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GCC slams Zionist aggression

Qatar blasts 'shameful' inaction • Unified Gulf visa approved

Crown Prince meets Sheikh Nasser

KUWAIT: HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace on Tuesday HH Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. — KUNA



DOHA: (From left) GCC Secretary General Jassem Al-Budaiwi, Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Al-Abdullah, Omani Deputy Prime Minister Sayyid Fahd Al-Said, Qatari Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Bahraini King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa and UAE President Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan pose for a group photo on Dec 5, 2023 during the 44th GCC summit. — KUNA

NEWS IN BRIEF

Amir's health remains stable
KUWAIT: The health condition of HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah remains stable, the Amiri Diwan affairs minister said Tuesday. Sheikh Mohammad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah expressed wishes of good health and rapid recovery for HH the Amir. — KUNA

MP calls to reshuffle constituencies
KUWAIT: MP Abdulhadi Al-Ajmi said on Tuesday he has proposed a new distribution of electoral constituencies that he believes achieves equality among Kuwaiti voters to resolve huge imbalances in present districts. According to Ajmi, the new proposal calls to shift residential areas amongst constituencies to ensure that the number of voters in the five districts are almost equal. Based on Ajmi's proposal, the number of voters in the five constituencies will range from 138,000 to 173,000 voters.

MP queries expat test delay
KUWAIT: MP Abdulaziz Al-Saqaabi on Tuesday asked Interior Minister Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled Al-Sabah about the delay in implementing a project to test expat professionals when they come to Kuwait for work. Saqaabi said the Public Authority of Manpower announced several years ago that it has a plan to test expat professionals like engineers, doctors, accountants and others, but the tests have not been implemented. He asked the minister about the reason for the delay and inquired about the measures taken so far to start testing.

Putin to visit Saudi, UAE
MOSCOW: President Vladimir Putin will visit Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates on Wednesday, the Kremlin has announced, as Moscow courts allies abroad despite being isolated by the West over the Ukraine conflict. In Saudi Arabia, Putin will discuss trade, international politics and humanitarian aid with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. He will meet his counterpart Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan in the UAE for talks on trade, energy, tourism and education. —AFP

DOHA: Qatar's ruler hit out at "shameful" international inaction over the Zionist-Hamas war in Gaza as he opened the 44th Gulf Cooperation Council summit in Doha on Tuesday. "It is shameful for the international community to allow this heinous crime to continue for nearly two months, during which the systematic and deliberate killing of innocent civilians continues, including women and children," Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani said.

Qatar was a key mediator in negotiations that resulted in a seven-day truce, which saw scores of Zionist captives exchanged for Palestinians prisoners and humanitarian aid, until it ended on Friday. Qatar's ruler said his country was "constantly working to re-

Zain, Ooredoo, TASC create \$2.2bn tower firm, largest in MENA

DOHA/KUWAIT: Zain Group and Ooredoo announced the signing of definitive agreements between Ooredoo Group, Zain Group and TASC Towers Holding (TASC) to create the largest tower company in the MENA region, in a cash and share deal. The enlarged tower company, comprising approximately 30,000 towers, has a combined estimated current enterprise value of \$2.2 billion. Ooredoo and Zain will equally retain a substantial stake of 49.3 percent each in the newly restructured

new" the truce, but added this was "not an alternative to a permanent ceasefire". He called for "an international investigation into the massacres committed by (the Zionist entity)" and for the Security Council "to assume its legal responsibility and act to end this barbaric war, and compel (the Zionist entity) to return to credible negotiations to achieve a just solution to the Palestinian issue". Some members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) have moved towards closer ties with the Zionist entity in recent years. The United Arab Emirates and Bahrain normalized ties with the Zionist entity in 2020, and Saudi Arabia was seen as close to following suit. But the war has put a halt to these diplomatic efforts.

In a joint statement, the GCC expressed "deep concern" with what it called "blatant (Zionist) aggression" in Gaza. The council praised the efforts of Qatar, Egypt and the United States in negotiating the humanitarian pause, urging a fresh truce "immediately" to "achieve a complete and sustainable ceasefire". Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan attended the session and accused the Zionist entity of "war crimes" and "crimes against humanity in Gaza", which he said "should not be left unanswered". Both Turkey and Qatar have been vocal supporters of the Palestinian cause and have opened channels of communication with Hamas.

Continued on Page 6

entity, through an asset and cash equalization process. The founders of TASC will retain the remaining shareholding, through Digital Infrastructure Assets LLP, and will continue to manage the operations of the business. The chairmanship of the tower company rotates every two years between Zain and Ooredoo, beginning with Bader Al-Kharafi as Chairman and Aziz Aluthman Fakhroo as Vice-Chairman. In a joint commentary, Aziz Aluthman Fakhroo, MD and Group CEO, Ooredoo; Bader Al-Kharafi, Zain Vice-Chairman & Group CEO; and Iyad Mazhar, Founder & CEO of TASC said: "This pioneering deal embarks us on an exciting journey together as it results in the establishment of the region's largest independent tower company, placing the MENA region on the world telecom tower map." (See Page 8)



'Hellish scenario' in Gaza as death toll tops 16,200

GAZA: Zionist forces battled Hamas militants in southern Gaza on Tuesday, prompting a UN warning of an "even more hellish scenario" as fighting pushes civilians into a steadily shrinking area of the besieged territory. The army launched its ground invasion in Gaza's north, sending in troops and tanks to destroy Hamas and free captives taken in unprecedented Oct 7 cross-border attacks.

After an air and ground assault that has displaced tens of thousands and reduced much of the north to rubble, the army said it had moved south as it targets "Hamas strongholds throughout the Gaza Strip". Zionist tanks, armored personnel carriers and bulldozers were seen near the southern Gaza city of Khan Yunis, forcing already displaced civilians to pack up and flee again, witnesses told AFP.



GAZA: A Palestinian child wounded during Zionist bombardment is carried into Nasser hospital in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip on Dec 5, 2023. — AFP

Local

Kuwait, Hungary promote economic, diplomatic ties

Trade volume stands at \$30 million

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: Recently appointed Hungarian Ambassador to Kuwait Andras Szabo shared insights into the strong diplomatic ties between the two countries during a press conference, emphasizing the historical depth of the Hungarian-Kuwaiti relationship and diplomatic connections dating back to 1964. He disclosed details of his discussions during his presentation of credentials to HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Nov 22, saying they centered around bilateral relations between the two countries, delving into the historical context while also exploring prospects for the future.

Ambassador Szabo's emphasis on reviewing the shared history and envisioning a cooperative future underscores the commitment to strengthening diplomatic ties between Kuwait and Hungary, setting a positive tone for their continued collaboration. "Kuwait was the first in the region to establish diplomatic relations with Hungary, with the subsequent opening of the Hungarian embassy in Kuwait in 1975," he said, expressing his joy over the upcoming celebration of the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations, reflecting on the enduring friendship between the two countries.

Delving into the milestones, Szabo highlighted the establishment of a small economic office, affirming his presence in Kuwait signals a renewed effort to strengthen ties, noting Hungary is a developed country in the field of information technology innovation and medical and automotive sectors, and notably in cybersecurity and information technology.

Szabo indicated trade volume between the two countries stands at \$30 million, revealing Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary Peter Sijjarto will visit Kuwait in March, hoping for new agreements and memoranda of understanding to be signed related to the fields of cybersecurity and advanced information technology.

Szabo called on Kuwaiti investors, encouraging them to consider investments in Hungary, particularly through

real estate acquisitions. He highlighted an upcoming legislative development – a new law for a "golden visa" currently before parliament. This visa, as outlined by the ambassador, will extend beyond real estate ownership to encompass individuals supporting university activities and making donations. However, he noted that specific conditions for obtaining the golden visa would be outlined.

"The Hungarian-Kuwaiti Joint Economic Committee, which meets every two years, will hopefully meet in 2025 in Hungary, while we celebrate the 60th anniversary of the establishment of our bilateral relations," he said. The ambassador highlighted the comprehensive nature of the agreements already in place between Kuwait and Hungary in various fields, emphasizing ongoing efforts to renew certain longstanding agreements, specifically investment protection and double taxation avoidance agreements. Regarding visas, Szabo conveyed his delight over the European Union's decision to grant Kuwaiti citizens 5-year entry visas, stressing the importance of reinstating direct flights between Kuwait and Hungary, pledging to invest significant efforts into facilitating this crucial transportation link to enable the entry of 1,500 Kuwaitis who seek visas to enter Hungary yearly.

The Hungarian ambassador, reflecting on the historical trajectory of bilateral relations, highlighted the zenith during the '80s and '90s when around 10,000 Hungarian citizens thrived in various sectors in Kuwait, notably in medical and sports domains. However, with Hungary's shifting focus to Europe, particularly after joining the European Union in 2004, ties experienced a decline. He expressed a



Hungarian Ambassador to Kuwait Andras Szabo



Hungarian Ambassador to Kuwait Andras Szabo poses for a group photo with local media.

commitment to rekindling these relations and his dedication to advancing economic cooperation between the two countries.

Szabo said his country offers 20 scholarships annually for Kuwaiti students, highlighting the academic excellence of Hungarian universities, which rank among the top globally, emphasizing that three internationally accredited medical universities in Hungary conduct courses in English. The ambassador also underlined Hungary's safe, strategic location in the heart of Europe, affordability, and the high quality of its cuisine as factors contributing to

an enriching and secure educational experience.

In promoting Hungary as an educational destination, the ambassador showcased the country's cultural richness, describing it as both ancient and steeped in heritage. He emphasized the warm hospitality of the Hungarian people and the overall cultural experience that students can enjoy. In a bid to strengthen cultural ties, Szabo expressed his desire to consolidate sports relations, sharing his vision to invite Hungarian coaches who have worked in Kuwait over the past decade and promoting Hungarian sports by organizing sporting events in the future.



IKEA and KSH provide opportunities for people with different abilities

KUWAIT: IKEA the leading brand for life at home and the Kuwait Society for the Handicapped (KSH) a non-profit organization officially signed a memorandum of understanding to collaborate on creating employment opportunities for people with different abilities in Kuwait. The MoU signing ceremony took place at KSH head office in Sabahiya and was chaired by Sabeeka Saad Saqer Al Jasser, Chairman at KSH and Marino Maganto, CEO of IKEA Kuwait, Jordan, and Morocco in the presence of KSH board members and KSH Director Bara'a Al Jenae.

Among the distinguished guests in attendance were the new IKEA co-workers, their families and IKEA management team. In his speech at a press conference held alongside the signing ceremony, KSH Director Al Jenae welcomed the guests and emphasized on the importance of such initiatives in

developing the Kuwaiti Society. "We welcome IKEA initiative for hiring People with Disabilities starting with IKEA the Warehouse.

We would like to express our gratitude to IKEA for their outstanding efforts in providing permanent employment contracts that ensure equal opportunities and rights for our students, and for creating a comfortable working environment that facilitates their work. To ensure the success of this initiative and achieve the best possible results, KSH provided extensive training to the new workers with disabilities and the IKEA staff who supervise them. The rehabilitation and education teams provided one-to-one training to ensure a smooth transition to the new work environment.

We truly appreciate IKEA's commitment to promoting inclusivity and enabling People with Disabilities to participate in the workforce," said Al Jenae. "At KSH, our mission is to improve the quality of life for individuals with disabilities. We strive to uphold their rights, showcase their abilities, encourage their self-realization, and promote their independence to the best of their abilities. We achieve this by providing programs,

projects, and high-quality services for individuals with disabilities, their families, and those concerned with their well-being.

Our work is guided by the relevant frameworks and systems. So, today's collaboration with IKEA contributes to the inclusion of people with disabilities with other members of society," explained Al Jenae. "At IKEA we believe that together we will make a lasting positive impact on people's lives. Our cooperation with KSH comes from our belief and long-term commitment in giving equal and fair employment opportunities to everyone," said Maganto.

During the event, IKEA and KSH celebrated the new hires and their graduation from their onboarding training program. "At IKEA we are committed to embracing all dimensions of human diversity and reflecting the demographics of the societies in which we operate. We actively work to prevent discrimination and ensure equality in opportunity and treatment. One important part is creating accessible and inclusive workplaces, where people can be themselves at work and everyone's voice is heard. The MoU with KSH is a milestone to this commitment in Kuwait," concluded Maganto.



Kuwait committed to confront climate change challenges

DUBAI: Secretary-General of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development (SCPD), Dr. Khaled Mahdi, stressed Tuesday that Kuwait, as an oil-producing country, is committed to obligations in facing climate change challenges, including commitments to reach carbon neutrality in 2060. Speaking to KUNA during the 28th UN Climate Change Conference (COP28 UAE), Mahdi stressed that Kuwait's commitment is an indication of its cohesive role in the international and global organizations to combat climate change.

Having the UAE organize COP28 is clear evidence of the importance of the climate change issue to the GCC and its effect on various areas of the world, Mahdi added. He pointed out the vision of His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah in reaching carbon neutrality by 2060, especially with major projects in this field within Kuwait's development plan and the Sustainable Environment Program.

Such projects include producing electricity from renewable energy, protecting environmental areas, building smart and green residential cities, and oil sector projects represented in producing electricity using solar energy, such as the Sidrah 500 project. Kuwait is keen on improving its environmental performance to become one of the leading countries in this field despite environmental and climate challenges, the Kuwaiti official concluded. — KUNA



AI 'can replace jobs but create new lines of professions'

KUWAIT: Artificial Intelligence (AI) could potentially replace many jobs but create new lines of work such as prompt engineering, which is a totally new discipline that teaches how to command and control this new technology, said a University (KU) academic on Tuesday. Vice President for Academic Services, Dr. Sulaiman Al-Rafee, said

in a statement to KUNA that "anyone who wishes to guarantee a future has to major in the field of technology, specifically artificial intelligence," although some jobs might be at risk.

The KU scholar pointed out the potential new job market AI could create but also favored the regulations placed on AI in tools like ChatGPT, some of which he believed posed ethical challenges, but did not elaborate on the nature of the challenges. Dr. Al-Rafee was among other scholars, namely his assistant professor Mohammad Al-Dhafiri, in a conference about AI, its innovations, and advancements, which took place at Kuwait University.

Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) and private and public institutions participated in the event, show-

ing their different applications of AI. Professor Al-Dhafiri expressed the important role AI plays across many fields in everyday life, the medical field being one of them. He said he believes that the positive impact of AI can be found in the potential it holds and the capacity it has to be developed to serve medical professionals in treating patients surgically or in diagnosing sick people.

KUNA participated in the KU event, showcasing its new Smart Oasis, an innovative new unit that seamlessly merges the realms of artificial intelligence and journalism, where a team of adept professionals harnesses the power of AI to elevate journalistic practices, ensuring the delivery of timely, accurate, and contextually rich content. — KUNA



Local

Audit Bureau saves KD 25 million

Health cases amount to 1,062

KUWAIT: The Audit Bureau's work between April 1 and November 30 resulted in saving KD 25 million (\$80.9 million) for the state treasury. Sara Al-Hajeri, an auditor tasked with advance examination of allocations for affiliated and independent departments, said in a statement that the bureau presented remarks on 2,455 topics envisaging state spending in some sectors, with a total of KD 3.27 billion (\$10.6 billion).

Up to 84 percent of the pondered cases concerned ministries and govern-

ment departments, with a total value of KD 3 billion (approximately \$9.7 billion). Health cases were the highest, amounting to 1,062 with a value estimated at KD 1 billion, Al-Hajeri said, adding that the bureau either approved or renewed approval for 1,415 cases, valued at some KD 2.2 billion (\$7.1 billion). Al-Hajeri added that the Divan turned back 768 cases with a total value of KD 458 million (\$1.4 billion) because there was no adherence to the terms set by the office. Up to 73 others

were turned down, valued at some KD 520 million (\$1.6 billion).

Oil prices are down

Meanwhile, the price of Kuwaiti crude oil dropped by \$3.27 to \$80.85 per barrel on Monday as opposed to \$84.12 per barrel last Friday, said the Kuwaiti Petroleum Corporation (KPC) on Tuesday. The Brent crude and the West Texas Intermediate in the global markets went down each by 85 cents and \$1.03, settling at \$78.03 per barrel and

\$73.04 per barrel, respectively.

Meanwhile, the price of the US dollar rose against the Kuwaiti dinar on Tuesday by five percent to KD 0.308, while the euro was stable at KD 0.334 compared to Monday's rates, said a Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) statement on Tuesday. The CBK indicated in its daily bulletin that the Pound Sterling's exchange rate went down by 0.24 percent to KD 0.389, while the Swiss Franc was stable at KD 0.353 and the Japanese Yen at KD 0.002. — KUNA



Sara Al-Hajeri

Grief of loss: Coping with the death of loved ones

By Passant Hisham

KUWAIT: Death, that permanent departure of a person from life, can leave behind a void and heartache that might probably never get filled again. At first, this void numbs all the senses and leaves one completely startled, leaving one to think: How could this happen to me? Then comes a moment of anger, where one blames fate and blames themselves, as if they were responsible for the person's death.



Mariam Al-Awadhi

Later, anger is replaced with depression, where sorrow takes over as one starts confronting the tough reality that the person who died is now gone forever. While pain never fades away completely, it diminishes by time, allowing a person to reach the phase of acceptance, where they finally make peace with the fact that there's nothing they can do to bring the dead person back, and it's time to move on with their life.

According to Dr Mariam Al-Awadhi, a consultant psychiatrist, these are the four stages of grief that people most commonly experience after the loss of someone close. Awadhi explained there's no set timeline for how long a person may experience these stages or how intensely they might feel them. Yet, based on scientific theories, these stages usually take an average of 3 to 6 months to unfold.

"If after 6 months, the person is still far from acceptance, far from dealing with his life, far from functioning well... then it's better for him to seek medical or clinical consultation," Dr Awadhi said. According to her, if a person's grieving keeps getting worse with time, then it is most likely they got stuck in a phase known as "complicated grief", which is a form of depression.

Dr Awadhi identified complicated grief as an intense and prolonged feeling of sadness that lasts



for almost two weeks, associated with at least four other symptoms of the following: Constant lack of pleasure, sleeping disorders, eating disorders, lack of concentration, drained energy, excessive guilt, suicidal thinking and hopelessness.

For a person to be able to recognize depression and spot these symptoms, they must regularly stay in tune with their inner thoughts and mindfully reflect on their emotions, because as Dr Awadhi highlighted, the failure to realize the existence of depression is very common among people. Unfortunately, this might make the case grow bigger and much worse, making it harder for the person to ever heal from it.

Equally important for self-awareness, one should learn how to overcome this phase wisely and effectively. Dr Awadhi advised people to not suppress their emotions, as she said about grief: "If you push it quickly, it comes back in a different way." Allowing oneself to feel grief naturally after the loss of someone is an essential part of the healing process. "Give yourself the time, don't rush it, don't invalidate or dismiss your emotions...if you want to cry, cry. If you want to feel angry, voice it...don't show the opposite of what you're feeling to look strong," Dr Awadhi noted.

Keeping oneself engrossed in a busy routine is also another way to overcome grief. People who have nothing to do and who have zero responsibilities are usually more likely to get easily overwhelmed by a cloud of negative emotions that worsens their mental state over time. So, finding a balance between being busy and at the same time taking enough time for

yourself to recharge and allow your feelings to flow on the surface is a must, she added.

Dr Awadhi suggested practicing spirituality as another solution for people who have a belief system. She noted its importance in helping one process death better, as faith can help someone bring meaning to loss and see it as a continuation of life in another dimension. Exercise on the other hand, can help too, she pointed out. Walking and engaging in social sports such as padel or tennis can also play a role in a more effective healing process, as they have been proven to release feelgood endorphins, which are chemicals that balance out one's negative emotions, reduce pain, alleviate pleasure and enhance the sense of well-being.

For those who are hardly able to survive grief on their own, Dr Awadhi recommended talk therapy with a professional as the best way to get over the death of someone easier and faster, noting that unlike what many people think, asking for help is not a sign of weakness, but a sign of strength and courage.

It's worth pointing out that even though grief of loss is usually associated with negative feelings, it is undermined by how much it can contribute to the growth and maturity of a person, as it can show them the true meaning of life. "Grief doesn't have to be all painful, sometimes it helps you reevaluate a lot of values in life," said Dr Awadhi. She believes that death is a great reminder that we're all going to eventually end up in the same place, so it's necessary to make the best out of our journey by resetting our priorities in life and focusing on what's worth living.

Kuwait's ambassador presents credentials to President Putin

MOSCOW: Kuwait's new Ambassador to Russia, Rashid Al-Adwani, presented his credentials to Russian President Vladimir Putin at the Kremlin Palace on Monday. During the ceremonial occasion of presenting diplomatic credentials, the website of the Russian Evoked Administration evoked Putin, saying, "Relations between Russia and Kuwait have developed drastically," while also pointing to the importance of developing bilateral cooperation in the economic sector.



Rashid Al-Adwani

He also mentioned how prominent the strengthening of political relations is, especially in terms of foreign policy, explaining that cooperation is based on the convergence of views encompassing a range of regional and international issues, as both countries are working towards coordinating stances on the energy sector. — KUNA

Suspended sentence handed to Kuwaiti

KUWAIT: The Criminal Court sentenced a tweeter, Abdulaziz Al-Hajri, to a three-year suspended sentence on charges of insulting the Turkish Interior Minister on the "X" platform. Earlier, Turkish Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya announced the filing of a criminal complaint against the Kuwaiti tweeter on charges of insulting Kemal Ataturk and the Turkish passport. The minister's complaint came a day after a similar complaint by the Good Party against Kuwaiti tweeter Abdulaziz bin Rumaih.

The Turkish Interior Minister said in a tweet on the X platform that, in coordination with the directorate of combating cybercrime, "it was found that the Kuwaiti writer, who writes under the name of Abdulaziz bin Rumaih, published many offensive publications. He added that the person has been identified, and his real name is Abdulaziz Al-Hajri, and he resides in Kuwait.



Municipality removes illegal structures, tents

KUWAIT: Kuwait Municipality announced on Tuesday the removal of encroachments on state property that were obstacles to the South Saad Abdullah housing project in cooperation with the public institution for housing care and the company implementing the project. The head of the department in the Jahra governorate, Mohammed Fahad, said in a press release that the team has begun the process of removing 35 structures in addition to 10 tents set up on state property there. Fahad pointed out that, within the scope of the housing project, about 600 buildings have been removed over the past months. — KUNA



During the meetings, memoranda of understanding and special agreements were signed with those states, especially for organizing air transport to better meet the needs of affiliated air carriers. Furthermore, meetings in the upcoming days will commence with other countries until the last day of the conference, December 7, which will focus on updating air transport mechanisms with positive impacts, linking Kuwait International Airport with the largest number of airports worldwide to better serve passengers and airlines.

He also eagerly talked about the importance of the conference to upgrade operational mechanisms with countries with which "our national carriers work" to better operate inbound and outbound flights from the Kuwait International Airport in order to achieve the goals set by the national air carriers and serve the desired economic goals. — KUNA

Kuwait's retirees master handicrafts amid govt encouragement

KUWAIT: Hussein Al-Bazzaz carefully examined an unfinished statuette of a wooden dhow, the "Kuwaiti Al-boom," relishing the moments of gazing at the product of meticulous work that had lasted for a month and a half and now decorated the center of his diwaniya. The 74-year-old Kuwaiti craftsman, Bu Waleed, said in an interview with Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) that building dhows is one of the oldest Kuwaiti crafts and has remained a symbol of prosperous trade in the old times and ancestors' skills both in commerce and handwork.

Nowadays, building the wooden boats, "Al-Galafa," is a craft on the verge of extinction and has become a hobby for some retirees, such as Bu Waleed, who spends much of his time constructing small figures of the dhows. In a recent government resolution to back up Kuwaiti craftsmen and workers, namely the young ones, Bu Waleed said that maintaining traditional professions needs more than financial support because only a countable number of Kuwaitis are practicing the crafts.

He called for establishing special workshops, securing sufficient support for the young citizens willing to turn into artisans, and engaging government institutions, citing as a successful example the training of inmates at the central prison on some crafts. Bu Waleed said that he had met many young Kuwaiti artisans who practice traditional handwork in addition to their jobs; however, they would need government incubation and care to render these works a reliable source of income.

Salman Boland, President of the Kuwaiti Craftsmen Association, echoed Bu Waleed's hope that government support would eventually develop to render the crafts a sustainable source of income for the skilled juniors. Up to 200 handworks disappeared after the oil discovery, and many others would follow, Boland said, noting that the crafts' products are only promoted and sold at exhibitions, popular markets, and even through personal acquaintances.

The handcraft requires a lot of time, effort, and high costs, in addition to difficulties in selling the products; thus, government intervention is very much needed to save them, Boland said, suggesting that the relevant authorities organize training courses for the young craftsmen, specialize pavilions for their works at exhibitions, and organize workshops. In some Gulf countries, authorities have allocated plots of land and booths for craftsmen and craftswomen in exchange for token fees.



Moreover, the craftsmen are allowed to sell their items at airports, where the majority of the clients are tourists interested in carrying souvenirs with them back home. The ancestors-created handworks are honorable professions that maintain the national identity and heritage, he said, alluding in part to the making of "bishts" and "sadu" weaving in addition to pottery and gold works. — KUNA

Kuwait's DGCA inks MoUs of cooperation with five countries

RIYADH: The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) signed a memorandum of understanding for cooperation with five countries on Monday during the ICAO Air Service Negotiations Event, ICAN 2023, currently held in Riyadh. In a press briefing, Acting Director-General of the DGCA, Eng. Emad Al-Jalawi, mentioned meetings with representatives of Ethiopia, Italy, Iceland, Seychelles and Turkey were held on the sidelines of the event.

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KUNA pavilion highlights 'role in media arena'

KUWAIT: Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) pavilion participating in the Our Media Role 2 exhibition, organized by the Department of Media at the College of Arts at Kuwait University, highlighted the efforts and role of the agency in the local, regional, and Arab media arenas. The KUNA Pavilion showcases the services and training courses provided, as well as the multiple publications produced by KUNA, such as Kuwait in Memory of Days, Kuwait: The State of Constitution, The Simplified Linguistic Guide for Journalists, Kuwait: The Capital of Islamic Culture (2016), KUNA Lens, KUNA Kids Magazine, and others. More than 240 governmental and private entities and a number of embassies in Kuwait participated in the exhibition.

The Mass Communication Unit at Kuwait University inaugurated the "Our Media Role 2" exhibition, with participation from more than 240 public and private institutions, including KUNA, and several embassies in Kuwait. In the opening statement, the acting director of Kuwait University, Dr Meshari Al-Harbi, emphasized KU's consistent contributions to society in different sectors.

Al-Harbi said, "Public relations is a vital part of our academic journey, and it reflects effective communication with our society and world." He added that the exhibition sheds light on "improving students and professors skills and abilities, and it unveils their dedication and persistency." Moreover, the Dean of the College of Arts, Dr Abdulmohsen Al-Madaj, stressed in his statement the great impact of media in society. "We all experienced the impact of media in Kuwait, where freedom of speech scrutinizes economic, political, and social issues," Al-Madaj said.

Al-Madaj appreciated KU and the College of Art for receiving a vast number of participants from several public and private institutions and linking students with the labor market. For his part, the event supervisor, Dr Hussain Ibrahim, said, "The exhibition focuses on the crucial role of PR in the governmental and private sectors, non-profit organizations, and embassies." Ibrahim added, "The exhibition highlights the significance of media studies at KU, where plenty of innovators and leaders in different fields have graduated. — KUNA

GCC warns against dangerous impacts of Zionist occupation

Kuwait 34th Gaza relief plane heads to Al-Arish

DOHA: Gulf Cooperation Council Secretary General Jassem Al-Budaiwi commended the GCC countries' firm support of the Palestinian people, which contributed to alleviating their suffering caused by the Zionist occupation. Al-Budaiwi, addressing the GCC Summit in Doha, cited the first final statement of a GCC summit on May 26, 1981, which noted that stability in the Gulf region was linked to peace in the Middle East.

"This asserts the importance of a just resolution of the Palestinian cause that guarantees the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, including the right of return and establishing their independent state, as well as securing Zionist withdrawal from the occupied Arab territories, foremost Al-Quds," he said. Al-Budaiwi warned against the dangerous impacts of the Zionist occupation and the deprivation of the Palestinian people of their rights and to work on an immediate ceasefire and the provision of humanitarian supplies in the Gaza Strip.

He said the GCC has become a leading regional and international organization, encouraging many countries and organizations to seek strategic partnerships. Al-Budaiwi said the Arab Gulf leaders would be discussing industrial cooperation, boosting food, water, and energy security, artificial intelligence, and coordination on political, economic, development, security, and military fronts. He congratulated the UAE for the success of the climate summit (COP28), as well as Saudi Arabia for winning the bid to host the 2030 EXPO and Qatar for hosting the 2023 EXPO.

'State of Palestine'

Meanwhile, President Abdul-Fattah El-Sisi on Tuesday urged the international community to push for a two-state solution and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital. This came during El-Sisi's meeting with Cyprus President Nikos Christodoulides, Spokesman of the Egyptian Presidency Ahmad Fahmy said in a statement.

The discussions centered on the occupation military escalation in Gaza and Egypt's efforts for a permanent ceasefire in the enclave. The Egyptian president stressed the importance of the international community undertaking its responsibilities in recognizing a state of Palestine. El-Sisi pointed out his country's extensive efforts to deliver humanitarian aid to the people of Gaza, stressing that Egypt is willing to coordinate all international aid directed to the sector.

National Guard honors commanders, officers

KUWAIT: The Undersecretary of the National Guard, Lieutenant General Engineer Hashem Al-Rifai, honored Lieutenant Colonel Saad Rashid of the First Facilities Protection Battalion and members of the battalion assigned to secure the Ministry of Foreign Affairs building in appreciation of their national role and distinguished efforts in participating in extinguishing the fire that broke out in one of the parts of the Ministry's building. The undersecretary of the National Guard praised the honorees and presented an honorable model for the National Guard men, which reflects their dedication to serving the country.



The 34th Kuwait relief plane for the Gaza carrying 40 tons of humanitarian aid that includes two ambulances and a mobile clinic. — KUNA

For his part, Cyprus President Nikos Christodoulides appreciated Egypt's efforts in calming the situation in Gaza and called for boosting joint efforts concerning the humanitarian corridor initiative in Gaza. The two officials addressed bilateral relations and the ongoing development of such relations in all fields, the statement added. Cooperation in many fields was discussed between the two presidents, including the power file and finding new ways for merging relations, whether at the bilateral level or through the tripartite cooperation mechanism between Egypt, Cyprus, and Greece.

34th Gaza relief plane

In another development, the 34th Kuwait relief plane for the Gaza Strip left for the Egyptian city of Al-Arish on Tuesday, carrying 40 tons of humanitarian aid. The plane also carried two ambulances and a mobile clinic, with a donation from the Ministry of Health and the National Bank of Kuwait (NBK). In a statement to Kuwait News Agency (KUNA), Deputy Chairman of the Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) Anwar Al-Hasawi praised the political efforts as well as the continued re-

lief bridge to support the people in Gaza, led by prominent Kuwaiti figures and people.

The continuation of the relief air bridge came from Kuwait's solid stance towards the Palestinian case, to support them against the occupation's aggression that martyred and left many injured in addition to destroying hospitals, shelters, and other infrastructure, he indicated. The two ambulances and mobile clinic will be transported through Al-Arish airport to be deployed in Gaza to support the medical capabilities in the Strip and maintain medical service for the people of Gaza, he added.

Al-Hasawi said that the situation in Gaza required immediate aid and relief from humanitarian organizations, which the KRCS had done and will continue to do more to support the affected. He expressed his gratitude towards the Kuwaiti Defense Ministry for providing airplanes for the air bridge and the Kuwaiti Foreign Ministry for its contributions towards this humanitarian mission. He reminded people, companies, and banks to donate through the society's website in the campaign to help the people in Gaza who are in desperate need of direct relief and aid. — KUNA



South African envoy explores opportunities at Lulu Hypermarket

KUWAIT: The South African Ambassador to Kuwait, Manelisi Genge made a significant visit to the regional office of Lulu Hypermarket Kuwait on December 4, 2023. During his visit, he engaged in productive discussions with Mohamed Haris, Director of Lulu Hypermarket Kuwait, and other esteemed members of Lulu's top management to explore potential business collaborations, particularly focusing on the import of more south African product ranges into the vibrant Kuwaiti market for the upcoming year 2024.

The meeting commenced on a cordial note, with warm greetings exchanged between the Ambassador and the Lulu Hypermarket team. Expressing gratitude for the opportunity to visit the renowned retail giant, the ambassador acknowledged Lulu's prominence in the Kuwaiti retail landscape and its contribution to the region's economic growth.

In addition to these discussions, the Ambassador highlighted that as part of the strategic initiatives for 2024, South African delegate teams are poised to visit Lulu stores across Kuwait. This upcoming visit aims to further strengthen the partnership between South Africa and Kuwait



by providing an on-the-ground understanding of the market dynamics and consumer preferences. It underscores the commitment of both nations to fostering lasting economic ties and promoting cultural exchange through mutually beneficial business endeavors.

The discussions between the parties centered on identifying potential sectors and more products for import from South Africa to Kuwait. Both parties expressed a keen interest in further exploring these opportunities, aiming to enhance trade relations and strengthen economic ties between South Africa and Kuwait. Lulu Hypermarket currently imports and stocks more than 70 well-known South African brands, including food and non-food items. The hypermarket also has a dedicated sourcing office for various products from the region, conveniently located in South Africa's port city of Cape Town.



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Toxic air divides Delhi between poverty, privilege

Singapore leads way as Asia tops world education class

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85 killed after Nigerian army drone strike hits villagers

LAGOS: A Nigerian army drone targeting armed groups killed at least 85 civilians by mistake in north-west Kaduna State, causing outrage over one of the country's deadliest military bombing accidents. Calling the incident "disturbing", President Bola Ahmed Tinubu on Tuesday ordered an investigation after the army acknowledged one of its drones mistakenly struck the village of Tudun Biri on Sunday as residents celebrated a Muslim festival.

The army did not give any casualty figures, but emergency officials and residents had said 85 people, many of them women and children, were killed. "The North-west Zonal Office has received details from the local authorities that 85 dead bodies have so far been buried while the search is still ongoing," National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) said in a statement.

NEMA said another 66 people were being treated

at hospital. Many of the victims were women, children and elderly who had been celebrating the Muslim festival of Maulud. "I was inside the house when the first bomb was dropped... We rushed to the scene to help those affected and then a second bomb was dropped," resident Idris Dahiru told AFP.

"My aunt, my brother's wife and her six children, wives of my four brothers were among the dead. My elder brother's family are all dead, except his infant child who survived."

Bandits, jihadists

Nigeria's armed forces often rely on air strikes in their battle against bandit militias in the northwest and northeast of the country, where jihadists have been fighting for more than a decade. "President Tinubu describes the incident as very unfortunate, disturbing

and painful, expressing indignation and grief over the tragic loss of Nigerian lives," the presidency said in a statement. The army had said its drone was a routine mission that "inadvertently affected" members of the community. But it also said the armed groups often mixed with civilian populations in the area. Later, Chief of Army Staff, Lt. General Taoreed Lagbaja visited local community leaders to apologize for the accidental strike and seek an enquiry to prevent similar mistakes.

"Troops were carrying out aerial patrols when they observed a group of people and wrongly analyzed and misinterpreted their pattern of activities to be similar to that of the bandits, before the drone strike," the military said. After coming to office in May, Tinubu said tackling insecurity was one of his key concerns as he looks to bring more foreign investment to Africa's most populous nation. — AFP

Former US envoy charged with spying for Cuba

MIAMI: A former US ambassador to Bolivia has been arrested and charged with spying for Cuba over a 40-year span, the Justice Department announced Monday, detailing a shock betrayal by a suspect who called the United States "the enemy." US Attorney General Merrick Garland laid out the allegations against Victor Manuel Rocha, a onetime member of the White House's National Security Council now accused of using his positions within government to support Cuba's "clandestine intelligence-gathering mission" against the United States.

The charges against the 73-year-old retired diplomat expose "one of the highest-reaching and longest-lasting infiltrations of the United States government by a foreign agent," Garland said in a statement. Rocha, a naturalized US citizen originally from Colombia, allegedly began aiding Havana as a covert agent of Cuba's General Directorate of Intelligence (DGI) in 1981, and his espionage activities continued to the present, the statement said. Garland delivered remarks about the arrest of Rocha Friday in Miami and elaborated on details learned when Rocha spoke at length with someone he believed to be a Cuban operative but who was in fact an undercover FBI agent.

"As detailed in the complaint, Rocha repeatedly referred to the United States as 'the enemy'" and spoke of his own "meticulous" efforts to infiltrate Washington's power center and influence American foreign policy, Garland said. "He repeatedly bragged about the significance of his efforts, saying that 'what has been done has strengthened the revolution immensely.'"

Rocha served on the National Security Council from 1994 to 1995 in the administration of Bill Clinton and was the ambassador to Bolivia from 2000 to 2002 under Clinton and George W. Bush. He has also served as advisor to the US military command responsible for Cuba. During an initial appearance in federal court Monday in Florida, Rocha broke down into tears and did not enter a plea, according to The New York Times. — AFP

Indonesia volcano toll rises to 22 as search nears end

AGAM: The death toll from a volcano eruption in Indonesia has risen to 22 after nine more bodies were discovered, a search and rescue agency official said Tuesday. Mount Marapi on the island of Sumatra spewed an ash tower 3,000 metres (9,800 feet) - taller than the volcano itself - into the sky on Sunday.

Hundreds of rescuers have worked for days to find the missing hikers, which numbered 10 on Tuesday before the local rescue agency's announcement that most had been found, bringing the days-long search closer to an end. "Nine of 10 missing victims were found dead this afternoon and at the moment, they are being evacuated. There is one remaining victim currently in the search," Abdul Malik, head of Padang Search and Rescue Agency told AFP. The dead were carried down the mountain in bodybags over several days, rescue officials said.

Images shared by Basarnas showed a rescue team of six in orange jackets and hard hats carrying a body down the side of the volcano on Tuesday.

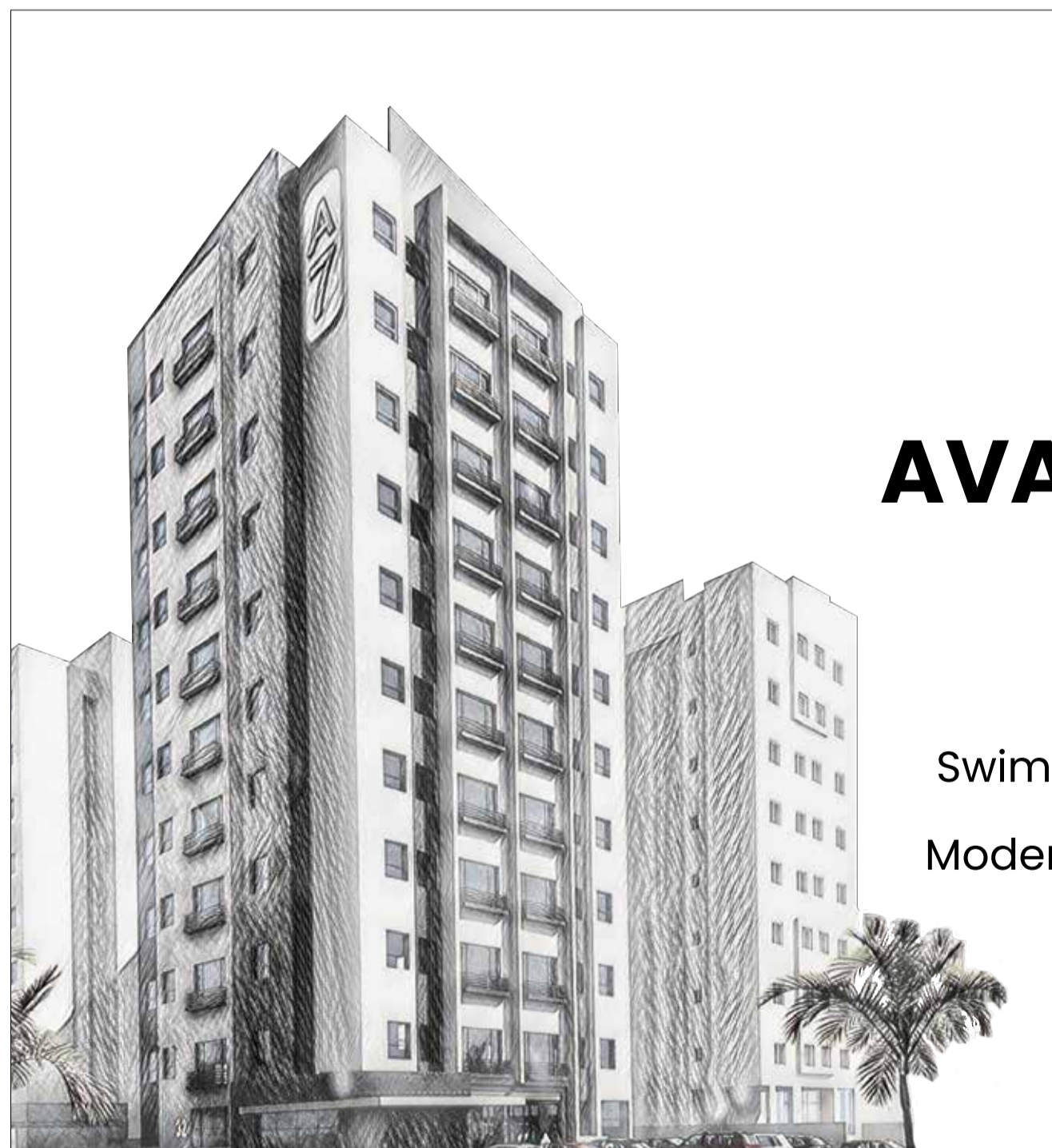


AGAM: Rescuers evacuate one of the victims who died on Mount Marapi when it erupted in Agam, West Sumatra province. The death toll from a volcano eruption in Indonesia has risen to 22 after nine more bodies were discovered, a search and rescue agency official said on December 5. — AFP

Some of the 75 hikers on the mountain during the eruption were found alive and carried down, with multiple suffering burns and fractures.

One survivor spoke of his panic after the eruption began. "I was zig-zagging, going down around 30 to

40 metres" to a trekking post, Ridho, 22, told AFP from a bed in a nearby hospital. "The eruption sounded loud, I took a look behind then immediately ran away as everyone did. Some jumped and fell. I took cover behind the rocks, there were no trees there." — AFP



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International

West Bank family sees no hope of justice in settler killings

'We are attacked, our land is taken from us and settlements are being built'

AS SAWIYAH: Moussa is eight years old and really likes marbles. But for the past month, this Palestinian boy, living in the occupied West Bank, has a new game: "Pretend daddy isn't dead." He calls his dad, imagines what he did with his day, and acts like he's suddenly going to run into him.

But his father, Bilal Saleh, was killed on October 28. The 40-year-old was shot in the chest while picking olives with his family near his home in the village of As-Sawiyah. Saleh is one of more than 250 Palestinians killed by Zionist soldiers and settlers in the West Bank, according to a Palestinian government tally, since Hamas's attack on October 7 sparked a new war with Zionist entity.

"He was a simple man, attached to his land," says his widow, Ikhlas, showing images on her phone of Saleh in the fields, reciting the Quran with Moussa and at a wedding. She struggles to even look at them, let alone tell the story of what happened. The children pressed around her fill in the details.

Spat on

Videos from the scene show four men wearing the knitted yarmulkes that are popular among Zionist settlers, shouting towards the family as they are harvesting. One is armed with an automatic rifle. The family flees, but Saleh has forgotten his phone and runs back to fetch it. A few minutes later, a gunshot rings out.

The family rushes back to find Saleh bleeding from the chest. He was taken to a hospital about 10

kilometres (six miles) away but declared dead soon after. The family says Ikhlas' brother and father saw on social media that a man had been arrested for the shooting but released a few hours later.

The police and COGAT, an Zionist defence ministry body overseeing civilian activities in the Palestinian territories, did not respond to multiple requests for comment from AFP. A few days later, without knowing why, Ikhlas was called to a police station in Ariel, a neighbouring Israeli settlement, where police asked her to explain what she saw.

"At the entrance, while a guard was checking my identity papers, a settler drove by. He saw that I was veiled and he rolled down his window to spit on me," she told AFP. "After that, I don't see what kind of justice they could give us," she added. Zionist human rights group Yesh Din convinced her to file a complaint anyway, though it says a study of settler violence cases between 2005 and 2021 showed 92 percent were dismissed by the Zionist authorities.

'Even worse'

Nearly three million Palestinians live in the West Bank, which has been occupied by Zionist entity since 1967. Nearly half a million Zionists also live there in settlements considered illegal by the United Nations. "For the past 10 years, it has been getting more and more serious," said Hazem Saleh, Bilal's brother-in-law. "We are being attacked, our land is being taken from us, settlements are being built. They have the power, they can do what they want."



NABLUS: Relatives and friends carry the body of Palestinian teenager Yazan Akoub during his funeral in Nablus city in the occupied West Bank, a day after he was shot by Zionist security forces at a checkpoint near the city. The Zionist army said troops shot dead a Palestinian at a checkpoint near the city of Nablus after he "drew a knife and started to advance towards them." — AFP

But it has been "even worse", he said, since Hamas militants from Gaza launched an unprecedented attack on southern Zionist entity, killing about 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and taking around 240 hostages, according to Zionist officials. — AFP

Venezuela vows to 'reclaim' disputed region

CARACAS: Venezuela vowed Monday to "reclaim" what it considers its right to a disputed oil-rich region bordering Guyana, which said it would remain "vigilant" although it did not expect an imminent invasion. President Nicolas Maduro on Monday said he had popular backing for laying claim to the region known as Essequibo following an overwhelming "yes" vote in a controversial referendum. The outcome, he said, was a "powerful, vital boost" to Venezuela's claim to a region which Guyana has administered for over a century and makes up more than two-thirds of its territory.

"Now we are going to reclaim the historic rights of Venezuela in the Essequiba Guiana (as it is called in Venezuela), now we are going to do justice," Maduro said at a press conference in Caracas with members of the National Electoral Council (CNE). Guyana, for its part, said it would remain "vigilant."

"We have to always remain vigilant. Of course, our monitoring must be always at a high level. President Maduro, while we don't believe he will order an invasion... can do something that can be very unpredictable," Foreign Minister Hugh Todd told AFP. Caracas said more than half of eligible Venezuelan voters had taken part in the referendum that yielded an overwhelming "yes" outcome, with more than 95 percent in favor. Venezuela has for decades laid claim to Essequibo, which is home to 125,000 of Guyana's 800,000 citizens. Litigation is pending before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague over where the borders should lie. — AFP

Singapore leads way as Asia tops world education class

PARIS: Asian countries led by Singapore dominated the top spots in a keenly watched survey of education capabilities published Tuesday, while levels in Europe slipped at a record pace—and not just because of COVID. However, the report also showed that students in top performing countries were not necessarily happier.

The PISA survey is carried out every three years by the Paris-based Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to assess the ability of 15-year-olds to meet real-life challenges. "The Pisa 2022 results show a fall in student performance that is unprecedented in PISA's history," OECD education analyst Irene Hu told reporters.

Singapore took top ranking in the latest assessment, which was carried out in 2022 and involved 690,000 students in 81 participating countries and economies. The southeast Asian island city state scored highest in all three of the survey's areas: mathematics, reading and science.

"These results suggest that, on average, Singaporean students are the equivalent of almost three to five years of schooling ahead of their peers," the report said. Five other Asian education systems—in Macau, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan and South Korea—came next in mathematics, and also scored near the top in reading and science.

But while Asia did well, other parts of the



TAIPEI: (FILES) Students wearing face masks as a preventive measure to curb the spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus attend a class at Dajia Elementary School in Taipei on April 29, 2020. Asian countries dominated the top spots in a keenly watched survey of education capabilities published on December 5, 2023, while levels in Europe slipped at a record pace—and not just because of COVID. — AFP

world declined, sparking an overall "unprecedented drop in performance", the report said. Germany, Iceland, the Netherlands, Norway and Poland, for example, all saw notably lower achievements in mathematics, it said. COVID-19 shutdowns hurt education standards, the report said, but there were also other factors behind the downturn. Students in Finland, Iceland and Sweden—once star performers—have been scoring lower marks for years.

"This indicates that long-term issues in education systems are also to blame for the drop in performance," it said. "It is not just about COVID." A key

factor is "the level of support pupils received from teachers and school staff", the OECD's Hu said.

Some education systems have not given sufficient resources for supporting students, said Eric Charbonnier, another OECD education analyst. "Countries have invested in education over the past 10 years, but maybe they didn't invest efficiently, or sufficiently into the quality of teaching," he said. — AFP "We also see less parental involvement with the progress of children compared to 2018," he added. In some cases, 2022's drop in skills amounted to roughly a year's worth of education. — AFP

COP28 faceoff hardens over oil phasedown

DUBAI: Battle lines on coal, oil and gas hardened at the UN climate talks on Tuesday where activists said a record number of fossil fuel lobbyists outnumber nearly every delegation in Dubai. The divide is so stark that a new draft agreement included options to phase out fossil fuels or not addressing the issue at all, setting the stage for tough negotiations due to end next week.

Saudi Arabia — the world's biggest oil exporter — took a hardline stance, saying it would "absolutely not" agree to phasing down fossil fuels, let alone phasing them out. This came despite scientists warning Tuesday that global warming could breach the 1.5C limit within seven years. The thorny debate over the future of fossil fuels, the largest contributor to global warming, is the key battleground at the COP28 meeting hosted by the oil-rich United Arab Emirates.

The latest version of a potential agreement in Dubai included three options — an "orderly and just" phasedown, faster efforts to phase out fossil fuel projects that do not capture and store emissions, or "no text" on the subject. Red lines are already being drawn, with nations digging in on traditional positions that have dogged past COP negotiations.

Saudi Arabia's energy minister said he would "absolutely not" agree to a phasedown of fossil fuels in the COP28 agreement, questioning if such a transition was even possible. "And I assure you not a single person — I'm talking about governments — believes in that."

GCC slams Zionist aggression...

Continued from Page 1

GCC leaders also approved the unified GCC visa during the summit. Interior ministers of GCC states were authorized to take necessary measures to enforce the Schengen-style tourist visa, which would allow holders free access across all six Gulf Cooperation Council member states.

Representative of HH the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh

Prince Abdulaziz said: "I would like to put that challenge for all of those who... comes out publicly saying we have to (phase down), I'll give you their name and number, call them and ask them how they are gonna do that. If they believe that this is the highest moral ground issue, fantastic. Let them do that themselves. And we will see how much they can deliver."

Separately, the Saudi royal also derided Western donations to a new climate loss and damage fund as "small change" and trumpeted Riyadh's pledges to developing countries. The fund for vulnerable nations — a major win at the start of COP28 — has attracted about \$655 million so far from donors including the European Union and the United States, a sum criticized as insufficient by campaigners.

"Unlike the small change offered for loss and damage from our partners in developed countries, the Kingdom through its South-South cooperation announced in the Saudi Africa Summit in Riyadh last month the allocation of up to \$50 billion," he said in a video message to Monday's Saudi Green Initiative forum, held on the sidelines of COP28.

But Germany's climate envoy Jennifer Morgan said transforming the global energy system was "the only option". "Renewables are the future, the end of the fossil age must become tangible here at the COP," she said. Wealthy economies have been accused of hypocrisy for demanding an exit from fossil fuels while expanding their own hydrocarbon projects.

Pedro Luis Pedrosa, a Cuban diplomat, said developing nations were being asked to make drastic economic changes without being provided adequate support. "If an extremely poor country discovers oil, how can we tell them they can't touch it, if nobody helps them?" Pedrosa, who heads a grouping of so-called Global South nations, told AFP. Morgan said progress was being made but admitted that "sometimes it is sluggish, but that is normal at this stage," she said. — AFP

Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Salem Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah, headed the Kuwaiti delegation to the GCC summit. During the session, ministers reviewed issues on the agenda and topics concerned with supporting and strengthening the process of joint Gulf action in various fields and at all levels.

The ministers also delved into the decisions and recommendations submitted to the GCC Supreme Council, in a way that would enhance the historical process of joint Gulf action, and discuss the most important regional and international issues, most notably the dangerous war in Gaza and the numerous violations on occupied Palestinian lands and their sanctities. — Agencies

'Hellish scenario' in Gaza as death...

Continued from Page 1

With top Hamas leaders still at large and many hostages still in militant hands, the Zionist army said it was taking "aggressive" action against Palestinian militants in Khan Yunis, Gaza's second-largest city. The health ministry in the territory, around 70 percent of them women and children.

International aid organizations have warned that civilians in the densely populated Strip are running out of places to flee to. "Nowhere is safe in Gaza and there is nowhere left to go," said Lynn Hastings, UN humanitarian coordinator for the Palestinian territories. "If possible, an even more hellish scenario is about to unfold, one in which humanitarian operations may not be able to respond," Hastings said in a statement.

Ambulances, trucks and other vehicles delivered more bloodied, dust-covered casualties to Khan Yunis's Nasser hospital, including children. Mohammed Saloul said he had received a call saying his sister had been killed in an air strike on a school where displaced people were sheltering. "We headed there and asked the medics to help us but they said they couldn't access it, so we had to carry her body ourselves," he said.

After visiting another medical facility in the city, the European Hospital, International Committee of the Red Cross president Mirjana Spoljaric said she saw horrors that were hard to describe. "What shocked me the most were the children with atrocious injuries and at the same time having lost their parents with no one looking after them," she said in a video. Their belongings piled onto donkey carts, battered vehicles and even camels, Gazans headed south to try to escape the expanding Zionist offensive.

An estimated 1.8 million people are displaced in Gaza — roughly three-quarters of the population, according to UN figures. A Zionist order for people to move from Khan Yunis to the southern city of Rafah "created panic, fear and anxiety", according to Philippe Lazzarini, head of the UN agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA). People were being pushed into an area that is less than one-third of the Gaza Strip, with roads to the south clogged, he said.

In northern Gaza, the military said it had encircled the Jabalia refugee camp and also raided a Hamas Internal Security Forces command and control center. It said the number of Zionist soldiers killed since the war began had risen to 80.

The World Health Organization said that it had almost completely emptied its aid warehouses in southern Gaza after being "advised" by the Zionist army that "active combat" was looming. The Zionist entity has denied that it ordered the WHO to empty its two warehouses in Khan Yunis.

Key ally the United States has cautioned the Zionist entity to do more to avert civilian casualties as operations shift to the south. The Zionist entity on Monday said it was not seeking to force Palestinian civilians to permanently leave their homes, but that it was instead seeking support from aid groups to improve infrastructure in a tiny coastal area of Gaza named Al-Mawasi.

As well as dropping leaflets telling Palestinian civilians to evacuate, the army has been warning people in Gaza to leave certain areas ahead of impending strikes via messages to mobile phones. But on Monday, all mobile and telephone services were cut across Gaza, according to Palestinian telecommunications firm PalTel.

Media workers have paid a heavy price reporting on the conflict. The Committee to Protect Journalists, a New York-based rights group, said it had documented 63 journalists and media workers killed in the war: 56 Palestinians, four Zionists and three Lebanese. The fighting follows the collapse on Friday of a Qatar-mediated truce that saw scores of Zionist and other captives released in exchange for Palestinian prisoners.

Hamas has ruled out more releases until a permanent ceasefire is agreed. The war has sparked fears of a wider regional conflict, with frequent exchanges of fire with Iran-backed Hezbollah across the Zionist entity's border with Lebanon. The Zionist military said its fighter jets had struck Hezbollah positions in response to cross-border fire from Lebanon. The Lebanese army said one of its soldiers was killed by Zionist fire on Tuesday — the first such death since cross-border hostilities began in October. The Zionist-occupied West Bank has also seen a surge in violence, with more than 250 Palestinians killed there since the war began, according to Palestinian authorities. — AFP

International

Eight dead as cyclone batters India's southeast coast

Thirteen killed in fighting in India's Manipur state

CHENNAI: Chest-high waters surged down the streets of India's southern city Chennai on Tuesday with eight people killed in intense floods as Cyclone Michaung was set to make landfall on the southeast coast. The cyclone was forecast to hit the coast of Andhra Pradesh state around midday Tuesday (0630 GMT) as a "severe cyclonic storm", packing winds up to 100 kilometres (62 miles) per hour, the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) said. In Chennai, cars were seen floating on raging torrents, homes were flooded, and a crocodile was spotted swimming the streets in the city. IMD warned of "exceptionally heavy rainfall" in some areas. "We are facing the worst storm in recent memory," Tamil Nadu state chief minister M.K. Stalin said, in a statement late Monday.

Police said on Tuesday that eight people have been killed in state capital Chennai. They include some who drowned, as well as one person hit by a falling tree, another electrocuted with live wires in the water, and one crushed by a falling wall.

Trees were uprooted and vehicles swept away due to the heavy rains, according to images posted on social media. The cyclone is expected to hit India's southeast coast near the town of Bapatla, on the 300-kilometre (185-mile) stretch between Nellore and Machilipatnam.

Sea surges of waves up to 1.5 metres (nearly five feet) above normal tide levels are expected when the cyclone makes landfall, IMD said. Home Minister Amit Shah said the government was "braced to provide all the necessary assistance to Andhra Pradesh", with rescue teams deployed and more "on standby to mobilise as needed".

The cyclone is expected to reduce in power late in the evening on Tuesday. Scientists have warned that storms are becoming more powerful as the world gets warmer with climate change. Cyclones—the equivalent of hurricanes in the North Atlantic or typhoons in the Northwest Pacific—are a regular and deadly menace on coasts in the northern Indian Ocean, where tens of millions of people live.

Meanwhile, at least 13 people have been killed in gun battles in India's northeastern Manipur, the latest clashes since ethnic violence erupted seven months ago, a state official and local media said. At least 200 people have been killed in Manipur state since fighting broke out in May between the predominantly Hindu Meitei majority and mainly Christian Kuki community. A state official confirmed to AFP late Monday that the bodies were found in Manipur's Tengnoupal district, an area lying close to the border with Myanmar.

State police also released a statement confirming the death toll, the Times of India said Tuesday. Long-standing tensions between the two communities have revolved around competition for land and public jobs, with rights activists accusing local leaders of exacerbating ethnic divisions for political gain.

The far-flung state has now fractured along ethnic lines, with rival militias setting up blockades to keep out members of the opposing community. Human Rights Watch has accused state authorities in Manipur, which is governed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's party, of facilitating the conflict with "divisive policies that promote Hindu majoritarianism". —AFP



CHENNAI: Men stand along a flooded street after heavy rains in Chennai. Cyclone Michaung is expected to make landfall along the southern coast. — AFP

Philippines chase 4 suspects in Catholic mass bombing

MANILA: Police in the Philippines are chasing four men, including two linked to a local militant group, in connection with the deadly bombing of a Catholic mass in the restive south, authorities said Tuesday. A manhunt was underway after Sunday's attack on worshippers inside a university gymnasium in Marawi, the country's largest Muslim city, which was besieged by Islamist militants in 2017.

Four people were killed and 50 were wounded in the bombing that was later claimed by the Islamic State group. President Ferdinand Marcos blamed "foreign terrorists" for the assault. Police have identified two Filipino men—both with criminal records that include murder—who were seen by witnesses inside the gym before the blast. "Their actions were very suspicious. That led to the suspicion that they might be involved in the explosion," spokeswoman Colonel Jean Fajardo told reporters. "There's an ongoing pursuit operation," she said.

Police had not yet identified the other two men or a motive for the attack. Fajardo said the two Filipino suspects belonged to a militant group "previously involved in bombing incidents in Mindanao", but she declined to release its name. Army chief General Romeo Brawner said previously that the attack may have been revenge for recent military operations against three militant groups—Dawlah Islamiyah-Philippines, Abu Sayyaf and Maute.

One of those operations killed an Abu Sayyaf "bomb expert", who was allegedly responsible for the 2019 deadly attack on a cathedral on the southern island of Jolo, Brawner told CNN Philippines on Tuesday. Pro-Islamic State Maute and Abu Sayyaf militants—including foreign and local fighters—held Marawi under siege in 2017. The Philippine military wrested back the ruined city after a five-month battle that claimed more than 1,000 lives.

Brawner denied there was an intelligence failure ahead of Sunday's bombing, insisting there should have been "more security measures in place" after the military warned local security forces, government officials and the public of possible retaliatory attacks.

Militant attacks on buses, Catholic churches and public markets have been a feature of decades-long unrest in the region. Manila signed a peace pact with the nation's largest rebel group, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, in 2014, ending their deadly armed rebellion. But smaller bands of Muslim fighters opposed to the peace deal remain, including militants professing allegiance to the Islamic State group. Communist rebels also operate in the region. —AFP



NEW DELHI: In this picture taken on November 30, 2023, Rizwan (C) pedals a tricycle rickshaw as he looks for customers amid dense smog, along a street in the old quarters of New Delhi. Environmental change hits the poorest the hardest, experts say, and in India's toxic smog-filled capital that extends even to the air people breathe. — AFP

Toxic air divides Delhi between poverty, privilege

NEW DELHI: Environmental change hits the poorest the hardest, experts say, and in India's toxic smog-filled capital that includes the air people breathe. In Old Delhi, the ancient heart of the capital, 39-year-old Rizwan pedals a rickshaw tricycle, transporting passengers and heavy goods through crowded streets often too narrow for cars, earning about seven dollars on a good day.

There is no escape from Delhi's deadly smog that cloaks the city in a misty winter grey and chokes the lungs of its 30 million residents, making it one of the world's worst capitals for air quality. "My eyes burn... I am aware of the health risks but what else can I do?" said Rizwan, who uses only one name, panting hard to manoeuvre through traffic-clogged streets. Levels of fine particulate matter—cancer-causing microparticles known as PM2.5 pollutants that enter the bloodstream through the lungs—often hit more than 30 times the World Health Organization's danger limits. Authorities in Delhi asked people last month to work from home and limit time spent outside to protect themselves from the poisonous air. But Rizwan said his choice was to work or starve. "I've left my village to come here, I have to work hard, it is a necessity," he said. "I am not educated enough to work in an office or do some other job. Either I can pedal a rickshaw or pull a cart."

'Thick layer of soot'

Adjoining Old Delhi is the modern city created when building expanded exponentially early last century. New Delhi's affluent Gulmohar Park neighbourhood lies just 10 kilometres (six miles) south of the old city walls but it could be a different world given how people there live and cope with the smog.

With an air purifier machine buzzing reassuringly in the background, successful 31-year-old cinematographer Madhav Mathur starts his day by checking pollution levels on a WhatsApp group made by residents.

Mathur, a keen long-distance runner born and brought up in Delhi, said he can no longer exercise outside during winter when pollution is at its worst. "I have stopped running outside because of the pollution," he said, noting a stark change since he was a boy. "I realised it is harming me more than it is benefitting me."

Mathur lives with his parents and usually works from home. When he does have to venture outside for prolonged periods, such as filming for work, he wears a tight-fitting mask. It mitigates the worst health risks but Mathur's key challenge is that colours on camera lose their vibrancy because of the "thick layer of soot".

Experts say that those suffering the worst from air pollution are not only those least responsible for it, they are also the least able to cope. "There is a contrast in the air pollution impact across diverse socio-economic ranges," said Sagnik Dey, professor at the Centre for Atmospheric Sciences at Delhi's Indian Institute of Technology (IIT). —AFP

Pakistan police detain Pashtun rights activist critical of military

QUETTA: The leader of an ethnic Pashtun rights movement has been detained after addressing a sit-in at Pakistan's frontier city of Chaman to demand free cross-border movement with Afghanistan, officials said Tuesday.

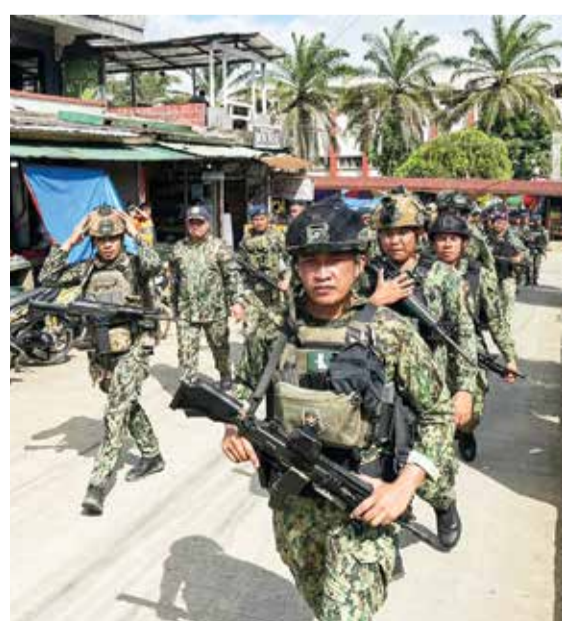
Manzoor Pashteen, chief of the Pashtun Protection Movement (PTM), was travelling from the border town of Chaman to Turbat in Balochistan province when he was picked up by police Monday evening.

Pashtuns are a distinct ethnic group with their

own language, living mostly in Pakistan and Afghanistan but divided by the colonial-drawn Durand Line that splits the two countries. "He was detained for making inflammatory speeches and threatening public law and order," Balochistan's minister of information Jan Achakzai told AFP.

Achakzai said Pashteen would likely be released later Tuesday, and was expected to be "expelled from the province". Thousands of Pakistani protesters have camped near the Afghan border to demonstrate against new regulations that require cross-border travellers to have passports and visas.

Previously, people crossing by land could pass using only national ID cards. The new regulations were introduced after Islamabad in October announced plans to expel all Afghans living illegally in Pakistan. So far nearly 400,000 have left voluntarily or have been deported. —AFP



MARAWI: Policemen and soldiers from the military arrive at Mindanao State University in Marawi City, Lanao del Sur province, a day after a bomb attack. At least four people died and dozens were wounded on December 3, 2023 in a bomb attack on a Catholic mass in the insurgency-plagued southern Philippines. — AFP

NEW DELHI: In this picture taken on November 30, 2023, Rizwan (C) pedals a tricycle rickshaw as he looks for customers amid dense smog, along a street in the old quarters of New Delhi. Environmental change hits the poorest the hardest, experts say, and in India's toxic smog-filled capital that extends even to the air people breathe. — AFP

own language, living mostly in Pakistan and Afghanistan but divided by the colonial-drawn Durand Line that splits the two countries. "He was detained for making inflammatory speeches and threatening public law and order," Balochistan's minister of information Jan Achakzai told AFP.

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Business

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2023

Zain, Ooredoo and TASC Towers create largest tower company in MENA region

The enlarged tower company with 30,000 towers valued at \$2.2 billion



Bader Al-Kharafi, Aziz Aluthman Fakhroo and Iyad Mazhar with executives of Ooredoo Group, Zain Group and TASC Towers Holding.

DOHA/KUWAIT: Ooredoo Q.P.S.C. (Ooredoo) – Ticker: ORDS and Mobile Telecommunications Company K.S.P.C. (Zain Group) – Ticker: Zain announced the signing of definitive agreements between Ooredoo Group, Zain Group and TASC Towers Holding (TASC) to create the largest tower company in the MENA region, in a cash and share deal.

The enlarged tower company, comprising approximately 30,000 towers, has a combined estimated current enterprise value of \$2.2 billion. Ooredoo and Zain will equally retain a substantial stake of 49.3 percent each in the newly restructured entity, through an asset and cash equalization process. The founders of TASC will retain the remaining shareholding, through Digital Infrastructure Assets LLP, and will continue to manage the operations of the business.

The tower entity is expected to achieve run-rate revenues close to \$500 million annually, with an EBITDAaL (after leases) of more than \$200 million annually upon the completion of closings in all individual countries – including Qatar, Kuwait, Jordan, Iraq, Algeria, and Tunisia. This financial position underpins the promising prospects and profitability of the newly-restructured tower company.

The chairmanship of the Tower company rotates every two years between Zain and Ooredoo, beginning with Bader Al-Kharafi as Chairman and Aziz Aluthman Fakhroo as Vice-Chairman.

The signing of this landmark transaction constitutes a major milestone towards realizing key aspects of both

- Acquisition and merger of close to 30,000 strong tower asset expected to create significant value, capital efficiencies and empower MENA's digital future
- Operating model will provide passive infrastructure as a service, supporting the reduction of MENA's carbon footprint

Ooredoo and Zain's strategies, focused on evolving into smart telecom companies and creating value-focused portfolio. It also reaffirms the commitment of Ooredoo, Zain and TASC to drive growth and value for shareholders.

In a joint commentary, Aziz Aluthman Fakhroo, MD and Group CEO, Ooredoo; Bader Al-Kharafi, Zain Vice-Chairman & Group CEO; and Iyad Mazhar, Founder & CEO of TASC said: "This pioneering deal embarks us on an exciting journey together as it results in the establishment of the region's largest independent tower company, placing the MENA region on the world telecom tower map. It also positions the region as an advanced player in the global telecoms landscape, and we anticipate wide-ranging positive implications for the region – from economic growth and upgraded connectivity to technological improvements and increased global relevance."

"This strategic transaction will unlock significant shareholder value through higher earnings multiples, as well as ensure capital efficiency, optimizing balance sheets for our respective companies and creating new possibilities for investors.

The deal also demonstrates our joint dedication to supporting the reduction of the region's carbon footprint, contributing to our vision of reshaping the telecommunications sector by building a more sustainable ecosystem and ensuring a better-connected future for our communities across the region," the CEOs concluded.

As an independent tower company, leveraging the combined assets of Ooredoo and Zain, TASC will offer Passive Infrastructure as a Service (PIaaS) in a partnership model. This creates unprecedented opportunities for all mobile network operators, offering a capital-efficient alternative to building, owning and managing their own passive infrastructure in a cost-efficient and environmentally friendly manner. This partnership model is well-equipped to meet the needs of other mobile network operators seeking to reduce costs, lower carbon emissions, and address the increasing demand for sites driven by double digit growth in mobile data consumption across the region.

Both Ooredoo and Zain will retain their respective active infrastructure, including wireless communication antennas, intelligent software, and intellectual



Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi (left) and Aziz Aluthman Fakhroo during the signing of the deal.

property with respect to managing their telecom networks.

The expected timeline for the completion of this transaction contemplates initial market closings in 2024. The phased implementation, tailored for each market and adhering to the regulatory environment, is subject to regulatory approvals, ensuring a seamless transition of operations. Ooredoo's tower network in Oman is following a stand-alone process.

Morgan Stanley acted as the exclusive

financial advisor to the Ooredoo Group, and Citigroup Global Markets Ltd acted as the exclusive financial advisor to Zain Group and TASC Towers Holding on this transaction. DLA Piper acted as the legal advisors for Ooredoo, and both Herbert Smith Freehills (HSF) and Norton Rose Fulbright (NRF) jointly acted as the legal advisors of Zain Group and TASC Towers Holding. Shearman & Sterling (S&S) acted as the legal advisors of Digital Infrastructure Assets.

Crunch time for EU-Mercosur deal at Rio summit

BRASILIA, Brazil: The fate of a long-awaited but controversial Europe-South America trade deal hangs in the balance this week when Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva hosts a summit of the Mercosur regional bloc.

The presidents of the Mercosur countries — Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay — will gather Thursday in Rio de Janeiro, with the clock ticking down on promises from both sides to finalize a trade deal between the bloc and the European Union by the end of the year. The meeting was originally supposed to seal a final version of the deal, which has been more than two decades in the making and would create the world's biggest free trade zone.

But last-minute bickering has erupted in recent days, with public criticism of the proposed deal from France and Argentina. French President Emmanuel Macron, who met Lula on Saturday on the sidelines of the COP28 UN climate talks in Dubai, voiced his opposition to the deal, sharply criticizing supposed environmental shortfalls. Agricultural powerhouse Brazil, the world's top exporter of beef and soy, notably faces accusations of tearing down the Amazon rainforest to make way for farming.

That chilled ties with Europe under far-right ex-president Jair Bolsonaro (2019-2022), who presided over a surge in deforestation. It is an image Lula is fighting. Since he took office for a third term in January, his government has halved deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon from last year. But Macron said the EU-Mercosur deal is "completely contradictory"



PUERTO IGUAZU, Argentina: (Left to right) Bolivian President Luis Arce, Paraguayan president-elect Santiago Pena, Paraguayan President Mario Abdo Benitez, Argentine President Alberto Fernandez, Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, and Uruguayan President Luis Lacalle Pou pose for the family picture during the Summit of Heads of State of Mercosur in Puerto Iguazu, Argentina, on July 4, 2023. — AFP

with the anti-deforestation drive.

"It's a patchwork deal (that)... doesn't take biodiversity or the climate into account," he said. Outgoing Argentine President Alberto Fernandez meanwhile said "current conditions" were not right to approve the deal as it stands. Fernandez is due to hand power on December 10 to self-described "anarcho-capitalist" Javier Milei, who criticized the accord during his presidential campaign and threatened to pull out of Mercosur.

A Brazilian foreign ministry source told AFP the Argentine presidential transition means Mercosur will likely be reluctant to make any big decisions on the accord at the Rio meeting. "But the new Argentine government has indicated its keen interest in closing" the deal, the official added, denying re-

ports the South American bloc was pulling out of the negotiations. Lula accused France of "protectionism" after Macron's criticism. "Let's be clear on one thing," he said. "Don't say this is Brazil's fault, don't say it's South America's fault... If we don't reach a deal, it will be clear whose fault it is."

But he backed off talk of a possible breakdown in negotiations after meeting Monday with Chancellor Olaf Scholz in Germany, which firmly backs the deal, seen as key for its industrial sector.

"I'm not giving up," Lula said. The contours of the deal were agreed in 2019, but a final version still needs to be ratified. Tension has erupted on several issues, most recently a series of environmental protection demands issued by the EU. — AFP

Tunisia pledges to triple renewable energy capacity

DUBAI: Tunisia, along with seven other Arab countries and in cooperation with countries around the world, has pledged to triple the world's renewable energy production capacity to 11,000 gigawatts by 2030. This commitment is part of the ongoing negotiations at the 28th Conference of the Parties (COP28) held in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, from November 30 to December 12, 2023.

As the international environmental NGO Greenpeace reported on Monday, 117 countries worldwide have endorsed this commitment, including the eight Arab countries (Tunisia, Morocco, Oman, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen and the United Arab Emirates). This reflects a determination to strengthen and accelerate the transition to clean and renewable energy in the Middle East and North Africa region.

The COP28 presidency outlined three main goals: tripling global renewable energy production capacity, doubling hydrogen production to 180 million tons, and improving energy efficiency by 2030.

Tunisia, one of the countries most vulnerable to the effects of climate change, ratified the Paris Agreement on climate change in accordance with Organic Law No 72 of 2016, dated October 31, 2016, and submitted its Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) on September 16, 2015. In October 2021, Tunisia updated its NDC in accordance with Article 3 of the Paris Agreement, stressing the importance of transitioning to a new comprehensive development model in line with the Sustainable Development Goals. — Agencies

Business

Moody's downgrades outlook on China credit rating over debt fears

EU chief warns China on trade gap ahead of summit

BEIJING: Ratings agency Moody's on Tuesday downgraded the outlook on China's credit rating to "negative" from "stable" on the back of rising debt in the world's second-largest economy. China's post-pandemic recovery has been hampered by weak consumer and business confidence, a persistent housing crisis, record youth unemployment and a global slowdown that is weighing on demand for the country's goods.

Those woes have piled pressure on central and local governments to step in with more financial support following a one trillion yuan (\$137 billion) sovereign bond issuance by Beijing in October.

Moody's said Tuesday its decision "reflects rising evidence that financial support will be provided by the government and wider public sector to financially stressed regional and local governments and state-owned enterprises". This, it said, was "posing broad downside risks to China's fiscal, economic and institutional strength". The move "reflects the increased risks related to structurally and persistently lower medium-term economic growth and the ongoing downsizing of the property sector", it added.

China's vast property sector is mired in a deep debt crisis, with some of the nation's biggest devel-



opers owing hundreds of billions of dollars and facing going out of business. Authorities are on edge as debt fears stoke buyer mistrust, send home prices plummeting and, crucially, threaten to infect other sectors in an already sluggish economy.

Construction and real estate account for around a quarter of China's gross domestic product. Beijing's finance ministry said in response it was "disappoint-

ed with Moody's decision". "Since the beginning of this year, facing a complex and severe international situation and against the backdrop of unstable global economic recovery and weakening momentum, China's macro economy has continued to recover," a spokesperson said.

"Moody's concerns about China's economic growth prospects and fiscal sustainability are unnecessary." After a tough year for the world's number-two economy, there have been flickers of life in recent weeks, with third-quarter growth coming in more than expected at 4.9 percent.

China is aiming for around five percent growth this year—from a low base last year when the economy was paralyzed by strict COVID restrictions. Moody's said Tuesday it expected the economy to grow 4.0 percent next year and 2025, "with structural factors including weaker demographics driving a decline in potential growth to around 3.5 percent by 2030". "Substantial and coordinated reforms will be needed for consumption and higher value-added production to drive growth" to offset the diminished role of the property sector, it added.

Meanwhile, European Union member states won't tolerate their growing trade imbalance with China

forever, EU chief Ursula von der Leyen warned Tuesday, ahead of a key summit. "We have tools to protect our market," von der Leyen told an AFP reporter in an interview for the European Newsroom, while adding: "But we prefer to have negotiated solutions."

Von der Leyen, the president of the European Commission, and Charles Michel, who chairs the European Council, will be in Beijing on Thursday for an EU-China summit. It will be the first in-person summit between the Brussels chiefs and Chinese President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Qiang since 2019, and focus on trade and the wars in Ukraine and the Middle East.

On the economy, von der Leyen stressed that Europe was not trying to "de-couple" itself from the Chinese powerhouse, but to "de-risk" ties that had become too one-sided. "We have seen a growing trade imbalance. The trade imbalance has doubled in the last two years to up to almost 400 billion euros by now," she said. "European leaders will not tolerate over time an imbalance in the trade relationship. We have tools to protect our market," she continued, in the ENR interview. "But we prefer to have negotiated solutions. And these are the choices that, for example, now are on the table and where I think it is also in China's interest to look carefully at these choices." —AFP

Sri Lanka's CB Act expected to drive fiscal discipline

KUWAIT: When Sri Lanka was granted independence by the British in 1948, the country was considered one of the strongest economies in Asia. It is said that the mastermind behind Singapore's economic success, former Singapore Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, in 1964 saw Sri Lanka as a role model and hoped that Singapore could be like Sri Lanka one day. Unfortunately, fiscal deficits — largely financed by debt and monetary financing — have played a large part in Sri Lanka's recent financial problems. Lack of independence of Sri Lanka's Central Bank has made many past governments comfortable with large fiscal deficits. Indeed, Sri Lanka has achieved a primary budget surplus only five times in the last 75 years.

Money is central to any economy as it is a medium to value products and services and to undertake financial transactions between various parties. It is of paramount importance that the value of money is prioritized and not used for short term gain. An IMF paper argues that for effective monetary and fiscal policies, it is important to have central bank independence. Evidence shows that independent central banks are generally associated with lower inflation and prevent a politicization of policy on interest rates.

Prior to the passing of the Central Bank Act in Sri Lanka this year, the bank came under the Monetary Law Act (MLA). The MLA gave the Central Bank independence to a certain extent in monetary policy formulation and complete freedom in drawing its budget. But it had its flaws. The Treasury Secretary was a member of the bank's monetary board and was able to influence the board's decisions. The Bank was able to buy treasury bills from the primary auctions. The bank's three joint core objectives — economic stability, price stability and financial system stability — were difficult to align. In the 12 months leading to Sri Lanka defaulting on its external debt, a colossal amount of money was printed which was a key reason for inflation heading up to 70 percent in 2022 as shown in the chart below.

The bank must agree with the Minister of Finance to set an inflation target under an inflation-targeting monetary policy framework every year. If the bank misses the inflation target for two consecutive quarters, then it is required to submit a special report to parliament explaining the reasons. The new law includes other important features such as regular inflation reports and public statements following meetings of the monetary board.

The core objective of the central bank is price stability which should help keep inflation low and stable. A stable currency can drive in foreign and local investments and encourage savings. Low inflation will result in lower interest rates and help encourage growth in private credit and the economy. Lower market interest rates will also result in the Treasury being able to borrow money locally at a lower cost resulting in less strain on the fiscal balance.

In 2022, 78 percent of government revenue was spent on interest payments on Sri Lanka's debt. Lower inflation can drastically bring down interest rates, easing Sri Lanka's fiscal balance. It should also result in fairer taxation as taxes are laid out in nominal terms and tax brackets are not frequently updated in line with inflation. The IMF program currently in place requires Sri Lanka to achieve a primary budget surplus of 2.3 percent and reduce its gross financing needs to 13 percent of GDP by 2027. Sri Lanka has one of the lowest government revenue to GDP ratios in the world at only 8 percent, with 70 percent of taxes being indirect taxes. The country also has a very narrow tax base. The Central Bank Act will result in the government looking at increasing progressive taxes to meet the IMF target of achieving a 15 percent government revenue to GDP ratio by 2025.

Overall, the Central Bank Act will result in increased independence of the bank. Price stability and depoliticizing decisions on monetary policy can lead to a stable currency, lower interest rates, tax reform, stronger incentives for foreign direct investment, and improved long-term economic growth.

Note: The article is written by Talal Rafi, a development economist based in Sri Lanka. He is an expert member of the World Economic Forum and a regular contributor to the IMF PFM Forum.

Friction at COP28 over green trade

DUBAI: Inside the negotiating rooms and on the sidelines of the COP28 climate talks, simmering tensions over wealthy countries' "green trade" policies have been bubbling to the surface, with developing nations fearful they will be penalized.

A particularly sore point has been the European Union's new carbon border tax, which sets a price on imported goods based on the emissions involved in creating them. While the EU deems the tax necessary to ensure everything entering the bloc meet its climate goals, powerful emerging economies at COP28 have labelled such policies as protectionist, saying they disadvantage poorer trading partners.

Concerns have also been raised that these kind of climate policies may—even though they cut emissions from one country—make it harder for another nation to sell their goods or access clean energy technology. "Trade regulations can have unintended consequences, and we should be a little thoughtful about that," World Bank president Ajay Banga told a side event packed with prime ministers, business executives, trade bosses and diplomats at the talks in Dubai.

Nations are divided over where best to handle a rising number of climate-related trade disputes, a matter that has never been discussed at COP gatherings. The World Trade Organization has received about 18,000 complaints over green policies yet trade was still often overlooked by climate policymakers, WTO director general Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala said. Brazil, China, India and South Africa applied to have "concerns with unilateral and coercive climate change-related measures" added to the COP28 agenda, but their call was not taken up.

However the subject still forced its way into discussions at this year's talks, which on Monday hosted the first-ever "trade day" held at the climate negotiations. The friction over green trade has spotlighted what experts say could evolve into a major sticking point in future climate negotiations if left unchecked. "This is becoming a very heated issue," Alden Meyer of the think



Environmental activists display placards during a demonstration at the venue of the COP28 United Nations climate summit in Dubai on December 5, 2023. —AFP

tank E3G told AFP after a panel on the subject in Dubai.

Complaints over "protectionist" climate policies have accompanied calls for the nearly 200 nations at COP to reconsider trade rules as they relate to the global race to decarbonise economies and meet emissions targets. Observers say the impact of the EU's carbon border tax on poorer countries, particularly in Africa, has been a particular focus.

China has been vocally critical of the scheme and in Dubai called for globally-agreed trade standards to be set. "For products that meet these standards, we must allow them to go into the market, and to be traded freely, and not set any barriers," China's climate envoy Xie Zhenhua told the same high-profile event attended by Banga and other policy heavyweights this week. Some developing nations want this regulatory rift addressed at COP conferences because they pertain to domestic climate policies.

Wealthy nations, meanwhile, believe the UN climate talks are inappropriate for such deliberations and the WTO is more suitable. Left unchecked, this

friction risks "percolating and bubbling over in different settings," said Trevor Sutton, research director at the Yale Center for Environmental Law and Policy. Observers said the perception that wealthy countries were protecting their own industries at the expense of everyone else risked eroding trust—a critical ingredient at COPs where decisions are made by consensus. "If there is a trust deficit, many of the countries just think this is for protectionist measures... an obstacle for their development," UN trade chief Rebeca Grynspan told an audience in a palatial theatre in the sprawling COP28 venue on Monday.

The tension also comes as so-called Global South nations urge richer countries to make good on promises to pay for the devastating impacts of global warming. "There has to be a much more thought-out program for changing trade rules," Lily Nacpil from the Asian Peoples' Movement on Debt and Development told AFP. "One that doesn't discriminate against the South, but one that actually hastens equitable greening of our planet." —AFP



SAO PAULO, Brazil: Shoppers buy TV sets at a supermarket during a Black Friday sale in Sao Paulo, Brazil. — AFP

Brazil economy ekes out 0.1% growth in Q3

SAO PAULO: Brazil eked out economic growth of 0.1 percent in the third quarter, the government said Tuesday, beating expectations of a contraction despite a hit from high interest rates and a slowdown in the agricultural sector. The result was better than analyst forecasts of a 0.2-percent contraction for Latin America's biggest economy, a crumb of comfort for President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva's administration as it seeks to kick-start growth.

Brazil's economy had grown 1.4 percent in the first quarter of the year and one percent in the second, according to revised figures from the national statistics institute, IBGE. The third-quarter slowdown was caused mainly by the key agricultural sector, which posted a contraction of 3.3 percent from the second quarter, IBGE reported. The industrial and service sec-

tors both posted growth of 0.6 percent for the third quarter, it said—though that was a slower pace than the second quarter.

Despite the sluggish July-September quarter, analysts forecast gross domestic product growth of 2.84 percent for the year in 2023 and 1.5 percent in 2024 in a poll published Monday by the central bank.

Veteran leftist Lula, who returned to office for a third term in January, has vowed to deliver "solid" economic growth of more than three percent per year. But he has clashed with the central bank over what he calls its "absurdly" high benchmark interest rate, currently 12.25 percent, which he says is putting the brakes on the economy. The bank had aggressively raised the interest rate to fight soaring prices unleashed first by the COVID-19 pandemic and then Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

But with the annual inflation rate now having fallen back to 4.82 percent—just above the central bank's target ceiling of 4.75 percent—the bank has begun reducing the interest rate again, with half-point cuts at each of its past three meetings. Analysts expect another half-point cut when the bank's monetary policy committee wraps up its last meeting of the year on December 13. —AFP

Lukoil considers selling Bulgaria oil refinery

SOFIA: Russian oil giant Lukoil said Tuesday it would consider selling its oil refinery in Bulgaria, following a government plan to end imports of Russian crude oil it called discriminatory. "In view of the significant change in the operating conditions of the Lukoil Group companies in Bulgaria, the company has commenced work to review its strategy with respect to this asset. Various options will be analysed... including the sale of the business," Lukoil said in a statement on its website.

Bulgaria, a country historically close to Moscow and almost entirely dependent on Russian oil and gas imports before the war, has been seeking to free itself from this dependence recently.

The EU member was granted an exemption from the bloc's embargo on Russian crude to run until end-2024, allowing the refinery to produce oil for the country's own consumption, export oil products to Ukraine and to a lesser extent to Europe. The country's new pro-European government is however planning to end this derogation by next March, according to a recent parliamentary proposal to be ratified in the coming weeks.

The government has also imposed a 60-percent tax on the profits of the Russian oil company. In its statement on Tuesday, Lukoil slammed the "adoption by the Bulgarian state authorities of discriminatory laws and other unfair, biased political decisions towards the refinery." The Russian oil giant said it was "not subject to sanctions by the European Union" and complained that it was victim of an "artificially fanned political storm" around its Bulgarian refinery that harmed its business. Lukoil acquired the Neftochim oil refinery in the Black Sea city of Burgas in 1999 and it is now the largest on the Balkans. Its distribution unit also enjoys a quasi-monopoly on the Bulgarian market with a network of nine oil depots, 220 petrol stations, as well as firms supplying ships and aircraft. Already deprived of Russian gas, Bulgaria may find it difficult to obtain crude supplies once the exemption ends, according to experts who cite the lack of adequate port infrastructure and the congestion of the Bosphorus Strait. —AFP

Business



Waleed Khaled Mandani delivers his speech.



Waleed Mandani and Salma Al-Hajjaj stand in the middle of the Ajjal graduates.

Gulf Bank recognizes employees at its annual Ajjal program ceremony

Mandani: Our achievements in 2023 stem from the devoted efforts of our employees

- The bank has made significant strides in enhancing customer experience and has made substantial progress in its digital transformation journey
- Fostering youth empowerment is a fundamental element of our strategy, and we take great pride in the achievements of our Ajjal alumni

- Salma Al-Hajjaj: We are pleased with our employees' performance and are eager to train and develop our workforce
- Gulf Bank's values and unique work environment are embodied in the strong spirit of bonding and communication among our employees

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank recently hosted its annual employee ceremony, celebrating the eighth batch graduation of the Ajjal program in the presence of Acting CEO, Waleed Khaled Mandani, and bank executives. Mandani expressed gratitude to employees for their year-long efforts, leading to positive impacts on the bank's overall performance. He highlighted the successful launch of Gulf Capital Investment, Invest GB, and commended collaborative efforts across various departments.

Proud of Gulf Bank's enhanced customer experience, Mandani emphasized ongoing service development and the introduction of more competitive products. He highlighted the bank's commitment to prioritizing customers and its significant strides in digital transformation. Additionally, he emphasized the crucial role of youth development in the bank's strategy, par-

ticularly through the Ajjal program.

Work environment

Salma Al-Hajjaj, the General Manager of Human Resources, expressed satisfaction in the numerous accomplishments of Gulf Bank's employees over the past year. Furthermore, she emphasized the bank's strong sense of unity and communication among its staff, highlighting how this cohesion reflects the financial institution's values and distinctive work environment. She went on to affirm the team's commitment to supporting one another by providing tools and opportunities for the enhancement and growth of the workforce. This commitment is realized through ongoing training initiatives, including participation in the Ajjal Program for Fresh Graduates. Additionally, Gulf Bank collaborates with renowned universities and train-

ing institutes worldwide to ensure continuous learning and development for its employees.

Panel discussion

Conversely, the ceremony featured a panel discussion moderated by Salma Al-Hajjaj. The panel included Mohammed Al-Qattan, the General Manager of Consumer Banking, Faisal Al-Adsani, the Director of Corporate Banking, Mona Mansour, the General Manager of Customer Support Services, and Shahzad Anjoom, the General Manager of Information Technology. During the session, the participants delved into the significant developments witnessed by the bank throughout the year in its digital transformation journey, aiming to solidify its position as a bank geared for the future. Each department provided insights into completed stages and ongoing efforts within this trans-

formative process. The discussion also highlighted the bank's achievements in sustainability across environmental, social, and governance realms. Emphasis was placed on the bank's dedication to implementing top-tier environmental sustainability practices in the ongoing development processes of its branches.

Ajjal training program

The Ajjal training initiative attracts individuals with under five years of experience, offering them the chance to enhance their skills and nurture both their professional and personal development. In its continuous commitment to developing and enriching the capabilities of its workforce, the bank initiated the ninth edition of the Ajjal program in September 2023. This edition welcomed a fresh cohort of newly recruited trainees in collaboration with the American University of Kuwait.

Gulf Bank's vision is to be the leading Kuwaiti Bank of the Future. The Bank is constantly engaging and empowering its employees as part of an inclusive and diversified workplace in recognition of every employee's role in delivering customer excellence and serving the community at large. With its extensive network of branches and innovative digital services, Gulf Bank is able to give its customers the choice of how and where to conduct their banking transactions, all while ensuring a simple and seamless banking experience. Gulf Bank is committed to maintaining robust developments in sustainability at environmental, social and governance levels through diverse sustainability initiatives, strategically selected to benefit the Bank both internally and externally. Gulf Bank supports Kuwait Vision 2035 "New Kuwait" and works with various parties to achieve it.

South Africa's economy shrinks as election looms

JOHANNESBURG: South Africa's economy contracted 0.2 percent in the third quarter following six months of slow growth, spelling trouble for the government ahead of elections next year. Agriculture, manufacturing and construction were "the biggest drags" on gross domestic product in Africa's most industrialized country from July to September, said the national statistics agency StatsSA.

South Africa is heading towards general elections in 2024 amid high unemployment and widespread disillusionment with the ruling African National Congress (ANC). The economy has been slumbering for several years and the latest contraction follows GDP increases of 0.4 percent and 0.5 percent in the first two quarters that had raised hopes the nation could weather through its many troubles. South Africa has been battered by a prolonged energy crisis resulting in daily power blackouts of up to 12 hours a day. Troubles at state-owned rail and ports firm Transnet, hobbled by graft scandals, theft and maintenance issues, have further hampered economic activity. StatsSA said the agriculture industry saw the sharpest fall in the third quarter, with output dropping 9.6 percent. The sector faced "several headwinds" including a major bird flu outbreak and floods in the southern province of Western Cape, the agency said. — AFP

Ireland to offer refugees tents as housing crisis bites

DUBLIN: Ireland has admitted that it can no longer provide accommodation to all asylum seekers due to a severe shortage of emergency housing, and will hand out tents and sleeping bags where needed. "Despite intensive efforts to source emergency accommodation, the Department (of Integration) is currently not in a position to provide accommodation to all international protection applicants due to the severe shortage," said a statement sent to AFP on Monday.

Tents and sleeping bags will be provided to people where required, added the department, which oversees asylum seeker accommodation. Asylum seekers forced to sleep rough will have access to drop-in centers during the day, it said.

The announcement comes after the Minister for Integration, Roderic O'Gorman, said asylum seekers could be turned away from shelters "in the coming days" without being accommodated. — AFP

Norway to allow deep-sea mining

OSLO: Norway's centre-left government announced Tuesday that it has reached an agreement with opposition parties to open parts of its seabed to mining, spurring angry reactions from environmentalists. Already a major oil and gas producer, the Scandinavian kingdom could become one of the first countries to explore the ocean floor for minerals crucial for renewable energies, a controversial practice because of its potential impact on marine eco-systems.

"We need minerals because we want to lead a green transition in the form of fuel cells and solar panels, of electric cars and mobile phones," Labour member of parliament Marianne Sivertsen Naess said during a press conference. "Norway could in the future contribute to larger access [to these minerals] without being dependent on countries that it is not always good to be completely dependent upon," she said. The Labour-dominated coalition government in June proposed allowing mining of the country's seabed, which might hold sizeable quantities of copper, cobalt, zinc and rare earths.

However, without a majority in the parliament, it needed the support of opposition parties. On Tuesday, the Conservative Party and the populist right agreed to support the gradual opening up of areas of the Greenland and Barents Seas in the Arctic. The government assured it would impose strict environ-



OSLO, Norway: Terje Halleland (left) of the Progress Party, Marianne Sivertsen Naess (second right) of Labour Party and Bard Ludvig Thorheim (right) of the Conservative Party attend a press conference on plans for the extraction of seabed minerals in Oslo on December 5, 2023. — AFP

mental safeguards. "Exploitation will only be authorized only if studies carried out show that it can be done in durable and reasonable ways," conservative MP Bard Ludvig Thorheim said.

The agreement between the four political parties angered environmental groups. "We will work to stop every deep-sea mining project presented to the Norwegian Parliament," said Frode Pleym, head of Greenpeace Norway. "We will not allow Norway to destroy the unique life in the deep

sea, not in the Arctic nor anywhere else." NGOs and scientists have warned that deep-sea mining could damage habitats and harm species that are little understood, but are potentially important to the food chain. In addition, they point to the risk of disrupting the ocean's capacity to absorb carbon emitted by human activities, and the noise that could disturb species such as whales. Several countries, including France and the UK, have called for a moratorium on deep-sea mining. — AFP

World could breach 1.5C warming threshold in 7 years

PARIS: The world may cross the crucial 1.5C global warming threshold in seven years as fossil fuel CO2 emissions continue to rise, scientists warned Tuesday, urging countries at the COP28 talks to "act now" on coal, oil and gas pollution.

Battle lines are being drawn over the future of fossil fuels at the UN climate summit in Dubai, with big polluters trying to see off calls for an agreement to phase out the carbon-intensive energy responsible for most of human-caused greenhouse gas. Fossil fuel CO2 pollution rose 1.1 percent last year, according to an international consortium of climate scientists in their annual Global Carbon Project assessment, with surging emissions in China and India—now the world's first and third biggest emitters.

They estimated that there is a 50 percent chance warming will exceed the Paris deal's goal of 1.5 degrees Celsius

over multiple years by around 2030, although they noted uncertainties around warming from non-CO2 greenhouse gases. "It is getting more and more urgent," lead author Pierre Friedlingstein, of Exeter University's Global Systems Institute, told reporters.

"The time between now and 1.5 degrees is shrinking massively, so to keep a chance to stay below 1.5C, or very close to 1.5C, we need to act now."

The landmark 2015 Paris Agreement saw countries commit to limiting temperature rise to well below 2C above the preindustrial era and preferably 1.5C. The more ambitious 1.5C goal has since taken on greater urgency as evidence emerges that warming beyond this could trigger dangerous and irreversible tipping points. To keep to that limit, the UN's IPCC climate science panel has said CO2 emissions need to be halved this decade.

That is becoming a more challenging



DUBAI: Environmental activists display placards in a hallway during the United Nations climate summit in Dubai on December 5, 2023. — AFP

task as emissions continue to rise, the Global Carbon Project found. Glen Peters, a senior researcher at the CICERO Center for International Climate Research, said carbon dioxide emissions are now six percent higher than when countries signed the Paris deal.

"Things are going in the wrong direction," he said. That is despite a promising surge in renewable energy, a key issue at the Dubai climate talks where more than 100 countries have signed a call to triple renewable capacity this decade. — AFP

Lifestyle



Erkki Pekkarinen shows a case for a Nokia mobile phone made of birch tree bark.



Erkki Pekkarinen poses for a portrait wearing a jacket he made from birch tree bark.



Erkki Pekkarinen shapes with his hands some birch tree bark in his shop.



Different objects made of bark from birch trees are on display in the small laboratory of Erkki Pekkarinen.



MAN IN A WOODEN SUIT

Finnish craftsman turns bark to art



Erkki Pekkarinen shows the birch tree bark he uses to make his creations.



Erkki Pekkarinen shapes with his hands some birch tree bark in his shop.



An object made of bark from birch trees is on display in the small laboratory of Erkki Pekkarinen.

In his rustic cabin in the forests of southern Finland, 87-year-old Erkki Pekkarinen carves delicate strips of birch bark with his knife, before intricately weaving them into beautiful objects. "I started practising at the age of 10. You could say that for 77 years I've been fiddling with birch bark," Pekkarinen tells AFP.

While wood is generally perceived as a robust and inflexible material, Pekkarinen insists that, with the right technique, birch bark can be used to make "anything you can imagine".

His art gallery in Asikkala is filled with a myriad of objects constructed of nothing but strips of birch bark woven together without glue or nails. When properly processed, the cardboard-like honey-hued bark from the black and white boreal tree can be effortlessly cut and flexed.

Pekkarinen has crafted everything from detailed wooden jewellery and handbags to small toy ducks and backpacks. His piece de resistance is a full suit, complete with a hat, briefcase and shoes. It creaks and rustles as he puts it on but it is surprisingly flexible when Pekkarinen walks around the cabin, which is brimming with his wooden artwork.

Born in the eastern Finnish town of Lieksa, Pekkarinen says his interest in bark dates back to his youth when he worked as a lumberjack. "I liked to spend my time at the logging camp crafting all kinds of things. There was plenty of free time back then," he says.

Stone Age traditions

He recalls birds gnawing through colleagues' cotton backpacks to steal their lunch while they were felling trees but his own food remained safe in his sturdy bark rucksack. Full bark



suits may have been rare in the Nordic country's past but the age-old tradition of weaving birch bark into everyday items dates far back.

Tracing its origins to the Stone Age, birch bark has served a role akin to our contemporary use of plastic, from boxes for storing berries to small toys for children.

With its water-resistant and insulating properties, the early inhabitants of the Arctic region traversed snowy for-

ests with bark shoes on their feet and bark packs on their shoulders.

The material was once so valuable that it left its mark on the Finnish language - the expression "to collect bark" still means "to make money". Pekkarinen said that with the correct technique, the bark can be removed from the trunk without killing the tree.

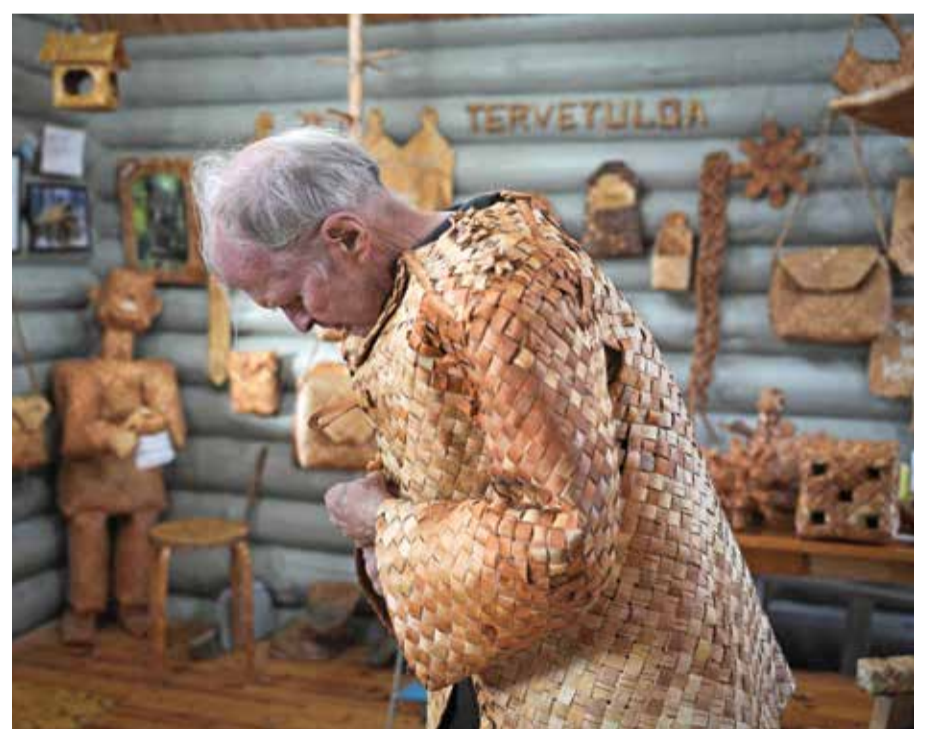
"It will still be usable in 10 years," Pekkarinen says, holding a roll of bark that he has cleaned and dried. Using

a stockpile of bark that he gets from friends and family, Pekkarinen crafts whatever comes into his mind.

"You can make whatever your imagination will allow," he says, showing off a football-sized bark version of a COVID-19 virus, complete with spikes extending in every direction. — AFP



Many objects made of bark from birch trees are on display in the small laboratory of Erkki Pekkarinen.



Erkki Pekkarinen wears a jacket he made from birch tree bark.



Erkki Pekkarinen walks back from his shop.



The smallest shoes made of bark from birch trees by Erkki Pekkarinen are seen on a tray.



An aerial view of the surroundings of Erkki Pekkarinen's shop.



Erkki Pekkarinen cuts some birch tree bark in his shop.

Lifestyle



Winners of the L'Oréal-UNESCO Young Talent Prize for Women in Science Sabine Adeline Fanta Yadang, 32, (left) and Hadidjatou Dairou, 33, work in a research laboratory at the Institute of Medical Research and Medicinal Plant Studies in Yaounde. — AFP photos



Hadidjatou Dairou poses for a photograph at the Institute of Medical Research and Medicinal Plant Studies in Yaounde.



Winners of the L'Oréal-UNESCO Young Talent Prize for Women in Science Sabine Adeline Fanta Yadang, 32, (right) and Hadidjatou Dairou, 33, work in a research laboratory.

SCIENCE AWARD FOR YOUNG CAMEROONIAN WOMEN'S WORK ON HERBAL MEDICINE

In Cameroon's rural north, very few girls go on to enjoy careers in science. Sabine Adeline Fanta Yadang, a neuroscience doctor, and Hadidjatou Dairou, PhD student of cellular physiology, have overcome prejudice and smashed through the glass ceiling. They have been recognized for the quality of their research, along with 28 others from sub-Saharan Africa, by the L'Oréal-UNESCO for Women in Science Young Talents programme.

UNESCO says the programme supports "young women researchers around the world to pursue scientific careers at home or abroad". Both women were distinguished for their research into the potential of Cameroon's traditional herbal medicines in the treatment of heart disease and Alzheimer's. They work in a laboratory at Yaounde's Institute for Medical Research and Medicinal Plant Studies (IMPM). In the lab, Dairou is carefully emptying the contents of a pipette into a Petri dish. Under her white coat she proudly wears a traditional African dress.

Dairou's interest in herbal medicine goes back to her years as a pharmacology student at the public University of Ngaoundere, in the country's north. "I've seen what a plant extract does to the human body and how that can help people I know," she says. The UNESCO programme picked out her research into the "potential of the indigenous *Garcinia Kola* plant for treatment of cardiovascular disease".



Winner of the L'Oréal-UNESCO Young Talent Prize for Women in Science Hadidjatou Dairou works in a research laboratory.

Overcoming workplace discrimination

Fanta Yadang is injecting samples into test tubes before putting them in a centrifuge. She likes to be known as a Moundang, a community from Cameroon's Far North region, where her grand-parents took herbal cures.

"I wanted to become a doctor, but I didn't get good enough marks. I wanted to help my fellow people so I became interested in medicinal plants," she says. "In a region where girls are not encouraged

to go to school, she stood up against stereotypes and overcame workplace discrimination," according to UNESCO.

The November 8 awards noted she was "seeking to better understand the physiopathologies of neuro-degenerative disease, in particular Alzheimer's, in order to find a new therapy source from medicinal plants". Locally, traditional African medicine is seen as a separate health sector. "In Cameroon, patients turn to plants before going to hospital," says Eric Owoundi Nkoa, a herbal therapist and secretary at the ministry of Arts and Culture's medicine centre. He believes 70-80 percent of Cameroonians take "natural medicine".

For Dairou, the bark of the bitter *Garcinia Kola* - a grain that looks like a nut eaten across Africa to ease all kinds of problems - may improve cardiovascular health. "In particular atherosclerosis, one of the major causes of heart attacks," she explained. Fanta Yadang is working on tiger nut milk, which is widely consumed in central Africa. It is extracted from a plant that has for centuries been reputed for its medicinal powers. With the cost of modern drugs for Alzheimer's prohibitive, she intends to prove that the plant extract will enable patients "to fight neurone degeneration and reduce stress on the brain".

Future of Africa

Only 13 percent of girls were enrolled in tertiary education, the UN education-



Winners of the L'Oréal-UNESCO Young Talent Prize for Women in Science Sabine Adeline Fanta Yadang (left) and Hadidjatou Dairou pose for a photograph with their prize at the Institute of Medical Research and Medicinal Plant Studies in Yaounde.

al organization UNESCO said in 2018. "In the north, where it is said girls don't go far enough with their studies, I have truly demonstrated the contrary," noted Fanta Yadang. When she had to balance her studies with having a baby, almost 10 years ago, her family gave her the strength to plough on. "My father is a nurse and my mother a mid-wife. They used to tell us to study to become someone," she recalled.

Dairou's father, a vet, pushed her to study for a doctorate. "That included when certain people thought the path was

too long," she said. "For many, a woman does not need it to take care of her home and risks not being submissive."

With the 10,000-euro and 15,000-euro grants from the UNESCO awards, Dairou intends to complete her thesis and Fanta Yadang wants to pursue her studies at Nigeria's Ibadan University. "The future of Africa is in the hands of its scientists," said Fanta Yadang. — AFP



(From left to right) SAG-AFTRA secretary-treasurer Joely Fisher, SAG-AFTRA president Fran Drescher, and SAG-AFTRA Committee member Frances Fisher and Kevin E. West arrive for the 2023 Women in Film Honors at the Ray Dolby Ballroom at Hollywood and Highland in Hollywood, California. — AFP

Hollywood braces for actors' vote on strike deal

Hollywood on Tuesday anxiously waited to learn if actors have approved their union's hard-fought deal with studios, or if an entertainment industry still reeling from months-long strikes could be plunged back into turmoil. While the Screen Actors Guild (SAG-AFTRA) deal is widely expected to pass, criticism - mainly over its perceived lack of protection against artificial intelligence - has swelled in recent weeks, raising jitters about a potential, if unlikely, return to picket lines.

Members have until 5:00 pm Pacific Time (0100 Wednesday GMT) to cast their votes, with a simple majority required to finally seal the agreement.

Jonathan Handel, an entertainment lawyer and analyst, said an approval figure between 75 percent and 85 percent is "a realistic expectation."

But should ratification fail, SAG-AFTRA would likely need to reopen talks with studios - who could themselves withdraw the terms previously offered - and a return to industrial action could beckon. "The contract is s***," said actor Michael Vaccaro, one of dozens of performers to speak out publicly against the terms.

"I voted no. And I'm fully prepared to go back on strike. Absolutely 100 percent," he told AFP. "By signing this thing, we gain nothing. By going back out on strike, there's the possibility to gain quite a bit." The tentative deal between SAG-AFTRA and Hollywood studios to end the actors' 118-day strike was agreed last month.

It contained higher pay, better bonuses for starring in hit shows or films, and the first-ever protections against the use of artificial intelligence to replace human actors. It was ratified by the union's leadership two days later, though not unanimously.

Union leaders have since held meetings and sent out emails and social media posts to members, strongly urging them to approve the deal.

"It is the most lucrative, innovative and protective contract in entertainment union history," said SAG-AFTRA president Fran Drescher in a recent Instagram post. But as details of the agreement emerged, warnings began to circulate online about its shortcomings, particularly over the issue of AI.

Performers fear they could soon be replaced by entirely synthetic "actors," generated by AI using the body parts of many different humans, whose likenesses have been scraped from film archives. The deal does not prevent studios from using generative AI, but it has a clause requiring them to inform the union each time the technology is used.

SAG-AFTRA would then have the right to bargain for compensation on behalf of the actors involved - though critics say it would be hard to identify who these are. Actors also say that the massive number of viewers a show or film needs to attract in order to trigger bonuses for its performers is too high for all but the very top echelon of hit shows.

Results of the vote are expected by late Tuesday local time. "Because of the opposition, people naturally wonder 'will it pass?' and that leads to some nervousness and concern," Handel told AFP. "But I think it's highly likely that this will pass. It would be very startling if it didn't." — AFP

Oscar-nominated Bhutan director turns lens on democracy ahead of vote

The Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan, the last country to introduce television, made waves last year with a film director who walked the red carpet of the Oscars. Now, as his nation prepares for a general election next month - only the fourth ever in its history - director Pawo Choyning Dorji has turned his lens on democracy.

"The film delves into the advent of democracy in Bhutan, coinciding with the onset of modernization and the influence of television," Dorji said of his movie "The Monk and the Gun". "It explores the tension between maintaining cultural innocence and adapting to modern expectations," the 40-year-old told AFP. Bhutanese people voted for the first time in 2008 after political reforms were instituted soon after the start of the reign of the present king. He remains widely popular among the majority Buddhist nation's nearly 800,000 people.

Dorji's film, set during Bhutan's historic transition from an absolute monarchy 15 years ago, discusses the complexities of embracing change while grappling with fears of losing cultural identity. It examines the "clash between Western influences and Bhutanese traditions", the director said.

'Clash'

The film tells the story of a Buddhist monk who, worried as the nation's first elections approach, sets off to find a rifle. Not all Bhutanese welcomed the end of the absolute monarchy, Dorji said, explaining the political change had not been a "choice made willingly" by all. Today, Bhutan has nearly 500,000 registered voters - and many say it is their civic duty to take part in the polls.

Elections, which have always been peaceful and orderly, are slated for January 9. "The film is not a pro-democracy stance but a narrative exploration of the events that transpired," said the self-taught filmmaker, who was born to a diplomat and went on to study political science in the United States.

"It acknowledges that the success of democracy depends on one's cultural context, and that it is too early to pass judgement on its effectiveness." Landlocked Bhutan, similar in size to Switzerland, lies squeezed between regional giants India and China. The



Bhutanese filmmaker Pawo Choyning Dorji attends the 94th Oscars at the Dolby Theatre in Hollywood, California. — AFP photos

mountainous country is famed for its philosophy of "Gross National Happiness", which sees the country benchmark itself on citizen well-being instead of economic growth.

Despite its focus on happiness, Bhutan also has its share of problems, including corruption and rural poverty. The youth unemployment rate stands at 29 percent, according to 2022 World Bank figures.

'Scribe of our traditions'

Dorji's drama, "Lunana: A Yak in the Classroom", was the first Bhutanese film ever nominated for an Academy Award, one of five movies named

in the 2022 Oscars Best International Feature Film category.

"The Monk and the Gun", which premiered in September and has been submitted by Bhutan to the 96th Academy Awards, has already picked up festival prizes in Vancouver and Rome.

Dorji said that making a film in Bhutan, where there is no formal film industry and the few cinemas are basic theatre halls, was just as hard the second time. On one hand, the country's actors provided "raw and authentic performances", he said. On the other, there were logistical headaches and other challenges.

"Creating a film in Bhutan meant overcoming not only the lack of infrastructure and professional equipment, but also the scepticism of those who failed to see the purpose of making films," Dorji said.

The director believes his storytelling has value beyond entertainment alone, by helping remind people of "their roots" and the country's history. "As a filmmaker, I believe in two crucial responsibilities," he added. "Sharing culture, tradition and spirituality, and serving as the scribe of our traditions to preserve our culture for future generations." — AFP



This picture shows Bhutanese college students at the Royal University of Bhutan in Thimphu.

Lifestyle



'Grand Theft Auto VI' trailer drops, flagging 2025 release

The first trailer for "Grand Theft Auto VI" hit YouTube in a surprise, ahead-of-schedule post on Monday, promising a 2025 release for the latest installment in the mega-popular video game franchise. True to rumors, the video game will be set in fictional Vice City, reminiscent of Miami, and appears to feature the first playable female character in the franchise, which has been criticized for its treatment of women and minorities people.

Fans were quick to infer the scene meant rumors of a "Bonnie and Clyde" type crime couple, with GTA's first playable female character, are coming true. "Major Bonnie and Clyde vibes," one member of the Reddit forum noted. "Grand Theft Auto VI continues our efforts to push the limits of what's possible in highly immersive, story-driven open-world experiences," Rockstar founder Sam Houser said in a statement.

Little off-limits

Released a decade ago, GTA V has sold around 190 million copies, according to Rockstar-parent Take-Two Interactive, making it the best-selling game in the United States for the past decade based on both unit and dollar sales.

The entire GTA franchise has sold a mammoth 410 million units so far, according to Take-Two. Webush analyst Nick McKay estimated that predecessor GTA V and an ongoing, online multiplayer extension of the game have brought in nearly \$10 billion in revenue.

With the wild success has come a wave of controversies. Critics have from the beginning accused the series of glorifying violence and encouraging players to engage in criminal behavior -- allegations Take-Two executives have denied.

GTA V players sell drugs, fight, rob, go on car rampages and more. Gameplay options also included assaulting prostitutes and going to strip clubs, raising the ire of activists.



GTA protagonists have historically been flawed but likable characters in a virtual world "that takes its cues from the craziness of what we read about in the news every day," according to McKay. The release of GTA V a decade ago came with the launch of an online multiplayer option. "I can play according to the main storyline, or I can just explore the world and cause mayhem to fill the time," McKay said. "Very little is off-limits to the player." --AFP



The early release of the trailer, prompted by a leak online, came on the eve of Tuesday's scheduled first glimpse for GTA VI. "Our trailer has leaked so please watch the real thing," Rockstar Games, the company behind GTA, said in a post on X, formerly Twitter. The video zoomed to almost 40 million views on YouTube in just over six hours. "I feel like this GTA will lean much more into the absurdity of America, much more than GTA V did," wrote a member of a Reddit forum devoted to spotting references in the trailer. "Oh absolutely," replied another member of the forum.

"Florida is the #1 craziest place in America, a place where you can get an AR-15 (assault rifle) and a free turkey with a roofing service. I'm so hyped." Set to the Tom Petty song "Love Is A Long Road," the GTA VI trailer opens with a female character named Lucia being released from prison in what appears to be Florida. In one scene an alligator walks in through the front doors of a corner store. There are also flashes of the usual GTA themes: police raids, car crashes, arrests, and illegal car stunt gatherings referred to as "sideshowes" in the real world.

Near the close of the one-minute-and-30-second trailer, the Lucia character tells her male partner in crime: "The only way we are going to get through this, is by sticking together, being a team." The pair go on to burst into a store with pistols drawn and bandanas covering the lower halves of their faces.



This handout courtesy of Rockstar Games taken on December 4, 2023 shows a video grab of the trailer of "Grand Theft Auto 6" video game.—AFP photos

'Grand Theft Auto' in numbers

Gamers got their first glimpse on Tuesday of a trailer for the sixth edition of "Grand Theft Auto", a testosterone-fuelled franchise that has been lighting up screens since 1997. Here are the key numbers connected with the record-breaking game.

- Three days that Grand Theft Auto V took to pass \$1 billion in sales in 2013, with publisher Take-Two Interactive claiming it was the fastest-selling entertainment product in history.
- Four thousand articles written about the game up to 2009, as logged by Guinness World Records. The chronicler of records dubbed it the world's "Most Controversial Video Game Series" -- a category that online commentators suggested had been dreamt up solely for GTA.
- Twenty million units of GTA V sold in 2020, which the firm said was the biggest number of sales in any year since its 2013 release.
- Ninety two million views of the GTA V trailer on YouTube, reportedly the most watched trailer for an action game. The GTA VI trailer looked on course to break further records, having been viewed 45 million times after just eight hours.
- Four hundred and ten million units sold by the franchise since its launch in 1997. GTA V has been the runaway success with the publisher claiming 190 million units sold up to September this year -- making it the second best-selling game in history. --AFP
- Ninety five square kilometres of the map in GTA V, which is set in the fictional city of Los Santos and its surrounding areas. The area is by far the biggest of the GTA series though dwarfed by other open-world video games.
- Ninety videos showing footage from the development phase of GTA VI that were stolen and leaked online during 2022. The trailer for GTA VI was also leaked, forcing the studio to release it officially hours ahead of schedule.
- Eight hundred sixty one voice actors involved in the creation of GTA IV, far surpassing any other game, according to Guinness



Grand Theft Auto VI: What we learned from the trailer

Fans around the world exploded with excitement Monday when Rockstar Games released the first trailer for Grand Theft Auto VI -- the most hotly anticipated game of the decade. The first look at the next instalment in the blockbuster series follows years of feverish speculation about the setting, characters and atmosphere of GTA VI.

What does the game look like?

The trailer shows Vice City, in the state of Leonida, in breathtaking detail -- a major upgrade from the graphics in GTA V, released 10 years ago. This is a fictional version of Miami, Florida, where the 2002 hit "Grand Theft Auto: Vice City" was based.

Set to "Love Is a Long Road" by Tom Petty, the video contains all that people across the globe have come to love -- or hate -- about GTA: high-octane chases in fast cars, a vast open world rendered in rich detail, scantily clad women, and numerous references poking fun at social media culture. Sam Houser, Rockstar's founder, said GTA VI "continues our efforts to push the limits of what's possible in highly immersive, story-driven open-world experiences".

What is the biggest change?

For the first time, a GTA game will feature a woman as one of the protagonists. Front and centre of the trailer is Lucia, introduced at what appears to be a prison in an orange inmate jumpsuit.

She is later shown partnering with a man -- unnamed in the trailer. The duo are seen breaking into stores wearing masks, and racing away in their car from pursuers. The introduction of Lucia -- and the focus on her in the trailer -- follows decades of criticism against Rockstar over its depiction of women in its games, in particular the lack of agency and the violence and denigration they suffer.

"From what we can tell at this stage... It is a noteworthy decision, and one that other game companies haven't necessarily made in the past when there's an option between gendered protagonists," Esther Wright, a games historian at Cardiff University, told AFP.

"That said, it instantly looks like the GTA people know and love... this is still very comfortably in Rockstar's wheelhouse," she added. "We'll have to wait and see whether commitment to the GTA branding, and players' expectation of it, leaves enough space to meaningfully engage with a different perspective."

Who will get to play GTA VI, and when?

If gamers were thrilled by what they saw of GTA VI, they were left slightly frustrated by the release date revealed at the end of the trailer: 2025. The game will be released on Sony's PlayStation 5 and Microsoft's Xbox Series X and Series S consoles, Rockstar said. It did not mention a PC version.

How did fans react?

There appeared to be near-universal praise from fans on social media, and the trailer swiftly became one of the hottest topics online. "Gave me goosebumps," commented @sachinbhujel909 on YouTube. "We (have) all been waiting for a good part of our life... RIP to the ones who never made it to see this." In just over 10 hours, the trailer racked up more than 54 million views on YouTube.

It led to speculation that it might challenge for the record number of views in the first 24 hours -- reportedly more than 100 million for the "Butter" music video by K-pop superstars BTS. GTA VI and related topics became the top trends worldwide on X, formerly Twitter, soon after the trailer was released, inspiring a flood of memes.

Some poked fun at how long they will have to wait to play the game, including users who posted videos of people switching to a healthier lifestyle to survive until 2025.

Wasn't the trailer due on Tuesday?

Rockstar had announced that the trailer would be released at 1400 GMT on Tuesday. But someone leaked the video nearly a day earlier on X. The account was suspended swiftly but the leak forced the company to share the trailer ahead of schedule.

Some online joked about the fate of the leaker, speculating about how Rockstar -- a famously secretive company -- could punish them. X user @vidthatgohard shared an image of an explosion at a house, with the caption: "NOOOO they got the gta leaker." AFP has contacted Rockstar for details about the leak. --AFP

Sports

Bitter pill for Botafogo and Textor as title slips away

Brazil's iconic clubs eliminated from the 2023 title race

SAO PAULO: After 28 years, it looked like Botafogo's Brazilian league title drought was finally ending, thanks to a crackling start to the season and a huge cash infusion from US magnate turned football investor John Textor. Then they lost their coach to Cristiano Ronaldo's Saudi club and spectacularly imploded in a string of key matches before letting a 13-point lead evaporate, leaving their long-suffering fans to suffer a little longer.

Considered one of Brazil's iconic clubs, Rio de Janeiro-based Botafogo, who won the league in 1968 and 1995, were mathematically eliminated from the 2023 title race on Sunday when they drew 0-0 at home against 14th-place Cruzeiro, falling five points behind leaders Palmeiras with one match remaining. Now reduced to fifth place, Botafogo - who led the league for 31 matches and looked invincible mid-season - thus suffered the biggest reversal in the history of the "Brasileirao," Brazil's top-flight league.

The humiliating homestretch has been a far cry from the team's seemingly unstoppable start, when they brushed aside star-studded favorites like Flamengo and defending champions Palmeiras to storm to a record 13 wins in their first 15 matches. Tapping a little-known but scrappy cast of players, Botafogo spent week after week making their fans dare to dream - not to mention Textor, who acquired a 90-percent stake in the club last year.

The 58-year-old media and tech mogul, who also has large stakes in English club Crystal Palace, France's Lyon and Belgium's Molenbeek, has pledged to invest \$77 million in improving Botafogo, who only returned to the top-flight league last season after being relegated in 2021. Home to former greats Garrincha and Jairzinho, Botafogo were soon turning heads with a new generation of talent, including goalkeeper Lucas Perri, defender Adryelson, mid-

fielder Eduardo and forward Tiquinho Soares. "The players aren't living day-to-day, they're hungry for tomorrow, to win, to be first," said then-coach Luis Castro of Portugal.

Revolving door of coaches

A first fateful moment came in June, 12 matches into the 38-match season, when Castro was poached by Saudi side Al-Nassr. Countryman Ronaldo reportedly called the coach personally to ask him to take the job. Fellow Portuguese national Bruno Lage, formerly of Benfica and Wolverhampton, took over at Botafogo.

But Botafogo suffered a series of injuries, and struggled to adapt to Lage's style, a change from Castro's possession play. Their once-commanding lead dwindled. Lage was sacked in early October, with Botafogo leading by seven points. Seeking an in-house solution, Textor named assistant coach Lucio Flavio, a one-time Botafogo midfielder, to replace him. But the team's problems only got worse. After they gave up the lead to Palmeiras in early November, Flavio, too, got the boot, replaced by veteran Brazilian coach Tiago Nunes. But Nunes has managed just four points in as many matches.

November to forget

Palmeiras meanwhile surged to a commanding lead. With 69 points - three clear of Atletico Mineiro and Flamengo - and a huge goal difference in their favor, the Sao Paulo giants are all but guaranteed a second straight title when the league wraps up Wednesday. For Botafogo, now out of the title race with 64 points, it was a November to forget. On November 1, they led Palmeiras 3-1 at home, only to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory, losing 4-3. Textor fumed in an obscenity-laced interview after the match that a crucial red card issued to Adryelson in the 76th minute



BANFIELD: Botafogo's defender Philippe Sampaio (right) and Defensa y Justicia's forward Lucas Pratto fight for the ball during the Copa Sudamericana quarterfinals second leg football match between Argentina's Defensa y Justicia and Brazil's Botafogo, at the Florencio Sola stadium in Banfield, Buenos Aires province. — AFP

was the result of "corruption." The tirade prompted Brazilian Football Confederation (CBF) president Ednaldo Rodrigues to sue him for slander.

Improbably, Botafogo repeated the exact same feat on November 9, giving up a 3-1 lead to lose 4-3 at home to Gremio, courtesy of a Luis Suarez hat trick. They also gave up leads to suffer painful last-

gasp draws against Bragantino (who equalized in the 96th minute), Santos (90th minute) and Coritiba (99th minute). "No words I could say can possibly console our fans," Nunes said. Their fairytale season now aborted, one Botafogo fan summed up the agony on X, formerly Twitter: "I've lost all feeling. I'm just a talking piece of meat." — AFP

Dreams sink Rivers in CAF Cup west Africa showdown

JOHANNESBURG: Veteran John Antwi scored as Dreams of Ghana got back into contention for a CAF Confederation Cup quarter-finals place with a 2-1 Group C victory over Rivers United of Nigeria. He put the home team ahead after 35 minutes in Kumasi and Abdel Issah doubled the lead on 74 minutes in the matchday two west African derby. An Alex Oyowah goal three minutes into added time was too little, too late as Rivers surrendered an unbeaten record this season in the African equivalent of the UEFA Europa League.

Antwi has scored three goals in the campaign - one less than chart-topper Abdulmunem Aleiyan from Libyan club Abu Salim. Club African of Tunisia, 3-1 away winners over bottom club Academica Lobito of Angola, top the table with six points, followed by Dreams and Rivers with three each. Group winners and runners-up after six matchdays qualify for the quarter-finals of a competition won by USM Alger of Algeria last season.

USM maintained a perfect Group A record with a 2-0 away victory over SuperSport United of South Africa in Polokwane. Clinical finishing in searing heat produced goals for Saadi Radouani five minutes into the first half and Braham Benzazza 11 minutes after half-time. "We were very efficient, defended well and when we got scoring chances we took them," said Spain-born USM coach Jean Carlos Garrido. "Playing away in Africa is always challenging, but we appreciated the excellent training facilities and pitch here."

SuperSport coach Gavin Hunt highlighted poor finishing after successive defeats for a club who were the 2017 runners-up. "I am encouraged by the fact that we create scoring opportunities at home and in Africa. We must soldier on and hope for a change of fortunes," he said. In the same section, Modern Future of Egypt overcame a red card to snatch a 2-1 win at Al Hilal Benghazi of Libya with Gambian Kajally Drammeh scoring the decisive goal in added time.

USM, the only Algerian club to lift the Confederation Cup, lead Future on goal difference with both having six points. A few hours after SuperSport lost, South Africans had cause for celebration as Sekhukhune United came from behind to edge Diables Noirs of Congo Brazzaville 2-1 in the same Polokwane stadium. Third-placed Sekhukhune are three points behind Group D pacesetters Renaissance Berkane of Morocco, who won 2-1 at Stade Malien of Mali thanks to a Paul Bassene brace. — AFP

Talking points from the Premier League

MANCHESTER: Arsenal opened up a two-point lead at the top of the Premier League after Manchester City stumbled once more in a thrilling 3-3 draw against Tottenham. Liverpool looked as though they were also set for a rare slip-up at Anfield, until two late goals secured a 4-3 win against Fulham, which lifted Jurgen Klopp's men into second place behind the Gunners, who were 2-1 winners over Wolves on Saturday. Manchester United's recent Premier League revival came to a grinding halt at Newcastle, while Everton boosted their survival hopes despite a 10-point deduction.

AFP Sport looks at three talking points from the Premier League weekend. Leaky Man City open door to challengers City have now won just three of their past eight Premier League games to give Arsenal and Liverpool hope their reign as English champions may finally come to an end. Defensive solidity was key to City's run towards the treble in the second half of last season. But Pep Guardiola's men have conceded eight times in their past three league matches.

City were also guilty of missing a host of glorious chances in the first half against a depleted Tottenham, who started without a recognized centre-back. Worse could be to come for Guardiola, with Rodri suspended for a daunting trip to Aston Villa on Wednesday. Villa have won 13 consecutive home Premier League games and City lost all three matches when the Spanish midfielder was banned earlier in the season.

Inter Milan make a title statement

MILAN: Inter Milan sent a warning to the rest of Serie A with convincing 3-0 win at Napoli which re-established their two-point lead at the summit and left the champions' title defense on its last legs. Beautifully taken goals from Hakan Calhanoglu, Nicolo Barella and Marcus Thuram pushed Inter back above closest challengers Juventus, who briefly held top spot after beating Monza on Friday. Sunday's thumping was a show of force from Inter who illustrated why they are favorites to win a 20th league title, still unbeaten away from home in all competitions after claiming a huge win at a ground where they have a dreadful record.

"It was a show of strength, of team spirit," said Inter coach Simone Inzaghi. "Winning like this in Naples is satisfying, but we're only 14 games in and there is a very long way to go." Napoli are now 11 points off the pace and travel to Juve next weekend in a match which could end any realistic hope of the champions retaining the Scudetto before the calendar year is out. To add insult to injury Napoli have dropped out of the top four, replaced by Roma who won 2-1 at Sassuolo earlier and sit in the last Champions League spot on goal difference.

Napoli recriminations

Returning Napoli coach Walter Mazzarri refused to speak after the match, sporting director Mauro Meluso expressing anger at referee Davide Massa for not stopping play for a foul before Inter's opener and not giving a penalty for what he believed was a clear foul on Victor Osimhen while the home side trailed by a single goal.

"I don't want to create an excuse for our team, who obviously still need to work on a few things, but we didn't deserve that humiliation today," said Meluso. Simone Inzaghi's side have won 11 of their 14 league matches so far this season and once Hakan Calhanoglu thrashed in the opener on the stroke of half-time they expertly dealt with a hyped-up Napoli.

Hosts Napoli were playing their first home fixture under Mazzarri, whose team are stuck on a paltry seven points from as many matches at the Stadio Diego Armando Maradona. Barella doubled Inter's



NAPLES: Napoli's Nigerian forward #09 Victor Osimhen jumps for the ball during the Italian Serie A football match between Napoli and Inter Milan at the Diego Armando Maradona stadium in Naples. — AFP

lead just after the hour mark with his first goal of the season shortly after Yann Sommer pulled off a brilliant save to deny Khvicha Kvaratskhelia, one of three superb stops from the Swiss.

Italy's Barella burst unopposed from midfield and after collecting Lautaro Martinez's low pass skipped past Leo Ostigard and Natan before confidently finishing past Alex Meret. And with five minutes remaining Thuram - who earlier had a goal ruled out for a microscopic offside - made absolutely sure of the points, tapping home his fifth league goal of a brilliant first season at Inter from substitute Juan Cuadrado's low cross.

Roma comeback

Paulo Dybala's 76th-minute penalty and a wildly deflected strike from Rasmus Kristensen shortly afterwards earned Roma a win from their scrappy match with 10-man Sassuolo, who opened the scoring through Matheus Henrique. The win at the Mapei Stadium came as coach Jose Mourinho is re-

portedly being investigated by the Italian Football Federation for saying that referee Matteo Marcanaro didn't "have the emotional stability to referee at this level" ahead of the match.

The Portuguese blasted Marcanaro, 31, in a pre-match outburst on Saturday which the country's refereeing association said "could lead to violence" against officials. And despite having excellent Italian Mourinho insisted on only speaking in Portuguese in his post-match interview with DAZN. "I am speaking Portuguese because my Italian is not good enough to explain certain concepts," claimed Mourinho.

"When I spoke about emotional stability, I was talking about a quality that is necessary in both life and football in order to perform at the highest level." Fiorentina are a point behind Roma and Napoli in sixth thanks to a simple 3-0 win over the division's bottom team Salernitana, while Bologna are a further point and place back following their 1-1 draw at Lecce. — AFP



LONDON: Wolverhampton Wanderers' English goalkeeper #25 Dan Bentley lands on Arsenal's English striker #14 Eddie Nketiah after jumping to make a save during the English Premier League football match between Arsenal and Wolverhampton Wanderers at the Emirates Stadium. — AFP

United no match for the best

Manchester United had risen to sixth in the table ahead of the weekend on the back of five wins in six Premier League games. But all of their eight wins this season have come against sides in the bottom half and Erik ten Hag's men were again found wanting against stronger opposition. An under-strength Newcastle, without 11 first team players due to injury or suspension, were dominant at St James' Park and worthy of a more comprehensive victory than the 1-0 scoreline suggests. The visitors were toothless in attack, with Marcus Rashford's performance attracting criticism for

both a lack of quality and effort. Newcastle full-back Tino Livramento consistently ran off Rashford into dangerous positions before the England international was substituted by Ten Hag on the hour mark.

After producing his best-ever scoring season in Ten Hag's first campaign in charge, Rashford has netted just twice this season. The 26-year-old's only goal since September came after he was handed a penalty by Bruno Fernandes in last weekend's win at Everton. "He works hard and he's investing a lot," said Ten Hag in defence of the forward. "He will get back, he will recover and he gets all our support." — AFP

Venues revealed for 2024 Copa America

MIAMI: Next year's 48th edition of the Copa America, featuring 10 South American nations and six North American teams, will be held in 14 venues across 10 US states, organizers said on Monday. South American governing body CONMEBOL had already announced that the June 20 opener would be held at Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta with the final on July 14 at Hard Rock Stadium in Miami Gardens, Florida.

On Monday CONMEBOL revealed that AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas, NRG Stadium in Houston, State Farm Stadium in Glendale, Arizona and Allegiant Stadium in Las Vegas, Nevada, will host quarter-final matches. Semi-finals will be played at MetLife Stadium in New Jersey and at Bank of America Stadium in Charlotte, North Carolina. Other venues are Q2 Stadium in Austin, Texas, SoFi Stadium in Los Angeles and Levi's Stadium in Santa Clara, Exploria Stadium in Orlando, Florida, and Children's Mercy Park in Kansas City.

Group play will take place from June 20 through July 2. The quarter-finals will be held July 4-6, semi-finals July 9 and 10 and the third-place match on July 13. "According to the dynamics of the competition, two groups will play in the west and center of the country, and two groups in the east and center," CONMEBOL said in a statement. — AFP

Sports

Al Hilal end campaign unbeaten

4-time winners finish atop Asian Champions League group

RIYADH: Four-time winners Al Hilal ended their Asian Champions League group campaign unbeaten thanks to a 2-1 home victory against Iran's Nassaji Mazandaran on Monday. The Saudi side, runners-up last year, had already qualified for the last 16 as Group D winners, allowing manager Jorge Jesus the luxury of starting in-form striker Aleksandar Mitrovic and attacking midfielder Sergej Milinkovic-Savic on the bench.

Ruben Neves, another summer signing, was not part of the squad, with Brazil superstar Neymar out for the majority of the season after rupturing the anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) and meniscus in his left knee on international duty in October. However, Al Hilal needed only four minutes to take the lead against Nassaji Mazandaran at the Prince Faisal bin Fahd Stadium, when winger Michael finished Mohammed Al Breik's low cross at the back post. Al Hilal, who replaced Morocco goalkeeper Yassine Bounou at half-time, doubled their advantage on 54 minutes courtesy of a clever half volley from reigning Asian Player of the Year Salem Al Dawsari.

Mitrovic and Milinkovic-Savic were introduced on the hour mark, although it was not enough to prevent Nassaji Mazandaran from pulling a goal back 13 minutes from time. Mahmoud Ghaed Rahmati halved the deficit with a thunderous volley following a clearance from Al Hilal defender Kalidou Koulibaly. In the group's other match, Uzbekistan's Navbahor booked

their place in the last 16 with a 2-1 victory against Mumbai City in Pune. While Navbahor progress by finishing second, Mumbai ended their campaign with six defeats from six matches.

In Group B, Uzbek side Nasaf Qarshi qualified for the knockouts by drawing 2-2 against Qatar's Al Sadd in a match that featured a goal for each team in injury-time. UAE club Sharjah, meanwhile, dropped to third and thus exit the tournament after they let slip the lead to lose 2-1 to Jordan's Al Faisaly in Amman. Elsewhere, Iraq's Air Force Club condemned Uzbekistan's AGMK to a sixth successive Group C defeat with a 3-2 victory in Erbil. Both teams went into the match without any chance of advancing to the knockout rounds.

Al Ittihad concluded Group C with a 2-1 win against Iran's Sepahan in Makkah. Former Celtic winger Jota grabbed the winner for the Saudi champions, who welcomed back Egypt international Ahmed Hegazy from long-term injury. Also in Group C, Iraq's Air Force Club condemned Uzbekistan's AGMK to a sixth successive defeat with a 3-2 victory in Erbil. Both teams went into the match without any chance of advancing to the knockout rounds. The 10 group winners and the six best second-placed teams advanced to the knockout rounds, which begin in February. The final takes place, across two legs, in May. — AFP



RIYADH: Nassaji's Iranian forward #09 Mohammad Reza Azadi (left) vies for the ball with Hilal's Saudi defender #02 Mohammed Al-Breik during the AFC Champions League Group D football match between Iran's Nassaji Mazandaran and Saudi Arabia's Al-Hilal on December 4, 2023. — AFP

Man City charged by FA over players' behavior

LONDON: Manchester City were charged by the Football Association on Monday over their players' behavior in the final moments of their 3-3 draw against Tottenham at the weekend. Several City stars, including an irate Erling Haaland, surrounded referee Simon Hooper after he failed to play advantage in the closing moments of a thrilling Premier League clash at the Etihad Stadium on Sunday. Haaland was fouled but shrugged off the challenge from Emerson Royal to play Jack Grealish through on goal, only for Hooper to pull play back to award the hosts a free-kick, having apparently already waved play on.

Haaland continued to voice his anger as he left the field after the final whistle and he kept up his protests after the game by reposting a clip of the incident on X, formerly Twitter, with the comment "Wtf", which is offensive slang. Manager Pep Guardiola said he understood his forward's anger. "He's a little bit disappointed," the City boss said after the game. "Even the referee — if he

played for Man City today he would be disappointed for that action, that's for sure."

On Monday, the FA issued a statement saying City had been charged. "Manchester City have been charged with a breach of FA rule E20.1 after their players surrounded the match official during the Premier League fixture against Tottenham

Hotspur on Sunday, 3 December 2023," the governing body said in a statement. "It's alleged that, during the 94th minute of the fixture, the club failed to ensure their players do not behave in a way which is improper. "Manchester City have until Thursday, 7 December to respond to the charge". — AFP



MANCHESTER: Tottenham Hotspur's Argentinean midfielder #18 Giovanni Lo Celso (right) shoots to score their second goal during the English Premier League football match between Manchester City and Tottenham Hotspur. — AFP

'No plan B' for Olympics river opening ceremony

PARIS: The French government on Monday insisted it would keep a plan to hold the 2024 Paris Olympics opening ceremony on the River Seine even after a deadly attack in the French capital at the weekend amplified security concerns. Sports Minister Amelie Oudea-Castera told French radio that the plan could still be adapted within the idea of the river flotilla, with media reports indicating grave concern within the security forces that the ceremony could be vulnerable to attack. A man known to the authorities as a radical Islamist with mental troubles on Saturday stabbed to death a German tourist close to the Eiffel Tower by the River Seine in what prosecutors are investigating as a suspected act of terror.

"There is no plan B, we have a plan A within which we have several alternatives," the minister told France Inter radio. She said the "terrorist threat and in particular the Islamist threat exists" but added "it is not new

and it is neither specific to France nor specific to the Games". Bur she added that there were "a certain number of adjustment variables", notably the number of spectators who can attend which will be decided in the spring and can be "modulated".

Also subject to adjustment could be "the number of events which will be authorized around the area and in Paris" on the sidelines of the ceremony and "the management of security perimeters". But asked whether any relocation of the ceremony was being considered, she emphasized: "this is not the hypothesis on which we are working". For the first time in Olympics history, the opening ceremony is set to take place outside the main athletics stadium, with competitors and officials set to travel through Paris on a flotilla of more than 100 vessels. The attacker chose the Eiffel Tower area more for its "symbolic" side than as an "Olympic site", Emmanuel Gregoire, Paris's first deputy mayor told France Info radio. — AFP

Spanish La Liga table

BARCELONA: Spanish La Liga table after Monday's match (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):

Real Madrid	15	12	2	1	33	9	38
Girona	15	12	2	1	34	18	38
Barcelona	15	10	4	1	28	14	34
Atletico Madrid	14	10	1	3	30	13	31
Athletic Bilbao	15	8	4	3	30	18	28
Real Sociedad	15	7	5	3	26	18	26
Real Betis	15	6	7	2	18	16	25
Las Palmas	15	6	3	6	13	13	21
Valencia	15	5	4	6	17	20	19
Getafe	15	4	7	4	17	20	19
Rayo Vallecano	15	4	7	4	16	22	19
Villarreal	15	4	4	7	22	26	16
Alaves	15	4	4	7	14	19	16
Osasuna	15	4	3	8	17	25	15
Sevilla	14	2	7	5	20	20	13
Cadiz	15	2	6	7	12	22	12
Mallorca	15	1	8	6	13	20	11
Celta Vigo	15	1	6	8	15	25	9
Granada	15	1	4	10	19	35	7
Almeria	15	0	4	11	16	37	4

Note: Top four qualify for Champions League; team in fifth qualifies for the Europa League. The sixth-place team goes into the Europa Conference League play-offs. Bottom three are relegated.

Italian Serie A table

MILAN: Italian Serie A table after Monday's match (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):

Inter Milan	14	11	2	1	33	7	35
Juventus	14	10	3	1	22	9	33
AC Milan	14	9	2	3	24	15	29
Roma	14	7	3	4	27	16	24
Napoli	14	7	3	4	26	17	24
Fiorentina	14	7	2	5	23	17	23
Bologna	14	5	7	2	16	11	22
Atalanta	14	6	2	6	21	16	20
Lazio	14	6	2	6	15	15	20
Torino	14	5	4	5	14	16	19
Monza	14	4	6	4	15	14	18
Frosinone	14	5	3	6	20	24	18
Lecce	14	3	7	4	16	19	16
Genoa	14	4	3	7	15	19	15
Sassuolo	14	4	3	7	21	26	15
Udinese	14	1	9	4	12	21	12
Empoli	14	3	2	9	9	26	11
Verona	14	2	4	8	12	21	10
Cagliari	14	2	4	8	13	26	10
Salernitana	14	1	5	8	10	28	8

Note: Top four qualify for the 2024/25 UEFA Champions League group phase; fifth goes into Europa League group stage; sixth goes into Europa Conference League play-offs; Bottom three relegated to Serie B unless the teams in 17th and 18th finish on the same points, in which case a play-off will decide which team is relegated. — AFP

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

Hospitals

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

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
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Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

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JACKSONVILLE: Tanner Hudson #87 of the Cincinnati Bengals is tackled after a reception against the Jacksonville Jaguars at EverBank Stadium on December 04, 2023. — AFP

Bengals grab 34-31 overtime win

Jaguars lose quarterback Lawrence to injury

LOS ANGELES: Cincinnati's Jake Browning threw for 354 yards and a touchdown Monday as the Bengals grabbed a 34-31 overtime win over Jacksonville, who lost quarterback Trevor Lawrence to injury. Browning, making just his second NFL start, also ran for a touchdown for the Bengals, who improved to 6-6 for the season when Evan McPherson booted a 48-yard field goal to win it. The defeat was devastating for the Jaguars, who fell

to 8-4 and saw the driving force of their season, Lawrence, go down.

Jaguars tackle Walker Little inadvertently stepped on Lawrence's ankle as the quarterback was going down under a sack late in the fourth quarter. Lawrence tried to rise but couldn't, beating the turf and throwing his helmet in frustration before he was eventually able to stand and walk gingerly to the locker room with the help of medical staff. After the game he was seen

on crutches with a protective boot. Jaguars head coach Doug Pederson said that the severity of the injury was not yet known. Before he was hurt, Lawrence completed 22 of 29 passes for 259 yards and two touchdowns and also ran for a TD.

Browning, who got the starting nod after star Bengals quarterback Joe Burrow suffered a season-ending wrist injury last month, completed 32 of 37 passes, piloting a 42-yard drive capped

by McPherson's winning field goal. CJ Beathard came on in place of Lawrence and completed nine of 10 passes for 63 yards. The Jags were down 31-28 when Beathard directed a 53-yard drive capped by Brandon McManus's 40-yard field goal that tied it with less than 30 seconds in regulation.

Jacksonville had the ball first in overtime but their drive stalled, setting the stage for Cincinnati's final push. Ja'Marr

Chase caught 11 passes for 149 yards, including a 76-yard touchdown that put Cincinnati up 21-14 early in the third quarter. Cincinnati's Joe Mixon ran for 68 yards and two touchdowns - both in the second quarter. "We definitely had to earn it," Browning said. "I needed even some overtime to get it done, but I thought we played a complete game on offense. Defense came up with the stops we needed." — AFP

Haliburton stars as Pacers oust Celtics; Pelicans advance

LOS ANGELES: The Indiana Pacers, fueled by Tyrese Haliburton's first career triple-double, beat the Boston Celtics 122-112 Monday to reach the semifinals of the NBA's new in-season tournament. The New Orleans Pelicans also booked their spot in Thursday's semifinals in Las Vegas, shaking off a slow start to beat the Kings 127-117 in Sacramento. In Indianapolis, Haliburton scored 26 points with 10 rebounds and 13 assists and the Pacers put together a 9-0 scoring run with less than two minutes remaining to take control of a tightly contested battle.

The Pacers, ranked sixth in the Eastern Conference regular-season standings, knocked out the East-leading Celtics and will face either the Milwaukee Bucks or New York Knicks in the semifinals. The Bucks host the New York Knicks in the quarters on Tuesday and Haliburton said the Pacers will be ready for either one. "We're a young, hungry group and we want to win every night," Haliburton said. "So we're excited to be there, but we're not complacent being there. We want to win." Buddy Hield added 21 points for the Pacers, who had seven players score in double figures to the delight of the 16,000-plus crowd at Gainbridge Fieldhouse.

"The atmosphere is crazy," Haliburton said of the playoff-type intensity in the arena, which was just what the NBA was looking for when it launched the in-season tournament hoping it would lend excitement to the early stages of a long season. "I love this," Haliburton said. Jayson Tatum scored 32 points and grabbed 12 rebounds and Jaylen Brown added 30 points and nine rebounds for Boston, who dominated inside in the first half but just couldn't keep the prolific Pacers offense in check in the second. Boston out-scored Indiana 32-14 in the paint and out-rebounded them 34-19 in the first half, leading 55-48 at the break.

The Pacers turned the tables in the second half. Haliburton, held to seven points in the first half, scored eight in the first four minutes of the third quarter. Boston coach Joe Mazzulla said 18 turnovers - six of them



INDIANAPOLIS: Jayson Tatum #0 of the Boston Celtics attempts a layup while being guarded by Tyrese Haliburton #0 and Obi Toppin #1 of the Indiana Pacers in the second quarter during the NBA In-Season Tournament on December 04, 2023. — AFP

in the third quarter when the Pacers briefly pushed their lead to 11 - doomed the Celtics. "When you turn the ball over you just let them get out in transition," he said. Even so, a game that featured 16 lead changes was all tied up at 105-105 with 1:33 to play when Indiana delivered the final blow.

Ingram powers Pelicans

Haliburton drew a foul on a step-back three-pointer and converted the free throw to give the Pacers the lead for good. Hield drilled a three-pointer and Aaron Nesmith threw down a dunk before the Celtics could respond and the Pacers held on. In Sacramento, the Kings led by as many as 15 points in the first quarter, but the Pelicans clawed back to lead 69-61 at halftime and

never trailed in the second half as they handed the Kings their first defeat of the tournament. Pels star Zion Williamson had a relatively quiet night with 10 points, but Brandon Ingram scored 30 and Herbert Jones added 23 as six New Orleans players scored in double figures.

De'Aaron Fox led the Kings with 30 points. Domantas Sabonis notched a triple-double of 26 points, 13 rebounds and 10 assists for Sacramento, who had won all four of their group-stage games. The Pelicans will play the winner of Tuesday's quarter-final between the Los Angeles Lakers and the Phoenix Suns. The title game is on Saturday in Vegas - where the finalists will be competing for the first NBA Cup and the \$500,000 in prize money per player for the winning team. — AFP

EPL announces record \$8.45bn domestic TV deal

LONDON: The Premier League announced on Monday it had agreed a record £6.7 billion (\$8.45 billion) domestic television rights deal for a four-year period starting from the 2025/26 season. The current deal is reported to be worth around £5 billion over a three-year cycle and covers 200 matches per season. The English top flight hailed the agreements shared between different broadcasters as the "largest sports media rights deals ever concluded in the UK".

Sky Sports and TNT Sports have retained their rights to show live matches, with Amazon, currently showing 20 matches per season, not part of the next cycle. Sky will screen a minimum of 215 live matches per season while TNT will broadcast 52. BBC Sport will continue to broadcast highlights via its Match of the Day program.

A Saturday afternoon blackout, designed to protect attendances in the lower leagues, will remain but for the first time all matches outside of those scheduled for 3:00 pm on Saturday will be screened live. The Premier League boasted of a four percent increase in live rights value compared with the previous process but the broadcasters will be paying significantly less per game because they will be showing more matches each season.

"The outcome of this process underlines the strength of the Premier League," said the Premier League's chief executive, Richard Masters. "It is testament to our clubs, players and managers who continue to deliver the world's most competitive football in full stadiums, and to supporters, who create an unrivalled atmosphere every week." He added: "As longstanding and valued partners, Sky Sports and TNT Sports are renowned for consistently delivering world-class coverage and programming."

"We have enjoyed record audiences and attendances in recent seasons, and we know that their continued innovation will drive more people to watch and follow the Premier League." The Premier League said the new deal would provide financial certainty for clubs throughout professional football until at least 2029. It is the first Premier League tender process since 2018 as the current deal was rolled over in 2021 for an extra three years due to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. — AFP