charged that House Republicans were "telling the country that they will cause the most egregious self-inflicted economic meltdown in modern history unless they can hurt the most popular programs in existence."

## 'Enormously concerning'

The debt limit refers to the amount of money the US government is allowed to borrow to meet existing legal obligations, including Social Security and Medicare benefits. America spends more money than it collects through taxation, so it borrows money via the issuing of government bonds, seen as among the world's most reliable investments.

Around 80 years ago, lawmakers introduced a limit on how much federal debt could be accrued.

Congress has always acted when called upon to raise the debt limit, according to the Treasury, and the ceiling has been lifted dozens of times. Yellen noted Friday that "increasing or suspending the debt limit does not authorize new spending commitments or cost taxpayers money."

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky will appear by video link on Wednesday for a live interview. Other sessions will discuss whether we are living through "de-globalisation or re-globalization", the impact of trade tensions and supply-chain disruptions, the cost-of-living crisis and the planet's heating climate. Russia is expected to miss out on the event for a second consecutive time, underlining the sea change since 2021, when President Vladimir Putin addressed delegates via video link, or 2009 when he attended in person.

China has not yet announced its presence. Karen Harris, an economist at the consulting firm Bain & Company, said that hopes had faded that "we would go back to the old normal, this sort of globalised world." "I think there's an acknowledgement now that that era is ending."

## Ukrainian lobbying

The conflict in Ukraine and its cascading effects on global energy and defense policies will be prominent throughout the five-day meeting, whose theme is "cooperation in a fragmented world".

It is expected to dominate the opening day on Tuesday as well as Wednesday, when NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg takes the stage with Polish President Andrzej Duda. Several Ukrainian ministers, military leaders and soldiers will be among a large delegation that is expected to lobby for more weapons and financial support from the West. Climate change has also been announced as a top topic, with organizers keen for discussion to help prepare the next round of global talks, COP28, that will take place in the oil-producing United Arab Emirates from November 30. —AFP



Kristalina Georgieva



WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden speaks about the economy in the South Court Auditorium at the Eisenhower Executive Office Building next to the White House in Washington, DC. —AFP



# MEN'S FASHION WEEK GOES LIVE IN MILAN



DOLCE & GABBANA

The return of Gucci to the menswear catwalk calendar, robust sales of Italian fashion and a farewell to the pandemic-imposed trend of virtual shows - it's all systems go for men's fashion week in Milan which opened Friday. Promising spectacle and optimism after a year in which sales of Italian fashion showed the strongest growth of the last 20 years, presentations for Fall-Winter 2023/2024 men's collections run until Tuesday.

Of the 79 shows, only four are digital, a holdover from the debilitating pandemic period that sent sales plunging and brought a halt to live runway shows. Nothing replaces "the live experience, the frenzy, the expectation, the applause, the top models parading on the catwalk and the powerful music," fashion consultant Elisabetta Cavatorta told AFP. Most anticipated was fashion powerhouse Gucci which put on a menswear-only show for the first time in three years and the luxury label's first since artistic director Alessandro Michele's surprise departure in November.

### New direction at Gucci?

At its minimalist show Friday, Gucci said it was celebrating "the aesthetics of improvisation" with a collection inspired by the classic wardrobe of the gentle-

man, revisited in a subversive spirit. Combining faded jeans with sequined tops and green and red or pink boots with heels, the collection mixed genres and colors.

Long oversized coats with ample shoulder pads and maxi skirts split to reveal bare legs peppered the collection, while wool hats and rectangular tote bags tossed carelessly over the shoulder added to Gucci's accessory arsenal. With his colorful collections seeped in the 1970s, Michele provided a new lease on life after being tapped in 2015 to revive sales at the storied brand with the world-famous stripe logo in green and red.

While sales exploded by 44 percent in 2018 for Kering's flagship brand, growth has lagged competitors in the last two years. "It remains to be seen whether Alessandro Michele's departure initiates a change of direction for the fashion house," Cavatorta said. As to who will take over the reins at Gucci, the fashion world awaits news of Michele's successor with bated breath.

### Soaring revenues

Armani, Prada, Fendi, Dolce & Gabbana and Zegna are among the big labels unveiling men's collections in the Italian fashion capital. But there have been defections including Versace, which plans to show its men's and women's collections together in Los Angeles on March 10. Despite the war in Ukraine and the impact of the energy crisis on an energy-intensive fashion supply chain, sales of Italian fashion last year rose 16 percent to 96.6 billion euros (\$104.4 billion).

"This is the highest revenue in the last 20 years," said Carlo Capasa, president of the Italian Fashion Chamber, at a presentation ahead of the shows last month. Inflation has had an impact, as Italian fashion prices rose by about nine percent in 2022, but their increase is "a positive sign that closes a year marked by dramatic events and difficult times," Capasa added.

Exports of "Made in Italy" fashion climbed 18.7 percent in the first nine months of last year, driven by demand in the United States and the Gulf countries where exports both soared by more than 50 percent. Sales to China grew more moderately, at 18.8 percent, while exports to Russia fell by 26 percent, in the wake of the invasion of Ukraine. But one area in which the impact of the COVID-19 crisis will still be felt in Milan is the absence of Chinese buyers. Despite the lifting of coronavirus-related health restrictions by authorities in Beijing, the number of buyers who will travel to the city for the shows will be "limited", Capasa said. — AFP



GUCCI. — AFP photos



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EMPORIO ARMANI



## Let's waltz! Vienna ball season back in full swing

After Covid restrictions had wiped out Vienna's glamorous winter ball season for two years in a row, 50-year-old Wahyuni couldn't wait any longer to get all dolled up and put on her dazzling floral-patterned ballgown to once again waltz the night away. "We love to come here, because the very nice decorations are made out of real flowers and it's very lovely," Wahyuni said, alongside her friend Deasy, who declined to give their full names, as both were attending the legendary Flower Ball in Vienna's neo-Gothic city hall.

Admiring the riot of colours, 46-year-old Deasy, who originally hails from Indonesia, said that she had already been here a few years ago and "had to come back". Known for being one of the most beautifully decorated winter balls among the approximately 450 hosted in the Austrian capital each season, the Flower Ball showcases mesmerizing floral arrangements skillfully crafted out of 100,000 blossoms.

Donning snow-white dresses and classy black evening suits, four first-time debutants said they were "quite nervous" about opening the ball. "I think it is so beautifully decorated, and that makes me super happy," 18-year-old Eduard Wernisch said. The self-described "rookies" said they had attended dance classes for a couple of hours every week since September to be prepared.

The rhythm of the waltz can be tricky and 17-year-old classmate Emma said

she was particularly afraid of dropping her flower bouquet. "People come here with the expectation of experiencing spring" as opposed to the grey, foggy winters so prevalent in Vienna, Peter Hucik, art director of the Flower Ball told AFP. Even though the ball is not sold out, Hucik said he is pleased that 2,400 visitors are attending Friday's ball, kicking off the season as one of Vienna's first big balls.

### Most successful season

The COVID-related shutdown of Vienna's famous ball season had caused the city to lose at least 152 million euros (\$164 million) in revenue per year. This season, however, appeared to be on track to become one of Vienna's most successful ever recorded. "The season is making a roaring comeback," Markus Griessler, chairman of the tourism and leisure division of the Vienna Chamber of Commerce, said.

Griessler said he expects the city to rake in "170 million" euros this season. "Every third Viennese aged 15 and older is planning to attend a ball this year," compared to only one in four in 2019, he added, noting that "550,000 sold tickets" are within reach. About one tenth of the ballgoers each year come especially from abroad. On average every ballgoer spends around 320 euros per ball.

### Too close for comfort

There are "exciting parallels" between Vienna's ball season and travelling in general, Norbert Kettner, director of the city's tourist office told AFP, when asked about why balls remained a top priority. "Clearly, people insist on travelling and dancing," said Kettner while emphasizing the city's age-old tradition of hosting such events. The tradition dates back to the 18th century, when the balls of the Habsburg royal court ceased to be reserved for the aristocracy alone.

The Viennese began adopting court customs for their own soirees, soon launching balls dedicated to hunters, cafe owners and florists. The Viennese used the opportunity to approach the opposite sex, lavishly wine, dine, spy and dance. "The Viennese ball season and the waltz had always been a thorn in the side of the Catholic Church," Kettner said, because "waltzing was too close for comfort".

Therefore the famous ball season "loosely follows the Christian calendar and wraps up before Ash Wednesday," he added. Thousands will earn their living in the flourishing sector, from hotels and restaurants to fashioning evening wear and hairdressing. All businesses were as excited as the revelers to gear up and make this season a success. — AFP



Attendees dance during the opening of the 99th Flower Ball at the City Hall in Vienna on Jan 13, 2023. — AFP photos



## Lifestyle | Features

## 'Avatar 2' success proves cinema in post-pandemic 'resurgence': Cameron

The huge success of "Avatar: The Way of Water", James Cameron's sequel which is approaching \$2 billion at the global box office, proves that "movies are back with a resurgence" after the pandemic, the Canadian director said. "We've had a year to see that this resurgence isn't just a fluke, or just one film," Cameron told AFP this week in Los Angeles, pointing to other recent mega-grossing blockbusters including "Top Gun: Maverick" and "Black Panther: Wakanda Forever".

"You've seen a pattern," added Cameron, after having his handprints immortalized in cement at Hollywood's famous TCL Chinese Theatre. "Avatar: The Way of Water" came 13 years after the original film, which remains the highest-grossing movie of all time, amassing \$2.9 billion at the global box office. Even if the sequel - which transplants the 3D action to a new underwater setting - does not quite scale those heights, it is already the seventh biggest film of all time by ticket sales.

That remarkable success has helped to reinvigorate the movie theater industry, which has been slammed by competition from streamers, and apathy about the movie-going experience since the pandemic. In the United States alone

some 500 theaters have disappeared since the arrival of COVID-19 forced costly closures, according to the National Association of Theater Owners.

Cineworld-the British group that owns America's second-largest theater chain Regal Cinemas - is in the midst of restructuring after filing for bankruptcy last year. But Cameron, the director of "Titanic," "The Terminator" and many more hits, remains firmly convinced about the viability and adaptability of cinema in the future. "I don't think movies are ever gonna die," he said. "We need this as culture, as a society. We need to go into these theaters into these big large spaces with hundreds of strangers."

## 'Pseudo-intellectual' critics

At 68, the director nevertheless recognizes that habits have changed. While grand spectacle continues to draw younger crowds to giant multiplexes, auteur-driven and independent cinema is finding it increasingly hard to convince older audiences to leave their homes. "I'm also seeing a pattern of the type of film that people will go to see in a movie theater and the type that they won't. And so streaming still has a very, very rich



Jon Landau and James Cameron attend the handprints and footprints ceremony honoring "Avatar: The Way Of The Water" filmmakers at TCL Chinese Theatre in Hollywood on Jan 12, 2023. — AFP

and important place," said Cameron.

His "Avatar" sequel sees the blue Na'vi of Pandora fighting off yet another invasion of their homeland by resource-hungry humans. The storyline allows Cameron, who is famously passionate

about underwater exploration and is a vegetarian, to expand on the franchise's themes: protecting nature, and the threats posed to the environment by imperialism and capitalism.

But while it has torn audiences away

from the comfort of their sofas, it has received a mixed reaction from critics. It left this week's Golden Globes empty-handed, unlike its 2009 predecessor which won best drama and best director for Cameron. It was not even nominated by Cameron's peers, the Directors Guild of America, for their own annual awards. "That's in the nature of art. You can't please everybody," shrugged Cameron. Critics "think a certain kind of earnestness, where you wear your heart on your sleeve, is unsophisticated or naive," he said. "To me, that's a little bit of a pseudo-intellectual perspective."

## 'Hope in Ukraine'

Cameron pointed to the film's massive international appeal, citing data from its distributor that the sequel is "approaching being the number one film in the history of Ukraine." "That means that when the missiles stop and the power comes back on, people are going to the movie theaters," he said. "Giving hope in Ukraine right now, that made the whole thing worthwhile. Not the money. Not the awards." — AFP



In this file photo taken on May 11, 1976, Egyptian Ambassador Naguib Kadry and Egyptologist Christiane Desroches-Noblecourt attend the opening of the sarcophagus of Pharaoh Ramses II during an exhibition dedicated to him at the Grand Palais in Paris. — AFP photos

## Pharaoh Ramses II's sarcophagus in Paris for rare loan

The sarcophagus of ancient Egyptian pharaoh Ramses II is to return to Paris in April for the first time in almost 50 years, in a rare loan of the relic outside Egypt. The ornate coffin will be on show in the French capital from April 7 to September 6, the star attraction alongside an exhibition previously shown in San Francisco and which will conclude in Sydney - minus the sarcophagus.

"I almost wept for joy that I would be seeing him again here when they told me he was coming to Paris," said Dominique Farout, an Egyptologist at the prestigious Ecole du Louvre art history school who is scientific commissioner to the exhibit. "I was 16 in 1976" when Ramses II was last in Paris, Farout added. "I had a big poster in my bedroom. I went eight times in a row."

Farout said Egyptian authorities had made an exception in loaning the yellow-painted cedar-wood sarcophagus to France. It did not travel to San Francisco and will not be included when the rest of the exhibition packs up and heads to Sydney. The gesture marks gratitude towards Paris, where scientists preserved Ramses II's mummy by treating it against fungus when it was exhibited in 1976.

## Top woman conductor says Blanchett's 'Tar' is 'misogynistic'

"Tar" is tipped to win Cate Blanchett a third Oscar for her role as a power-hungry conductor, but for one real-life pioneer in the job, the film does a "disservice to women". Marin Alsop, 66, is chief conductor of the ORF Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra and has frequently broken new ground for women in the field. Born in the United States, she was the first woman named as musical director of a major orchestra there (in Baltimore) and the first to conduct London's famous Last Night of the Proms.

"Tar" has been hailed by critics and already scooped several awards for



This time, the sculpted coffin will be shown empty, as Egyptian law now forbids transporting royal mummies abroad. It depicts the recumbent king in bright colors with his arms crossed on his chest holding his scepter and whip of office.

## 'Sacrificed to the gods'

His eyes outlined in black, he wears a striped pharaonic headdress and a braided false beard. One of the best-known pharaohs, reputed as a great warrior and builder of temples, Ramses II ruled from 1279-1213 BC. Inscriptions on the sarcophagus' sides detail how his body was moved three times from 1070 BC, after his tomb in Luxor's Valley of the Kings was raided by grave-robbers. Its final resting place was discovered in 1881, just as it too was being pillaged.

As well as the coffin, the Paris exhibition will include vast numbers of ancient Egyptian objects, solid gold and silver jewels, statues, amulets, masks and other sarcophagi. Only animal mummies will be on show, including cats which were "raised and sacrificed to the gods", Farout said. Other treasures come from the capital Tanis that Ramses II built east of the Nile Delta, including a solid silver coffin, finger and toe sheaths and solid-gold masks decorated with jewels.

Exhibition organizers hope large numbers of people will make the trip to the La Villette exhibition center in northeast Paris. A previous exhibition about Tutankhamun drew 1.4 million visitors to the same place in 2019. — AFP

Blanchett, including a Golden Globe this week, as well as one for writer-director Todd Field. Alsop told AFP that while Blanchett's performance was certainly "marvelous", her concern was this was "yet another misogynistic portrayal of a woman in a leadership role."

"Historically, there have been very few opportunities for women at the top level (in classical music), so to assume that a woman would behave in an abusive, conceited manner similar to many men... does a real disservice to women," she said. The film is currently being



Cate Blanchett

## Auctioneers eye new record for Tintin artwork at sale

Known around the world for his blond quiff and daring adventures, Belgian comic book hero Tintin is setting the art world astir with an original illustration that could set a new record at auction. The 1942 black-and-white ink drawing by creator Hergé for the cover of the third volume in the series, "Tintin in America", is set to go on sale in Paris next month.

The illustration, which shows a Native American chief pointing an accusatory finger at the tied-up Tintin, has been given an estimate of between 2.2 million to 3.2 million euros (\$2.4-3.5 million) by auction firm Artcurial. That top figure would see it match an original illustration for the 1936 cover of the Tintin adventure "Blue Lotus" - which became the most expensive comic book art when it sold in 2021.

But there are hopes that the upcoming sale for the cover of one of the most popular Tintin books could go higher and beat that record. "We are talking about drawings that belong to the history of art," said Vinciane de Traux, Artcurial's director for Belgium. "Hergé is, along with (surrealist painter) Rene Magritte, the most important figure in Belgian art."



Vinciane De Traux, Director of Artcurial Benelux, poses with an original front cover of "Tintin in America" from a 1942 painting by Tintin creator Hergé at the auction house in Brussels on Jan 11, 2023. — AFP

released around Europe and beyond.

## 'Reinforcing stereotypes'

Blanchett has previously dismissed the importance of having a woman at the center of the film, which charts the downfall of a fictional conductor following claims of abuse. After its premiere at the Venice Film Festival in September, where she also won best actress, Blanchett told reporters she "didn't think about the character's gender nor her sex at all" during preparations. "It wasn't until we started doing the press and they



Marin Alsop

## 'More impressive'

The illustration - put up for sale by an unidentified Belgian collector - is the centerpiece of the February 10 auction in Paris. De Traux said it was a "larger, more impressive composition" than the record-breaking Blue Lotus work, and was a perfect example of the style used by Hergé, whose real name was Georges Remi. The picture has been displayed at exhibitions in Paris in 2009 and Lausanne in Switzerland in 2010. "It is totally documented and authenticated," de Traux said.

Tintin's image is closely guarded intellectual property. The sale of the Blue Lotus illustration originally drew ire from Nick Rodwell, the British husband of Hergé's second wife Fanny Vlamynck, who holds the rights to the Tintin works. The famous picture of the black dragon on a red background was sold by members of the Casterman publishing family, who said their father Jean-Paul had been given it by Hergé as a present when he was seven.

The future head of the publishing house reportedly kept the illustration folded up in a drawer for decades. That was disputed by Rodwell, who criticized the Castermans for not returning the work and said it rightfully belonged in the Hergé museum in Belgium. But relations were eventually smoothed. "The rights-holders of Hergé's works were pleased with the outcome of the sale," de Traux said. "Everyone is happy that the market is supporting the value of Tintin." — AFP



Damien Chazelle

## Damien Chazelle: 'There's a lot of fear in Hollywood'

Damien Chazelle's new film pulls zero punches in its drug-added, vomit-splattered vision of Hollywood's early years, and the French-American filmmaker laments that today's industry has lost some of its wild side. Chazelle burst onto the scene with "Whiplash" (2014) and "La La Land" (2016), the latter making him the youngest-ever recipient of the best director Oscar at 32.

He returns with "Babylon", which rolls out around the world next week, starring Brad Pitt and Margot Robbie as stars in the early days of Hollywood. It is a visually orgiastic film that serves as a sort of dark and hedonistic retelling of "Singin' in the Rain" and the shift from silent movies to the era of sound. "In the 1920s, the rules were not yet completely written, cinema was still in its youth," said the American-born Chazelle, who spoke to AFP in fluent French during a recent visit to Paris.

"We don't really know this period, just before the arrival of sound, when there was a freedom that we would normally associate more with the 1960s," he said. Film sets of the time were "perhaps a little more brutal, a little more violent, a little darker, but also comical. There was something rich and complex in it that inspired me."

There are parallels to the tumult in today's Hollywood, as streaming platforms and the pandemic have put cinemas in jeopardy and led to Hollywood relying on tried-and-tested franchises and superheroes. "We are really at a crossroads," said Chazelle. "Today in Hollywood there's a lot of fear, and not a lot of people taking risks. There are always great movies being made, thankfully, but it's a time of fear."

## 'Like a drug trip'

As "Babylon" makes clear, Chazelle has a deeply romantic love for the big screen. He has tried his hand on a streamer, directing the series "The Eddy" about a Parisian jazz club for Netflix. "But the big screen is always something different - an experience that is not interrupted, not divided into chapters," he said. "It's a bit like a drug trip - when you leave the cinema, the world looks different, something is changed."

Despite the huge success of "La La Land", "Babylon" was a tough project to get off the ground, with a budget estimated at around \$80 million thanks to its extravagant sets and hundreds of extras. "Thirty or 40 years ago, it was not uncommon to see films like this. But financing this type of film is not so easy today and it's becoming more and more difficult - so it's more and more important to show that it can still exist." — AFP



## Lifestyle | Features

## Lisa Marie Presley, daughter of Elvis, dies at 54

Singer-songwriter Lisa Marie Presley, the only child of rock and roll legend Elvis Presley, died Thursday hours after being hospitalized, her family said. She was 54. Presley, who led a tumultuous life in the sprawling shadow of her world-famous father, and who attended a high-profile awards ceremony just this week, had been rushed to a California hospital's intensive care unit for cardiac arrest. "Priscilla Presley and the Presley family are shocked and devastated by the tragic death of their beloved Lisa Marie," the family said in a statement. "They are profoundly grateful for the support, love and prayers of everyone, and ask for privacy during this very difficult time."

Priscilla Presley - Lisa Marie's mother and the iconic crooner's wife for six years until their divorce in 1973 - said in a statement to People magazine: "It is with a heavy heart that I must share the devastating news that my beautiful daughter Lisa Marie has left us." News of the death triggered an immediate outpouring of grief from fans and famous friends.

"Our hearts are broken with the sudden and shocking passing of Lisa Marie Presley tonight... It's too much," said Rita Wilson and Tom Hanks, who starred in the recent biopic movie "Elvis". "Lisa baby girl,



Lisa Marie Presley

I'm so sorry. I'll miss you but I know I'll see you again," wrote actor John Travolta on Instagram. "It's hard to take when someone so young and full of life passes on," wrote Beach Boys legend Brian Wilson on Twitter. "I feel so bad about Lisa Marie and I wish the best for her children and her family."

Billy Corgan, frontman of the rock band Smashing Pumpkins, wrote on Instagram: "There is heartbreak and then there is sorrow. This would be sorrow and on more levels than I can count. Please send your prayers out for her family and children at this difficult time." "I truly cannot find the words to express how sad this truly is," he added.

## 'Very proud'

Presley was found "unresponsive" by her housekeeper at home Thursday morning in the celebrity-studded Los Angeles suburb of Calabasas, entertainment website TMZ reported. The Los Angeles County Fire Department, which runs paramedic services, told media that crews attended to a woman in her mid-50s suffering cardiac arrest just after 10:30 am (1830 GMT), without confirming her identity.

Presley's ex-husband, Danny Keough, who also lives at the property, performed CPR until paramedics arrived and transported her to hospital, where she was put in an induced coma on life support, before passing, TMZ said. As recently as Tuesday, mother and daughter were seen together at the Golden Globe awards in Beverly Hills, where Austin Butler was awarded Best Actor in a drama for his turn as The King in Baz Luhrmann's film "Elvis."

Butler, whose performance has earned wide praise, thanked the two women during his acceptance speech. "Thank you, guys. Thank you for opening your hearts, your memories, your home to me. Lisa Marie and Priscilla, I love you forever," Butler said. Two nights before that, at a

Los Angeles event thrown by "Elvis" studio Warner Bros, Presley gave a brief speech in which she said she was "overwhelmed by this film" and that her father would "be very proud."

## Heir

Lisa Marie Presley was Elvis's only child. She previously controlled Elvis Presley Enterprises, but sold the bulk of shares in the company to a private equity firm in 2005. She retained control of Graceland, the Memphis, Tennessee estate her father owned and where he was found unconscious in August 1977. Elvis was taken to a hospital but pronounced dead from a heart attack. Toxicology reports found high levels of prescription drugs in his system.

Lisa Marie released three albums this century, and is the mother of actor Riley Keough, who appeared in "Mad Max: Fury Road". In addition to Danny Keough, whom she divorced in 1994, she has also been married to Nicolas Cage, Michael Jackson and actor-composer Michael Lockwood. She was left devastated following the death by suicide of her son Benjamin less than three years ago. — AFP



Reinaldo Maria Cordeiro

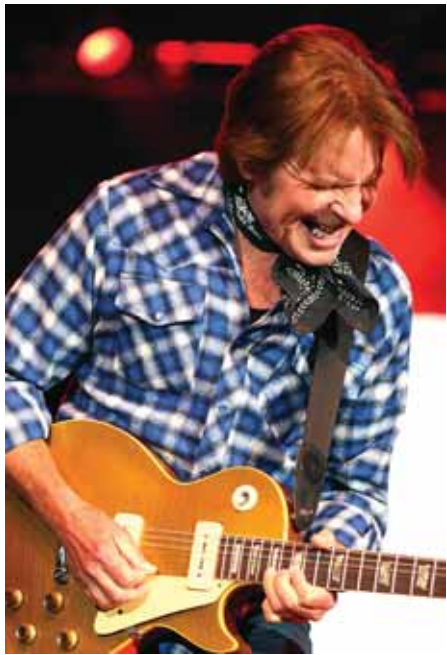
## 'World's most durable DJ' dies at 98 in Hong Kong

Beloved Hong Kong radio host dubbed the "world's most durable DJ" by Guinness World Records has died aged 98 after more than seven decades on the air. Reinaldo Maria Cordeiro, known to fans as "Uncle Ray", was hailed as an industry powerhouse who jump-started the careers of numerous local musicians and introduced pop trends to generations of Hong Kong fans on his long-running radio shows.

He interviewed scores of pop icons over the years including the Beatles, the Bee Gees, Ella Fitzgerald and Frank Sinatra. Cordeiro died on Friday in Hong Kong surrounded by family and friends, who sang "You'll Never Walk Alone" as a farewell, a committee organizing his funeral said. The veteran DJ was "a prominent figure in Hong Kong popular culture" who made "considerable contributions to the Hong Kong music scene", the city's culture minister Kevin Yeung said Saturday.

Born in Hong Kong in 1924, Cordeiro was the fifth of six children in a family descended from Portuguese immigrants. He worked as a prison warden and bank clerk before turning to music, hosting his first show "Progressive Jazz" at Radio Rediffusion in 1949. Cordeiro became a household name in the 1960s by hosting easy listening shows for Hong Kong's public broadcaster RTHK that became a hit with teenagers.

His signature late-night program "All The Way With Ray" launched in 1970 and became the station's longest-running radio show. He was named the "world's most durable DJ" by Guinness World Records in 2000. Cordeiro retired in 2021, telling RTHK that "I've had the best in life and I've had everything I wanted to be, everything I wanted to do". — AFP



John Fogerty

## Fifty years later, Creedence's Fogerty regains song rights

After a half-a-century of legal wrangling, rocker John Fogerty of Creedence Clearwater Revival fame said Thursday that he owns a majority stake in his songs again. The development turns the page on one of music history's most bitter and infamous copyright struggles, which saw Fogerty—the sole songwriter on hit songs including "Proud Mary," "Have You Ever Seen the Rain" and "Bad Moon Rising"—battle to gain control of his work after what he dubbed a bad deal.

In the mid-1960s, entertainment mogul Saul Zaentz signed the now 77-year-old Fogerty and the rest of CCR to Fantasy Records. The rights to the vault that also includes the anti-war anthem "Fortunate Son" for decades was the subject of merciless lawsuits, intense press attention and artistic hiatus on the part of Fogerty. When CCR split in the early 1970s, Fogerty grew overwhelmingly exasperated with Fantasy, but couldn't get out of his contract without forfeiting even more royalties to Zaentz.

Lawsuits that ensued included an eyebrow-raising tax-shelter case, and an even more bombastic plagiarism suit that Zaentz brought followed, with Fogerty going for long stretches without recording. He even refused to sing Creedence songs for years. Concord purchased Fantasy in 2004, and Fogerty resigned, but still didn't own his publishing rights.

He recently went to them with an undisclosed offer, with the knowledge that copyright law mandates that the US publishing rights begin returning to Fogerty in the coming years. Concord agreed: "As of this January, I own my own songs again. This is something I thought would never be a possibility," the artist wrote on his website. "I am looking forward to touring and celebrating this year! And, I am excited for new ideas and a renewed interest in my music ... like a revival."

Concord maintains ownership of the CCR masters rights already in its possession, while its deal with Fogerty applies to the publishing rights available to songwriters. Fogerty retains all rights to his solo work. The move goes against the current music sales trend that's seen the world's classic stars including Bob Dylan, Bruce Springsteen and Sting sell both publishing and masters rights for massive sums.

Calling Fogerty's work "some of the greatest compositions of the 20th century," Concord President Bob Valentine said in a statement that "given the unique set of circumstances around the history of John's relationship with Fantasy, we were more than happy to oblige" an agreement. Fogerty also said he's working on new material: "There's definitely more to come. I happen to like the songs a lot." — AFP

## De La Soul finally stream albums after years of legal woes

Hip-hop pioneers De La Soul are finally releasing their classic early hits on streaming platforms from Friday after decades-long battles over their samples. The roll-out starts with the single "The Magic Number" from the platinum-selling 1989 album "3 Feet High and Rising". It got a new lease of life when featured on the soundtrack to 2021's "Spiderman: No Way Home".

The New York trio's first six albums, dating from 1989 to 2001, have not appeared on streaming platforms because their label, Tommy Boy, never tackled the huge legal task of clearing all the samples (there are some 60 to 70 on "3 Feet..." alone). The group cleared the rights for sales of vinyl and audio cassettes, but streaming offers a much more lucrative and ongoing source of revenue that requires specific deals with each rights-holder.

De La Soul are well aware of the dangers of unlicensed sampling, having been at the center of a landmark case in 1991 when little-known band The Turtles sued them for sampling one of their songs and won a reported \$1.7 million. "That first album by De La Soul marked the end of sound sampling as it was practiced before, with little concern for credits," journalist and rap expert Olivier Cachin told AFP. "The whole album was a mosaic of



De La Soul rap group members Vincent Mason, aka Maseo, Dave Jude Jolicoeur and Kelvin Mercer, aka Posdnus.

## 'We were frustrated'

Known for their positive spirit, in contrast to the tough gangster image of West Coast rap at the time, De La Soul are now heralded as one of the most influential hip-hop groups of all time. But they recently told industry magazine Billboard: "It almost felt like we were being erased from history, because our music wasn't up (on streamers)."

At one point in 2014 - after they had reached a new generation of fans through their collaborations with Damon Albarn's Gorillaz and touring - the trio even organized a free giveaway of their albums online. "We were frustrated with people not being able to just get it," they told the

New York Times at the time. The situation was finally resolved after Tommy Boy was acquired in 2021 for a reported \$100 million by rights company Reservoir Media, who set about signing all the necessary deals with sampled artists.

From March 3 - 34 years to the day since the release of "3 Feet..." - all six albums will be available to stream, including "De La Soul Is Dead" (1991), "Buhloone Mindstate" (1993), "Stakes Is High" (1996), "Art Official Intelligence: Mosaic Thump" (2000) and "AOI: Bionix" (2001). "We can't believe this day is finally here, and we are excited to be able to share our music with fans, old and new," they said in a statement. — AFP

## Cameroon's 'funeral music' gives voice to frustrated youth

It began as a form of music chanted at wakes to comfort mourners - now it is part of Cameroon's cultural mainstream, and a powerful form of expression for its frustrated youth. Mbole (pronounced "embo-lay") developed around a quarter of a century ago in poor districts of Yaounde, the central African nation's capital.

It began as a sort of back-and-forth at funeral vigils between a chanter, who would devise lyrics and sing them, and "responders", who sang the lyrics back and provided rhythm using buckets, saucers or other implements. "You would invite people around, you formed a circle, and you started to play to keep people entertained," said Etienne Koumato, a 24-year-old biology student who performs in a mbole group called League des Premiers and is signed to a specialist record label.

"At the start, mbole was stigmatized - people looked on it as gutter music, like rap," he said. "But beneath the image, it was adaptable and it won people over."



Lasto, 20, a professional djembe player, poses for a portrait in Yaounde.

Mbole spread to weddings and baptisms and other ceremonies, progressively becoming more sophisticated as instruments such as keyboards and the big West African drum, the djembe, were brought in. Around six years ago, mbole started to go mainstream, and it is now feted as a national music genre.

"There's no TV or radio station which doesn't have mbole," said Yannick Mindja, who has made a documentary on the

music's rise. "We had Afro-beat, which came from Nigeria, but when you listen to mbole, you hear all the sounds of Cameroon," he said, pointing to traditional music forms called bend skin, makossa and bikutsi. "Mbole is the grandson of bikutsi and the nephew of makossa, but when you hear it, you feel immediately Cameroonian," said Lionel Malongo Bellinga, who performs under the name of Petit Malo.

## Neighborhood roots

Beneath the media success, mbole remains a versatile form of expression and is still very much rooted in poor neighborhoods. Poverty, drugs and insecurity are recurrent themes among its young performers, some of whom have almost iconic status in their neighborhoods. In 2016, Petit Malo recorded his first mbole hit, "Dans mon kwatta" ("In My Neighborhood"), which depicted life in Nkoldongo, a rundown area of Yaounde.

The district is a warren where wastewater runs in rivelets down the narrow unpaved streets. Many homes have no door but just a cloth to cover their entrance, hanging above some shoes, showing that people live there. The sound of voices and the djembe bring neighborhood youngsters running. "Petit Malo is a good singer," said Herman Sone, a 15-year-old fan. "He sings about peace and hope, and lots of good things."

Female singers are also shouldering their way into a genre that "is still very male-oriented," said Jeanne Manga, 29, who, as performer Jay-Ni, has set up a girls-only mbole group. Mbole is a fine vehicle for denouncing sexism, she said. "In my lyrics, I talk for instance about men who invite women out and then expect sexual favors in return," she said. "We are not targets, and mbole gives us the chance to say so." — AFP



A group of young mbole artistes gather in a stadium during an improvisation session in the Mvog-Ada district in Yaounde on Nov 8, 2022. — AFP photos



Gerard Pique and Shakira

## Shakira sets social media alight with song haranguing ex Pique

Colombian star Shakira set social media alight on Thursday with the release of her latest song, in which she takes aim once again at ex-partner Gerard Pique, a retired Spanish footballer. The song "BZRP Music Session #53" was listened to 34 million times in just 17 hours and generated an avalanche of comments. The 45-year-old music star takes no prisoners as she launches into a tirade against her former partner, 35, even taking a pop at his 23-year-old girlfriend, Clara Chia.

"Lots of gym work, but work your mind as well," she sings. "You swapped a Ferrari for a (Renault) Twingo, a Rolex for a Casio," she continues. "I wouldn't go back to you, even if you cried or begged me ... I was out of your league and that's why you are with someone like you." Just in case there were any doubts about who the song was aimed at, Shakira includes a couple of word plays using the names Pique and Clara.

The track's release was accompanied by a publicity campaign that included an airplane flying over the Argentine seaside resort Mar de Plata, dragging a banner containing a line from the song: "A she-wolf like me is not for someone like you." Reactions to the song began trending on social media, where Shakira has tens of millions of followers.

It is the third song she has dedicated to the couple's separation, which was announced in June. The couple was together for more than a decade and have two sons: Nine-year-old Milan and Sasha, seven. They never married, and Shakira did not share her estimated \$300 million fortune with Pique. He retired in November after a glory-laden 18-year football career, earning enough to invest in several multi-million euro business projects. — AFP



## Sports

# Phillips fires New Zealand to ODI series win over Pakistan

## Williamson's team have now won seven of their last eight ODI series

**KARACHI:** Glenn Phillips smashed an unbeaten half-century as New Zealand secured a series victory over Pakistan with a two-wicket win in the third and final one-day international in Karachi on Friday. Phillips scored 63 off 42 balls, hitting four sixes and as many fours, to rescue New Zealand from a precarious 181-5 in their pursuit of a 281-run target. His knock overshadowed Fakhar Zaman's 101 as Pakistan made 280-9 in their 50 overs. Walking in to bat with New Zealand needing 100 off 87 balls, Phillips added 64 for the seventh wicket with Mitchell Santner, who scored 17 in a match-turning stand.

Skipper Kane Williamson contributed with 53 and Devon Conway struck an equally steady 52 before Phillips finished off the chase with 11 balls to spare. Phillips completed his first ODI fifty off just 28 balls, but he was dropped the following delivery when wicketkeeper Mohammad Rizwan failed to hold a catch off spinner Usama Mir.

New Zealand's win sealed their first ODI series victory in Pakistan in six attempts and kept them top of the one-day rankings. "He (Phillips) wasn't feeling great but he came out and played with a lot of freedom," said Williamson whose team have now won seven of their last eight ODI series.

"I thought we were in the game at the halfway stage but made a few errors. For Glenn to play that knock, and credit to Pakistan as well. It was a hard-fought series," Pakistan captain Babar Azam said: "When Rizwan and Fakhar played it looked like we'd touch 300 but when wickets fall, it is difficult for

new batters. "We couldn't quite execute in the last 10 overs with the ball." Williamson steadied the innings during his stands of 65 with Conway for the second wicket and then another 52 with Daryl Mitchell (31) for the next, but New Zealand lost four wickets in the space of 45 runs.

Off-spinner Agha Salman (2-42) dismissed Conway and then had Mitchell caught off a miscued reverse sweep to break the two partnerships. Williamson was run out for the fourth wicket. Opener Zaman laid the foundations for a good Pakistan total.

The left-hander hit 10 fours and a six after Pakistan won the toss and opted to bat first. Zaman lifted Pakistan from 21-2 during a third-wicket stand of 154 with Rizwan, who made a polished 77 featuring six boundaries.

Pakistan made a poor start as they lost Shan Masood without scoring and Azam, the world's top-ranked ODI batsman, for just four. Azam, who had two half-centuries in the first two matches, was stumped by Tom Latham off spinner Michael Bracewell in the seventh over.

It was left to Zaman to rebuild the innings and he took a sharp single to reach his eighth hundred, his first three-figure ODI score in Pakistan. Leg-spinner Ish Sodhi broke the stand by bowling Rizwan, while Zaman was run out as he tried to steal a quick single. Salman gave the innings some late impetus by hitting 45 off 43 balls, while New Zealand seamer Tim Southee finished with 3-56. —AFP



**KARACHI:** New Zealand's players pose with the winners' trophy on the third and final one-day international (ODI) cricket match between Pakistan and New Zealand at the National Stadium in Karachi. —AFP

## Kohli, Rohit out of India squad for N Zealand T20s

**NEW DELHI:** Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma have been left out of India's T20 squad for the home series against New Zealand as selectors ponder major long-term changes. November's World Cup semi-final drubbing to England prompted soul-searching in India and talk among the cricket board of easing out senior players.

Both men remain in the one-day squad for the visit of the Black Caps. Kohli hammered 113 off 87 balls to drive a big win over Sri Lanka in an ODI at Guwahati on Tuesday. Skipper Rohit made 83. Batsman KL Rahul and all-rounder Axar Patel will sit out the ODI and T20 matches against New Zealand because of family commitments, the Board of Control for Cricket in India said.

It did not give reasons however for the T20 omissions of Kohli and regular all-format captain Rohit. Hardik Pandya will continue to skipper the T20 side, having done so against Sri Lanka earlier this month.

The three-match ODI series against New Zealand begins on Wednesday in Hyderabad while the first of three T20 matches takes place at Ranchi on January 27. India will then go into a home Test series against Australia on February 9.

**ODI squad:** Rohit Sharma (capt), Shubman Gill, Ishan Kishan (wk), Virat Kohli, Shreyas Iyer, Suryakumar Yadav, KS Bharat (wk), Hardik Pandya, Washington Sundar, Shabbaz Ahmed, Shardul Thakur, Yuzvendra Chahal, Kuldeep Yadav, Mohammed Shami, Mohammed Siraj, Umran Malik.

**T20 squad:** Hardik Pandya (capt), Suryakumar Yadav, Ishan Kishan (wk), Ruturaj Gaikwad, Shubman Gill, Deepak Hooda, Rahul Tripathi, Jitesh Sharma (wk), Washington Sundar, Kuldeep Yadav, Yuzvendra Chahal, Arshdeep Singh, Umran Malik, Shivam Mavi, Prithvi Shaw, Mukesh Kumar.

**Test squad against Australia:** Rohit Sharma (capt), KL Rahul, Shubman Gill, Cheteshwar Pujara, Virat Kohli, Shreyas Iyer, KS Bharat (wk), Ishan Kishan (wk), Ravichandran Ashwin, Axar Patel, Kuldeep Yadav, Ravindra Jadeja, Mohammed Shami, Mohammed Shami Siraj, Umesh Yadav, Jaydev Unadkat, Suryakumar Yadav. —AFP

## Loeb's six appeal makes Dakar history

**HOFUF:** French driver Sebastien Loeb won a record sixth successive stage in the Dakar Rally on Saturday although barring a disaster Qatar's Nasser Al-Attiyah looks set for a fifth title. Loeb, a record nine-time world rally champion, won the 13th and penultimate stage, a 154 kilometres special from Shaybah to Al-Hofuf, to break Finnish driver Ari Vatanen's mark of five consecutive victories in 1989.

The 48-year-old Prodrive star is in second spot overall—the same position as he filled last year — 1 hour and 21 minutes behind Al-Attiyah. "It's great, even though the record was not necessarily my goal," said Loeb.

"I especially wanted to cement my second place. The gap was small and I eased into my pace from the start of the dunes, so I wasn't going to change everything. I feel good on sand, I can set a strong pace, I'm confident, I can drive aggressively while watching out for broken dunes. It's cool."

In contrast to Loeb setting the Saudi dunes ablaze, Al-Attiyah has

settled for a safety first strategy having established a commanding lead going into the final week of competition. The 52-year-old lost just 5min 38sec to Loeb in Saturday's stage.

"What is really important to me is winning the Dakar," said Al-Attiyah. "The race was great for us, we just have to bring the title home now." Al-Attiyah's Toyota team-mate, Brazilian Lucas Moraes fills out the podium. He holds a comfortable advantage of over an hour from another Toyota driver South African Giniel de Villiers.

### 'Need to push'

The car crown may appear done and dusted but it is far from the case in the motorbike category. Australia's two-time motorbike champion Toby Price holds a wafer thin advantage following closest rival Kevin Benavides' victory in Saturday's stage.

The 35-year-old KTM rider holds a lead of just 12 seconds over the Argentinian. Price maintained first spot despite a fall and a navigation error in the stage. "I made one little mistake around 130," he said.

"We went too far right and I took a fall while looking at the top of a dune. At this stage here, you need to push to keep the lead. I'm happy, I've put a 100 percent in every day." American Skyler Howes lies in third spot 1min



**SHAYBAH:** Toyota's driver Nasser Al-Attiyah of Qatar and his co-driver Mathieu Baumel of France compete during Stage 12 of the Dakar 2023 between Empty Quarter Marathon and Shaybah, in Saudi Arabia. —AFP

31secs adrift of 2016 and 2019 champion Price. Benavides, who won the title in 2021, was awarded the stage win after having more than 23 minutes restored to him. This was the time he took to aid a stricken rival Matthias Walkner at the outset of the stage.

The late revision dashed the cup of victory from South African amateur and debutant Michael Docherty, who had been hoisted to the top of the stage standings after Benavides' younger brother Luciano was

penalised a minute for speeding.

Howes' compatriot Mason Klein's rollercoaster race-mixing impressive performances with several tumbles came to a premature end. The KTM rider was unable to start the stage due to medical reasons according to race organisers Amaury Sport Organisation (ASO). Sunday's final stage is a 417km run-including a 136km special-to Dammam bringing to a close two weeks of combat conducted over 8,000km. —AFP

## Brignone breaks Italian record with super-G win

**ST ANTON:** Italian skier Federica Brignone picked up a record-breaking 21st World Cup victory of her career and her first of the season with a dazzling run in the super-G at the Austrian resort of St. Anton on Saturday. Overall champion in 2020, Brignone, 32, held off a spirited Swiss challenge, timing 0.54 seconds faster than Joana Haehlen and 0.66 quicker than Olympic champion Lara Gut-Behrami.

The race was switched from a downhill and then shortened due to significant snowfall this week. Mikaela Shiffrin, who last weekend equalled Lindsey Vonn's women's record of 82 World Cup wins, did not compete but remains well ahead in the general classification.

Victory meant Brignone became the first Italian woman to win 21 World Cup races, breaking a tie with her teammate Sofia Goggia, who emerged unscathed after she crashed out halfway down the course. "I'm really satisfied and proud of what I've

done today on the slope," said Brignone who came into the race with just one top 10 finish in her previous five speed races this season.

"I started the season really badly with the speed and with speed skis I had no confidence. It's coming back now and I know I can do what I want with my skis." Brignone made a small mistake early on but put that to the back of her mind as she ripped up the course in a blistering final section. "I really wanted to attack and I had not made a big mistake but before the Eisfall I was near the nets," she said. "And I said, 'Oh, I lost so much time', so I tried really to go and I tried to push really until the end and I knew I could make the difference down here."

"From after the Eisfall to the finish I was really able to push every single turn, not going late, not sliding, and I was really maintaining my speed." Haehlen was the surprise package on the podium as she equalled her career-best finish of second, set in the downhill at the World Cup finals last season in Meribel, to edge Gut-Behrami down to third.

"I couldn't believe it when I crossed the finish line and saw number two because on gate number five, I almost went out," said Haehlen. "I guess that's super-G. You need to push it to the limit and it worked out until the finish."

Another Italian Elena Curtoni retains the lead in the super-G standings after three events in spite of



**ST ANTON:** Winner Italy's Federica Brignone celebrates on the podium of the Super G competition of the Women's FIS Ski World Cup in St Anton am Arlberg on January 14, 2023. —AFP

only finishing 13th, although she is joined on 140 points by the Norwegian Ragnhild Mowinckel, who was sixth on the day. The second St. Anton super-G is scheduled for 0930 GMT on Sunday. —AFP

## Nadal says Djokovic clear favourite at Australian Open

**MELBOURNE:** Defending champion Rafael Nadal admitted Saturday he felt vulnerable heading into the Australian Open after two straight defeats in the build-up and said that Novak Djokovic was clear favourite. The 22-time Grand Slam winner crashed in his season-opening match at the mixed teams United Cup in Sydney to 12th-ranked Cameron Norrie and then again to Australia's Alex de Minaur.

Against the Australian, the Spaniard dropped six consecutive games after leading by a set and 1-0. The 36-year-old

top seed faces a testing first-round clash at Melbourne Park on Monday against emerging 21-year-old Briton Jack Draper, who reached the Adelaide semi-finals this week.

"Probably one of the toughest first rounds possible... young, powerful, growing very, very fast in the rankings, playing well," he said. "A big challenge for me at the beginning to start the tournament. Let's see. I'm here to just give myself a chance. I know he's playing well."

Nadal has lost six of his last seven matches stretching back to defeat to Frances Tiafoe in the last 16 at the US Open. Asked if he felt vulnerable, the defending champion admitted: "Of course, without a doubt."

"I have been losing more than usual, that's part of the business. Just accept the situation. I think I am humble enough to

accept that situation and just work with what I have today. I need to build again all this momentum. I need to build again this confidence with myself with victories. But it's true that I have been losing more than usual."

Nadal, who recently became a father, swept past Russian Daniil Medvedev to win the Australian Open and a 21st Grand Slam title last year in an epic five-setter. That victory came after arch-rival and nine-time Australian Open winner Djokovic was detained and deported ahead of the tournament after refusing to get vaccinated for COVID-19.

The Serbian star, looking to equal Nadal's record-breaking 22 Slam titles, is back this year and in top form after winning the Adelaide International I event last week. That followed another ATP Finals crown in late 2022. —AFP



**MELBOURNE:** Spain's Rafael Nadal (C) hits a return during a practice session at the Melbourne Park ahead of the Australian Open tennis tournament in Melbourne on January 14, 2023. —AFP



Sports

# Warriors rout Spurs 144-113 in front of record NBA crowd

LOS ANGELES: The Golden State Warriors were the stars of the party in San Antonio on Friday, cruising to a 144-113 victory over the Spurs before an NBA record crowd of 68,323 at the Alamodome. Jordan Poole led the defending champion Warriors with 25 points off the bench, and Donte DiVincenzo added 22 as Golden State's reserves came up big.

They were not the names that attracted the raucous crowd to the Alamodome—the Spurs' home from 1993 to 2002 before their move to the AT&T Center arena. But that hardly mattered as fans celebrated both teams and the sheer size of the crowd—which shattered the previous record attendance for a regular-season NBA game of 62,046, for a showdown between Michael Jordan's Chicago Bulls and the Atlanta Hawks at the Georgia Dome on March 27, 1998.

The Spurs played the game at their old arena as part of the celebrations of the franchise's 50th-anniversary season. Old-school Spurs fans relished a chance to return to the 'Dome, but plenty of those in the crowd were drawn by Warriors star Stephen Curry and his teammates.

Curry scored 15 points on six-of-12 shooting. Klay Thompson and Andrew Wiggins had 16 apiece as eight Warriors players scored in double figures. It was a morale-boosting away win for the Warriors, who have struggled mightily on the road this season.

And it was an emotional night for Warriors coach Steve Kerr, who played four seasons in San Antonio and won two titles with the Spurs. "Just the presentation of the game was spectacular," said Kerr, who received a huge cheer before the game when the Spurs showed a video tribute to him.

"To get an ovation from 68,000 fans gives you chills." Curry called the atmosphere "amazing," as did Spurs coach Gregg Popovich, who said he advised his young team "just to play the game and not worry about everything else."

Tre Jones led the Spurs with 21 points, and five San Antonio players scored in double figures. But Golden State led by five after the first quarter and never looked back. "The fans enjoyed themselves, even though we were getting our ass kicked," Popovich said. "They seemed to be having a hell of a time, so there must have been a lot of beer sales out there."

"It was a great night," he added. There was more on-court drama in Indianapolis, where Atlanta's John Collins tipped in the game-winner with seven-tenths of a second remaining in the Hawks' 113-111 victory over the Pacers.

Dejounte Murray's dunk put Atlanta up 108-107 with 2:08 to play. Benedict Mathurin answered with a basket that gave the Pacers the lead with 58 seconds remaining. Trae Young drained a three-pointer for Atlanta before two free throws from Indiana's Buddy Hield knotted the score at 111-111 with 21.5 seconds to play. There were 2.1 seconds on the clock when Murray managed to corral a miss from Young but couldn't get his own basket to drop. Collins grabbed that rebound and made the put-back basket—just his second of the night—for the win.

### Sabonis shines

In Sacramento, Domantas Sabonis delivered a triple-double of 19 points, 15 rebounds and 16 assists, along with two steals and two blocks, to lead the Kings in a 139-114 victory over the Houston



SAN ANTONIO: Malaki Branham #22 of the San Antonio Spurs drives to the basket during the game against the Golden State Warriors at the Alamodome in San Antonio, Texas. —AFP

Rockets. New York point guard Jalen Brunson continued his recent strong form, scoring 34 points—including four free throws in the final 14 seconds—in a 112-108 Knicks victory over the Wizards in Washington.

Julius Randle added 23 points and 16 rebounds

for the Knicks, who withstood a 40-point performance from Washington's Kyle Kuzma. Lauri Markkanen starred in Utah's 112-108 victory over the Orlando Magic, leading the Jazz with 28 points and blocking a three-point attempt by Franz Wagner with 5.8 seconds left. —AFP



BASRA: Kuwaiti and Bahraini players vie for the ball during the 25th Arabian Gulf Cup match played in Basra.

## Bahrain, Qatar to Gulf Cup semifinals

BASRA: Kuwait National Football Team is officially out of the 25th Arabian Gulf Cup after drawing a draw against Bahrain in the third round of Group B competitions.

The 1-1 match on Friday in Basra, took Kuwait out by goal difference with Qatar, who also qualified after a 1-1 result with UAE. Bahrain's Mahdi Humaidan scored in the 26th minute, while Shibeeb Al-Khaldi's header at the last breath of the first half put Kuwait on the scoring board. With today's results, Bahrain will meet Oman in the semifinals, while the host Iraq will go against Qatar. —KUNA

## Real Madrid still hungry for success

RIYADH: Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti said his team are still hungry for success ahead of their Spanish Super Cup final showdown against rivals Barcelona on Sunday. The Catalans failed to win a trophy last season and are looking for their first since coach Xavi arrived in November 2021, while Real Madrid won a Champions League and La Liga double.

The sides meet in a Clásico at the King Fahd International Stadium in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, and Ancelotti thinks his players will be equally motivated, despite their success. "We are talking about players that started winning in 2013, have kept winning and have never filled their stomachs and they never will fill them," Ancelotti told reporters Saturday.

"We are at a very demanding club that doesn't allow you to think your stomach is full." Madrid are the record 14 time-Champions League winners, with five of those trophies arriving from 2014 onwards.

"All titles are important for this club, titles give

motivation, confidence, there's a lot at stake in this game," continued Ancelotti. "We fight each day for this, to get to a final. The team is motivated and comfortable too, because we are used to playing under this type of pressure, that's why we have a lot of confidence."

Ancelotti has a fine record in finals, having lost just one of the last 10 in which his teams have competed in—against Atletico Madrid in the 2014 Spanish Super Cup. "Statistics are there to be changed," Barcelona coach Xavi told a news conference.

"It is a difficult game but I want to think positively. I have to remember that I have had a lot of luck too in finals. "We have to take stock of where we are, that we have Real Madrid in front of us is a huge motivation."

Real Madrid beat Valencia on penalties to reach the final on Wednesday, and a day later Barcelona triumphed against Real Betis on spot-kicks as well. Xavi was filmed shouting at his players during a team-talk in the break in extra-time against Betis.

"I would change myself for one of them, even one on the bench who was only getting a few minutes," said Xavi. "This is what you think about as a child, this is why we play, to show you're at a great level, to be important. —AFP

## Napoli crush Juventus to move 10 points clear

NAPLES: Napoli's dreams of a first Serie A title since the days of Diego Maradona are more alive than ever after thrashing Juventus 5-1 on Friday and moving 10 points clear at the summit. Luciano Spalletti's free-flowing team once again thrilled with a statement performance against their old rivals to stamp their authority on a title race which is increasingly looking like a one-team affair.

Victor Osimhen took his league tally for the season to 12 with a goal in each half while Khvicha Kvaratskhelia, Amir Rrahmani and Eljif Elmas netted the hosts' other goals to extend their advantage on both Juve and AC Milan. Champions Milan can cut the gap back to seven points with a win at Lecce on Saturday but the way Napoli dealt with Juve was the latest signal that southern Italy's biggest club are the real deal and ready to end a 33-year wait for a league crown.

Kvaratskhelia and Osimhen were devastating in attack, with the pair settling up each other's goals and causing havoc more or less from the first whistle against a team who before Friday had only conceded seven league goals in 17 matches. "It was a brilliant night," said Osimhen to DAZN.

"I'm happy for the team and I'm happy as well to contribute to it with two goals and an assist. We want to keep this momentum. "The road is still long, we just want to continue to win our games... at the end of the season I think we have a good chance." Juve had come into the match at a packed Stadio Maradona on a run of eight straight wins in which they hadn't conceded, making them title contenders despite a dismal start to the season.

Instead Massimiliano Allegri's team left Naples with their tails between their legs after conceding five goals in a Serie A match for the first time since May 1993. "When you make errors like we did against a team like Napoli, you are going to be punished. They are the league leaders and deserve to be where they are," said Allegri.

### Osimhen double

Napoli got stuck into Juventus right from the off, pressing high up the pitch and stopping the away side from building any play. Osimhen couldn't quite get on the end of Kim Min-Jae's long ball in the 12th minute but the Nigeria international was not to be denied and two minutes later gave the hosts a deserved lead.

Matteo Politano's cross found its way to Kvaratskhelia, whose acrobatic volley was brilliantly saved by Wojciech Szczesny but then fell right to Osimhen who nodded in from close range. Juve looked like they were about to be blown away but to their credit responded to the initial bombardment and got a foothold in the game. The Maradona had its collective heart in its mouth in the 21st minute when Angel Di Maria gobbled up a dreadful Rrahmani pass and let rip with a distance effort that skimmed off the top of the bar.

Arkadiusz Milik and Bremer both went close with headers but with Juve apparently in the ascendency Kvaratskhelia rolled Napoli two ahead in the 39th minute after Bremer bungled a high ball and Osimhen turned provider for the Georgian wing wizard.

Juve pulled one back almost immediately through their best player Di Maria, whose precision low finish punished panicky Napoli defending. And Napoli had Alex Meret to thank for their half-time lead after the Italian tipped away Rrahmani's odd attempt at clearing Federico Chiesa's inswinging cross. —AFP



NAPLES: Napoli's players celebrate after winning the Italian Serie A football match between Napoli and Juventus at the Diego-Maradona stadium in Naples. —AFP

### Today's matches

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE		
Newcastle United v FC Fulham		17:00
beIN Sports 1 HD Premium		
beIN Sports HD 1 English		
beIN Sports Connect		
Chelsea v Crystal Palace		17:00
beIN Sports 2 HD Premium		
beIN Sports Connect		
Tottenham Hotspur v Arsenal		19:30
beIN Sports 1 HD Premium		
beIN Sports HD 1 English		
SPANISH LEAGUE		
Getafe CF v RCD Espanyol		16:00
beIN Sports HD 1		
beIN Sports HD 2 English		
UD Almeria v Atletico de Madrid		18:15
beIN Sports HD 1		
beIN Sports HD 2 English		
ITALIAN CALCIO LEAGUE		
US Sassuolo Calcio v SS Lazio		14:30
AD SPORTS Premium 1		
Atalanta v Salernitana		20:00
AD SPORTS Premium 1		
AS Roma v ACF Fiorentina		22:45
AD SPORTS Premium 1		
FRENCH LEAGUE		
LOSC Lille v ES Troyes AC		15:00
beIN Sports HD 2		
beIN Sports Connect		
Angers SCO v Clermont Foot 63		17:00
beIN Sports HD 3		
beIN Sports Connect		
HSC Montpellier v FC Nantes		17:00
beIN Sports HD 2		
beIN Sports Connect		
OStade de Reims v OGC Nice		17:00
beIN Sports HD 6		
beIN Sports Connect		
Toulouse FC v Stade brestois		17:00
beIN Sports HD 7		
beIN Sports Connect		
AS Monaco v AC Ajaccio		19:05
beIN Sports HD 2		
beIN Sports Connect		
Stade Rennais FC v Paris Saint-Germain		22:45
beIN Sports HD 2		
beIN Sports Connect		

# Classifieds

## Hospitals & Clinics

### Hospitals

Sabah Hospital	24812000
Amiri Hospital	22450005
Maternity Hospital	24843100
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700
Chest Hospital	24849400
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010

Adan Hospital	23940620
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9

### Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733

Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088

Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

## Change of Name

I, DIANA AGNELA FALEIRO, holder of Passport No. L3856658, do hereby change my name to DIANA AGNELA (as Given Name) PEREIRA (as Sumame) for all purposes. I will henceforth be known in the name DIANA AGNELA PEREIRA and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents. (C#2832) 15-1-23



## MAN UTD PAINT THE TOWN RED

Rashford earns United derby triumph over Manchester City



MANCHESTER: Manchester United's Brazilian midfielder Casemiro challenges Manchester City's Norwegian striker Erling Haaland during the English Premier League football match between Manchester United and Manchester City at Old Trafford in Manchester, north west England, on January 14, 2023. — AFP

MANCHESTER: Marcus Rashford scored the winner as Manchester United came from behind to beat Manchester City 2-1 and go third in the Premier League in a thrilling finale at Old Trafford on Saturday. Both United goals came in the final 12 minutes as Erik ten Hag's side moved to within one point of their local rivals in the table after inflicting a damaging blow to City's hopes of retaining the title. Pep Guardiola's men looked to be heading to victory when Jack Grealish came off the bench to head the visitors into the lead. But Bruno Fernandes' controversial equalizer turned the game and four minutes later Rashford netted for the ninth consecutive match at Old Trafford. City could now fall eight points off the top of the table should Arsenal beat Tottenham in the north London derby on Sunday. The victory for United was sweet revenge after

being destroyed 6-3 when the sides met in October. The scoreline even flattered United at the Etihad thanks to two late goals from Anthony Martial. However, Ten Hag's men have now lost just once in 19 games since in a stunning turnaround in the Dutch coach's first season in charge. The introduction of Casemiro has transformed United's midfield since the last Manchester derby and Ten Hag's decision to play Fred alongside his Brazilian international teammate cut City's supply line to Erling Haaland. United's turnaround is reflected in Rashford's revival. The England international has now scored 16 times this season.

### Rashford threatens

Rashford's pace in behind was the biggest threat posed by either side in the first half and he should

have done better after rounding Ederson than allowing Kyle Walker to comfortably clear off the line. Another Rashford burst then took him beyond Rodri, but again the finish was lacking as Ederson hurried off his line to smother. United's new loan signing Wout Weghorst was watching on from the stands and Martial's lacklustre performance before being replaced at half-time by Antony underlined Ten Hag's need for more forward options. By contrast, City are blessed with an abundance of talent in the final third and Guardiola's ability to make game-changing substitutions looked to have swung the game in their favour. Grealish had only been on the field three minutes before netting the biggest goal of his City career to date as he nodded in Kevin De Bruyne's cross on the hour mark. But City have struggled this season

to match the consistency that has won them four Premier League titles in the past five years and were undone by a hugely controversial equalizer. Rashford was clearly offside as he raced towards Casemiro's pass, but crucially did not touch the ball and left it for Fernandes to sweep home. The assistant referee initially flagged for offside and City were livid at the decision to allow the goal to stand. City were still rocking when they conceded again as Alejandro Garnacho sprinted down the left and crossed for Rashford to prod home from close range. There was still time for City to feel further aggrieved at referee Stuart Attwell as Haaland saw a penalty appeal waved away. But the champions now have a huge job on their hands if they are to maintain their dominance of English football in the Guardiola era. — AFP

## Brighton rock Liverpool as Everton lose

LONDON: Troubled Liverpool crashed to a shock 3-0 defeat at Brighton on Saturday on a dramatic day of Premier League action, while Everton boss Frank Lampard was pushed closer to the sack as his struggling side were beaten 2-1 by relegation rivals Southampton. Liverpool's hopes of salvaging a top four finish from a difficult campaign suffered a major hit as Brighton swept to victory on the south coast. After dominating the first half without making the breakthrough, Brighton deservedly took the lead in the 47th minute. Joel Matip carelessly surrendered possession to Alexis Mac Allister and he found Kaoru Mitoma, whose cross was perfectly weighted for the unmarked Solly March to tap in. Liverpool were in disarray and six minutes later, March crashed a fine finish into the far corner from just inside the area. Danny Welbeck wrapped up the victory, flicking March's pass over Joe Gomez and volleying home. Beaten at Brentford in their previous league game, Liverpool are languishing in eighth place, seven points adrift of the top four, and look a shadow of the team that nearly won the quadruple last term. Liverpool's Merseyside rivals Everton are in even more dire straits after Southampton's 2-1 win at Goodison Park. Everton's board of directors did not attend the game because of a "real and credible threat to their safety". Everton chief executive Denise Barrett-Baxendale was reportedly manhandled by a



BRIGHTON: Brighton's Dutch defender Joel Veltman (L) vies with Liverpool's French defender Ibrahima Konate (R) during the English Premier League football match between Brighton and Hove Albion and Liverpool on January 14, 2023. — AFP

fan and had her car attacked after last week's 4-1 home defeat by Brighton. Everton have won only one of their last 13 matches in all competitions and banners and flags calling for the board to leave were unfurled before kick-off. Southampton fell behind in the 39th minute as Amadou Onana headed home from Demarai Gray's corner. But less than two minutes into the second half, James Ward-Prowse collected Che Adams' knock-down on the edge of the area and drilled Southampton's equaliser. Ward-Prowse inflicted greater pain in the 78th minute when he whipped one of his trademark free-kicks past Jordan Pickford. Southampton remain bottom of the table but they are now behind second bottom Everton only on goal difference. West Ham fill the final place in the bottom three after a 1-0 defeat at Wolves that saw the hosts move above the hapless Hammers. Daniel Podence netted in the 48th minute to leave West Ham without a win in their last seven league games. Brennan Johnson struck twice as Nottingham Forest beat midlands rivals Leicester 2-0 at the City Ground. — AFP

## Dakar Rally to remain in Saudi Arabia

AL HOFUF: Saudi Arabia will continue to be the home of the Dakar Rally for the next few years with race director David Castera telling AFP "we still have so many deserts to explore". Castera was speaking after Saturday's penultimate stage with Qatari Nasser Al-Attiyah poised for his fifth title. "I'm very happy we're staying here, with so many deserts still to explore and with this country's enormous potential," he said. Motorsport's toughest endurance test moved to the conservative kingdom in 2020 after a spell in South America on an initial 10-year contract. Dakar organisers ASO announced the switch in

2019 saying a new chapter of the gruelling race's history would be written in the "mysterious and vast deserts" of the land. Castera confirmed a clause in the Saudi deal to pull out after five years would not be taken up. The race's move to the oil-rich state sparked controversy with accusations of 'sportswashing' as the Gulf monarchy, often criticised over its human rights record, attempts to burnish its image and attract foreign interest as it diversifies its economy away from oil. "Today there's been a big change, it's progressing at a fast rate," commented Castera. "I'm not here to play politics but to organise a sporting event which has the legitimacy to exist here because the terrain suits it." Saudi Arabia has invested heavily in attracting high profile sporting events including tennis, golf and Formula One to its shores and is preparing a joint bid to host the 2030 World Cup. And last month five-time Ballon d'Or winner Cristiano Ronaldo signed for Saudi side Al Nassr in a deal worth 200 million euros. — AFP



HOFUF: French driver Mathieu Serradori and his French co-driver Loic Minaudier compete during the Stage 13 of the Dakar 2023 between Saybah and Al-Hofuf, in Saudi Arabia, on January 14, 2023. — AFP

