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## NO PLACE SAFE IN GAZA

Scores killed in Zionist strikes on schools, buildings, hospitals



GAZA: Palestinians carry an injured person as rescuers search the rubble of a building for survivors following Zionist bombardment in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip on Nov 18, 2023. — AFP

GAZA: A Hamas health official said more than 80 people were killed Saturday in twin strikes on a northern Gaza refugee camp, including a UN school used as a shelter for people displaced by the Zionist-Hamas war. Social media videos showed bodies covered in blood and dust on the floor of a building, where mattresses had been wedged under school tables in Jabalia, the Palestinian territory's biggest refugee camp.

The Zionist army's relentless air and ground campaign has since killed at least 12,300 people, including 5,000 children, in Gaza. "At least 50 people" were killed in a Zionist strike at dawn on the UN-run Al-Fakhoura school in the camp, which had been converted into a shelter for displaced Palestinians, an official at Gaza's health ministry told AFP.

According to UN figures, some 1.6 million people have been displaced inside Gaza by six weeks of fighting. A separate strike Saturday on another building in Jabalia camp killed 32 people from the same family, 19 of them children, the official said. The ministry released a list of 32 members of the Abu Habal family who had died. Contacted by AFP, the Zionist army did not

immediately respond to requests for comment on the two strikes.

The Zionist entity has told Palestinians to move from north Gaza for their safety, but deadly air strikes continued to hit central and southern areas of the narrow coastal territory. "They said the south was safer, so we moved," Azhar Al-Rifi told AFP. Her family was caught in a strike at the Nuseirat refugee camp on Friday, killing seven of her relatives including her five-year-old nephew. The same blast caught up Nada Abu Hiya, aged eight — her third bombing of the war. "There are bombings everywhere," she said. "My grandmother is dead, my mother is dead, my grandfather is dead, my uncle is dead, they destroyed our house. Our neighbors' house is also destroyed and they are all dead."

On Saturday, hundreds of people fled on foot after the director of Gaza's main hospital said the Zionist army ordered evacuation of the facility where some 2,000 people were trapped. Columns of sick and injured — some of them amputees — were seen making their way out of Al-Shifa hospital

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### Social media titans caught in Gaza storm over content

WASHINGTON: Six weeks after the eruption of the war in Gaza with the attack by Hamas on the Zionist entity, social media platforms are still caught in the maelstrom, struggling to control content and withstand user fury. TikTok and X, formerly Twitter, were swept up in controversies this week, one involving an unearthing of a two-decade old screed by Osama bin Laden, the mastermind of the 9/11 terror attacks on the United States.

Facebook and Instagram owner Meta is also facing pushback from users accusing the company founded by Mark Zuckerberg of over-censorship of pro-Palestinian content. The problems have cast a harsh light on content moderation policies at the big platforms after a big cost-cutting campaign last year saw trust and safety teams gutted.

For TikTok, the risks are real as it faces a threat to be outright banned in the United States, under suspicion that its powerful algorithm is ultimately under the control of the Chinese Communist Party. Those calls were renewed when it emerged on Thursday that videos promoting bin Laden's "Letter to America" went viral, 22 years after he wrote it.

Bin Laden's deeply anti-American writing explained his reasons for masterminding plane attacks on New York and Washington that killed nearly 3,000 people. Searches for the letter were eventually banned by TikTok which minimized the reach of the videos.

"TikTok is so popular now with younger users, and when you talk about younger users you are talking about uniquely uninformed people," said Paul Barrett, deputy director of the NYU

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### Pro-Palestinian protestors rally in France, UK

LONDON: Thousands of protesters took part in rallies across France and Britain on Saturday calling for a ceasefire in the Gaza war. Several thousand people marched through central Paris, in torrential rain, behind a banner proclaiming "Halt the massacre in Gaza and West Bank, immediate ceasefire". "France must immediately call for a ceasefire so that the guns go silent," said CGT union secretary general Sophie Binet, one of several union leaders to speak at the rally. Rallies

were held in dozens of towns across France, Binet added.

In Marseille, AFP saw several hundred people stage a minute's silence for Palestinian victims of the war. In Toulouse, more than 1,200 people took part in a march, according to police. Rallies have been held across Europe since Oct 7. Last Saturday saw more than 300,000 people stage a pro-Palestinian march in London. Smaller protests were held this week with one targeting an office where main opposition Labour Party leader Keir Starmer holds meetings.

Protesters there waved Palestinian flags and chanted "Ceasefire now". Some held placards reading "Stop the war in Gaza" and "Starmer — blood on your hands" amid a heavy police

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LONDON: Protesters hold placards reading a message for Britain's Labour leader Keir Starmer as they walk past his office during the "Day of Action for Palestine" on Nov 18, 2023. — AFP

### Germany, Turkey leaders trade barbs over Zionist assault

BERLIN: Germany and Turkey's leaders traded barbs Friday over the Zionist entity's war on Hamas, with Chancellor Olaf Scholz stressing the country's right to self-defense while Recep Tayyip Erdogan demanded an end to the Zionist entity's military operation. Erdogan is on a highly controversial visit to staunch Zionist entity defender Germany, made more tricky by his recent accusations directed at the Zionist entity.

The Turkish leader has branded the Zionist entity a "terror state" and repeatedly defended the Hamas militants who rule Gaza as "liberators" fighting for their land. Erdogan did not repeat such statements in Berlin but nevertheless lashed out at the Zionist entity over its air and ground campaign in Gaza, triggered by the deadly Oct 7 attack by Hamas in the Zionist entity.

"Shooting hospitals or killing children does not exist in the Torah, you can't do it," he said at a joint press conference ahead of dinner with Scholz. In talks with German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier earlier Friday, Erdogan had said that "(The Zionist entity's) attacks on Palestinian lands must end and that the reaction from the whole world against

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BERLIN: German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan address a joint press conference before talks at the Chancellery on Nov 17, 2023. — AFP

### In shock move, OpenAI sacks CEO Altman

WASHINGTON: OpenAI, the company that launched ChatGPT a year ago, said Friday it had dismissed CEO Sam Altman in a shock firing of a central figure in the AI revolution. Altman became

a tech world sensation with the release nearly a year ago of ChatGPT, an artificial intelligence (AI) chatbot with unprecedented capabilities, churning out human-level content like poems or artwork in just seconds. His dismissal caught the tech world by surprise, with rumors rife on social media as to the cause of the sudden sacking.

A statement about the firing by OpenAI referred to its stated mission of making sure AI benefits everyone, and said that new leadership is

needed for the company to move forward. Fellow OpenAI cofounder Greg Brockman was pushed from the company's board in the shakeup and put out late in the day that he quit. "I'm super proud of what we've built... but based on today's news, I quit," Brockman said in a post at X, formerly known as Twitter. "I continue to believe in the mission of creating safe AGI (artificial general intelligence) that benefits all of humanity."

Continued on Page 6



Sam Altman



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# Kuwait rallies support at WFP for sustained aid flow to Gaza

## Kuwait reelected to World Food Programme's Executive Board

ROME: The State of Kuwait has received unanimous support from the Executive Board of the World Food Programme to formally demand the sustained flow of food and humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip. The Permanent Delegation of the State of Kuwait to the WFP told KUNA on Friday that the second regular session of the Executive Board succeeded, at the conclusion of its activities held at the organization's headquarters in Rome, in issuing an official statement on the humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip.

The Kuwaiti delegation pointed out that the Executive Board's issuance of the statement came after continuous consultations and negotiations it carried out with the rest of the board member states in coordination with the Arab group at the UN organization to tackle the catastrophic humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip.

The delegation noted that the Executive Board instructed its chairman in the statement to present to the Executive Director Cindy McCain, "the

strong views of the member states regarding the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip and their demand of the WFP to effectively carry out its mandate of ensuring the immediate delivery of humanitarian aid to all civilians in the Gaza Strip". It also instructed the chairman to express "the board members' expectation that the Executive Director will stress the seriousness of the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip and continue her call so that the World Food Program can effectively carry out its mandate of ensuring the immediate delivery of humanitarian assistance to all civilian populations in need throughout the Strip."

In his speech at the board meeting, the representative of the State of Kuwait at the WFP Engineer Yousef Jahil, offered "condolences to our people in Gaza and salutes to the steadfast Palestinian people in the face of the most horrific occupation in history." He praised the WFP's tireless efforts and work to deliver humanitarian and food aid to civilians in Gaza



The representative of the State of Kuwait at the WFP Yousef Jahil.

strip. He stated that the WFP, as recently confirmed by its Executive Director, "possesses logistical capabilities that enable it to quickly deliver humanitarian

aid to the Gaza Strip, which is facing a massive hunger crisis in light of the interruption of food supplies in all its forms to civilians."

The Kuwaiti representative denounced those who do not see the "ethnic cleansing, the indiscriminate bombing of civilians, the killing of children, or the mass displacement in Gaza." He blamed those who "pay lip service to international principles, humanitarian values, human rights, equality, solidarity, and basic rights to access to food and water and the empowerment of women and girls." "Where did these slogans go in the face of the machine of killing and destruction of the occupation forces in Gaza and the burial of children and women under the rubble of their destroyed homes?", he asked.

Kuwait was reelected to the membership of the Executive Board of the World Food Programme, which consists of 36 countries. Kuwait presided over the Board from 2016 to 2018. The new term would end on Dec 31, 2024. — KUNA



MANAMA: Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah attends the inaugural ceremony of Manama Dialogue 2023 on Friday. — KUNA

## Kuwait FM attends Manama Dialogue

KUWAIT: Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Friday evening attended the inaugural ceremony of Manama Dialogue 2023 patronized and attended by Bahraini Crown Prince and Prime Minister Prince Salman bin Hamad Al-Khalifa and attended by a number of ministers of sisterly and friendly countries.

Manama Dialogue 2023 tackles several political and security issues, primarily regional and international challenges and tensions, and ways of promoting strategic cooperation to address relevant reflections and achieve regional peace and joint future ambitions. — KUNA



Assistant Secretary for the Arts sector at NCCAL Musa'ed Al-Zamil

## NCCAL's ceramic expo showcases unique artworks

KUWAIT: The National Council for Culture, Arts and Literature hosted an exhibition of contemporary Arab ceramics and a book signing ceremony for contemporary Arab ceramics by the Jordanian artist Yacoub Al-Otoom. The exhibition was held under the patronage of the Minister of Information, Minister of Endowments and Islamic Affairs and Chairman of the National Council for Culture, Arts and Literature, Abdul Rahman Al-Mutairi.

The exhibition featured the works of Arab artists participating in the Contemporary Arab Ceramics Celebration, which was launched last Monday at the Arts Hall in the Abdullah Al-Salem suburb. The Secretary-General of the Council, Dr Mohammad Al-Jassar, said in a statement on the sidelines of the opening ceremony that this ceremony is the first gathering of Arab potters in the Arab world, expressing his pride that Kuwait is the incubator of culture, arts and literature in the region.

He pointed out that since its inception, the celebration has witnessed busy activities with the participation of approximately 26 Arab guests, along with artists from Kuwait, in an atmosphere of friendship for exchanging ideas and experiences.

He stressed the importance of these forums for developing ceramic skills in the Arab world, which has existed for hundreds of years and ceramics were a craft for making practical, daily tools in the past



before it was an art. He explained that most of the ceramic works that resulted from this gathering and were displayed in the exhibition reflect the prevailing psychological state and sadness due to the situation of the Palestinian people in Gaza. He noted that "art is a message that reflects the state of the nation." In turn, Assistant Secretary for the Arts Sector at the Council, Musa'ed Al-Zamil, said in his speech that the participating potters presented wonderful works during the exhibition that reflected their skill and creativity in the field of ceramics. He added that the National Council for Culture, Arts and Literature was keen to hold this first forum, indicating that Kuwait is a pioneer in many fields. He explained that the book 'Contemporary Arab Ceramics' by the Jordanian art-

ist Yacoub Al-Atoum was the basis of this gathering, and the book, which was issued by the NCCAL led to the establishment of this forum.

Dima Al-Quraini, head of the Kuwaiti Ceramic House, told KUNA that this forum is the result of an effort to bring together guests and an elite group of Arab potters under one roof.

Jordanian artist Yacoub Al-Otoom said that his book includes works of about 225 Arab potters and about 700 ceramic works documented by the name of the artist, measurement, year of production, and technique. The book is also decorated at the beginning with the critical words of the most important Arab critics, so that it is considered a reference book on Arab ceramics. — KUNA

## Fire Force admits 561 applicants

KUWAIT: The General Fire Force on Saturday conducted a public lottery to select and accept applications for non-commissioned officer courses which resulted in the acceptance of 561 applicants in addition to 100 reserve members. The First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah directed their acceptance, making the total number of those accepted to 661.

The Fire Department said in a press statement that it conducted a public lottery on Saturday morning to select and accept applications for its courses in the presence of the Chief of the Force, Lieutenant General Khaled Al-Mukrad, the Director General of the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training, Dr. Hassan Al-Fajjam, and the Vice President of the Kuwait Transparency Society, Dr Fahd Al-Raqeeb. However it said that the applicant's election by the lot is not considered final unless they pass the mandatory medical examination. He explained 1,980 applicants participated in the lottery who met the conditions for admission. 125 applicants were admitted for the Mechanism Operator Sergeant course (25 from the reserve), 75 applicants for Special Tasks Mechanism Operator Sergeant (25 from the reserve) and 100 applicants for Combat Sergeant (25 from the reserve).

## Masayel Co-op mulls firing expats drawing pay over KD 700

KUWAIT: Masayel Cooperative Society will discuss a request from treasurer Ali Al-Jurayed to terminate expats whose salaries are more than KD 700 to cut expenses of the co-op and reduce the indemnity cost of employees. He said these employees can be rehired for lower salaries, and those who refuse to accept this will have their employment terminated, adding it is better to appoint Kuwaitis instead if they will accept the job.

### Rise in domestic helpers

Official data reveals a notable increase in

the number of domestic helpers in Kuwait, with a surge of 34,850 individuals of both genders during the first six months of 2023. The total count reached 788,150 by the end of June 2023, compared to 753,290 at the close of Dec 2022.

The average cost of bringing in domestic helpers, excluding those from the Philippines, is approximately KD 700. This results in a total cost of bringing in domestic help amounting to KD 71.96 million, encompassing KD 62.78 million for female helpers (including the airline ticket cost of KD 180 for each worker) and KD 9.18 million for male helpers.

Female domestic helpers brought to Kuwait from Oct 2022 to Oct 2023 incurred a cost of around KD 112 million, constituting 80 percent of the total expense of importing labor into the country. The expenditure on airline tickets to bring in domestic help from all nationalities ex-

ceeds KD 30 million for the entire year. Statistics indicate that female domestic helpers from India, the Philippines and Sri Lanka collectively constitute 50 percent of the total domestic help in Kuwait, with their combined number reaching 382,720. Among them, Indian domestic helpers lead in numbers, totaling 347,290.

### Last day for transfer

The education ministry has decided that Sunday will be the last day for school students to transfer for the first semester for the school year 2023-2024. The ministry will discontinue the transfer after that date.

### Firemen douse blaze

Farwaniya and Subhan firemen, in addition to backup forces, put out a fire in a house in Khaitan. No injuries were reported.



Fire-fighters combating a blaze in Khaitan.

Local

# Navigating the future and challenges of AI in Kuwait and the Middle East

## AI presents unique challenges and rare opportunities for Kuwait

By Mariam Al-Ayyoub

**KUWAIT:** In recent years, the rise of artificial intelligence (AI) has sparked both excitement and concern across the globe. Kuwait and the wider Middle East region have not been immune to this wave of technological progress. As AI continues to evolve and integrate into various aspects of society, a debate is emerging about its potential benefits and drawbacks. While exploring the nuances of this discussion and delving into the unique challenges and opportunities Kuwait and the Middle East face in embracing AI, one needs to maintain a neutral stance.

Artificial intelligence holds the promise of transforming various sectors in Kuwait and the Middle East, ranging from healthcare and education to transportation and energy. One of the key advantages of AI is its ability to analyze vast amounts of data quickly and efficiently, enabling informed decision-making and resource optimization. This could prove invaluable in addressing complex issues such as healthcare management, traffic congestion, and resource allocation in the region.

In Kuwait, AI is already making inroads in healthcare with the development of advanced diagnostic tools that can help physicians make more accurate and timely diagnoses. Additionally, AI-driven applications are being used to enhance the efficiency of logistics and supply chain management, a crucial aspect of the country's oil industry. In the wider Middle East, AI is playing a significant role in modernizing transportation infrastructure and reducing the region's dependence on fossil fuels.

However, the integration of AI in Kuwait and the Middle East also comes with its share of challenges. One of the foremost concerns is the potential impact on the job market. As automation and AI-driven technologies become more prevalent, there is a legitimate fear that certain job categories may become obsolete. In a region where unemployment rates can be high, this poses a significant challenge to policymakers.

Furthermore, there are concerns about the ethical and privacy implications of AI. As AI systems collect and analyze vast amounts of data, there is a need for robust regulations to protect individuals' privacy and ensure responsible data use. Additionally, there have been concerns about the potential for AI systems to perpetuate bias, particularly in areas like facial recognition and criminal justice.

tems to perpetuate bias, particularly in areas like facial recognition and criminal justice.

In Kuwait and the Middle East, where culture and tradition hold significant importance, the introduction of AI technologies can be met with resistance. Questions arise about how AI aligns with local values and customs. For example, AI-driven robots providing customer service or AI-powered language translation might not fully understand the nuances of local dialects and cultural sensitivities. Moreover, the role of AI in education raises questions about the impact on traditional teaching methods and the preservation of cultural heritage.

While AI can enhance learning through personalized education platforms, there are concerns about the potential erosion of traditional teaching practices and cultural identities. Kuwait and the Middle East are also grappling with issues related to cybersecurity. As AI systems become more integrated into critical infrastructure, they become attractive targets for cyberattacks. Ensuring the security of AI systems is a paramount concern, as a breach could have far-reaching consequences.

Recognizing both the potential and challenges of AI, governments in Kuwait and the Middle East have initiated various policies and investments to foster the development and responsible adoption of AI technologies. Kuwait, for instance, has established the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR), which is actively engaged in AI research and development.

Similarly, other Middle Eastern countries have set up AI research centers and launched initiatives to build AI talent pools. The Middle East is also witnessing the growth of AI startups and entrepreneurship. Government support in the form of funding, mentorship, and access to resources has played a crucial role in nurturing a vibrant AI startup ecosystem. This, in turn, has the potential to drive economic diversification and reduce reliance on oil revenues.

In a world increasingly interconnected, collaboration on AI research and knowledge exchange between countries and regions is critical. Kuwait and the Middle East have been active participants in international AI conferences, fostering partnerships with global AI research institutions and companies. Such collaboration can accelerate AI development and ensure that the region benefits from the latest advancements in the field.



Addressing the ethical concerns surrounding AI is paramount. Kuwait and the Middle East should actively engage in discussions on AI ethics, ensuring that AI systems are developed and used responsibly. This includes considering issues of bias, transparency, accountability, and privacy. By adopting ethical frameworks, the region can navigate the path to AI integration while safeguarding its values and principles.

The future of artificial intelligence in Kuwait and the Middle East is a complex and multifaceted topic. While AI holds great potential to transform various sectors and drive economic growth, it also presents challenges in terms of job displacement, ethical considerations, and cultural integration. Governments in the region are taking proactive steps to harness the benefits of AI while mitigating its risks.

As Kuwait and the Middle East continue to navigate the evolving landscape of AI, it is crucial to maintain a balanced approach that respects tradition and culture while embracing technological progress. The journey toward the responsible adoption of AI is a challenging one, but with careful planning, collaboration, and a commitment to ethical principles, Kuwait and the Middle East can chart a path toward a brighter and technologically advanced future.

## Magic of cinema: Exploring the power of films

By Passant Hisham

**KUWAIT:** It's the enchanting moments explored in movies that continuously keep us captivated by cinema, providing a chance to fully immerse ourselves in alternate worlds, momentarily losing touch with our reality. Movies serve as a means to address our hidden desires, alleviate pain and offer an escape from loneliness by connecting us with diverse characters and the conflicts they navigate. The journeys and stories of these characters often lead us to yearn to be part of their fictional realities, finding companionship, rediscovering lost relationships with family members or experiencing the compassion of a desired love story.

In a conversation with Kuwait Times, Mohamed Maged, an international award-winning film director and founder of a media production company in Kuwait, passionately shared his perspective on the profound impact movies can have on us. Maged believes that movies extend beyond mere entertainment, serving as sources of inspiration, self-reflection and education.

### The power of storytelling

According to Maged, the essence of compelling movies lies in strong storytelling. The power of a story transcends its narrative, emotionally engaging viewers. A seamless blend of artistic elements such as cinematography, acting, editing, music and sound effects creates a rich experience that fully involves the audience. Maged highlighted scenes in movies that moved audiences to tears or excitement, emphasizing the belief that when viewers feel the story, they believe in its authenticity.



Mohamed Maged

### Opens a window into different cultures and views

Maged asserted that films possess a remarkable ability to bridge gaps by providing a window into worlds otherwise inaccessible. They expose us to diverse perspectives, cultures and experiences, broadening horizons. Even for those residing in peaceful regions, movies can simulate war, poverty or cruelty, fostering understanding and empathy. They help audiences make sense of their realities and those of others.

### Source of inspiration

Movies often mirror our struggles, ambitions and dreams, making characters and conflicts relatable. Witnessing a character overcome obstacles can serve as a potent source of motivation, inspiring individuals to pursue their goals despite challenges. Maged cited instances of people achieving success in football or filmmaking, influenced by fictional role models. "Cinema inspires you, strengthens you, guides you and educates you. That should be the ultimate purpose of media," he said.

### Encourages social change

Maged acknowledged cinema's dual nature as both showbusiness and a catalyst for cultivating values. While films entertain, they also provoke thought, shaping societies and influencing people's ideologies. Maged pointed to movies that sparked revolutions against tyranny, corruption and injustice, highlighting filmmaking as a lasting form of art with a significant societal impact.

In essence, according to Maged, the enchantment of cinema is its magical spark that makes it an indispensable part of our lives. By mirroring society and addressing human issues, movies touch our hearts, evoke empathy and connect us to a different reality.

## NBK and KidZania celebrate 10 years of partnership

**KUWAIT:** KidZania celebrates the completion of 10 successful years in Kuwait and fruitful partnership with National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) through the NBK Branch within KidZania Kuwait, which is an integral aspect of the child-sized world of KidZania.

The NBK branch within KidZania Kuwait plays an instrumental role in this child-sized city where kids are empowered to manage their own world and explore what it's like to experience careers in a city built just for them. Kids will be introduced to basic banking services so they can deposit and withdraw 'KidZos', the national currency which kids spend within the city of KidZania. Young KidZanians gain from NBK's presence by learning first-hand the benefits of saving and investing money. The bank is a scaled down replica of an NBK branch, featuring NBK branded ATM's around the park.

To commemorate 10 years of partnership, KidZania Kuwait introduced limited issue of "NBK - 10th Anniversary Special KidZos cheque worth 100 kidZos". Kids performed 5-6 activities to earn this one-time edition cheque and 100 kidZos deposited in their NBK KidZania account. The activ-



ity ran from August 3 - 5, 2023, on this occasion, Hisham Al-Nusif, Deputy General Manager of Consumer Banking Group at National Bank of Kuwait said: "NBK is proud to partner with KidZania Kuwait to be the only bank in the child-sized city. We are excited to be contributing to the growth and development of Kuwait's youth by providing real life lessons for kids to learn financial responsibility."

"We also view this partnership as a valuable opportunity to connect with our future target market and to begin building our customers' lifelong engagement with the NBK brand," he added. On his part, Fernando Medroa, Vice President of Leisure and Entertainment at Alshaya Group said: "Much more than a children's museum or family entertainment center, KidZania takes interactive entertainment and learning to an entirely new level by combining role-playing with real life. We replicate the real world in a safe and self-contained over 7,000 square meter children-sized city."

"As in the real world, children choose activities - such as being a police officer, doctor, journalist or a shopkeeper - and earn money which they can then

spend or save. KidZania operates just like a real city complete with buildings, paved streets, vehicles, a functioning and recognizable destinations in the form of "establishments" sponsored and branded by leading multi-national and local brands. The facilities are designed to educate through experience, fostering the development of life skills, but from a children perspective - it's all about fun," he added.

Over the course of a decade, KidZania has achieved remarkable success in Kuwait, as the interactive entertainment and learning park has welcomed over 3 million children at over 65 establishments, offering youngsters over 82 roleplay activities and 70 professions. KidZania's award-winning entertainment concept is recognized globally for its unique blend of entertainment and education for children, as kids can now experience what it is to live in the real world, and how to become better citizens, through ultra-realistic role-play, learn about different careers, the inner-workings of a city and the concept of managing money. Each experience is designed to empower kids, giving them the confidence to be their best selves, and inspiration to be great global citizens.



ABU DHABI: (From left) Kuwaiti photographers Bader Hussein, Mohammad Al-Kandari and Mohammad Al-Qattan receive their awards. — KUNA photos

## Three Kuwaiti photographers win UAE award

**ABU DHABI:** Three Kuwaiti photographers won Friday Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammad bin Rashid Al-Maktoum International Photography Award of the UAE in various categories, which attracted hundreds of professional and amateur photographers from all over the world.

Speaking to KUNA, Mohammad Al-Kandari, a wildlife photographer, said Kuwait's outstanding presence in this international event is a big achievement for "all of us to raise the country's flag internationally". He expressed his delight at winning categories in the 12th edition of the award, which is one of the most important international events, adding that several photographers from Arab and foreign countries participated in the award. Al-Kandari and his compatriot Mohammad Al-Qattan have won the fourth and fifth places respectively in the award titled "diversity", while their compatriot Bader Hussein came second in another category of the award.

Al-Kandari is a wildlife photographer, and he won many awards in several countries, mostly in the National Geographic Photography Competition in 2015 and Hamdan International Photography Award in 2016, in addition to his participation as a member of the jury in many local and international photography competitions. Established in 2011 in the UAE, Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammad bin Rashid Al-Maktoum International Photography Award aims to enhance global interest, improve performance and creativity in photography as well as create a global base and encourage the participation of citizens in relevant international competitions and activities. — KUNA

## Kuwait ambassador congratulates Oman on 53rd National Day

MUSCAT: The Ambassador of Kuwait to Oman Mohammad Al-Hajri on Saturday congratulated the leadership and people of Oman on the 53rd anniversary of National Day, commending the deep-rooted Kuwaiti-Omani ties.



Mohammad Al-Hajri

Al-Hajri told KUNA that Oman plays an active role in all local, regional and international forums. The Kuwaiti-Omani relations are progressing steadily with unwavering determination, as they are united by the common goals under the leadership of both sides, he explained. He underlined the keenness of the wise leaderships

of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and Oman's Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, to enhance bilateral cooperation between the two sides. In recent years, many agreements and memorandums of understanding have been signed that would achieve the anticipated goals and objectives for both countries, he pointed out. — KUNA

## 122 expatriates deported in 2023 so far

KUWAIT: The Traffic Department revealed that the number of expatriates who were deported from the country for committing serious violations amounted to 122 from the beginning of this year until the end of last October. It said the number is likely to increase by the end of this year. The Traffic Department also indicated that the number of licenses cancelled in four years has reached 300,000. About 50,390 driving licenses were cancelled in 2020, 88,925 in 2021, 100,266 in 2021 and about 53,083 were withdrawn in 2023. The number includes the deceased and the expats whose residency permits expired or those who left the country permanently.

### Photo of the day



KUWAIT: This aerial view shows Kuwait Towers (bottom center) and Kuwait City (background) caught in heavy fog on November 17, 2023. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

# Kuwait Diabetes Society signs MoU with Sanofi

## Partnership to enhance cardiometabolic care standards in Kuwait



KUWAIT: Dr Walid Al-Dhahi, Niven Al-Khoury and other officials during the signing of the MoU.



Signing of the MoU.

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Diabetes Society (KDS) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Sanofi for patients living with diabetes and dyslipidemia. The MoU was signed between Dr Walid Al-Dhahi, Chairman of the Kuwait Diabetes Society and Director of the Internal Medicine Department at Mubarak Al-Kabeer Hospital, and Niven Al-Khoury, General Manager of General Medicines at Sanofi KSA and Gulf MCO.

Claire Le Flecher, French Ambassador to Kuwait, was also present to witness the occasion. The partnership will enhance cardiometabolic care standards in Kuwait. Under the terms of the agreement, Sanofi will collaborate with Kuwait Diabetes Society to implement a training program aimed at enhancing the capabilities of primary care physicians in the management of diabetes and dyslipidemia. Sanofi will also support the upgrading of pharmacists' knowledge about recent trends in Pharmacoeconomics.

Furthermore, and with the goal of empowering the patient community, Sanofi and KDS will jointly develop comprehensive awareness materials to provide patients with the tools they need to prevent and control diabetes and dyslipidemia.

Dr Walid Al-Dhahi: "Our cooperation with Sanofi has the potential to dramatically improve the quality of care provided to patients with diabetes,

heart disease and dyslipidemia in Kuwait, bearing in mind that there are more than 803,400 diabetics in Kuwait. The MoU covers in its scope several vital areas including the preparation and implementation of training courses and workshops for primary care doctors, pharmacists and diabetes educators with specific standards and indications for use, as well as the deployment of digital health tools to provide integrated care for patients, enabling them to achieve optimal blood sugar control. Over the years, Sanofi has played an active role in supporting Kuwait's public health agenda, and we look forward to more fruitful cooperation between us in the time to come."

Niven Al-Khoury: "Our collaboration with Kuwait Diabetes Society is a testament to our shared commitment to fostering a culture of care, support, and empowerment within the healthcare landscape of Kuwait. With the rising prevalence of chronic diseases such as diabetes and dyslipidemia posing a key public health challenge in the country, Sanofi is committed to working with its partners to improve the quality of life of patients with cardiometabolic diseases. Through awareness and education, and harnessing digital solutions to empower patients, we are proud to be actively contributing to the achievement of the country's healthcare agenda."

## Obesity could cause diabetes, says Jarallah

KUWAIT: The President of the Kuwaiti Association for Bariatric Surgery and former Minister of Health Dr Mohammed Al-Jarallah said obesity is spreading rapidly in Kuwait as a result of modern lifestyle and negative nutritional practices.

"40 percent of the people in the country are overweight and 30 percent are suffering from obesity of various degrees," Dr Al-Jarallah said on the occasion of World Diabetes Day. He stressed the importance of obesity surgery and its impact on the treatment of diabetics which has become a threat to every human being especially within the Arab world and the Gulf in general and Kuwait in particular.

He pointed out that it has become imperative to address obesity from its roots to reduce the risk of diabetes, and its consequent complications. He explained that radically changing the lifestyle is one of the best ways to reach the desired goal over the long-term. "The number of obesity operations performed by GCC citizens annually reaches 100,000, which is a high percentage compared to the popu-



lation," he said. He described obesity as an epidemic that threatens the Gulf countries due to the changing patterns of social and nutritional life and people's sedentary lifestyle.

He called upon the health authorities to develop plans and strategies to confront the epidemic and promote healthy lifestyles to reduce obesity-related diseases. "Surgical solutions are not the first but the best way to treat some cases of obesity," Dr Jarallah said pointing out that Kuwait is one of the top 10 countries in the world in the rate of obesity operations for citizens, as it exceeds 5,000 operations annually, as a result of the spread of obesity.



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About 250 Rohingya refugees in Indonesia sent back to sea

## Maldives new leader vows to expel Indian troops

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DEIR EL-BALAH: Palestinians mourn over bodies of members of the al-Rifi family who were killed in Zionist bombardment, on Nov 17, 2023, as they pray outside Al-Aqsa hospital in Deir el-Balah in the center of the Gaza Strip. — AFP photos



Members of the Palestinian Al-Rifi family who survived the Zionist bombardment, rest at a house after receiving treatment at a nearby hospital.

# No escape for Gaza's displaced

## Zionists order Gazans in parts of Khan Younis to flee amid continuous bombardment

**GAZA:** Airstrikes, destroyed houses and loved ones annihilated by bombs: Palestinians who fled the north of the Gaza Strip on Zionist orders have found no trace of the safety promised to them. Nada Abu Hiya is eight years old and suffered her third bombing of the war at the Nuseirat refugee camp on Friday.

"First they bombed my grandfather's house where we lived" in Gaza City, she told AFP. "Then we went to Deir el-Balah, where we were bombed again. "So we came here and they bombed us again." At dawn on Friday a Zionist plane bombed the Nuseirat camp, in the central Gaza Strip, killing 18 people according to health officials in the Hamas-run government. "There are bombings everywhere," said Nada. "My grandmother is dead, my mother is dead, my grandfather is dead, my uncle is dead, they destroyed our

house. Our neighbors' house is also destroyed and they are all dead."

The child is among hundreds of thousands of Palestinians who fled Gaza City and other parts of the north in recent weeks after Zionist forces ordered residents to move south as they wage a military offensive to oust the territory's Hamas rulers. In all, more than 1.5 million people have been displaced in Gaza, nearly two-thirds of the territory's population, according to the United Nations.

The Zionist entity has vowed to "crush" Hamas in response to the group's October 7 attack, when it broke through Gaza's militarized border. About 1,200 people, most of them civilians, died that day and around 240 hostage were taken by Hamas, according to Zionist officials. The Zionist army's air and ground campaign

has killed 12,000 people, including 5,000 children, according to Hamas, which has ruled Gaza since 2007.

On Thursday, the Zionist forces dropped thousands of leaflets on some areas of Khan Younis, ordering residents to evacuate. It was not clear where residents in eastern Khan Younis were expected to flee as the Zionist entity continues its bombardment in areas in the south where Palestinians were previously ordered to relocate for their safety. "We have been absolutely clear that at the current moment, we do not consider any part of Gaza to be safe," UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk said Thursday.

### 'I'm your mother'

The victims of Friday's bombing at Nuseirat included seven of Azhar al-Rifi's relatives, three of them chil-

dren. It was the second time that her family had been bombed. Rifi, 36, first fled the north to stay with relatives in Deir el-Balah, only for their house to be destroyed. She then sought refuge at the Nuseirat camp.

Rifi was admitted to hospital in Deir el-Balah with leg injuries, while her two-year-old son Mohammed survived with a head injury. "They said the south was safer, so we moved," she said. But her five-year-old nephew Joud was killed. "Two weeks ago, his mother died, so my husband decided that he would live with us," she said. "He arrived last night and said to me: 'Now that my mother is dead, I can no longer call anyone mom'. "I replied: 'I'm your mother'." The boy went to sleep in a room with 12 other children, she said. "At four in the morning he was taken away from us." — Agencies

## WHO wants flow of Gaza patients into Egypt

**GENEVA:** The World Health Organization called on Friday for a regular flow of patients to be allowed out of Gaza for treatment in Egypt, to relieve the pressure on overwhelmed hospitals. The WHO said a system needed to be set up to get priority cases out of the besieged Palestinian territory.

Twenty-five out of 36 hospitals in the Gaza Strip are not functioning and the remainder are struggling to provide services. "This is clearly not enough to support the endless needs arising due to the hostilities," said Richard Peeperkorn, the WHO representative in the occupied Palestinian territories.

Addressing a press briefing in Geneva, he called for daily sustained, orderly, unimpeded and safe medical evacuations of critically injured and sick patients into neighboring Egypt. Speaking via video-link from Jerusalem, Peeperkorn said 50 to 60 patients a day ought to be transferred into Egypt, "where they will get — and they deserve — the right treatment and care". Moving priority patients to Egypt "will also relieve part of the overwhelmed current health sector so that we can address the other needs in a better way", he said.

Zionist troops carried out building-by-building searches at Gaza's main hospital, Al-Shifa, on Friday, after a communications blackout in the Palestinian enclave compounded fears for civilians trapped inside the facility. "We are, as WHO, extremely worried for the safety of patients, health and workers, not just at Al-Shifa but other hospitals as well," said Peeperkorn. "Health facilities, health workers, ambulances and patients must be safeguarded."

Peeperkorn said that prior to the conflict, there were around 3,500 hospital beds across Gaza, and now there are an estimated 1,400. "Based on our plans, the needs at the moment would be 5,000 beds," he said. He said the communications blackout had made the WHO's contact with its staff on the ground in Gaza "very problematic". Peeperkorn also said he was extremely concerned about the spread of diseases in the Palestinian territory, including acute respiratory infections, chicken pox, skin rashes and hepatitis A. — AFP



Palestinian refugee Fatima al-Ashwah, follows the news on television at her home.

## Lebanon's Palestinian refugees fear for families in Gaza

**BEIRUT:** In a ramshackle Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon, Hayat Shehadeh wrings her hands as she watches the Zionist assault on Gaza. Her daughter is in coastal Palestinian territory, which has been under near relentless bombardment for nearly a month and a half, and she has not spoken to her for a week.

"I can't sleep. I get up at 3:00 am ... I go to watch the television," said the 69-year-old from her flat in south Beirut's Burj al-Barajneh Palestinian camp. "Sometimes she writes to me, 'I'm fine'. She doesn't write more than that" because she has no way to recharge her phone battery, said the elderly woman, a baby grandchild playing with a Palestinian flag on the floor nearby.

The Zionist entity has carried out a relentless air and ground offensive in Gaza in a bid to "crush" Hamas, the Palestinian militant group that launched an attack on the Zionist entity on Oct 7, which killed 1,200 people and took 240 captive, according to Zionist officials. The assault on Gaza has killed more than 12,000 people, more than one third of them children, according to Palestinian authorities.

With pain in her voice but trying to maintain her composure, Shehadeh said her daughter had separated her three children, sending them away with different relatives. "She was crying, she said 'I split up the kids', her mother said, so that "if someone dies, they don't all die."

The Burj al-Barajneh camp is a labyrinth of alleyways, some bearing pictures of former Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, or stencils and posters in support of Hamas and other Palestinian groups. Lebanon hosts an estimated 250,000 Palestinian refugees, many living in the country's 12 official camps, according to the United Nations agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA).

### 'Dear to me'

Shehadeh said her daughter, who is in her thirties, had been living in Lebanon in recent years but a few months ago "her husband came and took her" back to Gaza. "She's moving around ... I don't know what area she's in now," Shehadeh said, requesting the young woman not be identified by name.

More than 1.5 million people have been internally displaced in Gaza, and UN agencies have warned of rapidly deteriorating conditions. UNRWA chief Philippe Lazzarini has described children sheltering at a UN school "pleading for a sip of water or for a loaf of bread". On Friday, network provider Paltel group said communications with Gaza were severed due to a lack of fuel.

Shehadeh's family came to Lebanon from the Acre area, now occupied by the Zionist entity, survivors of Nakba, or the "catastrophe", when more than 760,000 Palestinians were evicted or forced to flee their homes in 1948 to make way for the creation of the Zionist entity.



BEIRUT: Palestinian refugee Hayat Shehadeh, shows a picture of her daughter, at her home in the Burj al-Barajneh Palestinian camp south of Beirut on Nov 15, 2023. — AFP photos



Palestinian refugee Hayat Shehadeh ties a checkered 'keffiyeh' headdress around her granddaughter's head, at her home in the Burj al-Barajneh.

She said the family had feared for their lives, including after Jewish paramilitary groups massacred more than 100 Palestinian villagers at Deir Yassin, near Jerusalem, in April that year. The elderly woman said if she could talk to her daughter, she would tell her not to cry. "I want to tell her that her tears are dear to me," she said.

### 'Nothing left'

The Burj al-Barajneh camp was partially destroyed by the Zionist entity's 1982 invasion of Beirut and during Lebanon's 15-year-long civil war, according to UNRWA. In her small flat in the camp, Palestinian Fatima al-Ashwah, 61, is also glued to the television, praying her family members in Gaza are not among those being pulled dead from the rubble, or hoping to get a glimpse of them in footage of displaced people.

Originally from Al-Kabri in northern Palestine, now occupied by the Zionist entity, Ashwah has some 70 extended family members in Gaza, including her cousins and their families, the eldest in their seventies, the youngest just one year old. They used to live in northern Gaza's Beit Hanoun, near the Erez crossing with the Zionist entity, Ashwah said, but now "their houses are all gone ... because they're on the front lines. There's nothing left."

The Zionist entity has for more than a month been calling on the population in northern Gaza to evacuate south as it pushes ahead with its war against Hamas. Ashwah's relatives have fled from place to place, with some now sheltering in schools near Gaza's southern Rafah crossing with Egypt. She said sometimes she had been able to hear bombing during short telephone calls. Her relatives have told her: "We're hungry, we're afraid, the children are afraid, they're terrified", she said. "The situation breaks your heart," she said. "I can't stand the sound of crying and screaming anymore". Fighting back tears, she recounted how she had visited Gaza in July, and how the family greeted her and another relative with drums and dancing in celebration at the Rafah crossing. "God willing it will be over and Gaza will go back to how it was before," she said. — AFP



DEIR EL-BALAH: Two Palestinian children wounded in Zionist strikes, lie in an ambulance outside Al-Aqsa hospital in Deir el-Balah in the center of the Gaza Strip. — AFP

## International

# Maldives new leader vows to expel Indian troops

## Muizzu says Maldives too small to be entangled in geopolitical rivalry

**MALE:** President Mohamed Muizzu of the Maldives vowed Friday to expel Indian troops deployed in the strategically located archipelago, in his first speech to the nation after being sworn into power. Muizzu, 45, did not name India — but promised he would deliver on his election promises, key among them a pledge to evict some 50 to 75 Indian security personnel.

“The country will not have any foreign military personnel in the Maldives,” Muizzu said after being sworn in before chief justice Ahmed Adnan at a televised, open-air ceremony. “When it comes to our security, I will draw a red line. The Maldives will respect the red lines of other countries too.”

Earlier this week, Muizzu told AFP that his intention was not to upend the regional balance by replacing the Indian military with Chinese troops. Muizzu, a former mayor of the capital Male and a construction minister for seven years, had previously promised to cultivate “strong ties” with China, a key financial backer of his nation.

The country’s eighth president since independence from Britain in 1965. Muizzu was elected in September as a proxy for a pro-China predecessor who is jailed on corruption charges. High-level representatives from both China and India were in

attendance, as well as from Bangladesh, the Seychelles and Sri Lanka.

Primarily known as one of the most expensive holiday destinations in South Asia, with pristine white beaches and secluded resorts, the Maldives has also become a geopolitical hotspot. Global east-west shipping lanes pass the nation’s chain of 1,192 tiny coral islands, stretching around 800 kilometers (500 miles) across the equator.

China was represented at the ceremony by State Councillor Shen Yiqin as a special envoy of President Xi Jinping, who visited the Maldives in 2014 when Muizzu’s mentor Abdulla Yameen was president. Maldivian media had reported for days that India’s President Droupadi Murmu was expected to attend, but New Delhi announced sending Minister of Earth Sciences Kiren Rijiju instead.

### “Too small to be entangled”

“Maldives is too small to be entangled in geopolitical rivalry,” Muizzu said in his interview with AFP. “I am not very much interested to engage the Maldivian foreign policy in this.” He told the Chinese Communist Party a year ago that he wanted stronger ties with Beijing should his Progressive Party win the 2023 elections.

“We look forward to returning to government in 2023, with President Yameen at the helm, to script a further chapter of strong ties between our two countries, both domestically and internationally,” Muizzu said at the time. Yameen was barred from running in this year’s election because of a criminal conviction and an 11-year jail term for corruption. He nominated Muizzu as his proxy.

Muizzu, a British-educated civil engineer, has attempted to walk a balance between regional rivals India and China. “We are going to work together with all the countries, India, China and all other countries as well,” he told AFP. Muizzu said he hoped to begin negotiations with New Delhi on the withdrawal of Indian personnel deployed to operate three aircraft gifted to the Maldives.

India has traditionally considered the Maldives, a country with a population of about 380,000 Sunni Muslims, to be within its sphere of influence. But during the presidency of Yameen, who borrowed heavily from China for construction projects, New Delhi worried about Beijing’s expanding footprint.

India has a history of entanglements in the Maldives, including the deployment



**MALE:** Maldives’ president-elect Mohamed Muizzu (left) reads out the oath during his inauguration ceremony on Nov 17, 2023. — AFP

of soldiers to thwart a 1988 coup attempt. But Muizzu also faces an even greater challenge: his nation is one of the countries most threatened

by rising sea levels linked to climate change. Eighty percent of the Maldives is less than a meter (three feet) above sea level. — AFP

## Sudan announces ‘immediate’ end to UN’s mission

**UNITED NATIONS:** Sudan has informed the UN chief of the “immediate” end of the United Nations political mission in the war-torn country, according to a letter circulated in the Security Council.

In an official letter in Arabic dated Thursday, accompanied by an English version from the Sudanese ambassador to the UN, Foreign Minister Ali Elsdag Ali informed Antonio Guterres of “the decision of the government of Sudan to terminate the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS) with immediate effect.”

According to the English version, UNITAMS had aimed to “assist the transitional government of Sudan after the December 2018 revolution,” but the government said the mission had proven “disappointing.” However, Khartoum said it would continue to work “constructively” with the United Nations.

Guterres spokesman Stephane Dujarric said Friday the mission’s mandate was scheduled to end on December 3. “The Secretary-General has appointed Ian Martin to lead a strategic review of the UN Mission in Sudan to provide the Security Council with options on how to adapt the mission’s mandate,” he said.

Guterres was also appointing Algeria’s Ramtane Lamamra as his personal envoy for Sudan. “We will continue to engage closely with all actors, including the Sudanese authorities and members of the Security Council, to clarify next steps,” Dujarric said. UNITAMS employs 245 people, including 88 in Port Sudan, as well as others outside Sudan

in Nairobi and Addis Ababa, Dujarric confirmed.

### Human rights crisis

In an address to the Security Council on Thursday, the UN assistant secretary general for Africa, Martha Ama Akya Pobe, denounced the spread of the conflict to other parts of Sudan, which already has the largest number of displaced people in the world. “Sudan is facing a convergence of a worsening humanitarian calamity and a catastrophic human rights crisis,” she said.

The UN demanded an investigation Friday into reports of a second wave in months of ethnically-motivated killings in Sudan’s Western Darfur region that have left hundreds dead.

The United Nations rights office said preliminary information it had obtained from survivors and witnesses suggested that Masalit civilians “suffered six days of terror” earlier this month.

“Some of the victims were summarily executed

or burnt alive,” spokesman Jeremy Laurence told reporters in Geneva. Between May and June, hundreds of Masalit men, women and children, including the governor of West Darfur, were killed, he recalled, stressing that “such attacks may constitute crimes under international law.” There have also been serious allegations of revenge attacks, in which Masalit militia have reportedly attacked Arab civilians.

After almost seven months of fighting between the Sudanese army, led by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhane, and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), led by General Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, almost 25 million people need humanitarian aid in Sudan, UN humanitarian operations chief Martin Griffiths said Monday. The civil war, which started on April 15, has left more than 10,000 dead, according to an estimate by the NGO Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (Acled), a figure that is widely considered an underestimate. — AFP

## NO PLACE SAFE IN GAZA...

### Continued from Page 1

towards the seafloor without ambulances along with displaced people, doctors and nurses, as loud explosions were heard around the facility.

On the way, an AFP journalist saw at least 15 bodies, some in advanced stages of decomposition, along a road lined by badly damaged shops and overturned vehicles, as Zionist drones buzzed overhead. The Gaza health ministry said 120 wounded, along with an unspecified number of premature babies, were still at Al-Shifa hospital that has become the focus of the recent fighting. The Zionist entity has been pressing military operations inside the hospital, searching for the Hamas operations center it says lies under the sprawling complex — a charge Hamas denies.

In Gaza City, Zionist troops had called over loudspeakers to evacuate Al-Shifa “in the next hour”, an AFP journalist at the hospital reported. They also called the hospital’s director, Mohammed Abu Salmiya, telling him to ensure “the evacuation of patients, wounded, the displaced and medical staff, and that they should move on foot towards the seafloor”, he said.

According to Ahmed El Mokhallalati, a doctor at the hospital, “most of the medical staff and patients had left” but he was staying at Al-Shifa along with five other doctors. Despite the evacuation order, “many patients cannot leave the hospital as they are in the ICU beds or the baby incubators,” Mokhallalati said on X, formerly Twitter. The United Nations estimated 2,300 patients, staff and displaced Palestinians were sheltering at Al-Shifa before Zionist troops entered it on Wednesday.

The Zionist entity has imposed a siege on Gaza, allowing just a trickle of aid in from Egypt but barring most shipments of fuel over concerns Hamas could divert supplies for military purposes. A first consignment of fuel entered Gaza after the Zionist entity’s war cabinet bowed to pressure from its ally the United States and agreed to let in two diesel tankers a day.

A two-day blackout caused by fuel shortages ended after a first delivery arrived from Egypt late Friday, but UN officials continued to plead for a ceasefire, warning no part of Gaza is safe. A strike on a residential building in southern Gaza killed 26 people, the director of the Nasser hospital in Khan Yunis said. “I was asleep and we were surprised by the

strike. At least 20 bombs were dropped,” Imed Al-Mubasher, 45, told AFP. His wife Sabrin Mussa said she “saw human remains everywhere” and screamed for help.

The UN said the Zionist entity had agreed to allow in 60,000 liters of fuel daily from Egypt starting Saturday, but warned it was little more than a third of what is needed to keep hospitals, water and sanitation facilities running. Thomas White of the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, said the Zionist entity had “only permitted 50 percent of the daily fuel requirement for lifesaving humanitarian aid”.

US President Joe Biden’s chief adviser for the Middle East said more fuel deliveries and a potential “significant pause” in the fighting both depend of the release of hostages. “The surge in humanitarian relief, the surge in fuel, the pause... will come when hostages are released,” Brett McGurk told a security conference in Bahrain.

The Zionist entity has come under scrutiny for targeting hospitals in north Gaza, but says the facilities are being used by Hamas — a claim rejected by the group and medical staff. More than half of Gaza’s hospitals are no longer functional due to combat, damage or shortages, and people are waiting four to six hours for half the normal portion of bread. The Zionist entity has not recovered captives at the hospital but said it found not far away the bodies of two kidnapped women including a soldier.

Meanwhile, five fighters in the armed wing of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas’ Fatah party were killed early Saturday in a rare Zionist airstrike on a camp in the occupied West Bank, the Palestinian Red Crescent and Fatah sources said. Zionist army raids targeting Palestinian militant movements in the West Bank have surged since Oct 7.

The Balata refugee camp in Nablus is considered a militant hotspot and hosts fighters from Hamas, their ally Islamic Jihad, and the Fatah party, which leads the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, occupied by the Zionist entity since 1967. The Palestine Red Crescent Society said overnight five people were killed and two hurt in a strike, which the camp administration said hit local Fatah headquarters.

Witnesses told AFP the strike appeared to have come from a drone, and Fatah sources confirmed the dead were members of the movement founded by Yasser Arafat. Witnesses said Zionist forces entered the camp on foot after the airstrike and destroyed an empty house without causing further casualties. The airstrike came a day after the Zionist entity’s army said it had killed at least seven Palestinians in two separate confrontations in the West Bank. — AFP

nAI”. “It was transformative for me personally, and hopefully the world a little bit.” He promised “more to say about what’s next later.”

The launch of ChatGPT ignited a race in AI — hailed as the next big chapter in technology — with contenders including tech giants Amazon, Google, Microsoft and Meta. Microsoft has invested billions of dollars in OpenAI and has woven the company’s technology into its offerings, including search engine Bing. Altman has testified before US Congress about AI and spoken with heads of state about the technology, as pressure ramps up to regulate against risks such as AI’s potential use in bioweapons, misinformation and other threats.

Altman will be replaced on an interim basis by Mira Murati, the company’s chief technology officer, the statement said. Microsoft has a long-term agreement with OpenAI and remains “committed to our partnership, and to Mira and the team,” chief executive Satya Nadella said in a post. “Together, we will continue to deliver the meaningful benefits of this technology to the world.” — AFP

## Social media titans caught in Gaza...

### Continued from Page 1

Stern Center for Business and Human Rights. “They do not have enough knowledge of the world to know you can’t rely on Osama Bin Laden as your history teacher,” he added. At X, the problems came of mercurial owner Elon Musk’s own making, when he endorsed an anti-Semitic post as the “actual truth”, setting off a firestorm that saw yet more major advertisers flee the platform. Apple, Disney, and Lionsgate Entertainment on Friday were reported to have joined IBM in pausing advertising on X. Musk had engaged with a conspiratorial claim that Jews want to flood the US with minorities to weaken white majorities.

The theory, observers said, was once notoriously promoted by the man who carried out a mass shooting at a synagogue in Pittsburgh in 2018, killing 11 people in the country’s deadliest anti-Semitic attack. Musk’s post received a rebuke from the White House and saw

## Pro-Palestinian protestors rally...

### Continued from Page 1

presence in the Camden area of north London. “We here to basically put pressure on the UK government, and on Keir Starmer specifically as the leader of the Labour Party to pressure the (Zionist) government for a ceasefire,” said Aziz, a 26-year-old consultant originally from Jordan.

Starmer — whose party is predicted to win an election expected next year — has refused to call for a permanent ceasefire, sparking a string of resignations from his top team. Instead, the former human rights lawyer has called

## Germany, Turkey leaders trade...

### Continued from Page 1

human rights violations is important”, the Turkish presidency said in a statement.

But Scholz voiced backing for the Zionist entity’s war on Hamas, saying that long-term peace could not be forged in the region unless Hamas lost its ability to launch attacks. “There is a need to make (the Zionist entity’s) self-defense possible and not to call it into question,” he said. Erdogan has been increasingly critical of the Zionist entity’s war against Hamas. While Scholz travelled to the Zionist entity to offer Germany’s unconditional support, the Turkish leader has accused the Zionist entity of committing war crimes with its bombardment and ground incursion in Gaza. The death toll there has hit 12,000, mostly civilians and including thousands of children, according to Gaza’s health ministry.

Ahead of his trip to Germany, Erdogan ramped up his verbal attacks against the Zionist entity, calling it a “terror state” and alleging the West was “trying to exonerate the murderers”. In Berlin, Erdogan denied that his attacks against the Zionist entity were anti-Semitic, saying that he had “fought against anti-Semitism”.

Instead, he suggested that Germany, where anti-Semitism is illegal because of Berlin’s historic responsibilities over the Holocaust, was limited in its ability to speak free-

ly about the Zionist-Hamas war. “I speak freely because we do not owe (the Zionist entity) anything. We did not go through the Holocaust,” Erdogan said, suggesting that Germany carried a “psychological debt”. “If we were in debt, we could not talk so freely. But those who are in debt cannot talk freely,” he said. Erdogan’s stance had sparked questions over the decision to host him at this time, with the opposition conservatives and even the liberal FDP, a member of Scholz’s coalition, urging the chancellor to scrap the invitation. The Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung daily said Germany offered the “ideal stage” for Erdogan to position himself as a voice for the “global south”. “As the loudest critic of (the Zionist entity), he is underlining his demand for leadership of the Islamic world,” it wrote.

Standing next to Erdogan, Scholz acknowledged “it is no secret” that both sides viewed the conflict differently. “That’s why in these difficult moments, we need direct talks with each other,” he said. Described as an “uncomfortable partner” by Scholz’s spokesman, Erdogan was on his first visit to Germany since 2020.

While ties between the two countries have always been uneasy, Berlin recognizes that getting regional power Turkey onside was necessary to tackle thorny issues. From mediating to get grain shipments out of Ukraine amid Russia’s war to negotiating a key deal on alleviating the 2015-2016 migrant influx into Europe, NATO member Turkey remains a crucial player. Germany is also home to the biggest Turkish diaspora, and a majority of Turks in the country are supporters of Erdogan, including former German international footballer Mesut Ozil. — AFP

for a humanitarian pause to the Zionist entity’s bombardment to allow aid in for the 2.4 million population.

One protester at the London event, Nicoleta, 36, held a placard reading “Bombing hospitals is a crime”. “Because I’m a health care provider I’m here to defend the hospitals, the innocent civilians, the children in incubators,” she said. “We need a ceasefire and need peace negotiations and an end to the occupation,” she added.

The rally was one of many smaller protests organized nationwide by the Stop The War Coalition. London police said on Saturday they had now made 386 arrests since the Oct 7 attacks. Most — 253 — were linked to protests with 125 for “offences in communities” and the remaining eight were “terrorism related”, the force said. Showing support for Hamas is an offence as the organization is proscribed in the UK as a terrorist group. — AFP

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## In shock move, OpenAI sacks...

### Continued from Page 1

Analysts scrambled to interpret the shakeup, and the sacking of 38-year-old Altman, a Stanford University dropout, entrepreneur and computer coder. “It sounded as though there were some ethical concerns which pushed the board to do something,” said Creative Strategies analyst Carolina Milanese. “If he is being ousted because of ethical concerns, that is only going to be good for the company.”

OpenAI’s board said that Altman’s departure followed a thorough review that found “he was not consistently candid in his communications with the board, hindering its ability to exercise its responsibilities”. “The board no longer has confidence in his ability to continue leading OpenAI,” it concluded. In a post on X, Altman said he “loved my time at Ope-

## International

# About 250 Rohingya refugees in Indonesia sent back to sea

## Locals turn away refugees citing lack of 'proper' housing, frustration with human trafficking

**JAKARTA:** About 250 Rohingya refugees crammed onto a wooden boat have been turned away from western Indonesia and sent back to sea, residents said Friday. The group from the persecuted Myanmar minority arrived off the coast of Aceh province on Thursday but locals told them not to land. Some refugees swam ashore and collapsed on the beach before being pushed back onto their overcrowded boat.



**ULEEMADON:** Newly arrived Rohingya refugees rest on the beach after the local community decided to temporarily allow them to land for water and food in Ulee Madon, Aceh province, Indonesia, on Nov 16, 2023. — AFP photos

After it was prevented from landing, the decrepit boat travelled dozens of kilometers farther east to North Aceh. But locals again sent them back to sea late Thursday. By Friday, the vessel, which some on board said had sailed from Bangladesh about three weeks ago, was no longer visible from where it had landed in North Aceh, residents said.

It was later sighted Saturday several miles off the coast of Indonesia's westernmost region, according to a local commander. "At the moment (the boat) is not visible. Maybe it's beyond the horizon," Andi Susanto said. "We are still observing the situation and ready to help if needed," he added.

The commander said the boat was believed to be a few miles off the coast in waters around North Aceh district. "The permission for the ship's arrival on the beach is not our authority. As in previous cases, it was handled by the local government with the coastal community and UNHCR (UN refugee agency)," said Susanto.

Thousands from the mostly Muslim Rohingya minority risk their lives each year on long and treacherous sea journeys, often in flimsy boats, to try to reach Malaysia or Indonesia. "We're fed up with their presence because when they arrived on land, sometimes many of them ran away. There are some kinds of agents that picked them up. It's human trafficking," Saiful Afwadi, a community leader in North Aceh, told AFP on Friday.

### Trafficking scheme

Chris Lewa, director of Rohingya rights organization the Arakan Project, said the villagers' rejection seemed to be related to a lack of local government resources to accommodate the refugees and a feeling that people smugglers were using Indonesia as a transit point to Malaysia.

"It is sad and disappointing that the villagers' anger is against the Rohingya boat people who are themselves victims of those smugglers and traffickers," Lewa told AFP on Friday. The UN refugee agency said in a statement Friday that the boat was "off the coast of Aceh", and gave a lower passenger count of around 200 people. It called on Indonesia to facilitate the landing and provide life-saving assistance to the refugees.

The statement cited a report that said at least one other boat was still at sea, adding that more vessels could soon depart from Myanmar or Bangladesh. "The Rohingya refugees are once again risking their lives in search for a solution," said Ann Maymann, UNHCR's head of representatives in Indonesia.

A 2020 investigation by AFP revealed a multimil-



**PINEUNG:** Rohingya refugees are stranded on their boat after the nearby community decided not to allow them to land after giving them water and food in Pineung, Aceh province.

lion-dollar, constantly evolving people-smuggling operation stretching from a massive refugee camp in Bangladesh to Indonesia and Malaysia, in which members of the stateless Rohingya community play a key role in trafficking their own people.

### No 'proper place'

Locals in neighboring Ulee Madon and Cot Trueng villages gave the refugees supplies, including food, clothing and gasoline, before turning their boat around on Thursday, North Aceh's Afwadi said. To encourage their departure, locals also repaired the boat after Rohingya on board tried to sink it, he said.

Afwadi was among the locals who escorted the ves-

sel away from shore, ensuring it left the area. A village leader from Ulee Madon said residents did not have the resources to accommodate more refugees. "We don't have any proper place to house them," Rahmat Kartolo told AFP late Thursday. "It's not that we don't care about humanity, but these people sometimes run away."

Nearly 600 Rohingya refugees have reached western Indonesia this week, according to local authorities, with 196 arriving on Tuesday and 147 on Wednesday. More than 2,000 Rohingya are believed to have attempted the risky journey to Southeast Asian countries in 2022, according to the UN agency. Nearly 200 Rohingya died or went missing last year while attempting hazardous sea crossings, it estimated. — AFP

## Canadian man who ran over Muslim family found guilty

**OTTAWA:** A Canadian man who used his truck to run down a Muslim family out for a walk was found guilty Thursday in Canada's first murder trial in which jurors were asked to consider a terrorism motive related to white supremacy. Nathaniel Veltman, 22, was convicted of four counts of first degree or premeditated murder, and one count of attempted murder. He faces up to life in prison when sentenced.

He acknowledged striking the Afzaal family with his pick-up truck in June 2021 in London, Ontario, which left three generations of the family dead and a young boy orphaned. The prosecution argued at trial that he was motivated by white supremacist ideology and sought to intimidate or terrorize Muslims.

The defense said he'd suffered a mental decline — which did not, however, meet the requirements for an insanity plea — and was in "a state of extreme confusion" after consuming hallucinogenic psilocybin mushrooms that weekend. "Today's verdict is a monumental step in the fight against hate and Islamophobia," Imam Abdul Fattah Twakkal said outside the courthouse.

"It sets a precedent against white nationalist terrorism," he said. "It sends a clear message that such hate has no place in our society." But he added, "the evidence that came out of this trial shows us that there is still a lot of work to be done to ensure that the next radicalized young man is not out there." Tabinda Bukhari, the mother of one of the adult victims, told reporters: "The enduring grief, trauma and the irreplaceable void left by the loss of multiple generations of one family has pierced us profoundly." The verdict, she added, provides "some solace."

### 'Brutal and terrifying'

The jury in the almost 10-week trial heard Veltman had penned a "terrorist manifesto," found on his computer, in which he espoused white nationalism and described his hate for Muslims. He "dressed like a soldier," wearing body armor and a helmet, with a "crusader T-shirt" with a red cross, prosecutor Fraser Ball said in closing arguments earlier this week. "He was hunting for Muslims to kill," he said.

When Veltman passed the Afzaal family on a London street on that warm Sunday evening, the Crown attorney said, he turned his pick-up truck around and accelerated "pedal to the metal," jumping the curb as he drove into them. Bodies flew into the air.

Salman Afzaal, 46, his wife Madiha Salman, 44, their 15-year-old daughter Yumnah and her grandmother Talat Afzaal, 74, were killed. A nine-year-old boy orphaned in the ramming suffered serious but non-life-threatening injuries. Bits of the victims' clothing were found embedded in the grill of Veltman's truck after he surrendered in a nearby parking lot. He told police he'd wanted to "send a strong message" against Muslim immigration.

Ball said that message was "brutal and terrifying: leave this country or you and your loved ones could be next." The defense argued that a combination of mental disorders, childhood traumas and drug use left Veltman feeling detached or disconnected from reality. The attack two years ago "changed Canadian Muslims' relationship with their country," said Omar Khamissa, head of the National Council of Canadian Muslims. "For the first time for many of us, we felt unsafe and targeted just for walking down the street." Former federal minister Omar Alghabra said on X that this case was "an example of how hateful words could lead to radicalization which could lead to deadly violence." —AFP

## India tunnel rescue efforts paused over fears of cave-in

**DEHRADUN:** Indian rescuers said Saturday they had paused efforts to reach 41 men trapped in a collapsed road tunnel after a cracking sound created a "panic situation" over the possibility of a further cave-in. Excavators have been removing debris from the under-construction road tunnel in the northern Himalayan state of Uttarakhand since Sunday after a portion of the tunnel the workers were building collapsed.

The week-long rescue efforts have been slowed by the continued falling of debris as well as repeated breakdowns of the crucial heavy drilling machines. On Saturday, senior local civil servant Abhishek Ruhela said the number of trapped men was 41 — one more than the construction company had reported — which prompted criticism of negligence.

The government's highways and infrastructure company, NHIDCL, said a sudden cracking sound late Friday had "created a panic situation in the tunnel", sparking fears the roof could cave in. Operations were then halted amid the possibility of "further collapse", NHIDCL said in a statement. Rescuers have been



**UTTARKASHI:** Rescue workers stand at an entrance of the under construction road tunnel on Nov 18, 2023, days after it collapsed. — AFP

## Liberia's Weah concedes to Boakai in election

**MONROVIA:** Liberian leader and football legend George Weah conceded defeat to opposition leader Joseph Boakai after a tight presidential run-off, saying it was "time to put national interest above personal interest". The latest and nearly complete results showed Boakai leading with nearly 51 percent of the votes in Liberia, Africa's oldest republic founded by freed American slaves.

"The results announced tonight, though not final, indicate that ... Boakai is in a lead that we cannot surpass," Weah said in a speech on national radio late on Friday. He said his CDC party "has lost the election but Liberia has won," adding: "This is the time for graciousness in defeat". The 78-year-old Boakai lost to Weah,

communicating with the trapped men using radios. Food, water, oxygen and medicine have also been sent via a six-inch-wide (15-centimetre) pipe, but those trapped inside are desperate, Indian media reported. "We keep sending word in, inquiring about their health," Mohammed Rizwan, part of the rescue team, told the Times of India. "But all of them have just one question: 'When will you bring us out?'"

### 'Don't tell Ma'

On Saturday, the key work of drilling through the tons of earth and rock to reach the men was still on hold, Ruhela told AFP. "Except drilling, other necessary work is going on," Ruhela said. Rescuers said Friday that they had drilled less than halfway to where the men are trapped.

After the first drill broke down, a replacement was flown in on Wednesday on an air force C-130 Hercules military plane. But that earth-boring machine then hit a boulder. "The machine was not able to push further as the machine was getting lifted and the bearings of the machine were damaged," NHIDCL added.

The air force said on Friday that a C-17 Globemaster aircraft had flown in "almost 22 tons of critical equipment" for the rescue effort. NHIDCL director Anshu Manish Khalko has warned the rescue operation "may take time." Engineers are trying to drive a steel pipe about 90 centimeter's (nearly three feet) wide through the debris — wide enough for the trapped men to squeeze through. —AFP

## 7 dead, 2 missing in 6.7-magnitude Philippines quake

**MANILA:** The death toll from a strong earthquake off the southern Philippines rose to seven on Saturday, while rescuers also searched for two people feared buried beneath a landslide. The 6.7-magnitude quake that struck the Mindanao region mid-afternoon on Friday caused part of a shopping mall ceiling to collapse, triggered power cuts and sent people fleeing into the streets. Falling debris from the mall in General Santos City crushed a woman to death, city police captain Ari Noel Cardos told AFP. Police earlier reported the death of a couple pinned under a collapsing concrete wall in General Santos. Another person was killed by a falling steel structure in the municipality of Glan, in Sarangani province, police officer Paul Mesalido told AFP.

The quake was felt across a wide area of the mountainous island. "I think it was the strongest earthquake I've ever experienced," Keeshia Leyran, 27, told AFP from Davao City, about 200 kilometers (124 miles) from the epicenter, where she was attending a conference. "People around me were panicking and running to go outside."

A video showed terrified shoppers in a shopping mall in General Santos hiding under fast-food restaurant tables and screaming as the building shook and pieces of the ceiling fell. "We were on the second floor so there was nothing we could do but duck under the tables," said Gregorio Narajos, 34, who shot the video. "Power went out two or three seconds into the quake. It came back after a while," Narajos said. "I saw stuff falling from the ceiling. When we got out we saw cracks and debris outside."

About 30 students at a nearby high school were treated for breathing difficulties due to panic following the quake, said Adrian Imbong, an emergency medical services worker in General Santos. Sarangani municipality police officer Captain Giecarrjune Villarín said he and his colleagues fled their building, which is about 30 kilometers southeast of where the quake struck. "We saw people run out of a nearby gym where they had been playing basketball," he said. "We have not received any reports of damage or casualties."

Firemen dug with shovels as they searched on Saturday for two members of a family feared buried beneath a landslide at a remote mountain village about four hours' drive from Glan, rescuer Daniel Nocos told AFP. "The village chief reported to us that a mother and her child were trapped beneath the rubble," Nocos said. An excavator had been sent to help in the search but had not yet reached the area because of bad roads and a damaged bridge, he said. The official National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council in Manila reported a second death in Glan and another in the adjacent Malapatan municipality but gave no details.

In neighboring Davao Occidental province, an elderly man was killed by a large rock that rolled down a hill near his house, police officer Patrick Laurente said. Two people were injured in General Santos, while 450 others were treated for panic and breathing difficulties, the disaster agency said. The quake damaged 60 houses in four provinces as well as 32 roads and bridges in the region, rescuers said. The state seismology service said the quake was likely generated by the movement of the earth's crust along the Cotabato trench, a long, narrow depression on the seafloor that forms the boundary of one tectonic plate pushing against another. Quakes are frequent in the Philippines, which sits along the Pacific "Ring of Fire", an arc of intense seismic as well as volcanic activity that stretches from Japan through Southeast Asia and across the Pacific basin. Most are too weak to be felt by humans. — AFP

# Business

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 2023

## NIC retains its profits with financial indicators up until end of Q3 2023

Company's net profit reaches KD 2.5 million, 3.15 fils per share



**Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi:**

- National Investments Company strengthens its leading position, attaining sustained growth and profitability indicator rates.
- Our business model has witnessed substantial success, supported by positive performance and clear vision, which reflects its solid financial position and the solid yet flexible foundation and base.



**Fahad Abdulrahman Al-Mukhaizim:**

- We provide innovative and distinctive investment products and services that contribute to meeting our customers' needs and suit their aspirations in a safe and distinguished manner.
- National Investments Company acted as the exclusive financial advisor to a prominent player in Kuwait's education sector by facilitating one of the largest and most successful deals in the field.

**KUWAIT:** The National Investments Company (NIC) has announced positive financial results, recording a net profit of KD 2.5 million for the first nine months ending on 30/9/2023.

Commenting on the results, Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi, Chairman of the board, said: "National Investments Company sustained its profits despite the adverse financial results achieved in Q3 2023. Up until the end of Q3 2023, the company noted positive performance which led to significant successes and maintained its leadership position as one of the substantial investment companies in Kuwait and the region in terms of the volume of revenues and profitability supported by positive results, and its ability to maintain the interests and needs of its customers with high efficiency."

### Solid financial position

Al-Kharafi also highlighted that National Investments Company has maintained profitability up to the end of the third quarter of this year despite the global economic challenges, concerns, and sufferings faced by financial markets due to the negative effect of the economic conditions; however, the sensible strategy followed by National Investments Company, which focuses on taking advantage of the operational environmental opportunities available in Kuwait, and the diversification of investments maintained the company's leading position, achieving favorable rates in profitability indicators and sustainable future growth.

"This confirms the advantages of the company's flexible business model, including the investment deals, acquisitions, efficiency of operational performance dis-



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sources through its endeavors to develop national competencies and provide ways to help optimal investment in its people by creating a work environment capable of growing businesses, enhancing knowledge, and attracting young talents and competencies. Therefore, the Human Resources and Administration Sector has decided, during the third quarter of this year, to support the (Shift) program, which is designed to develop and qualify Kuwaiti women to join the investment market. The sector, in cooperation with Creative Confidence, organized a comprehensive training program to contribute to advancing human development based on crucial pillars in motivating Kuwaiti youth to learn innovation and creativity skills.

Al-Kharafi also highlighted that National Investments Company maintained profitability up to the end of the third quarter of this year, which came in line with the strategy set by the company as a distinctive banking investment brand. Despite the change in interest rates in the region and the world, which led to a negative reflec-

tion in the movement of GCC market indices, these indicators declined and reached in Kuwait -2.0 percent, in the UAE market (Dubai) 9.8 percent, (Abu Dhabi) 2.4 percent, in the Saudi market -3.5 percent and 1.8 percent in the Qatar market during the third quarter of 2023. However, for nine months period ending 30 September 2023, National Investments Company achieved a net financial profit of KD 2.5 million at 3.15 fils.

He also revealed that the total assets under management at the end of the third quarter of 2023 amounted to KD 1.06 billion, and the total shareholders' equity of the parent company reached KD 172.7 million, adding that the total assets reached KD 239.3 million by the end of the third quarter of 2023.

"We are taking specific and proactive steps in creating new growth paths to strengthen our leadership position by creating a sustainable impact, adding value, and a noteworthy that extends across the region. We are also expanding our services within the various sectors and markets; in addition to the company's prudence in reducing risks, capitalization levels, and strong liquidity while enhancing the ability to deal with them by reaching the highest levels of operational efficiency, this can only be achieved by effective financial management despite the

various economic crises and challenges. The excellence in serving our customers and shareholders has always been one of the company's priorities, and we are committed to achieving lasting positive change for them, appreciating their trust and support for national investments," added Al-Kharafi. He concluded by expressing appreciation to shareholders for their trust in National Investments Company and to all customers for their loyalty and interaction with all the services we offer that go with their needs and expectations. Thanks to the regulatory authorities and NIC's professional and experienced executive management for the ideal approach to the company's vision and strategy related to customer service, in addition to the efforts of the company's employees in achieving growth and strategic objectives that made us one of the most prominent investment companies in the region.

### Selective management and study

Fahad Abdulrahman Al-Mukhaizim, Board Member and CEO of National Investments Company, praised the remarkable performance and efforts, stressing that National Investments Company has recently witnessed an advanced approach to broad plans based on the criteria of enhancing and creating financial inclusion in preparation for the launch of rapid growth and development, which we will witness in the coming years. He explained that National Investment Company has focused on keeping pace with and meeting the changing needs of customers and the ability to provide the best deals and investment services that rely on advanced digital technologies. He confirmed the success of the company's well-established plans in all its sectors, which had a pos-

itive impact on increasing those wishing to invest in distinguished opportunities, as well as through investment portfolios managed by the company for individuals and institutions locally and globally.

### Successful selective opportunities

Al-Mukhaizim also hailed the exceptional efforts of the Financial Advisory Services Department, thanks to its distinguished strategy in attracting and seizing many investment opportunities and managing private and qualitative listings in Boursa Kuwait.

On a related note, the National Investments Company acted as the exclusive financial advisor to a major company in the education sector by facilitating one of the largest and most successful deals during the past few years. The company was also appointed as an exclusive listing advisor for a prominent company in the automotive sector, and the company has acted as the exclusive financial advisor to a company in the food sector; National Investments Company has also been appointed as an issue manager for the offering of preferred shares of a company operating in the energy sector, and also as an exclusive listing advisor for shares of a prominent company in the real estate sector. The team arranged and

coordinated a finance deal for one of our clients. As an independent financial advisor, the company successfully merged Al-Mazaya Holding Company K.P.S.C. and First Dubai Real Estate Development Company K.P.S.C., in addition to the team's successful implementation of many advisory services for listed and unlisted companies.

In the dynamic market environment, the Alternative Investment Management team succeeded in achieving impressive results in passing and completing the real estate investments of the student housing project on schedule, with an occupancy rate of 99.37 percent, despite the general economic conditions and affairs and rents are expected to grow by an impressive rate of 6 percent. The sale and purchase transactions of two critical projects will likely be completed by the end of 2023. This confirms the company's commitment to expanding its real estate portfolio to consolidate its stability and positive outlook. In terms of technological development, the National Investments Company shares an exceptional record of performance in the market with a fund manager with broad growth, with expected participation, as this performance is considered evidence of NIC's commitment to promoting growth and modernity, and its constant endeavor to provide promising investment services to achieve rewarding returns, which helps to align and create advanced and new opportunities in the business.

On the performance of the MENA's Priced Investments Sector, Al-Mukhaizeem pointed out that the outstanding performance of our investment funds during the past nine months has continued to reflect the excellence and success of the management in adopting strategies aimed at achieving rewarding financial returns for the company's clients.

Looking at the performance of equity funds during this period, Al-Mukhaizim stated that despite the global conditions, which were represented by geopolitical and economic conflicts, high inflation rates, weak expectations about global economic growth, and the Federal Reserve's attempt to control inflation rates and tighten monetary policy by raising interest rates, some of our investment funds had achieved advanced positions compared to the rest of the local funds established in the State of Kuwait, especially specialized ones, as a result of several critical main factors, namely rational investment decisions and prudent management of funds by investing in shares of preferred companies with rewarding returns, solid management and a clear future vision.

Mawarid Fund for Industrial and Petroleum Services Fund achieved a positive performance of 7.5 percent, while Zajil Services and Telecommunications Fund achieved 5.6 percent within the same period. Al-Mukhaizim also highlighted that during the third quarter of 2023, National Investments Company was able to expand its portfolio as a Market Maker by renewing many contracts and by maintaining a total of 11 shares of companies listed on Boursa Kuwait while effectively achieving the turnover and liquidity rates required on those shares.

The Wealth Management Sector continued to achieve essential accomplishments during the third quarter of 2023, working on expanding the company's customer base and attracting investors and new capital of approximately KD 20 million since the beginning of the year. Despite the challenges faced in the region, on both political and economic levels, the number of new investment portfolios has witnessed growth by 17 percent during the first nine months of this year while applying many practices that helped develop and improve investor service and keep pace with the latest technologies followed.

Al-Mukhaizim added that the Real Estate Investment Sector witnessed the positive continuation of maintaining high occupancy rates in the company's properties and properties managed by it, as the sector succeeded in increasing the volume of managed properties, in addition to increasing the number of real estate portfolios during the third quarter, by receiving two real estate portfolios, to be executed in the fourth quarter of this year. The technology of the electronic real estate system has also been enhanced to enable tenants to follow up immediately on all matters related to their real estate units and to proceed with plans to develop some properties, preserve the value of assets, and develop their facilities.

To conclude, Al-Mukhaizim esteemed the outstanding performance of the company and the sustainable growth maintained for several years, a result of the successful executive management working and building effective strategies based on experience and leadership, while achieving the problematic equation of this accomplishment, as well as the robust presence in the market, gaining customer confidence while taking clear steps in excellence, innovation, and competition.

tinguished by continuous momentum, as well as the contribution of sectors in operational processes and disciplined implementation of the company's strategy, which helped to achieve balance through its ability to manage financials and risks, in addition to the solid and stable base that characterizes National Investments Company, which impacted on achieving the desired strategic goals," clarified Al-Kharafi.

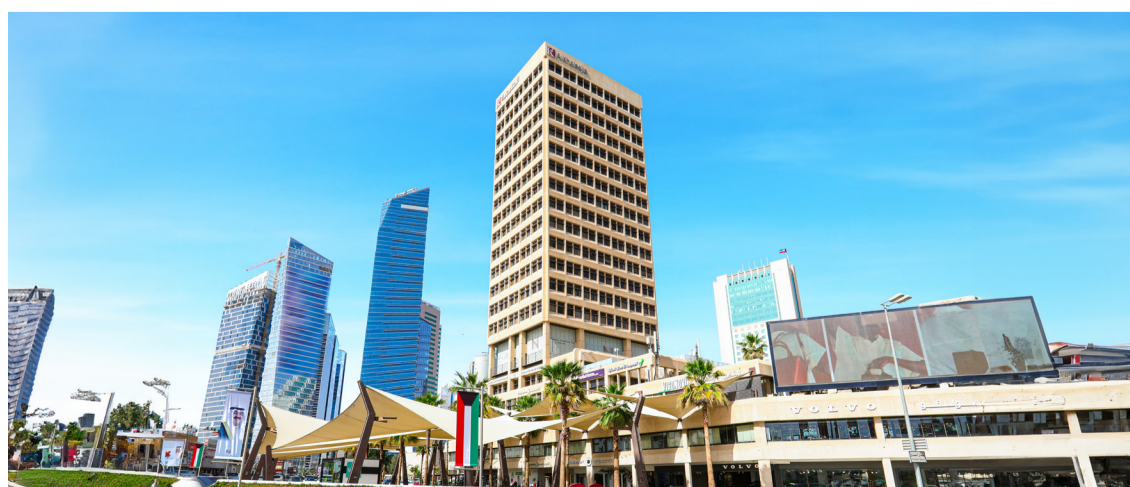
He also added that the company's strategy and the exceptional performance achieved are based on several foundations, namely expanding sources of income and reducing risks, in addition to diversity and innovation based on a transparent methodology and supporting the solid foundations enjoyed by National Investments Company, in addition to the company's excellence in managing capital levels with prudence to prepare appropriately for any scenarios that may occur in the global economy. Thanks to the efforts made by our executives, which translate the aspirations of the Board of Directors, which focus on achieving shareholders and customers objectives.

### Leadership in digital transformation

On the other hand, Al-Kharafi pointed out that the National Investments Company's strategy is to obtain the highest levels of customer satisfaction through constant communication with them via studies and surveys. "Our strategy is based on developing the digital business to improve our integrated services package and lead a significant digital transformation proposal while expanding the application and development of intelligent solutions to ensure a flexible and scalable infrastructure is in place. The goal is to make a qualitative leap in innovative and distinctive investment services and products that meet all the needs and aspirations of the company's customers, in addition to enhancing cybersecurity to ensure confidentiality, as the company pays wide attention to providing security to protect customer and employee information from any breaches that may occur to their data network," added Al-Kharafi.

### National human resources development

Al-Kharafi also explained that the National Investments Company continues to support its human re-





Business

NBK ECONOMIC REPORT

# Kuwait's non-oil growth remains solid, consumer activity buoyant

## Oil output down on OPEC+ cuts, refined products surge

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait economic conditions are expected to remain positive over the forecast period, with consumer activity constructive, government fiscal policy expansionary amid elevated oil prices and inflation easing. GDP growth will also be boosted in 2024 from additional crude supply following the unwinding of voluntary OPEC+ production cuts. The challenge remains to extend near-term gains into sustainable, long-term improvements to the public finances and economic diversification. Amid a greater sense of political urgency, prospects for progressing key reform steps appear stronger than in previous years.

Table 1: Key economic indicators

		2020	2021	2022	2023f	2024f
Nominal GDP	\$ bn	106	139	177	163	172
Real GDP	% y/y	-8.9	1.2	8.4	-0.7	3.3
- Oil sector	% y/y	-8.9	-1.0	12.1	-4.3	3.3
- Non-oil sector	% y/y	-8.9	3.8	4.3	3.6	3.4
- Non-oil ex refining	% y/y	-8.6	3.4	3.2	3.0	3.0
Budget balance (FY)	% of GDP	-33.2	-10.3	11.8	-3.6	-1.2
Current acct. balance	% of GDP	1.4	26.8	35.3	26.9	22.9
Inflation (avg.)	% y/y	2.1	3.4	4.0	3.6	2.5

GDP growth should turn negative in 2023 (-0.7 percent) on the back of Kuwait's commitment in April 2023 to additional OPEC+ voluntary oil production cuts, which will cut full-year output by 4.3 percent to an average of 2.6 mb/d. These cuts are scheduled to be unwound in 2024, which should drive both oil sector and total GDP up 3.3 percent next year. Higher crude flows will also facilitate further refining sector value-add (classified as non-oil activity), with the newly-commissioned 615 kb/d Al-Zour refinery steadily ramping up gasoil and fuel oil output in a key recent megaproject success story.

## Alibaba shares fall after cloud service spinoff cancelled

**HONG KONG:** Shares in Chinese ecommerce titan Alibaba tanked 10 percent in Hong Kong on Friday after the firm's surprise decision to call off part of its high-profile restructuring because of the US-China chip war. In a move that shocked investors, the Hangzhou-based tech giant said Thursday that US curbs on exports of advanced chips had forced it to call off the spinoff of its cloud computing arm.

The firm's stock dived 9.96 percent, tracking a collapse in its New York-listed shares. Washington has moved to bar the shipment to China of powerful chips, including those from California-based Nvidia, which are crucial to the development of artificial intelligence, on national security grounds. In one of its most wide-ranging restructurings, Alibaba said in March it planned to split the vast group into six distinct entities that would be able to separately pursue funding through public listings.

But on Thursday, it called off the creation of its Cloud Intelligence arm in light of "the recent expansion of US restrictions on export of advanced computing chips". "We believe that a full spin-off of Cloud Intelligence Group may not achieve the intended effect of shareholder value enhancement," the company said in its earnings release. "Accordingly, we have decided to not proceed with a full spin-off, and instead we will focus on developing a sustainable growth model for Cloud Intelligence



## Singapore, Indonesia launch cross-border QR-code payments

**SINGAPORE:** Singapore and Indonesia launched cross-border payment services Friday, the countries' central banks said, as part of a regional drive to boost connectivity. Customers of a dozen banks in Singapore and Indonesia will now be able to make payments to merchants in both countries by scanning QR codes, Bank Indonesia and the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) said in a joint statement.

The system "will promote cross-border e-commerce activities and tourism spending across Singapore and Indonesia", MAS Managing Director Ravi

### Non-oil growth normalizes

Growth in the non-oil economy (ex-refining), meanwhile, has been solid, at a forecast of 3.0 percent in 2023 (down from an estimated 3.2 percent in 2022) on the back of buoyant private and expanding government consumption, supported by elevated oil prices. With the exception of project awards and refining sector output, both of which ranged higher in 2023—the former at more than twice 2022's full year levels—key indicators of non-oil activity, such as consumer cards spending (+8.7 percent y/y in Q3), real estate sales (-18.2 percent y/y as of Sept) and household credit (+2.6 percent y/y as of Sept), have been trending downwards in annual growth terms since peaking in 2022. This has taken place amid tighter monetary conditions and softer global economic growth. Looking ahead, we expect non-oil GDP to grow at a similar rate in 2024 on broadly constructive consumer spending, an uptick in household lending growth and still high oil prices. The economy may also benefit from continuing post-pandemic expatriate inflows (employment up 14 percent y/y to 2.5 million as of mid-2023) to ease labor shortages and drive projects activity.

### Inflation likely to ease in 2024

Inflation ranged at around 3.7 percent for most of 2023 (core rate at 3.2 percent), likely reflecting a combination of ongoing strength in consumer demand, rising housing rents and lingering supply chain issues. These dynamics are expected to lessen in 2024, helping to bring inflation down to 2.5 percent on average. Meanwhile, with the US Fed likely to cut interest rates before end-2024, the Central Bank of Kuwait may follow suit — although having hiked its discount rate only about half as much as the Fed since March 2022 (+275 bps to 4.25 percent), it may opt to cut by less on the way down.

### Budget deficits through 2024

The public finances have improved amid higher

Group under the fluid circumstances," Alibaba said. Alibaba is a key player in China's expansive digital economy and the operator of a major online shopping platform. The group's performance is considered a barometer of domestic consumption, which has flagged in recent months.

And the firm has faced new headwinds in recent years, with Beijing imposing tighter restrictions on the domestic tech sector and weak consumer spending leading it to record its third consecutive quarter of single-digit revenue growth earlier this year.

Alibaba has said it aims to achieve a "more nimble" structure in order to maintain competitiveness in the face of new regulatory challenges and mounting pressures on the global economy. But it has now become one of the most high-profile Chinese firms to admit that trade tensions with Washington are affecting business. The announcement took investors by surprise, with Kevin Net, head of Asian equities at Tocqueville Finance, telling Bloomberg News: "My initial thoughts are that the whole corporate restructuring... could be at risk."

Loop Capital Markets' Rob Sanderson said "Alibaba Cloud was the crown jewel within the restructuring plan". And Stephen Innes at SPI Asset Management warned it could throw the restructuring into doubt.

"The potential upside from the breakup appears to be diminishing, as none of the subsidiaries have robust financial health," he said in a note. "There is a caveat—if consumer confidence rebounds in China, it could potentially change the outlook for the subsidiaries, creating an opportunity for improved valuations. But broader economic factors, particularly consumer sentiment and confidence levels in the Chinese market, are not good." —AFP

Menon said in the statement issued on Friday. In the first half of 2023, over a million travelers entered Singapore from Indonesia—the largest economy in Southeast Asia and the fourth most populous country in the world with 270 million people. The two central banks will also establish a framework to allow cross-border payments to be settled in local currencies in 2024, the statement said. Singapore has already established QR payment service links with China, Malaysia and Thailand. "Users around the world should be able to send money across borders in a secure, efficient and affordable way," Menon said in a speech at the Singapore FinTech Festival earlier this week.

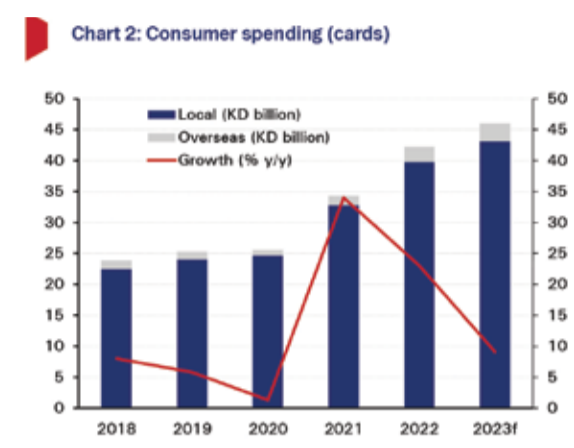
Singapore and Malaysia also announced a new service on Friday that enables people in the neighboring countries to send instant payments across the border, MAS said in a joint statement with Malaysia's central bank. Singapore already has similar services with Thailand and India. —AFP



oil prices and generally keener spending oversight. That said, the FY22/23 surplus of 11.8 percent of GDP, Kuwait's first since 2014, is expected to revert to a deficit of 3.6 percent of GDP (KD 1.83 billion) in FY23/24 given the record spending penciled in the budget. This included large, non-recurring outlays on fuel subsidies and employee leave payments. Our deficit estimate is much narrower than the budget's forecast of 6.2 percent of GDP, given the historical tendency for spending to undershoot the budget and conservative official oil revenue assumptions. Next year, the deficit should narrow to 1.2 percent of GDP on a moderate spending increase (+4 percent from FY23/24 excluding one-off items) and still-high oil prices. Capex should see another year of double-digit gains as development projects are prioritized.

### Outlook positive

Overall near-term economic prospects are favorable, with private consumption solid, inflation trending lower and fiscal and external buffers ample (CBK reserve and KIA overseas assets are in excess of \$850 billion, or 521 percent of GDP). Public debt (3.0 percent of GDP) is also extremely low by interna-



tional standards. Nevertheless, the economy remains exposed to oil price volatility, uncertain OPEC+ oil production policy and disruptive domestic politics. Here fiscal sustainability and economic diversification goals have often run up against populist calls for greater welfare spending and policymaking inertia, respectively.

That said, the new executive and legislature appear to share a greater sense of urgency to address key economic challenges. Priorities in the government's 4-year economic plan (2023-27) include creating a comprehensive fiscal framework, developing the private sector and improving government efficiency. Corporate and excise taxes may be the first revenue-boosting measures to be rolled out, helping to offset increases in retiree pensions and possibly cost-of-living allowances championed by MPs.

System-wide, supply-side and regulatory reforms (e.g. of business, housing and labor markets) alongside initiatives to boost historically soft investment rates will be essential to realize productivity gains and economic diversification goals. Mooted housing development and mortgage laws plus the potentially sizeable 'Ciyada' domestic investment vehicle could be positive initiatives on the horizon.

## Moody's upgrades Italy's economic outlook to 'stable'

**WASHINGTON:** The US ratings agency Moody's announced Friday it had affirmed Italy's credit rating at Baa3, and upgraded the country's outlook to "stable" from "negative," citing its significant economic strengths. "The decision to change the outlook to stable from negative reflects a stabilization of prospects for the country's economic strength, the health of its banking sector and the government's debt dynamics," Moody's said in a statement.

It added that the decision to maintain Italy's credit rating above junk status at Baa3 is supported by its "significant economic strengths, including its robust manufacturing sector, high household wealth, and the low indebtedness of the private sector." Moody's joins rivals Fitch and S&P Global Ratings in reaffirming Italy's investment-grade rating in recent weeks, providing a much-needed boost to the economic plans laid out by Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's hard-right government.

"I welcome this evening's ruling with great satisfaction," Italy's economy minister Giancarlo Giorgetti said in a statement. "It is a confirmation that, despite many difficulties, we are working well for the future of Italy." Despite the radical past of her government, which also includes Matteo Salvini's far-right League, Meloni promised to follow a path of budgetary responsibility. But in September, Rome raised its deficit forecasts to reflect a plan to finance an election promise to cut taxes for families with the lowest incomes—sparking an immediate reaction from the markets.

Ten-year borrowing rates rose sharply, with the gap between Italian and German rates—the closely watched "spread"—temporarily exceeding 210 points. The public deficit for 2023 is now expected to be 5.3 percent of gross domestic product (GDP), up from 4.5 percent previously forecast, and 4.3 percent in 2024. Under government plans, it is only in 2026 that the deficit is expected to fall below the three percent threshold set under the EU's spending rules, which were suspended during the coronavirus pandemic until the end of this year.

Italy's enormous public debt—the second highest in the eurozone in relation to GDP after Greece—is expected to decrease only marginally, from 140.2



Moody's reaffirms Italy's investment-grade rating in recent weeks, providing a much-needed boost to the economic plans laid out by Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's hard-right government.

percent of GDP to 139.6 percent in 2026. Another worry is that the Italian economy is slowing down, a knock-on effect of the situation in Germany, its main trading partner which is expected to fall into recession this year. Italy itself narrowly avoided recession in the third quarter of the year, with GDP stagnating after a 0.4 percent drop in the previous three months. Giorgetti warned on Tuesday that he could revise downwards his growth forecast for 2023, currently 0.8 percent, in a context of high interest rates.

In August 2022, after the fall of Mario Draghi's government in Rome, Moody's had given Italy's Baa3 rating a negative outlook citing "political risks" preventing the implementation of structural reforms. The agency warned in April that Italy risked being relegated to the speculative category, citing "sluggish growth" and "higher" debt financing costs, in a context of rising interest rates.

Around the same time, US banking giant Goldman Sachs also sounded the alarm, advising investors to sell debt securities from Italy and focus instead on Spain. However, Fitch last week confirmed Italy's rating at BBB, two notches above junk, highlighting the "stability" of Meloni's coalition. S&P had also confirmed its BBB rating for Italy at the end of October, while cautioning that "the pace of government debt reduction will slow." "Medium-term cyclical economic prospects continue to be supported by the implementation of Italy's National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP)," Moody's said in its statement supporting its decision to improve its outlook. It added that "risks to energy supplies have abated, in part due to strong policy action by the government." —AFP

## Kenya's economy faces climate risks: World Bank

**NAIROBI:** The impacts of climate change could shave up to seven percent off Kenya's economic output by 2050 compared to baseline forecasts, unless it adapts, the World Bank warned on Friday. The East African economic powerhouse is extremely vulnerable to climate disasters, recently enduring a punishing years-long drought followed by flooding precipitated by the El Nino weather phenomenon.

"Without adaptation measures, the impact from climate change could not only disproportionately affect the poor, but also result in real GDP (gross domestic product) losses of up to seven percent from the baseline by 2050," the World Bank said. Although African nations are among the world's lowest contributors to

emissions, they are acutely vulnerable to the growing impacts of climate change, as extreme weather events occur with increased frequency and intensity.

The World Bank said that the number of poor people in Kenya could increase by 1.1 million by 2050 if there is "inaction against climate change." "Furthermore, death and illness due to malaria and water borne diseases are expected to increase by 56 percent and 10 percent respectively by 2050," the Washington-based lender said. The country of 53 million people will need \$62 billion by 2030 to adapt its economy to climate challenges, according to the government.

"Financing to increase Kenya's resilience to climate change will require both domestic resources and expanding climate-compatible private investment in existing areas, such as livestock feed and tourism, and emerging sectors, such as e-mobility and green energy," the World Bank said.

But Kenya's government has limited room for maneuver, with its coffers depleted as it struggles to contain skyrocketing inflation and a plunging currency that has sent debt repayment costs soaring.—AFP

# Asia trade talk stumble is another setback for US

## IPEF failure to weigh on America's standing amid growing China clout

**SAN FRANCISCO:** The United States stumbled again in trade negotiations with Asia-Pacific partners this week, a setback analysts say could weigh on America's standing as a partner in the face of China's growing influence. While Washington had for decades used free-trade pacts to forge relationships around the world, a more isolationist mood has gripped domestic politics.

The Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF) failed to materialize at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum, held back by US fears over the impact on workers at home. Pushback from President Joe Biden's own party underscores the challenges, with congressional Democrats concerned it could impact their prospects in next year's elections.

A failure to deliver IPEF could look like a replay of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), which former president Donald Trump denounced as bad for US jobs. One of his first actions in office was to yank the US out of the TPP, a huge multi-national deal yoking major Asian allies that had been years in the making, and which had been a key plank of foreign policy.

That withdrawal smarted in Asian capitals. The White House insists IPEF is not dead, but needs more work to get it over the line. "November was never about a trade deal," US Trade Representative Katherine Tai told reporters Thursday.

"November was always about providing more details and transparency into the progress that we were accomplishing," she added. Further details have yet to be released, but Tai stressed "we will continue to work on this."

### 'Imbalance'

Analysts say Washington is skating on thin ice. "To see the United States fail to deliver on trade negotiations in the Indo-Pacific again would fur-

ther damage US credibility as a trade partner in the future," said Thibault Denamiel of the Center for Strategic and International Studies. Into that breach steps China, whose lavish spending on infrastructure projects around the world—under its Belt and Road Initiative—have won it friends and favor in many places. Beijing has also forged its own Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership with 14 other Pacific-rim countries, all resulting in "an imbalance in economic engagement" in favor of Beijing, said Denamiel.

IPEF could help rebalance that, he told AFP. While the framework falls short of a traditional multinational deal—it doesn't include market access—participants hope it would lead to greater US engagement, analysts say. US officials and partners this week trumpeted the conclusion of talks on three of four segments in IPEF, which seeks to create common rules and standards across countries that make up 40 percent of the global economy.

Leaders signed a deal on supply chains, and reached agreements on climate and anticorruption efforts. Trade remains the last holdout, a blow to Biden who launched the initiative last year bringing together the United States and 13 other nations—including Japan, India and much of Southeast Asia, although not China.

Asia Society Policy Institute vice president Wendy Cutler noted the lack of a deal "is a major setback for US trade policy." Beijing's active trade agenda ought to nudge Washington towards a "bolder approach," or it risks having its influence undermined, Cutler argued in an earlier commentary.

While she conceded a November deadline was "ambitious" as trade talks typically require more time, she warned that prospects are slim for further progress as the 2024 elections near. The trade section has drawn criticism in part due to a lack of



**SAN FRANCISCO:** US President Joe Biden (center) speaks while hosting the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Leaders' Retreat on the last day of the APEC Leaders' Week in San Francisco, California, on November 17, 2023. — AFP

worker protections, an issue that looms large for American voters. US Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo lauded progress this week at the APEC summit in San Francisco.

She said agreements on climate, energy transition and combating corruption were worthwhile, as was the creation of a ministerial council for cooperation.

IPEF, Raimondo said, "was never conceived to be a trade agreement." She added that the US aims to be a "durable force and partner" in the Asia-Pacific, a region from which it had been largely absent in the years before Biden took office.

It is "difficult to judge" the scale of commitments made without full texts of the latest agreements, said Inu Manak of the Council on Foreign Relations. "It is concerning that the trade pillar was not concluded because the IPEF has been pitched as the answer to US withdrawal from the TPP," she added.

"One of the most difficult realities of the last few years has been that the United States has stepped down from its leadership role on trade," Manak told AFP. "Even if the IPEF trade pillar is concluded, the absence of high standard digital trade rules would weaken its overall value." — AFP

## Long-term economic risks of America's budget dysfunction

**WASHINGTON:** The use of stop-gap funding measures to keep the US government open amid frequent political squabbles over how to tackle rising national debt carries long-term risks for the world's largest economy.

While the ongoing stasis in Congress has yet to do any serious damage to the buoyant US economy, the regular budget stand-offs—and the failure to tackle the country's growing debt burden—are already having an impact. Two out of the three major American ratings agencies have now cut their credit rating for US government debt, while Moody's, the sole holdout, recently downgraded its own outlook.

Lower credit ratings reflect higher perceived risk for investors, and typically raise the cost of government borrowing. "In the context of higher interest rates, without effective fiscal policy measures to reduce government spending or increase revenues, Moody's expects that the US's fiscal deficits will remain very large, significantly weakening debt affordability," the agency said in a statement.

"The fiscal situation is challenging and members of Congress, policymakers, the president, have to do something over time," Phillip Swagel, the director of the independent Congressional Budget Office, told CNBC in a recent interview. The US budget deficit widened to \$1.7 trillion in the 12 months to September 30, 2023, pushing up federal debt to 123 percent of economic output, according to the Treasury Department.

Left unchecked, the US debt-to-GDP ratio is on track to surpass its pandemic-era peak in 2027, the International Monetary Fund announced in a recent report. "We can't escape the fact that we are in over spending and under taxes, given the skew of spending commitments we have made to retirees," KPMG Chief Economist Diane Swonk told AFP. She called it "that reality that no one wants to actually tackle, especially in an election year."

The risk of a shutdown in early 2024 is likely to be even higher, Goldman Sachs economists wrote in a recent note, pointing to the \$120bn gap that still exists between House Republicans and the Democratic-controlled Senate on proposed spending levels. "The longer the government operates under short-term extensions, the less likely it will be that Congress will reach a deal on full-year spending bills," they said.

If no budget is approved by April next year, the Biden Administration will face a one-percent cut across the board to all non-essential spending, as part of a previous deal to avert a government shutdown.

"The end result would be automatic spending cuts that take effect in May, resulting in a step-down in funding," of around 0.4 percent of GDP in the second and third quarters of 2024, the Goldman Sachs economists said. "At this point, we can see no realistic path to a resolution of the internal Republican divisions, which are deep and wide," Pantheon Macroeconomics Chief Economist Ian Shepherdson wrote in a recent note to clients.

It is increasingly likely, he said, that Congress will end up passing another stop-gap measure that keeps non-essential spending at 2022 levels until after the 2024 elections—a significant cut in real terms. "In any previous Congress this would be a preposterous idea, but this is not any previous Congress," he added. —AFP

## Gulf Bank unveils gifts for new Red Account customers

**KUWAIT:** In its commitment to rewarding its young customers, Gulf Bank has unveiled exclusive welcome gifts for new Red and Red Plus customers transferring student benefits to their accounts in collaboration with Flare Fitness. Until December 31, 2023, youth welcome offers include a free one-month subscription at Flare Fitness, 25 percent discount for one month on Macros Diet meals, a 50 percent discount on a specially designed t-shirts for Red customers.

Red Plus MasterCard is the first prepaid card in the Middle East to offer cashback to youth, boasting the highest cashback program in Kuwait and the first

vertically designed MasterCard prepaid card.

Red Plus cardholders reap numerous advantages, including immediate discounts of up to 25 percent at over 550 restaurants and cafes across Kuwait. Moreover, cardholders have the opportunity to explore enticing offers in travel, leisure, health, beauty, and beyond through the Gulf Offers program. Furthermore, the card offers secure online transactions through Gulf Bank's Triple Secure System, ensuring peace of mind with robust fraud protection. Gulf Bank's vision is to be the leading Kuwaiti Bank of the Future. The Bank is constantly engaging and empowering its employees as part of an inclusive and diversified workplace in recognition of every employee's role in delivering customer excellence and serving the community at large. With its extensive network of branches and innovative digital services, Gulf Bank is able to give its customers the choice of how and where to conduct their banking transactions, all while ensuring a sim-



ple and seamless banking experience.

Gulf Bank is committed to maintaining robust developments in sustainability at environmental, social and governance levels through diverse sustainability initiatives, strategically selected to benefit the Bank both internally and externally. Gulf Bank supports Kuwait Vision 2035 "New Kuwait" and works with various parties to achieve it.

## US chip curbs trip up AI-hungry tech giants in China

**SHANGHAI:** US restrictions on advanced computer chips are forcing China's tech giants to rethink their ambitious AI-powered projects, analysts say.

E-commerce titan Alibaba on Thursday became the latest Chinese firm to admit to feeling the bite of US sanctions, as it abandoned a plan to spin off its multi-billion-dollar cloud computing arm. It followed gaming giant Tencent's acknowledgement this week that its ability to sell advanced cloud services has been hit by the restrictions, which were introduced by Washington last year to prevent China's access to cutting-edge chips.

"What this (Alibaba) episode tells us is that US restrictions of chip supply to Chinese tech firms will have the potential of disrupting consequential business decisions," Ni Tao, founder of the Chinese robotics and automation portal cnrobotics.com, told AFP. "This is a rude awakening that they will have to speed up adjustment of their operations to offset the blow of a chip crunch, which will only become more acute going forward."

Washington has said the export controls are a national security measure, aimed at cutting off China's access to advanced chips critical to the development of AI tech as well as cutting-edge weapons such as hypersonic missiles and stealth fighter jets.

Beijing has dismissed these concerns, with President Xi Jinping telling US President Joe Biden this week that such actions "seriously hurt China's legitimate interests". The chip controls were strengthened on October 17 to close loopholes that had allowed Chinese firms to acquire chips that were powered down to stay within the limits imposed by Washington. The curbs now also target cloud computing to prevent Chinese companies from accessing powerful AI chips hosted elsewhere. "The US is sending a clear



**SHANGHAI:** China's gaming giant Tencent acknowledged this week that its ability to sell advanced cloud services has been hit by the restrictions.

signal to the world's cutting-edge chip developers: don't even bother... developing a high-performance computing chip for the China market. The rules will catch up," the research firm Rhodium Group said in a report this month. "China's tech champions face an uncertain future in the wake of the October 17 controls."

### 'Recalibrate their bombasts'

The US chip controls are yet another blow to China's tech sector, which was already suffering from the economic impact of the COVID pandemic and Beijing's regulatory crackdown against some of the country's biggest firms. They have kneecapped the AI-driven ambitions of many companies, which had relied on a steady supply of powerful imported chips

to train their AI models and develop advanced cloud-based products. Alibaba said Thursday that US controls have not only hit its lucrative cloud business, but will also limit its ability to upgrade technologies in the future. And despite boasting one of the largest inventories of AI chips in China, Tencent—operator of the super-app WeChat—admitted in an earnings call this week that it will need to find ways to use them more efficiently and seek other sources.

Advanced cloud services, however, are an important business alongside the large sums they are investing in AI models to rival the likes of ChatGPT. Bloomberg News quoted Alibaba's Joseph Tsai as saying last month that its cloud arm hosts half of the generative AI firms in China. —AFP

## Japan PM: Experts to talk in China seafood row

**SAN FRANCISCO:** Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said Friday that China had agreed to expert-level talks aimed at addressing its ban on Japanese seafood following the release of Fukushima wastewater.

China banned all Japanese seafood imports in August after Japan began to release the treated

wastewater from the nuclear plant hobbled by a 2011 earthquake and tsunami. Kishida said he discussed the wastewater row with Chinese President Xi Jinping when they met Thursday on the sidelines of an Asia-Pacific summit in San Francisco.

Kishida said he and Xi agreed to "seek to find a resolution through consultation and dialogue based upon a constructive attitude." "In the days ahead, discussions will take place based upon science at the experts' level," Kishida told a news conference. China, which has historic tensions with Japan, has accused Tokyo of treating the sea as a "sewer." Japan insists that the discharge is safe, a view backed by the UN atomic watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency, and promoted

by the United States, Japan's close ally. Kishida called on China to make an "objective judgment" on the safety of seafood, which is a major industry in Japan. "Frankly, we are not at this point in a position to predict the timing of the lifting of the import restrictions," Kishida said.

"However, the government will be pressing the Chinese government" and taking measures to support Japanese fishermen, he said. Xi met leaders including US President Joe Biden in San Francisco, mostly showing a softer side as China tries to calm tensions and focus on its faltering economy.

But tensions were palpable with Japan, with Kishida voicing alarm over China's military activity in waters near Japan. —AFP

## Lifestyle

## Shakira to go on trial in Spain for tax fraud

Just days after her success at the Latin Grammys, Colombian pop idol Shakira is set to go on trial in Barcelona on Monday for allegedly cheating Spain's tax office out of 14.5 million euros. Prosecutors are seeking a jail term of eight years and two months, and a fine of nearly 24 million euros (\$24 million dollars) for the 46-year-old singer, who now lives in Miami with her two sons Milan and Sasha.

She has denied any wrongdoing and turned down a plea deal with prosecutors, paving the way for the trial which is set to get underway on Monday at 10:00 am (0900 GMT). The case centres on where the singer, whose hit singles include "Hips Don't Lie", "Whenever, Wherever" and the 2010 World Cup song "Waka Waka", lived between 2012 and 2014. Prosecutors allege Shakira Isabel Mebarak Ripoll -- dubbed the Queen of Latin Pop -- spent more than half of that period in Spain and should have paid taxes in the country.

They say she moved to Spain after her relationship with FC Barcelona defender Gerard Pique became public in 2011, but maintained official tax residency in the Bahamas until 2015.

In its indictment, the prosecution claims that Shakira "used a set of companies" based in tax havens "with the intention of not paying" tax in Spain.

## Hairdresser payments

Shakira's lawyers say that until 2014, she was leading a "nomadic life" and earned most of her money from international tours and that she only moved permanently to Barcelona just before the birth of her second son in January 2015. The high-profile trial is expected to hear from nearly 120 witnesses and to run until December 14. While the singer is expected to testify during the opening session of the trial, she may request permission from the court to not be present at the remaining hearings.

Even without her presence, details of her private life will likely emerge during the proceedings, since Spanish prosecutors carried out a meticulous investigation to prove their case. They interviewed her neighbours, tracked her images on social networks, checked her payments at hairdressers and even the health clinic she attended during her pregnancy to prove their accusation.

## 'Not a UN diplomat'

Questions about the singer's finances have been raised before. The diva

was named in the 2021 "Pandora Papers" leaks, which revealed the wealth and tax avoidance strategies of the global rich, in her case relating to her residence in the Bahamas.

The trial comes after Shakira had a big night at the Latin Grammy Awards held in Seville in southern Spain on Thursday, where she performed twice and picked up three awards, including for song of the year and best pop song for her collaboration with Argentine DJ Bizarrap on "Bzrp Music Sessions, Vol. 53".



Colombian singer Shakira arrives at the 24th Annual Latin Grammy Awards ceremony at the Conference and Exhibition Centre (FIBES) in Sevilla.—AFP

The track takes swipes at her former partner Pique -- the couple broke up last year after a decade-long relationship -- and includes a reference to being left with a "debt to the tax office". It has been played almost 1.5 billion times on Spotify and YouTube.

"People on my team tried to convince me to change the lyrics, but I'm not a UN diplomat. I am an artist and, above all, a woman," Shakira said in an interview published in Spanish celebrity magazine ¡Hola! in which she made no reference to her looming trial.

One of the highlights of the Latin Grammys was her rendition of her ballad "Acústico". Wearing a glittering gold high-cut gown adorned with an image of the Virgin Mary, the singer performed the song, with her two sons which she had with Pique appearing in a pre-recorded video on screen to join her in singing it.—AFP

## Shakira, Shakira: Latina superstar with tax woes

Shapeshifting Colombian superstar Shakira is in comeback mode after a torrid, highly publicised split from her footballer ex, Gerard Pique. But the trials of the woman dubbed the queen of Latin music since her 2005 smash hit "Hips Don't Lie" are far from over, with all eyes on Barcelona, where she will take the stand on November 20 on tax fraud charges. Prosecutors are seeking a jail sentence of eight years and two months and a fine of nearly 24 million euros (\$26 million) for the pint-sized 46-year-old diva, who previously lived in Barcelona with Pique.

They accuse her of defrauding the state of 14.5 million euros on income earned between 2012 and 2014, charges denied by the singer who says she only moved to Spain full time in 2015. In September, she was hit with a second investigation into alleged tax fraud, this time amounting to a suspected 6.6 million euros. Shakira now lives in Miami, with her two sons, Milan and Sasha.

## Dark times

Both an icon of Latina girl power and a sex symbol, the "Whenever, Wherever" songstress and "Waka Waka" performer at the 2010 South Africa World Cup has sold some 80 million albums worldwide and won three Grammy awards. But the last few years have not been easy for Shakira Isabel Mebarak Ripoll.

In 2021, she was named in the "Pandora Papers" leaks, which revealed the wealth and tax avoidance strategies of the global rich, in Shakira's case relating to a residence in the Bahamas. And in June 2022 she announced her split from Spanish football hero Gerard Pique, with whom she has two children, ending what had been one of the world's most famous celebrity couples.

Around the same time, her elderly father suffered a bad fall and sinister stalker-like messages were spraypainted outside her Barcelona home. "Everything happened at once. My home was falling apart," she told People Magazine in 2023. "I was finding out through the press that I had been betrayed while my dad was in ICU (intensive care)."

"I thought I wasn't going to survive so much." Picking herself up through her music, Shakira released a searing



File picture shows Colombian singer Shakira (center) leaves the court in Barcelona after she has attended the ratification of the separation demand with his ex husband Spanish football player Gerard Pique (not pictured) and the agreement on the custody of their children.—AFP

revenge song with Argentine DJ Bizarrap that has been viewed 645 million times on YouTube. Slamming Pique and his new love interest, she sings: "You swapped a Ferrari for a Twingo/You swapped a Rolex for a Casio."

## 'Like a goat'

Her phenomenally successful career is a story of serial reinvention, from teen crooner to Colombian rock chick to Latina bombshell.

She grew up in a family of Arab descent in the Colombian port city of Barranquilla and began performing at the age of four, when she hopped up onto a table in a Middle Eastern restaurant and had the room clapping and cheering as she belted out songs.

"I fell in love with the sensation of being on stage," she told Britain's Guardian newspaper in a 2002 interview. Her friends were less complimentary about her voice, declaring she sang "like a goat", but Shakira was undeterred, recording her first single "Magia" as a denim-clad 14-year-old pining for her first love. Her breakthrough came in 1996 with her third album "Pies Descalzos", featuring a young rocker with jet black hair and a guitar slung across her shoulder.

## 'Innocent sensuality'

By 22, she had become Latin America's biggest pop star, with fans including

Colombian Nobel literature prize laureate Gabriel Garcia Marquez, who declared she had "invented her own brand of innocent sensuality".

To help her break out of Latin America, US-Cuban diva Gloria Estefan encouraged her to sing in English and in 2002 she went on a world tour with her first bilingual album, "Laundry Service".

She had become blonde by this point, mixed salsa and merengue with RnB, electro and hip-hop on chart-topping tracks like "Whenever, Wherever", and infused her routine with the head-spinning hip gyrations that would become her trademark.

By the time she got to the World Cup South Africa, where she met Pique and headlined the closing ceremony, she was a superstar. In 2017, she temporarily lost her voice after suffering a haemorrhage on her right vocal cord and was forced to call off a world tour for seven months.

But she recovered and enjoyed a new career high in 2020 when she shared a half-time show with Jennifer Lopez during the Super Bowl. This year she collaborated with one of her new rivals on the Colombian music scene, Karol G, on the reggaeton hit "TQG" (acronym for "Too Big for You" in Spanish). It included further jabs at Pique and hit the top spot on Spotify.—AFP

## Rio's Christ statue welcomes Taylor Swift with open arms

After lobbying from "Swifties," Rio de Janeiro's Christ the Redeemer statue was lit up to welcome Taylor Swift to Brazil ahead of a concert on Friday as part of her global blockbuster "Eras Tour." As die-hard fans gathered at the famed statue atop Corcovado mountain and in the square below, the giant monument went dark Thursday night, then was reilluminated wearing a light-projection tribute to Swift's "Junior Jewels" T-shirt, from her video "You Belong With Me."

"Welcome to Brasil," it said -- in English, but using the Portuguese spelling of "Brazil" -- with the names of the country's 27 states scrawled across it.

Fans were ecstatic. "I'm going to cry. What matters most to me is her seeing it, her smiling, her being happy," said Rafaela Martins Lopes, one of those who flocked to the statue.

The tribute to the US pop sensation came after fans inundated social media with calls to give her a fitting welcome to the South American country.

The Catholic rector responsible for the Christ the Redeemer statue, Omar Raposo, responded with a challenge Thursday on Instagram: raise 300,000 reais (\$60,000) for charity, and he would organize a special message.

The response was so overwhelming it temporarily crashed the fundraising site handling the campaign.

By Friday afternoon, less than 24 hours later, the goal had been met, organizers said. "Young people like a challenge. So we channeled the fans' energy for good," Raposo said in a statement. The donations are being used to give out food baskets to the homeless to mark the World Day of the Poor on Sunday, an initiative launched



An image projected onto Christ the Redeemer welcomes US singer Taylor Swift to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.—AFP

by Pope Francis. Organizers said they would continue accepting donations through Sunday, which is the last day of Swift's three-night stop in Rio.

On Rio's spectacular Guanabara Bay, a giant Ferris wheel was also lit

up in tribute to Swift Thursday, with the message, "Love's a Game, Wanna Play?" -- a lyric from her hit song "Blank Space."—AFP

## Singer Cassie, Sean Combs settle lawsuit alleging rape: US media

Singer Cassie and rap mogul Sean Combs have reached a settlement "amicably" a day after she filed a lawsuit accusing him of rape and physical abuse, US media reported late Friday. The R&B singer, whose real name is Casandra Ventura, said in a suit filed Thursday that hip-hop artist Combs subjected her to more than a decade of coercion by physical force and drugs as well as a 2018 rape.

A lawyer for Combs, also known as both Puff Daddy or Diddy, has denied the allegations. The parties said Friday evening that they had agreed to resolve the case, but did not disclose the settlement terms, The New York Times and other US media reported. "I have decided to resolve this matter amicably on terms that I have some level of control," Ventura said in a statement published by US media.

"I want to thank my family, fans and lawyers for their unwavering support," she added. In a separate statement also carried by US media, Combs said: "We have decided to resolve this matter amicably. I wish Cassie and her family all the best. Love."

According to Ventura's lawsuit, filed in federal court in Manhattan, she met Combs in 2005, when she was 19 and he was 37. He signed her to his label, Bad Boy Records, with her hits including tracks like "Me & U." They also began a romantic relationship. Court documents called Combs a violent man, recounting disturbing scenes of his outbursts, including forcing Ventura to engage in sex acts with male sex workers, which she alleges Combs filmed.—AFP



Singer and model Cassie Ventura (left) and Rap mogul P Diddy (aka Sean Combs) arrive for the traditional Clive Davis party on the eve of the 60th Annual Grammy Award — AFP



## Guitar from Kurt Cobain's last tour fetches over \$1.5 million

The guitar that the late Nirvana frontman Kurt Cobain used during his last tour sold for more than \$1.5 million, an auction house announced Friday. The American grunge icon played the sky-blue, left-handed Fender Mustang during the band's In Utero tour, Julien's Auctions said in a statement.

"Nirvana played their final show on March 1, 1994 in Munich, Germany and all available concert footage confirms that Cobain played this guitar that night," the auction house said. Cobain died by suicide in April 1994, aged 27 and at the height of his fame.

Julien's listed the final sale price as \$1,587,500. The Mustang guitar was still intact, unlike many that Cobain destroyed on stage. In May, a smashed-up black Fender Stratocaster of his fetched \$595,000 at the Hard Rock Cafe in New York.

On Thursday, Julien's also sold a guitar belonging to Eric Clapton for \$1.27 million. Nicknamed "The Fool", the Gibson SG is associated with the English musician's time with the band Cream, where he produced one of rock's most distinctive sounds.

Its personalized decoration, in a psychedelic style, makes the instrument one of the most easily recognizable in rock and a symbol of the "Summer of Love", the counterculture movement of 1967 which marked a generation.—AFP



US rapper Calvin Cordozar Broadus Jr aka Snoop Dogg blows smoke as he performs on stage at the Accor Arena of Bercy, in Paris.—AFP

## Weed enthusiast Snoop Dogg is 'giving up smoke'?

Snoop Dogg, the acclaimed rapper whose image has long been tied to his professed love of marijuana, on Thursday said he's giving up smoking. "After much consideration & conversation with my family, I've decided to give up smoke. Please respect my privacy at this time," he posted across his social media platforms.

It was not clear if Snoop meant he was giving up smoking in all its forms, and if he meant he was giving up weed altogether. Fans of the California rap superstar born Calvin Broadus responded to his posts with skepticism, positing that the 52-year-old was jok-

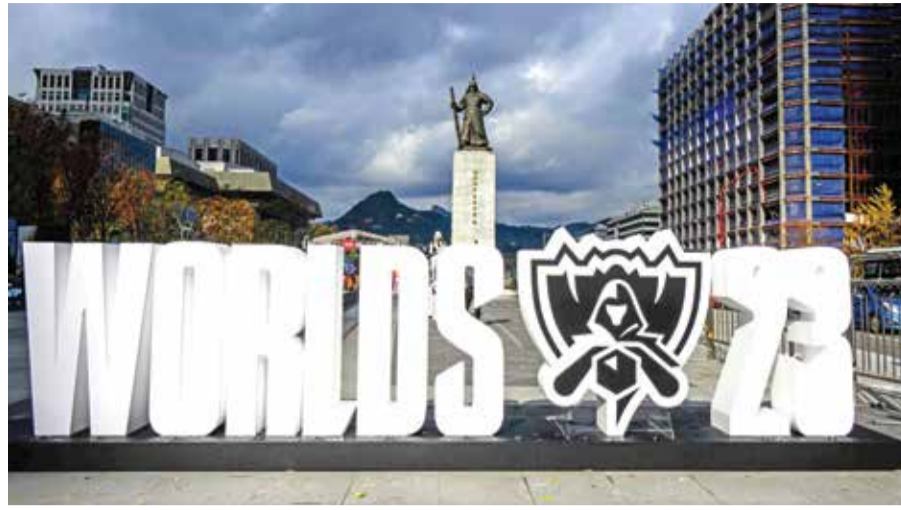
ing, while others noted potential health concerns. His manager did not immediately respond to a query from AFP.

Snoop Dogg's global fame dates back to the early 1990s, when his debut solo album "Doggystyle," produced by Dr Dre, debuted in the top spot of the hit albums chart. He's sold millions of albums worldwide, with myriad hits including "Gin & Juice" and "Drop It Like It's Hot." Today Snoop has a number of business ties to the cannabis industry. He also was known to employ a professional blunt roller.—AFP

Lifestyle



Cosplayers attend the '2023 Worlds Fan Fest' for the League of Legends World Championship 2023.



Lettering that reads 'Worlds 23' is seen displayed in front of the statue of Admiral Yi Sun-Sin (top center).



A cosplayer attends the '2023 Worlds Fan Fest' for the League of Legends World Championship 2023.

# Gaming fans throng Seoul for League of Legends world final

Thousands of fans from around the world have descended on South Korea's capital Seoul for the League of Legends world championship final on Sunday, widely considered the Super Bowl of e-sports.

First held in 2011, the League of Legends (LoL) world championship has rapidly grown to become one of the crown jewels of e-sports, which are globally forecast to attract audiences of nearly 1.4 billion by 2025. South Korean powerhouse T1, who lost in last year's world final, will take on China's Weibo Gaming at the Gochok Sky Dome, a 16,000-capacity baseball stadium.

"Every time the LoL world championship was held in South Korea, we were not able to advance, but this year, we've secured the opportunity to play... in front of our Korean fans," T1's Faker, a superstar often hailed as the Michael Jordan of e-sports, said at a press conference this week. "I hope to end this rare... opportunity with a positive result."

Faker, whose real name is Lee Sang-hyeok, is looking to win a record fourth world title with T1. He won gold with South Korea at the Asian Games this year. He has celebrity status in gaming-mad South Korea, where fans chant his name during matches.



A woman poses next to a cardboard cutout of South Korea's T1 team at the '2023 Worlds Fan Fest' for the League of Legends World Championship 2023.

At a fan zone set up for the final in central Seoul, people queued up to take photos with life-sized cutouts of Faker and his team. "My favourite is Faker," said Park Jeong-hyeon, a 22-year-old student who said she has been playing League of Legends with her friends for three years.

She compared him to K-pop's biggest stars: "He plays so well, it makes me wonder how he does it! I'd say he's the BTS of e-sports." Many in the fan zone were decked out in costumes and carried props as they posed for photos.

League of Legends involves two teams with five players each competing



People walk in front of a huge temporarily installed 'Teemo' at the '2023 Worlds Fan Fest' for the League of Legends World Championship 2023, also known as LoL Worlds 2023 or Worlds 2023, at Gwanghwamun Square in Seoul ahead of the grand final.—AFP photos

in a battleground where the goal is to destroy the opponent's base.

During competitive games, screaming and cheering fans follow the action on giant screens above the teams.

Tickets for the final at the 16,000 capacity Sky Dome sold out in 10 minutes when they were made available in Au-

gust, according to League of Legends maker Riot Games. Dozens of cinemas across South Korea will also screen the final live. Those tickets also sold out rapidly, according to listings on operator CGV.—AFP



Giant Panda Xiao Qi Ji hangs upside down from a tree in its enclosure at the Smithsonian National Zoo in Washington, DC.—AFP

## Pandas could return to US after Xi-Biden summit

Chinese President Xi Jinping appears ready to deploy his country's soft power after his summit with US President Joe Biden -- in the form of cuddly pandas. Tensions between Washington and Beijing mean that only a handful of the black and white bears remain in the United States, with three having left the national zoo in Washington earlier this month.

But Xi told a dinner after meeting Biden in California on Wednesday that China could send new pandas as "envoys of friendship between the Chinese and American people." The White House said it would be happy to have more bamboo-chewing bears.

"Should the decision be made by the PRC (People's Republic of China) to restore some of the pandas to the United States, we would absolutely welcome them back," National Security Council spokesman John Kirby told reporters. "That's got to be a decision that obviously President Xi makes."

China has been using so-called "panda diplomacy" since 1972, when the first animals were sent to the United States in 1972 as a gift, following then-president Richard Nixon's historic visit to the Communist nation.

Strained relations between the rival superpowers in recent years have however led Beijing to call some of the pandas back home.—AFP

Almost half of the breeding seabird species in the UK and Ireland have declined in the past 20 years, with climate change one of the possible causes, according to a new survey released on Thursday. The study, which also covered the Channel Islands off the coast of northern France, found that 11 out of 21 seabird species had seen a loss in numbers.

In the other 10 species, five remained stable with five increasing partly due to targeted conservation work.

Researchers said drivers varied between species and regions but were likely to be partly linked to "adverse weather conditions which may be a result of climate change". For the remaining four of the 25 species surveyed, no conclusions were drawn due to survey method changes.

One of the factors implicated in the loss of species included invasive predators which may have been released in seabird colony islands, or brown rats or American minks which may have stowed away on boats.

"Climate change is another important factor, adverse weather conditions are causing nest sites to be swept away and making foraging conditions more difficult," the Seabirds Count survey said. "Increased water temperatures reduce the availability of important food such as sandeels which leads to seabird parents not finding enough food," it added.

This was exacerbated by fish stock



## Over half of seabirds in UK and Ireland 'in decline': Survey

depletion by commercial fisheries resulting in insufficient food to go around during the breeding season.

The study, which took place between 2015 and 2021, was carried out by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) along with 20 partners.

It found that Scotland had seen the biggest loss with 14 species in decline.

Species of particular concern highlighted by the study include the Atlantic puffin whose decline at most sites

surveyed marked a change from three previous censuses. "Measures are needed to support populations and to actively prioritise their conservation," Seabirds Count said.

The researchers also warned that since the census was completed, seabird colonies in Britain and Ireland had seen a severe outbreak of bird flu. The overall impact of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) is yet to be estimated with the help of new data col-

lected in 2023. The survey's findings are set out in Seabirds Count which is being released in book form by wildlife publishers Lynx Edicions.

It is said to be the most comprehensive seabird census produced to date and provides population estimates for all 25 regularly breeding species of Britain, Ireland, the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands.—AFP

## 1.5C limit 'only option' for saving Earth's ice and snow

Allowing global temperatures to rise two degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels will be catastrophic for the world's ice sheets, glaciers, polar seas and permafrost, a new report warned Thursday. The assessment of the global "cryosphere" -- parts of the Earth covered in ice and snow for at least some of the year -- urges upcoming climate talks to commit to keeping warming below 1.5C.

"Because of what we have learned about the cryosphere since the Paris Agreement was signed in 2015, 1.5C is not merely preferable to 2C. It is the only option," the report argues.

The Paris Agreement called for warming to be held below 2C, but the United Nations this week said global climate commitments are vastly off-track for that target. Thursday's report from the non-profit International Cryosphere Climate Initiative says recent research shows only dramatic emissions reductions can prevent irreversible consequences for areas from the Arctic to the Himalayas. At 2C warming, they warn,

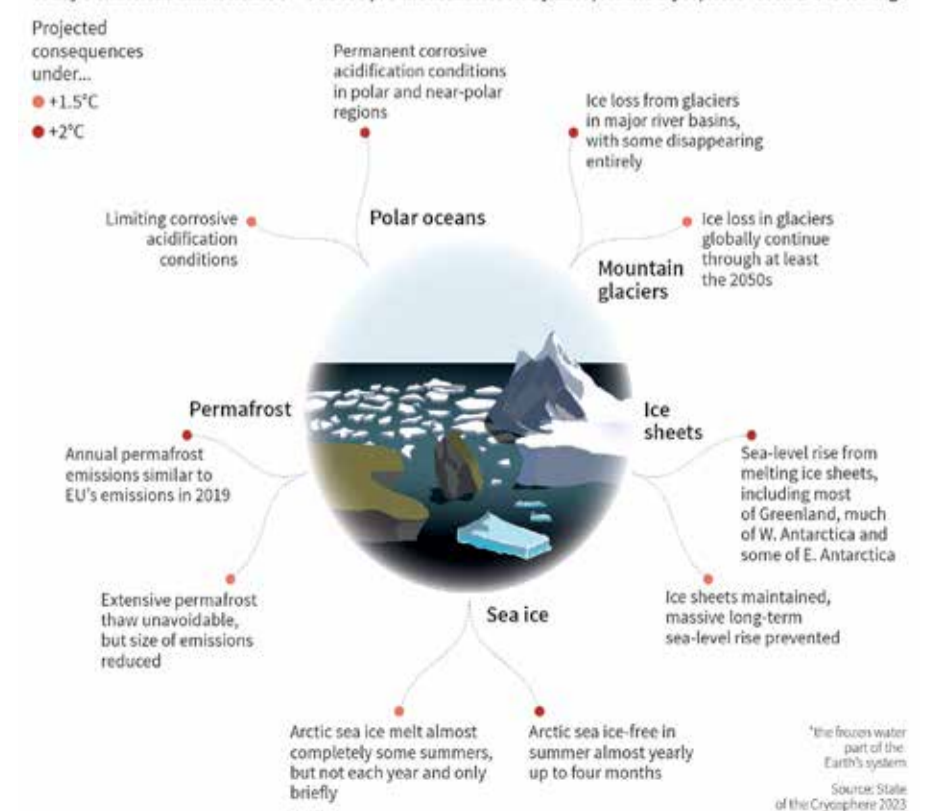
melting ice sheets will cause "extensive, potentially rapid, irreversible sea-level rise". The world will also see major ice loss from the world's glaciers, "with some disappearing entirely". Sea ice may be the worst affected part of the cryosphere, it added, with the Arctic Ocean becoming ice-free every summer.

Open Arctic waters would absorb more heat from the 24-hour summer sun, in turn speeding the thawing of permafrost and the melting of the Greenland ice sheet, raising sea levels. Thawing permafrost presents another dire risk because it releases carbon dioxide and methane, emissions that help boost temperatures.

At 2C warming, "these emissions are irreversibly set in motion and will not slow for one-to-two centuries", the report warns. The Earth's polar seas would not be spared either. The carbon they would absorb at 2C warming would cause "year-round, essentially permanent corrosive ocean acidification conditions", the report says.—AFP

### 1.5°C only option for Earth's ice, snow and frozen oceans

Today's emissions aim towards 3+°C above pre-industrial levels by 2100, for the cryosphere\* even 2°C is too high



\*the frozen water part of the Earth's system. Source: State of the Cryosphere 2023. AFP

Lifestyle

# Karol G wins Album of the Year at Latin Grammys

Colombian singer Karol G won the coveted Album of the Year award for her LP "Mañana sera bonito" at Thursday's Latin Grammy Awards, the first ever held outside the United States. "To have the Album of the Year is too (great)," she said as she was presented with the gramophone trophy on stage in the Spanish city of Seville.

**'This album changed my life.'**

Also competing in the category were past Latin Grammy winners Ricky Martin and Andres Cepeda, as well as Pablo Alboran, Paula Arenas, Camilo, Juanes, Natalia Lafourcade, Fito Paez and Carlos Vives.

The 32-year-old singer won two other awards at the gala, including Best Urban Music Album for

"Mañana será bonito" and Best Urban Performance for "Tgg", on which she collaborated with fellow Colombian star Shakira.

Shakira also won three awards, two for her collaboration with Argentine DJ Bizarrap on "Bzrp Music Sessions, Vol. 53", which was crowned Song of the Year and Best Pop Song.

The track has been played almost 1.5 billion times on Spotify and YouTube, with Shakira describing it as a "great outlet" following her break-up with former footballer Gerard Pique.

The Spanish and Portuguese-language music awards have been presented by the Latin Recording Academy since 2000.—AFP



Colombian singer Karol G poses with her Album of the Year and Urban Music Best Album Awards during the 24th Annual Latin Grammy Awards ceremony at the Conference and Exhibition Centre (FIBES) in Sevilla.—AFP photos



Colombian singer Karol G poses with her Album of the Year and Urban Music Best Album Awards next to (left) Colombian producer Ovy on the drums.



Mexican singer Natalia Lafourcade poses with her Record of the Year, Best Song and Best Album Awards.



Colombian singer Shakira poses with her Record of the Year, Best Pop Song, Best Urban Interpretation awards.



Colombian singer Shakira performs on stage.



Spanish actor Antonio Banderas (R) reacts after receiving the Academy special Award.



Spanish singer Alejandro Sanz performs on stage.



Mexican musician Julieta Venegas poses with her Best Vocal Pop Album Award.



Venezuelan singer Joaquina Canabal poses with her New Artist Award.



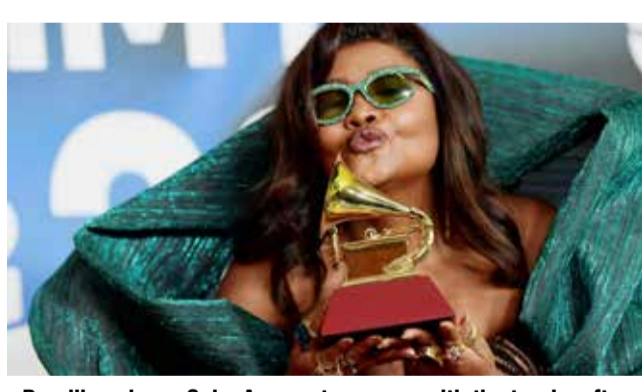
Colombian singer Juan Fernando Fonseca poses with his Best Tropical Song award.



Mexican singer Carin Leon poses with his Award for Best Norteño Album.



Spanish singer Nina Pastori poses after receiving her Best Flamenco Album Award.



Brazilian singer Gaby Amarantos poses with the trophy after receiving the Best Portuguese Language Roots Album award for her album "TecnoShow".



Members of Colombian salsa band Grupo Niche and of the National Symphonic Orchestra of Colombia pose with the trophy after receiving the Best Salsa album award.



Mexican American songwriter and producer Edgar Barrera poses with his Best Producer and Best Composer Awards.

## List of winners:

- Album Of The Year**  
"Mañana Será Bonito" by Karol G
- Record Of The Year**  
"De Todas Las Flores" by Natalia Lafourcade
- Song Of The Year**  
"Shakira: Bzrp Music Sessions, Vol. 53" by Santiago Alvarado, Bizarrap, Kevyn Mauricio Cruz Moreno and Shakira, songwriters (Bizarrap Featuring Shakira)
- Best New Artist**  
Joaquina
- Best Pop Vocal Album**  
"Tu Historia" by Julieta Venegas
- Best Traditional Pop Vocal Album**  
"Décimo Cuarto" by Andrés Cepeda
- Best Pop Song**  
"Shakira: Bzrp Music Sessions, Vol. 53" by Santiago Alvarado, Bizarrap, Kevyn Mauricio Cruz Moreno and Shakira, songwriters (Bizarrap featuring Shakira)
- Best Urban Fusion/Performance**  
"Tgg" by Karol G featuring Shakira
- Best Reggaeton Performance**  
"La Receta" by Tego Calderón
- Best Urban Music Album**  
"Mañana Será Bonito" by Karol G
- Best Rap/Hip Hop Song**  
"Coco Chanel" by Bad Bunny and Eladio Carrion, songwriters (Eladio Carrion featuring Bad Bunny)
- Best Urban Song**  
"Quevedo: Bzrp Music Sessions, Vol. 52" Santiago Alvarado, Bizarrap and Quevedo, songwriters (Bizarrap featuring Quevedo)
- Songwriter of the Year**  
Edgar Barrera
- Producer of the Year**  
Edgar Barrera

## Sports

# India eyeing fairytale finish in World Cup final against Aussies

## Cummins urges Australia to 'embrace' India crowd challenge

**AHMEDABAD:** Rohit Sharma's undefeated India will look to end a 10-year global title drought in front of 130,000 fans in the World Cup final against five-time champions Australia on Sunday. India have racked up 10 straight wins at the tournament as they seek a third World Cup triumph to add to their 1983 and 2011 victories, the last of which came on home soil. Despite the country's cricket riches, India are without a major international title since the 2013 Champions Trophy and expectations in the cricket-crazy nation of 1.4 billion people have reached fever pitch.

However, the hosts are up against an Australian side who have won eight matches in a row and will be playing in their eighth World Cup final. "We've won before," Australia captain Pat Cummins said on Saturday. "I think one of the pleasing things is I still don't feel like we've played the complete game."

Cummins urged his side to "embrace" the challenge of facing a hostile crowd. A capacity crowd of 130,000 — which would be a record for any cricket match — is expected to roar on India. But five-time champions Australia are a team full of big-match performers who also know what it's like to play in cricket-crazy India from their time in the Indian Premier League.

"I think you've got to embrace it, the crowd's obviously going to be very one-sided," Cummins told the pre-match news conference at the Narendra Modi Stadium, named after the Indian prime minister, on Saturday. "But also in sport, there's nothing more satisfying (as an opposition player) than hearing a big crowd go silent and that's the aim for us tomorrow." The 30-year-old fast bowler added: "You've just got to embrace every part of it, every part of a final — you know in the lead-up there's going to be noise and more people and interest and you just can't get overwhelmed."

## 'Hitman' Rohit eyes crowning glory in World Cup final

**AHMEDABAD:** Rohit Sharma will carry a billion hopes when he leads India out for the World Cup final on Sunday, the pinnacle of a journey which began in poverty but which has led to a personal fortune of around \$25 million and the high-pressure captaincy of the national cricket team. The swashbuckling 36-year-old opener, nicknamed "Hitman" for his ability to get big scores quickly, has accumulated 550 runs at the tournament in a chart led by teammate Virat Kohli (711) ahead of Sunday's showdown with Australia in front of around 130,000 fans.

But Rohit's selfless approach with the bat to give the team attacking starts and allow the likes of Kohli and the middle-order to build has won him praise in a near-perfect campaign for two-time World Cup winners India. "The impact he's had has been unbelievable because he sets the tone for the batting, he is the one who is sacrificing his wicket so that others could come and score the runs," former India captain Sunil Gavaskar told TV channel India Today.

"He is taking the attack to the opposition in the first 10 overs. Demoralizing the opposition attack at the start. He has got out in the 40s three or four times already. As a leader he has shown the template." Rohit smashed 47 off 29 balls laced with four fours and four sixes in India's 70-run over New Zealand in the semi-final in Mumbai on Wednesday. Former England captain Michael Vaughan called Rohit a "genuine hero" and the "man who has changed the culture" of the team, which stands at the cusp of a third World Cup title.

### IPL supremacy

Rohit took over the captaincy of the white-ball team in 2021 and a year later became the all-format leader in the cricket-crazy nation's quest for a global title. M S Dhoni led India to their last World Cup victory in 2011 at home and then a Champions Trophy title two years later before the team faltered twice in the semifinals of the 50-over showpiece — 2015 and 2019.

Kohli's inability to lead India to a title remained one of the biggest talking points by his critics and Rohit was the chosen one with five Indian Premier League titles under his captaincy belt. Rohit took over the IPL leadership from Australia great Ricky Ponting and led Mumbai Indians to titles in 2013, 2015, 2017, 2019 and 2020. He rose from humble beginnings — he studied on a scholarship after his family was unable to afford the \$3.30 monthly fees — to become India's limited-overs star and the only batsman to have scored three double-centuries in one-day internationals.

Rohit, who is often criticized for his visible paunch in contrast to Kohli's chiseled frame, has amassed 10,662 runs at an average of over 49 in 261 ODIs for India since his debut in 2007. His boyhood cricket coach Dinesh Lad, in an interview with AFP last week, said if his student lifts the World Cup in Ahmedabad he will be the "richest person in the world".—AFP



Rohit Sharma

### 'Real challenge'

Former India captain Sunil Gavaskar, a member of the 1983 World Cup-winning team, told TV channel India Today, "This is going to be an unbelievable game". "You are playing against the five-time champions, a team that knows how to come back from almost impossible situations, who know how to play finals, how to win finals." "So I believe it will be a real, real challenge for the Indian team but I do believe that Rohit Sharma's men are up for it."

Apart from their five World Cup titles, Australia clinched their maiden T20 crown in 2021 and also beat India convincingly in the World Test Championship final earlier this year. India handed Australia a six-wicket mauling in the group stage in Chennai four weeks ago where Cummins' side were bowled out for 199. Australia also slumped to a 134-run defeat by South Africa in pool play but avenged that loss with a tense three-wicket semi-final win over the Proteas in Kolkata on Thursday.

### Red-hot Kohli

India made the final by hammering New Zealand by 70 runs in Mumbai with a red-hot Virat Kohli hitting a record 50th ODI century. Kohli, who surpassed compatriot Sachin Tendulkar's record of 49 tons, leads the tournament batting with 711 runs including three hundreds. Rohit is the next best Indian batsman with 550 runs and his leadership has been widely praised — former England captain Nasser Hussain called him a "real hero".

India also boast the tournament's leading bowler with Mohammed Shami taking 23 wickets in six matches, including 7-57 against the Kiwis on Wednesday. Despite losing to India and South Africa in their first two matches of the tournament, Australia have bounced back. They won seven league games on the trot with a hobbling



Pat Cummins

## Unlikely captain Cummins on brink of World Cup win

**AHMEDABAD:** Pat Cummins may be an unusual captain, but he heads into Sunday's World Cup final against India in Ahmedabad on the verge of leading Australia to their second global title this year. Cricket teams are often reluctant to appoint fast bowlers such as Cummins as their skipper because of concerns the extra workload will distract them from taking wickets.

But Cummins, thrust into the captaincy just days before the start of the 2021/22 Ashes after Tim Paine's shock resignation after a 'sexting' scandal, still led Australia to a 4-0 series win over England. Then in June this year, Cummins oversaw Australia's 209-run thrashing of India in the World Test Championship final at The Oval. Cummins also doesn't fit the 'macho' image of an Australia captain established by abrasive skippers such as Ian Chappell, Allan Border and Steve Waugh, although the paceman was accused of plotting the downfall of the similarly gritty former coach Justin Langer.

Following a defeat by India in the second Test in Delhi this year, Border said: "I'd be playing with a harder edge... The Kiwis (New Zealand), they are the ones that play the goodie two shoes." Cummins' membership of the 'Cricket for Climate' group, meanwhile, led to suggestions he had influenced Cricket Australia to abandon a sponsorship deal with energy company Alinta—an accusation both he and his bosses denied.

### 'Woke means nothing'

He has been labelled "woke" by some critics. "I don't even know what 'woke' means," Cummins told the Sydney Morning Herald in January. "It's a label, it means nothing." But few opponents would call Cummins, an outstanding bowler with 239 wickets in 55 Tests at 22.94 apiece and 139 in 87 one-day internationals at 28.83, a soft touch. His steel was evident when he refused to withdraw an appeal after Jonny Bairstow was controversially given out stumped during an Ashes Test at Lord's in July, despite the England batsman thinking the ball was dead. Australia won that match and retained the Ashes in a series drawn 2-2.

Cummins knows about resilience given injuries meant he endured a six-year wait for a second Test appearance after a debut as an 18-year-old. And Cummins, a shining light following the 2018 ball-tampering scandal in South Africa that cost Steve Smith the captaincy, is now just one game away from leading his country to a record-extending sixth World Cup title — despite defeats in their opening two matches. "Basically, we had to be flawless to make it through to the semis," Cummins said Saturday. "And fortunately, we were." His calmness was evident when, with Australia having collapsed to 91-7, Cummins held up an end as Glenn Maxwell's spectacular double century sealed a remarkable three-wicket pool victory over Afghanistan in Mumbai. He also then held his nerve with the bat in a tense semifinal run-chase against South Africa. "There have been no huge wins (at the World Cup)," added Cummins. —AFP



**AHMEDABAD:** Performers take part in a rehearsal at the Narendra Modi Stadium on Nov 18, 2023, on the eve of the 2023 ICC Men's Cricket World Cup one-day international (ODI) final match between India and Australia. — AFP

Glenn Maxwell authoring a performance for the ages with his undefeated 201 not out against Afghanistan, rescuing his team from 91-7 and carrying them to their victory target of 292.

Leg-spinner Adam Zampa is their top bowler with 22 wickets with pacemen Mitchell Starc and Josh Hazlewood, who both played in the 2015 World Cup winning side, peaking at the right time. The new-ball duo reduced South Africa to 24-4 in Kolkata, with their performances key to setting up a repeat of the 2003 World Cup final — where Australia thrashed India by 125 runs in Johannesburg. Sunday's meeting will be the eighth between the two teams in ODIs in 2023. "We have played them a lot of times so we know them inside-out," Hazlewood told reporters.

"Same for them, with us. They have been a quality team, they have been on the march the whole tournament. No real weaknesses in their team, so looking forward to Sunday."

India rode on the back of an explosive start from opener Rohit (47) and Shubman Gill (80 not out after retiring hurt) as they racked up 397-4 against New Zealand in the first semifinal. But Hazlewood preferred to focus on the early stages of India's pool chase against Australia, when the hosts were three down for two runs in pursuit of a modest 200 to win. "Hopefully similar to last time we played them," Hazlewood said on tackling the Indian top-order. "We got them out cheaply. I think we made them 3-3 maybe so that would be ideal." — AFP

## Asian handball Championship opens in Kuwait

**KUWAIT:** The 26th Asian Men's Club League Handball Championship was officially inaugurated by Commerce and Industry Minister and State Minister for Youth Affairs Mohammad Al-Aiban on Friday. The opening ceremony was attended by Director General of Public Authority for Sport Yousuf Al-Baidan, Vice President of the International Handball Federation Bader Al-Theyab, Former President of Qadsiya Club Sheikh Talal Al-Fahad and the club's board members.

In a brief address, Aiban expressed regret over the absence of the Al-Salah Palestinian team, who were unable to participate. He extended a warm welcome to all guests, emphasizing Kuwait as the land of friendship and peace.

Theyab praised the Asian Handball Federa-

tion for providing essential support to ensure the technical success of the championship, particularly in terms of officiating and supervision. He commended Qadsiya for meeting all necessary requirements, wished success to all teams, and hoped for a high technical level reflecting the game's achievements in the Asian context.

In the opening round, Qadsiya Sports Club handball team lost against their Sharjah counterparts, with a score of 28-30. The match showcased a fast pace and strong performance from both teams. However, Qadsiya's defenders struggled with lapses in concentration and personal mistakes, especially during goal attempts.

Sharjah capitalized on this, displaying disciplined defense and benefiting from the outstanding performance of their goalkeeper, Mohammad Al-Taher, who was named the player of the match.

Results from the first round included Al-Arabi from Qatar defeating Al-Jaish from Iraq 42-23, Sidon Youth from Lebanon overcoming Sai from India 47-34 in the second group, Gulf from Saudi Arabia winning against Al-Gharrafa from Qatar 28-27, and Najma from Bahrain defeating Golden from India 42-21.



**KUWAIT:** Qadsiya and Sharjah players vie for the ball.

## Hit Pakistani cricket show wins hearts in India

**NEW DELHI:** Long-simmering rivalries on and off the pitch divided India and Pakistan once more at the World Cup, but a cricket show run by Pakistani greats of the game has won fans across the border. The Pavilion, featuring cricketers turned broadcasters including Wasim Akram, Shoaib Malik, Misbah-ul-Haq and Moin Khan, has been a hit in India for what fans say is its unbiased and engaging commentary.

"They give cutting-edge, sharp analysis," said Shubhan Nair, a 32-year-old in India's southern city of Bangalore, who said watching the program online had become part of his "daily ritual". "They will talk about what went wrong with every team, including their own... they also appreciate whichever team did well." Neighbors India and Pakistan share deep cultural and linguistic links but their history has been mired in violence and bloodshed. The two nuclear-armed nations have fought three wars since the subcontinent's partition in 1947. "If it's black, we say black, and if it's white, we say white," presenter and Pakistan legend Wasim Akram told AFP. "Speak your own mind but nothing personal, everything has to be professional and positive."

Launched for the 2021 T20 World Cup in the UAE, the show enjoyed viewing figures on all platforms of about 130 million — until the one-day World Cup opened last month in India. Akram said numbers were now "almost double". "It's just four to five of us talking, no science... it's a lot of hard work," he said. "But sitting together, enjoying each other's company, it's a lot of fun—and I suppose that's what people see."

### 'Love from India'

Akram said he was happy the show was reaching a wider audience and admitted its popularity across borders had surprised him. "We have respect for each other, we crack jokes, we enjoy each other's company... if our show is able to tell people that at the end of the day it's only a game, that's so nice. "If you're Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan — everybody is patriotic about their country," he added. "Let's leave it at that and just talk about good in this day and age, to be nice to each other, respect each other. If our show is making that impact, then we're over the moon."

Hosts India, who will contest Sunday's final against Australia, beat Pakistan in the only match they played against each other at this World Cup. The clash took place in front of a partisan home crowd after Pakistani fans were unable to secure visas from Indian authorities. Any meeting between the rivals has millions watching around the globe and is a bonanza for broadcasters and sponsors.—AFP

## Sports

# Denmark edge out Slovenia to book Euro 2024 spot alongside Albania

## Lacklustre England see off Malta as Kane strikes

**PARIS:** Denmark booked their spot in the Euro 2024 finals with a 2-1 win in their crunch match against Slovenia. Albania also qualified on Friday, drawing 1-1 in Moldova to ensure they would finish in the top two in Group E. The Czech Republic drew 1-1 in Poland to leave the second qualifying place from Group E undecided.

Italy moved to second in Group C with a 5-2 home win over North Macedonia. England, who have won the group, eased to a 2-0 home win over Malta. In Group H, both teams were able to qualify with a win in Copenhagen but the hosts claimed the spoils, with goals either side of the break by Joakim Maehle and Thomas Delaney.

Danish coach Kasper Hjulmand said: "I'm satisfied with the whole team. I'm satisfied with everything. The boys looked each other in the eyes and said 'Let's show them!'" Denmark had the better of the opening exchanges and were rewarded when Maehle slid in at the far post to tuck away an in-swinging cross on 26 minutes. But the lead only lasted four minutes before Erik Janza curled a left-footed free-kick beyond Kasper Schmeichel. A tight, tetchy affair was swung in Denmark's favor nine minutes after half-time when Delaney controlled and finished in the box after Jannik Vestergaard's flick-on.

Earlier, Kazakhstan won 3-1 at home to San Marino to move to 18 points, one behind second-placed Slovenia. Islam Chesnokov struck in the 19th and 51st minutes but Simone Franciosi hit back on the hour for the minnows, before Abat Aimbetov's penalty in added time killed off San Marino's hopes of a rare point. In the same group, Finland kept themselves

within a win of third place by beating Northern Ireland 4-0 in Helsinki.

### Albania progress with draw

Earlier, Albania clinched a place at Euro 2024 despite conceding a late equalizer as they drew 1-1 in Moldova. Sokol Cikalleshi put the visitors ahead with a first-half penalty and although Vladyslav Babohlo levelled with three minutes left, the point ensured Albania will finish in the top two in Group E. It will be Albania's second appearance at a major tournament after their debut at Euro 2016.

Czech Republic had the chance to seal up the Group E qualification spots when they travelled to Poland but could only draw 1-1. Jakub Piotrowski scored on 38 minutes and although the Czechs levelled through Tomas Soucek four minutes into the second half, they were unable to force a winner that would have ensured an automatic place in Germany next year.

Italy survived a scare against North Macedonia in Rome, which saw them move into second in the group ahead of Ukraine. Matteo Darmian headed in the opener and Federico Chiesa grabbed a quick-fire brace in the first half. Jani Atanasov pulled one back for the visitors early in the second half, before scoring a second with 16 minutes remaining but Giacomo Raspadori and Stephen El Shaarawy struck for Italy to ensure the victory. "The important thing is that we won. We conceded two goals that I don't think we deserved to concede," said Chiesa.

Ukraine and Italy meet on Monday, a draw will ensure the Italians automatic qualification thanks to



**COPENHAGEN:** Denmark's forward Yussuf Poulsen is tackled by Slovenia's defender Jaka Bijol during their UEFA Euro 2024 Group H qualification match on Nov 17, 2023. — AFP

their better head-to-head record, following September's 2-1 win in Milan. An experimental and disjointed England team beat winless Malta 2-0 through an Enrico Pepe own goal with eight minutes gone and

a second-half Harry Kane strike. "If you don't start games well, it's very difficult to pick it up and we didn't. We know the level we've got should be better," said England coach Gareth Southgate. — AFP

## Ivory Coast score 9 against Seychelles for record victory

**JOHANNESBURG:** Ivory Coast crushed Seychelles 9-0 in Abidjan on Friday to create a record winning margin for a World Cup qualifier in Africa. Borussia Dortmund forward Sebastian Haller started the goal rush on 20 minutes and Karim Konate from Salzburg completed it five minutes into added time. Konate and Hamed Traore scored two goals each and Haller, Ibrahim Sangare, Simon Adingra, Seko Fofana and Jean-Philippe Krasso one apiece in the matchday one Group F mismatch.

Seychelles, a tourist destination off the east coast of Africa, are 195th in the FIFA rankings, 121 places below the Ivory Coast. The seedings for the first round of 2026 World Cup qualifying in Africa meant the nine top-ranked teams were paired at home against the nine bottom ones, so it was almost inevitable that there could be some one-sided matches. Egypt put six past Djibouti on Thursday in Group A with Liverpool star Mohamed Salah netting four times.

Before the Abidjan goal deluge, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Libya and Algeria shared the record with eight-goal winning margins. While the Ivorians scored freely, fellow west Africans Ghana had to wait 96 minutes before Inaki Williams snatched the goal that earned a 1-0 win against Madagascar in Group I. The Bilbao forward possibly saved the job of under-fire Ghana coach Chris Hughton by heading a Gideon Mensah cross past goalkeeper Melvin Adrien in Kumasi.



**ABIDJAN:** Ivory Coast forward Karim Konate vies for the ball with Seychelles' goalkeeper Carlos Simeon during their FIFA World Cup 2026 Africa qualifying at the Olympic Stadium of Ebimpe on Nov 17, 2023. — AFP

### Special goal

"This goal is very dear to me because my family was in the stadium," said Spain-born Williams after scoring his first for the country of his parents. Former Premier League manager Hughton has been under huge pressure since friendly losses to Mexico and the United States last month. Cameroon, whose eight World Cup appearances is an African record, struggled for much of a Group D home match with minnows Mauritius before a couple of late goals completed a 3-0 win.

Brentford forward Bryan Mbeumo broke the deadlock in first-half added time in Douala and Georges N'Koudou and Frank Magri netted when the visitors tired. Tunisia, who have qualified six

times for the global showpiece, also won comfortably at home, beating Sao Tome e Principe 4-0 in Group H in Rades. Zambia continued a revival under former Chelsea manager Avram Grant with second-half goals from Fashion Sakala and Patson Daka delivering a 4-2 Group E win over Congo Brazzaville in Ndola.

Burkina Faso, who hope to challenge Egypt for the first place and automatic qualification for the 2026 finals from Group A, suffered a setback when held 1-1 by Guinea-Bissau. Reigning African champions Senegal and South Africa are among the teams in action on Saturday, when the 26-fixtures first round ends. Matchday two begins on Sunday. — AFP

## Uruguay stun Argentina as Colombia sink Brazil

**MONTEVIDEO:** Uruguay ended Argentina's 14-match unbeaten streak with a 2-0 victory over the world champions in World Cup qualifiers on Thursday as Luis Diaz scored twice to fire Colombia to an emotional 2-1 win over Brazil. Defender Ronald Araujo fired Uruguay ahead on 41 minutes before Liverpool forward Darwin Nunez made the game safe with an 87th-minute goal on the counterattack to settle a hard-fought clash at the Bombonera Stadium in Buenos Aires.

It was Lionel Messi and Argentina's first defeat of the 2026 World Cup qualifying campaign, and their first loss since they were stunned 2-1 by Saudi Arabia at the 2022 finals in Qatar. "We never felt comfortable," Messi said after the defeat. "They're a physical team that works well and on the counterattack they were very dangerous," added Messi, praising the work of Uruguay's revered Argentine coach Marcelo Bielsa.

"You can see his hand in the team. In all the teams or clubs he's been involved in, including Argentina, you can see his hand," said Messi. Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni meanwhile backed his team to recover in time for next week's showdown with Brazil. "There is a very difficult game coming up and we will try to do our best; I think this team has shown plenty of times that it can get out of difficult situations," Scaloni said.



**BARRANQUILLA, Colombia:** Colombia's forward Luis Diaz eyes the ball during the 2026 FIFA World Cup South American qualification football match against Brazil at the Roberto Melendez Metropolitan Stadium on Nov 16, 2023. — AFP

"We lose and win as a team, and there are times when you have to give credit to the opponent," Scaloni added. "We can't think that because we're world champions, we can't lose. We are unbeatable—I've said it before and will continue to say it." Argentina, who had won all four of their opening qualifiers, remain on top of the standings with 12 points from five matches. Uruguay's win leaves them in second place on 10 points. — AFP

## Everton docked 10 points after breaching Premier League rules

**LONDON:** Everton have been docked 10 points after being found guilty of breaching Premier League financial rules, plunging one of England's most storied football clubs into the relegation zone. The punishment, the biggest sporting sanction in the history of the competition, leaves Sean Dyche's side 19th in the table on a total of just four points after 12 matches — five points from safety.

Everton said they were "shocked and disappointed by the ruling", announcing their intention to appeal. The Premier League referred the club, who have posted losses for five consecutive years, to an independent commission in March for an alleged breach of its profitability and sustainability rules (PSRs). Clubs are allowed to lose a maximum £105 million (\$130 million) over a three-year period or face sanctions.

"The club admitted it was in breach of the PSRs for the period ending season 2021/22 but the extent of



the breach remained in dispute," the Premier League said in a statement on Friday. "Following a five-day hearing last month, the commission determined that Everton FC's PSR calculation for the relevant period resulted in a loss of £124.5 million, as contended by the Premier League, which exceeded the threshold of £105 million permitted under the PSRs.

"The commission concluded that a sporting sanction in the form of a 10-point deduction should be imposed. That sanction has immediate effect." The commission was blunt about the situation in its full written

reasons. "The position that Everton finds itself in is of its own making," it said. "It is Everton's responsibility to ensure that it complies with the PSR regime. The excess over the threshold is significant. The consequence is that Everton's culpability is great."

But Everton said the punishment was "wholly disproportionate and unjust". "Everton maintains that it has been open and transparent in the information it has provided to the Premier League and that it has always respected the integrity of the process," the club said in a statement. "The club does not recognize the finding that it failed to act with the utmost good faith and it does not understand this to have been an allegation made by the Premier League during the course of proceedings. "Both the harshness and severity of the sanction imposed by the commission are neither a fair nor a reasonable reflection of the evidence submitted."

Everton great Neville Southall said the team, who have won three of their past five league games, have the quality to survive. "All we've got to do is galvanize the players, the manager and the fans into one, which will be a good thing for them," he told the BBC. "The Premier League isn't a great league from the bottom half down so they've got half a chance of winning that half of the league." — AFP

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## Wembanyama shines but Spurs lose

### James fuels Lakers win over Trail Blazers



PORTLAND: LeBron James of the Los Angeles Lakers drives to the basket during the game against the Portland Trail Blazers in the In-Season Tournament on Nov 17, 2023 at the Moda Center Arena. —AFP

LOS ANGELES: Victor Wembanyama put on a show but his San Antonio Spurs slumped to a seventh straight defeat on Friday as group play continued in the NBA's new in-season tournament. De'Aaron Fox matched his career high with 43 points, adding eight rebounds and seven assists for the Sacramento Kings, who beat the Spurs 129-120.

After scoring just eight points in a 36-point loss to Oklahoma City on Tuesday, Wembanyama scored 27 points and pulled down nine rebounds. The 19-year-old French phenomenon, who was taken number one in the NBA draft, impressed with an array of shots — including a gravity-defying alley-oop dunk. Zach Collins scored 28 for the Spurs, who roared to an 18-point lead in the first quarter but couldn't keep pace in a fourth quarter that saw Fox deliver 14 points as Wembanyama was held to six.

"All of us, we know we're on a good path," Wembanyama said as he reflected on yet another defeat. "Of course it's hard to be patient sometimes, but it's an everyday fight. I know that the end of the season

will not look like the beginning of the season." Now 3-9 for the season, the Spurs fell to 0-3 in group play in the league's new cup-style tournament—out of the running for the knockout rounds.

The Los Angeles Lakers, meanwhile, were closing in on a quarterfinal berth after a 107-95 victory over the Trail Blazers in Portland. LeBron James, who turns 39 next month, matched his season-high with 35 points and the Lakers led by as many as 17 in the final quarter. Anthony Davis added 16 points and 14 rebounds as the Lakers improved to 3-0 in the tournament. They can clinch their group with a win on Tuesday over Utah, who fell 131-128 to the Phoenix Suns.

Kevin Durant scored 38 points — including a dagger three-pointer with 18.8 seconds left—to propel the Suns to victory in Salt Lake City. James Harden was the hero for the Los Angeles Clippers, who snapped a six-game losing streak with a 106-100 victory over the Houston Rockets — their first win in the five games since Harden arrived in a trade from Philadelphia.

With six seconds remaining and the score tied at 100-100, Harden dribbled against Jae'Sean Tate, making his trademark step back to drain a three-pointer, drawing a foul and converting the free throw. "It's a sigh of relief," admitted Harden. "It's been some tough times these last few games. But we've got a bigger picture, got to be the last team standing so it's going to be a process."

Elsewhere, Zion Williamson scored 26 points and the New Orleans Pelicans withstood a Nikola Jokic triple-double of 26 points, 16 rebounds and 18 assists in a 115-110 victory over the NBA champion Denver Nuggets. New Orleans never trailed, leading by as many as 20 in the third quarter and holding off a Denver charge that saw the Nuggets pull within one in the final period.

In Toronto, Boston guard Derrick White drained a go-ahead three-pointer with 27.5 seconds left as the Celtics held off the hard-charging Raptors 108-105. Jaylen Brown scored 23 points, Jayson Tatum added 17 and Kristaps Porzingis chipped in 14 points and 12

rebounds for the Celtics, who are 2-0 in tournament play and maintained their one-game lead atop the Eastern Conference over Philadelphia—who beat the Atlanta Hawks 126-116.

#### Bridges returns

In Charlotte, Milwaukee's Damian Lillard scored 27 points to lead seven Bucks players in double figures in a 130-99 victory over the Hornets. Malik Beasley added 20 points and Bucks star Giannis Antetokounmpo returned from a one-game injury absence to score 16 points with eight rebounds and nine assists in Milwaukee's third straight victory.

The Bucks connected on 22 of 45 three-pointers to withstand a 37-point night from Charlotte's LaMelo Ball. Miles Bridges came off the bench for Charlotte and scored 17 points in his first NBA game since April 2022. Bridges missed all of last season and was suspended 10 games to start this season after pleading no contest in a felony domestic violence incident last year. —AFP

## Kuwaiti champion Noura Al-Mutairi an inspiration for girls

By Ghadeer Ghloum

KUWAIT: Noura Al-Mutairi is a Kuwaiti champion who has achieved remarkable success in the realm of combat sports, winning multiple medals. Her most recent victory was at the Riyadh World Combat 2023, where she bagged the gold medal and proudly raised Kuwait's flag in first place, solidifying her position as a Kuwaiti boxing champion. Mutairi's significant achievements prove that not only has Kuwait produced champions, but it has produced champions who are female.

Mutairi told Kuwait Times it is important to give girls the opportunity to thrive in any field they desire, even if it is boxing, which many people consider to be limited to young men. She highlighted that by sharing the triumphs of female boxers, societal barriers can be dismantled, inspiring young girls to pursue their passions, besides motivating existing champions to achieve even more.

During her interview with Kuwait Times, Mutairi elaborated that despite facing significant societal barriers, she has overcome obstacles and fought for equal recognition opportunities, as she rejects the notion that men and women have different capabilities. She instead sees this notion as a motive to train even harder and prove that women can match the efforts of men in training.

"It is what gives me more motivation to train more. To show them that women can do the same effort in training as men," she said, proving her own hypothesis

through her achievements in international tournaments and showcasing the potential for Kuwaiti women in boxing. Moreover, Mutairi emphasized the importance of highlighting women in sports through various forms, including media, organizations and individuals to provide a positive and welcoming environment for those who have the potential to excel.

By sharing the triumphs of female boxers, societal barriers can be dismantled, inspiring young girls to pursue their passions in addition to motivating existing champions to achieve even more. "We seek to eliminate these stereotypes about women and sports by spreading awareness, by supporting and encouraging women's achievements in all fields, and by publishing achievements and holding awareness sessions on the importance of sports," Mutairi said.

According to her, if we were to speak about boxing for instance, then to ensure female boxers thrive, it is crucial to promote equitable representation in the realm of boxing and combat sports. This encourages young girls to participate in boxing and provides them with proper training and resources, which are essential for fostering their growth, whether in boxing or any other sport or field of their interest.



Noura Al-Mutairi

## Eagles ready for Chiefs in Super Bowl rematch

LOS ANGELES: The Philadelphia Eagles face the Kansas City Chiefs on Monday in a blockbuster rematch of last season's Super Bowl classic that may well turn out to be a preview of next February's NFL championship game. Nine months after Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes engineered a last-gasp drive to defeat the Eagles 38-35 to clinch victory in Arizona, arguably the two best teams in the NFL will meet again at Arrowhead Stadium.

The fixture is the undisputed highlight of week 11 in the NFL, and is a rare regular-season collision of the two teams who are currently on track to be the top seeds in their respective conferences. The Chiefs (7-2) have the best winning percentage in the AFC, while the dominant Eagles are leading the NFC standings with an 8-1 record. Mahomes, who is neck-and-neck with Eagles counterpart Jalen Hurts in the NFL Most Valuable Player stakes, is anticipating another heavyweight showdown.

"They're really good," Mahomes said of the Eagles. "At the end of the day that's the main thing. They have a lot of the same players; they've added some more talent. "The defensive line is special, one of the best defensive lines I've ever seen. Waves of guys that can come in and play, a mix of veterans and young guys."

The Eagles, meanwhile, head into the game with several players still smarting from last February's agonizing Super Bowl loss, when they let a 10-point half-time lead slip before losing to Harrison Butker's winning field goal with eight seconds remaining. "For me, it's a little bit more personal," said Eagles tackle Jordan Mailata. "I'll never forget the feeling of that red and gold confetti falling on my head, and I'll never forget the emotions from that day. "I haven't even

rewatched the film from that game. It's hard for me."

#### No 'revenge' for Kelce

Eagles coach Nick Sirianni meanwhile said he is letting his players decide for themselves whether they want to treat Monday's clash as an opportunity for revenge. "My feeling is that if you can use that for extra motivation, then go ahead," Sirianni said. "But if it's a distraction, then leave it to one side." For Eagles center Jason Kelce, revenge is not on the agenda.

The 36-year-old six-time Pro-Bowler says he is more focused on finally scoring the first win of his career against Chiefs coach Andy Reid and younger brother Travis Kelce, the Chiefs' star tight end, who used last week's bye week to watch girlfriend Taylor Swift in concert in Buenos Aires. Jason Kelce said last season's Super Bowl thriller has no bearing on Monday's game.

"It's not the same game," Kelce said. "I'm motivated to win the game. I don't need the Super Bowl to make me want to beat my brother or Andy Reid. I've never beaten them in my career. I'm maybe more motivated by that. I don't buy into Super Bowl 'revenge' games. Each season is different. "Nothing that goes on out there and happens Monday night is gonna change or make anything different about what happened last year."

In other games this weekend, the in-form Dallas Cowboys will attempt to stay hard on the heels of the Eagles in the NFC East with victory over the Carolina Panthers on Sunday. Meanwhile in the AFC North, the Pittsburgh Steelers and Cleveland Browns (both 6-3) meet in a game that will the winner move into second place in the division behind the Baltimore Ravens (8-3).

In Houston, the Texans will look to keep their momentum rolling when they host the Arizona Cardinals. The Texans head into the game on the back of wins over Tampa Bay and Cincinnati in which rookie quarterback C J Stroud was outstanding. Stroud has passed for more than 800 yards in his past two games, and is on course to post one of the best rookie seasons in NFL history. —AFP