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Palestinian prisoners walk free

Hamas delays second handover after Zionist entity violates truce deal



(Left) Rawda Abu Ajamieh hugs a relative after her release from a Zionist prison as part of a truce agreement in the Al-Duheishe refugee camp in Bethlehem in occupied West Bank on Nov 24, 2023. (Right) Raghad Fan is greeted by her family on her release in Baytunia in the occupied West Bank. — AFP photos (See Page 5)

Kuwait ready to treat injured Gazans; KTV journo survives strike



GAZA: Suad Al-Imam, Kuwait TV correspondent in Gaza. — KUNA

KUWAIT: Minister of Health Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi has instructed public medical facilities, namely hospitals, to prepare for hosting and treating injured Palestinians, the ministry of health announced on Friday. The ministry said in a statement that the minister had given the instructions in line with Kuwait's unwavering support for the Palestinian cause and in accordance with guidelines by the political leadership and recommendations made by the National Assembly during a session held on Nov 1 to discuss the Zionist breaches in the Gaza Strip.

The ministry of health will coordinate with other concerned public departments to organize the reception of the injured Palestinians and prepare for their transfer to Kuwait. It lauded some private health institutions that decided to receive and treat some of the injured Palestinians expected to be brought to Kuwait.

Meanwhile, Suad Al-Imam, Kuwait TV correspondent in the Gaza Strip, survived Thursday the Zionist occupation forces' bombardment, which targeted a house near Kuwait Hospital in

Continued on Page 6

GAZA: Hamas said Saturday that it was delaying the release of a second group of Zionist captives in exchange for Palestinian prisoners until the Zionist entity complies with a truce agreement. The Palestinian group's armed wing said the issues of aid deliveries to the northern Gaza Strip and the selection criteria for prisoner releases were holding up the handover.

The unforeseen setback followed an initial exchange on Friday when Hamas released 13 Zionists, all of them women and children, hours after a four-day truce took effect in Gaza. Ten Thais and one Filipino were also unexpectedly freed. The Zionist entity in turn released 39 Palestinian women and children from its prisons under an agreement that mandates

exchanges at a ratio of three to one.

In the Zionist-occupied West Bank, fireworks exploded and crowds filled the streets. The freed prisoners waved Palestinian and Hamas flags. "I was just waiting for the day I would be released from prison so I could hug my mother like this," said Rawan Abu Matar, who served eight years for attempting to stab a Zionist soldier.

"I am happy but my liberation came at the price of the blood of the martyrs," said Marah Bakir, 24, referring to the nearly 15,000 deaths across the Gaza Strip. Hanan Al-Barghouti, 58, released after two months in Zionist custody, lauded the armed wing of Hamas, its leader, and the people of

Gaza. "May God reward them well on our behalf," she said. "If it were not for the people of Gaza, we would not have seen freedom."

The Zionist entity on Saturday denied that it had violated the truce agreement and vowed to continue the war to eliminate Hamas when the pause in fighting ends. "We will return immediately at the end of the ceasefire to attack Gaza," Zionist chief of staff Lieutenant General Herzi Halevi said. "We will also do this in order to dismantle Hamas, also to create a great deal of pressure to return as quickly as possible and as many abductees as possible, every last one of them," he added.

Continued on Page 6

Gazans return to destroyed homes as truce begins

GAZA: With children and pets in their arms and their belongings loaded onto donkey carts or car roofs, thousands of displaced Gazans headed home Friday as a four-day Zionist-Hamas truce began. The din of war was replaced by the horns of traffic jams and sirens of ambulances making their way through crowds emerging from hospitals and schools where they had taken refuge. For nearly seven weeks, Zionist strikes on the Gaza Strip had been relentless.

But on Friday morning, no more shots were heard in Khan Yunis, in the south of the Palestinian territory. "We are civilians," said Mahmud Masood, standing in front of flattened buildings in Jabalia, northern Gaza. "Why have they destroyed our houses?" A woman sat on top of a mound of debris with her head in her hands, crying.

Hayat Al-Muammar was among those hurrying to take advantage of the truce deal. "I'm going home," said the 50-year-old, who had been sheltering in a school. "We fled the death, destruction and everything," she told AFP. "I still don't understand what happened to us — why did they do this to us?" she asked. The lives of Gazans have been turned

Continued on Page 6



GAZA: A Palestinian youth sits next to his bicycle amid the rubble of destroyed buildings in Gaza City in the northern Gaza Strip as a four-day ceasefire took effect on Nov 24, 2023. — AFP

Scores march in London for full Gaza ceasefire

LONDON: Tens of thousands of protesters marched in London on Saturday demanding a permanent ceasefire in the war between the Zionist entity and Hamas, as a temporary truce largely held in Gaza. It was the latest large pro-Palestinian demonstration in the British capital since the unprecedented Oct 7 Hamas attacks on the Zionist entity unleashed the latest conflict in the Gaza strip.

"The occupation needs to end. We need a full ceasefire and not a four-day ceasefire," Alaa Hassan, a 24-year-old wellbeing practitioner,

told AFP. The demonstrators waved pro-Palestinian banners and chanted slogans as they walked through central London to the Houses of Parliament at Westminster. Some 1,500 police officers were on duty for the protest, including 500 that had been brought in from forces outside of London.

The demonstration was organized by the Palestine Solidarity Campaign and the Stop the War Coalition. "We come to show our solidarity and tell the Palestinians they are not alone, we are thinking about them and we are not gonna stop until they are free," said 25-year-old student Leila Talhi. London police have made hundreds of arrests for alleged hate crimes since the attack. Showing support for Hamas is an offence in Britain, where the organization is classified as a terrorist group. — AFP



LONDON: Protesters holding placards and Palestinian flags take part in a 'National March For Palestine' on Nov 25, 2023. — AFP



Local

Kuwait, an exemplary model for Arab world: Palestinian minister

Rajoub thanks Kuwait's leadership for supporting suffering Gazans

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: Lieutenant General Jibril Rajoub, Palestinian Minister of Youth and Sports and Head of the Palestinian Scout Association, expressed admiration for the Kuwaiti people, lauding them as an Arab-Islamic model. He expressed hope that Kuwait's example would spread throughout the Arab and Islamic nations, becoming a source of inspiration. He extended his gratitude to HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, acknowledging his role as a symbol of unity, along with HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and the government and people of Kuwait, extolling Kuwait's efforts in its delivery of a powerful message, showcasing a profound commitment to the Palestinian cause.

Rajoub said Kuwait's hospitality during the match of the Palestinian football team extended beyond athletic performance, resonating even in the dedication of players, some hailing from the Gaza Strip. These individuals carry the heavy weight of uncertainty, with the constant anticipation of potential martyrdom of their families. Despite these challenges, their commitment and resilience mirror the broader spirit of Arab solidarity.

Within the political realm, he stated that adhering to the Fatahists' perspective politics and struggle shape their future. The strength of the Palestinian cause, as emphasized, resides in the strategic human reserve of seven million Palestinians. "Safeguarding this resource is a national responsibility, requiring the provision of all necessary conditions for the steadfastness and survival of these individuals. Their resilience, in turn, becomes the bedrock of strength for the Palestinian cause," he said.

Internationally, there is a growing consensus on the justness of the Palestinian issue. The proposed solution involves establishing an independent Palestinian state and addressing the refugee dilemma in alignment with United Nations resolutions. Crucially, this consensus underscores the Palestinians' right to self-determination, emphasizing that they stand as the guardians of their destiny without external imposition. This recognition on the global stage contributes to the legitimacy and strength of the Palestinian cause.



Lieutenant General Jibril Rajoub

On the other hand, Rajoub expressed his disappointment with the outcomes of the Arab Summit, wondering where the political will, executive mechanisms and financial support for the Palestinian people are. "Our policy must be realistic and consistent with our aspirations and ambitions, which must be based on three national pillars — Palestinian national unity, a regional and accurate understanding of the complexities, agendas, interests and circumstances that the region is experiencing, and the international pillar, which is based on international legitimate decisions and a system of values for the people, to determine the fate and rights of women and children, international interests and how to protect them," he added.

Rajoub indicated that what happened on Oct 7 was a turning point. "It is a defensive war that the Palestinian people have been waging for 75 years. This event must be evaluated in its defensive context, and the one who bears responsibility for this event is the (Zionist) aggression. Their reaction was part of an ongoing, round-the-clock, year-round aggression of unilateral aggressive actions that targeted every land and every Palestinian, whether in the West Bank, Gaza or Jerusalem," he explained.

After October 7, he said: "The pace of aggression took an unprecedented turn, where the Zionist entity force is a rightwing fascist force that does not recognize the existence of the people of Palestine, and their roots are supremacist racism. They were able to provide an international umbrella led

by America to protect this official terrorism, which includes genocide." He added 45-50 percent of martyrs are children, 30 percent are elderly, while infrastructure destruction exceeds 50 percent. With this method, the Zionist entity has the goal of revenge and sending a message of terror to the people to break their will and force displacement or create living conditions that are not conducive to survival after the war, he pointed out.

Rajoub stressed that the recent events brought about a state of defeat for the army, the Zionist aggression, as well as exposing their lies, and made Zionist citizens unsure about their personal security and the settlement project. There are a quarter of a million Jews present in hotels due to the lack of personal security. "What happened foiled the goal of (the Zionist entity) to integrate into the Middle East region and its goal in isolating it from the Palestinian cause," he said.

Regarding the four-day truce in Gaza, he said: "We are happy with this truce, but this truce should be a part of the roadmap for peace. There are 5,000 prisoners from 1985 until now, and this is a bleeding wound that will not be closed unless they are all liberated."

"We have developed a policy based on the establishment of a Palestinian state. The organization is the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. International legitimacy is the beacon and reference for resolving the conflict and the unity of the Palestinian territories occupied in 1967. These are red and sacred lines linked to a political horizon. Of course, we are positive, but we are also developing mechanisms to end divisions, unite the homeland and seek a resolution. The Palestinian leadership is in agreement with all political forces," he noted.

Regarding expansion of settlements, Rajoub said there must be a firm and decisive international stance towards this spreading cancer, pointing out this is considered a danger even to the Zionists who want to live in peace, and a danger to world peace and regional stability. There are 3 million Palestinians in the West Bank and more than 2 million in Gaza, and they are a people with a civilization, heritage, values and all components that enable them to have a state and an independent country, and they will not give up on that.



Palestinian Ambassador Rami Tahboub (left) with Lieutenant General Jibril Rajoub.

Meanwhile, Rajoub praised the role of Egypt and Jordan. "These two countries share our hope and pain, and what happened recently was a touchstone and a test. The position of Egypt and Jordan is a position consistent with protecting their national security in that the solution is to establish the State of Palestine. We are with them with the same goals," he said.

"From the first day till the seventh of October, the Zionists sought to expand the war into a regional war, and it was the American administration that refused and is still refusing. If a regional war occurs, nuclear weapons will be used, and the international community will have no interest," he argued. "The truce was imposed on them by international and US will, and we hope that this will be transformed into policy. The legendary steadfastness of the Palestinian people also played a role. But the question is — are the international pressure elements capable of making the truce last and turn into stopping the aggression against the Palestinians in all occupied Palestinian territories?" he asked.

Doomscrolling is slowly draining your energy

By Passant Hisham

KUWAIT: In an attempt to connect with worldwide issues, one can easily become fully immersed in an infinite loop of scrolling through negative news on social media. It might take hours to snap back to reality and realize that you've been engulfed in this behavior, scrolling through the phone in your hand. This draining and potentially addictive behavior is known as doomscrolling, indulging in bad news from around the globe through photos, videos or articles on digital platforms.

It's crucial not to overlook that the root cause of this act is our natural inclination to constantly seek out risks and threats in our environment, regardless of how depressing it makes us feel. The continuous act of reading and scrolling is an attempt to stay more alert to our surroundings, hoping that more information will help make sense of the traumatic events happening globally.

Dr. Ayesha Kamal, a clinical psychologist in Kuwait, explained this phenomenon in an interview

with Kuwait Times. Dr. Kamal pointed to the Zionist-Hamas conflict, currently dominating our focus, explaining that the urge to connect with the war's victims triggers the incessant search for such news. This practice stems from the fear that by turning off our phones, we might be perceived as turning our backs on those suffering, closing our hearts to their plight.



Dr. Ayesha Kamal, a Clinical Psychologist

Staying informed about global events is informative and healthy, but we must be aware of the potential negative consequences. Dr. Kamal emphasizes that even though we consume this news through screens, it can give us a near-to-real-life sense of urgency, as if we are present in the situations these people face.

By looking into these victims' faces, seeing how they suffer when losing their relatives, we can get a sense of familiarity with their pain. Through the innocent crying of children and the tears frozen in their eyes, we can see a reflection of a pain that we've once witnessed before happening to us or

to someone whom we are very closely attached to. This emotional human link is what makes us relate to them very strongly, despite how distant they are from us. The constant influx of negative information can feel overwhelming, and the emotional impact — feelings of hopelessness, tragedy, loss, and sorrow — stays with us even after disconnecting from social media, affecting our daily lives and altering our sense of reality, making us think that there's nothing good in the world.

Dr. Kamal acknowledges that overcoming doomscrolling is easier said than done and shares tips to help. She suggests overcoming the sense of guilt by realizing that living our lives normally doesn't diminish the importance of global issues. Instead of intensively scrolling to feel others' suffering, she encourages turning those feelings into something helpful and productive, such as supporting causes through donations. "It's about trying to step back and saying, okay I do feel guilty, I do feel helpless. Let me do something with that feeling," she said.

Taking a break from the news is essential, and people should find peace in the idea that they can live their lives normally while remaining compassionate. Stepping away for a while doesn't mean forgetting; it's about having faith in our human instinct and trusting that empathy persists. Dr. Kamal encourages practicing mindfulness, staying anchored in the moment during daily life duties, similar to being present while consuming the news.



Bashar Al-Duwaisan

Kuwait urges Iran to cooperate with the IAEA

VIENNA: The State of Kuwait has called on Iran to pursue cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and fully adhere to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) set in accordance with the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2231. The official Kuwaiti stand was expressed by member of the permanent mission of the State of Kuwait at the UN in Vienna, counselor Bashar Al-Duwaisan, addressing a session of the IAEA Board of Governors for talks on verification and monitoring of the nuclear activities in Iran. The State of Kuwait looks forward to Iran's endorsement and execution of the additional protocol so the agency would be able to present credible confirmation on nonexistence of undeclared nuclear materials and activities in the republic of Iran, counselor Al-Duwaisan said.

He touched on some points in the report of the IAEA director general dating on November 15, 2023, where he affirmed anew the agency's tasks were affected with Tehran's back down from honoring its obligations, on February 23, 2021, as warranted by the comprehensive task plan. Al-Duwaisan also indicated that the agency's latest report re-affirmed that the IAEA would not be able to re-establish its monitoring mechanisms of the nuclear activities in that country due to the government's decision to abstain from adhering to the obligations with the agency. — KUNA

Kuwaiti MP urges parliamentarians to stand by Gazans

ISTANBUL: National Assembly MP Dr Falah Al-Hajri called on parliamentarians around the world on Saturday to carry out their responsibilities in expressing the will of their people in solidarity with the Palestinian cause and its people and expose the criminal practices of the Zionist entity.

This came in a speech by Al-Hajri, who heads the Kuwaiti National Assembly delegation during the parliamentary symposium on the role of parliamentarians in supporting Palestine and supporting Gaza which was held on Saturday as part of the activities of the fourth conference of the International Islamic Forum for Parliamentarians in Istanbul. The forum will continue for three days under the title, "Parliamentary Work and the Palestinian Issue in New World."

He added that parliamentarians have a major role by virtue of the powers they enjoy in their legislative councils, noting that on November 1, the Kuwait National Assembly held a special public session on the Zionist violations in Gaza in the presence and participation of the government, where the Council of Ministers issued a number of recommendations and directives related to confronting the challenges of the current situation and



ISTANBUL: Falah Al-Hajri delivers his speech during the parliamentary symposium on Saturday.

supporting our people in Gaza and throughout the occupied territories of Palestine.

He explained that based on the directives of the political leadership and the recommendations of the special session of the National Assembly, the Kuwaiti Ministry of Health announced on Friday, the readiness of its relevant sectors to receive a number of wounded and injured Palestinians to receive treatment in its hospitals, in addition to the announcement of private health facilities' readiness to carry out the same role, and the government

undersecretary of the ministry.

Informed sources have indicated that previous versions of exceptions were granted for force majeure circumstances and certain special categories, with doctors being among the first. However, the sources highlight that entry visas to join a breadwinner will not be opened in the current year, as the circumstances leading to the issuance of the ban decision have yet to be addressed.

"The opening of visas to join a breadwinner

health sector's participation in this duty.

As for the level of presenting the Palestinian issue and exposing the crimes and practices of the Zionist entity against the Palestinian people, Al-Hajri cited the most prominent decisions and recommendations approved by the Kuwaiti National Assembly in support of Gaza and the Palestinian cause. The National Assembly delegation includes the Secretary of the Parliamentary Division Dr. Muhammad Al-Mahan, and a member of the Division's Executive Committee Fahd bin Jamea. — KUNA

will be contingent on the completion of the issuance of the new residence law, expected to be approved in the National Assembly next year," they added.

The sources further emphasized that the supreme demographics committee is closely monitoring the reduction of marginal laborers. In recent years, most families joining have been those of marginal workers, and some of them still violate residence regulations.

Minister tours East Taima project

KUWAIT: The Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Housing Affairs Dr Faleh Al-Ruqba inspected the East Taima project during the tour of the site in the presence of MP Fayez Al-Jamhour and leaders of the Public Authority for Housing Welfare. The PAHW announced that the minister of housing listened to a brief explanation from the acting Director General of the authority Rashid Al-Enezi about the components of the project which consist of 509 houses. Each house comprises two floors in addition to its infrastructure services.

"The minister of housing affairs listened during the tour to the remarks of the citizens in addition to some claims raised by MP Fayez Al-Jamhour," it added. The authority pointed out that the citizens' observations primarily focused on their desire to permit the construction of an additional road expansion on the residents of the area. "The citizens submitted a request for approval to issue a loan by the Credit Bank for people with special needs to meet their requirements in these families such as the elevator similar to their fellow citizens in their residential homes," they added.

Local

Zain Kuwait celebrates World Children's Day with BACCH

Special event in partnership with 'Sahabat Amal' volunteer team



Zain's team with the volunteers and children.



Event's many segments brought joy to the children.

KUWAIT: In a step to foster the spirit of giving, sharing, and community, Zain joined a special initiative held to celebrate World Children's Day at Bayt Abdullah Children's Hospice (BACCH). The joyful event, organized by the 'Sahabat Amal' volunteer team in collaboration with the Kuwait Association for the Care of Children in Hospitals (KACCH), brought together children, families, and volunteers for a day of fun, laughter, and heartwarming moments.

Zain's contribution to this wonderful gathering came under its ongoing partnership with 'Sahabat Amal', BACCH, and KACCH, through which the company has had many fruitful initiatives and programs throughout the years to serve the humanitarian goals of the three non-profits. By actively supporting such projects, Zain seeks to reflect the commitment and key role of the private sector in shouldering civil society organizations to create a positive social impact in the community.

The event consisted of many entertaining segments that brought joy to the children and their families and friends, like reading interactive stories, distributing toys and gifts, offering science and culture sessions, drawing and coloring segments, a unique photo booth, and more. The event was also joined by some of Kuwait's renowned children's theater actors like Dawood Hussain, Mohammed Al-Hemli, and Samah.

Registered as a non-profit, charitable organization by the Ministry of Social Affairs in 2003, KACCH continues its mission to offer programs and pediatric services providing psychosocial and emotional support for hospitalized children and their families in almost all government hospitals across Kuwait.

Bayt Abdullah Children's Hospice (BACCH) is the first children's hospice in the Middle East, giving children living in Kuwait the specialized care they need. BACCH works on ensuring the emphasis is

placed on quality of life and the best day-to-day care possible, and providing children and their families with expert clinical, psychosocial, emotional, and spiritual support.

'Sahabat Amal' is an active Kuwaiti volunteer team that was formed by a number of local and regional medical students. The team's members occasionally travel abroad to support underprivileged communities with medical and educational care. The team works to raise health awareness, provide essential vaccinations, train medical staff, conduct first aid and health checkups, supply medications, and more. Zain continues to work towards fostering a spirit of giving, sharing, bonding, and community by directly supporting programs and initiatives that serve humanitarian needs. The company puts its social responsibility as a top priority, embodying and reflecting the values of its brand: Zain, A Wonderful World.

In my view

King of the Desert



By Azzah Al-Ghamdi

This month marks the anniversary of the passing of the founder of Kuwait, the late Sheikh Mubarak Al-Kabeer, may God have mercy on him. Whenever I find myself in times of crisis, a sense of anger wells up within me, and I often wish that this great leader was still alive.

My personal connection with the late Sheikh Mubarak Al-Kabeer began at the onset of my entry into journalism during my first year of university. In my adolescence, I was preoccupied with the aspiration of becoming a professional journalist and writer. My sole focus was conducting press interviews across various sectors of society, engaging with representatives of political blocs, Islamists, liberals, Sunnis, Shiites, ministers and community leaders.

Over nine continuous years, I had the opportunity to meet a diverse range of individuals. Some sheikhs and ministers left a lasting impression on me, displaying humility and kindness that amazed me, despite my mistakes. Their tolerance, bright smiles and humility towards the general public were qualities that stood out.

After a pause to complete my university studies, I delved into researching the royal family tree. This exploration led me to Sheikh Mubarak Al-Kabeer, and thus began my journey of reading, researching and discovering more about this remarkable leader.

Through extensive reading, I learned that Sheikh Mubarak Al-Kabeer was an Amir by God's command. His empowerment as Amir was evident in the fact that he became a subject of foreign press attention a century ago, when the Arabian Peninsula was still a neglected desert. Sheikh Mubarak Al-Kabeer possessed distinctive qualities — handsomeness, intelligence, masculinity, strength and deep religious conviction.

He played a pivotal role in establishing a renaissance and building a state and civilization for Kuwait. His impact was so profound that he earned the moniker the "Lion of the Peninsula". Foreign press covered him extensively, recognizing him as a unique and powerful figure with a sword of truth that targeted both the near and the far, ensuring God's retribution for all.

Sheikh Mubarak Al-Kabeer's descendants inherited the monarchy, but the true Amir, empowered by God's command, was Sheikh Mubarak the Great. Despite facing numerous adversaries and enemies throughout his life, he emerged victorious with God's support. Even after passing away, Sheikh Mubarak continues to hold a significant position in the sight of God, and his opponents are weighed against his good deeds.

Without Sheikh Mubarak Al-Kabeer, the Arabian Peninsula would not be what it is today. In the past, he was hailed as the "Lion of the Peninsula", and now, a hundred years later, I would refer to him as the "King of the Desert".

Among all the grandchildren of Sheikh Mubarak Al-Kabeer, none struck me as resembling their grandfather except for His Highness the former prime minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled. He garnered global attention with his intelligence, reminiscent of the late Sheikh Mubarak Al-Kabeer. This resemblance was evident in an interpellation session where Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled displayed legal prowess, offering convincing responses that exposed the malicious intent of the interrogators.

His statements removed all doubt and affirmed his innocence, echoing the spirit of his late grandfather. In boldly stating, "I am the grandson of this manazz," Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled set a precedent, expressing a connection with Sheikh Mubarak that transcends generations.



Administrative Officer of the Qatari Dar Al-Watad Marwa Musleh.



Musa Al-Musawi from Faradis House Bahrain.



Owner of the Egyptian University Press House George Awaad.

Kuwait Book Fair lures huge crowds, thrills publishers

KUWAIT: The owners of Arab publishing houses participating in the 26th Kuwait International Book Fair confirmed on Saturday that the fair is considered one of the most successful book fairs in the region and are keen to participate in it annually. They added in separate statements to KUNA that the turnout for the exhibition by the public is excellent, stressing that publishing houses are achieving good sales in it with the participation of an educated audience of all ages and groups.

In this regard, Ismail Al-Houfi from the Saudi Al-Mutanabbi Library told KUNA that the Kuwait Exhibition is still keen on its identity in choosing elite publishers, indicating that the exhibition is in a continuous reformation in the titles offered in cooperation with publishing houses.

He stressed the participation of the Al-Mutanabbi Library permanently in the Kuwait Exhibition, which is distinguished by presenting the library books in different sections in the Arabic language, philosophy, logic, sociology, education, psychology, legal and Islamic sciences and other literary books.

Musa Al-Musawi from the Bahraini Dar Faradis told KUNA that the house is participating for the first time in the Kuwait exhibition, indicating that the exhibition's initiative is very good and promising,

pointing to the huge attendance in all sections. He pointed out that the house has a specialized part in the history of the region and the Gulf countries, in addition to translated and local novels, self-development books and various other literary publications.

Ziad Mkhallati from Dar Al-Asma, Damascus said that the Kuwait exhibition is one of the most important Arab exhibitions, as the public is waiting for it and preparing for it as it is one of the successful exhibitions, stressing the keenness of the house to participate in it periodically.

The owner of the Egyptian University Press House, George Awaad, told KUNA that the house has been participating in the book fair for 30 years, explaining that the exhibition has clearly developed in recent years through the excellent arrangement that befits the level of Kuwait.

In turn, the administrative officer of the Qatari Dar Al-Watad, Marwa Musleh, told KUNA that the house was established in 2017 and participates in the Kuwait Book Fair for the third time and participates with about 200 titles of novels, children's books, law and development, adding that the turnout for the house by the exhibition audience is excellent with the presence of a conscious audience.

The representative of the Jordanian Cultural Book House, Idris Al-Shaloul, said that the house is participating in the Kuwait exhibition after a long interruption, as its last participation was in 2011, indicating "the house offers books in all fields and specializes in serious studies, whether in Arabic language or Islamic and economic studies."

The owner of the Lebanese company Turn the Page Asma Habbal expressed her happiness to

Court postpones adultery case of three expats

KUWAIT: The criminal court has postponed the verdict of three expatriates involved in a case of adultery, abortion and the burial of a fetus. The charges against the expatriates include the first defendant selling abortion pills to his friend (the second defendant) who sought assistance in aborting the fetus carried by his wife (the third defendant).

Following investigations, it was revealed that the expatriate wife was married to the second defendant through an informal contract. The fetus, fathered by the first defendant, was discovered buried near the building. It was disclosed that the expatriate wife had betrayed her husband with his friend, resulting in her pregnancy by the first defendant.

The wife admitted to terminating the pregnancy with her husband's assistance, citing his intense

love for her as the reason for his compliance. However, the husband was unaware that the fetus was not his, but rather his friend's. Upon learning the truth during the confrontation, he acknowledged the accusations against him but was shocked to discover the betrayal involving his friend.

The defendant confessed to being married to the second defendant for six years. She explained she was manipulated by his friend, leading to adultery and her pregnancy. The husband, unknowingly, purchased abortion pills from the friend, only later discovering that the fetus was not his child but that of his friend. The criminal court has decided to reserve the case and will pronounce the verdict next week.

Camping licenses

The Kuwait Municipality said 630 temporary camping licenses were issued in areas North and South of the country. It said that approvals included 422 licenses in Jahra governorate and 208 in Ahmadi since the start of receiving applications for spring camps.

Registration is done through a QR Code in the municipality website. — KUNA



Ziad Mkhallati from Dar Al-Asma Damascus.



Owner of the Lebanese company Turn the Page Asma Habbal.

participate in this mega exhibition, which is like a cultural wedding for a connoisseur of books, adding "publishing houses are keen to provide distinctive titles to the public for books, especially in the field of art." — KUNA

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The seminar entitled "Investment Management, Real Estate Investment and Risk Management in Awqaf".

Awqaf holds investment seminar

KUWAIT: The Department of Finance and Financial Institutions, in coordination with the General Secretariat of Endowments, held a seminar entitled "Investment Management, Real Estate Investment and Risk Management in Awqaf", in which Hanan Al-Kandari, Assistant Secretary-General for Investment Affairs, and Sarah Al-Mutairi, Director of Risk Management, Jinan Al-Zamil, Director of the Real Estate Investment Department, participated. The seminar was held at the College of Administrative Sciences Theater.

At the beginning of the seminar, Hanan Al-Kandari touched on the investment and real estate aspect and praised the role of the General Secretariat of Endowments, represented by the Real Estate Investment Department, which manages the 346 properties received and registered with the Real Estate Investment Department, and its annual income of KD 30 million.

She explained about the listed and unlisted companies contributed by the Secretariat and their number inside and outside Kuwait – 9 listed and 19 not listed inside Kuwait – and outside Kuwait 5 listed and 6 unlisted. The companies must be in conformity with the provisions of sharia.

Al-Kandari presented to the public the investment opportunities model, the exit model and the financial analysis model. Sarah Al-Mutairi, Director of Risk Management, expressed the importance of risk management in the investment decision-making process, saying: "It is a very sensitive process surrounded by the possibility of uncertainty of achieving the desired results due to several external factors related to the political and economic conditions and crises, and internal factors related to operational operations." She added that the main objective of risk management is to notify decision-makers of the risks and surrounding threats that were not referred to in the feasibility study. — KUNA

Photo of the day



KUWAIT: A commercial airliner flies past the rising moon above Kuwait City on Nov 25, 2023. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Peninsula Shield Force to participate in joint military exercise in Kuwait

'Integration Ex I' to commence on Sunday, conclude on Dec 7



Ground forces participating in the "Integration Ex I" arrive in Kuwait.



KUWAIT: Kuwait's Ministry of Defense (MoD) announced on Saturday that all ground forces participating in the "Integration Ex I" due Sunday have arrived in Kuwait. The exercise will conclude on December 7. The exercise will be hosted by the General Command of the Kuwaiti Army, represented by its ground forces, with the participation of the Peninsula Shield Force, the ministry said in a press release.

The participating units will carry out the field exercise in Al-Adra' and Abraaq areas, northwest of Kuwait,

it added. The ministry underlined the great importance of this first field exercise of the Peninsula Shield Force after the establishment of the unified military command. This exercise embodies dedication and integration between the member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council, it pointed out.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Defense announced that a force from the Commando/25 Brigade left for Pakistan on Friday to participate in the joint exercise titled "Dawn of the East" in its fifth edition, which kicks

off next week and lasts for two weeks.

The ministry said in a press statement that the exercise aims to exchange experiences in search and inspection operations, combating terrorism, securing vital buildings and how to deal with explosives and carrying out medical evacuations.

"This participation comes within the framework of supporting and strengthening joint military cooperation with all brotherly and friendly countries," the ministry added. — KUNA

MoH to open special pediatric dental center in Jahra

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Health announced that it will open a specialized center for pediatric dental treatment in Jahra to provide comprehensive dental services for children from birth to the age of 16 years.

Assistant Undersecretary for Administrative Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Fares said in a speech on behalf of Minister of Health Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi during the opening of the 23rd Kuwait Dental Conference on Saturday that this project will be an initial step in preparation for its dissemination to the rest of the governorates.

"We will witness preparations for the operation and opening of the Capital School Program Center for Oral and Dental Health in Abdullah Al-Salem suburb around 40 clinics as soon as the rehabilitation and processing works are completed," he added.

He pointed out that the ministry is following up the rehabilitation and equipment work for the Sabah Al-Ahmad Specialized Dental Center by 41 clinics in preparation for the opening and operation, which is expected to be operational by the end of the first half of next year.

"There are many achievements during the recent period, including the expansion of scholarship plans by increasing the number of scholarships for post-graduate studies abroad in the field of dentistry to 77 doctors this year and providing the opportunity to increase the number of doctors to enroll in local graduate programs - Kuwait Board of Dentistry programs," he stressed.

He praised the expansion of local graduate programs in the specialties of dentistry by introducing and adopting three new programs this year, including the Kuwait Board of Orthodontics Program, the Kuwait Board Program for Periodontics and the Kuwait Board Program for Prosthetic Dental Prosthesis.

"The electronic link of services between specialized dental centers, public hospitals and primary health care centers has been completed," he said pointing to the opening and operation of Taima Health Center for Dentistry, which has 18 clinics under it distributed over six specialized departments that represent an unprecedented qualitative leap for dental services in Jahra Governorate.

He stressed that the conference comes within the vision and objectives of the Ministry in keeping



Abdulrahman Al-Fares

Dr. Mohammad Dashti

pace with the latest global developments in the field of dentistry in order to improve the scientific and practical aspect of the working cadres as well as to provide a climate of knowledge and exchange of experiences with its counterparts in the Arab world and the rest of the world.

For his part, the President of the Conference and President of the Kuwait Dental Association, Dr. Mohammad Dashti, confirmed that this conference is the largest of its kind in the State of Kuwait, with the attendance of more than 2,000 doctors and more than 70 international and local lecturers, in addition to many workshops.

"What distinguishes the conference this year is that it is the first of its kind in terms of allocating a scientific day for dental implants, prepared by the scientific committee of the conference in cooperation with the Association of Periodontal Surgeons in the Kuwait Association of Dental Surgeons," Dashti pointed.

He stressed the conference's keenness to highlight the important and basic challenges facing the dental sector in the country, including how to train and develop dentists from new graduates, pointing out "about 500 dentists graduate annually need continuous training and development."

For his part, orthodontist consultant Dr. Mubarak Al-Saeed confirmed to reporters that Kuwait is one of the most advanced countries in the world in the field of dentistry thanks to the state's efforts in sending Kuwaiti doctors to the best international universities.

He stressed that "digital braces" is the most innovative and advanced technology in the world and is a revolution in the future of dentistry in Kuwait and the world, pointing out "transparent braces have revolutionized the world of dentistry, as braces have shifted from manual to smart digital." — KUNA



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Internet out: India deploys shutdowns in name of security

Officer who killed George Floyd stabbed in prison

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JERUSALEM: Marah Bakr (left) a Palestinian detained in a Zionist prison for eight years and released on Nov 24, 2023, looks on as her mother Sawsan sits by her side in their home in east Jerusalem. — AFP photos



BETHLEHEM: Fatima Shaheen's daughter Ayfool gently caresses her mother's cheek after her release from a Zionist prison as part of a truce agreement between the Zionist entity and Hamas.

Joy, defiance as Zionist entity releases Palestinian prisoners

Zionist authorities warned families, prisoners against showing joy, speaking to press: NGO

BEITUNIA: Firecrackers lit up the night sky Friday as raucous celebrations — mixed with defiance — marked the release of Palestinian women and children from Zionist prisons in exchange for the first wave of hostages freed by Hamas in Gaza.

Crowds across the West Bank cheered and waved Palestinian and Hamas flags, along with keffiyeh scarves after two white coaches — escorted by armored vehicles — exited the Ofer military camp with the prisoners. "I am happy but my liberation came at the price of the blood of the martyrs," said Marah Bakir, 24, referring to the nearly 15,000 people who, according to the Gaza health ministry, were killed by Zionist strikes.

Freedom from "the four walls of the prison" was "magnificent", said Bakir, who had been in custody for eight years. "I spent the end of my childhood and my adolescence in prison,

far from my parents and their hugs," she told AFP after returning to her family home in Beit Hanina in annexed east Jerusalem. "That's how it is with a state that oppresses us."

'Eating bitterness'

The ongoing Zionist attack on Gaza came after Hamas, a Palestinian armed group which on Oct 7 infiltrated the Zionist border with Gaza in an attack that left around 1,200 people dead and 240 taken captive. The subsequent Zionist bombardment of Gaza has displaced an estimated 1.7 million of the territory's 2.4 million people, and damaged or destroyed more than half of its homes, the United Nations says.

A total of 39 prisoners were released by Zionist authorities under a truce agreement to pause the fighting in Gaza, after 13 hostages from the Zionist entity had been handed over.

Hanan Al-Barghouti, 58, released after two months in Zionist custody, lauded the armed wing of Hamas, its leader, and the people of Gaza. "May God reward them well on our behalf," she said. "If it were not for the people of Gaza, we would not have seen freedom."

"We were inside the prison, eating bitterness. They were sadists. They insulted us and humiliated us, but our pride is high and our dignity is elevated, thanks to the resistance." Palestinian prisoners wearing grey jumpers were paraded in Beitunia in the occupied West Bank in front of euphoric supporters, many of whom broke down in tears.

Before their release, clouds of white smoke filled the air close to the prison as Zionist authorities fired tear gas to disperse the crowds. The Palestinian Red Crescent said three people were shot and wounded by Zionist forces. The Zionist entity had barred celebrations

in Palestinian communities over the return of prisoners. According to the Palestinian Prisoners' Club NGO, the Zionist authorities set several conditions forbidding the released prisoners and their families from speaking to the press, receiving guests at home or distributing sweets in celebration. Those who do not abide by the rules could be fined about 70,000 shekels (\$18,740), the NGO added. "The (Zionist) police are at our house and are preventing people from coming to see us," said Fatima Salman, the mother of Malak, 23, who was arrested on the way to school in 2016 for allegedly trying to stab a police officer in Jerusalem.

Malak had been seized "without injuries" after occupation forces demanded she open her bag in Jerusalem and allegedly found the knife. She was not due to be released until 2025 but returned to a triumphant welcome in her neighborhood of Beit Safa-

fa. "My daughter is weak, she hasn't eaten since yesterday," said Salman.

'Tears of joy'

In the West Bank, occupied by the Zionist entity since 1967, more than 200 Palestinians have been killed by Zionist soldiers and settlers since the Oct 7 attacks, according to the health ministry of the Palestinian Authority. Heavily armed Zionist troops are again carrying out raids in Palestinian towns, maneuvers supposedly eliminated in some areas of the West Bank by the Oslo accords.

But Friday was a night of celebration for many Palestinians. "I'm very happy to be with my family and very happy that I will start a new life with them," said Bakir. "I'm also thrilled to see how happy they are," she said, adding: "Yes, they are crying, but it's the tears of joy." — Agencies

Escaped Al-Shifa surgeon recalls impossible choices

BERLIN: With the power out, the water off, medical supplies short and hundreds of war injured and sheltering Palestinians crowding the Al-Shifa hospital in Gaza City, Ahmed Abunada was faced with impossible choices. "Who do I let die, this woman or that man? ... I do not have the time to do reconstructive surgery on this child, I will have to amputate," said the 47-year-old surgeon, who left Gaza earlier this month to escape the Zionist bombardment of Gaza. "These are very difficult decisions for a doctor," said the German doctor of Palestinian origin.

Abunada was received on Friday by German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier along with seven of his compatriots, who were evacuated from the Gaza Strip when the Rafah border crossing between the Palestinian territory and Egypt was opened to foreign nationals. "We were operating on the floor, on gurneys. There were no beds left," he told AFP about his time in the hospital. "The week that I left the hospital, the situation got worse. We had no more electricity, no more water, no more oxygen," he said. Without oxygen it was no longer possible for Abunada to operate. "That is why I left, on the 28th day of the conflict."

The Zionist military raided Al-Shifa, the largest hospital in the Gaza strip, claiming Hamas used a tunnel complex under to stage attacks — an allegation the Palestinian armed group and hospital officials denied. "I worked there as a doctor and I did not notice anything like that," Abunada said, when asked about Hamas's alleged presence at the facility. Last week, the hospital's director Mohammad Abu Salmiya, who has been frequently quoted by international media about conditions



BERLIN: German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier greets German citizen Ahmed Abunada, Chief specialist for vascular surgery at Al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza, on Nov 24, 2023. — AFP

inside the complex, was arrested by Zionist forces. "I hope they free him soon," said Abunada.

'Too loud to sleep'

Abunada, who did his medical studies in Germany, has lived in Gaza for the last eight years with his wife and four children, one of whom was injured before the family's departure. As the head of vascular surgery at Al-Shifa, Abunada barely had time to rest after the Zionist entity began its military campaign in Gaza. "Naturally, I had to have breaks to sleep. But sleeping without being able to lie down is difficult," he said. "The bombardments were everywhere. It was too loud to sleep."

On Friday, Abunada gave his account to the German president and asked for more aid to enter Gaza. "I called for the creation of a medical air-bridge from Germany" to deliver supplies, the surgeon said. "There are lots of German doctors of Palestinian origin. They could be made available and could help." Not all members of Abunada's family have left the Gaza Strip. "My mother is there, she is 85. I worry about her a lot." The elderly woman fled her home in Gaza to the south during the war on foot, he said. — AFP

echoed his views, saying the "indiscriminate killings of innocent civilians" in the Palestinian territory was "completely unacceptable". Both leaders called for a permanent ceasefire in the war-battered territory. Foreign Minister Eli Cohen "gave the order to summon the ambassadors of these countries for a harsh rebuke", his office said in a statement, accusing the two leaders of supporting "terrorism".

In a separate statement, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he "strongly" condemned the comments by the European leaders. The statement released by his office blamed them for not placing "total responsibility on Hamas for the crimes against humanity it perpetrated: massacring (Zionist) citizens and using Palestinians as human shields". Spanish Foreign Minister Jose Manuel Albares told public television he had called in the Zionist ambassador to lodge a formal protest against the Zionist government's allegations. — AFP

Zionist entity summons Spain, Belgium envoys over Gaza comments

JERUSALEM: The Zionist foreign ministry on Friday summoned the ambassadors of Spain and Belgium for a "harsh rebuke" over comments by the two countries' leaders about the Zionist offensive in Gaza. Spain's foreign ministry swiftly riposted by calling in the Zionist ambassador to explain her government's "false and unacceptable" allegations against the Spanish prime minister.

Visiting the Rafah border crossing between Gaza and Egypt on Friday, Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo said the Zionist "operation needs to respect international humanitarian law" and denounced the destruction in the Gaza Strip as "unacceptable". Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez

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International

Officer who killed George Floyd stabbed in prison

Stabbing comes weeks after US Supreme Court rejects Chauvin's conviction appeal

WASHINGTON: Derek Chauvin, the US police officer whose murder of George Floyd sparked massive racial justice protests in 2020, was stabbed in prison on Friday, the New York Times reported citing unnamed sources. Chauvin knelt on the 46-year-old Black man's neck for more than nine minutes on a Minneapolis street despite the dying man's pleas. Floyd's cries of "I can't breathe" were a rallying call for demonstrators domestically and abroad who took to the streets in the killing's aftermath.

The US Federal Bureau of Prisons confirmed an assault to AFP without naming the person wounded. "An incarcerated individual was assaulted at the Federal Correctional Institution (FCI) Tucson," in the southwestern state of Arizona, it said in a statement. "Responding employees initiated life-saving measures for one incarcerated individual," the statement said, adding that the wounded individual was sent to a local hospital "for further treatment and evaluation." Chauvin survived the attack, according to a New York Times source.

Chauvin was found guilty of second-degree murder, third-degree murder and second-degree manslaughter in 2021, and sentenced to 22 and a half years in prison. The incident was caught on video — providing a drastically different ver-

sion of events than the initial police news release, which simply stated "officers were able to get the suspect into handcuffs and noted he appeared to be suffering medical distress."

A Justice Department probe into the Minneapolis police, the findings of which were published in June 2023, said that officers in the department routinely resorted to violent and racist practices, "including unjustified deadly force." The city of Minneapolis, in the midwestern state of Minnesota, also settled a wrongful death lawsuit filed by the Floyd family, agreeing to pay his relatives \$27 million.

2020 protests

Chauvin appealed his second-degree murder conviction, which was rejected by the US Supreme Court earlier this month. "At the end of the day, the whole trial, including sentencing, was a sham," he said from prison in a recent documentary. But at his sentencing hearing, he spoke little, "due to some additional legal matters at hand." "I do want to give my condolences to the Floyd family," he added. Otherwise he remained expressionless, as he did during the trial, even when witnesses gave damning testimony against him.

Chauvin's lawyer Eric Nelson had said his cli-

ent "exuded a calm and professional demeanor" in his interactions with Floyd and sought to convince the jury that the ex-cop only applied a hold that was authorized and consistent with his training. But the prosecution successfully argued that Chauvin had used excessive force — not only with Floyd, but with others he arrested during his 19-year career on the force.

Prior to the trial the prosecution dug up several examples of his "modus operandi," including the case of Zoya Code, a young Black woman arrested by Chauvin in 2017. "Even though the female was not physically resisting in any way, Chauvin knelt on her body, using his body weight to pin her to the ground," the prosecution said.

But the Floyd case was from the beginning a bigger story than individual accounts of injustice, helping galvanize huge protests and a reckoning on racism and policing in the United States and internationally. The reverberations are still playing out in the United States today, with debates over racism still roiling politics and schools.

Paper trail

After the murder, colleagues later sketched a portrait of Chauvin as a silent, rigid workahol-



This handout photo provided by the Hennepin County Jail and received by AFP on May 31, 2020 shows Derek Chauvin booking photos face and profile. — AFP

ic who often patrolled the city's more difficult neighborhoods. His commitment to the job earned him four medals throughout his career. But he also racked up 22 internal complaints and investigations, according to a public record scrubbed of all details. Only one of these numerous complaints, filed by a white woman whom he had violently pulled from her car in 2007 for speeding, in front of her crying infant, was followed by a letter of reprimand. — AFP

'You just act': Ireland salutes 'heroes' of Dublin knife attack

DUBLIN: A Brazilian delivery driver and a young French chef were among the "heroes" Ireland saluted Friday for subduing a knife-wielding assailant suspected of attacking children outside a Dublin school. "They are the real Irish heroes, whatever their nationality — Irish, Brazilian, Italian," Ireland Prime Minister Leo Varadkar said of Thursday's attack, which was followed by an anti-immigrant riot by right-wing youths.

A five-year-old girl sustained serious injuries and remains in hospital. Two other children and two adults — a woman and the suspected perpetrator — were taken to hospital with lesser injuries. Caio Benicio, a Brazilian driver for the Deliveroo takeaway app, used his helmet to stop the attacker as he allegedly stabbed three children and a woman.

Benicio, a 43-year old father of two from Rio de Janeiro, said he was riding past the Parnell Square scene of the attack when he saw what looked like a fight. "I just pulled up my motorcycle and I saw him stabbing her many times in the chest," the former restaurant owner told the Irish Daily Mirror. He took off his helmet and started hitting the attacker. "I hit him in the head and he fell on the ground," Benicio added. "After that I hit him a couple of times and then after that people came and started to kick him."

'You just act'

"When you see a little kid, five years old, with a man with a knife, you just act," Benicio said. Benicio was aided in disarming the attacker by a trainee chef from France, who has been in Dublin on an internship



DUBLIN: Workers clear debris from the road as the shells of burnt out buses wait to be removed from O'Connell Street in Dublin on Nov 24, 2023, following a night of protests. — AFP

at the Spitalfields restaurant since October.

The 17-year-old student, who suffered minor injuries to his hand and face, received a congratulatory phone call from French President Emmanuel Macron on Friday. "The president called him to congratulate him and thank him for this act of bravery that saved lives and made us all proud," the presidential office told AFP. The restaurant where he works also paid tribute on Instagram. "This is our own 17-year-old super hero ..." the restaurant wrote, alongside his picture. "He noticed something happening as he passed by and selflessly jumped in to stop the attacker and managed to wrestle the knife off him," it added.

Rumors on social media about the nationality of the assailant, who police only described as a man in his fifties, fueled tension. A mob — described as made up of right-wing youths — later broke through the police cordon around the attack area in north central Dublin and went on the rampage. Multiple police officers were injured, 34 people arrested and several cars torched by the time calm was restored around midnight. Benicio, who moved to Ireland so that he could support his family after his restaurant burned down, said the riot that erupted "doesn't make sense". "They are protesting about foreign people — about immigrants — I am an immigrant!" — AFP

Palestinian prisoners walk free...

Continued from Page 1

Hamas fighters took around 240 captives when they broke through Gaza's militarized border with the Zionist entity on Oct 7. Following the deadliest attack in its history, the Zionist entity launched an air, artillery and naval bombardment alongside a ground offensive to destroy Hamas, killing nearly 15,000 people.

A video released by Hamas showed masked militants with rifles, wearing military fatigues and the green headband of the Islamist movement's armed wing, handing captives over to the Red Cross on Friday. Hamas is expected to free a total of 50 captives during the truce in exchange for 150 Palestinian prisoners, under an agreement brokered by Qatar, Egypt and the United States.

Egypt said that it had received positive feedback from both sides about the idea of extending the truce for a day or two and releasing more captives and prisoners. "It's only a start, but so far it's gone well," US President Joe Biden told reporters, adding "the chances are real" for extending the truce. Jordan's Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi called for "a permanent ceasefire and a complete end to this aggression."

Roongaran Wichanguen, sister of 33-year-old Thai hostage Vetoon Phoom, expressed joy and disbelief that he is coming home. She thought he had been killed. On a video call, "his face was very happy, and he seemed okay," she said, adding he told her he "was taken care of very well. It looks like he just stayed in a house, not the tunnel."

The pause in fighting in Gaza opened the way for more aid to Gazans struggling to survive with shortages of water and other essentials. The Zionist entity had placed Gaza under near-total siege. Trucks carrying supplies including fuel, food and medicines began

Kuwait ready to treat injured...

Continued from Page 1

Rafah in the south of the Gaza Strip. Speaking in a statement to KUNA, Imam said that she and her accompanying crew survived while they were standing in front of the hospital. She noted that the bombing, which was violent, destroyed the house and resulted



GAZA: Palestinians fleeing the north through Salaheddine Road in Zeitoun district on the southern outskirts of Gaza City walk past Zionist army tanks on Nov 24, 2023. — AFP

moving into Gaza through the Rafah crossing from Egypt on Friday, and more entered on Saturday.

In Rafah, many waited to fill gas canisters for cooking. "All the people are hoping and ready for it to make their lives easier," said one resident, Ezzeddine Abu Omeira. The UN estimates that 1.7 million of Gaza's 2.4 million people have been displaced by the fighting. Since the truce, thousands have been returning to what is left of their homes.

The Hamas-run health ministry said seven people were wounded on Saturday when Zionist soldiers opened fire to discourage people from making the journey. The Zionist army said early Saturday that it downed a surface-to-air missile launched from Lebanon towards a Zionist drone. In response, the army said Zionist warplanes also struck infrastructure of Hezbollah, the Lebanese group allied with Hamas, both of which are backed by Iran. But after weeks of intensifying cross-border fire, Hezbollah has not claimed any attacks on the Zionist entity since the truce came into effect. — AFP

in killing six residents and wounding 25 others.

She elaborated that some fragment and stones fell down on her and the crew while they were covering the arrival of medical aid provided by Kuwait. Imam has been working as a Kuwait TV and Radio correspondent for 20 years, and she covers field and news events in the Strip on a daily basis. More than 60 journalists have been martyred and dozens others wounded since the start of the Zionist occupation forces' aggression, in addition to the destruction of dozens of houses and offices of reporters in all Palestinian governorates. — KUNA

Cuban prez marches for Palestinians

HAVANA: President Miguel Diaz-Canel of Cuba led a huge protest march Thursday in support of Palestinians as the Zionist entity wages war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip. Protesters waving Palestinian flags criticized the United States for its support of the Zionist entity as the procession made its way along the seaside promenade called the Malecon, under a hot Caribbean sun.

The interior ministry said on X, formerly Twitter, that 100,000 people took part in the hour-long march, convened by associations of youth groups in the communist-run nation. "What young people taking part in this march want is that the attacks on Palestine stop," said Cristina Diaz, 22, a physics major at Havana University. Both sides have suffered in the war triggered by the Oct 7 attacks on the Zionist entity by Hamas, she said. "It would be naive to think this is a war," she added. "It is genocide."

Diaz-Canel walked at the head of the procession along with his wife, Lis Cuesta, and senior government officials. As the protesters marched past the US Embassy on the seaside avenue, some yelled "fas-



HAVANA: (From left) Cuba's Prime Minister Manuel Marrero, President Miguel Diaz-Canel and his wife Lis Cuesta take part in a march in support of the Palestinian people on Nov 23, 2023. — AFP

cist Yankees, you are terrorists". It was the biggest of several such pro-Palestinian rallies held in Cuba since the war started. Palestinians studying medicine in Cuba also took part. "Many thanks to the people and government of Cuba for always having supported Palestine," said Isaam Aldawodeh, 22, one of the students. — AFP

Gazans return to destroyed homes...

Continued from Page 1

upside down since Oct 7. Weeks of sustained Zionist bombardment has killed nearly 15,000 people, around two thirds of them women and children. Some 1.7 million of the territory's 2.4 million people are estimated to have been displaced, and more than half of homes damaged or destroyed.

A multitude of men, women and children travelled on foot, carts or tuk-tuks with the few belongings they had taken with them when the war started. One woman carried her cat in her arms through the streets. Some families tried to retrieve some living basics from under the rubble before getting back to school shelters, as panic ensued when some unexploded missiles were sighted inside the houses.

Large parts of Gaza have been flattened by thousands of air strikes, and the territory faces shortages of food, water and fuel. Zionist warplanes dropped leaflets warning people in the south not to head back

to the north, which it has previously told Palestinians to leave for their safety. "The war is not over yet," they read. "Returning to the north is forbidden and very dangerous!!!"

Even so, Ghadi Salamat was considering going back from the south. "We're fed up of being here. It's no life. We hope that we can return to Gaza City, even if it's to set up a tent in the rubble," he said. Abu Qussai, however, had no intention of returning. "It's a ghost town. When we left, there was already nothing but rubble," he said. "Why would I go there? To see my destroyed house? To see the bodies of my dead cousins? To be cold outside?" he asked.

Khaled Al-Halabi said he would like to see his home in northern Gaza but did not plan to risk the journey back. At least with the truce "we will finally breathe after 48 days", he said, welcoming the arrival of aid trucks from neighboring Egypt. Raed Saqer, who took refuge in Rafah, said he hoped the promises of increased aid would come true. "We needed this truce to treat the wounded, so that people could recover a little, because people displaced from the north are experiencing an unspeakable tragedy," he said. "We hope it's the first step towards a definitive ceasefire," he added. — AFP

International

Internet out: India deploys shutdowns in name of security

Country records highest number of Internet shutdowns worldwide for fifth consecutive year

NEW DELHI: With the world's largest biometric ID database, a pioneering digital payment system for daily transactions and a flagship space and satellite program, India knows the power of connected technology. But when trouble brews with political unrest or sectarian violence, authorities are quick to sever Internet service to stem disinformation — cutting off millions of people who depend on the web for communication, information and business. For authorities, Internet shutdowns have “become the first tool in their toolkit”, said Indian online civil liberties activist Mishi Choudhary. Some blackouts last hours, others days. Some stretch for months. In India's northeast Manipur state, more than three million people have been cut off from mobile Internet since clashes broke out in May.

That meant it took two months for Phijam Ibungobi to find out that his missing 20-year-old son had been one of the more than 150 people killed in the violence. When the Internet was briefly restored in September, photographs of the young man's corpse circulated on social media. “The Internet meant I could find out the news of my son — even if that news was tragic,” Ibungobi told AFP in tears.

'Default policing measure'

India, the world's largest democracy, with general elections due next year, is also a global leader in Internet shutdowns, according to New York-based online freedom monitors Access Now. Of the 187 Internet shutdowns it recorded worldwide last year, 84 were in India, the “most of any country for the fifth consecutive year”, it said.

The main reasons India gave for the shutdowns were protests and the need to prevent cheating during exams, according to an analysis of blackouts from 2020 to 2022 by the Internet Freedom Foundation. The tactic helps the government shape its narrative “as no counter voices emerge”, said Choudhary, founder of the Software Freedom Law Centre. But she said the authorities fail to understand “what the impact would be”.

Human Rights Watch argues Internet shutdowns “disproportionately hurt” the poorest, who depend on the government's online social support systems. Nearly 121 million people were affected by shutdowns last year, HRW said in a report in June. “In the age of ‘Digital India’, where the government has pushed to make Internet fundamental to every aspect of life, the authorities instead use Internet shutdowns as a default policing measure,” HRW's Jayshree Bajoria said in the report.

'Economic security'

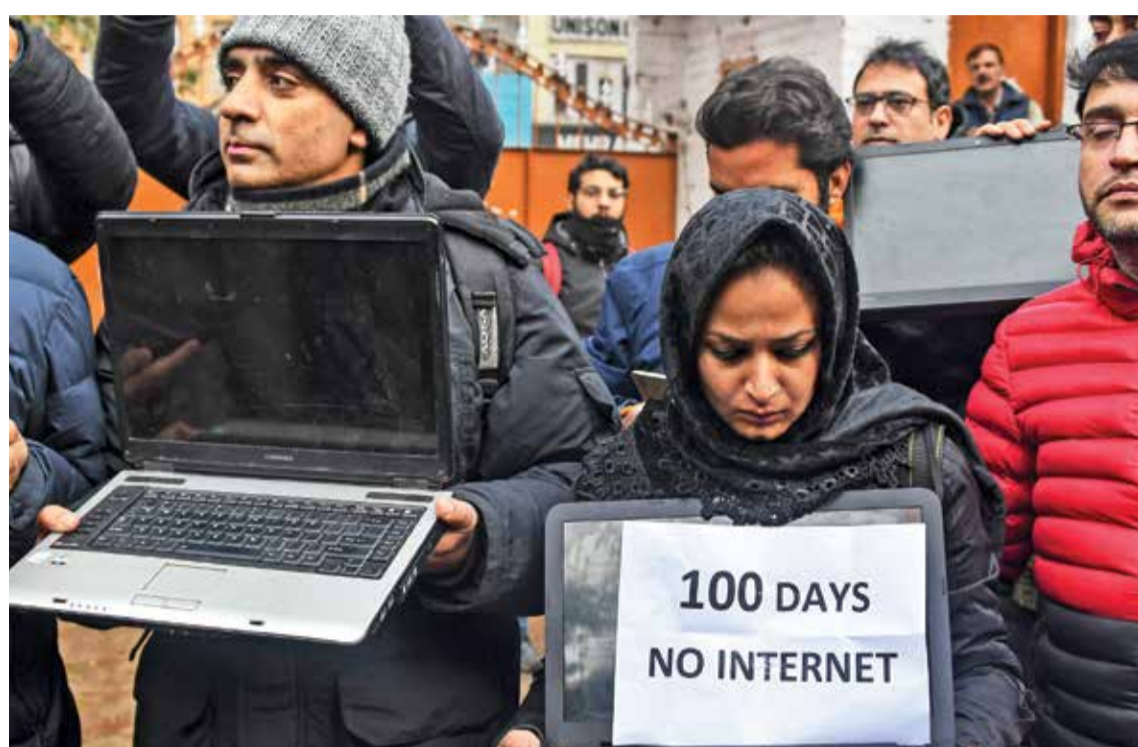
In Indian-administered Kashmir, a 500-day blackout in 2019 and 2020 cost the economy more than \$2.4 billion, according to the region's traders. “Internet access is vital for realizing economic security,” Access Now said. From market vegetable sellers to larger businesses dependent on online apps for payment, the loss of Internet access stifles trade.

“I am living hand to mouth,” said Mark Fanai, 42, who was working from home in Manipur for a New Delhi-based law firm when the Internet was cut. Initially, he spent up to 12 hours a week commuting to the state border to send emails and make online payments, but eventually, he was forced to relocate to neighboring Mizoram state.

The bans also hinder journalists. When protesters demanding job quotas in Maharashtra state torched the homes of lawmakers last month, authorities turned off the Internet for three days. “The authorities usually suspend Internet whenever they see some sort of disturbance getting worse,” said Vinod Jire, a journalist in Maharashtra's Beed district. “Work was extremely difficult,” said Jire, who had to leave the district to file his story on the incident. “It is our job to report facts and news accurately.”

'Song and dance'

The government says Internet cuts curb disinformation by stemming rumors from spreading on social media or mobile messaging applications. In



SRINGAR: In this file photo, Kashmiri journalists protest against Internet blockade put by India's government on Oct 12, 2019. — AFP

August, authorities blocked the Internet in parts of Haryana state — just north of the capital New Delhi — when at least six people were killed in sectarian conflict between Hindus and Muslims, violence exacerbated by posts online.

External Affairs minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar has dismissed the “big song and dance” about Internet cuts. “If you've reached the stage where you say an Internet cut is more dangerous than the loss of human lives, then what can I say?” Jaishankar said in 2022.

But Internet access advocate Tanmay Singh points

out that disinformation still spreads offline. “Your primary defense against misinformation is fact verification and fact checking,” said Singh, from the Delhi-based Internet Freedom Foundation. “That primarily happens on the Internet.”

Blackouts also do not address the root causes of conflict, even if they can slow the spread of hate. In troubled Manipur, indigenous tribal leader Ginza Vualzong said the violence had divided a community into rival ethnic groups. “The Internet ban does not solve that issue,” he said. — AFP

UK hits record net migration, piling pressure on Sunak

LONDON: Net migration to the UK hit a record high last year, official figures showed Thursday, heaping pressure on Conservative Prime Minister Rishi Sunak who has vowed to reduce new arrivals. Immigration — long a vexed political issue in Britain — is set to be a key issue in a general election expected next year, which the main opposition Labour Party are currently favorites to win. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) said net migration — the difference between the number of people arriving in Britain and those leaving — was 745,000 in 2022, higher than previously thought. It revised the figure upwards by 139,000 from what was already a record when released in May, citing “unexpected patterns” in the behavior of migrants. Sunak has long described regular immigration levels as “too high”.

His party won a landslide under the leadership of Boris Johnson at the last election in 2019, largely on a promise to bring net migration numbers down. The Conservatives have repeatedly promised that leaving the European Union, which ended the free movement of people from member states, would allow the UK to “take back control” of its borders.

But legal migration has soared since Britain formally left the EU in January 2020. In 2021, net migration was 488,000. Some Tory backbenchers urged Sunak to “act now” to cut net migration and meet the party's 2019 pledge. “This really is ‘do or die’ for our party,” the New Conservatives group of right-wing lawmakers said in a statement.

A spokesperson for Sunak said it was clear net migration “remains far too high” and hinted that further measures to reduce it were on the horizon. The government has already cracked down on visa applications for dependents of students and is reportedly mulling raising the minimum salary threshold for



In this file photo, Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI) Severn class lifeboat, the City of London II, makes its way towards migrants travelling in an inflatable boat across the English Channel. — AFP

work visas. “We believe there is much more to do and where the (visa) system is being abused we will leave no stone unturned in rooting that out,” Sunak's spokesperson told reporters. The ONS added though that net migration for the year to June 2023 is estimated to drop to 672,000.

'Failure'

It said 1.2 million people came to Britain during that time, while 508,000 left. “While it is too early to say if this is the start of a new downward trend, these more recent estimates indicate a slowing of immigration coupled with increasing emigration,” the ONS said.

Interior minister James Cleverly focused on this lower number. “This figure is not showing a significant increase from last year's figures and is largely in line with our own immigration statistics,” the home secretary said. Most new arrivals were from non-EU countries, including India and Nigeria, continuing a trend seen since the 2016 Brexit referendum.

of migrants without proper papers to reach the border. Since August, around 700 asylum seekers have entered Finland without a visa over its 1,300-kilometer (800-mile) border with Russia.

This prompted Finland, over the past week, to close all but its northernmost border crossing with Russia, in the Murmansk region. Finnish officials claim Russia is attempting to destabilize its Nordic neighbor. “This is a systematic and organized action by the Russian authorities,” Prime Minister Petteri Orpo said Monday. Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova denied Russia was acting deliberately. “Finnish authorities are beginning to make clumsy excuses, warming up Russophobic sentiments,” she said.

Weaponizing migration

Finland's traditionally cordial relationship with

Study accounted for 39 percent of non-EU arrivals, while 33 percent came for work — up from 22 percent last year. The ONS attributed that rise to more health and care visas, with Britain's National Health Service under pressure to find staff.

On top of the record number of legal migrants, Sunak is struggling to cut the number of irregular arrivals crossing the Channel from northern France on the small boats. More than 28,000 have undertaken the dangerous crossing this year.

The government has deemed such crossings illegal but its much-trumpeted plan to deport asylum seekers to Rwanda was struck down by the courts last week. Sunak has vowed new “emergency” legislation and a revised treaty with Kigali to get flights in the air by the spring. The Tories, in power since 2010, lag well behind center-left Labour in opinion polls ahead of an election that must be held by January 2025. Labour said Thursday's figures highlighted the government's “failure” on immigration. — AFP

its eastern neighbor has soured since Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine. After Finland reversed its decades-long policy of military non-alignment and joined NATO in April, Moscow warned of “countermeasures.” “Russia and the West, including Finland, are in a very deep conflict,” said Arkady Moshes, Russia Program Director at the Finnish Institute of International Affairs (FIIA). “Weaponizing migration is one of the instruments” Russia possesses.

Moshes said there were “parallels” to the Belarus-EU border crisis in 2021. The EU has claimed President Alexander Lukashenko pushed tens of thousands of migrants across the Belarus border to Poland in retaliation for sanctions. “The actions of the Finnish government show that the experience of Poland has been taken into account,” Moshes said. The European Union's border protection agency Frontex said Thursday it will deploy 50 officers to Finland, to help boost the country's border controls.

Poland toughened its border to resolve the crisis and Finnish authorities are aiming to do the same. Anticipating that Moscow could use migrants as political pressure, Finland in February began building a 200-kilometer (124-mile) fence along its Russian border. But only three kilometers of the fence is finished. In terms of information warfare, pushing people to the Finnish border is potentially “a double-win situation for Russia,” Moshes said. Finland is left with two bad options: It can either keep the border open and accept the migrants, or close the border completely. “If Finland does not close its border ... that will show that the West is weak” in Russia's eyes, Moshes said. If Finland closes the border, Russia can play the victim and call the response “a Russophobic action,” he added. — AFP

Dutch Muslims between fear and support for Wilders

VENLO: Dutch Muslim community leaders voiced anger, fear, and defiance after the election victory of anti-Islam firebrand Geert Wilders, but on the ground the picture seemed more nuanced, with many even expressing support because of his economic policies. No mosques, headscarves or Qurans: the manifesto of Wilders' PVV party is unashamedly anti-Islam. “We want less Islam in the Netherlands,” says the PVV platform.

Wilders has called Moroccans “scum” and received death threats after threatening to organize a competition to draw cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH). He toned down his anti-Islam rhetoric during the campaign, focusing more on issues such as the rising cost of living. But community leader Muhsin Koktas of the CMO Muslim association said: “I don't know if Muslims are still safe in the Netherlands. I am worried about this country.”

Habib el-Kaddouri from the SMN association of Moroccan Dutch told AFP that “some people are scared, others uncertain about their future, about what the result means for their citizenship or place in Dutch society.” “At the same time, I have noticed that people are also combative. ‘We won't be driven away by Mr Wilders' or a right-wing cabinet,” he said.

'He deserves a chance'

But Muslims AFP spoke to in Amsterdam and the eastern city of Venlo painted a more nuanced picture, with some attaching more importance to economic issues than to his past comments about Islam. “I'm from Turkish descent and a Muslim. Yet, I voted for Geert Wilders,” said one Venlo-born man on condition of anonymity. “Why? Because we are all poor and we think he can make a change. All this talk about closing mosques is just politics,” said the 41-year-old unemployed man munching a toasted cheese sandwich.

In an Amsterdam cafe, Burak Cen, a 40-year-old taxi driver said he didn't vote, but he would have voted for Wilders. “I think he deserves a chance,” he told AFP. “I honestly think he's just trying to drum up votes with his propaganda about mosques and Muslims. But otherwise, what he says about the Dutch and poverty is right,” added Cen. “Refugees are given priority for housing while we have to wait 20 years for a home,” he said, voicing a key campaign topic around a crippling shortage of affordable housing. Many people however declined to comment to camera. — AFP



UTRECHT: A woman carries a sign reading “A racist is not a minister” as supporters of the Antifascist Action (Antifa) protest on Nov 23, 2023 one day after the victory of Geert Wilders's party. — AFP

Finland pushing back 'weaponized migration' on border with Russia

HELSINKI: Growing numbers of asylum-seeking migrants have in recent weeks been crossing the once quiet border from Russia into Finland in freezing temperatures, a move Helsinki has labelled a hybrid attack. Cloaked in heavy winter coats, many have been arriving on bicycles, attempting to bypass a ban on crossing the border on foot. Finland barred entry by bicycle last week. In early October, the Finnish border guard raised the alarm about a shift in Moscow's policy, saying Russia was allowing an increasing number



SALLA, Finland: Finnish border guards and migrants with bicycles are pictured at the international border crossing on Nov 21, 2023. — AFP

Business

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 26, 2023

‘Black Friday’ kicks off US shopping season amid economic unease

182 million consumers expected to shop in stores and online over weekend

NEW YORK: US retailers' efforts to attract holiday gift buyers build to a crescendo this weekend as the "Black Friday" shopping day kicked off with big discounts. The major sales day after Thanksgiving, a custom increasingly adopted in Europe and other markets, comes amid lingering unease over the economy this year.

As a result, markdowns are expected to be especially deep, reflecting the pressure stores are under to lure US consumers jaded by stubborn inflation for some goods and lingering effects from Covid-19 upheaval. "Black Friday" will be followed by the newer "Cyber Monday," as the sector seeks to entice bargain-hunters.

On Friday, crowds swarmed through the doors of the Macy's department store in Manhattan when it opened at 6 am (1100 GMT) after a symbolic countdown. Consumers said they were not only looking for deals but happy to soak up the festive atmosphere. "It's Black Friday, and there's great sales. And there's no place better than Manhattan to go shopping at Christmas time," said shopper Sandee Foster, 74.

Another customer, 30-year-old Cristina Carradero from Puerto Rico, said it was a tradition to go Black Friday shopping with her mother. "We're just having a different kind of version here in New York," she said. In Nantucket, an island off Massachusetts, President Joe Biden went shopping with a stop at a bookstore, which he called a "tradition." Biden and his family make an annual trip to the posh vacation locale for Thanksgiving. Meanwhile, e-commerce giant Amazon was hit by strikes at locations in Britain, Germany and Italy during the annual shopping extravaganza, as workers demand higher wages and

better conditions. Forecasters expect heavy consumer traffic, with the National Retail Federation (NRF) predicting more than 182 million consumers will shop in stores and online over the weekend.

That turnout would top last year's level by 16 million and constitute a record since the trade group began tracking the period in 2017. While Black Friday itself remains crucial, stores have been offering deals for weeks, marketing Black Friday sales earlier in October.

The bargains reflect hyper competition among retailers trying to win over consumers inundated with offers in digital spaces. A New York shopper who gave his name only as Raf, 23, said staff were more "aggressive" in promotions than before.

"Consumers will not sit out, but they will spend less," said Randy Allen, senior lecturer at Cornell University. "Retailers are concerned."

Especially hot items this holiday season include mainstays like Lego and Hot Wheels, along with Barbie, which is still basking in the afterglow of this summer's blockbuster movie. Game consoles remain in demand, along with Meta Quest 3, a virtual reality headset, new iPhones and tablets.

Yet, with lingering inflation for groceries and other staples, many shoppers will buy items only if they are on sale. "The shopper will be looking for items they really want and need," said Neil Saunders, managing director of GlobalData.

Saunders said retailers "are carefully targeting discounts" instead of "having a promotional free-for-all." The NRF has projected overall holiday sales growth of between three and four percent, which would mark a return to the pre-pandemic



ARCADIA, United States: People shop during Black Friday in Santa Anita within the city of Arcadia, California on November 25, 2022. — AFP

trend of more modest increases.

While inflation has slowed from a year ago, interest rates remain high. That can lead to punishing interest costs if consumers don't pay off their credit cards. Households also have less excess cash compared with a year ago, and those with student loans are back on the hook for interest payments

after a moratorium expired. Although consumers have been bolstered by a strong job market that has kept unemployment under four percent, Allen pointed to recent layoffs and meager bonuses in some high-paying industries. These include banking and technology, "masking" vulnerabilities and potentially weighing on sales. — AFP

Japan's tallest skyscraper opens in Tokyo

TOKYO: Japan's new tallest building opened in Tokyo on Friday, taking the title from an Osaka skyscraper. The 330-metre-high Azabudai Hills Mori JP Tower is not Japan's highest structure, which is still the Tokyo Skytree, a broadcasting and observation tower in the capital's east, which stands at 634 meters.

But it does have a 30-metre advantage over the Abeno Harukas building in Osaka, previously Japan's tallest building. The JP Tower and its surrounding facilities have an overall floor area of around 861,700 square meters, and include office space, green areas, residential units, hotel rooms, and shops and restaurants, its developer Mori Building said in a statement.

The development project in central Tokyo was aimed at renewing the area filled with small wooden houses and old buildings, while also offering "infrastructure such as roads and parks", according to Mori Building's website. The area "will host approximately 20,000 office workers and 3,500 residents when fully occupied and is expected to welcome 30 million visitors per year", it said. It is scheduled to be surpassed in March 2028, with the completion of a 390-metre-high building by Mitsubishi Estate, also in Tokyo, the Asahi Shimbun reported. — AFP



TOKYO: This general view shows a night view of Tokyo's newest skyscraper, the Azabudai Hills Mori JP Tower complex, after its official opening earlier in the day as Tokyo Tower (back R) looms nearby in central Tokyo on November 24, 2023. — AFP

UAE: Fossil fuel power and COP28 host

PARIS: A gas-guzzling fossil fuel exporter trying to spearhead more ambitious climate action, the United Arab Emirates remains heavily dependent on hydrocarbons for its prosperity. Energy-intensive construction and cooling activities flourish as gleaming skyscrapers sprout from the once barren desert and air conditioning is ubiquitous in the scorching heat. Electricity in the Emirates is nearly entirely produced by burning gas (82.5 percent in 2022).

Renewables only account for five percent of its power, and a burgeoning nuclear capacity has seen atomic power's share jump to almost 13 percent in 2022, according to the energy think tank Ember.

In July, the UAE announced an updated climate action strategy, joining a growing list of nations committed to tripling renewable energy production by 2030. It unveiled plans to slash emissions in everything from industry to transport, including a new focus on electric cars.

It recently launched its first wind farm. And just two weeks before COP28 it inaugurated the Al-Dhafa solar power plant — one of the largest in the world. But the UAE's climate strategy has been deemed "insufficient" or "highly insufficient", depending on the criteria, by Climate Action Tracker (CAT), a monitoring group which tracks government climate action and measures it against the global effort needed to keep warming below 1.5 degrees Celsius compared to pre-industrial levels.

CAT cited planned increases in oil production,

offshore gas exploration and a 2050 net-zero target lacking credible emission reduction policies as reasons for its rating. The Emiratis, however, highlight the rising diversification of their economy — even if oil and gas remain dominant, they represent 30 percent of GDP compared to Saudi Arabia's 42 percent.

The UAE is the seventh largest producer of oil in the world, ahead of Iran and Kuwait, through their state-owned Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC). ADNOC plans to invest \$150 billion dollars between 2023-2027 to expand its oil and gas production capacity. In October, it announced a new off-shore gas project known as the Hail and Ghasha fields. The project, located within a marine biosphere reserve, is spearheaded by ADNOC CEO Sultan Al-Jaber — also the founding chief executive of the renewable energy company Masdar and this year's COP28 president.

His chairmanship of the climate talks has drawn the ire of campaigners accusing the country of double dealing. Jaber has said the UAE's oil is cheaper and less carbon-intensive than that of other producers and that ADNOC seeks to increase the capacity for extracting oil, rather than its production, to meet future demand. Fossil fuels should only be abandoned once enough renewables can replace them, he argues. The UAE supports carbon capture and storage (CCS) technologies that remain far from capable of storing the billions of tons of CO2 necessary.

"With its focus on 'emissions-free' fossil fuels and CCS, the UAE is clearly pushing an agenda to distract attention from a fossil fuel phase-out," said Mia Moisiu, of the NewClimate Institute non-profit organization. According to the non-profit Global Witness, ADNOC is "on course" to increase its total emissions from oil and gas by more than 40 percent, reaching 684 million tons of CO2 by 2030 — nearly triple the nation's 2021 emissions. — AFP

Sweden CB leaves rate unchanged after series of hikes

STOCKHOLM: Sweden's central bank on Thursday left its key rate unchanged at four percent, after a year and a half of successive hikes aimed at reining in inflation. The Riksbank joins the US Federal Reserve and European Central Bank which also paused their rate hike campaigns at their latest policy meetings inflation has slowed.

The Swedish central bank said in a statement that while inflation has fallen it was "still too high", and it was "prepared to raise the policy rate further if inflation prospects deteriorate." "All in all, the Executive Board assesses that monetary policy needs to remain contractionary, but that it is appropriate now to hold the policy rate unchanged," the bank said. Sweden's consumer price index came in at 6.5 percent in October, according to Statistics Sweden, the same as it did in September.

Adjusted for fixed interest rates (CPIF) — the figure used by the Riksbank to guide monetary policy — was 4.2 percent in October, while the bank targets inflation around two percent. "Prices for services are increasing at a rapid pace and contributing significantly to total inflation. In addition, the krona is still unjustifiably weak, which is holding up the rate of price increase for goods," the bank said. The Swedish economy is struggling to recover, contracting by 0.8 percent in the second quarter compared with the previous quarter. Against this backdrop, analysts at Capital Economics noted that they "would be surprised if the Bank does in fact raise rates again," despite its insistence that it was ready to do so. — AFP

Somalia joins East Africa trade bloc in 'milestone'

NAIROBI: Conflict-weary Somalia on Friday became the eighth member of the East African Community (EAC) in a move hailed as a milestone for the troubled Horn of Africa country. Somalia's population of 17 million will boost the EAC's market to more than 300 million people as the bloc seeks to expand free trade across the region. Its admission was announced at an EAC summit in the Tanzanian town of Arusha, and it joins Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda.

Analysts said while it would be an economic boost for Somalia and its neighbors, it could pose security challenges for the EAC. President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud described Friday's announcement as a "new chapter" in the history of Somalia, which has long been blighted by conflict, political turmoil and climate disasters. "This moment is not just a culmination of aspiration but a beacon of hope for a future replete with possibilities and opportunities," he told the summit. The Arusha-headquartered EAC was founded in 2000 and works to encourage trade by removing customs duties between member states and allowing free movement of citizens. It established a common market in 2010.

Somalia boasts the longest coastline of a mainland African country at over 3,000 kilometers (1,800 miles) and its membership will give the EAC access to the Arabian peninsula. Only two other members — Kenya and Tanzania — have access to the sea. The UN mission in Somalia said on X, formerly Twitter, it was "another milestone in Somalia's return to its rightful place in the international community and engagement with its neighbors".

The African Union mission in Somalia (ATMIS) also hailed it as "historic" and a new step towards regional integration and socio-economic development. Excluding Somalia, EAC countries cover 4.8 million square kilometers (1.8 million square miles) of land and had a combined gross domestic product of \$305 billion, according to the bloc's website.

Total EAC trade was \$78.75 billion in 2022, it said. But the admission of Somalia could cause security jitters for the bloc as the country is struggling to put down a deadly insurgency by the Islamist militant Al-Shabaab group. After making significant progress, Somalia's offensive against the Al-Qaeda-linked group has stalled for months and raised concerns about the government's capacity to crush the 16-year insurrection. EAC members Kenya and Uganda contribute troops to an African Union force which was first deployed to Somalia in 2007 to crush Al-Shabaab.

In November last year, the EAC also sent troops into the restive east of the DR Congo, which had joined the bloc last year, after the resurgence of the M23 rebel group. Mogadishu-based think tank the Heritage Institute for Policy Studies said the accession of Somalia — which has been seeking to join the bloc since 2012 — was a "pivotal leap" in the EAC's expansion across East Africa. But it said in a report ahead of the summit that Somalia's "poor track record in governance, human rights and the rule of law" could hinder its smooth integration. — AFP

Business

India tunnel crash 'wake-up call' for Modi's infrastructure drive

Experts call for 'complete rethink' of infrastructure projects

NEW DELHI: India's aggressive infrastructure push into the ecologically fragile Himalayan mountains has been given a "wake-up call" by the collapse of a road tunnel that trapped 41 men, environmental experts say.

The partial cave-in of the under-construction Silkyara road tunnel in northern Uttarakhand state nearly two weeks ago — with the desperate men still awaiting rescue on Friday — was only the latest disaster in the geologically unstable region. Added to that are the challenges caused by rising global temperatures unleashing a cascade of extreme weather that scientists warn will get worse.

"The scale and extent of the infrastructure development needs a complete rethink," Shripad Dharmadhikary, an environmental researcher and veteran activist, told AFP.

India's monsoon rains mean flooding is common, but major infrastructure projects in the mountains — including hydroelectric dams, railways and roads — are being built in areas hit ever harder by storm surges and landslides. "It is one thing to build roads for local connectivity," Dharmadhikary said.

"But roads for big hydropower projects are much wider, increasing vulnerability and risk... Scale makes a big difference," Raghav Chandra, ex-chairman of the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI), warned Friday that "building a tunnel through a mountain is perilous", but dangers were multiplied when such large-scale projects are poorly carried out. "The accident is a wake-up call about the perils of undertaking massive construction projects in the fragile Himalayan range, which is under threat from intense human activity and the vagaries of the climate crisis," Chandra wrote in the Hindustan Times, alongside another top ex-NHAI official, BS Singla.

The Himalayas — the world's highest mountain

range, with peaks driven upwards by colliding continental plates — is one of the globe's most seismically active regions, with earthquakes common.

Scientists say glaciers in the Himalayas are melting faster than ever due to climate change, exposing communities to unpredictable and costly disasters. Last month, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said Himalayan regions were struggling with rapidly melting glaciers, warning on a visit to neighboring Nepal that the "rooftops of the world are caving in".

The Silkyara tunnel is part of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's infrastructure project aimed at cutting travel times between some of the most popular Hindu temples in the country. The 4.5-kilometre (2.7-mile) passage is meant to connect Uttarkashi and Yamunotri, two of the holiest sites. For Modi, leader of the BJP, the grand projects help burnish his appeal, with elections due next year. But India's projects are also focused on improving access to strategic areas bordering rival China.

New Delhi has been wary of Beijing's growing military assertiveness and their 3,500-kilometre shared frontier has been a perennial source of tension. "Tunnelling helps to reduce travel time and plays a strategic role by enabling quicker passage of defense armaments and military troops," Chandra and Singla added. "But, with the growing urgency to speed up construction, the manifold risks and challenges involved... are often ignored." After the Silkyara collapse, the NHAI said it would assess all 29 under-construction tunnels to "ensure safety and adherence to the highest quality standards". Arnold Dix, president of the International Tunnelling and Underground Space Association, pointed out the advantages of building tunnels.

"The environmental footprint of a tunnel is likely to be less than the environmental footprint of a much larger and more complex road," Dix told



UTTARKASHI, India: Rescue personnel work at the mouth of the collapsed under construction Silkyara tunnel in the Uttarkashi district of India's Uttarakhand state, on November 24, 2023. - AFP

AFP at the Silkyara tunnel site, where he is helping rescue efforts. Campaigners say that while development is needed, the breakneck pace is causing problems, including a surge of unregulated building development replacing the forests that helped keep hillsides stable. "This decade... the Himalayas have been tunnelled, blasted, cut, gouged, turned to rubble and concretized as never before," environmental

campaigner Priyadarshini Patel wrote in the Times of India this week. "The development model in this young, fragile mountain range has been disastrous and needs course correction," added Patel, head of Ganga Ahvaan, a community group working to protect the Himalayas and the watershed of the Ganges river. "Mega-projects are not what the Himalayas are about, culturally or geologically". - AFP

Argentine retailers struggle to keep pace with prices

MORON, Argentina: Paola Basso sighs as she hastily sticks price tags one on top of the other in a suburb of Buenos Aires, as the cost of goods soars after the election of libertarian outsider Javier Milei.

"It doesn't stop," Basso said. Annual inflation in Argentina is already at 143 percent, and prices have risen further after the outgoing government this week eased price controls on basic goods — which Milei is expected to scrap. "Customers ask us to ... buy eggs individually. It hurts, people are in need and it's like taking away their dignity, but the prices are crazy," said the grocer in Moron, a working-class neighborhood in the western suburbs. On the shelves, some products have up to four labels superimposed, testifying to the dizzying inflation. "These are crazy days," said Paola's husband Fernando Savore, vice-president of the Buenos Aires grocers' federation. "Although we already changed prices last week. We saw increases of around 25 to 30 percent at the wholesalers" since the election. He said pasta had gone up 50 percent and cleaning products 30 percent.

Milei, a free-market champion who is opposed to state intervention in the economy, will take office on December 10. The imminent end of the agreement on price controls is fanning inflation even more, said economist Hernan Letcher. "The increase will be more marked next month, because the market expects a significant devaluation (of the peso) when Milei takes office, and therefore the possibility of an inflationary resurgence," he told AFP.

The government has in recent years kept strict control of the exchange rate of the peso, at great ex-



A woman stands in a vegetable street stall in Buenos Aires on November 22, 2023. - AFP

pense to the state, and Milei has said he would push to eliminate these controls.

In the Moron supermarket, client Mario Amor, 70, scrutinizes the price tags. "It's gone up a lot again. I am looking to see who has the best prices. I don't know where to buy," he said, leaving with empty bags. In another aisle, seamstress Clara Tedesco, 60, is "horrified" to see the price of cheese "has gone up again this week".

"It's exhausting, you analyze the prices, you go from one place to the next. You compare, you calculate, and you come back. Buying groceries is harder than finding a husband." In the Mataderos neighborhood, butchers leave their priceboards empty. "We no longer waste time writing them down, it changes

every two days," said the manager of one shop, Evelyn Garcia. "The customers know it, they don't get angry. There is more sadness than anger," she said.

In beef-mad Argentina, sales of the most expensive cuts of meat have declined in favor of lower-quality cuts or cheaper pork chops. "People already changed their habits so that there is still a bit of meat on their plates. Now, I don't know what they're going to do. Everything has gone up by more than 10 percent this week," said Evelyn, whose store was empty. At a street market near Moron, Clarisa Gomez dusts off a crate of kiwis at her fruit and vegetable stand, where all prices have soared this week. "People buy two apples, one banana. If this continues I will have to sell by the slice." - AFP

Argentina's Milei discusses economic crisis with IMF chief

BUENOS AIRES: Argentina's president-elect Javier Milei and IMF chief Kristalina Georgieva had a first meeting via video call on Friday, in which they discussed the country's economic crisis. Argentina has had a \$44 billion credit program with the IMF since the government of ex-president Mauricio Macri requested financial assistance in 2018.

The outgoing administration of Alberto Fernandez renegotiated the loan, but the recession that accompanied the COVID-19 pandemic and a severe drought this year made it difficult for Argentina to meet the targets agreed with the IMF. "Today I had an excellent conversation with the director of the IMF, @KGeorgieva, in which we talked about the great economic challenge facing our country," Milei said on X, formerly known as Twitter.

"I told her about different aspects of our fiscal adjustment plan and our monetary program. The Fund was collaborative in finding the structural solutions that Argentina needs."

Libertarian outsider Milei promised during the campaign to drastically cut public spending as part of a program that includes eliminating the central bank and dollarizing the Argentine economy.

He later toned down some of his rhetoric, leaving uncertainty over his actual plans. Georgieva wrote on X that she and Milei discussed "the significant challenges for Argentina's economy and the decisive policy actions needed." "The IMF is committed to support efforts to durably reduce inflation, improve public finances, and raise private-sector-led growth," she said. Argentina's annual rate of inflation is over 140 percent and 40 percent of the population lives in poverty. - AFP

Amazon hit by 'Black Friday' strikes in Europe

LONDON: Amazon was hit by strikes at various locations in Britain, Germany and Italy during the annual "Black Friday" shopping extravaganza as workers demand higher wages and better working conditions.

UNI Global Union said Amazon would face strikes and protests in more than 30 countries around the world, including the United States, as part of a "Make Amazon Pay" campaign. "Workers know that it doesn't matter what country you're in or what your job title is. We are all united in the fight for higher wages, an end to unreasonable quotas and a voice on the job," said Christy Hoffman, general secretary of UNI Global Union. "That's what workers in Coventry are striking for and that is why workers around the world are standing up to Make Amazon Pay," Hoffman said.

Heard the day after the US Thanksgiving holiday, "Black Friday" has been increasingly adopted in Europe and beyond, with stores offering big discounts to kick off shopping for the holiday gift-giving season. More than 1,000 workers went on strike at an Amazon hub in Coventry, England, which employs 2,300 people and supplies other warehouses, said Stuart Richards, spokesman for the GMB union.

In Germany, the industrial action called by Union Verdi began overnight Thursday, affecting five out of the US e-commerce giant's 20 logistics sites in Europe's biggest economy. Amazon said the strikes in the UK and Germany would have no impact on customers. Workers at the Amazon hub in Castel San Giovanni, between Piacenza and Milan, joined the strike. Citing trade unions, Italy's Ansa news agency reported that 60 percent of permanent employees and 50 percent of temporary workers at the site took part in Friday's strike.

"The mood music is souring for Amazon over this important time as industrial action over pay and conditions by warehouse staff could threaten performance," said Sophie Lund-Yates, lead equity analyst at Hargreaves Lansdown. This "will be something monitored closely by investors," she added.

In Britain, the GMB union said Amazon has refused to talk to the workers. "The pressure GMB members have put on the company has led to Amazon offering pay rises across the board but what they offer is still a long way short of what workers want," Richards said. Workers want their pay to rise from £12 (\$15) per hour currently to £15 per hour. An Amazon UK spokesman said the company regularly reviews its pay "to ensure we offer competitive wages and benefits". He said starting pay in the UK will rise to between £12.30 and £13 per hour depending on the location, from April — a 20-percent increase over two years and 50 percent since 2018. In Germany, Amazon said workers already had a "fair wage and good additional benefits".

Starting wages are at 14 euros (\$15.30) and above per hour, the company said, higher than Germany's minimum wage of 12 euros. But Verdi is pushing for the company to recognize the regional collective agreements of the retail and mail order sector.

In Italy, the union complained about "unacceptable" pay increases as well as a failure by Amazon to raise the amount of meal vouchers and a lack of attention to health issues, among other reasons.

The actions in Italy coincided with a strike called across the whole of northern Italy against Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's budget. In Spain, one-hour work stoppages are planned for "Cyber Monday" on November 27 and the following day, according to the CCOO union, which pointed to poor working conditions and "persistent problems" with human resources at the company's Spanish sites. — AFP



SUNDERLAND, UK: Workers listen as the Nissan President and CEO delivers a speech at the Nissan production plant in Sunderland, north east England on November 24, 2023, where the Japanese vehicle manufacturer announced it will produce electric models of two best-selling cars. - AFP

Nissan invests in two new electric cars in UK

SUNDERLAND, UK: Japanese auto giant Nissan will invest up to £1.12 billion to build electric models of two best-selling cars in Sunderland, northeast England, supporting thousands of jobs, it said Friday. The carmaker will plough the cash into electric versions of its best-selling Juke and Qashqai models in Sunderland, which is its largest factory in Europe and employs around 6,000 people.

"Nissan's latest investment includes up to £1.12 billion (\$1.4 billion) into its UK operations and wider supply chain for R&D (research and development) and manufacturing of the two new models announced today," it said in a statement. The news will spark further investment in infrastructure projects and the broader supply chain, including a new elec-

tric car battery factory, which could bring the total investment up to £2 billion.

"Exciting, electric vehicles are at the heart of our plans to achieve carbon neutrality," said Nissan President and CEO Makoto Uchida. "With electric versions of our core European models on the way, we are accelerating towards a new era for Nissan, for industry and for our customers."

The news comes as Britain looks to take a leading role in the production of electric cars as companies and governments accelerate away from fossil-fuel vehicles.

"Nissan's investment is a massive vote of confidence in the UK's automotive industry, which already contributes a massive £71 billion a year to our economy," said British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, who will attend a formal announcement at the site later on Friday.

"This venture will not only secure Sunderland's future as the UK's Silicon Valley for electric vehicle innovation and manufacturing. "Making the UK the best place to do business is at the heart of our economic plan." - AFP

Business

Crisis-mired Germany to blow through debt limit in 2023

Business morale improves but clouds darkening

BERLIN: German business sentiment improved in November, a survey showed Friday, but analysts warned it was too early to sound the all-clear for the struggling economy. The Ifo institute's closely watched confidence barometer, based on a survey of 9,000 companies, rose to 87.3 points from 86.9 in October.

Analysts surveyed by financial data company FactSet had expected 87.5 points. "Sentiment among the German companies has improved slightly," said Ifo president Clemens Fuest, adding that "the German economy is stabilizing, albeit at a low level".

Germany will seek to suspend a constitutional debt limit for a fourth straight year, its finance minister said Thursday, after a shock court ruling upended government spending plans and sparked a budget crisis. "The federal government will present a supplementary budget to constitutionally secure the expenditures made this year," Finance Minister Christian Lindner said in a post on social media.

Along with the new fiscal plan, the government would put a resolution to parliament declaring an "exceptional emergency situation", the legal basis for suspending the debt rule, he said.

Germany's top court last week said Chancellor Olaf Scholz's government had broken the constitutional debt rule by transferring money earmarked for coronavirus pandemic support to a fund to fight climate change. The ruling left Berlin with a 60-billion-euro (\$65-billion)

hole in its budget and threw sorely needed investments into doubt.

Following the decision, the government suspended most of the projects being financed through the climate fund and imposed a broad spending freeze for the rest of 2023.

Written into the constitution in 2009 under former Chancellor Angela Merkel, the debt brake caps new borrowing in Europe's top economy to 0.35 percent of gross domestic product. The brake was suspended from 2020 to 2022 during the pandemic and energy crisis, but was set to come back into force this year.

Suspending the debt rule again will be a bitter pill for the coalition between the Social Democrats, Greens and pro-business FDP, which had pledged to reapply the constitutional brake this year.

The often-criticized commitment to balanced budgets has become a symbol of Germany's fiscal prudence. The new suspension of the debt rule is a particular blow to Lindner, who has staked his reputation on sound financial management. The finance minister, who has intoned on the importance of clear debt limits, avoided direct mention of the brake in an earlier press conference.

Lindner said he would present the new budget for 2023 next week to "clear the decks" before "we can talk about 2024 and the next few years". "No new debt will be taken on. Rather, the funds that have been used for crisis management will be put on a secure

legal basis," Lindner said in his social media post. The supplementary budget would be worth 40 billion euros, bringing Germany's total deficit for 2023 to 85 billion euros, German weekly Spiegel reported.

The total included money already largely paid out to help tackle households and businesses with soaring energy prices, Spiegel said.

The government this week delayed a planned vote on the budget for next year, while it reviewed the court's ruling. MPs were set to have their final vote on the budget next week. The ruling had already fuelled tensions in Scholz's uneasy coalition, at odds over how best to spend its resources.

The clash has in particular pitted Lindner and his party, the FDP, against the other two parties, some of whom argue the constitutional rules should be reformed. Worth 212 billion euros prior to the court ruling, the climate fund was aimed at speeding Germany's shift to an emissions-free economy.

Cash had also been earmarked for boosting domestic semiconductor production as Europe seeks to reduce its reliance on Asian chip imports. The pot of money is one of several that sit outside the main government budget, including a 100-billion-euro fund to boost the military in response to Russia's war in Ukraine. The defense ministry said the armed forces fund was exempted from the government's 2023 spending freeze. Companies were less pessimistic than in



BERLIN: German Finance Minister Christian Lindner gives a press statement on the effects of Germany's top court ruling that blew a massive hole in the country's finances, at the Finance Ministry in Berlin on November 23, 2023. — AFP

October about the outlook for the months to come. But they "still reported a lack of new orders", said Fuest. For Capital Economics analyst Carsten Brzeski, the Ifo data points to a "bottoming out of the German economy, rather than an imminent rebound".

"It is too insignificant to celebrate," he said. Pointing to the absence of growth factors, Brzeski said the risk that 2024 would be a recession year for Germany has clearly increased.

An ongoing budget crisis buffeting

the government is adding to risks such as higher interest rates and the potential slowing of the US economy. After being buffeted by surging inflation and an energy crisis, Germany is expected to finish the year in recession.

Official data released earlier Friday confirmed preliminary figures that the German economy shrank slightly in the third quarter. The International Monetary Fund has predicted that Germany will be the only major advanced economy to shrink this year. — AFP

Markets suffer post-Thanksgiving sluggishness

NEW YORK: Global stock markets wavered Friday in subdued trading with Wall Street only open for a half session due to the extended Thanksgiving holiday weekend. European equities posted modest gains, with London edging into positive territory after having spent most of the day in the red in the face of the stronger pound and profit-taking.

"The usual adage is when the United States sneezes the world catches a cold — in the latest case, it appears when the US is on holiday, global markets hit the snooze button," said AJ Bell investment director Russ Mould. Wall Street was shut Thursday for the Thanksgiving holiday and closed early on Friday.

The Dow ended 0.3 percent higher, while the S&P 500 was up 0.1 percent. The tech-heavy Nasdaq ticked down 0.1 percent. Among individual companies, Nvidia shares dropped 1.9 percent on a news report that it was delaying the launch of a new AI chip for China. While trading is traditionally light, "the Friday after Thanksgiving also means it is Black Friday, which is why the business media are going to be paying a lot of attention to the retail industry," said Briefing.com analyst Patrick O'Hare.

American shoppers flock to stores for bargains during the annual pre-Christmas "Black Friday" sales event, followed by the newer "Cyber Monday." Consumers are expected to be increasingly price-conscious this year, still jaded by stubborn inflation and lingering effects from the upheaval of the pandemic. Asian traders hoped for fresh moves to help China's troubled property sector after officials called on banks to provide support.

Equities have rallied in recent weeks on optimism the Federal Reserve will not hike interest rates again this cycle with inflation slowing and the economy showing signs of easing without falling into recession. And while minutes from the bank's most recent policy meeting echoed warnings from decision-makers that borrowing costs will likely stay elevated for some time, there is hope that they will cut in 2024. Hong Kong led the losses in Asia trading, having risen over the week, while Shanghai, Seoul, Singapore, Taipei, Jakarta and Bangkok were also down.

Tokyo jumped as dealers caught up with Thursday's Asian advance, while the yen rose against the dollar as Japanese inflation jumped again, adding to bets the central bank will shift from its ultra-loose monetary policy.

Oil prices retreated Friday, extending a two-day fall that came in the wake of OPEC's decision to put back a crucial meeting by four days owing to a row over output quotas. Saudi Arabia and Russia earlier this year announced cuts of a million barrels a day through to 2024 to support prices, and there had been expectations Riyadh was planning to extend that or even cut further. However, African countries are said to be pushing back, causing the standoff.

The reductions have come as prices continue to drop owing to increased non-OPEC supplies, a pick-up in US inventories and easing worries about the effects of the the Zionist entity-Hamas war. — AFP

Japan inflation up 2.9% as energy subsidies reduced

TOKYO: Japanese consumer inflation was up 2.9 percent year-on-year in October as the government reduced subsidies for electricity and gas bills, government data showed Friday. The figure for the world's third-largest economy, which excludes volatile fresh food prices, followed a 2.8 percent on-year jump in September.

"The drop in electricity and city gas bills shrank although the rise of gasoline prices narrowed," a statement accompanying the data release said. The reading was slightly below market expectations of a 3.0 percent increase in a Bloomberg survey. Stripping out fresh food and energy, Japan's prices rose 4.0 percent, data published by the internal affairs ministry showed. September marked

the first time inflation slowed to below three percent since August 2022.

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's government has been providing subsidies for gasoline since January 2022 and electricity and gas since the beginning of this year. They decided to continue the aid, which was originally scheduled to end in September, but halved the subsidy amount for electric and gas fees from October. Earlier this month, Kishida, whose poll numbers are at a record low, announced a stimulus package worth more than \$100 billion as he tries to ease the pressure from inflation.

The supplementary budget for this package is expected to pass the Lower House on Friday, public broadcaster NHK reported. Japan, like other economies around the world, has seen prices rise on the back of the Ukraine war, while a weaker yen has also made imports more expensive.

Unlike other major central banks that have raised interest rates, the Bank of Japan has stuck to its ultra-loose monetary in the expectation that inflation will ease, adding to pressure on the yen. — AFP



TOKYO: A sign for the "Black Friday" sale is posted in a department of an electronics chain store in central Tokyo on November 24, 2023. Japanese consumer inflation was up 2.9 percent year-on-year in October as the government reduced subsidies for electricity and gas bills, government data showed on November 24. — AFP



HERMANKONO, Ivory Coast: Workers pile sacks of cocoa beans at the warehouse of a cocoa cooperative in the village of Hermankono. — AFP photos

Top producer Ivory Coast fears for cocoa output after rains

HERMANKONO, Ivory Coast: "Thirty years I've been in cocoa — and this is the worst season yet," said Siaka Sylla as he contemplated an almost empty warehouse at his cooperative in Ivory Coast, the world's top producer of the bean.

Following exceptionally heavy rain, this year's overall harvest of cocoa, used to manufacture chocolate, is set to be very low. The crop is harvested twice annually — October to March for the main crop and a May to August mid-crop. On a hot November morning, a squad of trucks arrived from the plantations to drop off a few dozen bags of beans at the Scappen cooperative in the village of Hermankono, near the central southern town of Divo, some 200 kilometers (125 miles) from the economic capital Abidjan.

"It's rained too much this year. Usually at this time, trucks are queuing up to unload. Here, we have barely 200 bags whereas we could stock 10 times as many," complained Sylla, chairman of the cooperative grouping some 1,500 planters. He expects harvest volume to drop some three to four times on last year's.

A look in the fields nearby suggests that fear is well-founded. And Analysts confirm as much.

"Traders are worried about another short production year and these feelings have been enhanced by El Nino that could threaten West

Africa crops with hot and dry weather later this year," said Jack Scoville of Price Futures Group. The analyst warned of "tight supplies" amid "more reports of reduced arrivals in Ivory Coast and Ghana," the number two global producer.

By a dirt track which only motorbikes could thread their way along, Bamoussa Coulibaly collected a few rare yellow-red pods from the many cocoa trees. July was a particularly rainy month in Ivory Coast's south, just as the cocoa plants were flowering. As a result, "the flowers fell," the farm worker said as he explained his meager harvest. Of those cocoa pods which resisted, some rotted anyway in the excessive humidity.

Some areas have seen rainfall this year between 20 and even 40 percent above the 1991-2020 norm, according to data from national meteorological service Sodexam.

To blossom fully, cocoa needs a subtle alternation between sunshine and rain. A few kilometers from Hermankono, in the bush near N'Douci, Monique Koffi Amenan waded through a marshy field resulting from weeks of rainfall which caused the neighboring river to burst its banks.

"This year, what we've harvested won't even fill one bag, instead of the usual two. The rain has rotted the cocoa," explained the planter in her 40s who has spent a decade working the area with her husband. "We'd forecast a 20 percent drop on last year and our forecasts are confirmed. With the heavy rains, many pods have rotted," Yves Brahma Kone, who heads Ivorian regulator the Coffee-Cocoa Council (CCC), told AFP.

With a 40 percent share of global supply, Ivory Coast is the world's top producer ahead of neighboring Ghana, whose production has recently suf-



HERMANKONO, Ivory Coast: An agricultural worker harvests cocoa pods at a cocoa plantation in the village of Hermankono.

fered from cocoa swollen shoot virus disease, as well as illegal mining on some cocoa farms. Anticipating a poor crop, Ivory Coast suspended export contracts — some two-thirds of produce usually goes to the EU bloc — back in July.

As a result of that move, cocoa prices have soared on commodity markets beyond \$4,000 a tonne in New York, a level not seen in more than four decades, since 1978.

It was a similar story in London, with a ton fetching £3,478 on November 10, a post-1989 record and up 70 percent on January. The situation threatens to remain critical with the resurgence of the El Nino climate phenomenon threatening western Africa.

"This is proof that climate change is hitting developing countries hardest," said Ivorian economist Seraphin Prao. Even ahead of expected further El Nino woe next year, producers are already fretting over their short-term financial health. In Ivory Coast, the government sets cocoa prices. At 1,000 CFA francs per kilogram (1.50 euros, \$1.70) it is higher this year than in recent seasons, but low volumes will eat into many producer families' revenues.

Cocoa provides a wage for around one in five Ivorians — some six million people — according to the World Bank. "My children are school age — but if cocoa doesn't deliver, how shall we manage?" Amenan worried. "In a liberalized system, farmers would be winners in the current context, as cocoa (prices) reach record levels. In Cameroon, for example, where the price is not set by the state, a kilo of cocoa sells for twice as much," said economist Prao.

Back at the Hermankono cooperative, Siaka Sylla is pinning his hopes on a better intermediate harvest next April. "But that won't make up for our losses," he said. — AFP

Lifestyle



Mango, a 5-year-old Jack Russell dog, waits to enter the Fiuto restaurant.



Dogs sit under a table at the restaurant.



Meals to woof down at Italy's first dog restaurant

Pepe's meal is so good he licks the plate clean. In any other Rome establishment, slobbering on one's chicken and mashed potato would be frowned upon — but this is "Fiuto", Italy's first dogs' restaurant. The lighting is soft, lounge music plays in the background, attentive staff show people and pets to their tables and ask whether fur-

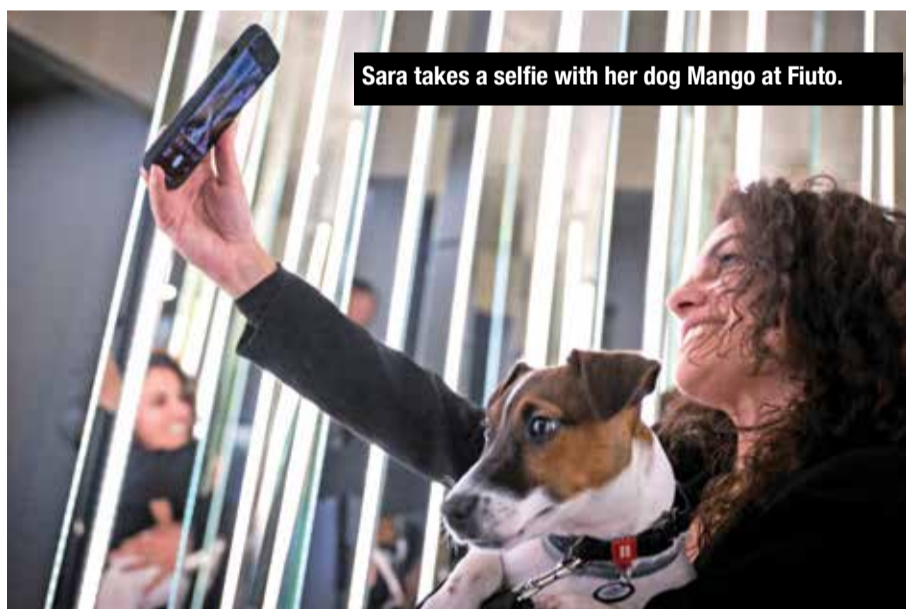
into account, because dogs have many more allergies than humans," said head chef Luca Grammatico, who previously worked as a dog trainer.

Pepe, a four-year-old Bichon with a naughty face, licks every last crumb off his elegant black bowl, almost taking the geometric patterns off too. Pets "are part of our family, so why not treat

choice at the restaurant, which opened just a month ago, because the dogs "can have a balanced diet too", with "suitable ingredients". "No spices, no salt and no oils," insists Grammatico. Food for canine customers is prepared in a separate kitchen to that of their human owners. Portions are tailored to the dogs' size — S (for those weighing two to 10 kg), M (11-20 kg), L (21-30 kg) and even XL (over 30 kg). "Fish is very popular because it is a different flavor to their usual food," Grammatico said.

can't see each other or disturb each other by invading each other's spaces," said Marco Turano.

The restaurant's three co-founders did not expect the establishment in the heart of Rome's Ponte Milvio district to be so successful. "We are obviously super happy," said Turano, 33, as he wrapped up a surprise present — a



Sara takes a selfie with her dog Mango at Fiuto.

ry, four-legged customers might fancy a boiled egg with pureed peas and fontina cheese? Or perhaps a simple fish with ricotta and courgettes?

Thirsty pups can opt for a green apple and watermelon juice, or go wild and have a pear, strawberry or banana one instead. "We drew up the menu with a veterinary nutritionist with whom I determined the ingredients, taking allergies

them like family?" says Sara Nicosanti, as she takes a selfie with Mango, her five-year-old Jack Russell, in the mirror-lined area designed especially for this purpose. There is not a bark to be heard: Guests focus on their designer bowls, sitting on fleece blankets next to their owners' tables.

Nicosanti, a 36-year-old real estate agent, says she is "very happy" with the

Birthday cake

The mood is festive as Romina Lanza, a 40-year-old lawyer, celebrates her dog Rudy's fourth birthday. She sees "Fiuto" (Sense of Smell) as "a very welcome initiative" and brushes off questions as to whether it is right to wait hand and paw on pets, serving them freshly prepared, costly dishes, while people in other parts of the world go hungry. "It's a personal choice, I don't see anything wrong with it," she said.

Neither does Maria Gliottone, a 20-year-old student who discovered the restaurant on TikTok and came with Nala, her two-year-old dog, and Nala's friend Douglas, a four-month-old Corsican puppy. "Those who don't have a dog think that, but those who do (have one) are more than happy to come here with their companion," she said.

Since it opened, the restaurant has welcomed an average of six to 10 dogs every evening during the week and 10 to 15 at weekends, for a price per head of between €8 and €20 (around \$22), depending on the size of the dog. "We've installed screens (between tables) so that when the dogs eat, they



Nala, a two-year-old mixed breed, waits for its bowl of food.

detangling conditioner — for Rudy. And while there won't be candles, he will get a birthday cake of sorts: "A cheese biscuit with ricotta cheese and an end note of green apple". — AFP



Customers look at their dog at Fiuto.



Chef and dog trainer Luca prepares dishes for dogs at Fiuto restaurant.

Rap lyrics at issue in racketeering trial of rapper Young Thug

Opening statements in the long-awaited US gang conspiracy trial targeting rapper Young Thug are due next week — and the prosecution controversially will be allowed to present rap lyrics as evidence. Critics say the practice that's sparked controversy numerous times over past decades is a constitutional violation of expression that stifles creativity, taking slice-of-life lyrics out of context and criminalizing artists of color.



Young Thug

This time around the defense had sought to exclude lyrics from evidence, saying the use of verses could unfairly influence the jury. But Atlanta Judge Ural G. G. G. ruled that 17 sets of lyrics could be admitted, and that additional verses could be presented if prosecutors can "lay the foundation" of how they connect to alleged real-life crimes. The American Civil Liberties Union in the past has deemed prosecuting raps a violation of free speech, including in the trial of Christopher Bassett, an aspiring Tennessee rapper who was convicted of murder.

The ACLU contended in that case that the state's admission of a music video as evidence in the trial violated the first amendment protecting free speech, saying that both images and lyrics fall under its safeguards. Young Thug, the 32-year-old rapper born Jeffery Williams, was one of 28 alleged street gang members originally swept up in a May 2022 racketeering indictment. Many of those defendants have since taken plea deals or will be tried separately.

The accusations included myriad predicate offenses that support an overarching conspiracy charge, including murder, assault, carjacking, drug dealing and theft. Prosecutors say Young Thug's record label is a front for a crime ring, arguing that the defendants belong to a branch of the Bloods street gang identified as Young Slime Life, or YSL. But defense lawyers insist YSL — Young Stoner Life Records, a hip-hop and trap label that Young Thug founded in 2016 — is simply a music label and vague association of artists, not a gang.

'Fictional art form'

During a recent motions hearing on the matter of allowing lyrics as evidence, the prosecution said "the question is not rap lyrics. The question is gang lyrics." "These are party admissions," said prosecutor Mike Carlson. "They just happen to come in the form of lyrics." But the defense countered that "rap is the only fictional art form treated this way". "As soon as you put these lyrics in front of a jury the blinders drop," said Doug Weinstein, who represents the artist Yak Gott.

Several studies attest to Weinstein's argument, including a 2016 paper published in the "Psychology, Public Policy, and Law" journal that found rap was evaluated "more negatively" than country or in a control group. The findings, authors said, "highlight the possibility that rap lyrics could inappropriately impact jurors when admitted as evidence to prove guilt."

Erik Nielson, a University of Richmond professor and specialist on the subject, told AFP in an interview earlier this year that prosecuting rap lyrics "resides in a much longer tradition of punishing black expression". He noted that the explosion of social media has exacerbated the "troubling" trend of prosecuting rap by making "this music and these videos far more accessible to everyone."

Nielson could not comment directly on the YSL case as he will testify in it as an expert witness, but said that "we know that this issue of rap on trial is just one manifestation of a system that is hell-bent on locking up young men of color". The scholar said he thinks prosecutors see lyrics as "insurance" that they will secure a conviction. "If you have other evidence, don't use the rap lyrics," Nielson said. "And if you don't have other evidence, don't bring the charges in the first place."

Monday's opening statements are slated to begin nearly 11 months after a painstaking jury selection process began, in the same courthouse where former president Donald Trump is also embroiled in a racketeering case. The YSL trial could continue well into 2024: The prosecution filed a list of hundreds of potential witnesses. — AFP



Shakira

Shakira pays €6.6m in another Spain tax fraud case

Colombian superstar Shakira has paid €6.6 million (\$7.2 million) to a Spanish court investigating her for unpaid taxes, her agent said Friday, just days after she reached a deal to avoid trial in another tax case. Spanish prosecutors in July opened a second case against the 46-year-old singer, accusing her of using a network of companies, some of them based in tax havens, to cheat Spain's tax office out of some €6.6 million in 2018, including interest and adjustments.

Shakira paid the court in August, the agency that represents her told

AFP, confirming a report in daily newspaper El Periodico. The 6.6-million-euro payment does not imply either the singer's guilt or innocence in the case, but is "another demonstration of her willingness to repay her possible debts to the Spanish tax authorities", the newspaper said.

Separately, the "Hips Don't Lie" singer Monday reached a last-minute settlement with Spanish prosecutors to avoid trial for tax fraud on income she earned between 2012 and 2014. As part of that deal Shakira agreed to pay a fine of €7.3 million, equal to 50 per-

cent of the amount of unpaid tax. She had already paid €17.45 million to the Spanish tax authorities to settle her situation in this case.

The singer, who had previously rejected a deal offered by prosecutors, said in a statement she had settled "with the best interest of my kids at heart who do not want to see their mom sacrifice her personal well-being in this fight". Shakira moved to Miami with her two sons in April following her split from former FC Barcelona star defender Gerard Pique. — AFP

Lifestyle



Members of the band Madness open the shutters to waiting members of the public at the HMV Shop on Oxford Street in central London on Nov 24, 2023. - AFP photos



Madness pose for a photograph after opening the HMV Shop.



Canadian businessman and owner of HMV Doug Putman holds his dog Ollie as he poses for a photograph outside the HMV store.

British music retailer HMV returned to the iconic site of its former flagship store in central London on Friday, in a much-needed boost to the flagging fortunes of the capital's premier shopping street. The re-opening of the historic shop comes as authorities fight back against a wave of so-called American candy stores which have plagued central London since the pandemic. UK 1980s band Madness joined Canadian owner Doug Putman as the store threw open its doors.



Putman said it was a "pretty great moment" and a sign of the "positive direction things are going in here". "It is all about balance. There is no problem having the odd candy store here but people don't need tens of them," he added. The entrepreneur even brought his dog Ollie, a dead ringer for Nipper, the original model for the famous HMV logo featuring a dog listening to its late master's voice coming from a gramophone. HMV stands for "His Master's Voice".

Stepped in musical history, the one-time HMV store at 363 Oxford Street was opened in 1921 by English composer Edward Elgar and later helped propel The Beatles to fame. But in recent years, the capital's main



Members of the public queue for the opening of the HMV Shop on Oxford Street.

shopping thoroughfare has struggled as big department stores such as Debenhams and House of Fraser shut. "It feels like Times Square in New York, heavy on quantity but low on quality," unimpressed US tourist Brandy Fons, 51, told AFP.

Fons, a film publicist on a visit to London with her teenage daughter Sienna, said they had been struck by the amount of rubbish constantly needing to be cleared up. "We've been to better, a lot better," she said. After HMV Oxford Street closed in 2019, it was con-

verted into one of the many unwanted sweet stores that popped up during the pandemic when only food shops were allowed to stay open.

Local authorities say that at its peak, there were 30 candy or souvenir shops on Oxford Street, traditionally home to big, prestigious retailers. They also accuse them of questionable business practices and say they owe millions in unpaid business taxes. Geoff Barraclough, of Westminster Council which administers the area, told AFP he believed the reopening of HMV was

a real turning point. "It's testimony that the buzz is back on the nation's most-loved high street," he said, highlighting the much-anticipated opening next year of an IKEA store.

'His Master's Voice'

The new HMV, which will also feature a space for performances and signings, represented "exactly what we want Oxford Street to be all about — an experience beyond traditional retail", Barraclough added. The Oxford Street flagship secured its place in musical

history in 1962 when Brian Epstein put a demo for The Beatles in the shop studio. That led to the Fab Four signing with EMI, the record label that owned HMV until 1996.

But HMV fell into financial distress in 2019 as it struggled to compete with music streaming and the Oxford Street site was forced to close. The company was eventually rescued by Canada's Sunrise Records for an undisclosed



A worker sorts through vinyl records at the HMV Shop.

sum and has since experienced a renaissance under Putman, returning to profit last year. The turnaround in its fortunes prompted the retailer to announce in April that it would be "back by popular demand on Oxford Street" in time for Christmas.

For some Londoners that cannot come soon enough. London scaffolder Dave Jacobs, 60, said like many Britons he had fond memories of browsing and buying music in HMV. The candy stores made the whole street look "trashy", he said, adding that he was "glad they're getting rid of them". The HMV store was "just a part of London", he said. — AFP

Venice to launch tourist tickets for 29 days in 2024

Venice announced on Thursday that it would introduce a fee for day tourists to enter the city's overcrowded historic center on 29 days next year as it seeks to come to grips with overtourism. Day visitors will need to pay five euros (\$5.45) to enter the city center between 8:30 am to 4:00 pm during the peak tourist season from April 25 to May 5. The fee will also apply for the rest of the weekends in May and June, as well as the first two weekends of July.

Authorities have debated for years — without taking concrete action — over how best to regulate the millions of visitors to the famous watery city, who come anxious to see sights including St Mark's Square, the Rialto Bridge and its countless picturesque canals. The ticketing plan had been repeatedly postponed over concerns it will seriously dent tourist revenue and compromise freedom of movement.

But city authorities finally decided earlier this year to push forward with the experiment after UNESCO warned it could list the city as an at-risk world heritage site. "Venice is the first city in the world to introduce such a system, which could serve as a model for other fragile and delicate cities that must be protected," Mayor Luigi Brugnaro said in a statement. But he called it a "first step" rather than a "revolution" and said authorities stand ready to make changes to ensure it works.

The list of Venice's challenges are many, from environmental damage to its lagoon to its fleeing residents — with only about 50,000 left — leaving what many critics charge is now a city without a soul. Two years ago, Venice narrowly avoided being placed on the same UNESCO list — which is intended to spur governments into action to preserve places deemed of "universal value to humanity" — after the city imposed a ban on massive cruise ships travelling past the center. Environmental groups warned the ships, carrying thousands of day-trippers and sailing exceptionally close to shore, caused large waves eroding Venice's foundations and harming the lagoon's fragile ecosystem. — AFP

TikToker Murja Kunya once ran afoul of sharia police in Nigeria's northwest city of Kano, where "hisbah" units enforce Islamic law that runs alongside common law. Earlier this year, the units detained Kunya and other influencers for racy media posts and parodies the agency deemed indecent. But now the morality police are trying a softer approach to curb online celebrities like 24-year-old Kunya who they see as a moral risk in Nigeria's majority Muslim north.

The tussle with influencers is just one sphere where the conservative religious sensibilities of north Nigeria are being tested by new trends. Earlier this month, the Hisbah invited Kunya and dozens of influencers for a meeting to "sensitize them on the negative effects of immoral content", Abba Sufi, Hisbah's director-general told AFP.

Kunya, who has one million followers on Tiktok, attended the meeting in the hijab commonly used by women across the north. That contrasted sharply with the less modest videos, some replete with obscenities, she posted and that earned her Hisbah's wrath. "The meeting with Murja Kunya and other Tiktokers is a change in Hisbah strategy in dealing with the immoral online content," Sufi said. "It is better to show compassion and care to someone you want to reform instead of vilifying and stigmatizing them."

Kunya declined to speak to AFP on the Hisbah meeting. Other influencers have also not commented. But on Sunday, Kunya launched a Tiktok tirade against the Hisbah. "Now that you don't know what to do you are resorting to preaching? You should stop wasting your saliva," she said. "I'm not interested in your preaching."

Carrot and stick

The Hisbah dismiss criticism they violate freedom of expression by targeting influencers. The agency says it is just carrying out its mandate to protect society. Abdallah Uba Adamu, a professor of anthropology and popular culture at Kano's Bayero University, said for the Hisbah the carrot and stick approach alone had not curbed influencers. "The dialogue approach is a very good," he said. "They can use the stick, they can use the carrot, but it can never prevent people from doing what they think they want to do in order to survive, because they rely on this for survival."



A bride dressed in red robe, looks on at the venue of a wedding reception at the Kano state governor's office after taking part in a mass wedding at the central mosque in Kano city, Nigeria on Oct 14, 2023. - AFP

In Nigeria's north, sharia police change tack on influencers

For influencers, the meeting was likely seen as another way to get more followers, part of their online theatre, he said. And also why most had not commented. "What do you want them to say? That they were invited by Islamic authorities and they didn't like it?"

Crackdowns

Kano is one 12 predominantly Muslim states in north Nigeria where sharia courts operate in parallel to the civil and criminal law. The Hisbah enforces sharia by periodic crackdowns on what it considers immoral acts, including raids on brothels and beer parlors or wedding parties where men and women mingle. Kano, Nigeria's second largest city, is home to a burgeoning Kannywood film industry, which produces movies in the Hausa language spoken across parts of West Africa.

Kano also has hundreds of studios which churn out songs by local artists like Gwanja which dwell on love, marriage and money. Kannywood has already been under close watch by Muslim clerics and officials who believed it promoted un-Islamic foreign values, prompting authorities to create a censorship board. But the increasing number of Kannywood skits and songs online prompted the board to extend its authority to social media.

Kunya was among 10 local celebrities a Sharia court in the city ordered arrested and investigated for immoral conduct on social media seen capable of corrupting the youth. Lawyers filed a suit for their prosecution for singing and dancing online, generating furor in the city and condemnation from hard-line clerics. Police arrested Kunya in January in a hotel while preparing for her much-publicized birthday party.

In March, she was sentenced to three weeks of community service by the sharia court which ordered her to work as a janitor in Kano's largest medical facility. Sufi said they had a private discussion with Kunya at the meeting where he showed her the implication of the "obscene and immoral" videos. According to Sufi, the state government was also ready to assist influencers by paying for education or startup money for new businesses.

Muhsin Ibrahim, a Nigerian who teaches Hausa, culture and film at the Institute of African Studies, University of Cologne, said it was too early to tell whether the new approach would impact influencers like Kunya. "Many people thought she would stop or reduce some of her 'transgressive' acts after the previous court sentence," he said. "She did not." — AFP



Shear bliss for New Zealand's pampered sheep

Sheep are moved in a paddock at the 6,500-hectare Lake Hawea Station.



Sheep shearing gang leader Kevin Patrick O'Neill at work.



Vorne Wheki processes wool.



Farm manager Jack Mansfield marks wool bales.

Classical music, soft mattresses and the gentlest touch of a wool clipper: welcome to the New Zealand farm indulging what may be the world's most pampered sheep. Forget any preconceptions of rough-hewn shearers manhandling the flock as they quickly deprive them of their fleece in crowded, noisy wool-sheds. At Lake Hawea Station on New Zealand's South Island, owners Geoff and Justine Ross are advocates of the gentler, more soothing art of "slow-shearing".

The sounds of Debussy, Vivaldi and Mozart may be wafting through the shed as shearers usher the ewes from their pens before trimming off their thick wool with slow, methodical strokes of the clippers. Shearers are paid according to the sheep's overall experience: Stress, bruises and cuts can lead to lower wages. The trimming is performed on pristine whitewashed boards, to better reveal any nicks inflicted on the sheep's skin.

Once shorn, each sheep is guided towards a chute, where it slides into a holding pen — landing not on gravel but on a soft mattress. It's sheep shearing, reconsidered from the sheep's perspective. "It came first from a place of care for the animal," Justine Ross told AFP. "We're all about having happier, calmer sheep. That starts with the way we treat them. "We raised lambs in our first season. Once you see their personality and their unique character, you know the great responsibility of their care. And we have 10,000."

Silence for the lambs

On the station, there are "silent yards" where working dogs are trained not to bark while moving the merino flock. In the hospital paddock, sick sheep get extra nutrition and medical treatment. "You lose animals in farming, that's a fact, but sometimes

with a little extra love and care, they come good," Ross said. After reading that cows produce more milk if played classical music, Ross decided to make additions to the playlist in the shearing shed, where high-tempo rock, pop or rap is typically heard.



"We sometimes play Mozart. Some dairy farmers use it as a way to calm the animals," Ross said. "Vivaldi's 'Four Seasons' is probably my favourite. We're just trying stuff to build a case for less stress for the animal and a calmer, happier shed." New Zealand is home to five million people and 25 million sheep. It is one of the world's main wool exporters, sending 84 million tonnes, worth US\$232 million, overseas in the last financial year.

Shearing, meanwhile, is hard, physical work. It demands skill and stamina to handle the sheep. Each weighs up to 60 kg and can give the occasional painful kick. A good shearer trims several hundred sheep per day. Traditionally, shearing was about speed, with little concern given to the occasional cut. Nowadays, animal welfare is a key

factor, Carolyn Clegg from New Zealand's shearing association told AFP. The priority remains trimming the best quality wool, she said, "but that extends to the sheep — you don't want them cut up or under stress, because that affects their welfare".

international company, Geoff and Justine Ross bought the sheep station in 2017, determined to make it sustainable. It was the first New Zealand farm to be certified as carbon clear by a government research institute. In addition to keeping emissions down, the



Owner Justine Ross with a sheep at Lake Hawea Station.

couple also wanted to reduce stress on their sheep.

And focusing on animal welfare has business benefits too, said Justine Ross. "Our clients are demanding animal welfare credentials as part of their fiber purchasing. If an animal isn't stressed — full of that fight-or-flight energy — then they will use that energy to grow more wool," she said. UK-based merino knitwear firm Sheep Inc is one of the companies that buys their wool. Co-founder Edzard van der Wyck said they were drawn to Lake Hawea because of its carbon-clear status and animal welfare policy. "If you bring less stress into a sheep's life, there is less breakages in the wool fiber, so the quality sustains itself," he said. — AFP



Millie Aporo Renata checks wool at the Lake Hawea Station.



This picture taken on Sept 21, 2023 shows sheep waiting to be shorn at the 6,500-hectare Lake Hawea Station, located on the eastern shores of Lake Hawea, near the town of Wanaka on the South Island of New Zealand. — AFP photos

Relief in Netherlands as 'escaped' mamba never left home

The Dutch city of Tilburg breathed a collective sigh of relief Friday as a highly venomous green mamba thought to be on the loose was found safe and sound in its owner's house. Tilburg has been on edge since Monday when the serpent's owner alerted police that "he was missing a snake". Police issued a mugshot of the "very dangerous" two-meter-long coiled green mam-

ba, warning people to stay indoors and under no circumstances to attempt to ensnare the snake.

The snake's fate has been national news in the Netherlands — despite media competition from a historic election — with herpetologists regularly quoted on TV and in papers. Authorities deployed sniffer dogs and snake experts in vain for days, before the breakthrough on Friday: The mamba had slithered behind a plaster wall.

The snake was "alert and active", said biologist Freek Vonk, who helped with the search. "It was able to drink enough water and is in very good health." Despite police reassurance that the cold-blooded snake was unlikely to slip out into the chilly Dutch winter air, many residents had barricaded themselves inside. — AFP

Rare elephant twins born in Kenya

An elephant in Kenya has given birth to a set of twins, a conservation group said on Friday, a rare event for the planet's largest land mammals. Save the Elephants said that the twins, both female, were born in the Samburu National Reserve in northern Kenya to a mother named Alto, describing it as "double joy". Twins make up only about one percent of elephant births, although another pair — one male and one female — were born in the same reserve in early 2022.

A video posted on X, formerly Twit-

ter, by Save the Elephants, showed the baby elephants feeding from their mother, alongside other members of the herd. African elephants have the largest gestation period of any living mammal, carrying their young for nearly 22 months, and give birth roughly every four years. However, elephant twins do not often fare so well. A previous pair of twins born in Samburu in 2006 failed to survive more than a few days.

The African savanna elephant is classified as endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Na-

ture (IUCN), which says poaching and habitat destruction had a devastating effect on elephant numbers in Africa as a whole. According to the Kenya Wildlife Service, there are more than 36,000 elephants in the East African country, with efforts to stem poaching halting a decline in numbers. The elephant population in Kenya stood at 170,000 in the 1970s and early 1980s but plunged to only 16,000 by the end of 1989 because of the demand for ivory, it said. — AFP

Sports

De Minaur drives Australia past Finland to reach Davis Cup final

'We're a tight-knit unit and we've given ourselves another opportunity'

MALAGA: Alex de Minaur smoothly guided Australia into a second successive Davis Cup final with an assured 2-0 win over Finland on Friday in Malaga. The world number 12 wore down Emil Ruusuvuori in a 6-4, 6-3 straight sets triumph, after Alexei Popyrin beat Otto Virtanen 7-6 (7/5), 6-2 in the first singles rubber.

Australia, who last won the competition in 2003, will face Novak Djokovic's Serbia or Jannik Sinner's Italy in Sunday's final. "For us this cup is a priority, we do everything we can to represent Australia, with pride and passion," said De Minaur. "It's not too bad to reach another final." Australia captain Lleyton Hewitt said reaching the final means "a hell of a lot" to him. "Our boys dug really deep ... we're a tight-knit unit and we've given ourselves another opportunity on Sunday," he added.

De Minaur produced a remarkable comeback against the Czech Republic in a rollercoaster classic to help his country reach the semi-finals but had a gentler ride this time at the Martin Carpena arena. Although he and Hewitt have been highly critical of the revamped Davis Cup format, the 24-year-old expertly steered his team into their 49th final.

The 28-time champions, behind only the United States, ended Finland's fairytale run with little fuss, and the captains agreed not to play the deciding doubles. Nordic fans outnumbered those in green and gold, just as they did for their superb last eight victory over reigning champions Canada on Tuesday, but this time left disappointed.

Finland's number one, Ruusuvuori, 69th in the world, missed the Canada win with a shoulder problem and he had heavy lifting to do after Virtanen's defeat. Ruusuvuori exchanged breaks with De Mi-

naur, with the Australian finally converting his sixth break point in the third game to get back on serve and never looked back.

Finding rhythm

De Minaur broke a second time when the Finn hit a backhand into the net and consolidated to move 4-2 ahead as he hit his stride. Ruusuvuori conceded a third break by slapping a forehand into the net and despite breaking back with a lovely drop shot, De Minaur served out to wrap up the set. At the start of the second he saved a break point against an aggressive Ruusuvuori and then broke himself for a 2-1 lead, which he protected. De Minaur clinched victory with a superb backhand winner, hit on the rise.

Hewitt, who played in Australia's last Davis Cup win 20 years ago, knows the final will be tough, whether it is against number one Djokovic's Serbia, or number four ranked Sinner and Italy. "It's tough either way," said Australia's captain.

"Obviously the number ones are both absolute quality players — they are as good as anyone going around at the moment." Popyrin, 40th in the world, had paved the way for De Minaur by showing his quality in the second set to defeat his 171st ranked opponent. "Alexei stood up when he needed to today," added Hewitt. After a tight first set decided by tie-break, the Finn double-faulted to hand his opponent a break for 4-2, and then went wide as the Australian broke again to seal the win.

"It's nerves that I have never experienced before in my life, the nerves playing the first tie, the first rubber of a Davis Cup, winning my first live rubber of a Davis Cup (tie)," Popyrin said. "I just had to keep my head steady and just really focus on my



MALAGA: Australia's Alex de Minaur returns the ball against Finland's Emil Ruusuvuori during the second men's singles semifinal tennis match between Finland and Australia of the Davis Cup tennis tournament at the Martin Carpena sports hall, in Malaga. — AFP

serve and try to capitalize on opportunities when they came." Finland captain Jarkko Nieminen was disappointed not to make further history by taking the team to the final but said the experience was "amazing". "(I feel) empty when you realize that this

trip for this year is over, (the) amazing trip that we have had," said Finland captain Jarkko Nieminen. "(I) appreciated the effort of the team, players, the crowd." Serbia face Italy on Saturday in the second semi, ahead of Sunday's final. — AFP

MLS giants LAFC, Seattle clash as playoffs heat up

MIAMI: Major League Soccer's playoffs reach the sudden-death knockout stage this weekend with the Western Conference semi-final clash between Los Angeles FC and the Seattle Sounders topping the bill. Defending champions LAFC travel to Seattle on Sunday knowing they are up against one of the most consistent post-season performers in the league.

Seattle have reached the playoffs in all but one of their seasons since joining MLS in 2009, reaching four finals and clinching two MLS titles as well as the CONCACAF Champions League last year. The first round of MLS's playoffs this season featured a best-of-three format but the conference semi-finals, championship games and the MLS Cup are all single elimination games.

"Both teams are going to come out with an intensity and make sure that this isn't their last game of the season," said Sounders defender Alex Roldan. "So, the stakes are very high." The Sounders have a rich history as a club pre-dating their arrival in MLS - the club won four league titles in the second-tier United Soccer Leagues and before that were twice runners-up in the old North American Soccer League.

In contrast, LAFC are only in their sixth season of existence but they have quickly established themselves as one of MLS's powerhouses. Twice they have topped the Western Conference and last season they went all the way, winning their first title with a thrilling penalty shoot-out victory over the Philadelphia Union.

LA are coached by former United States international Steve Cherundolo and he knows that Seattle have the upper hand in terms of crunch-time experience. "I think they know how to play big games, maybe the only organization that I am aware of that has had that number of big games in the last ten years," he said. "At the very least you will see a very intense game, a competitive game, hopefully with good football but the players on the field will decide that," he added.

Rivalry

Cherundolo's counterpart, the quietly spoken Brian Schmetzer, is not a coach that draws much attention but the 61-year-old has an impressive track record having led the club to both MLS titles and two of those won in USL.

Seattle's traditional rivals are neighboring Portland Timbers but Schmetzer says there is now something special about the clashes with LAFC. "It feels like a rivalry in the sense that it is two of the biggest clubs in the league. We have high ambitions, high goals and so do they," he said, looking forward to the clash on his team's artificial turf field. "We're going to come after them. Raining, windy, turf; we want to get on top of them early. We're going to come out on the front foot. If we can pin them back and create chances, that's what's important. And then...if we can shut down their transition moments, then I think we're going to have a good result," he said.

The weekend kicks off on Saturday with an appetizing encounter between two of the more attractive teams in the Eastern Conference when Orlando City host twice MLS champions, Columbus Crew. The last time the teams met, on September 16 in Florida, the Crew led 3-1 after 69 minutes before Orlando roared back to win 4-3. Orlando haven't been beaten at home since an April loss to D.C United. — AFP

Al-Fuzaie wins equestrian club championship

KUWAIT: Massila Equestrian Club's rider Abdelrahman Al-Fuzaie won first place in the club's championship in which more than 350 riders representing local clubs participated.

Al-Fuzaie was able to complete the main heat in the quickest time of 38.69 seconds at the height of 130 cm without a fault ahead of riders Fawaz Al-Subaie, Ghazi Al-Juwairi, Hamad Al-Hajiri, Shaker Al-Kazmi and Ahmad Al-Ansari. Meanwhile, at the height of 120 cm rider Nick Changing was first followed by Ali Al-Sayegh and Madhi Al-Khamis, while rider Mohammad Al-Shimmari won the third heat at the height of 110 cm.

Kuwait's junior handball team takes bronze

KUWAIT: Kuwait juniors handball national team bagged the bronze medal and third place of the First Arab Championship for those born in 2006 that was held in Tunis earlier last week.

Kuwait beat Algeria 29-24 in the match of third place decider, as Kuwait goalkeeper Abbas Al-Qallaf was selected best player of the match. Tunis meanwhile won the tournament by beating Saudi Arabia's team in the final match 28-24. Head of Kuwait delegation lauded the heroic performance of Kuwait's team which brought them the bronze medal. He said "despite the limited preparation time which was of local training and two friendly matches with Bahrain and Saudi Arabia comparing with other teams that were prepared by having training camps held in Europe".

Russell fastest as Verstappen has problems

ABU DHABI: George Russell topped the times for Mercedes ahead of McLaren's Lando Norris in Saturday's third and final practice ahead of the season-ending Abu Dhabi Grand Prix. On a hot afternoon at the Yas Marina Circuit, Russell's pace raised Mercedes' hopes of clinging on to second place in the constructors' championship as Ferrari, four points behind, struggled to keep pace.

Three-time world champion Max Verstappen was also off the pace in his Bull as he wound up sixth in the unrepresentative conditions that offered few real clues to the outcome of qualifying later Saturday or Sunday's race.

Russell was quickest in a time of one minute and 24.418 seconds to beat Norris by 0.095 seconds with Oscar Piastri third in the second McLaren, three-tenths adrift, ahead of Williams' Alex Albon, Charles Leclerc of Ferrari and Verstappen.

Esteban Ocon was seventh for Alpine ahead of Logan Sargeant in the second Williams, Yuki Tsunoda of Alpha Tauri and Alfa Romeo's Zhou Guanyu, the top ten separated by only eight-tenths of a second. Seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton was 12th in the second Mercedes, one place behind Sergio Perez in the second Red Bull, and two-time champion Fernando Alonso was 14th for Aston Martin.

Verstappen was unhappy with his car set-up throughout the session. "The car is bottoming again, jumping," he grumbled in the final minutes. "I don't know what is going on..." After Friday's furore over Verstappen's attempted passing move on the two



ABU DHABI: Red Bull Racing's Mexican driver Sergio Perez drives during the third practice session for the Abu Dhabi Formula One Grand Prix at the Yas Marina Circuit in the Emirati city. — AFP

Mercedes driver in the pit-lane exit tunnel, the race stewards had reacted to protests aired during the drivers' briefing and banned the practice.

The session began in hotter conditions than the opening day with an air temperature close to 30 degrees Celsius and the track at 47 with Hamilton, unusually, among the early starters together with Sainz and both Aston Martins. All of them needed mileage after their lack of Friday action, even in the unrepresentative conditions relative to Sunday's 'twilight' Grand Prix, and Sainz, who crashed in FP2, quickly set an early fastest lap on softs.

Perez soon improved on that before Russell clocked 1:25.163 on fresh soft rubber to take top spot as Verstappen slotted in third with his first effort, complaining of 'quite a loose rear, sliding a lot'. Russell was one of the few top drivers who ran in FPI, when ten rookies took part, and as most of

the field returned to the pits, after 20 minutes, he stayed out to trim his time to 1:24.829.

For Russell and Hamilton, protecting Mercedes' four-point advantage ahead of Ferrari in their scrap for second place in the constructors' championship, there was also the motivation of claiming the team's first win and first by a British driver this year. After a lull, the major contenders returned for the final half hour's practice, Verstappen rising to third and then second, but he remained half a second adrift of Russell while Ferrari continued long run work on medium tyres, running 16th and 17th, 1.2 seconds adrift of the pace.

With 12 minutes remaining, Albon went second on softs while Verstappen pitted again for front suspension tweaks, the Dutchman keen to find a better set-up in his bid for more winning records — as the rest improved in a frantic finale. — AFP

Sports

Five-star PSG rout Monaco ahead of Newcastle clash

Defeat is a blow to Monaco's hopes of mounting a title challenge

PARIS: Ousmane Dembele scored his first Paris Saint-Germain goal in stunning fashion as the reigning French champions crushed Monaco 5-2 in Ligue 1 on Friday to cement their lead at the top of the table.

Goncalo Ramos opened the scoring early on for PSG but a howler by home goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma gifted Takumi Minamino the equalizer soon after. However, Kylian Mbappe's penalty against his former club restored PSG's lead and two superb goals in the space of three second-half minutes by Dembele and Vitinha put the game out of sight.

The defeat is a blow to Monaco's hopes of mounting a title challenge and they have now won just once in four outings. "It is easy to analyze this game today. We conceded four goals that were for me own goals and at this level that is too much," said Monaco coach Adi Huetter. "PSG is a top team. When you want to be on top of the table, or in the best three in France, we made too many mistakes."

Folarin Balogun pulled another back for Monaco but substitute Randal Kolo Muani put the seal on PSG's win in stoppage time. Paris have now won seven and drawn one of their last eight Ligue 1 games and this result moved them four points clear of second-placed Nice, who are in action on Sunday. Monaco remain third but are six points adrift of the leaders.

"The most important thing was the attitude shown by the players after the international break," said PSG coach Luis Enrique. "We had one day's training, for one hour, to prepare for this game." The result, which was achieved despite captain Marquinhos and teenage midfield prodigy Warren Zaire-Emery both missing out through injury, was a boost for Luis Enrique's team ahead of a crucial home Champions League clash with Newcastle United.

The Qatar-backed side could be at real risk of going out of Europe's elite club competition in the group stage if they fail to win that match on Tuesday. "Monaco are a team on the same level as us and also aspire to win the league, so it is a good result," added Luis Enrique.

"We are going into a vital game against Newcastle and the best way to do that is to win, and all the better winning in that way." Marquinhos and Zaire-Emery were both injured on international duty and so there were notably starts for PSG here for Nordi Mukiele at left-back and for Fabian Ruiz in central midfield.

Portugal striker Ramos was preferred to Kolo Muani at centre-forward and he opened the scoring in the 18th minute, pouncing to finish after goalkeeper Philipp Koehn spilled a Dembele shot. Monaco had squandered a great chance to go ahead before that when the unmarked Soungoutou Magassa failed to beat Donnarumma with a header from point-blank range.

Donnarumma howler

The principality side also had a Vanderson goal disallowed for offside but they were gifted an equalizer midway through the first half when Donnarumma played an attempted clearance straight to Minamino and the Japan international pounced to score.

Nevertheless, the Parisians went back in front six minutes before the interval as Magassa caught Dembele in the box, and Mbappe rifled in the resulting penalty for his 14th goal in 12 Ligue 1 appearances this season.

Donnarumma made up for his earlier gaffe with a fine save from Minamino to maintain PSG's lead into half-time, and they ended any doubt about the outcome with two goals in quick succession in the



PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain's French forward #07 Kylian Mbappe (C) controls the ball under pressure from Monaco's Swiss midfielder #06 Denis Zakaria (L) during the French L1 football match between Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) and AS Monaco at The Parc des Princes Stadium in Paris. — AFP

second half. It was 3-1 on 70 minutes as Dembele showed great agility to control a quickly-taken free-kick sent over the top by Ruiz, and then advanced into the box to finish emphatically past Koehn.

It was his first goal in 16 appearances since signing for PSG from Barcelona in August. Two minutes after that it was four as Portugal midfielder Vitinha

controlled a pass from Mbappe wide on the left and curled a fine strike into the far corner.

Monaco quickly pulled one back when Minamino sent through USA striker Balogun to finish past Donnarumma, but they conceded again in the sixth added minute as a botched Guillermo Maripan clearance fell to Kolo Muani to score. — AFP

Kuwait Special Olympics partakes in training for swimming coaches

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait Special Olympics participated in the advanced regional training course for senior training coaches of Special Olympics that was organized by Special Olympics MENA and Saudi Special Olympics at Prince Faisal bin Fahad Olympic Complex with 14 countries participating as Kuwait was represented by senior swimming coach Ahmad Rashwan.

The course that was held over four days included introduction of Special Olympics, official competitions, distribution of competitors, role, and importance of swimming for the mentally challenged and the role of the teacher in dealing with the mentally challenged athletes, how to select them and the common mistakes in teaching and means of its correction

as well as the unified sports in Special Olympics.

The technical part of the course included lectures in the kinetics analysis of the four types of swimming (freestyle, backstroke, breaststroke, and butterfly), training load, means of rationalizing it, means of swimming training in addition to lectures on healthy nutrition, first aid for Special Olympics athletes.

The course had a practical part with the participation of swimmers from the Saudi Special Olympics. Kuwait Special Olympics National Director Rehab Buresli lauded the issues the course dealt with and its positive returns in developing the technical capabilities of cadres at Special Olympics and prepare them to be up-to-date with all that is new in the field of training. She also appreciated the efforts of the Special Olympics MENA led by engineer Ayman Abdelwahab, Director of Sports and Training Dr Emad Mohyveeden, Director of games and competitions Dr Shareef Al-Fouli and their keenness on developing the abilities of technical departments and the Special Olympics through an integrated training plan and organizing several courses for senior coaches to be the foundation for preparing new coaches in all games.



Bayern ease past Cologne

BERLIN: England striker Harry Kane continued his brilliant Bundesliga form on Friday, scoring the winner in Bayern Munich's 1-0 win over Cologne. Kane scored a first-half tap-in to give Bayern a tenth win of the season and put them top of the table overnight.

"It was one of the easier goals I've scored in my career, but I'll take it," Kane told Dazn after the final whistle. The England captain has now scored 22 goals in all competitions since joining Bayern in August, and has found the net in each of his last seven games in all competitions.

His latest strike was all Bayern needed as they eased past struggling Cologne with a controlled performance in the second half. "Some people might look at the result and think they expected a bit more, but it was a really good performance from us today," said Kane.

"We controlled the game really well and should have had a few more goals in the first half for sure. Cologne approached the game with their usual gung-ho attitude, pressing high and occasionally managing to unsettle Bayern.

Yet Bayern repeatedly tore through their hosts on the counter-attack, and could have been several goals ahead by the half-hour mark. Leroy Sane missed two good chances early on, before Kane finally broke the deadlock on 20 minutes.

A quick transition from Bayern left Cologne outnumbered in the box, as Sane sliced through the middle to set up Eric-Maxim Choupo-Moting. Cologne defender Julian Chabot blocked Choupo-Moting's on the line, but Kane was on hand to tap in the rebound. — AFP



COLOGNE: Bayern Munich's German goalkeeper #01 Manuel Neuer (R) and Cologne's Danish defender #18 Rasmus Carstensen (C) vie for the ball during the German first division Bundesliga football match between FC Cologne and FC Bayern Munich in Cologne. — AFP

Kuwaiti jet ski rider ranks 3rd in marathon

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Jet Ski rider Rashid Al-Dawas achieved third place in the overall ranking in the World Senior Professional Jet Ski Marathon Race in the Senior Professional Jet Ski Marathon category in Indonesia.

Al-Dawas expressed his great happiness with this new achievement in the championship, which began on November 21 and concluded on Saturday under the organization of the International Marine Sports Federation.

He pointed out that the number of participants reached 22 contestants representing 22 countries, and the tournament lasted four days, consisting of three rounds and each round has two stages. — KUNA



For a diaspora soccer club in Chile, 'Palestine exists'

SANTIAGO: Thousands of miles from the Middle East, in a stadium in Santiago, Chile, the nation of Palestine exists, if only for the 90 minutes of a soccer match. Chileans and Palestinians created that alternate reality again on Thursday when Club Deportivo Palestino, which traces

its origins to Palestinian immigrants who came to the South American nation in the early 1900s, held a tribute for the Gaza victims of the war between Zionist entity and Hamas. A banner reading "In memory of those who are no longer with us" was displayed in the stands, where a section of seats was left empty to represent the dead. "We decided to have a space in our grandstand and leave it empty...as a gesture of support for the Palestinian people and what is happening in Gaza," club president Jorge Uauy told AFP.

Chile is home to the largest Palestinian community outside the Arab world, with the first immigrants arriving from Bethlehem, Beit Jala and Beit Sahour. As the com-

munity - now estimated to number 500,000 - grew, the soccer club was founded in 1920.

The players took to the field in green, white and red striped jerseys, adorned with a map of the territory before the establishment of Zionist entity, and observed a minute of silence. Children wearing keffiyehs accompanied them. In a previous match, the players had worn the traditional Palestinian scarves themselves. "There are different ways of expressing pain and closeness to Palestine. Today it was the children as a way of showing that they are the most affected," said Uauy. "We hope (Palestinians) will see that there are people in other parts of the world who are looking out for them and who are suffering for them." — AFP

Classifieds

Clinics & Hospitals

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134

Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

Hospitals

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

Change of Name

I, **Hakimuddin** holder of Indian Passport No. V6127603 having permanent Address 118 Bahadar Pura, Bakhal, Ujjain, Pin:456001, Madhya Pradesh, India residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as Given Name Hakimuddin and surname Lightwala. #4563 - 24-11-2023

I, **Husain** holder of Indian Passport No. M5457327 having permanent address 78 Ibrahim Pura Bhakal, Kharakuwa, Ujjain, Pin: 456006, Madhya Pradesh, India residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as : given name Husain and surname Ajabshawala. 4564 - 24-11-2023

Liverpool hit back to hold Man City, end Etihad winning streak

Fatigue appeared a factor as expected fireworks failed to materialize



MANCHESTER: Manchester City's Norwegian striker #09 Erling Haaland (2R) scores the opening goal during the English Premier League football match between Manchester City and Liverpool at the Etihad Stadium in Manchester, north west England, on November 25, 2023. — AFP

MANCHESTER: Liverpool snapped Manchester City's 23-match winning run at the Etihad as a clash between the Premier League's top two ended 1-1 on Saturday. Trent Alexander-Arnold's fine strike 10 minutes from time salvaged a point for the visitors after Erling Haaland's 50th Premier League goal put City in front.

A share of the spoils means there remains just one point between the sides and that Arsenal could now take top spot from City if they win at Brentford later on Saturday. Liverpool boss Jurgen Klopp made his displeasure clear at the early kick-off time on the back of an international break where both sides had players who had been in World Cup qualifying action in South America little over 72 hours ago.

Fatigue appeared a factor as the expected fireworks failed to materialise. The best chances before the break came from City pouncing on sloppy Liverpool passes out from the back. Alisson Becker was let off the hook by Phil Foden's weak shot after the

Brazilian gifted away possession inside his own box.

But the Liverpool goalkeeper was not so fortunate when his next sliced clearance picked out Nathan Ake. The Dutch defender dribbled forward before picking out Haaland, who found the far corner with Alisson getting a hand to his low shot.

Haaland's 50th Premier League goal in his 48th appearances smashed the previous record for the quickest half century held by Andy Cole in 65 matches. Alisson made some measure of amends by turning behind Foden's low drive from outside the box that was arrowing into the bottom corner.

At the other end, Darwin Nunez was Liverpool's biggest threat as Mohamed Salah failed to build on his impressive record against City. Ederson clawed away Nunez's first-half header and turned a powerful effort behind at his near post after the break.

But it was City who had looked the more likely to add to their lead in the second half as Liverpool struggled to contain the speed of Jeremy Doku on the counter-attack. The Belgian winger teed up Ju-

lian Alvarez with a glorious chance that the Argentine spooned over. Alisson was handed another let-off 20 minutes from time when he spilled a corner under minimal pressure from Manuel Akanji and Ruben Dias tapped home. However, a VAR check did not overturn the referee's on-field decision to award the Liverpool keeper a soft free-kick.

Klopp turned to his bench to try and summon a response with Luis Diaz, Cody Gakpo and Ryan Gravenberch introduced. Diaz's father was among the crowd after being flown to England by Liverpool to enjoy the Christmas season following a kidnap ordeal in his native Colombia.

And Diaz was involved in Liverpool's leveller against the run of play 10 minutes from time. The Colombian picked out Salah, who laid the ball into Alexander-Arnold's path for a fantastic finish into the bottom corner. City pushed for a winner in eight minutes of added time but were thwarted as they failed to win at home for the first time since December 31 last year. — AFP

Oscar Pistorius granted parole over girlfriend's murder

PRETORIA: South Africa's ex-Olympic runner Oscar Pistorius will be released from prison in January after he was granted parole on Friday, a decade after he shot dead his girlfriend, Reeva Steenkamp, in a crime that gripped the world, prison authorities said.

Steenkamp's mother, who had said she did not believe the ex-athlete was rehabilitated for he had not shown true remorse, was "satisfied" with the parole terms, which include therapy for anger and gender-based violence issues, according to her lawyer.

"She feels heard," June Steenkamp's lawyer, Tania Koen, told AFP. "(The ruling) sends a clear message that gender-based violence won't be tolerated." A parole board reviewing whether Pistorius, 37, was fit for social reintegration decided to allow him out of prison early, the department of correctional services said.

"Mr Pistorius will complete the remainder of the sentence in the system of community corrections and will be subjected to supervision in compliance with parole conditions until his sentence expires," the department said. He will be released on January 5.

A spokesman for Steenkamp's family said that as part of the parole conditions, Pistorius will have to do community service and attend therapy for anger and gender-based violence issues. He will also not be allowed to leave the Pretoria district of Waterkloof without prior authorisation, Steenkamp family spokesman Rob Matthews said, adding the parole period will end in December 2029.

Before being let out, Pistorius will undergo a pre-release programme that is to prepare him for life outside prison, said department of correctional services spokesman Singabakho Nxumalo. "Not everyone will find it easy to adjust," Nxumalo said, adding the scheme was to prepare inmates that "not everyone will welcome you as others will open their arms". — AFP



Oscar Pistorius

Flat Barca claim late draw at Rayo

MADRID: Spanish champions Barcelona slipped up in a 1-1 draw at Rayo Vallecano on Saturday in La Liga, continuing a worrying run of underwhelming performances. Surprise leaders Girona and rivals Real Madrid in second now have the chance to extend their lead on the third-place Catalans over the next two days.

Unai Lopez drove Rayo ahead from long range in the first half but Barca levelled through Florian Lejeune's own goal in the 82nd minute. The draw adds to the doubts around Barcelona, who have not been at their best for several weeks and face Porto on Tuesday seeking Champions League knock-out round qualification.

Inaki Pena started in goal for Barca with Marc-Andre ter Stegen out with a back problem, while Xavi turned to the fit-again Frenkie de Jong to replace the injured Gavi in midfield. The 19-year-old's cruciate ligament tear will keep him out for the season, with Barcelona losing a player the coach has described as the "soul" of the team.

Barcelona players wore shirts before kick off with his name on the back, and a message saying "we are with you, Gavi". Pena spilled the ball the first time he was called into action but recovered quickly to clear up the danger.

The goalkeeper then denied Oscar Valentin after De Jong lost the ball on the edge of his own box. Hosts Rayo started well, encouraged by having beaten Barca on three of their four previous clashes, including twice at their ramshackle Vallecas stadium.

They took the lead after 39 minutes when Lopez hammered a superb effort into the bottom right corner from around 30 yards out after the ball was cleared into his path. Rayo came close to adding a second in stoppage time but Alejandro Balde was



MADRID: Barcelona's Spanish midfielder #08 Pedri kicks the ball during the Spanish league football match between Rayo Vallecano de Madrid and FC Barcelona on November 25, 2023. — AFP

alert to cut Jorge de Frutos' low cross out with two Rayo attackers ready to pounce.

Lack of intensity

Xavi said Barca would miss Gavi's "intensity, heart and courage" against Francisco Rodriguez's side and he was proven right, although they improved a little after the break. Ferran Torres might have levelled early in the second half with a header but sent it too close to Rayo goalkeeper Stole Dimitrievski.

Xavi immediately replaced the winger, along with Oriol Romeu after another disappointing shift at the base of Barca's midfield, sending Ilkay Gundogan and Joao Felix on. Pedri headed narrowly over from Robert Lewandowski's cross and Inigo Martinez nodded a Gundogan free kick off target

too as Barca sought the equaliser.

Raphinha's raking effort struck the post and Rayo hacked Lewandowski's attempted finish from the rebound off the line. Eventually the Catalans levelled with eight minutes remaining when Lejeune diverted Balde's cross into his own net, under pressure from Lewandowski.

Raphinha appealed for a penalty in stoppage time when he fell after Pacha Espino challenged him, but the officials did not oblige. Barcelona now have failed to beat Rayo in five matches and could fall seven points behind Girona if they beat Athletic Bilbao on Monday at Montilivi. Real Madrid, two points clear of Barca, visit Cadiz on Sunday, while fourth place Atletico Madrid host Mallorca later Saturday. — AFP