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# Fossil fuels in focus at COP28

Loss and damage fund launched • Gaza war looms over climate talks

## Diwan: Amir's health condition remains stable

**KUWAIT:** The health condition of HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah remains stable, the Amiri Diwan minister said on Thursday. Sheikh Mohammad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah expressed wishes for good health and rapid recovery of HH the Amir.

On Wednesday, Sheikh Mohammad said HH the Amir was admitted to the hospital due to an emergency health problem to receive the necessary treatment and undergo medical examinations. He later reiterated the health condition of HH the Amir is stable and he is taking necessary medication, calling on the public to verify news with regards to HH the Amir's health, obtaining such information only from official sources. — KUNA



HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah

**DUBAI:** Nearly 200 nations agreed Thursday to launch a fund to support countries hit by global warming, in a "historic" moment at the start of UN climate talks in the oil-rich UAE. The announcement came as the Emirati host of the COP28 talks declared that fossil fuels must be part of any climate deal negotiated over the next two weeks.

The talks in Dubai come at a pivotal moment for the planet, with emissions still rising and the UN on Thursday declaring 2023 on track to become the hottest year in human history. The formal establishment of the "loss and damage" fund long sought by climate-vulnerable nations provided an early win at COP28, where sharp divisions over the phasing out of fossil fuels were immediately apparent.

"We have delivered history today," said COP28 president Sultan Al-Jaber as delegates embraced and cheered. Jaber said it was "the first time a decision has been

adopted on day one of any COP and the speed in which we have done so is also unique, phenomenal and historic. "This is evidence that we can deliver. COP28 can and will deliver," he said.

Leaders have been urged to move more quickly to a clean energy future and make deeper cuts to emissions, with the world off-track to keep global temperature rises below agreed levels. A central focus of COP28 will be a stocktake of the world's limited progress on curbing global warming, which requires an official response at these talks.

Double the size of last year's COP27, the conference is billed as the largest ever with 97,000 people, including Britain's King Charles III and some 180 other heads of state and government expected to attend. The UN and hosts the UAE say the talks will be the most important since Paris in 2015, and climate finance for poorer nations has been a key agenda item.

The UAE sees itself as a bridge between the rich developed nations most responsible for historic emissions and the rest of the world, which has contributed less to global warming but suffers its worst consequences. The UAE announced \$100 million toward the loss and damage fund with the European Union following with \$246 million. More pledges are expected in coming days, but the amounts fall well short of the \$100 billion developing nations say are needed.

"The progress we've made in establishing a loss and damage fund is hugely significant for climate justice, but an empty fund can't help our people," warned Madeleine Diouf Sarr, chair of the Group of the 46 Least Developed Countries. The 50-year-old Jaber is both COP president and head of UAE's national oil giant, raising concerns over a conflict of interest amid calls for a phasedown of fossil fuels to be negotiated in Dubai.

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### NEWS IN BRIEF

#### No fees for children with cancer

**KUWAIT:** Minister of Health Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi has decided to exempt non-Kuwaiti children with cancer from all fees for health services offered by public hospitals and clinics. However, the minister stipulated that these children must have valid residency and be aged no more than 16 years when initially diagnosed with cancer in Kuwait, with fee relief lasting until the age of 18, the ministry said. — KUNA

#### Call on EU to recognize Palestine

**MADRID:** The European Union should recognize a Palestinian state since this would help end the Zionist-Palestinian conflict and "stabilize" the region, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said on Thursday. "It is in Europe's interest to address this issue out of moral conviction because what we are seeing in Gaza is not acceptable," he added. The Zionist entity's top diplomat later said he was recalling the country's envoy to Madrid over the "outrageous remarks" by Sanchez. — AFP

#### 2023 set to be hottest year

**GENEVA:** This year is set to be the hottest ever recorded, the UN said Thursday, demanding urgent action to rein in global warming and stem the havoc following in its wake. The UN's World Meteorological Organization warned that 2023 had shattered a whole host of climate records, with extreme weather leaving "a trail of devastation and despair". — AFP (See Page 13)

#### Zurich, Singapore most expensive

**PARIS:** Zurich and Singapore are the most expensive cities in the world ahead of New York amid the ever-rising cost of living, according to rankings published Thursday by The Economist magazine. The British weekly estimated that prices have increased an average of 7.4 percent over the past year in 173 major cities. Geneva tied in third place with New York, followed by Hong Kong, Los Angeles and Paris. — AFP

## More captives freed as Gaza truce extended

**GAZA:** Hamas released two more Zionist women captives on Thursday with more Palestinian prisoners to be freed under an extended truce that has paused weeks of deadly conflict. With the current truce set to expire early Friday, international bodies have called for a lasting halt to the Zionist violence in the Gaza Strip. The delicate truce held through its seventh day after a 24-hour extension despite a shooting claimed by Hamas militants that killed three people in Jerusalem.

US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken met Zionist and Palestinian lead-

ers to seek a longer pause that would allow further prisoner-captive exchanges and more aid for displaced civilians in Gaza. The Zionist military said on Thursday at least two women captives had been returned from Gaza after being released to the Red Cross by Hamas.

More were expected to be transferred "in the next few hours", it said. The Zionist entity is due to release more Palestinian prisoners in turn, after the sides agreed to extend the pause in combat operations until Friday morning. Only hours after the truce extension, the Hamas claimed responsibility for a shooting in Jerusalem that killed three people and called for an "escalation of the resistance".

The morning attack saw two gunmen from annexed east Jerusalem kill three people and wound eight others at a bus stop in the western part of

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RAMALLAH: Newly released activist Ahd Tamimi is greeted by relatives during a welcome ceremony following the release of Palestinian prisoners from Zionist jails on Nov 30, 2023. — AFP

## OPEC+ slashes output, Brazil to join in 2024

**VIENNA:** Saudi Arabia on Thursday announced it would extend its voluntary oil production cut of one million barrels per day "until the end of the first quarter of 2024", according to a statement. Riyadh has implemented the cut since July, bearing the brunt of the production cuts in a bid to

support prices. Russia said on Thursday it would deepen its voluntary oil production cut to 500,000 barrels per day and extend it until the end of the first quarter of 2024. The extra cuts are intended to "maintain stability and balance in the oil market." Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak said in a statement following a meeting of OPEC+ ministers.

Kuwait will voluntarily cut crude oil output by 135,000 barrels per day for three months starting from Jan 1, 2024. First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Oil Dr Saad Al-Barrak announced on Thursday. Kuwait oil pro-

duction will thus stand at 2.413 million bpd until the end of March 2024. Barrak said in a statement. He said this is an additional reduction to that previously announced by Kuwait in April 2023 and estimated at 128,000 bpd until the end of 2024.

Meanwhile, major producer Brazil will join OPEC+ from next year, the oil cartel announced on Thursday. Brazil is among the world's top 10 producers and has been the largest oil producer in Latin America since 2016. Its crude production hit a record 3.7 million barrels per day in September, a near 17

percent increase from the same month last year and a 6.1 percent hike from August, according to pricing agency Argus Media. Ministers of the 13-member Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) headed by Saudi Arabia and its 10 partners led by Russia had met to discuss further output cuts to boost prices. "The meeting welcomed Alexandre Silveira de Oliveira, Minister of Mines and Energy of the Federative Republic of Brazil, which will join the OPEC+... starting January 2024," OPEC said in a press release.

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## Divisive US envoy Henry Kissinger dies aged 100

**WASHINGTON:** Henry Kissinger, the relentlessly ambitious US diplomat whose unapologetic promotion of raw American power helped shape the post-World War II world, died Wednesday, his consulting firm said. He was 100. Kissinger, arguably the most identifiable secretary of state of modern times, died at his home in Connecticut, announced Kissinger Associates, through which the late diplomat grew wealthy helping businesses for decades after his government career.

It said that Kissinger's family would hold a private funeral, with a memori-

al service to take place later in New York, where Kissinger grew up after his Jewish family fled Nazi Germany. The statement did not provide a cause of death. Kissinger had remained active even as a centenarian, traveling to China in July to meet President Xi Jinping.

China was one of Kissinger's most lasting legacies. Hoping to shake up the Cold War fight against the Soviet Union, Kissinger secretly reached out to Beijing, culminating in a historic 1972 visit by president Richard Nixon and later the US establishment of relations with the isolated country, which has soared to become the world's second-largest economy and a growing competitor with Washington.

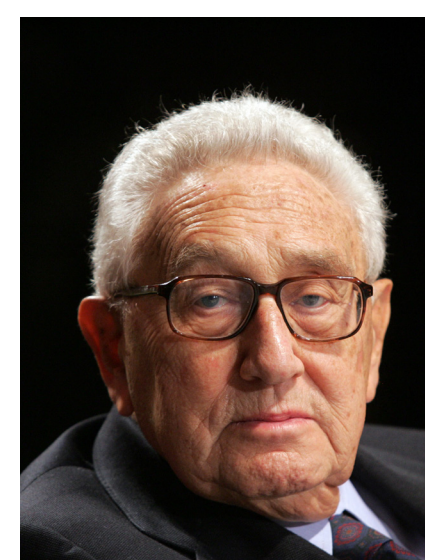
While Kissinger was despised in much of the world, China's foreign ministry on Thursday hailed the late US diplomat as an "old and good friend

of the Chinese people". Kissinger "had long been concerned about and supported the development of China-US relations, visiting China more than a hundred times and making historic contributions to promote the normalization of China-US relations," foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said.

Fumio Kishida, prime minister of US ally Japan, credited Kissinger for his "significant contributions" to peace and stability in Asia, "including the normalization of diplomatic ties between the US and China." At home, Kissinger also enjoyed deference across the political mainstream, with incumbent Secretary of State Antony Blinken, a member of the rival Democratic Party, attending his 100th birthday party in New York.

"America has lost one of the most dependable and distinctive voices

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Henry Kissinger



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## Local

# Kuwait moving towards renewables to address future challenges: Officials

## COP28 kicks off in Dubai with Kuwait's participation

**DUBAI:** Kuwait has reiterated its commitment to the international agreements to cut gas emissions to building a system capable of addressing future challenges. Kuwait is also moving forward to achieving New Kuwait Vision by insuring that 15 percent from the local electricity is renewable energy by 2030.

With the active participation of Kuwait, the annual United Nations Climate Change Conference, known as the Conference of the Parties (COP28), kicked off on Thursday in Dubai Expo City. COP is considered the primary decision-making body of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), with the participation of representatives of 197 countries which signed or are parties to the UNFCCC, and thousands of experts and journalists in the field of climate change.

UAE President Sheikh Mohammad Bin Zayed Al-Nahyan welcomed the international community for the start of COP28 in Dubai, through a post on social media platform known as X. The conference aims to discuss ways to fight climate change, which increased and has a negative outcome on human rights, he added.

Kuwait's Minister of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy Jassem Al-Ostad affirmed to KUNA that His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, made clear

instructions to build renewable energy stations in order to provide clean and cheap energy on one hand, and honor Kuwait's commitment in the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030 on the other hand. He added that Kuwait will face power shortage in the coming years so that the planned approach is to invite corporates or consortiums to establish clean energy stations in what is known as the Independent Power Provider (IPP), adding that these companies would be building solar energy stations that provided clean and cheap electricity.

Undersecretary of the Ministry of Oil Nimer Al-Malek Al-Sabah stressed the importance of Kuwait's participation in COP28 and other ministerial meetings before the conference to unite the international efforts regarding climate change. These meetings are of great importance because it shows the international community's ability to achieve and deliver a clear message on protecting the climate and looking into related important issues, Sheikh Nimer Al-Sabah said to KUNA in a previous statement during his participation in the COP28 preliminary meeting.

He expressed aspiration for fruitful valuable discussions in the conference, amid the participation of world leaders to enhance efforts to reduce emissions from the current energy system and cooperate to build a system capable of keeping pace



Sultan Al-Jaber meets Kuwaiti delegations of COP28 at the Kuwaiti Pavilion in Expo City Dubai.

with future requirements and challenges. COP28 is scheduled to witness the first global assessment of the ongoing efforts for two years to determine the extent of progress made by the concerned authorities in implementing climate action plans, to face global warming and other environmental issues.

The world has been witnessing outbreaks of

forest fires and their spread to cities that are experiencing extreme heat, leading to drying up agricultural lands and storm-swept coasts, in addition to the increasing concentration of greenhouse gases in the Earth's atmosphere, resulting mainly from burning fossil fuels, is leading to serious consequences. — KUNA



The Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research delegation.

## KISR delegation participates in COP28 in Dubai

**KUWAIT:** The Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research announced on Thursday its participation in the 28th United Nations climate conference (COP28) in the United Arab Emirates, with lectures presented by its researchers. KISR, in coordination with the Environment Public Authority, will be present at the pavilion of Kuwait and at the pavilion of the General Secretariat of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf.

The official spokesman and executive director of the marketing and business operations sector at the institute, Abdul Mohsen Al-Haroun, said in a press statement that participation in the conference, which was launched on Thursday, comes to shed light on Kuwait's efforts and programs to reduce carbon dioxide emissions.

Al-Haroun added that the Institute, at the request of the International Atomic Energy Agency, participates in the 'Ship Explorer' project which the agency places on the list of important research facilities at the regional level. The project will result in a number of regional and international studies related to climate change. He explained that 'Ship Explorer' is a unique project in the Middle East as it specializes in research and development activities in the field of fisheries and marine environment and is equipped with seven modern laboratories.

He stated that the conference is an opportunity to conduct the first global assessment of the efforts that have been going on over a period of two years to determine the extent of progress made by the concerned governments in implementing climate action plans to confront global warming and other priority environmental issues. He pointed out that Kuwait had previously signed the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement in order to keep pace with global interest in the phenomenon of climate change and limit its repercussions, in addition to participating in global conferences concerned with it. — KUNA



Abdul Mohsen Al-Haroun

## Kuwait Heart Failure Team helps implement cardio-MEMS in Riyadh

By Faten Omar

**KUWAIT:** A notable collaboration unfolded between the Kuwait Heart Failure Team at the Chest Diseases Hospital and Dr Jehad Al-Buraiki, the lead cardiologist, in the successful implementation of cardio-MEMS technology in Riyadh. This partnership reflects a commitment to advancing cardiac care through innovative solutions. The integration of cardio-MEMS technology, designed to remotely monitor heart failure patients and enhance treatment strategies, showcases the collective efforts to embrace cutting-edge medical advancements.

Speaking to Kuwait Times, Dr Fatma Hadi, advance heart failure and transplant cardiologist, said: "The technology of cardio-MEMS is currently being implemented at the Chest Diseases Hospital and utilized by a structured advance heart failure and transplant team for the first time in Kuwait, supported by lead interventional cardiologists in Kuwait — Head of Department Dr Abdullah Al-Enezi and Head of Cath Lab Dr Khalid Al-Merri in collaboration with Dr Jehad Al-Buraiki, who is the leading heart failure and interventional cardiologist in implementing and utilizing this technology at Riyadh's King Faisal Specialist Hospital and Research Center."

Dr Hadi indicated that this technology is expected to be incorporated in a large clinical trial with an anticipated duration of one to two years for the first time in Kuwait. "A small sensor is placed in the patient's lung artery through a catheter with local anesthesia while the patient is fully awake in the catheterization room. This sensor is responsible for detecting the changes that happen in body fluids



Dr. Fatma Hadi, Advance Heart Failure and transplant cardiologist, poses for a group photo with cardiac catheterization lab's team.

before the patient starts to develop symptoms of heart failure," she explained.

"The patient is asked to use simple tools provided by this technology to send daily reports in a user-friendly way to their physicians. This will allow their treating team to tackle the changes in the patient's fluid status without the need to admit the patient to the hospital. This should greatly improve the patient's quality of life and reduce the need for urgent ER visits and hospitalization," Dr Hadi added.

Decompensated heart failure is one of the leading causes of hospital admissions and readmissions worldwide. Retaining fluids in the body, especially the lungs, is the hallmark of heart failure and worsening episodes. Severe shortness of breath with inability to lay flat

along with body swelling is caused by fluid retention. This usually requires hospitalization for monitoring the patient and administering IV medications to improve the patient's fluid status and improve the patient's breathing.

The burden of heart failure admissions extends beyond the cost of the admission to greatly impair the patient's quality of life. Suffering from hospital-acquired infections is an extra cost paid by the patients every time they get hospitalized adding to their morbidity. The technology of cardio-MEMS was extensively studied in large clinical trials which resulted in a significant reduction of 44 percent in heart failure hospitalizations and urgent ER visits.

## KFAED keen on realizing COP goals: Al-Bahar

**DUBAI:** Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development is keen on supporting sustainable goals and protecting the environment in line with the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Conference of the Parties (COP), said a top fund official on Thursday. Speaking to KUNA during the COP28 in Dubai, Acting Director General of KFAED Waleed Al-Bahar indicated that the fund was eager to bolster cooperation with regional and international entities within the environmental level through various partnerships and agreements. Such cooperation would surely lessen the impact on the climate and boost efforts to safeguard the environment from pollutants via pioneering projects to better utilize natural resources, he added. The COP28 event will last until December 2nd. The Kuwaiti participation in the event would reflect the Gulf state's commitment to the environment through highlighting its new vision that includes strategies to utilize sustainable elements as a base for development. — KUNA



A delegation from the KFAED at the Kuwaiti pavilion of the COP28 conference in Dubai.

## MoE lays off expats from supervisory jobs

**KUWAIT:** The ministry of education has outlined the Kuwaitization process for educational supervisory positions as part of its initiative to replace expatriate staff with Kuwaiti nationals. Following recent supervisory job tests, successful candidates will replace ex-

patriate teachers in disciplines with 25 percent or fewer foreign staff. An expatriate head of department is expected to face permanent termination or reassignment as a teacher.

Official sources have confirmed the termination of services of all expatriate teachers in disciplines where the expatriate presence is 25 percent or less. The aim is to replace them with suitable numbers of Kuwaiti educators, including graduates from teachers' colleges. For disciplines exceeding the 25 percent threshold, a phased replacement plan will be implemented, reaching 100

percent over several years. This pace is essential for meeting the target percentage of Kuwaiti hires.

Contrary to concerns about a shortage of teachers, the ministry of education is actively moving forward with plans to dismiss a significant number of expatriate teachers, specialists and administrators before the end of the current school year. The ministry has instructed educational zones to continue the policy of replacement by appointing Kuwaitis, and if necessary, the children of Kuwaitis, Gulf citizens and stateless individuals.

The ministry of education has directed educational zones to assess the number of teachers needed for the upcoming academic year and fill vacancies with recent national graduates. Additionally, there is an opportunity for Kuwaitis from the College of Science and Engineering to teach in disciplines facing continuous shortages, such as physics, chemistry and mathematics.

The announcement of the names of those being dismissed is expected at the end of June. Dismissed individuals will have a three-month period to settle financial matters and residency affairs

with the ministry of interior. Recent decisions by the manpower authority have prevented the transfer of residences to the private sector, and those who remain in the country will face residence violations and financial penalties.

Disciplines that will see expatriate staff reductions include Islamic education, history, geography, psychology, sociology, computer science, art education, craft, electricity and mechanics for males. For females, in addition to these disciplines, expatriate teachers in biology, geology, English and Arabic will also be phased out.



Local

# Largest edition of Mirzaam Expo to kick off in Kuwait from Dec 12

## Volvo Cars Kuwait returns as the strategic sponsor • Zain platinum sponsor

**KUWAIT:** Eng Farah Al-Humaidhi, the founder and organizer of Mirzaam, Kuwait's platform for interior design, furniture and decor, unveiled details about the upcoming Mirzaam Expo 2023 - the fourth and largest edition of the exhibition, scheduled to take place from Dec 12 to Dec 16, 2023 at the Kuwait Int'l Fair Ground in Mishref.

In a statement to the press, Al-Humaidhi emphasized that the annual return of Mirzaam signifies tremendous success for all involved, including organizers, sponsors, and participants. Mirzaam Expo 2023 marks the largest edition to date, featuring over 300 booths, exhibiting more than 30 categories from the interior design and décor world, covering a sprawling area of over 25,000 square meters, making it the largest and most significant in Mirzaam's history.

She further highlighted that Mirzaam Expo aims to facilitate visitors in finding everything they need under one roof, from interior and exterior finishes to furniture, accessories, kitchens, and all household necessities.

Al-Humaidhi mentioned that Mirzaam has consistently aimed to transform the process of home decoration and furnishing from a challenging task

to an enjoyable experience by bringing together industry professionals under one roof. She added that the expo presents visitors with opportunities to win valuable prizes while shopping within the exhibition, including the grand prize of a Volvo car, as well as KD 10,000 in cash prizes and more than 10 valuable prizes provided by Mirzaam's sponsors. Participating companies are also set to offer exclusive offers and products to visitors during the exhibition. Emphasizing the commitment to providing a comfortable experience for all family members, Al-Humaidhi noted that Mirzaam dedicates a special area for children with educational and recreational activities, along with a designated space for nursing mothers. Recognizing that visitors often spend extended hours at the expo and revisit over several days, the exhibition features restaurant and cafe zones for visitor comfort.

Additionally, Al-Humaidhi announced that dedicated pavilions have been allocated for universities in Kuwait that specialize in interior design and architecture to showcase their curricula and students' work. Expressing gratitude to sponsors and participants, Al-Humaidhi acknowledged the vital

role of supporting companies since Mirzaam's inception in 2019.

She specifically commended Zain, a leading telecommunications service provider in the Middle East, for being the platinum sponsor for the fourth consecutive edition of the expo. Also, a platinum sponsor of Mirzaam for the second time and a four time participant, Al-Wazzan United Trading Company, specializes in providing unique and high-quality solutions in kitchens, doors, wardrobes, and jewelry safes, in addition to restaurant and cafe equipment.

Techno Gym, a global leader in supplying fitness equipment for commercial gyms and homes, joins Mirzaam 23 as a platinum sponsor. Al-Humaidhi welcomed the return of Boubyan Bank as the exclusive banking sponsor for the second consecutive year, noting their distinctive financial services tailored to the needs of homeowners.

Al-Rai Media Group is acknowledged as the media sponsor, leading the advertising campaign across its diverse platforms, and Volvo Cars Kuwait returns as the strategic sponsor for the exhibition. Al-Humaidhi extended special thanks to the gold sponsors: Al-Waseet Pools, Lapunta Kitchens and Wardrobes

powered by Midas Company, and Farah Home.

Mirzaam Expo will also host the second edition of the Kutayba Al-Ghanim Furniture Design Award Competition in collaboration with Alghanim Industries and Safat Home. The award celebrates the remarkable skill and passion of creative professionals across the GCC. The nominated designs will be showcased at Mirzaam Expo, and the winner announced in December 2023.

In conclusion, Eng Farah Al-Humaidhi reiterated that the collective goal of everyone involved in the exhibition is to provide the best possible experience for visitors and participants. She eagerly anticipates welcoming visitors in December. Mirzaam Expo will be held at KIF Halls 5 - 6 - 7 from December 12 - 16.



Eng Farah Al-Humaidhi

## Environmental crossroads in Kuwait and beyond

By Mariam Al-Ayyoub

**I**n a world teetering on the precipice of environmental crisis, the notion of sustainability has emerged as a clarion call. However, the quest for ecological harmony is not without its contradictions, and nowhere is this paradox more evident than in the arid landscapes of Kuwait.

Kuwait, a nation synonymous with oil wealth and rapid modernization, finds itself at a crossroads where development aspirations clash with the imperatives of environmental preservation. The global discourse on sustainability, often marked by lofty ideals and grand commitments, starkly contrasts with the ecological challenges faced by Kuwait and its counterparts around the world.

On the global stage, climate change stands as an undeniable threat, its effects reverberating from the melting ice caps in Antarctica to the wildfires raging through the Amazon rainforest. It is a shared predicament that demands a collective response, transcending borders and political affiliations. Yet, amidst this global urgency, individual nations grapple with the intricacies of their own environmental narratives. Kuwait, a nation nestled in the heart of the Arabian Peninsula, confronts its environmental paradox with a complex interplay of economic interests, climatic realities, and the imperative to secure a sustainable future. The dichotomy between being a major oil exporter and a nation vulnerable to the impacts of climate change encapsulates the global struggle to balance economic growth with environmental responsibility.

In Kuwait, the specter of rising temperatures poses a tangible threat, exacerbating water scarcity and challenging traditional agricultural practices. The rapid urbanization and infrastructure development, while emblematic of progress, cast a shadow on the delicate ecosystems that once defined Kuwait's landscape. It is a microcosm of the global tension between economic advancement and environmental stewardship.

One of the critical issues on Kuwait's environmental landscape is water scarcity. Despite its wealth, Kuwait faces the harsh reality of limited freshwater resources, relying heavily on desalination plants for potable water. The ecological toll of desalination, coupled with excessive water consumption, paints a stark picture of the delicate balance between development and sustainability.

The controversy deepens as Kuwait grapples with waste management. Rapid urbanization has led to an upsurge in consumerism, resulting in a corresponding surge in waste generation. The challenge lies not only in waste disposal but in fostering a culture of recycling and reducing environmental impact. While governmental initiatives are underway, the pace of change is often at odds with the urgency demanded by the environmental crisis.

The global phenomenon of plastic pollution, symbolized by vast islands of debris in the oceans, is mirrored in Kuwait's struggle with single-use plastics. The convenience of these materials clashes with their devastating environmental consequences, echoing a broader global dilemma on how to curtail the pervasive use of plastics. As the world grapples with the imperative to reduce carbon emissions, Kuwait's reliance on oil as its economic backbone becomes a contentious point. The paradox lies in the reality that the very resource that fueled Kuwait's economic ascent is now a catalyst for environmental challenges. The nation faces the daunting task of diversifying its economy while navigating the socio-economic consequences of this transition.

The environmental paradox extends beyond Kuwait's borders, implicating global actors in a web of interconnected challenges. The discourse on sustainability often takes center stage in international forums, where commitments are made, and targets are set. However, the implementation of these aspirations encounters hurdles, with nations prioritizing economic interests and geopolitical strategies over environmental imperatives. The controversial reality is that, despite global agreements and pledges, many nations continue to prioritize short-term gains over long-term sustainability. The extraction of finite resources, deforestation, and the proliferation of environmentally damaging industries persist, underscoring the contention between economic growth and ecological responsibility.

In Kuwait and around the world, the controversy lies not only in acknowledging the urgency of environmental issues but in mustering the political will and societal changes necessary for effective solutions. The discourse on sustainability is a complex tapestry woven with threads of economic considerations, political maneuvering, and societal behaviors. The path forward demands uncomfortable conversations and radical shifts in perspective. It requires nations, including Kuwait, to reassess their developmental trajectories, placing environmental considerations at the forefront of policy-making. The controversy lies in the necessity for systemic change, challenging entrenched norms and reimagining a future where economic prosperity coexists harmoniously with ecological well-being.

The environmental controversy in Kuwait and globally is not merely a clash of ideologies; it is a battle for the very survival of our planet. It necessitates a collective introspection, transcending borders and political affiliations. The paradoxical interplay between economic development and environmental sustainability is a Gordian knot that demands unraveling. In Kuwait's arid landscapes and on the global stage, the controversy underscores the imperative for decisive action to ensure a sustainable future for generations to come.



KUNA contributed to the young readers section at the 46th Kuwait International Book Fair.



## Book Fair celebrates young readers' literary journey

**KUWAIT:** Amidst the bustling energy of Kuwait's 46th International Book Fair, a dedicated pavilion stands as a beacon for young readers. This specially crafted space by organizers of the book fair, with the help of Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences, the Environmental Voluntary Foundation, Kuwait News Agency and others, has been designed to lure children away from their iPads and immerse them in the captivating world of books.

It also aims to ignite the spark of curiosity and learning among the young audience, fostering an environment where the joy of reading takes center stage. — KUNA



The kids pavilion is decorated with colorful children's characters.



A toddler showing interest in a colorful book.

## Observe Sept 7 as a day to raise awareness on DMD disease: Kuwait

**NEW YORK:** Kuwait's proposal to consider September 7th of each year as a day to raise awareness of Duchenne muscular dystrophy (DMD) is a step forward in serving those affected by rare diseases worldwide, said Kuwait's Permanent Representative to UN, Ambassador Tariq Al-Bannai.

This came in Ambassador Al-Bannai's speech late Wednesday during a meeting held by the General Assembly (125) concerned with global health and foreign policy, in which Kuwait received 128 countries' sponsorship of its decision. Ambassador Al-Bannai said: "Our decision is more than just a campaign, but rather a pledge to support the dignity and rights of every child with this condition and to leave no one behind in our quest to achieve a more compassionate and inclusive world."

Al-Bannai also stressed that the adoption of this decision will provide hope and encouragement to individuals living with DMD, their families, and medical professionals who are facing this condition. Further, Ambassador Al-Bannai warned of the constant infection rates, which makes it a source of global concern that requires international attention, noting that DMD is still not recognized and has not been adequately researched, despite its global impact and life-limiting nature.

Ambassador Al-Bannai pointed out that the decision is consistent with the goals of sustainable development by calling for health and well-being and supporting comprehensive education, as well as seeking to reduce inequality for those who suffer from rare diseases. — KUNA



Kuwait's Permanent Representative to UN, Ambassador Tariq Al-Bannai speaks at the UN.

## Customs seizes 2,183 bottles of alcohol

**KUWAIT:** Shuwaikh Port customs inspectors managed to seize approximately 2,183 bottles of alcohol, hidden in a large generator arriving from one of the Gulf countries through Port Customs.

"A large electric generator coming from one of the Gulf countries arrived at Shuwaikh Port Customs, but the customs inspectors of the northern ports and Failaka Island - Inspection and Deposit Control had doubts about

that electric generator," Kuwait customs announced.

They added that the Shuwaikh port customs referred it to the radiation detection device, which showed a difference in densities inside the generator. "Accordingly it was opened with the support of the General Fire Force, and approximately 2,183 bottles of alcohol were found hidden inside. The accused was arrested and handed over to the competent authorities," the officials said.

The Deputy Director General for Customs, Ports Affairs, Osama Al-Shami, and the Director of Customs of the Northern Ports and Failaka Island, Saleh Al-Harbi, thanked the customs men for their tireless efforts in addressing all smuggling operations of contraband, whatever their form or type. They also thanked the ministry of interior and the Kuwait Fire Force for their keenness and rapid response to the call.



The confiscated bottles of alcohol.



## Unique opportunity: KJA's participation in NATO meetings

BRUSSELS: Kuwait Journalists Association's (KJA) participation in the NATO foreign ministers meeting in Brussels is a unique experience enabling Kuwait to deliver its media message to the world, said a Kuwaiti journalist on Thursday. Speaking to KUNA, Rabaa Maki Al-Juma, a member of the KJA Board, said that her participation in the NATO meeting was a unique opportunity to deliver Kuwait's views on important regional issues chiefly amongst them was the just Palestinian cause.

She stated that the meeting was held during a disturbing situation in the Middle East region as well as the continuous Russian military operations against the Ukraine with both crises causing the death of thousands of lives including those of children and women.

Al-Juma stressed that journalists must take the opportunity to ask the NATO FM's about their stance on the humanitarian truce between Hamas and the Zionist forces in the Gaza Strip, adding that questions should also revolve around the importance of implementing international law in Gaza and allowing humanitarian aid to enter the war-torn region.

However, Al-Juma indicated that the NATO FM's meeting focused on the war in the Ukraine, the organization's relation with China, the tension between Kosovo and Serbia, and Turkey's demand to allow Sweden to join the organization. She affirmed that there was a great interest in having Kuwaiti journalists present at the meeting, a preparatory step for the NATO summit to be held in Washington next year.

Al-Juma stressed that Kuwaiti journalists must highlight Arab causes during the future NATO summit via using the latest technologies and tools to reach a wider audience. NATO is an integral global organization and Kuwait has a strategic relation to on the bilateral level and also through the NATO's Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI). — KUNA



Rabaa Maki Al-Juma

### Photo of the day



KUWAIT: As the winter approaches, fog hovers over the Kuwait City skyline on Thursday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

# Kuwait Relief Society ready to launch 'Gaza Ship' campaign

## 31st relief plane takes off from the Kuwaiti air bridge for Gaza Strip



KRCS workers and charity volunteers stand as the 31st plane is ready to take off. — KUNA photos



Yousef Al-Maraj

KUWAIT: Kuwait Relief Society is set to launch a campaign under the slogan "Gaza Ship" with a load of 1,200 tons of necessary relief aid for Palestinians, with the participation of 30 Kuwaiti charity societies, in cooperation with the Turkish Red Crescent.

The Society's Deputy Director General and General Supervisor of the "Gaza Ship" campaign Omar Al-Thuwaini told KUNA Thursday that the campaign affirms Kuwait's human values and is an embodiment of the concepts of Islamic and Arab solidarity and brotherhood between the Kuwaiti and Palestinian people. He explained that the campaign aims to collect KD 800,000 (about \$2.6 million), which will contribute to supporting and providing relief to the wounded and displaced in Gaza Strip, due to the Zionist occupation's aggression, in addition to providing support to hospitals, schools and shelter centers. The "Gaza Ship" will depart from Turkish ports towards the Egyptian port of Al-Arish before mid-December and aims to fill the severe shortage in medical and food supplies and shelter, Al-Thuwaini added.

Meanwhile, the 31st relief plane took off from the Kuwaiti air bridge on Thursday, heading to the Al-Arish Airport in Egypt, carrying 10 tons of aid and medical supplies to help the brothers in Gaza Strip. Director of Disaster and Emergency Management at the Kuwait Red Crescent Society, Yousef

Al-Maraj, told KUNA that Kuwait is making every effort to deliver humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip urgently to alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian brothers following of the devastating attacks by the Zionist entity. The relief campaign comes within the framework of the support provided by the Kuwaiti leadership and the close follow-up of the relevant ministries and institutions in the country, especially the Kuwait Red Crescent Society, he said. He expressed the hope that this aid will help in alleviating the suffering of the Palestinian people.

Kuwaiti charities play an integral role in providing assistance to those in need spreading through such actions the true message of Islam, said Kuwait Ambassador to Italy Nasser Al-Qahtani on Wednesday. In a statement obtained by KUNA, Ambassador Al-Qahtani commended the opening of a new Masjid and Islamic center in the Island of Sicily last Friday, affirming that Kuwait was always on the forefront on assisting Muslims worldwide. He affirmed that such actions was part of the Kuwaiti national identity, which sought the betterment of the whole world.

First Secretary at the Kuwaiti Embassy Hamad Al-Turkait attended the opening of the new Masjid and Islamic center in Sicily, which was sponsored by Kuwaiti's International Mercy Society. Islamic societies and charities operating in Italy as well as several Italian officials attended the event. — KUNA

## Kuwait's October crude oil exports to Japan drop

TOKYO: Kuwait's crude oil exports to Japan in October fell 51.1 percent from a year earlier to 3.81 million barrels, or 123,000 barrels per day (bpd), for the first decline in two months, government data showed Thursday. As Japan's third-biggest oil provider, Kuwait supplied 5.3 percent of the country's total crude imports, compared with 9.2 percent in the same month of last year, the Japanese Natural Resources and Energy Agency said in a preliminary report. Japan's overall imports of crude oil in October shrank 15.3 percent from a year earlier to 2.31 million bpd, down for the fourth straight month.

Shipments from the Middle East accounted for 92.0 percent of the total, down 2.7 percentage points from the year before. By country, Saudi Arabia returned to the top spot, although imports from the kingdom decreased 3.9 percent from the year before to 978,000 bpd, followed by the United Arab Emirates with 934,000 bpd, down 14.5 percent. The US ranked fourth with 82,000 bpd and Qatar fifth with 73,000 bpd, respectively. Japan is the world's-third

biggest oil consumer after China and the US.

The Kuwaiti oil price rose 13 cents to \$84.93 per barrel on Wednesday, as opposed to \$84.80 on Tuesday, said the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) Thursday. In international markets, Brent crude went up by \$1.42 to \$83.10 pb, while West Texas Intermediate rose \$1.45 to stand at \$77.86. OPEC+ was expected to decide its output policy as they headed into virtual meetings Thursday in a bid to halt a continuous slump in prices. Amid stuttering global economic growth, analysts expect OPEC+ -- the 13 OPEC members headed by Saudi Arabia and 10 partners led by Russia -- to extend or deepen production cuts into next year to prop up prices. But heading into the meeting, disagreement over output quotas persisted among the OPEC+ group, which was forced to delay its key meeting by four days. It remained unclear whether Saudi Arabia would succeed in convincing African producers to accept lower output targets to further buttress prices, as some members were pushing for higher production instead, sources said. In recent months, nine OPEC+ members including Riyadh, Moscow, Baghdad and Dubai have reduced their output. Since the end of 2022, the alliance has implemented supply cuts of about five million barrels per day (bpd). They initially slashed some two million barrels in their first in-person meeting after the COVID pandemic. In May they implemented more cuts by nine members totalling 1.6 million bpd. — Agencies



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Changing face of Kabul: Safer, more somber

## Russia controversy overshadows OSCE security summit

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GAZA: Palestinians inspect the destruction caused by Zionist strikes in Wadi Gaza in the central Gaza Strip on Nov 28, 2023. — AFP

# Gazans return to homes in ruins

## Families scour rubble to recover possessions to survive and rebuild

GAZA: Tea and cheese sandwiches are on the breakfast menu for Taghrid Al-Najjar's children. It should be an everyday moment, but their home in the Gaza Strip is now mostly rubble. The walls have collapsed, with furniture and appliances buried under concrete. Until the war, the 46-year-old mother had never left her farming village along the border with the Zionist entity in the southeast of the Strip.

Since Friday a truce has paused the fighting between the Zionist entity and Hamas, allowing them to return to a neighborhood in ruins. "It is only here that I feel good," she said. Najjar fled when Zionist bombardments started as it went to war with Hamas in retaliation for the Oct 7 attacks. For weeks she lived with nine members of her family in a Khan Yunis school converted into a makeshift camp for displaced people.

The Gaza government says nearly 15,000 people, mostly civilians, have been killed in the Gaza war, and Najjar said dozens of people in her wider extended family have died. As soon as the truce went

into effect on Friday — it has now been extended for additional days — she began making her way home to Abasan on foot. "I discovered that my house had been completely destroyed — 27 years of my life to build it and everything is gone!" she said.

"For two days I couldn't eat, then I told myself that I had to continue living," she added, looking at her children. "My house is destroyed but my children are alive, so we will rebuild. We have already done it once, we can do it again," she told AFP. Each night the family squeezes through a window to sleep in the only room where the walls have not entirely crumpled.

### Children 'traumatized'

Once there is a permanent ceasefire, Najjar said, they will pitch a tent, but only for "long enough to rebuild the house". Her 64-year-old neighbor Jamil Abu Azra's main concern was his four young grandchildren. "They can sleep anywhere, the problem is that they are afraid and they are traumatized," he

said. "Even us adults are afraid, but we pretend in front of the little ones."

Across the street, Bassem Abu Taaima contemplated the destroyed building where his family and his four brothers' families had lived. "We are all farmers or taxi drivers. We really have nothing to do with the resistance," he said of Palestinian armed groups, "so we don't understand why all this is happening to us." Wearing a jacket given to him by a neighbor, and shorts despite the biting cold, he said he will wait for the war to end before setting up a tent and starting to clear and rebuild. He has scoured the debris for warm clothes, although everything he has found has been burned or torn.

### School destroyed

Nearby, Naim Taaimat, 46, was building a shelter for his family from wood, some fabric and a few nails. "This is where I will live with my wife, our seven children and my mother after the war," he said. More tents will be needed as his brothers — each has sev-

en children — "have also lost their homes", he added. The brothers "shed blood" to build the houses where the families' possession are now buried under rubble.

Taaimat's first priority was to find his daughter Nivine's trousseau, as she had been due to get married next week. He used a hammer to try to break up the concrete blocks before rummaging around with his bare hands. "Now she's lost her house and her fiancé also lost his house. So I have to find something so that she can still be a little happy."

Twelve-year-old Abdessamad interrupted, running in shouting: "We found an electric lamp and we have logs for the fire!" Sitting with his friends on a dirt floor near the United Nations school where used to study, now partly wrecked by Zionist bombing, he laughed, sang and joked. "The war really scared us and it was horrible, but there is good news," said his friend Nabil, eight. Laughing, and hoping his parents couldn't overhear him, he explained: "The school's destroyed and we won't be able to go back for a while." — AFP

## Zelensky visits front as Russia ups attacks

KYIV: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on Thursday visited a frontline command post in eastern Ukraine, where Russian forces have been stepping up attacks after holding back a Ukrainian counteroffensive. Zelensky praised Ukrainian troops deployed around Kupiansk, where Russian forces have been mounting attacks to reclaim territory they lost in a lightning Ukrainian offensive last year.

But the frontline has largely remained static for the last year despite a massive push by Ukrainian forces this summer with Western military hardware. "Fighters on the Kupiansk front are protecting the peaceful life of Ukrainians and the people of the Kharkiv region," Zelensky said in a post on social media. "I wish you victory, be strong and don't lose the initiative."

Zelensky's visit came as Russia's defense ministry said Moscow's forces had repelled two Ukrainian assaults near Kupiansk with the help of fighter jets and artillery. Ukrainian military officials meanwhile said Russian forces had continued trying to wrest control of Avdiivka, a frontline town in the neighboring Donetsk region.

Russia launched a renewed bid to capture the war-battered town last month and analysts suggest Moscow's forces have made incremental gains, though at an enormous human cost. "The enemy continues active ground infantry attacks in the operational area of the Tavria operational-strategic group of troops. In some places, they use armored vehi-



KUPIANSK, Ukraine: This handout photograph taken and released on Nov 30, 2023 shows Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and Colonel General Oleksandr Syrskyi visiting an army command post in the Kharkiv region. — AFP

cles," said Oleksandr Tarnavsky, who is responsible for fighting in the east.

He said Ukrainian forces had fended off more than 20 Russian attacks on several towns and villages around Avdiivka and that Ukraine had taken dozens of Russian forces captive in the last month. AFP was not able to independently verify the claims. Local officials in the Donetsk region earlier said that one person was killed and several more were missing after simultaneous Russian strikes on three towns.

The industrial region has seen some of the fier-

est fighting of Russia's nearly two-year invasion. The Kremlin claimed to have annexed it last year, along with three other regions. Russian forces fired six S-300 rockets on Pokrovsk, Novogrodovka and Myrnohrad, officials in Kyiv said, before local authorities announced the fatality. "At the site of the shelling of a residential building in Novogrodovka, the body of a dead man was recovered from the rubble," Igor Moroz, the acting head of the Donetsk region, said. He said emergency workers were still searching for four people trapped under the debris, including one child. — AFP

Emergency services said that 72 people were staying at the hostel at the time of the fire, and 59 were safely evacuated. Authorities said the building was converted into a hostel a month and a half ago. The cause of the incident is under investigation. Russian media reported two Russian citizens were among the dead. Kazakh media said the ground and basement floors of the hostel had been turned into dorms, with some publishing images of a cramped room without windows with at least five wooden bunk beds. A lax approach to safety regulations in Kazakhstan is widespread, often leading to deadly situations. — AFP

## Fire at dawn in Kazakhstan hostel kills 13

ALMATY: Kazakhstan said Thursday that at least 13 people were killed in a fire that broke out at dawn in a hostel in the Central Asian country's largest city Almaty. The victims most likely suffocated in the basement of the building, officials said, and authori-

## German court sentences Gambian death squad member to life in prison

CELLE, Germany: A German court on Thursday sentenced a Gambian man to life in prison over his participation in a death squad that assassinated opponents of former dictator Yahya Jammeh, including an AFP journalist. Bai Lowe was convicted of crimes against humanity, murder and attempted murder for his role as a driver for the hit squad known as the Junglers.

Lowe's conviction came after a trial that rights groups and family members said was just the beginning of a long road towards justice for the victims of Jammeh's regime. Lowe, who denied the charges against him, shook his head as the sentence was read out by the judge at the court in the northern town of Celle. The Junglers unit was "used by the then-president of The Gambia to carry out illegal killing orders, among other things" with the aim of "intimidating the Gambian population and suppressing the opposition", according to prosecutors.

The list of crimes included the 2004 killing of AFP correspondent Deyda Hydara, who was gunned down in his car on the outskirts of the Gambian capital Banjul on Dec 16, 2004. Lowe was found to have acted as a driver for the unit and to have helped stop Hydara's car on the night of the murder. Hydara's son, Baba Hydara, said in Celle that while the ruling was an "important day" for the victims of Jammeh's government, it was "just a start". "We have more fights. We have more challenges, trials and tribulations to achieve our goal, and our main goal is to get the one who was giving the orders," he told AFP.

Hydara was an editor and co-founder of independent daily The Point and a correspondent for AFP for over 30 years. The father of four also worked as a Gambia correspondent for the NGO Reporters Without Borders (RSF) and was considered a doyen among journalists in the tiny West African state. In The Point, he wrote a widely read column, "Good morning, Mr President", in which he expressed his views on Gambian politics. As well as having a role in Hydara's killing, Lowe is accused by prosecutors of involvement in the attempted assassination of lawyer Ousman Sillah and the murder of Dawda Nyassi, a suspected opponent of the president. The ruling against Lowe was "the first time a court has recognized that crimes against humanity were committed by Yahya Jammeh", Hydara's lawyer Patrick Kroker said. — AFP



## International

## Row overshadows OSCE summit

Forum struggling to operate as Russia's war in Ukraine unleashes tensions

**SKOPJE:** The world's largest regional security group opened its Skopje summit Thursday with Russia and Ukraine's allies in open conflict, rattling the organization that is intended as a forum for East-West blocs. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) has been struggling to survive with Russia blocking key decisions, including the group's budget.

These building tensions spilled into dispute over Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov's attendance at the gathering this week, sparking a boycott from Ukraine and key allies over 20 months into Russia's attack. Ahead of Lavrov's speech to the summit, Russia came in for fierce criticism, with much of the ire from member states focused on its war against Ukraine.

"Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine flies in the face of all this organization holds dear," said Bujar Osmani, North Macedonia's foreign affairs minister and OSCE chairman in office, during opening remarks as the summit kicked off. "The war undermines trust, dialogue, and our capacity to deliver," he added.

Lavrov fired back at the remarks, saying the OSCE was becoming an "appendage" of the NATO alliance and the European Union. "The organization, let's face it, is on the edge of a precipice. A simple question arises: does it make sense to invest in its revitalization?" said Lavrov, who immediately left the session after delivering his remarks.

Created in 1975 as a forum for dialogue between the Eastern and Western blocs, the OSCE has been struggling to operate as Russia's war in Ukraine has unleashed a torrent of tension in the organization. Earlier this week, Ukraine, Estonia, Latvia, Poland and Lithuania announced that they would boycott the annual ministerial conference, with Warsaw saying Russia's presence was "unacceptable".

Ukraine wants the OSCE to expel Russia, as the Council of Europe has done, warning the body faced a "slow death" if Moscow remains a member. "We just cannot ignore the fact that the Russian minister of foreign affairs will be present at the table of the organization that is supposed to build peace and security in Europe," Polish Foreign Minister Szymon Szykowski told reporters on Wednesday. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who was in Skopje on Wednesday for a pre-summit dinner with repre-



**SKOPJE:** Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and San Marino's Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Luca Beccari attend the 30th OSCE Ministerial Meeting on Nov 30, 2023. — AFP

sentatives of other OSCE states, was not in attendance on Thursday.

Late on Wednesday, the European Union's top diplomat, Josep Borrell, said he understood the unease of some states but welcomed the decision by North Macedonia to allow Lavrov to participate, saying it aligned with the "common objective of keeping multilateralism alive". "It will be a good occasion for him (Lavrov) to listen directly from the participants at this meeting why Russia is being condemned and isolated," he told reporters.

After months of negotiations, Malta on Monday agreed to take over the organization's rotating presidency next year, instead of NATO member Estonia — who the Kremlin openly rejected. The ruling is expected to be ratified during the two-day ministerial meeting.

Ahead of the summit, Russia accused Western countries of trying to stop its officials from attending the meeting. "We see attempts by part of the West to do everything possible to hinder our country's normal participation at this meeting," Russian foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said. She

went on to accuse some countries — without naming them — of threatening "the very existence of the organization, just to satisfy their ambitions".

Russia's repeated criticism has fueled speculation it could pull out of the OSCE altogether, cutting another fragile line of communication with the West. Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the OSCE has issued several reports on possible war crimes and crimes against humanity by Russian armed forces. Borrell is also attending the meeting but has said he will not meet Lavrov directly. — AFP

## Red and blue US square off in clash of the governors

**ATLANTA:** They are ambitious and relatively young leaders whose passionate views about running their large, powerful states offer contrasting ideals on how the deeply-polarized United States should be run. But Republican Florida governor Ron DeSantis and Gavin Newsom, his counterpart in Democratic California, will swap social media antagonism for an in-person televised debate Thursday that could preview the White House race in 2028.

The pair represent almost one in five Americans — California is the largest US state and Florida is third — and debate host Fox News is billing the showdown as a clash between liberal blue and conservative red America. The right-leaning cable network says the debate will focus on the "vastly different approaches" of the governors to issues from the



economy and immigration to crime — though both Newsom and DeSantis have broader goals.

The Florida governor, once seen as the most viable alternative to scandal-plagued Donald Trump for Republican presidential nomination, is desperate to revive a flagging White House bid going into election year. Newsom, 56, isn't running but speculation about a presidential campaign in 2028 has grown as

commentators have been impressed with his appearances on the stump for President Joe Biden.

"This is a high school version of American Idol," Republican strategist Brian Robinson told The Atlanta Journal-Constitution ahead of the debate. "It makes no difference for 2024, but it's a chance to spot talent for a future presidential race." Newsom has spent much of the election cycle needling DeSantis over gun control, abortion restrictions and other so-called "culture war" issues such as the teaching of gender and sexuality in classrooms.

## 'Shadow campaign'

"Freedom, it's under attack in your state," Newsom said in an ad that aired in Florida last year. "Republican leaders, they're banning books, making it harder to vote, restricting speech in classrooms, even criminalizing women and doctors." DeSantis has fired back at Newsom on immigration, public health restrictions and crime, arguing that "leftist policies" have damaged Californian cities like San Francisco and have sparked an exodus to conservative states.

"He caters to a very far-left slice of the electorate. I think that that will be on display when we have the de-

bate," DeSantis said at a campaign event in Manchester, New Hampshire last week. "But I've been warning Republican voters, it may not be Biden in 2024. This guy is running a shadow campaign. He denies it, but even people in his own party are saying it."

The 90-minute "DeSantis vs Newsom: The Great Red vs Blue State Debate" takes place in the suburbs of Atlanta, Georgia, a once staunchly Republican state that has moved leftwards to become a key battleground. There has also been bad blood between the pair over DeSantis transporting undocumented migrants to California, and Newsom's fierce criticism of Florida's six-week abortion ban. Newsom called DeSantis a "small, pathetic man" and suggested that Florida officials could face kidnapping charges for their involvement in a stunt flying migrants from Texas to Sacramento in June.

DeSantis appears to face more risks on the night, although political scientist Justin Buchler, of Case Western Reserve University in Ohio, told AFP that either governor could slip up in the debate arena. "They each have political ambitions, which would be set back by an embarrassment, so this is a bad deal for each," he said. "They can only lose." — AFP

## Fossil fuels in focus at...

Continued from Page 1

In his opening address, Jaber told delegates they must "ensure the inclusion of the role of fossil fuels" in any final climate agreement and praised oil companies for coming to the table. "They can lead the way. And then leading the way will ensure that others follow and catch up," he said.

But UN climate chief Simon Stiell told the meeting: "If we do not signal the terminal decline of the fossil fuel era as we know it, we welcome our own terminal decline." And Pope Francis, who cancelled his trip to COP28 due to illness, urged participants to reject "the vested interests of certain countries or businesses", in a statement posted on X, formerly Twitter.

Finding a common position on the future of fossil fuels will be difficult at COP where all nations — whether dependent on oil, sinking beneath rising seas or locked in geopolitical rivalry — must take decisions unanimously. The UAE hopes to marshal an agreement on the tripling of renewable energy and doubling the annual rate of energy efficiency improvements by 2030.

Nations will navigate a range of thorny issues between Nov 30 and Dec 12, and experts say building trust could be a huge challenge. At the opening of the conference, delegates paused for a minute's silence for civilians killed in the Gaza conflict. The deadly war also dominated the activist agenda, with chanting, keffi-

yeh-wearing climate justice defenders urging a ceasefire and an end to the Zionist entity's 17-year blockade of the Gaza Strip. "We are here to express our solidarity with the Palestinians and call for a permanent ceasefire," Lidy Naqipil, representing a coalition of 350 climate justice organizations, told a press conference on the sidelines of the COP gathering.

Zionist President Isaac Herzog, who was scheduled to arrive in the UAE on Thursday, plans to use his COP28 visit for a diplomatic push to release captives held by Hamas. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas is also expected to be at COP28 and will be in the same room as Herzog on Friday, as they are scheduled to give speeches just minutes apart. Some activists at the press conference, wearing keffiyehs, chanted "Free Palestine!" and other slogans. "It's our duty as protectors of motherland and the mother earth, and also protectors of humans, to speak up publicly and demand a ceasefire and the end of the occupation," said Rania Harrara of the MENA Feminist Taskforce.

Dozens of people also attended a separate gathering in support calling for an end to the war. "We see the same rich countries who say there is no money to help pay for the damage they caused to the climate, say they have no problem paying for bombs raining on innocent people," said Asad Rehman, lead spokesperson for the Climate Justice Coalition. The activists at COP28 included Tariq Luthun from Gaza, who is a member of the Climate Action Network. The 32-year-old based in the United States said 95 percent of his family is in the besieged Palestinian territory, including extended family members who have died in the latest fighting. — AFP

down due to the COVID pandemic, sending oil demand plunging. The group agreed in April 2020 to slash output by 9.7 million barrels per day in order to boost sagging prices. It began to raise production again in 2021 as the market improved.

In the most recent meetings amid plunging prices, OPEC+ members have announced voluntary cuts to boost prices. Since the end of 2022, the alliance has implemented supply cuts of about five million barrels per day (bpd) with Saudi Arabia taking the lead. Amid stuttering global economic growth, analysts had largely expected OPEC+ producers to extend or deepen production cuts into next year to halt the recent slump in prices. Intense negotiations have continued in recent days as Saudi Arabia, which has borne the brunt of the cuts, sought to convince African countries to chip in by accepting lower production quotas. Angola and Nigeria were among those countries reluctant to sign up, seeking to step up production to secure foreign currency. — AFP

## More captives freed as Gaza...

Continued from Page 1

the city, before two off-duty soldiers and civilians fired at them and "neutralized" them, police said. Separately, two Zionist soldiers were slightly injured in a ramming attack on a checkpoint in the occupied West Bank on Thursday, the army said, adding the assailant had also been "shot and neutralized".

International bodies have called for more time to allow medical supplies, food and fuel into the besieged Gaza Strip after fierce combat and bombardments. "We have seen over the last week the very positive development of hostages coming home, being reunited with their families," Blinken said at a meeting with Zionist President Isaac Herzog in Tel Aviv. "It's also enabled an increase in humanitarian assistance to go to innocent civilians in Gaza who need it desperately. So this process is producing results. It's important, and we hope that it can continue."

Blinken later told Netanyahu it was "imperative" to protect civilians in southern Gaza "before any military operations there". The latest extended truce had been due to end at 0500 GMT Thursday, but the Zionist army said the "operational pause" would continue as international mediators

negotiate the release of captives held by Hamas. Qatar, which has led the truce negotiations supported by Egypt and the United States, confirmed the pause had been extended for one day "under the same previous conditions".

The truce agreement allows for extensions if Hamas can continue to release 10 captives per day, but both sides have warned they are ready to return to fighting. Since the truce began on Nov 24, 70 Zionist captives have been freed in return for 210 Palestinian prisoners, including well-known activist Ahed Tamimi. At least 24 foreigners, most of them Thais living in the Zionist entity, have been freed outside the terms of the deal. The Zionist entity says it sees the truce as a temporary halt intended to free captives, but there are growing calls for a more sustained pause in fighting. Before the truce, Zionist ground and air forces had pounded Gaza, forcing an estimated 1.7 million people — around 80 percent of the Hamas-run territory's population — to leave their homes and limiting the entry of food, water, medicine and fuel.

Conditions in Gaza remain "catastrophic" and the population faces a "high risk of famine", according to the World Food Program. The truce has allowed some of the displaced to return to their homes, but for many there is little left. "I discovered that my house had been completely destroyed — 27 years of my life to build it and everything is gone," said Taghrid Al-Najjar, 46, after returning to her home in southeastern Gaza. — AFP

## OPEC+ slashes output, Brazil...

Continued from Page 1

OPEC+ was born in late 2016 when Russia and nine others joined forces with the Saudi-led OPEC to prop up falling prices. "Considering that Brazil is a large oil producer and is driving oil production growth it is important to have them on board, but it seems that they are not cutting production like Mexico, so would conclude with: Good for OPEC+, less relevant for oil market balances," UBS analyst Giovanni Stauvovo said.

The 23-member OPEC+ is a motley crew of countries: Saudi Arabia and Iran are bitter rivals, South Sudan and Libya have been wracked by civil wars and others such as Venezuela are mired in economic crises. The cartel faced its biggest crisis in 2020 as countries locked

## Divisive US envoy Henry Kissinger...

Continued from Page 1

on foreign affairs with the passing of Henry Kissinger, former president George W Bush, a Republican, said in a statement. Kissinger was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for negotiations to end the Vietnam War, even though the conflict did not immediately end and his North Vietnamese counterpart, Le Duc Tho, declined to accept the prize.

After the Watergate scandal brought down Nixon, Kissinger served under his successor, Gerald Ford. In an unprecedented arrangement reflecting his influence, Kissinger served simultaneously as secretary of state — the country's top diplomat — and national

security advisor, the president's right-hand aide.

While Kissinger's intellectual gifts were begrudgingly acknowledged even by his critics, he remains deeply controversial for his ruthless philosophy of realpolitik — the cold calculation that nations pursue their own interests through power. Declassified documents showed that Kissinger gave his blessing to the undermining of Chile's elected Marxist president Salvador Allende and the 1973 coup by General Augusto Pinochet. Kissinger also supported Indonesia, a close anti-communist ally, as it seized East Timor in 1975. More than 100,000 East Timorese died from the start of the invasion — launched one day after Kissinger and Ford met Indonesian leader Suharto — until Indonesia ended its occupation in 1999.

Kissinger also turned a blind eye to Pakistan's mass atrocities as Bangladesh won independence in 1971, believing the US interest was keeping Islamabad as the quiet go-between with China. — AFP



## International

## Kabul changing: Safer, more somber

## Traffic jams, pollution remain challenges for municipal authorities

**KABUL:** The streets of the Afghan capital have changed since the Taliban returned to power in 2021, becoming cleaner and safer — but more somber. Under Afghanistan's Taliban leadership, Kabul municipal authorities have launched an ambitious program to improve life in the city of seven million, with aggressive tax collection funding roadworks, public monuments and clean-up campaigns.

They have also ruthlessly purged the streets of drug addicts, and rounded up beggars to differentiate between the "professionals" and genuinely needy. "Since the destruction of the republican government and the takeover of the Islamic Emirate, we have seen a lot of changes," said Zia Wali, 43, a lifelong resident. "One of the biggest changes is that we are feeling secure now," he told AFP. Crowded, polluted and bristling with security, the centuries-old city is squeezed into a basin ringed by mountains and sliced through by the Kabul River.

## Open roads

During the 20-year rule of the former Western-backed government, parts of the city became heavily fortified as the Taliban regrouped and began attacking foreign and national targets. Many parts of Kabul are still "bunkerized", with access fettered by barriers, barbed wire, huge Hesco walls, and security officers manning fortified concrete chicanes. But in the past two years Kabulis have regained kilometers of streets blocked by the decades of conflict.

"Those who were the cause of insecurity are now in charge of security," said Amin Karim, an architect and former presidential advisor, calling it "their greatest achievement". Nematullah Barakzai, the municipality's cultural affairs advisor, told AFP that more than 100 roads that were closed to the public have been reopened since 2021.

Standing in the middle of a crossroads in the "Green Zone" — which used to house embassies,

and residences for foreigners and the Afghan elite — Barakzai gestured to an avenue now open to traffic after the home of an ex-president's daughter was demolished. More than 100 km of new road have been laid or resurfaced, a redeveloped central park in Shahr-e Naw boasts lush lawns defying the surrounding aridity, and greenhouses full of a million flowers are ready for spring planting.

Security threats have not disappeared entirely, however, and checkpoints once set up to counter Taliban attacks remain to thwart Islamic State militants — along with 62,000 surveillance cameras, according to the interior ministry. This has helped bring down petty crime, and Khalilullah, a 21-year-old apple vendor, says he now feels safe to go to and from work "even late at night".

But traffic jams and pollution remain complicated challenges for the municipal authorities. On the northern outskirts, an old man on horseback rides past excavators building a four-kilometer expressway where brick shacks had clung to the rugged mountainside. Taliban authorities have also gathered private sector investment to revamp 24 roundabouts in an attempt to bring order to the anarchic traffic — although cars still navigate them from both directions. All will be solved though the city's "10-year strategic vision", Barakzai says confidently.

## Changing atmosphere

While a grey smog frequently hangs in the Kabul air — particularly in winter — the atmosphere has changed in other ways too, becoming more somber. "Before, on Thursday afternoons and Fridays until late at night, the center was teeming with people," said Karim. "The restaurants were full, you could hear music everywhere, young people were walking around, going to concerts," he added.

But these days after nightfall, many Kabul streets are dark and deserted — as if the capital was under



**KABUL:** In this photo taken on Nov 20, 2023, Afghan men stand next to an Afghanistan map on the ground built by municipal authorities at Shahr-e-Naw Park. — AFP

curfew — and even during daylight there are far fewer women about. Kabul — like the rest of conservative Afghan society — has long been male dominated, but Taliban authorities have introduced harsh restrictions that have squeezed women out of public life.

Thousands of beauty parlors, whose shopfronts were a colorful feature of Kabul's streets, were ordered to shut, while parks, sports halls and gyms were also made off limits to women. Gone too is the daily sight of thousands of teenage Afghan girls and women

going to and from classes since authorities shut down their schools and colleges. Humaira, 29, noted that women who did venture out were now dressing more conservatively — with black full-length coverings, scarves and masks now dominant. Still, she feels safer because she is no longer "harassed" in the street. If there is a glum mood in the city, it stems as much from money woes, says Ramisha. "The sadness you see on a woman's or a man's face comes from economic difficulties," she said. — AFP

## Poor education, stigma fuel HIV in Philippines

**MANILA:** HIV infections are soaring in the Philippines, with experts blaming online dating, poor sex education and conservative attitudes in the deeply religious country for fueling the spread of the virus. While less than one percent of the country's more than 110 million people have been diagnosed with HIV, UN data show it has one of the world's fastest-growing epidemics.

Philippine health officials warn the number of people testing positive for HIV every year is accelerating and the caseload could more than double to over 400,000 by 2030. A growing number are teenagers. "It's alarming because it shows that we're not yet controlling the epidemic," said Van Phillip Baton, an adviser for the Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) in the Philippines. Baton warned the virus could spread to the general population if action wasn't taken.

Experts said social media and online dating sites had fanned infections over the past decade by making it easier for people to find sexual partners. But increased sexual activity, particularly since COVID-19 restrictions were lifted, has not been matched by a greater use of condoms or pre-exposure prophylaxis drugs to prevent infection, said Baton.

Ignorance was a major factor. A sexual health study by the University of the Philippines' Population Institute in 2021 showed more than a third of young Filipinos aged 15 to 24 did not believe using condoms could reduce the risk of acquiring HIV. And the proportion of young Filipinos who had heard of HIV and AIDS had fallen to 76 percent — the lowest level since 1994.

"This means more information needs to be disseminated to correct the perspectives of young people on HIV/AIDS," said Vicente Jurlano, a professor at the Population Institute. A family planning law that took effect in 2013 after years of opposition from the Catholic Church required government health centers to hand out free condoms and mandated that sex education be taught in schools. But people aged under 18 need parental permission to receive condoms.

And the education department only began rolling out "comprehensive sexuality education" in 2018 after legal delays, with the main focus on preventing teenage pregnancy. Rosalie Masilang of the department's curriculum bureau told AFP that HIV was part of sex education and students were informed about condoms, but they were not shown how to use them. Many schools, however, do not allow the discussion of condoms or sex, said HIV & AIDS Support House co-founder Desi Andrew Ching, whose non-profit organization teaches sex education in schools. "Our culture demonizes sex," Ching said.

## Indian rights lawyer spotlights plight of jailed women

**MUMBAI:** After three years in detention experiencing the "sea of misery" endured by women in Indian jails, one of the nation's best-known rights lawyers warns that society's prejudices are amplified behind bars. Unable to raise funds or complete complicated paperwork for bail, many women are incarcerated for years while awaiting trial in India's glacial judicial process — especially those at the bottom of the country's millennia-old caste hierarchy, said Sudha Bharadwaj.

"The legal aid system has more or less failed most of the poor prisoners", said the activist, who was herself released last year. "The patriarchal bias goes very deep," she told AFP in an interview. Women make up less than five percent of India's prison population. Of them, more than two-thirds are yet to be convicted and are in detention awaiting trial, according to government statistics from 2015, the latest available.



**ILOILO, Philippines:** This photo taken on Oct 6, 2023 shows Krang talking with Ryan Estrella, head of the community center. — AFP

## 'Stigma and discrimination'

HIV-positive youth often faced discrimination from family and friends, driving some to depression and even suicide, said Krang, who volunteers at an HIV testing and treatment facility in the central city of Iloilo. Krang, who asked AFP to use his nickname, said he knew very little about HIV before testing positive for the virus in 2018. The 23-year-old initially kept his result secret for fear of being ostracized.

"The majority of the youth living with HIV are discriminated against by their peers if they tell them," Krang said, with their status posted on Facebook or shared with their teacher. Even people trying to practice safe sex faced barriers. In online discussion forums, young Filipinos complain that they had been put off buying condoms at some pharmacies and small stores after being asked for identification cards or ridiculed.

## More testing centers needed

UNAIDS has set a goal of ending AIDS as a global health threat by 2030, which includes reducing the number of new HIV cases by 90 percent compared to 2010. While new infections globally fell 38 percent from 2010 to 2022, the Philippines saw a 418 percent increase — the fastest-growing HIV epidemic in the Asia-Pacific region and the fourth fastest in the world, UNAIDS data show.

With only 63 percent of HIV-positive Filipinos aware of their status and 41 percent on medication — far below the UNAIDS target of 95 percent — more testing and treatment centers were needed, particularly outside cities. HIV can lead to AIDS if untreated. AIDS-related deaths increased 538 percent in the Philippines between 2010 and 2022, compared with a 51 percent drop in the world, UNAIDS data show. "The only people who die of AIDS these days are those who were diagnosed late," said John Ruiz, medical director of Klinika Bernardo, which offers free HIV services in Manila. "I really think the entire population should be open to HIV — for people not to stigmatize the disease, and for those who are infected not to be ashamed." — AFP

## 'Prejudices and discriminations'

"All the dynamics which play out in society are reflected even more sharply in the prison," the 61-year-old said. "So whatever prejudices and discriminations you see outside in the society, they are very much reflected there." US-born Bharadwaj, a committed lawyer of the poor, moved to India and renounced her US citizenship to support underprivileged communities in Chhattisgarh.



**MUMBAI:** In this photograph taken on Oct 19, 2023, trade unionist, activist and lawyer Sudha Bharadwaj reads her book 'From Phansi Yard' at her residence. — AFP

## Indian charged in plot to kill Sikh separatist in US

**WASHINGTON:** An Indian national has been charged with plotting to assassinate a Sikh separatist leader on US soil, the Justice Department said on Wednesday, alleging an Indian government official was also involved in the planning. The Justice Department unsealed murder-for-hire charges against Nikhil Gupta, 52, "in connection with his participation in a foiled plot to assassinate a US citizen" of Indian origin in New York City, it said in a statement.

The man allegedly targeted in the killing "is a vocal critic of the Indian government and leads a US-based organization that advocates for the secession of Punjab", a northern Indian state with a large population of Sikhs. An Indian government official, directing the plan from India, worked with Gupta and others based around the world, the US government said.

Gupta, who lives in India, was arrested by authorities in the Czech Republic under US extradition orders. The news comes after the White House said last week it was treating an alleged plot to assassinate a Sikh separatist on American soil with "utmost seriousness," and had raised the issue with the Indian government. The Financial Times reported that same day that US authorities had thwarted a conspiracy to kill Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, a US and Canadian citizen. After Wednesday's news broke, Pannun said in a statement that "the attempt on my life on American soil is the blatant case of India's transnational terrorism which has become a challenge to America's sovereignty and threat to freedom of speech and democracy". The Justice Department, which did not identify the target of the alleged assassination attempt on Wednesday, said that Gupta was recruited into the effort in May 2023. — AFP



**NEW DELHI:** A member of United Hindu Front organization holds a banner depicting Gurpatwant Singh Pannun during a rally on Sept 24, 2023. — AFP

But the trade unionist was arrested in 2018 and accused of giving speeches that allegedly incited violence, charges she has denied. "I was still a much more privileged person than most of the people around me," she told AFP from her home in Mumbai. "Most of them were of course poor, and a lot of them were uneducated — some of them were completely illiterate. They didn't know what was happening. They were abandoned by their families most of the time. So, I was really in a sea of misery".

Three bail applications were denied before Bharadwaj was released under strict conditions that barred her from discussing her case. But in a book researched while behind bars, she has detailed the situation of the women she met and tried to help. Titled "From Phansi Yard", or, the "hanging" yard, the book details stories from inmates at Yerwada jail in Pune.

There were many cases where the women she wrote about could have been granted bail. "Either they were too poor to afford a good lawyer, or the legal aid lawyer didn't really bother to even come to meet them," she said. Bharadwaj wrote "hundreds" of applications for older women in poor health, but all were rejected. "Only those who you very much require to be in jail should be in jail," she said, adding that bail should be "the rule and jail the exception". — AFP



**NEWSHERA, Pakistan:** This photo taken on Nov 10, 2023, shows Afghan journalist Abdullah during an interview at his apartment. — AFP

## Afghan refugees in limbo in Pak

**ISLAMABAD:** Abdullah was a well-known public figure in Afghanistan, a journalist and university lecturer respected by his readers and students. In Pakistan, however, he is laying low — worried about being caught in a deportation dragnet and after two years still waiting to be evacuated to the West. He fled Afghanistan when the Taliban returned to power in August 2021 on the advice of US officials and Reporters Without Borders (RSF), fearing retribution from the new authorities who, as a militant group, had a history of targeting journalists.

The 30-year-old crossed into Pakistan along with an estimated 600,000 other Afghans, with tens of thousands promised asylum in third countries. But more than 345,000 Afghans have returned to their country or been deported since Pakistan in October ordered undocumented migrants or those who have overstayed their visas to leave. "For fear of the police, I haven't left this room for 15 days," said Abdullah, using a pseudonym for security reasons. "If I could have led a normal life in Kabul, I would have become a street vendor or shopkeeper. I would have preferred that to my current situation."

Rights groups have said many Afghans have been left in limbo — their visas expired because of delays in the Pakistan registration system. Thousands are trapped in an interminable relocation process established by Western nations, which has significantly slowed. Abdullah has a valid visa, but said armed police have twice raided his home.

"In Kabul, I was a journalist and university teacher. Here I've lost my identity," he told AFP from an apartment in Islamabad. Since fleeing Afghanistan he has exchanged only two or three emails with US officials. RSF has arranged an interview for him at the French embassy in Islamabad.

## 'Need to live'

Ahmed, a former British army interpreter in Afghanistan, was approved for evacuation two years ago yet remains stuck in an Islamabad hotel room paid for by the UK's diplomatic mission. "I have been here more than 700 days," the 32-year-old said bitterly. "I don't know the reason why the UK government is doing injustice with me, why I have been stuck here. I need a life, I need education and I want to build my new home," said Ahmed, also using a pseudonym.

His Pakistan visa expired over a year ago, and he fears being deported to Afghanistan, even though Islamabad has pledged not to kick out people in his situation. "When I text my caseworker, he's telling me: 'Be patient, be patient, be patient'," he told AFP. "The worst word is 'Be patient'," said Ahmed, who is also supported by Sulha Alliance — an association campaigning for Afghan interpreters who worked with the British army.

Many Afghan refugees, migrants and asylum seekers feel forgotten by the world, which has turned its attention to other crises, such as the conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza. While Britain has welcomed 21,500 Afghans as part of its resettlement programs for former employees and people at risk, 70 percent of them arrived when Kabul was evacuated by the chaotic airlift that coincided with the Taliban takeover. — AFP



# Business

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 1, 2023

## Musk's latest gamble: Tesla Cybertruck

Austin event marks first deliveries of iconoclastic American pickup



Tesla co-founder and CEO Elon Musk introduces the newly-unveiled all-electric battery-powered Tesla Cybertruck at Tesla Design Center in Hawthorne, California on November 21, 2019. — AFP file photo



The all-electric battery-powered Tesla Cybertruck.

**NEW YORK:** Four years after startling the car world with designs for the Cybertruck, Elon Musk on Thursday marked the arrival of Tesla's iconoclastic take on the American pickup. Musk has scheduled an event at Tesla's Austin headquarters to mark the first deliveries to customers of the Cybertruck, whose design to some has evoked a futuristic, sometimes dystopian future akin to "Blade Runner" or "Mad Max."

The belated debut comes as other automakers have delayed capital investments due to sluggish demand for electric vehicles. Tesla itself has undertaken numerous price cuts, even as its share price has stayed lofty. "This is an important launch for Musk and the Tesla brand," said Wedbush Securities analyst Daniel Ives in an email to AFP.

The omnipresent Musk has faced even more scrutiny than usual following criticism that the billionaire entrepreneur and his social media platform X, formerly Twitter, have promoted a growing wave of anti-Semitism. "We do not believe the Tesla brand has been negatively impacted, but it's a care-

ful balance for Elon he is trying to tightrope," said Ives, who praised Musk's recent trip to the Zionist entity after the latest X controversy.

Musk caused a stir in November 2019 when the prototype of the angular, uniformly gray Cybertruck generated much curiosity and buzz even if it wasn't universally loved. "It doesn't look like anything else," said Musk.

The launch event included a demo conducted by a vehicle designer intended to highlight the truck's toughness. Its body emerged unscathed from an encounter with a sledgehammer but the window cracked when struck with a metal ball. But the vehicle's unusual styling, which employs large flat plates of unbent stainless steel, poses challenges in manufacturing, said Art Wheaton, an expert on transportation industries at Cornell University's School of Industrial and Labor Relations.

"It may look cool, but it's extremely difficult to manufacture successfully," Wheaton said. The vehicle was originally billed with a starting price of \$39,900 and first production to come in 2021.

Musk has stayed effusive on the design but has sought to limit expectations as to the vehicle's commercial potential, saying, "we dug our own grave with Cybertruck" last month. "Cybertruck is one of those special products that comes along only once in a long while," he said. "And special products that come along once in a long while are just incredibly difficult to bring to market, to reach volume, to be prosperous."

With more than one million Cybertruck orders, demand is not an issue, Musk said. But making it affordable will be "insanely difficult," said Musk, who expects to reach an output of 250,000 probably some time in 2025.

Though less prominent in several areas outside the United States, pickup trucks occupy a distinct and dominant place on American roads, generating huge sales volumes from consumers who appreciate their image of rugged self-sufficiency.

Once again last year, the three top-selling models in the US were pickups, led by Ford's F series with more than 650,000 trucks sold, followed by

General Motors and Ram (Stellantis) models, according to Car & Driver. The biggest question surrounding Thursday's event will be updated retail pricing of the vehicle, said CFRA equity analyst Garrett Nelson, who expects the price to have risen to about \$50,000 given supply chain pressures and higher material costs.

Nelson called the Cybertruck a "much higher-risk" product compared with Tesla's current fleet of autos, but noted that Musk "has done a good job of lowering expectations."

Wheaton, the expert at Cornell, is skeptical the Cybertruck will be a big seller in part because of the "polarizing" design. But Cybertruck could still succeed for Musk even if it turns out to be a niche product if it lures customers to the brand. Wheaton likened the effect to the Chevrolet Corvette, which does not account for huge sales but draws in buyers to other GM vehicles. "I don't think it's going to be a massive success in terms of selling big numbers," Wheaton predicted. "It works as a kind of attention-grabber." — AFP



LONDON: Britain's Finance Minister Alistair Darling poses for pictures with a briefcase containing the 2010 Budget Report at a photocall outside 11 Downing Street in London, on March 24, 2010. — AFP

## Former UK finance minister Alistair Darling dies aged 70

**LONDON:** Alistair Darling, the UK finance minister when the 2008 financial crisis hit, has died at the age of 70 following a "short spell" in hospital, his family said on Thursday. "The death of Alistair Darling, a former chancellor of the exchequer and long-serving member of the Labour cabinet, was announced in Edinburgh today," said a statement issued on behalf of his family. Darling died "after a short spell in Western General Hospital under the wonderful care of the cancer team", it added.

The Labour politician served as finance minister between 2007 and 2010 under the leadership of Gordon Brown, steering the country through the

financial crisis and resulting recession.

Paying tribute to Darling, Brown wrote on X (formerly Twitter) that "I, like many relied on his wisdom, calmness in a crisis and his humor. 'I send my deepest condolences to his loving wife Maggie and their children Calum and Anna. He will be missed by all who knew him.'"

Current Labour leader Keir Starmer said he was "deeply saddened" by the news. "Alistair lived a life devoted to public service. He will be remembered as the chancellor whose calm expertise and honesty helped to guide Britain through the tumult of the global financial crisis," Starmer said. Darling entered parliament in 1987 and saw his political career flourish after Labour swept to power in 1997 under the leadership of Tony Blair. He was also one of the directors of the successful campaign for a "No" vote in the 2014 referendum on Scottish independence, and campaigned for the UK to remain in the European Union in 2016. — AFP

## Ethiopia secures \$1.5bn in debt relief from creditors

**NAIROBI:** Cash-strapped Ethiopia has secured a \$1.5 billion debt relief agreement with creditors, its central bank chief said, temporarily easing the country's financial burden as it seeks a wider funding program.

The accord was announced on Wednesday by National Bank of Ethiopia governor Mamo Mihretu and confirmed in a statement from the Paris Club of creditor nations on Thursday which described it as an "important achievement". "We've been able to achieve an interim debt service suspension and therefore able to save around \$1.5 billion that would have gone to debt servicing," Mamo told a parliamentary committee.

The finances of Africa's second most populous country have been hit by the two-year conflict in the northern region of Tigray that ended with a peace deal in November last year. Ethiopia has said it needs around \$20 billion to rebuild northern Ethiopia after the war that claimed the lives of around half a million people, according to US estimates. The landlocked country has about \$28 billion of external debt and is also grappling with sky-high inflation at a short-age of foreign currency reserves.

The debt relief agreement was reached with bilateral creditors, including China which has loaned Ethiopia around \$14 billion according to analysts. "This debt standstill from Ethiopia's official bilateral creditors will provide time-limited liquidity relief ahead of discussions on a wider debt treatment," the Paris club said in a statement. Landlocked Ethiopia has been in discussions with the International Monetary Fund for a program of financial support for its economic reforms. — AFP

## Sri Lanka inflation doubles ahead of debt deal

**COLOMBO:** Sri Lanka's inflation more than doubled to 3.4 percent in November, the statistics office said Thursday, a day after Colombo announced a deal to restructure nearly \$6 billion in bilateral debt.

The benchmark Colombo Consumer Price Index rose to 3.4 percent from 1.5 percent in October, official statistics showed. However, the latest inflation number was still dramatically lower than the 61 per-

cent recorded a year ago when the country was in the grip of an unprecedented economic crisis after running out of foreign reserves.

The sharp price rises in November compared to the previous month were due to the increases in electricity and water tariffs and fuel prices, the statistics office said. On Wednesday, the finance ministry said it had reached an "agreement in principle" with its lenders, including China, to restructure nearly \$6 billion in loans and unlock International Monetary Fund (IMF) funding for a bailout.

The country defaulted on its \$46 billion debt in April last year after running out of foreign exchange to finance imports of even the most essential commodities, making life a misery for the island's 22 million people. The ministry said the deal included a mix of extending the tenure and reducing interest

on around \$5.9 billion in bilateral loans granted to the cash-strapped South Asian island. Sri Lanka in March secured a four-year \$2.9 billion bailout package from the IMF subject to Colombo ensuring debt sustainability in line with agreed targets.

However, the release of a second \$330 million loan instalment had been held up since September due to delays in securing a deal with foreign creditors. Sri Lanka's largest single bilateral lender China had been reluctant to take a haircut on its loans and instead had offered to extend the term of its loans and adjust down interest rates. The IMF warned in September that Sri Lanka's "full economic recovery is not yet assured". At the peak of last year's economic crisis, months of civil unrest forced the ouster of then-president Gotabaya Rajapaksa when protesters stormed his residence. — AFP

## Eurozone inflation declines to more than two-year low

**BRUSSELS:** Inflation in the eurozone fell to its lowest level in more than two years in November, official data showed Thursday, raising hopes the European Central Bank could soon cut interest rates. Consumer prices in the 20-nation single currency bloc rose a lower-than-expected 2.4 percent in November from a year earlier, the EU's official statistics agency said, the smallest annual gain since July 2021.

The consensus of analysts compiled by financial data firm FactSet had predicted inflation would slow to 2.7 percent in Novem-

ber, from 2.9 percent in October. The data will provide comfort to the European Central Bank (ECB), which has paused its unprecedented streak of interest rate hikes, although it has remained cautious about declaring victory over once red-hot inflation.

The painful hiking campaign has seen borrowing costs rise faster and further than ever before. "The larger-than-expected fall in inflation in November means it is becoming increasingly untenable for policymakers to claim that they are not even thinking about rate cuts," said Andrew Kenningham, chief Europe economist at Capital Economics.

"We are now pencilling in a first cut for next June, rather than September," he added. Bert Colijn, senior eurozone economist at ING, suggested the first rate cut "could well happen before the summer". Eurozone inflation has steadily dropped since reaching a peak of 10.6 percent in October 2022 following the

upheaval in markets wrought by Russia's war on Ukraine. Inflation is still above the ECB's two-percent target, however. Core inflation, which strips out volatile energy, food, alcohol and tobacco prices, and is the key inflation indicator for the ECB, also slowed in November to 3.6 percent from 4.2 percent in October.

The ECB held rates steady at its last meeting in October, but its chief, Christine Lagarde, has warned another energy shock could prompt inflation to jump again. "There will be a resurgence of probably a higher number going forwards and we should be expecting that," Lagarde said on November 10. "The central bank worries about factors like wage growth and possible spikes in the energy market that could put inflation on a higher path again," ING's Colijn said. The rise in food and drink prices also slowed to 6.9 percent in November, compared with 7.4 percent in October, according to Eurostat. — AFP



BRUSSELS: Inflation in the eurozone fell to its lowest level in more than two years in November, official data showed Thursday, raising hopes the European Central Bank could soon cut interest rates.



# ‘More than a chatbot’: Google policy chief touts firm’s AI tech

## Google’s position as king of the search engines is under threat

MALAGA, Spain: Google’s position as king of the search engines is under threat like never before, but the firm’s global policy chief told AFP this week it still had the edge over its AI competitors. Kent Walker played down the idea that viral AI chatbots like ChatGPT could challenge Google’s crown, stressing that his firm had spent the past decade integrating artificial intelligence into its products.

“It’s important to realize that AI is far more than just a chatbot,” he said in an interview on Wednesday in Malaga, southern Spain, where Google is opening its biggest European cybersecurity centre.

He said AI would transform the way we conduct science and stressed that anyone who had used Google Maps, Translate, Gmail or search recently had been benefitting from AI. “We’ve been using AI to power search for a dozen years,” he said. “We’re finding new ways to use generative AI tools to expand the different ways people can search.”

A year ago, the launch of ChatGPT by the California firm OpenAI lodged in the public’s imagination the idea of generative AI — computer programmes that can generate content with just a few instructions. Microsoft, already a backer of OpenAI, ramped up its support to the tune of billions of dollars and began sprinkling AI stardust over its search engine Bing.

The early reviews were good and suddenly, for the first time this century, Google seemed to have a genuine competitor. Google quickly unveiled its own chatbot — named Bard in honor of William Shake-

spere — and Walker conceded that rapid advances with chatbots had influenced his company.

“I would say the rise of AI chatbots accelerated our work and expanded popular acceptance of AI in a more visible way, and we have doubled down on our work,” he said. But Google is no longer a bold startup. It is a sprawling trillion-dollar global entity with many divisions and stakeholders. In recent times it has become more notable for its cautious approach to new technology rather than for pushing the boundaries.

And Walker, who joined Google in 2006 and heads its legal and policy teams, chose his words carefully on AI’s potential to upend the search engine market. “It’s always a balance because some of these new AI tools are not always as accurate as traditional search,” he said. AI tools like ChatGPT are known to invent details of people’s lives, cite fake academic papers or pass off their own creations as fact.

“So we need to make sure to use our traditional experience in search to ground the results in accurate, authoritative information,” said Walker.

“So we are blending AI into search — what we call a search generative experience — to have the best of both worlds.” Google’s current difficulties go further than competition in the AI space, however. A high-profile trial in the United States is probing its dominance of the search market. Among the most damaging revelations has been that Google pays billions to Apple to ensure it continues as the default engine on its products. Walker was sanguine, though, saying the case has



Kent Walker speaks at a “Grow with Google” launch event in Cleveland in this file photo.

given his firm the chance to show that users choose Google “because they want to, not because they have to”. He said Google worked with other platforms to

make it easier for users to find their products. “We hope the court will agree with this,” he said. “We’ll probably find out in the spring of next year.” — AFP

## Billionaires swelling fortunes through inheritance: Study

ZURICH: A massive transfer of wealth is gaining speed, as billionaires are increasingly padding their vast fortunes with inheritance rather than entrepreneurship, a study by Swiss banking giant UBS showed Thursday.

Over recent decades, the number of billionaires has ballooned, with surging entrepreneurial activity within tech and other areas ushering fresh members into the super-wealthy club.

But in its ninth annual report on the world’s billionaires, UBS noted a significant shift in the way such fortunes are being made and expanded. “The heirs to billionaires are gaining prominence,” Benjamin Cavalli, head of strategic clients at UBS Global Wealth Management, said in the foreword to the report. “This year’s report found that the majority of billionaires that accumulated wealth in the last year, did so through inheritance as opposed to entrepreneurship,” he added in a statement. “This is a theme we expect to see more of over the next 20 years, as more than 1,000 billionaires pass an estimated \$5.2 trillion to their children.” That forecast, UBS said, was based on the estimated accumulated wealth of today’s billionaires who are over the age of 70.


“After the surge in entrepreneurial activity witnessed over the past few decades, many business

founders are now ageing and passing their wealth to the next generation,” the study said.

The study indicated that there were 2,544 billionaires in the world by April this year, with their ranks swelling by seven percent in the preceding year. After seeing their combined fortunes shrink the previous year, billionaire wealth grew by nine percent between April 2022 and April 2023 to \$12 trillion, the study found. The new billionaires included 53 heirs, whose accumulated inheritance amounted to \$150.8 billion, exceeding the \$140.7 billion joint fortunes of the 84 new self-made billionaires on the list, it said.

UBS attributed this shift in part to a subdued market for initial public offerings through 2022 and into 2023, limiting the opportunities for entrepreneurs to monetize the values of their businesses. — AFP





AL SAFAT INVESTMENT COMPANY

### KUWAIT BOURSA WEEKLY REPORT

WEEK ENDED ON 30 NOVEMBER 2023

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No.	Ticker	Sector	Price Movement & Performance										Valuation Multiples *				
			Open Price	Close Price	Week High	Week Low	Range	Volume	WTD Change	WTD %	YTD %	Support Level	Resistance Level	P/E	P/B	Yield	Beta
101	National Bank of Kuwait	Banking	879	885	885	863	22	28,270,607	6	0.68%	-13.80%	860	895	12.7	1.64	3.9%	1.02
102	Gulf Bank	Banking	250	253	256	249	7	63,603,900	3	1.20%	-14.86%	252	256	12.3	1.17	3.7%	1.32
106	Kuwait International Bank	Banking	147	146	150	144	6	14,597,963	-1	-0.68%	-18.50%	143	147	15.1	0.55	2.5%	1.11
107	Burgan Bank	Banking	170	170	174	170	4	27,878,795	1	0.59%	-18.49%	170	176	17.9	0.65	4.4%	1.36
108	Kuwait Finance House	Banking	702	699	704	686	18	43,230,035	-2	-0.29%	-6.57%	689	704	17.2	1.78	2.4%	1.17
109	Boubyan Bank	Banking	601	583	601	581	20	10,975,214	-15	-2.51%	-22.56%	579	593	36.3	2.36	1.0%	1.20
201	Kuwait Investment	Financial Services	127	130	132	127	5	5,474,023	3	2.36%	-14.47%	129	133	7.6	0.60	3.8%	1.82
204	National Investments	Financial Services	229	223	236	218	18	17,265,294	-5	-2.19%	-5.91%	220	227	71.5	1.02	12.7%	2.04
205	Kuwait Projects	Financial Services	115	113	117	111	6	39,020,624	0	0.00%	0.89%	110	116	28.1	0.64	0.0%	1.01
212	Arzan Financial Group	Financial Services	202	196	211	190	21	98,809,682	-4	-2.00%	73.84%	192	205	28.9	1.35	2.0%	1.17
222	Aayan Leasing and Investment	Financial Services	166	164	171	164	7	48,312,225	-1	-0.61%	23.31%	163	166	8.4	1.14	4.5%	1.64
252	Al Intiaz Investment	Financial Services	61	57.5	61.6	57.5	4.1	4,428,853	-2.6	-4.33%	-23.23%	57.1	59.1	NM	0.39	14.9%	1.36
401	Kuwait Real Estate	Real Estate	182	186	186	176	10	75,750,020	5	2.76%	77.39%	183	187	14.6	1.21	1.6%	1.08
413	Mabaneer	Real Estate	835	838	844	820	24	8,209,478	11	1.33%	4.75E-02	825	838	17.3	1.80	1.6%	1.04
418	The Commercial Real Estate	Real Estate	103	104.0	104	100.3	3.7	16,139,780	2.0	1.96%	8.31%	102	104	20.4	0.62	2.9%	0.61
501	National Industries	Financial Services	191	186	194	184	10	16,278,196	-5	-2.62%	-10.00%	186	194	17.0	0.88	2.6%	1.62
505	Gulf Cable	Industrials	1,339	1,295	1,345	1,250	95	3,513,225	-43	-3.21%	6.58%	1,290	1,350	13.5	1.19	4.7%	1.04
506	HEISCO	Industrials	878	837	878	837	41	7,510,924	-41	-4.67%	36.54%	832	858	24.0	2.19	2.3%	0.92
514	Boubyan Petrochemical	Basic Materials	622	649	649	607	42	4,003,539	37	6.05%	-18.88%	633	655	11.4	1.30	9.8%	0.96
603	Agility	Industrials	539	540	540	519	21	8,355,357	5	0.93%	-25.00%	536	566	15.9	0.75	0.0%	1.53
605	Zain	Telecommunications	500	489	501	486	15	34,401,699	-10	-2.00%	-13.14%	487	503	9.9	1.72	7.1%	0.63
623	Human Soft Holding	Industrials	3,060	3,011	3,094	3,007	87	600,556	-49	-1.60%	-10.18%	3,000	3,065	9.0	3.36	12.6%	0.64
642	ALAFCO	Industrials	183	178	186	176	10	5,645,204	-6	-3.26%	-12.32%	178	184	NM	0.78	0.0%	1.17
654	JAZEERA	Consumer Discretionary	1,261	1,279	1,350	1,258	92	1,796,429	19	1.51%	-32.68%	1,204	1,300	23.0	8.67	5.9%	1.45
813	GFH Financial Group	Financial Services	78.5	77	78.7	76	2.7	11,316,095	-1.1	-1.41%	1.32%	76.6	79.0	8.3	0.88	6.4%	1.37
821	Warba Bank	Banking	179	179	181	172	9	7,594,864	0	0.00%	-21.54%	169	188	24.2	0.95	1.7%	1.14
823	Mezzan Holding	Consumer Staples	514	517	517	490	27	3,339,455	6	1.17%	31.55%	490	519	12.4	1.47	2.4%	0.46
824	Integrated Holding	Industrials	448	449	455	437	18	3,821,052	2	0.45%	21.35%	445	458	31.6	1.83	3.3%	0.67
826	Shamal Az-Zour	Utilities	176	178	178	173	5	1,607,491	2	1.14%	-5.32%	174	179	13.5	1.45	6.9%	0.42
827	Boursa Kuwait	Financial Services	1,740	1,694	1,745	1,645	100	861,791	-46	-2.64%	-17.45%	1,640	1,700	21.5	5.46	5.1%	0.91
830	AL GHANIM	Consumer Discretionary	1,071	1,048	1,084	1,021	63	2,907,320	-22	-2.06%	30.19%	1,033	1,069	11.0	3.78	6.6%	0.65

\* As of end of week closing



## Business

# COP28 should seek total fossil fuel 'phaseout', says UN chief

## Guterres warns of 'total disaster' on humanity's current trajectory

**UNITED NATIONS:** The COP28 climate conference should aim for a complete "phaseout" of fossil fuels, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told AFP on Wednesday, warning of "total disaster" on humanity's current trajectory.

"Obviously I am strongly in favor of language that includes (a) phaseout, even with a reasonable time framework," Guterres said in an interview before flying off to the United Arab Emirates, the oil-rich nation hosting the two-week UN climate summit beginning Thursday.

With nations' actions falling far short of the Paris Agreement's most ambitious target of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius, some countries have called for the COP28 final statement, which requires unanimous agreement, to explicitly call for a reduction in fossil fuel consumption.

That would be a historic first for a COP statement, as the Glasgow 2021 climate conference was only able to agree on mentioning coal. But for Guterres, who has made fighting climate change a major priority as secretary-general, a simple promise to reduce fossil fuels would not be enough.

"I think it would be a pity if we would stay in a vague and noncommittal 'phase-down' whose real meaning would not be obvious for anybody," he said. A phase-down "can be whatever, you never

know exactly what it means—to phase out means that at a certain moment, it stops," said Guterres.

He admitted however that nations "cannot stop tomorrow." "We need to do it in an organized way and we need to make sure that we have a time framework that is simultaneously credible but at the same time is in line with our objective to keep the temperature rise at 1.5 degrees."

When asked about COP28 president Sultan Al-Jaber, an Emirati official and CEO of the national oil company who has become embroiled in accusations of conflicts of interest, the UN chief said he had a "special responsibility" to influence the fossil fuel industry. "He is of course linked to the oil business in his activities, but also linked to renewables, I think it creates with him a special responsibility," said Guterres.

He said Al Jaber was in a better position to tell the oil industry that the "solution of the climate problems requires the phase-out of fossil fuels" than "if he was member of NGO with a very solid pro-climate record." "That will give him an opportunity to prove all those that accuse him wrong," said Guterres, who added the allegations against Jaber would be "inconceivable" to him.

Another key issue at the COP28 is the development of renewable energies. "We need to triple renewable at the global level," Guterres said, and

not just depend on the voluntary commitments of some states. To that end, he hopes that COP28 will allow an advance in the idea of a "massive" global investment program in Africa, a continent that is experiencing an "absurdity," he said since the continent has 60 percent of solar capacity yet only two percent of solar investment.

There are a "large number of other measures that are essential to make this COP28 a success," he said, citing issues like climate justice. Last year's COP27 in Egypt allowed for further progress in that regard, with the creation of a fund intended to compensate for the "losses and damages" of countries especially vulnerable to climate impact that have historically been the least responsible for greenhouse gas emissions. But getting that started is complicated, requiring the upcoming COP to give a boost to the fund with announcements of "meaningful contributions," Guterres said.

With temperatures set to rise between 2.5 degrees Celsius and 2.9 degrees Celsius this century if nothing is done, the UN chief—who warned of a "total disaster" if temperatures rise three degrees—does not want to abandon the 1.5 degree objective, confident that technologies, and particularly renewable energies, will help achieve that goal. "It is not dead, it's alive," Guterres said of the 1.5 degree goal. "We have the potential, the



UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres speaks during an interview at the United Nations headquarters ahead of the COP28 meeting in New York, November 29, 2023. — AFP

technologies and the capacity and the money—because the money is available, it's a question of making sure it goes into the right direction—to do what is necessary, not only to keep the 1.5 degrees alive, but alive and well," he said.

"The only thing that is still lacking is political will," he said, adding that the upcoming gathering will have to make the world realize that "we are really moving in a very wrong direction still." — AFP

## News in Brief

### French economy shrinks in Q3

**PARIS:** The eurozone's second-largest economy France shrank slightly in the third quarter, official data showed Thursday, while the inflation weighing on consumers eased in November. Gross domestic product (GDP) retreated by 0.1 percent in July-September, statistics authority INSEE said, returning close to flat-line following a strong second-quarter expansion. INSEE pointed to revitalized household consumption over the three months, counterbalanced by slowing investments and falling exports. Thursday's figure was a revision of an earlier estimate that showed the economy expanding slightly in the third quarter. Monthly inflation data showed that year-on-year price growth in France slowed to 3.4 percent in November. — AFP

### Finland's GDP dips in third quarter

**HELSINKI, Finland:** Finland's economy shrank in the third quarter, official data showed on Thursday, burdened by slowing industry and weak demand. According to Statistics Finland, gross domestic product (GDP) contracted by 0.9 percent in the July-September period from the previous quarter and by 1.2 percent compared to the third quarter last year. While the first two quarters saw slightly stronger growth in Finland than the EU average, the situation changed in the third quarter. Finnish exports dipped by 1.8 percent in July-September from the previous quarter, while imports fell by 3.2 percent. Private consumption decreased by 0.6 percent and public consumption dropped by 2.7 percent, the statistics office said. Finland fell into a brief recession last year, suffering from accelerating inflation—which reached 8.4 percent in January—and the economic consequences of the war in Ukraine. — AFP

### Metro Bank to axe 850 staff

**LONDON:** Metro Bank, which has struggled in its quest to shake up Britain's established banking sector, said Thursday that it planned to axe about 850 staff. Launched in 2010 following the global financial crisis, Metro's offering has focused on customer service, in particular opening physical branches seven days a week, in a bid to snatch customers away from the likes of HSBC, Barclays and Lloyds. But as customers increasingly switch to online banking, traditional retail lenders have closed thousands of premises. In a statement Thursday, Metro said it "is reviewing seven day opening and extended store hours across the store network". In a bid to slash costs, Metro added that it planned a "20-percent headcount reduction". — AFP

### Honda invests on e-two-wheelers

**TOKYO:** Japanese auto giant Honda said it plans to invest 500 billion yen (\$3.4 billion) in production of electric motorcycles and mopeds this decade. The firm, the world's biggest makers of two-wheelers, also said it plans to launch 30 new electric models by 2030 and to reduce the current cost of electric motorcycles by 50 percent. "For the electrification of its motorcycles, Honda is investing 100 billion yen over the five-year period from 2021 to 2025, and will invest an additional 400 billion yen over the five-year period from 2026 to 2030," Honda said in a statement on Wednesday. It also hiked its global annual sales target for 2030 to 4.5 million units, up from its previous goal of 3.5 million announced last year. — AFP

## COP28 talks no place to boost fossil fuels: Ex-UN climate boss

**PARIS:** The UN's former climate chief said she was "giving up hope" that fossil fuel firms will be part of the solution to warming as pivotal COP28 talks started on Thursday in oil-rich United Arab Emirates.

With the UN climate negotiations expected to feature a showdown on the future of fossil fuels, Christiana Figueres expressed concern over reports the UAE planned to use its role as host to strike oil and gas deals. Figueres, who led the UN climate convention when the landmark Paris deal was struck, told AFP that she had previously championed the idea that the world's polluting coal, oil and gas industries should "sit at the table".

"I'm actually giving up hope on that," she said, adding that it was "unforgivable" that the industries funneled the bumper profits of recent years into shareholder dividends and lobbying efforts—rather than invest in renewable energy technologies. She also called for more transparency around fossil fuel influence from the COP presidency, which is held by the UAE's Sultan Al-Jaber, who is also head of the Emirates state oil and gas company.

Reacting to BBC reports of leaked documents suggesting the UAE planned to exploit its role organizing the climate conference to strike fossil fuel deals, Figueres said if true the claims would mark

a "serious breach of the responsibility of the COP presidency." "It is not a meeting to advance the interests of the oil and gas industry," she told PBS News in a linked interview hosted by the organization Covering Climate Now.

"This is a convening of all the governments in the world to advance the protection of the planet... precisely because of the negative consequences of mostly the operation of the oil and gas industry."

Jaber strongly denied the BBC reports Wednesday, saying they were "false, not true, incorrect." Global climate negotiations largely avoided mentioning fossil fuels for decades, until Glasgow's COP26 agreed to "phasedown" unfiltered coal power and the "phase-out of inefficient fossil fuel subsidies".

Momentum has built since then on a more ambitious pledge to move away from all fossil fuels and Figueres said an unprecedented surge in renewables and electric vehicles gave her optimism that the world can still achieve its climate goals. Those centre on the 2015 Paris deal, which saw nearly 200 nations agree to limit global warming to "well below" two degrees Celsius since the preindustrial era, and preferably a safer threshold of 1.5C. Figueres, a member of Costa Rica's climate negotiating team before she took the helm of the UN's climate change body from 2010 to 2016, said that deal was signed by leaders out of "enlightened self interest". But she said that the world was now "horribly close" to the 1.5C limit, with emissions continuing to rise and this year is almost certain to be the hottest in human history.

She called on leaders attending the COP28 meeting to respond to a damning Global Stocktake on the world's climate action shortcomings by both accept-



Christiana Figueres

ing efforts so far have been "completely insufficient" and by doubling down on future action. One key target, she said, should be fossil fuel subsidies, which the International Monetary Fund has said surged to a record \$7 trillion last year—equivalent to around 7 percent of global gross domestic product. "My outrage is fossil fuel subsidies," said Figueres, adding that she would also be in favor of extra taxation on fossil fuel profits—a suggestion championed by developing countries facing the sharpest impact of accelerating weather extremes. She said leaders must focus on the need to almost halve emissions by 2030, which the UN's IPCC climate expert panel says is needed to keep 1.5C of warming a possibility.

"If we breach the ceiling that has been established by scientists for 2030, we have a serious problem in our hands, because we will have very likely opened a cascade of tipping points into the ecosystems that negatively affect each other," she said. "And that will be incredibly damaging to human life, but also to all other life on this planet." — AFP

## Amazon community fights carbon credit project

**PIRA PARANA, Colombia:** Chewing on psychoactive coca leaves in a traditional ritual, Colombian Indigenous leader Fabio Valencia seeks the advice of jungle spirits and ancestors about a project sold to his community as a planet-saving initiative.

In a remote corner of the Amazon, far from COP28 in Dubai where world leaders will thrash out the final parameters for a reform of the global carbon credit system, the 43-year-old told AFP that one such project was destroying his people in the region of Pira Parana.

Carbon credits allow companies to buy carbon credits from forest preservation or other projects to offset or "compensate" for their greenhouse gas emissions.

But according to Valencia, the Baka Rokarire project in Pira Parana was "worse" for the community than even pollution from mining and oil extraction. It threatened the very fiber of the community, he claimed, fraudulently wresting control from the region's Indigenous leadership and driving a wedge between locals who support the project with its quick cash injection, and those against it.

"This contaminates spiritually, physically, it destroys everything... in this territory, for money," Valencia said. AFP walked, motor-boated and overflew part of the Pira Parana territory, which is nearly the size of Puerto Rico. It is an area so remote it is accessible only by million-dollar private flights or a boat trip of at least six days from the nearest city, Mitu.

A total of 2,246 members of six tribes in Pira Parana are contracted to the Baka Rokarire project to reduce deforestation in Pira Parana. It's the type of carbon credit project known as REDD+, which stands for "Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation." Trees are crucial absorbers of carbon dioxide—the most

widespread greenhouse gas—and Colombia, one of the world's most biodiverse countries, has tens of millions of hectares of forest. But local leaders say they wish they had never heard of Baka Rokarire, which they claim was illegally foisted on them.

They cite an increase in disputes between individuals and groups and a loss of Indigenous autonomy in the region. Valencia also points to a sudden rise in alcohol consumption, anathema in a region with a deeply traditional way of life.

Masbosques, a public-private sustainable forest management partnership, states on its website that Baka Rokarire protects more than 702,000 hectares of Colombian Amazon, with an estimated annual emissions reduction of 524,146 tons of CO2 equivalent. But some experts charge that the Baka Rokarire project is a farce as there is no real deforestation threat in the area and thus no emissions "savings" to be made. Inhabitants of Pira Parana further accuse Masbosques of having hoodwinked the community when it acted as an intermediary in a carbon credit deal with a private company.

They have referred the matter to the Constitutional Court in the first case of its kind in Colombia, claiming violations of their rights to territorial autonomy and self-government. The matter is pending.

Valencia, a leader of the Maku-na people, claims Masbosques negotiated a deal with a community member who had no legal power to take such decisions.

The prosecutor's office is also investigating claims that Masbosques falsified documents related to the deal signed in 2021. Masbosques, which describes itself as a not-for-profit organization, told AFP the contract was "valid, legal" and claimed to be the victim of a "smear campaign".



Aerial view showing deforested areas to plant food and coca taken near the Pira Parana River, Vaupes province, Colombia, on November 10, 2023. — AFP

The credits were sold to a Colombian data processing firm called Latin Checkout for some \$3.8 million—all of which went to community members, representatives and organizations, said Masbosques. According to the www.ecoregistry.com, which keeps tabs on carbon credit trading, Latin Checkout then sold the credits to US airline Delta which faces a lawsuit at home for alleged "greenwashing"—claiming to be carbon neutral while purchasing questionable carbon offsets.

Wilmer Garcia, another Indigenous leader, told AFP he was one of many community representatives never consulted on the deal. "The company (Masbosques)... invaded this territory. It did not recognize that there are already environmental and traditional authorities here," said the 37-year-old, a jaguar fang dangling on a string around his neck. Traditional leader Roberto Marin, 58, added the project was never approved in the "maloka"—an Indigenous council that has the final say on such matters.

"It must be recognized that we exist here, people, human beings with rights," he told AFP.

A similar project elsewhere in Colombia was stopped by a judge on the grounds that the community was not adequately consulted. Colombia's Environment Minister Susana Muhamad

told AFP a "lack of regulation" meant carbon credit projects are negotiated between private parties with no government control or participation. This has given rise to "some companies taking advantage of some communities," she told AFP, adding there were plans for the creation of a regulatory agency.

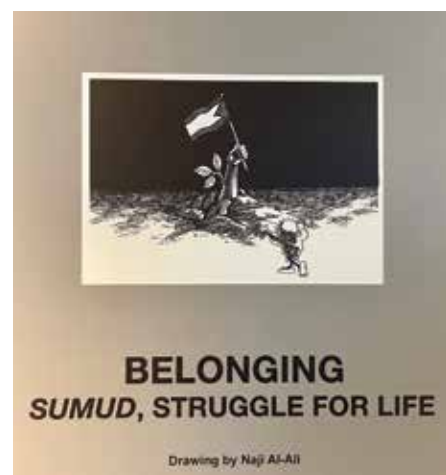
According to Colombia's Sinchi Amazonian Institute of Scientific Research, some two-thirds of Indigenous territory in the rainforest fall under carbon credit projects today.

The Paris Agreement that emerged from COP21 in 2015 widened a system of exchange of carbon credits—something the oil and gas industry had been demanding for years.

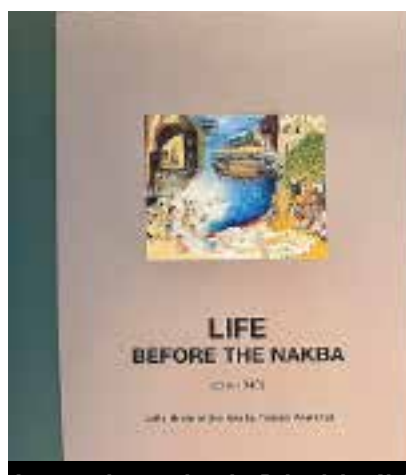
The details of the system have yet to be finalized, but the very concept took a major hit this year with several scientific studies and investigative reports questioning the credibility of the lucrative voluntary market which lies outside the UN process. "Many of these populations have experienced a long history of conflict with extractive industries. In some cases, the offset income can help support them.

"But we've seen many projects... putting at risk some of the most vulnerable communities on the planet," researcher Barbara Haya, director of the Berkeley Carbon Trading Project, told AFP earlier this year. — AFP





Artwork by Palestinian cartoonist Najj Al-Ali.



Images showcasing the Palestinian Nakba.



A video of one of the survivors of the Dawayma massacre.

# 'Palestine a land with a people': Expo recounts history of suffering and pain



Visitors of the exhibition learning and understanding about the Palestinian people and their struggle. — KUNA photos



People visiting the exhibition to learn about the struggle of the Palestinian people.

The United Nations headquarters held a photography exhibition titled "Palestine: A Land with a People" that showed the history of Palestine and commemorated the Nakba as part of International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian people, on Wednesday night. The tragic events of the Nakba where more than half the Palestinian nation was displaced and forced out of their homes in 1948 and its aftermath were depicted in photographs, videos, and art pieces. The exhibit came as a reminder of the six million Palestinians that remain refugees across the region until this day and the massacre of thousands of them in October during the Zionist's recent war on Gaza, which Secretary General of the United Nations, Antonio Guterres, described as "catastrophic". — KUNA

## 'Napoleon' conquers French box office, if not critics



Spanish actress Hiba Abouk poses during a photocall for the movie Napoleon in Madrid on November 20, 2023.

Ridley Scott's film "Napoleon" has stormed to the top of the French box office ratings, figures showed on Wednesday, despite sometimes savage reviews from critics in France who took aim at historical inaccuracies and the portrayal of the emperor. One person in three who went to the cinema in France over the last week went to see the film starring Joaquin Phoenix which features massive battle scenes, according to the weekly CBO figures.

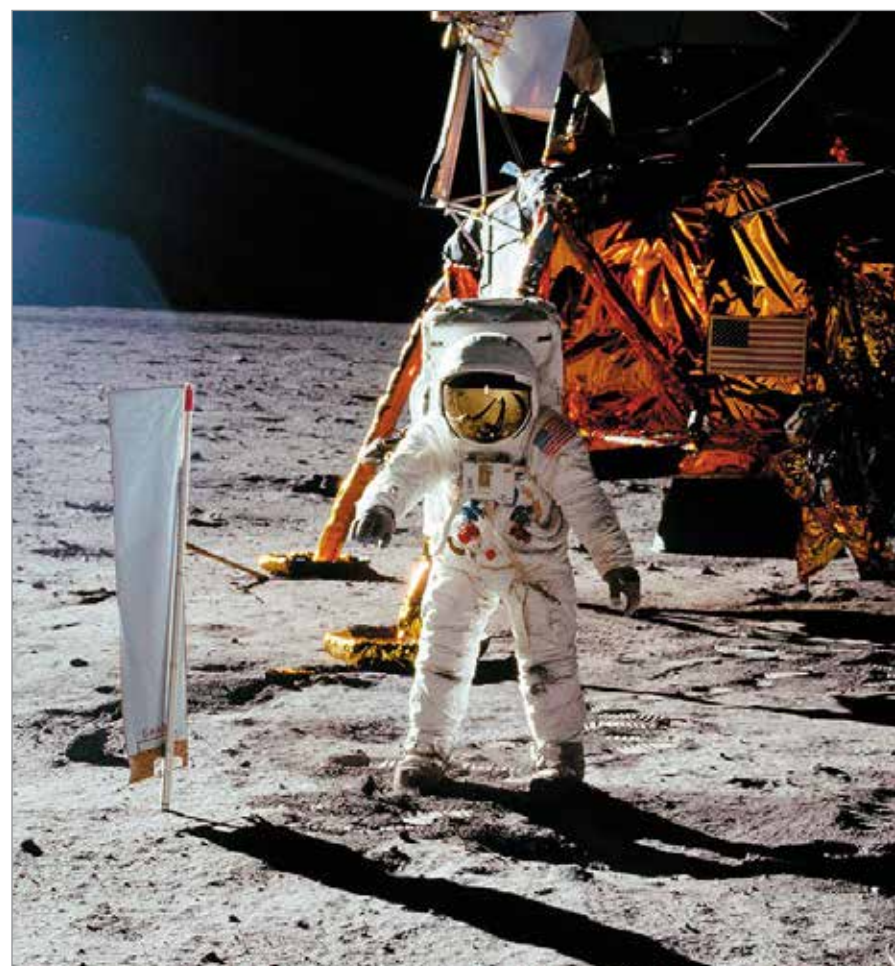
Some 764,000 tickets were sold for Napoleon on its first week of release in France, ahead of "Hunger Games" with 370,275 tickets sold and now into the second week of its release. New films come out in France every Wednesday. The film "Napoleon", originally shot in English, is being shown in France both in the English with subtitles and dubbed French versions, giving viewers the choice between languages.

It has also been the subject of a massive promotional campaign with posters of Phoenix in Napoleon's iconic bicorn hat frowning down at

passengers at metro stations across Paris. But many critics in France have been less enthusiastic about the film made by a British director and shot originally in the language of its old cross-Channel enemy.

"Ridley Scott's latest film makes Napoleon into gloomy and mediocre character," stormed a recent commentary in the right-wing Le Figaro daily. "Such sabotage is part of a logic that demeans and ridicules," it added. "Clumsy and deliberately unworthy of its poorly crafted subject, the biopic with Joaquin Phoenix offers no point of view, neither on the man, nor on the myth," added the left-wing Liberation for good measure.

Le Monde was more nuanced, noting it is also a portrait of Napoleon's complex relationship with his wife Josephine, played by Vanessa Kirby, it said that Scott superimposes the "emperor's love life onto his feats on the battlefield, leaving aside the political question." — AFP



## After 50 years, US to return to Moon on January 25

More than 50 years after the last Apollo mission, the United States will try once again to land a craft on the Moon on January 25, said the head of what could be the first private company to successfully touch down on the lunar surface. The lander, named Peregrine, will have no one on board. It was developed by American company Astrobotic, whose CEO John Thornton said it will carry NASA instruments to study the lunar environment in anticipation of NASA's Artemis manned missions.

Several years ago, NASA opted to commission US companies to send scientific experiments and technologies to the Moon — a program called CLPS. These fixed-price contracts should make it possible to develop a lunar economy, and provide transport services at a lower cost.

"One of the big challenges of what we're attempting here is attempting a launch and landing on the surface Moon for a fraction of what it would otherwise cost," said Thornton Wednesday at a press briefing at his company's base in Pittsburgh. "Only about half of the missions that have gone to the surface of the Moon have been successful," he said.

"So it's certainly a daunting challenge. I'm going to be terrified and thrilled all at once at every stage of this." Takeoff is scheduled for December 24 from Florida aboard the inaugural flight of the new rock-

et from the ULA industrial group, named Vulcan Centaur. The probe will then take "a few days" to reach lunar orbit, but will have to wait until January 25 before attempting landing, so that light conditions at the target location are right, Thornton said.

The descent will be carried out autonomously, without human intervention, but will be monitored from the company's control center. In the spring, the Japanese start-up ispace had already attempted to become the first private company to land on the Moon, but the mission ended in a crash. The Zionist entity also suffered a setback in 2019. Only four countries have successfully landed on the Moon: the United States, Russia, China and, most recently, India.

In addition to Astrobotic, NASA has signed contracts with other companies, such as Firefly Aerospace, Draper and Intuitive Machines. The latter is due to take off aboard a SpaceX rocket in January.

"NASA leadership is aware of the risks and has accepted that some of these missions might not succeed," said Chris Culbert, the CLPS program manager. "But even if every landing isn't successful, CLPS already had an impact on the commercial infrastructure needed to establish a lunar economy," he said. With its Artemis program, NASA wants to establish a base on the surface of the Moon. — AFP



British and US movie director Ridley Scott (right) and US actor Joaquin Phoenix pose for a photocall of the movie Napoleon. — AFP photos



British-Spanish pianist James Rhodes poses during a photocall for the movie Napoleon.



US actor Joaquin Phoenix poses for a photocall of the movie Napoleon in Madrid.



British and US movie director Ridley Scott (right) and his wife Costa Rican actress Giannina Facio pose during a photocall for the movie Napoleon.





A snail farmer tends to snails at a snail farm in Azaguie.



A vendor holds snails at a market in Azaguie.

# Working at giant *snail's* pace a boon for Ivorian farmers



A worker holds a snail at a snail farm in Azaguie.

**T**hey may weigh a maximum 500 grams and only grow to 10 centimeters (four inches) at most — but farming of giant snails is proving big business in Ivory Coast. Considered a delicacy for their tasty flesh, the slime and shells of the giant snails are also used to make cosmetics. But nearly 90 percent of the West African country's forests have disappeared over the last 60 years, something which, together with widespread use of pesticides have decimated wild snails' natural habitat.

Most forest has been lost to agricultural production in the world's top producer of cocoa — to the detriment of the creatures which naturally thrive in a hot, humid environment. As wild snail numbers have steadily fallen, farms specialized in breeding them have increasingly sprung up — some 1,500 in the humid south alone. A popular appetizer in Ivory Coast, the snails are bred in farms such as one of many in the town of Azaguie, some 40 kilometers (25 miles) north of the commercial capital, Abidjan.

Inside some 10 brick and cement containers topped with mesh lids is a layer of earth and another of leaves. Between the two slither thousands of snails, juveniles and breeders — some much larger than those found in Europe. The gastropods are watered and fed every two days.

**'Same taste'**

Purists swear by the "wild" snail captured in the forest, on the grounds, they say, of its tastier meat. But Bernus Bleu, founder and director of Ivory Coast Snail Expertise (CIEE), one of the largest companies producing, processing and marketing giant gastro-



A vendor holds snails at a market in Azaguie.

pods, rejects that view.

His company's watchword is "same snail, same taste" — he insists there is no difference in taste between those which roam wild and the farmed variety. On the farms "we reproduce the natural environment of rainforest snails and they only eat leaves, fruits, vegetables, corn, millet and soya. No pesticides are used, it is entirely organic," Alexis Famy, CIEE technical coordinator, said.

**Soaring production**

Jean-Norbert Akesse, a former trader in the Abidjan suburbs who manages one of around 30 Azaguie farms, opened the site in 2021 and has no regrets. "It's profitable!" he said with a smile, explaining how, on completing his professional training, he invested two million CFA francs (3,000 euros, \$3,300) in the enterprise. Today, the farm brings in 12 million francs per year, a more than comfortable income in Ivo-

ry Coast where the minimum wage is 75,000 francs per month (barely \$120).

Akese sells his entire production exclusively to CIEE. The simplicity of snail farming, its productivity and profitability have attracted thousands of Ivorians to the sector, after first receiving training. In five years, production has soared from 25 to 250 tons of snails per month, according to the government.



Workers make soap and gel from snail slime at the factory in Azaguie.



A snail farmer pours water at a snail farm in Azaguie. — AFP photos



Snails are seen at a snail farm in Azaguie.



A farmer holds a snail at a snail farm in Azaguie.



Workers pack soap and gel made from snail slime at the factory in Azaguie.



Soap made from snail slime are displayed in packaging at the factory in Azaguie.



Lifestyle



Workers make soap and gel from snail slime at the factory in Azaguie.



A snail farmer tends to snails at a snail farm in Azaguie.



Soap and gel made from snail slime are displayed at the factory in Azaguie.



A worker makes soap and gel from snail slime at the factory in Azaguie.

**No waste!**

Created six years ago, CIEE has 50 farms and processing units, employs 75 staff, trains some 200 people per month and helps to get them established. Most create their own livestock farms or join cooperatives with intra-company contracts.

From around 25,000 farms currently, the sector is targeting bumping up the number of producers to 100,000 in the next few years. "With the snail, nothing gets thrown away," said Bleu. The flesh, which is very popular with Ivorians as well as in neighboring Gulf of Guinea countries, is typically consumed with a spicy sauce or grilled on skewers.

It's an affordable dish, often served in popular bars and restaurants called "maquis". The slime is used to make soap, shower gel or ointment, while the powdered shell is used in the manufacture of other cosmetics or animal feed. At the CIEE's headquarters in Azaguie, women make soap and shower gel from snail slime, mixed with coconut oil, green coloring and perfume.

On average, the small, rudimentarily equipped workshop produces some 5,000 soaps and 5,000 bottles of gel each week. "Snail slime hydrates the skin, removes impurities and prevents its ageing," workshop supervisor Nelly Blon said. — AFP



Workers make soap and gel made from snail slime at the factory in Azaguie.



Concept image of the earth slowly burning with pollution, showing North central and south America. Earth based on Nasa image. — AFP

## 2023 set to be hottest year on record

This year is set to be the hottest ever recorded, the UN said Thursday, demanding urgent action to rein in global warming and stem the havoc following in its wake. The UN's World Meteorological Organization warned that 2023 had shattered a whole host of climate records, with extreme weather leaving "a trail of devastation and despair". "It's a deafening cacophony of broken records," said WMO chief Petteri Taalas.

"Greenhouse gas levels are record high. Global temperatures are record high. Sea level rise is record high. Antarctic sea ice is record low." The WMO published its provisional 2023 State of the Global Climate report as world leaders gathered in Dubai for the UN COP28 climate conference, amid mounting pressure to curb planet-heating greenhouse gas pollution.

United Nations chief Antonio Guterres said the record heat findings "should send shivers down the spines of world leaders". The stakes have never been higher, with scientists warning that the ability to limit warming to a manageable level is slipping through humanity's fingers.

The 2015 Paris climate accords aimed to limit global warming to well below two degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels — and 1.5C if possible. But in its report, the WMO said 2023 data to the end of October showed that this year was already around 1.4C above the pre-industrial baseline.

**'Not just statistics'**

The agency is due to publish its final State of the Global Climate 2023 report in the first half of 2024. But it said the difference between the first 10 months of this year and 2016 and 2020 — which previously topped the charts as the warmest years on record — "is such that the final two months are very unlikely to affect the ranking". The report also showed that the past nine years were the hottest years since modern records began.

"These are more than just statistics," Taalas said, warning that "we risk losing the race to save our glaciers and to rein in sea level rise". "We cannot return to the climate of the 20th century, but we must act now to limit the risks of an increasingly inhospitable climate in this and the coming centuries."

The WMO warned that the warming El Nino weather phenomenon, which emerged mid-year, was "likely to further fuel the heat in 2024". That is because the naturally-occurring climate pattern, typically associated with increased heat worldwide, usually increases global temperatures in the year after it develops.

The preliminary report also found that concentrations of the three main heat-trapping greenhouse gases — carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide — reached record high levels in 2022, with preliminary data indicating that the levels continued to grow this year. Carbon dioxide levels were 50 percent higher than the pre-industrial era, the agency said, meaning that "temperatures will continue to rise for many years to come", even if emissions are drastically cut.

**'Climate chaos'**

The rate of sea level rise over the past decade was more than twice the rate of the first decade of satellite records (1993-2002), it said. And the maximum level of Antarctic sea ice this year was the lowest on record. In fact, it was a million square kilometers less than the previous record low at the end of the southern hemisphere winter, the WMO said — an area larger than France and Germany combined.

Meanwhile, glaciers in North America and Europe again suffered an extreme melt season, with Swiss glaciers losing 10 percent of their ice volume in the past two years alone, the report showed. Dramatic socio-economic impacts accompany such climate records, experts say, including dwindling food security and mass displacement.

"This year we have seen communities around the world pounded by fires, floods and searing temperatures," UN chief Guterres said in a video message. He called on the leaders gathered in Dubai to commit to dramatic measures to rein in climate change, including phasing out fossil fuels and tripling renewable energy capacity.

"We have the roadmap to limit the rise in global temperature to 1.5C and avoid the worst of climate chaos," he said. "But we need leaders to fire the starting gun at COP28 on a race to keep the 1.5 degree limit alive." — AFP

## Team behind 'The Taste of Things' hopes to conquer Oscars with French food

Controversy has simmered around France's entry for the Oscars, "The Taste of Things" — a love letter to the country's culinary traditions — but filmmaker Tran Anh Hung and star chef Pierre Gagnaire say the art of cooking is worth celebrating. The movie, which hopes to win an Oscar nod in January, is a sumptuous 19th century romance about a cook (Academy Award winner Juliette Binoche), the gourmand she works for (Benoit Magimel) — and the exquisite dishes they create.

"I've been looking for a subject about cooking for 20 years, because I wanted to make a film about an art form. And I chose culinary art — not painting, not music," Tran told AFP at a New York screening hosted by the French government. The director, who came to France as a child in the aftermath of the Vietnam War, first earned international attention with "Cyclo" and "The Scent of Green Papaya" — both set in the Asian country.

With "The Taste of Things," the 60-year-old filmmaker said he hopes to "pay tribute to my country, which welcomed me when I was 12 years old," explaining how he was "amazed" by French culture upon his arrival. For the 73-year-old Gagnaire, who currently has restaurants in Paris, London, Tokyo, Seoul, Shanghai and Dubai, working on the film both as a consultant and in a small on-screen role was a way of "defending our know-how" in the kitchen.

"In the kitchens, in the back, we build things and defend our culture. In the kitchens, we often talk — there are French words," Gagnaire told AFP. "And by doing what we do, we sell not just taste — we sell crockery, we sell wine, we sell everything that revolves around the arts of the table."

**Art consumed by 'business'**

Tran and Gagnaire were in New York to promote "The Taste of Things" as it makes its way through the Oscars selection process, hopefully resulting in a nomination, to be announced on January 23. The film, which debuted in Cannes in May and opened this month to tepid reviews in France, was selected to vie for the best international feature film prize over Justine Triet's acclaimed courtroom drama "Anatomy of a Fall," sparking criticism.

That film, about a woman accused of murdering her husband, won the Palme d'Or at Cannes and managed to attract more than one million spectators in cinemas in France. Some felt that the choice of "Taste" as France's Oscars entry was a way of punishing Triet for some outspoken statements she made against the government of President Emmanuel Macron when she won the Palme.



Vietnamese-French film director Tran Anh Hung and French chef Pierre Gagnaire attend France's Oscars submission celebration for "The Taste of Things" at Villa Albertine in New York. — AFP photos

Gagnaire hit back at critics of "Taste" by saying slowing down is no crime. "That's what makes it beautiful," he said. "These days, we're all about 'quick and done' whereas cooking takes time. It takes time. (...) This cinema pays homage to slowness."

Tran, who won best director honors in Cannes, says cinema as an art form is "becoming increasingly rare" in favor of more commercially viable fare. "I think that today's art world is too much eaten up by, how shall I put it, business," he said. "The Taste of Things" is adapted from a Swiss novel written in 1920. It will open in the United States in February 2024, just before the Oscars in March. — AFP



Tran Anh Hung and Pierre Gagnaire attend France's Oscars submission celebration for "The Taste of Things."

## Shane MacGowan: Laureate of lowlife folk-punk

Shane MacGowan, the singer-songwriter who fronted Celtic folk-punk band The Pogues, was a booze-fueled bard who performed defiant ballads of the downtrodden and doomed. He died on Thursday aged 65, although many would have been forgiven for wondering how he made it that far. MacGowan seemed like a character from his own songbook and was renowned for his disheveled appearance, sparsely toothed mouth and often-slurred stage performances.

His lyrics gave a tender and profane voice to the experiences of the Irish and the Irish diaspora, framed in a rousing pub-anthem style. The Pogues carried MacGowan to fame before jettisoning him over the alcohol and drug abuse that dogged much of his life.

His 1987 Christmas "Fairytale of New York" duet with Kirsty MacColl, recounting a skid-row romance, is a festive staple, its ragamuffin charm standing out against syrupy standards. "The Body of an American", released a year earlier, featured in hit television series "The Wire" at the whiskey sodden wakes of fallen officers of the Baltimore Police Department.

"From his concrete-mixing voice that is by turns incoherent and lyrical, and his devil-may-care lifestyle to the rough tenderness of his worldview, he is the original death-or-glory anti-hero," wrote critic Liam Fay.



Shane MacGowan of British group The Pogues performs on stage at the British Summer Time festival in Hyde Park in central London. — AFP

**Punk in waiting**

Although considered quintessentially Irish, Shane Patrick Lysaght MacGowan was born in England to Irish parents on December 25, 1957. He claimed that as a five year-old he was given two bottles of Guinness a night. The teenage MacGowan won a scholarship at London's elite Westminster School but was expelled after being caught in possession of drugs. At 17, he found himself in rehab with a valium problem.

MacGowan came of age in the London punk scene, going by the name "Shane O'Hooligan" — aping the pseudonymous style of Johnny Rotten, Sid Vicious and Billy Idol. His first band was The Nipple Erectors before The Pogues were formed in 1982. The band's name was originally Pogue Mahone — the anglicized form of the Irish insult. But the moniker was swiftly shortened after the BBC got wind that radio DJs were issuing an indecent proposal with each mention of the band. — AFP



## Sports

# Najmul puts Bangladesh in control against New Zealand

## Southee, Kyle Jamieson frustrate Bangladesh for more than an hour

**SYLHET:** Skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto hit his third Test century in four innings to put Bangladesh on course for a strong total in the second innings of the first Test against New Zealand in Sylhet on Thursday. The hosts reached 212-3 at stumps on the third day, leading New Zealand by 205 runs, with Najmul unbeaten on 104.

Former captain Mushfiqur Rahim made an unbeaten 43 and put on 96 runs in the unbroken fourth-wicket stand with Najmul. Najmul, who scored a century in both innings of Bangladesh's previous Test against Afghanistan in June, also shared 90 runs with Mominul Haque for the third wicket.

The left-hander has now become the first Bangladeshi cricketer to score a hundred on his debut as Test captain. He took his hundred, his fourth in Tests, with a single off Ajaz Patel in 191 balls before signing off the day in style with a boundary in the last ball.

The 25-year-old has struck 10 fours so far in his innings. He was however involved in two runouts on the day, with the last being Mominul, who made 40. Najmul and Mominul helped Bangladesh recover from 26-2 after New Zealand made 317 in

their first innings to take a slender seven-run lead.

Patel, the only New Zealand bowler with some success on the day, trapped opener Zakir Hasan leg-before for 17. Tim Southee directed a straight drive by Najmul onto the stumps at the non-striking end to run out Mahmudul Hasan for eight next over.

Mominul, who joined Najmul in the rescue act, was also the hero for Bangladesh with the ball, having taken the last two New Zealand wickets in the morning. The tourists, replying to Bangladesh's first-innings 310, resumed on 266-8, still 44 runs behind.

Southee and Kyle Jamieson frustrated Bangladesh for more than an hour to share 52 runs for the ninth wicket, until left-arm spinner Mominul removed them both in the same over. Mominul trapped Jamieson leg-before for 23 to leave New Zealand 316-9, and then bowled Southee four balls later for 35 to finish with career-best figures of 3-4.

Southee hit three boundaries in his 62-ball stay. The two-match series is the beginning of a new cycle in the World Test Championship for both teams. — AFP



**SYLHET:** Bangladesh's Mushfiqur Rahim (R) plays a shot as New Zealand's wicketkeeper Tom Blundell (L) looks on during the third day of the first Test cricket match between Bangladesh and New Zealand at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium in Sylhet on November 30, 2023. — AFP

## England captain Farrell to miss Six Nations



Owen Farrell

**LONDON:** England captain Owen Farrell will not be available for the 2024 Six Nations after deciding to take a break from international rugby by "to prioritise his and his family's mental well-being". In a statement on Wednesday, English Premiership club Saracens said the 32-year-old would continue to captain and play for them.

"Owen Farrell has decided to take a break from international rugby in order to prioritise his and his family's mental well-being," Saracens said. "This means he will not be available for selection for the 2024 Six Nations.

"He will continue to play for Saracens and captain the club. As always, Owen will have the full support of everyone at the club." Farrell has won 112 caps since making his international debut in 2012 and is England's all-time leading points scorer, amassing 1,237 points.

The fly-half captained England to the final of the 2019 World Cup and the last four at this year's World Cup in France—their campaign ended with a heartbreaking 16-15 defeat to eventual winners South Africa.

In his absence, and following the international retirement of Courtney Lawes, Bristol prop Ellis Genge is a probable successor as skipper while George Ford and Marcus Smith are expected to battle it out for the fly-half role. England head coach Steve Borthwick hailed Farrell's courage for opening up about his mental health.

"He is an exemplary player, captain and leader and always gives his all for his country," he said. "It is with typical courage that Owen has made this decision to open up in this manner. "Together with all of us at England Rugby, I will do everything I can to ensure that he has the support he requires."

The Rugby Players' Association said Farrell, whom they described as a "leader and figurehead in the English game" had its unconditional support.

### Elite pressure

Farrell was sent off in a World Cup warm-up game against Wales, which resulted in a four-match ban that meant he missed England's opening two fixtures at the tournament. He came under fire on social media and at times during the World Cup he was booed by sections of the crowd.

Farrell is the latest high-profile sports star to draw attention to mental pressures at the elite level. England Test cricket captain Ben Stokes took a six-month break in 2021 to prioritise his mental health before making a successful return.

US gymnastics superstar Simone Biles took a two-year break from the sport, only returning to action in recent months. England begin their Six Nations campaign away to Italy on February 3.

Borthwick's men also travel to Scotland and France, with Wales and Ireland set to make the trip to Twickenham. England have not won the Six Nations title since 2020 but were the only northern hemisphere side to reach the semi-finals of the World Cup. — AFP

## Schoolgirl leads women's Australian Open as Davis sets men's pace

**SYDNEY:** A 16-year-old amateur schoolgirl stole the show and a share of the lead at the Australian Open on Thursday, while in the men's event Cameron Davis was a stroke ahead after a flawless nine-under-par 63. Australian teenager Rachel Lee was a shock joint leader, upstaging major winners Shin Ji-yai, Minjee Lee and Hannah Green. The qualifier fired a six-under-par 67 to accompany South Korea's Jenny Shin at the top of the leaderboard.

Former champion Davis sunk seven birdies and an eagle in front of big crowds at the DP World Tour event in Sydney to put the Australian one clear of US PGA Tour player Patrick Rodgers. The mixed Australian Open involves men and women teeing off in alternating groups on the same courses.

The Jack Nicklaus-designed Australian Golf Club is the main venue across all four days, with the nearby Lakes Golf Club co-hosting play for the first two rounds. Australian Hayden Hopewell and Scotland's Connor Syme were tied third in the men's tournament on seven-under.

"I know this place well, so I felt like I had plenty of good memories in the bank to go out there and play the course with," said 2017 winner Davis of the Lakes Golf Club. Australia's Min Woo Lee, who won the Australian PGA Championship in Brisbane last week, continued his stellar form with a bogey-free 67 as he chases a fourth DP World Tour title.

"I felt like I left a couple out there at the end, but bogey-free, solid," said Lee, who has reached a career high 38 in the world rankings. Japan's Rikuya Hoshino, who came second in Brisbane, carded 68.

### Frustrated Smith

But former world number two Cameron Smith has work to do after a 71 on the back of missing the cut a

## Global warming casts cloud over Winter Olympics future

**LAUSANNE:** As global warming and prohibitive costs threaten the long-term future of the Winter Olympics, organisers know they must soften their demands in order to retain a pool of potential hosts for the decades to come. On the face of it, there's no immediate concern, as the International Olympic Committee on Wednesday selected France ahead of two other contenders—Sweden and Switzerland—to enter into "targeted dialogue" over staging the 2030 Winter Games. It is a coup for France, which will also host the 2024 Summer Games in Paris.

President Emmanuel Macron hailed the bid focused on the snowy Alps region as "innovative, sustainable and inclusive" and said it would make "France and its mountains shine". The IOC will begin detailed discussions with French representatives before the event is officially awarded next year.

The three hosts in the running were an increase on the two vying for the 2022 Winter Olympics, when Beijing received the nod over Almaty in Kazakhstan. The Chinese campaign was marked by enormous investment, the exclusive use of artificial snow and widespread environmental concerns and human rights criticism.

Only two candidates bid for the 2026 Winter Olympics as well, with Milan-Cortina picked ahead of Stockholm. While Sweden made a push for 2030, with Stockholm and the Are ski resort, some 600km (370 miles) away from the capital, planned as venues, France and Switzerland waited until this summer to enter the fray, keeping their plans closely guarded, free of political debate and without consulting the public.

### Flurry of withdrawals

Those initially viewed as favourites pulled out, with Salt Lake City choosing to focus on 2034. On Wednesday, the US city, which last hosted the Winter Games in 2002, was confirmed as the sole candidate. A potential Pyrenees-Barcelona bid was scrapped, as was that of Sapporo in Japan, put off by the exorbitant costs. It highlights a recent trend that afflicts the Winter Games far more than its summer counterpart, with Calgary, Santiago, Auckland, Innsbruck, St Moritz, Sion, Oslo and Lviv forming a cascade of abandoned bids, often lacking in popular support. On top of the less significant economic benefits to those of a Summer Olympics, the winter



**SYDNEY:** Australia's Min Woo Lee hits a shot during the first round of the Australian Open golf tournament at The Lakes Golf Club in Sydney on November 30, 2023. — AFP

week ago in Brisbane by nine shots and being reduced to tears. Smith, who plays on the Saudi-backed LIV Golf circuit, said he felt his game had improved after four birdies and three bogeys.

"A little bit frustrating, but it was better," he said. "I think there's definitely something to build on there." Last year's champion Adrian Meronk of Poland hit 73 while American Michael Block, who became a cult hero at this year's PGA Championship with a hole-in-one playing alongside Rory McIlroy, made 71.

In the women's event Rachel Lee and Jenny Shin finished one ahead of two-time British Open champion Shin Ji-yai who shot a five-under 68. Tied for fourth on four-under were Australia's Stephanie Kyriacou and

South Africa's defending champion Ashleigh Buhai.

Australia's world number five Minjee Lee was tied sixth on three-under par. "I tried my best out there, shots were solid, putting was solid and everything was pretty good out there for me," said Rachel Lee, who had a practice round with her "hero" Shin Ji-yai this week.

"I'm surprised at how strong she is," Shin Ji-yai, an 11-time winner on the US LPGA Tour, said of the co-leader. "I'm looking forward to watching her in future." Green was six off the pace while Japan's Ayaka Sugihara, who drained a hole-in-one on the par-three 11th at the Australian Golf Club, ended eight adrift. — AFP

## Ledecky rules 800 free again at US Open

**WASHINGTON:** Seven-time Olympic champion Katie Ledecky eased to victory in the 800-meter freestyle on Wednesday in the opening race of the US Open Swimming Championships at Greensboro, North Carolina.

Ledecky, the three-time defending Olympic gold medalist and current world champion in the 800 free, posted a time of 8mins 15.91secs to win by almost 15 seconds. Ledecky's time was more than 11 seconds shy of her world record, set in 2016, and almost two seconds behind her winning time from last year's US Open. But the meet is a staging post for the 26-year-old Ledecky as she builds up towards next year's Olympics, where she hopes to become the first woman ever to win four Olympic gold medals in one event.

The US Olympic team trials will be held in Indianapolis on June 15-23, 2024. Fellow Olympian Paige Madden of Arizona State University, who is guided by former Michael Phelps coach Bob Bowman, finished second in 8:29.91.

Jillian Cox, a 19-year-old Texan who finished sixth at the World Championships in Fukuoka in July, was third. Ledecky will be back in the pool for the 400m freestyle heats on Thursday. In the men's 800 free, the withdrawal of world champion Ahmed Hafnaoui of Tunisia left Tokyo Olympic champion Bobby Finke as the favorite, but he surprisingly finished off the podium.

Charlie Clark came from behind to beat David Johnston with a time of 7:50.49 while Ilya Sibirtsev's time of 7:54.36 was enough to pip Finke for third. The meet continues until Saturday and features several international stars alongside American Olympians with Canadian sensation Summer McIntosh, a 17-year-old four-time world champion, set to challenge Ledecky in the 400m free. Seven-time Olympic gold medalist Caeleb Dressel will race as he continues his return to the sport after a lengthy break. — AFP



**PARIS:** IOC member and Advisory Board Member Karl Stoss of Austria (L) and Olympic Games Executive Director Christophe Dubi attend a press conference after an International Olympic Committee (IOC) Executive Board committee meeting in Paris, on November 29, 2023. — AFP

showpiece requires infrastructure that is both expensive to build and maintain—even more so when it serves little other purpose to the local community.

Ski jumps, sliding tracks for the luge and bobsleigh events, and indoor speed skating rinks are the most likely to become "white elephants". The issue of snow cover is unavoidable too. Despite the access to snow cannons, they can only operate when it is cold enough, and even then the events must remain fair. Rain fell on the slopes at the 2010 Vancouver Olympics, while mild conditions ate away at the snow at Sochi in Russia four years later.

The warming of the planet is highly likely to further reduce the places capable of guaranteeing suitable conditions for a Winter Games. According to a study published by the IOC last month, only 10 countries will still be in a position to host the Winter Olympics and Paralympics by 2040, down from 15 now, with Europe particularly affected. Olympic authorities did not venture to look further down the line, but a study from Canada's University of Waterloo estimated that of the 21 previous Winter Games hosts, only eight would remain "climate reliable" in 2080 if global emissions of greenhouse gases are not significantly slashed.

These fears have led to a series of adaptations envisaged by the IOC, including the "double allocation" of the 2030 and 2034 Games to secure sites as early as possible, cost-reducing measures to bring the Games more in line with various world championships, and a possible rotation between a handful of hosts which have pre-existing facilities. — AFP



## Sports

# Copenhagen grab crucial Champions League point after more VAR drama

## Danes sit second in Group A with a match remaining

MUNICH: Copenhagen grabbed a crucial point in a 0-0 draw at Bayern Munich on Wednesday as more VAR handball controversy erupted in the Champions League. The German champions had already qualified for the last 16 but the stalemate at Allianz Arena helped keep alive Copenhagen's hopes of joining them.

Coupled with Manchester United drawing 3-3 at Galatasaray, the Danes sit second in Group A with a match remaining and will have their fate in their own hands when they host the Turkish side in a fortnight.

Copenhagen had a major let-off in stoppage time at the end of the game when referee Stephanie Frappart awarded Thomas Tuchel's Bayern a penalty for handball against Peter Ankersen. But VAR showed contact with the upper arm and shoulder and Frappart withdrew the penalty after consulting the pitch-side monitor, to protests from striker Harry Kane and Tuchel. Bayern veteran Thomas Mueller said the decision against his side laid bare VAR's inconsistencies. "I'm no friend of the rule, but when you compare it to yesterday, it's pretty weird," he told DAZN. "I think the rule-makers want to try and make handball calls objective, but you can't do that."

Despite Bayern dropping points in the Champions League group stages at home for the first time since 2018, the German champions qualify for the last 16 in first place. It is the 16th straight year that they have reached the knockouts. Tuchel said his side "can do better and we've done better recently, but we can check that box and move past it." "We weren't fluid enough and we didn't take enough risks."

### Quiet Kane

After making no substitutions in the weekend's win over Cologne despite complaints about player strain, Tuchel shuffled his deck, benching Leroy Sane and Serge Gnabry, but keeping Kane up front. A hip complaint ruled out defender Kim Min-jae, pushing midfield stalwart Leon Goretzka into central defence, while Mueller was given a first Champions League start of the campaign. Despite 22 goals in 17 matches for Bayern before kick-off, England skipper Kane was quiet.

The home side however had several early chances through veteran Mueller and French teenager Mathys Tel. Mueller created an early chance for Tel only for the 18-year-old to blast over, scuffing his shot with his shin.

Tel then found Mueller directly in front of goal, but the 2014 World Cup winner's attempt was kept out by a desperate save from Kamil Grabara in the Copenhagen goal. Grabara was on the spot again midway through the second half, keeping a Kane shot out of goal with his fist.

Mueller, playing 90 minutes for just the second time this season in all competitions, went down in the box late under attention of the visiting defence but Frappart ignored his claims of a penalty. "From the images it doesn't look so wild... it's a small push but an obvious one at the right moment. You can give it," Mueller said. Bayern travel to Manchester in mid-December with the hosts sitting last in the group and in grave danger of an early exit. — AFP



MUNICH: Bayern Munich's Austrian midfielder #27 Konrad Laimer (L) and Bayern Munich's German forward #25 Thomas Mueller (R) vie for the ball with FC Copenhagen's Danish midfielder #12 Lukas Lerager during the UEFA Champions League Group A football match between Bayern Munich and FC Copenhagen in Munich. — AFP

## Man Utd on brink of CL exit, Arsenal, PSV into last 16

PARIS: Manchester United are facing elimination from the Champions League in the group stage after squandering a two-goal lead to draw 3-3 with Galatasaray in Istanbul on Wednesday, while Arsenal and PSV Eindhoven secured qualification for the last 16.

Three-time European champions United needed a win in Turkey, against opponents who beat them at Old Trafford last month, in order to keep qualification for the knockout rounds in their hands. Erik ten Hag's side appeared in control when Alejandro Garnacho's early opener was followed by a stunning strike by Bruno Fernandes on 18 minutes.

Hakim Ziyech pulled one back with a free-kick, only for Scott McTominay to restore the visitors' two-goal advantage early in the second half. Yet Galatasaray were again given hope when another Ziyech free-kick was fumbled into the net by United goalkeeper Andre Onana, and the hosts equalized thanks to a brilliant 71st-minute strike by Kerem Akturkoglu.

United have now conceded 14 goals in five European matches and this result, combined with FC Copenhagen's 0-0 draw away to already-qualified Bayern Munich, leaves the Premier League side bottom of Group A with one game remaining.

In order to go through they must now beat Bayern at home next month and hope Copenhagen and Galatasaray draw. "We are going in the right direction so I know we will be successful in the long-term but if you want to stay in the Champions League you need to win these games," said Ten Hag.

### Gunners hit six

Arsenal's form in Europe this season has been in stark contrast to that of United, and the Gunners romped into the last 16 with a 6-0 demolition of Lens in London. Mikel Arteta's side were five goals up at the break with Kai Havertz, Gabriel Jesus, Bukayo Saka, Gabriel Martinelli and Martin Odegaard all netting. Jorginho completed the scoring from a late penalty as Arsenal gained revenge for their 2-1 defeat by Lens in France last month. "Today was the day to get it done. We did it in a beautiful way," Arteta told broadcaster TNT Sports.

Arsenal have scored 12 goals without reply in win-



LONDON: Arsenal's Japanese defender #18 Takehiro Tomiyasu (L) and Lens' Malian defender #21 Massadio Haidara compete during the UEFA Champions League Group B football match between Arsenal and RC Lens at the Arsenal Stadium in north London. — AFP

ning their three home matches in Group B and have now wrapped up top spot ahead of PSV, who are also through. The Dutch side, European Cup winners in 1988, produced a superb comeback to triumph 3-2 away to Sevilla and put themselves out of sight in second place. Goals by Sergio Ramos and Youssef En-Nesyri had Sevilla 2-0 up, but Lucas Ocampos was sent off for the hosts just before substitute Ismael Saibari, the Spanish-born Moroccan international, pulled one back for PSV.

They equalized through a Nemanja Gudelj own goal and won it in stoppage time through United States forward Ricardo Pepi. Sevilla now have to win at Lens next month to salvage a place in the Europa League, the competition they won last season.

### Bellingham scores in Real win

Real Madrid were already through to the last 16 before hosting Napoli and they clinched top spot in Group C with a 4-2 victory at the Santiago Bernabeu. Giovanni Simeone, son of Atletico Madrid coach Diego, gave Napoli an early lead, but Rodrygo equalized immediately, continuing his fine form with a superb strike for his seventh goal in his last seven games.

Jude Bellingham put the hosts ahead with his 15th goal of the season in all competitions only for Andre-Frank Zambo Anguissa to get Napoli back level just after the restart. However, teenage substitute Nico Paz made it 3-2 for Real with a long-range strike that evaded the goalkeeper's grasp, and Bellingham set up Joselu to wrap up the win late on.

That result prevented Napoli from clinching qualification as they could still be caught by Braga, who drew 1-1 at home to Union Berlin in Portugal despite having Sikou Niakate sent off in the first half. Robin Gosens fired Union in front but Alvaro Djaló levelled for the hosts after the break.

Real Sociedad and Inter Milan were both already through from Group D and their meeting next month will decide who tops the section. On Wednesday, a much-changed Inter side recovered from three goals down to draw 3-3 with Benfica in Portugal after Joao Mario scored a first-half hat-trick against his old club. Marko Arnautovic and Davide Frattesi pulled goals back for Inter before Alexis Sanchez levelled from the penalty spot, and Benfica were reduced to 10 men late on when Antonio Silva was sent off. Real Sociedad drew 0-0 with Red Bull Salzburg. — AFP

## Jets' Rodgers cleared for return to practice

NEW YORK: New York Jets quarterback Aaron Rodgers has been cleared to return to practice just 11 weeks after undergoing surgery on a torn Achilles tendon, head coach Robert Saleh said on Wednesday. Rodgers will be limited to non-contact practice initially but the move paves the way for a possible return to action this season for the four-time MVP. "This isn't so much getting ready to play as much as it is a progression in his rehab," Saleh told reporters.

"There's no added risk to it. There's certain things that he's been cleared that we are going to allow him to do. Aaron is not going to do anything to put himself in harm's way," he said.

Rodgers had been the off-season focus of the NFL after he was traded to the Jets after 18 seasons with the Green Bay Packers.

His arrival was supposed to put the Jets over the top in their bid to become a title contender but without him the Jets have struggled offensively behind backups Zach Wilson and Tim Boyle.

The Jets have a 4-7 record and only the slimmest of lingering chances of making the postseason. Rodgers, who was injured on the Jets' fourth play of the season, had been bullish about returning despite knowing that such a speedy return from a serious



Aaron Rodgers

Achilles injury would be unprecedented in the NFL.

"I think it's a testament to who he is as a human and obviously there's a little bit of that drive where he wants to prove it can be done faster than anybody's done it before.

"That's OK. That's part of his mental makeup. I think he still runs with a chip on his shoulder and that's the way he lives his life, where he always wants to prove people wrong in terms of doubting him," he said.

"He's a special human and I think his actions are showing how much he appreciates, I think, this organization and everything around it," he added. Rodgers won the Super Bowl in 2010 with the Green Bay Packers who had drafted him in the first round in 2005. He is a 10-time Pro Bowler who has been the NFL's passer rating leader on four occasions and twice has been the league's passing touchdowns leader. — AFP

## British Gymnastics ban coaches from weighing athletes

LONDON: British Gymnastics has introduced new safeguarding rules that will prevent coaches from weighing athletes in an effort to stamp out methods it said are "on the fringe of abuse". The rules are part of a series of policies that the governing body is introducing following the 2022 Whyte Review, which found there was "systemic" physical and emotional abuse within the sport.

British Gymnastics has said it intends to go beyond the recommendations of that report in order to stamp out "harmful practices". Under the new rules, no gymnasts aged 10 or under can be weighed. Those above that age can only be weighed with the consent of both the gymnast and, if they are under the age of 18, a parent or guardian.

If athletes are weighed, it must be done by a sports science or medical practitioner, with a "scientifically valid rationale" for it, including measuring growth or designing strength and conditioning exercises.

British Gymnastics said the policy had been introduced "to prevent inappropriate practices and prevent potential areas of concern around weighing, due to some of the related psychological distress and risks of the development of mental health problems such as eating disorders/disordered eating, anxiety, and depression". — AFP

### News in Brief

#### Lyon joins Lancashire

LONDON: Australia Test bowler Nathan Lyon has joined Lancashire for the 2024 season, the English county announced on Thursday. The 36-year-old off-spinner, who has taken 496 Test wickets, played for Worcestershire in 2017 and helped them win promotion from division two. "This is an exciting opportunity for me and I am really looking forward to heading over to England for a full season of county cricket with Lancashire," said Lyon, who will be available for all formats. "I love playing cricket in England. I'm keen to keep learning, keep improving my game and hopefully I can contribute to winning matches for the Red Rose and pass on some of the experiences that I have gained over the years." Lyon played twice in the drawn Ashes series in England earlier this year but suffered a calf injury at Lord's, which sidelined him until October. Prior to that injury, Lyon had made 100 consecutive Test appearances for Australia. He is third on Australia's all-time list of Test wicket-takers, behind leg-spinner Shane Warne and paceman Glenn McGrath. Mark Chilton, director of cricket performance for the division one side, said: "Nathan is an extremely skilled and experienced operator and, once we heard that he was available for the duration of next summer, we jumped at the opportunity to add him to our squad for the 2024 season." — AFP

#### Uganda qualify for T20 WCup

PARIS: Uganda will make their first appearance at a cricket World Cup next year after qualifying on Thursday for the T20 tournament to be hosted by the West Indies and the United States. A nine-wicket win over Rwanda secured Uganda second place in the African regional qualifying event, joining Namibia at the 2024 T20 World Cup while eliminating Zimbabwe from contention. Uganda bowled Rwanda out for just 65 and knocked off the runs in 8.1 overs to record their fifth win in six matches in Windhoek. Qualifying hosts Namibia sealed their spot on Tuesday with a 58-run win over Tanzania, ensuring they will play at a third consecutive T20 World Cup. Zimbabwe, who lost to both Namibia and Uganda, will miss out for the second time in three editions. They did not participate in the 2021 showpiece after the ICC suspended Zimbabwe's membership because of government interference. — AFP

#### Franks returns to Canterbury

TOULOUSE: New Zealand tighthead prop Owen Franks, who had a stint with Toulouse in the Top 14 during the World Cup, has signed a contract with the Crusaders for the 2024 Super Rugby season, the Christchurch-based franchise announced on Wednesday. The 35-year-old, who has been capped 108 times by the All Blacks winning the World Cup in 2011 and 2015, returns to the side he played for at the start of his career, between 2009 and 2019. "Coming back makes me realize what a privilege it is to play for this club," he said in a statement. "I'm playing rugby at this stage of my career because I enjoy it and still have plenty to give." Recruited as a World Cup joker, Franks played seven matches, including six as a starter, for Toulouse in the Top 14 between August and November. "From what I've seen of his games for Toulouse, he's in some of the best form of his career," said Canterbury forwards coach Dan Perrin. "He's the ultimate professional and at 35 years of age is in his prime for a front rower." The Crusaders have won the last five editions of Super Rugby, a competition currently made up of New Zealand, Australian and Fijian franchises. — AFP





NEW ORLEANS: Williamson #1 of the New Orleans Pelicans dunks the ball during the third quarter of an NBA game against the Philadelphia 76ers at Smoothie King Center on November 29, 2023 in New Orleans.

## Magic win eighth in a row while Embiid ill as Sixers fall

### Pelicans guard C.J. McCollum scores 20 points in his return

WASHINGTON: German forward Franz Wagner's 31-point performance sparked Orlando to an eighth consecutive victory on Wednesday, ripping Washington 139-120 to move one game behind NBA overall leader Boston. The Magic connected on 60.7 percent of their shots in improving to 13-5 and matching Milwaukee for second in the Eastern Conference behind the Celtics (14-4).

"We believe we can win every day and we want to play up to our standards," Wagner said after achieving back-to-back 30-point games for the first time in his NBA career. "It's a lot of fun. We would like to keep that going."

Orlando can match the club's record win streak by beating the Wizards again on Friday. "It would be awesome," Wagner said. "But we've still got one to go so

we've got to lock in on that." Magic coach Jamahl Mosley agreed, saying: "I'm a 'one game at a time' guy. We'll enjoy this one but we've got to get to work tomorrow."

Cole Anthony came off the bench to add 25 points and Jalen Suggs scored a season-high 22 points for Orlando. But forward Paolo Banchero, last season's NBA Rookie of the Year, suffered an ankle sprain and had only six points.

"We've got a young team," Wagner said. "We're just a tight-knit group. We've got a lot of characters and we just enjoy playing with each other." The Philadelphia 76ers also could have reached 13-5 but with NBA Most Valuable Player Joel Embiid out with illness, the Sixers lost 124-114 at New Orleans.

Cameroonian seven-footer Embiid, the NBA's top scorer with 32.0 points a

game, was dearly missed as Pelicans star forward Zion Williamson struck for 33 points, eight rebounds, six assists and three steals. He shot 11-of-12 from the floor and the free throw line.

Pelicans guard C.J. McCollum scored 20 points in his return after missing more than three weeks with a collapsed lung and fractured rib. Tyrese Maxey scored 33 points for the 76ers in a losing cause.

#### Jokic triple double

At Denver, two-time NBA MVP Nikola Jokic struck for 32 points, 15 assists and 10 rebounds while Michael Porter Jr. added 30 points, 10 rebounds and five assists to power the defending champion Nuggets over visiting Houston 134-124.

Ignited by their star Serbian center's triple double, Denver improved

the NBA's best home record to 9-0 and reached 13-6 overall, moving into second place in the Western Conference only a game behind Minnesota (13-4).

"We play good at home," Porter said. "There's good energy in the building and we like to play at the crib. We've got to bring the same energy on the road." The Phoenix Suns saw a seven-game win streak snapped while NBA-worst Detroit lost its 15th game in a row.

Toronto got 23 points from Scottie Barnes and 22 from Pascal Siakam to beat visiting Phoenix 112-105. The Raptors led 108-105 when Devin Booker missed a tying three-pointer with 50 seconds remaining. German Dennis Schroder hit a jumper for Toronto and Kevin Durant — who scored a game-high 30 points — then missed a three-pointer for Phoenix.

Barnes added two final free throws to seal the Raptors' triumph.

At Detroit, D'Angelo Russell had game-highs of 35 points and nine assists to lead the Los Angeles Lakers over the Pistons 133-107. Detroit drop to 2-16. Anthony Davis added 28 points and a game-high 16 rebounds for the Lakers while LeBron James, coming off the most lopsided loss of his 21-year career at Philadelphia on Monday, added 25 points and eight rebounds.

At Sacramento, Kawhi Leonard scored 34 points and James Harden scored 17 of his 26 points in the first quarter as the Los Angeles Clippers routed the host Kings 131-117. De'Aaron Fox scored 40 points in a losing cause while Paul George netted 19 for the Clippers. — AFP

### Inter head to revived Napoli with Serie A lead in the balance

MILAN: Inter Milan defend their slender lead at the top of Serie A on Sunday when they travel to reigning champions Napoli with Juventus breathing down their necks. Simone Inzaghi's side maintained their two-point advantage over Juve with last weekend's scrappy draw in Turin but have another tough test in Naples to complete what has been a tricky week.

Inter travel south on Sunday after Wednesday's 3-3 Champions League draw at Benfica as they plough through a punishing schedule aiming to be top gun both at home and abroad. Their second string coming back from three goals down at the Estadio da Luz gave them a good chance of finishing top of Group F, and the heavy squad rotation Inzaghi decided to implement for the draw in Portugal means his top performers should be fresh for domestic action at the weekend. Also helping Inter is Napoli's atrocious record at the Stadio Diego Armando Maradona, which was largely why Rudi Garcia was sacked and replaced by Walter Mazzarri.

Seven points is a measly tally from six league matches at home and a strong performance against Inter will be the best way to forget an eventful 4-2 defeat at Real Madrid, in which Napoli showed signs of life after an awful start to the season.

Sunday's clash is Mazzarri's first at home since returning to the helm at fourth-placed Napoli earlier this month, and he is trying to cut the eight-point gap separating his team from Inter. Inter could already find themselves behind Juve before they take to the field in Naples as their closest rivals are at Monza on Friday night in the opening match of the weekend.

Monza have shown no signs of second season syndrome in Italy's top flight and are nestled in ninth place. Raffaele Palladino's side are tough to beat and can



TURIN: Inter Milan's Argentine forward #10 Lautaro Martinez (C) and Juventus' Italian midfielder #41 Hans Nicolussi Cavaglia (R) fight for the ball during the Italian Serie A football match between Juventus and Inter Milan at the Allianz Stadium in Turin. — AFP

count on one of the revelations of the campaign in Andrea Colpani, the 24-year-old attacking midfielder having scored six times and set up one more this season.

Juve meanwhile are finally coming to the end of an injury crisis and should have Manuel Locatelli back in midfield, while Federico Chiesa and Dusan Vlahovic looked to be back on form before last week's draw with Inter descended into a glorified street fight.

Six points back in third are AC Milan, who are in full-blown crisis mode after being all but eliminated from the Champions League following Tuesday's limp

home defeat by Borussia Dortmund which brought yet another injury.

Germany centre-back Malick Thiaw succumbed to a serious hamstring tear, meaning Milan have 10 players out, including star winger Rafael Leao, for Saturday's visit of Frosinone who are 10th and having a great time back in Serie A. Milan, who have won just two of their last eight matches in all competitions, are for now backing under-fire coach Stefano Pioli but another bad result will pile further pressure on both him and the club. — AFP

### Punches thrown as AFC CL match erupts into chaos

KUALA LUMPUR: The Asian Football Confederation said Thursday it was investigating a mass brawl involving two teams in the AFC Champions League. Punches were thrown and the benches of both sides got involved when Wednesday's encounter between China's Zhejiang and away side Buriram United of Thailand descended into violence. It was unclear what sparked it, but the chaotic scene erupted shortly after the final whistle of Zhejiang's bad-tempered 3-2 victory. "The AFC underlines the importance of fair play, mutual respect and sportsmanship, and takes a zero tolerance approach towards all acts of violence which threaten the physical integrity of players and officials," the Asian Football Confederation said in a statement.

"The AFC is investigating the incident(s) but does not comment on ongoing disciplinary affairs, which are matters for the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee and its secretariat to consider." AFC general secretary Windsor John told AFP that they were waiting for reports from the referee and match commissioner.

Multiple punches and kicks were exchanged between the two teams and at least two players ended up on the floor. One grabbed an opponent in a headlock. Security personnel raced onto the pitch at Huzhou Olympic Sports Center to restore order.

The bad blood extended into Thursday and the official Instagram account of the Thai team posted pictures of one of their players covering on the ground. The caption read: "Is it AFC Champions League? Come to play football or come to the battlefield." Buriram also posted a photograph of what appeared to be a home fan hurling something from the stands. — AFP