

3 NBK's executive management follows implementation of 'Bankee' in schools



8 Record passengers as airline industry recovers from pandemic



12 UNESCO recognizes iftar meal tradition of Ramadan



16 Messi named Time's 'Athlete of the Year'



Crown Prince freezes appointments

Defense minister stresses importance of cooperation between GCC forces



KUWAIT: Troops from GCC countries participate in a joint military exercise titled "Takamul 1" at the Al-Adaira military range on Dec 6, 2023. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

By B Izzak & Agencies

KUWAIT: HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah issued a decision on Wednesday ordering the government to freeze all types of appointments in government jobs. The decision was published in the official gazette and became effective immediately. It is valid for three months, which can be renewed.

The unprecedented decision effectively prohibits the prime minister and all Cabinet ministers, in addition to chairpersons of state establishments, to make any appointment for the next three months. HH the Crown Prince invoked an Amiri order issued two years ago delegating part of HH the Amir's powers to HH the Crown Prince.

Constitutional expert and university professor Ibrahim Al-Hmoud said on X the decision is in line with the constitution and aims to serve public interests. He said since HH the Crown Prince has invoked powers delegated to him by HH the Amir, the decision cannot be challenged in Kuwait courts.

The decision also banned promotions, transfers of employees or deputizing public employees from one position to another. There have been no comments from the government or lawmakers on the decision. Meanwhile, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Ahmad Al-Fahad Al-Sabah emphasized the importance of cooperation and coordination among the military sectors of the armed forces in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries to achieve greater understanding, integration and harmony.

He was speaking during the conclusion of the Takamul 1 military exercise on Wednesday in Al-Adaira in the northwest of the country. The exercise involved the participation of the Kuwaiti Army

Continued on Page 6

NEWS IN BRIEF

Amir's health condition stable

KUWAIT: The health condition of HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is stable, said Amiri Diwan Affairs Minister Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah Wednesday. He wished good health and speedy recovery for HH the Amir.

Private schools cannot hike fees

KUWAIT: Education Minister Adel Al-Mane issued a decision on Wednesday reiterating fees of private schools across all educational systems cannot be increased. He emphasized the ongoing validity of the provisions outlined in the ministerial resolutions regarding tuition fees for private schools, as well as private schools catering to individuals with disabilities for the academic year 2023/2024.

Tax breaks for firms with Saudi HQs

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia announced on Tuesday it would grant 30 years of tax relief to multinationals establishing regional headquarters in the kingdom. The tax-relief package includes a zero-percent rate for corporate income tax and withholding tax. Other benefits under the regional HQ program include the ability to apply for unlimited work visas and a 10-year waiver on quotas for hiring Saudis. — AFP

Putin visits UAE, Saudi on rare Middle East tour

RIYADH/ABU DHABI: Russian President Vladimir Putin arrived in Saudi Arabia Wednesday after visiting the United Arab Emirates, making a rare trip abroad as Moscow seeks to reassert itself on the global stage. It is only the third trip the Russian leader has taken outside the former Soviet Union since he invaded Ukraine, following visits to Iran and China, and comes as Moscow seeks to bolster its influence in the Middle East.

Putin was greeted by a number of Saudi officials after landing in the cap-

ital Riyadh, footage from the Kremlin showed. He met the country's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman for talks on international politics, the Zionist-Hamas war and oil markets, state media reported. The Kremlin emphasized the "great importance of maintaining dialogue with the Kingdom to preserve peace and security in the Middle East and North Africa." The two leaders will "consider ways to promote de-escalation" in the war in Gaza, it added.

The Russian leader was earlier welcomed with full cavalry escort and motorcade in the UAE, where he met President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan. A national air show team drew a Russian flag with colored fumes in the sky.

Continued on Page 6



RIYADH: Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman walks with Russian President Vladimir Putin during a welcoming ceremony on Dec 6, 2023. — AFP

Zionists keep up Gaza atrocities

GAZA: Zionist forces on Wednesday battled Hamas fighters in Gaza's main southern city, leading to "deepening horror" for civilians, the UN said, after nearly two months of war sparked by deadly attacks on the Zionist entity. Zionist troops, tanks, armored personnel carriers and bulldozers have rolled into Khan Yunis, Gaza's second-largest city, forcing already displaced civilians to flee again, witnesses told AFP. The military wing of Hamas reported fighting with Zionist forces east of the southern city.

"We are devastated," said local resident Amal Mahdi who survived an overnight Zionist strike on Khan Yunis. "We need someone to find us a solution so we can get out of this situation." Much of northern Gaza has already been re-

duced to rubble by fierce fighting and bombardment, displacing 1.9 million people according to UN figures.

With the Zionist entity now focusing on the south, the streets of Khan Yunis were almost empty early Wednesday as residents sought shelter from shelling and artillery fire, AFP journalists reported, while the dead and wounded continued to pour into the city's hospitals. The latest toll from the Gaza government's media office said 16,248 people in Gaza, most of them women and children, had been killed.

The Zionist entity has vowed to destroy Hamas and free 138 captives still held in Gaza after scores were released during a short-lived truce. But mass casualties in Gaza have sparked global concern, heightened by dire shortages caused by a Zionist siege that has seen only limited supplies of food, water, fuel and medicines enter.

Continued on Page 6

Swift named Time person of the year

NEW YORK: Time magazine named US pop superstar Taylor Swift as its person of the year on Wednesday, calling the musical force of nature the "hero of her own story". Swift has smashed industry records this year with both her tour and the film of the globetrotting musical cavalcade that is estimated to bring in almost \$2 billion of revenue as her adoring fans flock to see her in the flesh.

"Taylor Swift found a way to transcend borders and be a source of light... Swift is the rare person who is both the writer and hero of her own story," Time editor-in-chief Sam Ja-



cobs wrote in a statement. "Much of what Swift accomplished in 2023 exists beyond measurement.

Continued on Page 6



Local

Doha Declaration urges Iraq to respect Kuwait's sovereignty

GCC summit pushes for economic, political, security cooperation

DOHA: The 44th Session of the Supreme Council of the Gulf Cooperation Council, held on Tuesday, adopted the Doha Declaration, which underscores the importance of Iraq's respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Kuwait pursuant to the provisions of bilateral and multilateral agreements. The Declaration, citing UN Security Council Resolution 833 (1993) on the delineation of the Kuwait-Iraqi land and maritime boundaries, urged Iraq to adopt a serious approach to the completion of the demarcation of the maritime boundaries beyond the Mark 162.

The document called on the government of Iraq to abide by the agreement on maritime navigation in the Khor Abdullah waterway, which was signed by both countries on April 29, 2012, took effect on December 5, 2013, and was jointly lodged with the United Nations on December 18, 2013. The GCC leaders rejected categorically the historical disinformation contained in the verdict of the Supreme Federal Court of Iraq on the Khor Abdullah agreement, affirming that any unilateral step by Iraq in this regard would be null and void.

They also stated their rejection of Iraq's decision to cancel the protocol on security exchanges signed in 2008 and the appended joint plan for the safety of navigation in the Khor Abdullah, signed on December 28, 2014. The GCC Leaders renewed their support for UN Security Council Resolution 2107 (2013), which mandated the Special Representative for Iraq of the UN Secretary-General and Head of the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) to facilitate the efforts aiming to account for the missing Kuwaitis and other nationals in collaboration with the International Committee of the Red Cross and retrieve the stolen property of Kuwait, including the national archive.

GCC summit

Qatari Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammad bin Abdulrahman said on Tuesday that discussions by GCC leaders during the summit focused on raising the level of cooperation and ways to enhance it in several fields, including economic, political, and security. In a speech during a joint press conference with the Secre-



DOHA: The Representative of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah left Doha following his participation at GCC-Turkey and GCC 44th summits, which kicked off earlier in the Qatari capital. He was seen off at Hamad International Airport by Qatar Minister of Culture Sheikh Abdulrahman bin Hamad Al-Thani, number of senior Qatari Amiri Diwan representatives and top state officials. — KUNA

tary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council, Jassem Al-Budaiwi, the Qatari premier stressed that strengthening joint Gulf action is aimed at achieving the aspirations and hopes of the people in the Gulf and enhancing the position of the cooperation countries at the regional and international levels.

Sheikh Mohammad added that the Gulf leaders discussed during the summit many current regional and international issues, most notably the war on the Gaza Strip and the crimes resulting from Zionist aggression, which come in flagrant violation of international and humanitarian laws. Sheikh Mohammad stated that the leaders stressed the importance of continuing mediation efforts to reach a complete

ceasefire, ensure the opening of safe crossings, and secure the access of humanitarian aid to residents of the Gaza Strip.

Sheikh Mohammad noted that the leaders also discussed launching a political process aimed at reaching a comprehensive and just peace for the Palestinian people and preserving their legitimate rights in accordance with international legitimacy resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative on the basis of the two-state solution and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital. The Qatari Prime Minister stated that the leaders welcomed the outcomes of strategic partnerships with other countries

and groups, including the Association of Southeast Asia, the United States, the European Union, and the Association of Caribbean States.

In his response to the latest developments regarding the temporary pause in Gaza, the Qatari Prime Minister said that Qatar continues to collaborate with Egypt and the United States in making efforts to restore the humanitarian truce, release hostages, and exchange prisoners between the two sides. He stressed that there were challenges facing the efforts made by the mediators during the past week, which led to the cessation of the truce and the ability to extend it, underscoring the necessity of stopping the war and reaching a political solution. — KUNA



Guests watch the vases on display at Faridah Lashai foundation art exhibition.



The exhibition of 'Quill and verse: A calligraphic poetry'



A guest looks at one of the Palestinian faces portrayed in 'White memory' exhibition.

CAP hosts three art exhibitions

By Passant Hisham

KUWAIT: Contemporary Art Platform (CAP) hosted three exhibitions on Tuesday, where two of them depicted a combination of photography and calligraphy as a visual form of solidarity with Palestine, and the third continued the legacy of Iranian artist Farideh Lashai. In his exhibition "Quill and verse: A calligraphic poetry", Fareed Abdal, a Kuwaiti architect, artist and designer, showcased a distinctive collection of his previous calligraphic works that merged the reflection of the Palestinians' forms of resistance and their struggle with the occupation. The choice of the displayed artworks aimed to revolve around the theme of Palestine, delve into the depth of our Arab values and culture, and represent the true meaning of peace, Abdal said.

He took Kuwait Times on a tour through his artworks, which conveyed multiple powerful spiritual and political messages. For instance, one of his paintings, which featured two different prophets' stories, portrayed how self-isolation helps one to find their long-lost soul and strongly connect with it.

Another is inspired by preeminent philosopher and physician of the medieval Islamic world, Ibn Sina, showing how the Palestinian people are still able to hold on to their faith and feel contentment despite the war. An

artwork included the Star of David, a popular Jewish symbol, which he incorporated in the painting to educate the world about the origins of this symbol that goes back to our ancient history and civilization, before being stolen by the Zionist entity, he explained.

"What's really amazing about what Fareed Abdal has done is that he's been able to give us a new way of looking at ink on paper, deconstructing words, meanings, poetry and many different impressions... Whenever I see some of his pieces, I keep on going back and I can see different types of layers and spaces between the boldness of the broad brushstrokes and the fineness of the lettering that becomes an interplay of his work,"



Artwork displayed in Farideh Lashai foundation art exhibition.

For her part, the conference's head and director of the ministry's central department of primary health care, Dr Dina Al-Dhabaib, said that the conference includes 33 scientific lectures with the participation of 32 doctors and specialists over three days.

She hailed it as an important conference for all participants to exchange medical ideas that help in developing health care, which is considered an important factor in early diagnoses, treatments, and preventions. Dr Al-Dhabaib added that there are 115 health centers nationwide, including 97 chronic disease clinics, 56 mental health clinics, 84 well-kid clinics, 102 diabetes clinics, and 49 osteoporosis clinics. Honorary Treasurer and Lead Officer for International RCGP, Dr Steve Mowle, MBE, said the Royal College has been working with Kuwait since 1983. He added that in October 2023, the Royal College paid a visit to Kuwait and assessed its training program for resident doctors, affirming that it complied with the golden international standards. — KUNA

said Lubna Abbas, a guest attending the exhibition.

In the "White Memory" exhibition, Ghassan Hamada, a Jordanian-Palestinian artist, used the medium of photography to present a series of monochrome portraits and installations that explore the Palestinians' loss of their homeland in the Nakba in 1948. "A photo freezes a moment in time...and we tried as much as possible to document the last moments of these people's lives," said Hamada. According to him, all the photos were taken with mechanical traditional cameras to resemble the old time period these Palestinian people lived in.

He chose to name the exhibition "White Memory", as it refers to the Palestinians' dreams that still remind them of their homeland. "When they sleep, they don't dream of anything but that they are still in Palestine," Hamada said.

He explained that attached to each photograph capturing the face of a Palestinian person is a QR code that people can scan to listen to this person's own story from birth until the moment they were expelled out of their home and forced to flee to camps in Syria, Lebanon and Jordan. "You will hear from each person a completely different story from the other, but the only thing in common between them is their hope for return," said Hamada.

Farideh Lashai Foundation held the final exhibition titled "Studies & Sketches For Crystal & Glass Design, & Other Works," which presented a limited-edition portfolio of the Iranian artist Lashai, who passed away in 2013. The artworks included vases, silkscreens and other selected artworks from the private collections of Lashai.



Ghassan Hamada is pictured next to his art work.



Fareed Abdal stands next to his Art work.

Health care top priority in development programs

KUWAIT: Kuwait is one of the leading countries in the field of health care, and it receives great attention due to its developed medical achievements, stated Assistant Undersecretary of the Ministry of Health for Public Health Affairs, Dr Munther Al-Hasawi, on Wednesday. Speaking at the 5th Kuwait primary health care conference on behalf of the conference sponsor, Minister of Health Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi, Al-Hasawi said that Kuwait has been providing comprehensive care services for people since the early nineties.

He added that a recent ministerial decision was issued to establish the health care sector to ensure that all people receive comprehensive medical care.

Kuwait donates \$1 million to UN Refugee Agency

GENEVA: Kuwait pledged one million dollars to the UN Refugee Agency as part of its voluntary contributions to the agency's activities in 2024. Announcing the donation at the UNHCR's pledging conference on Tuesday, the country's Permanent Representative to the UN Office in Geneva, Nasser Al-Hayen, reaffirmed Kuwait's commitment to supporting the humanitarian activities of the UNHCR and other UN aid agencies.

The contributions of Kuwait to humanitarian action aim to alleviate the suffering of disaster-hit people around the globe, away from any political agendas, he said. On the one-day pledging conference, he said it coincided with exceptional disastrous incidents in several parts of the world, which required doubling down on

the UNHCR's effort to ensure the safety of vulnerable people. On behalf of Kuwait, Ambassador Al-Hayen called on the conferees to respond to the urgent humanitarian needs of the people in the Gaza Strip and shoulder a collective responsibility for addressing the complicated challenges in the territory.

The Zionist occupation forces persist in their brutal aggression on Palestinian civilians, including refugee camps and facilities of the UN aid agencies, he pointed out. The attacks of the occupation forces on civilian targets led to disruption of basic humanitarian services and deterioration of the economy and healthcare system in the Gaza Strip, forcing more than half a million people to flee their homes, Ambassador Al-Hayen went on.

He reiterated the call for the international community, particularly the UN Security Council, to shoulder their moral responsibility for halting the criminal war in Gaza and ensuring sufficient support for the civilians there. With today's pledge, Kuwait's contributions to the UN Refugee Agency over the past decade have topped \$462 million. — KUNA

Local

NBK's executive management follows implementation of 'Bankee' in schools

Aiming to promote financial literacy among government and private schools' students



KUWAIT: With the official kick-off of the "Bankee" program during this school year, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) organized a special visit to Um Atiya Ansariya Elementary School - Girls. During the visit, NBK's executive management followed up the latest updates on the implementation of the program, which aims to promote financial literacy among government and private schools' students, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Kuwait Anti-Corruption Authority "Nazaha" and Creative Confidence.

The visitors included Isam Al-Sager, Vice-Chairman and Group CEO of National Bank of Kuwait, accompanied by Maryam Al-Enezi, Assistant Undersecretary for Educational Development at the Ministry of Education, and Eng Abrar Al-Hammad, Assistant Secretary-General of the Prevention Sector at Nazaha. A large number of parents of participating students attended the visit and discussed the program's benefits with their children, who expressed their pleasure to see significant improvements in their children's financial behavior and knowledge, and also engaged in discussions with teachers about the program's impact on the students.

During the visit, the participants reviewed all the details of implementing the "Bankee" program, from the experience of the virtual bank that allows students to have a financial account in which they can trade using the "Bankos" virtual currency, and how students receive bonuses as a result of accumulating the program's currency in their accounts. They also visited the classrooms to see how the program has become part of the daily life of students in the class-



room, and how they receive bonuses for academic excellence and positive behaviors.

Having achieved a remarkable success in its pilot phase, "Bankee" encouraged more schools and students to join it. Out of 150 applicants, 30 schools have been enrolled in the program so far, in addition to a special needs school for learning difficulties (Joan Al Kuwait Elementary School), with a total of 15,000 students and 4,000 teachers.

"Bankee" also launched its website in Arabic

and English, as well as social media pages on Instagram, TikTok and YouTube, to enable all participants to benefit from the provided content, activities and events held at different schools all year round. Speaking on this, Isam Al-Sager said, "We are happy with the great impact that the "Bankee" program is making within the Kuwaiti educational system, by actively helping to promote financial literacy and inclusion among the students of government and private schools in Kuwait."

"Providing our children with financial knowledge is an investment into the future, as providing them with the skills to make well-advised financial decisions puts them on the path of success and progress," he added. "The program aims to give school students access to the financial knowledge they need to be able to make sound financial decisions throughout their lives," he noted.

Al-Sager explained that sponsoring "Bankee" aligns with NBK's broader objective of promoting financial inclusion among all segments of society saying, "NBK utilizes all its extensive capabilities and financial experience to actively contribute to promoting awareness regarding financial stability and independence for this generation of the Kuwaiti youth." It is worth mentioning that NBK recently received the Bronze Award for its "Bankee" program in the Social, Sustainable & Responsible Banking category, which recognizes the innovations made by institutions to integrate ESG standards into their operations.

"Bankee" is the first program of its kind in Kuwait, which was officially launched last October by NBK, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Nazaha, with a view to promote financial inclusion, especially among school students, to improve sustainable financial literacy among all members of society in the future. The program's primary goal is to introduce students to core financial concepts such as earning, spending, saving, and financial responsibilities. This objective is achieved by employing applied learning and gamification techniques to simulate a real-world economy within the classroom.

Art exhibition in support of Palestinian steadfastness

KUWAIT: The National Council for Culture, Arts, and Letters organized the Gaza steadfastness exhibition, which included paintings signed by Kuwaiti artists to express the extent of Kuwaiti support for Palestinian steadfastness in the face of Zionist occupation aggression. The exhibition was held at the free workshop in cooperation with a number of embassies of Arab countries in Kuwait.



Rami Tahboub

The assistant secretary general of the arts sector at the National Council for Culture, Arts, and Letters, Assistant Zamil, said the support is not limited to the political or diplomatic aspect only but also reaches art, through which it is possible to translate feelings and the extent of human suffering for what is happening in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

Al-Zamil added that "based on the leading role of Kuwait in supporting the Palestinian cause and extending a helping hand to the brothers and sisters there, we have chosen to express artistically what is happening in the Gaza Strip." The ambassador of Palestine to the country, Rami Tahboub, in a statement to the Kuwaiti news agency (KUNA), considered the exhibition another statement in Kuwait's support for Palestine and its cause, praising its support for the Palestinian people in "this ordeal that they are going through in



KUWAIT: The National Council for Culture, Arts, and Letters organized the Gaza steadfastness exhibition, which included paintings signed by Kuwaiti artists. — KUNA photos

light of the brutal aggression carried out by the occupation forces on our people in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank."

Ambassador Tahboub said that such exhibitions play a big role in conveying the message of Palestinian suffering and Arab solidarity with the Palestinian people to all over the world and to world public opinion, which "has come to stand with us and knows the truth from falsehood." "Kuwait was and remains until the moment one of the first countries to support the Palestinian people through relief campaigns, whether through the government, the Kuwait Red Crescent Society, or public benefit associations, shoulder to shoulder with the Palestinian people until this crisis disappears and the Palestinian people are protected from this injustice," he said. — KUNA



KRCS calls for development of joint programs

DOHA: Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) stressed Wednesday the importance of strengthening joint Gulf action in the field of media to achieve the aspirations of Gulf youth, which would reach the goals of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). In a statement to KUNA, KRCS Director of Public Relations and Media Department Khaled Al-Zaid called for the development of joint Gulf programs and events that take into account the future outlook and youth interest in the media field.

This came following the conclusion of the 12th meeting of the media and awareness official committee for the Red Crescent bodies in the GCC, held in Doha. The committee discussed the implementation of the training program to qualify Gulf media cadres and identify priority topics and common interests within the framework of joint international cooperation between the GCC and the regional organizations, especially the Arab Red Crescent and Red Cross Organization, he said.

The meeting also tackled preparing media cadres in the fields of relief, humanitarian, and environmental work, training programs, and topics of common priority and interest in the field of volunteer media, the statement added. The role of media in supporting humanitarian work, ways to deal with visual, audio, and print content, how to develop the benefits of modern technology, and how to improve the performance of the media staff in terms of covering relief and humanitarian work were also discussed.

The GCC General Secretariat sought, during the previous and current periods, to organize and hold workshops in the field of humanitarian media and disaster and crisis management out of its keenness to train media cadres and volunteers to deal with all humanitarian and relief fields, Al-Zaid said.

The latest relief aid

Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) announced on Wednesday the entry of a new relief aid batch containing blankets and tents into the Gaza Strip to help with the harsh weather conditions. Speaking to KUNA, the head of volunteering teams, Ahmad Abu Diyeh, said that the KRCS successfully distributed supplies of blankets and tents to the Kuwait hospital in Gaza and across shelters in Rafah city.

Abu Diyeh added that in a time like this, with the harsh weather conditions and the continued Zionist occupation aggression, this kind of aid was crucial. Recently, the KRCS revealed that 90 percent of relief aid has successfully entered the Gaza Strip. Since the onset of the Zionist brutal assault on the Gaza Strip on October 7, the State of Kuwait has sent thousands of tons of relief aid to the Gaza Strip via its humanitarian air bridge. — KUNA

PAM holds career day for jobseekers with disabilities

KUWAIT: The Public Authority of Manpower (PAM) organized with Kuwait Finance House, a career day for people with disabilities who have undergraduate, diploma, or secondary school degree to work in the private sector. It was held at the headquarters. This step is a confirmation of their support to provide job opportunities for national cadres who have disabilities to work in the banking sector in cooperation with KFH, as well as more opportunities to work in the private sector, which is compatible with the ambitions and qualifications of jobseekers, said PAM in a statement. It stressed that people with disabilities are huge and equally important in our society, as well as working to provide more opportunities to use their skills and potential in these jobs. The career day consists of an overview of the jobs and job interviews for jobseekers in KFH. — KUNA

Criminal court jails 4 for adultery and abortion

KUWAIT: The Criminal Court sentenced two Egyptians (a man and a woman) to three years in prison with hard labor for adultery, incest, pregnancy, and abortion. The court also sentenced the third defendant (Egyptian) to two years for selling abortion pills and imprisoned the building guard (Egyptian) for two years for digging a grave and burying the fetus in the yard of a building in Farwaniya. The suspects were accused of conducting an illegal abortion on a colleague's wife.

One of the suspect's wives' friends reported the incident to the police. Detectives conducted secret investigations, which revealed that the wife had a relationship with the second defendant. After notifying the public prosecutor, the body was exhumed, and it was confirmed that the baby had been aborted. Using DNA testing, it was found that the first defendant was the biological father of the fetus, indicating that the wife had cheated on her husband.

Azerbaijan embassy celebrates as Shusha declared 'Cultural Capital of Turkic World'

City also named the cultural capital of the Islamic world



Ambassador of Azerbaijan to Kuwait Emil Karimov speaks at the event.

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: The Embassy of Azerbaijan held an event on Wednesday to celebrate the declaration of Azerbaijan's Shusha city as the "Cultural Capital of the Turkic World" for 2023. During his opening remarks, Azeri Ambassador Emil Karimov said Shusha city of Azerbaijan was declared as the "Cultural Capital of the Turkic World" for 2023 at the extraordinary meeting of the permanent council of ministers of culture of the member countries of TURKSOY. In addition, Shusha has been declared the cultural capital of the Islamic world for 2024 by ISESCO.

"In the second half of the 18th century, Shusha,

which is considered a city of historical, cultural and strategic importance in Azerbaijan, reached the world markets with its carpets, silks, fabrics and porcelain dishes, and thus gained great fame. In the 19th century, a large number of poets, musicians, singers, artists, architects, doctors and teachers lived in Shusha, which had a population of 25,000. This great class of intellectuals played a great role in developing science and culture there," Karimov said.

In a pivotal moment in history, the ambassador highlighted that Shusha was liberated from occupation on Nov 8. Recognizing the significance of this victory, President Ilham Aliyev decreed Nov 8 as Victory Day in Azerbaijan. The year 2022 was declared the "Year of Shusha", marking the city's

resurgence with vibrant cultural events. Shusha quickly reclaimed its rich cultural life, hosting the "Kharibulbul" music festival and Vagif Poetry Days, along with various local and international events.

Karimov noted Azerbaijan's commitment to the reconstruction of Karabakh and the East Zangezur Economic Region is evident in the allocation of significant resources from the state budget. The "Great Return" program underscores the goal of ensuring the safe return of people displaced from their homes 30 years ago. The unwavering support of Turkic states during Azerbaijan's Patriotic War and the restoration of Karabakh serve as a testament to the strengthening ties between these countries.

Movie Night 2023: Exploring unique Korean storytelling

KUWAIT: The Embassy of the Republic of Korea to Kuwait, in collaboration with the Korean Film Council and Kuwait National Cinema Company, proudly held 'Korean Movie Night 2023' at Cinescape, Al-Muhallab Mall, Hawally, on December 5 and 6. This event celebrated the ever-increasing interest in Korean culture in Kuwait as well as globally, living up to the rising popularity of K-pop, K-food, the Korean language, and notably, Korean dramas and films.

Ambassador Chung Byung-ha in his opening address, introduced the global appeal of Korean dramas and films, attributing their success to compelling and unique narratives. He elaborated that these storylines are rooted in the rich history of Korea, echoing the nation's journey of overcoming challenges and achieving rapid development from being a war-stricken, impoverished country to a developed



nation. This history is intricately woven into the storytelling, reflecting the introspection and aspirations of the Korean people.

Highlighting the cultural resonance in Kuwait, Ambassador Chung pointed out the significant presence of Korean dramas on Netflix Kuwait. He noted a remarkable increase from 17 dramas in the weekly top 10 rankings in 2022 to 26 in 2023, signifying a surge in their popularity. This year's Korean Movie Night 2023 showcased the Korean movie 'Concrete Utopia,' which drew public attention by winning Best Director and Best Actor awards at a prestigious Korean film festival this year.

'Concrete Utopia' is a work that proves the resilience of the humanity in the face of adversity. Despite being set in an evident disaster and apocalyptic situation, the film includes the paradoxical word 'Utopia' in its title and explores themes such as human nature, coexistence, and hope, resonating deeply with viewers.



Coast guards seize illicit drugs, arrest 8 suspects

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Interior announced on Wednesday that the General Directorate of the Coast Guard was able to arrest eight suspects who tried to smuggle about 100 kilograms of methamphetamine into the country by sea, with a market value of KD 2 million (about \$6.5 million). The General Department of Relations and Security Media said in a press statement that it received information about a ship that had arrived in Kuwait and was loaded with narcotic substances. Security operatives were immediately formed, and after an investigation, they seized the vessel.



Scan & Subscribe
KD 20 a year

For Individuals Only



Scan Now

Kuwait Times
Established 1961
The First English Daily in the Arabian Gulf



Tel: 24833199 Ext: 220



Indonesia rescuers find last missing hiker on volcano, toll rises to 23

US facing growing Middle East crisis tied to Zionist-Hamas war

Page 6

Page 7



GAZA: Palestinians flee from Khan Yunis to Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip. — AFP

Palestinians in Gaza living in 'utter, deepening horror': UN

Call for an urgent end of hostilities and release of hostages: Turk

GENEVA: Palestinians in the Gaza Strip are living in "utter, deepening horror", the UN human rights chief said Wednesday, as he pleaded for an immediate ceasefire between Zionist entity and Hamas. Volker Turk said there was a high risk of atrocity crimes being committed in such "catastrophic" humanitarian circumstances.

"Citizens in Gaza continue to be relentlessly bombarded by Zionist entity and collectively punished — suffering death, siege, destruction and deprivation of the most essential human needs such as food, water, lifesaving medical supplies and other essentials on a massive scale," he told a press conference.

"Palestinians in Gaza are living in utter, deepening horror." He said 1.9 million of the Palestinian enclave's 2.2 million people had been displaced and were being pushed into "ever-diminishing and extremely overcrowded places in southern Gaza, in unsanitary and unhealthy conditions".

"The catastrophic situation we see unfolding in the Gaza Strip was entirely foreseeable and preventable. "In these circumstances, there is a heightened risk of atrocity crimes," the United Nations high commissioner for human rights said.

"As an immediate step, I call for an urgent cessation of hostilities and the release of all hostages," he said, adding:

"you need to come back to your senses".

'Hateful rhetoric'

The Zionist entity declared war on Hamas after the militant group's October 7 attacks that killed 1,200 people, mostly civilians, according to Zionist authorities, and saw around 240 hostages taken into Gaza. The latest toll from the Hamas-run government media office said 16,248 people in Gaza, most of them women and children, had been killed.

The Zionist entity has vowed to destroy Hamas and free 138 hostages still held after scores were released during a short-lived truce.

Turk said he was gravely concerned by "dehumanizing and inciteful statements" made by current and former Zionist officials, as well as Hamas figures. "History has shown us where this kind of language can lead," he said. "This is not just unacceptable, but a competent court may view such statements, in the circumstances in which they were made, as incitement to atrocity crimes."

Decrying a sharp rise in hate speech globally over the past two months — in particular anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim bigotry — he said political leaders using "inflammatory, toxic and hateful rhetoric... must be vigorously condemned".

Push for peace

Turk said the human rights crisis in the occupied West Bank was also "extremely alarming", calling for Zionist authorities to take immediate steps to end "widespread impunity" for violations.

"The only way to end the accumulative sufferings is ending the occupation and achieving the two-state solution," he said. Turk said he had met Palestinians and Zionists who want a peaceful future for both sides, whose voices were currently not being heard. "I hope that they will be much stronger in the future," he said. "One thing is very clear: It cannot go back to what it was." — AFP



TUSCALOOSA: Combo photo shows (from left) US Republican presidential candidate Chris Christie, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, US Republican presidential candidate Nikki Haley and entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy speaking during the second Republican presidential primary debate at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library in Simi Valley. — AFP

Republican stage shrinks for 4th US presidential debate

TUSCALOOSA: US presidential hopefuls limbered up Wednesday for the fourth debate in the 2024 Republican primary, with the race narrowing to a head-to-head battle to be the main alternative to runaway frontrunner Donald Trump.

The former president—who is running to retake the White House despite facing 91 felony charges—maintains a historically large lead and has seen his polling go from strength to strength with each new indictment.

But he has skipped the debates, seeing no advantage in sharing the stage with distant rivals, and rendering them a sideshow to the battle pitting his presidential ambitions against the might of the US justice system.

Meanwhile former UN ambassador Nikki Haley has been on an upward trajectory, threatening Florida Governor Ron DeSantis's status as the most viable Trump understudy, six weeks ahead of the first nomination vote. She hit out at DeSantis's faltering polling numbers and Trump's foreign policy record on Friday, telling Fox News she was proud of creating jobs and curbing crime as South Carolina governor in the 2010s.

"Our focus is on making America strong and proud. We're going to do it by getting our economy back on track. We're going to get our kids reading again," she said. "We're going to make sure that crime comes down. We're going to close our borders once and for all, and we're go-

ing to let the world know America's back."

Only four candidates from the last debate are still in the race and expected to attend Wednesday's showdown in Alabama: DeSantis, Haley, entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy and former New Jersey governor Chris Christie.

Upper hand

Much of Haley's momentum has been credited to strong performances in the previous three debates, and she is riding high on a key endorsement from the powerful Koch family and \$250,000 from LinkedIn co-founder Reid Hoffman, a major Democratic donor.

In a sign of the Desantis camp's eagerness to gain ground from Haley, spokesman Bryan Griffin slammed the donation as evidence she is actually "a liberal." "She would let corporations set immigration policy, roll out the red carpet for China, hike taxes on hardworking Americans, and require social media users to register with the government," he argued.

Trump, 77, is way out front in polling at around 60 percent, but faces prosecution in four jurisdictions, and will be forced to divide his attention between the election and a series of trials if he wins the nomination. He is accused of racketeering and leading a criminal conspiracy in his efforts to overturn the results of the 2020 election, mishandling classified documents and lying in business records to cover up hush money payments to a porn actress.

In the battle to usurp Trump should voters get cold feet, DeSantis is averaging 13 percentage points to Haley's 10 in the two major polling averages collated by RealClearPolitics and FiveThirtyEight. But presidential nominees aren't selected in national primaries and in some of the early states that matter most, Haley has the upper hand on DeSantis in the non-Trump undercard. — AFP

Peru court orders release of ex-president Fujimori, jailed for abuses

LIMA: Peru's Constitutional Court on Tuesday ordered the release of former president Alberto Fujimori, 85, who was serving a 25-year prison sentence for crimes against humanity committed on his watch. A court ruling seen by AFP ordered the "immediate" release under supervision of Fujimori, who was president from 1990 to 2000. The ruling reinstates an earlier pardon.

Fujimori has been jailed since 2009 over massacres committed by army death squads in 1991 and 1992 in which 25 people, including a child, were killed in supposed anti-terrorist operations. In February, Fujimori was admitted to hospital suffering from an irregular heartbeat.

He suffers recurrent respiratory, neurological and hypertension problems and has had tongue cancer. Tuesday's ruling reinstated a pardon granted to the ex-president for humanitarian reasons in 2017 but revoked by the Supreme Court two years later.

Last year, the Constitutional Court again ordered his release on humanitarian grounds, but the Inter-American Court of Human Rights urged Peru not to free him, and Lima agreed. Fujimori was impeached in November 2000 on grounds of "moral incapacity" and was accused of corruption.

The previous day he had fled to Japan, where his parents were from, and resigned by fax. He later went to Chile, from where he was extradited in 2007. Tuesday's ruling cannot be appealed. Fujimori was serving his sentence at the small Barbadillo jail at the barracks of the special operations police in eastern Lima.

There he grows flowers, paints and receives family visits. His family has submitted several petitions to have him released on health grounds but those were all rejected. Fujimori's lawyer Elio Riera traveled to the prison after Tuesday's ruling to fill out the documents required for the release, he told RPP radio, adding the ex-president was "very satisfied" and received the news with "great joy."



LIMA, PERU: Supporters of former Peruvian president Alberto Fujimori gather at the entrance of Barbadillo prison to demand his release in the eastern outskirts of Lima on December 5, 2023. Peru's Constitutional Court on Tuesday ordered the release of former president Alberto Fujimori, 85, who has been serving a 25-year prison sentence for crimes against humanity. — AFP

Iron fist

A group of Fujimori's supporters arrived at the prison wearing white T-shirts emblazoned with the phrase "Fujimori freedom." "Justice has been done for a man who did so much for Peru," said lawmaker Alejandro Aguinaga of Fuerza Popular, the party of Keiko Fujimori, the ex-president's eldest daughter.

Elsewhere, in front of the justice ministry, some 30 people holding flowers and photos of victims of the army death squads, gathered to protest the order for his release. Fujimori has divided Peruvians like few other ex-leaders.

For some, he bolstered economic growth through his neo-liberal economic policies, and deserves praise for crushing left-wing rebel groups. Others remember with loathing his ruthless, authoritarian government style. In a separate case, he pleaded guilty to bribing lawmakers and spying on rivals while in power. Fujimori was also investigated over the forced sterilization of hundreds of thousands of poor, mostly Indigenous women during his final four years in power. — AFP

International

US facing growing Middle East crisis tied to Zionist-Hamas war

US has shifted significant military assets to the ME since October 7

WASHINGTON: Washington is facing an increasingly complex and dangerous crisis resulting from the Zionist-Hamas war, which has sparked repeated militant attacks and drawn US military attention and assets back to the Middle East. The United States has deployed two aircraft carriers and other forces in a bid to deter a devastating region-wide conflict. But the current violence in the Middle East — while not rising to that level — still carries significant danger.

Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen raised the stakes over the weekend by striking commercial vessels in the Red Sea, while a US Navy destroyer shot down several inbound drones as it operated in the area and responded to distress calls.

"Without question there's been escalation," but all parties, especially the United States, "are trying to manage these clashes in ways that do not explode into a regional war," said Jeffrey Feltman, a visiting fellow at the Brookings Institution and former US assistant secretary of state for near eastern affairs. However, "I think we should be deeply, deeply worried that step-by-step escalation, while perhaps no party intends it to turn into a regional conflagration, could lead us there," he said.

'Have their cake'

The Houthis said they targeted two of the three ships that were hit in the Red Sea on Sunday, claiming they were Zionist vessels and that such attacks would continue "until the Zionist entity aggression against our steadfast brothers in the Gaza Strip stops." The US Navy shot down three drones launched from Yemen the same day — the targets of which were unclear — and others as well as missiles during the past six weeks, while the Houthis downed an American drone last month.

Feltman said the Houthis and Lebanon's Hezbollah, which has repeatedly traded fire with Zionist since the outbreak of the war with Hamas on October 7, "are basically trying to have their cake and eat it too."

"They're trying to say that they are part of the resistance, that they are standing in solidarity with the beleaguered Palestinian population in Gaza," but "they're doing it in a way, I think, that they believe will prevent a full-scale war," he said.

The latest round of conflict between Zionist entity and Hamas began when the Palestinian militant group carried out a shock cross-border attack that Zionist officials say killed 1,200 people. Zionists responded with a relentless land and air campaign that the Hamas-run government in Gaza says has left more than

16,200 people dead.

In addition to the attacks launched from Yemen and Lebanon, US troops in Iraq and Syria have been targeted by rockets and drones on dozens of occasions since mid-October, with the militants who claimed responsibility repeatedly citing the situation in Gaza.

Washington has blamed Iran-backed groups for the attacks and has carried out multiple strikes against those forces as well as sites in the region it said were linked to Tehran.

'Testing limits'

The US military fought a bloody war in Iraq from 2003 to 2011, later provided support to local forces in that country and Syria as they battled the Islamic State jihadist group, and has carried out numerous raids and strikes against militants in the region over the years.

But Washington is seeking to move on from the counterinsurgency-centric "War on Terror" conflicts in the Middle East and Afghanistan to put greater focus on countering China, which it has identified as its most consequential challenge.

The United States has shifted significant military assets to the Middle East since October 7, but that does not necessarily undermine efforts in the Asia-Pacific region. "While a long-term focus on



RAFAH: Palestinian children collect food at a donation point provided by a charity group in the southern Gaza Strip city of Rafah, on December 6, 2023, amid continuing battles between Zionist entity and the Palestinian militant group Hamas. — AFP

the Middle East would detract from readiness in East Asia, near-term responses are unlikely to provoke a near-term crisis in East Asia," said Jon Alterman, director of the Middle East Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Additionally, "the demonstrated ability to deploy quickly to defend allies and interests is watched carefully

in Asia, among allies and adversaries alike," he said. Alterman said the situation in the Middle East could potentially "go in a bad direction," but that he does not see the conflict as being out of control at this point. "The United States remains the preponderant power," he said, while America's adversaries are "carefully testing limits." — AFP

Ex-PM Johnson apologizes to COVID victims

LONDON: Boris Johnson on Wednesday apologized for "the pain and the loss and the suffering" caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, as he began giving evidence at a public inquiry into his government's handling of the health crisis. The former prime minister, who has faced a barrage of criticism from former aides for alleged indecisiveness and a lack of scientific understanding during the pandemic, is facing two days in the witness box.

Johnson, who was forced from office last year over lockdown-breaching parties held in Downing Street during the pandemic, accepted that "mistakes" had "unquestionably" been made. "I understand the feeling of the victims and their families and I'm deeply sorry for the pain and the loss and the suffering to those victims and their families," Johnson said.

Johnson, 59, was briefly interrupted as a protester was ordered from the inquiry room after refusing to sit down during the apology. "Inevitably we got some things wrong," Johnson continued, before adding "we did our level best" and that he took per-

sonal responsibility for decisions made. The former premier had arrived around three hours early for the proceedings, with some suggesting he was eager to avoid relatives of the COVID bereaved who gathered outside later in the morning.

Nearly 130,000 people died with COVID in the UK by mid-July 2021, one of the worst official per capita tolls among Western nations. Johnson will insist the decisions he took ultimately saved hundreds of thousands of lives, the Times newspaper reported, citing a lengthy written statement set to be published later Wednesday.

The Times said he would argue he had a "basic confidence that things would turn out alright" on the "fallacious logic" that previous health threats had not proven as catastrophic as feared. But he is expected to say that overall, the government succeeded in its main goal of preventing the state-run health service from being overwhelmed by making the "right decisions at the right times".

He will also say that while the country's death toll was high, it defied most of the gloomiest predictions and "ended the pandemic well down the global league table of excess mortality". According to The Times, Johnson, who quit in part because of revelations about lockdown-breaking parties in Downing Street, has reviewed 6,000 pages of evidence and spent hours in talks with lawyers.

He can expect to be questioned on whether he



LONDON: Protesters holds a placard reading "The dead can't hear your apologies" during a gathering outside the UK COVID-19 Inquiry building in west London, on December 6, 2023 as Britain's former Prime Minister Boris Johnson is inside giving evidence regarding his management of the pandemic. — AFP

thought the government was initially complacent about the pandemic, despite evidence suggesting a more proactive approach was needed. He will also need to justify his timing of the first UK lockdown on March 23, 2020, which some senior ministers, offi-

cial and scientific advisers now believe was too late. Johnson, who was treated in hospital intensive care for COVID early on in the pandemic, is expected to say that shutting down the country went against all his personal and political instincts. — AFP

Crown Prince freezes...

Continued from Page 1

ground forces and the joint Peninsula Shield forces. Sheikh Ahmad highlighted that cooperation and coordination between the military sectors of GCC countries contribute to raising the level of readiness and combat efficiency, thereby supporting the security and stability of the region. He commended the high morale and outstanding performance of the participating forces, which reflected their readiness, preparedness and field skills. Sheikh Ahmad emphasized that cooperation between armed forces in GCC countries serves as an exemplary model for integration and excellence in joint Gulf action.

Col Hamad Al-Sager, the official spokesperson of the Kuwaiti ministry of defense, confirmed the success and achievement of the exercise's objectives as outlined in the statement. He noted that the exercise, conducted within the framework of integration between the Peninsula Shield forces and the Kuwaiti land force, serves as a model for military cooperation and coordination among GCC countries. Sager stated that the exercise, which commenced on Nov 26, involved joint efforts and training experiences that contributed to enhancing coordination and combat readiness.

Sager stressed that the success of this exercise re-

flects the commitment of GCC countries to enhance their capabilities and improve their readiness to ensure safety and stability in the region. He highlighted that this periodic exercise represents a positive step towards enhancing military cooperation and defense capabilities. He added it is a special exercise for the Peninsula Shield forces carried out jointly with the ground forces of member states every four years, emphasizing its significance in achieving the concept of integration between participating ground forces and improving coordination while understanding the operational environment of different regions.

Upon concluding the exercise, Sheikh Ahmad received an explanation from the Commander of the Land Force Maj Gen Mohammed Al-Dhafiri regarding the nature, course and scenario of the final exercise. Dhafiri reviewed the capabilities of the participating forces and the most important tactical positions throughout its stages. He explained that the exercise and its multiple stages contribute to enhancing cooperation and joint coordination between the Kuwaiti land force and the joint Peninsula Shield forces, fostering complete knowledge and understanding of the tasks and duties entrusted to these forces. The exercise also aims to enhance efficiency and proficiency in implementing these tasks at the highest levels.

Subsequently, attendees witnessed the activities concluding the exercise, which included a joint practical field application and live ammunition shooting. The execution displayed a high level of professionalism and accuracy in implementation.

The NFL a whole new wave of fans as her hundreds of millions of social media followers checked out her new squeeze. "For building a world of her own that made a place for so many, for spinning her story into a global legend, for bringing joy to a society desperately in need of it, Taylor Swift is TIME's 2023 Person of the Year," Jacobs said.

The "Eras" tour currently has more than 145 dates. According to Pollstar, the industry magazine covering the performing arts, each concert generates \$13 million in revenue, which would bring the tour total to around \$1.9 billion. No artist or group has previously crossed the symbolic billion-dollar threshold. Swift's defining tool has proved to be social media, through which she regularly interacts with fans.

Born in Pennsylvania, Swift started writing country songs on guitar in her early teens. Her father shifted his job in financial services to the country music capital of Nashville to allow her a chance in the industry. After winning a growing mainstream audience for her introspective country songs, Swift switched to a thoroughly pop direction for her fifth studio album — "1989", named after her year of birth. — AFP

Putin visits UAE, Saudi on rare...

Continued from Page 1

"Today, thanks to your posture, our relations have reached unprecedented levels," Putin told his counterpart at the presidential palace, saying the UAE was "Russia's main trading partner in the Arab world."

Bilateral trade hit a record \$9 billion last year, according to the Kremlin, and Putin said "a number of projects" were underway in the oil and gas sector. The UAE is currently hosting the COP28 UN climate talks, but the Kremlin did not specify whether Putin attended any related events. Putin is next set to host Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi for talks in Moscow on Thursday, as the two countries strengthen economic and military ties in the face of Western sanctions.

With Moscow largely insulated from Western sanctions thanks to rebounding oil revenues, and its military fending off a Ukrainian counteroffensive in recent months, analysts say Putin may



ABU DHABI: Russian President Vladimir Putin and Emir of the United Arab Emirates Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan attending a welcoming ceremony on Dec 6, 2023. — AFP

be sensing reviving fortunes. "Putin has certainly been speaking more confidently now than any time since the war began," said Nigel Gould-Davies, senior fellow at the International Institute for Strategic Studies. — AFP

Swift named Time person...

Continued from Page 1

She mapped her journey and shared the results with the world: She committed to validating the dreams, feelings, and experiences of people, especially women, who felt overlooked and regularly underestimated."

The huge \$92.8 million opening earlier this year of Taylor Swift's "The Eras Tour" film set the tone for the 33-year-old "Cruel Summer" singer's 2023. Advance ticket sales for the movie topped \$100 million worldwide, theater operator AMC said, making it the best-selling feature-length concert film in history. "(Fans) had to work really hard to get the tickets... I wanted to play a show that was longer than they ever thought it would be, because that makes me feel good leaving the stadium," Swift told Time.

This year, Swift's blossoming romance with Kansas City Chiefs player Travis Kelce has also brought

homeless and some are searching for their missing children," he said. International aid groups have condemned the succession of orders to flee from one area to another, saying civilians were running out of options.

The Zionist entity's army has published a map it said was intended to enable Gazans to "evacuate from specific places for their safety if required". But the UN children's agency, UNICEF, said it was "not possible" to create safe zones in a tiny territory with some 2.4 million people.

Fighting resumed after the collapse on Friday of a Qatar-mediated truce that saw scores of Zionist and other captives released in exchange for Palestinian prisoners. The war has sparked fears of a wider regional conflict, with near-daily exchanges of fire with Iran-backed Hezbollah across the Zionist entity's border with Lebanon and a surge of deadly violence in the occupied West Bank.

On Wednesday, the Zionist entity said a missile fired at the Red Sea town of Eilat "was successfully intercepted" after sirens blared in the resort. In the West Bank, Zionist troops raided the northern Faraa refugee camp early Wednesday, sparking clashes that killed two people, one of them aged 16, Palestinian news agency Wafa reported. Palestinian authorities say more than 250 Palestinians have been killed during the current conflict by Zionist fire or settler attacks in the West Bank, which the Zionist entity has occupied since 1967. — AFP

International

Indonesia rescuers find last missing hiker on volcano, toll rises to 23

Marapi still billowing a column of smoke into the sky

AGAM: The last hiker missing after a volcano eruption in Indonesia was found dead Wednesday, rescuers said, raising the death toll to 23 three days after the disaster. Mount Marapi on the island of Sumatra in Indonesia's west spewed an ash tower 3,000 metres (9,800 feet) -- taller than the volcano itself--into the sky on Sunday as 75 people hiked in the area.

Hundreds of rescuers have worked tirelessly to find the missing hikers, who have been carried down the mountain in bodybags in an arduous search effort hampered by further eruptions and bad weather that sometimes forced workers to take shelter.

"The joint search and rescue team has found one victim of the Mount Marapi eruption, who is now in the process of being evacuated," Abdul Malik, head of the Padang Search and Rescue Agency, told reporters on Wednesday evening. Basarnas, the national search and rescue agency, earlier identified the final hiker as a woman.

It came after Suharyono, the West Sumatra police chief who like many Indonesians goes by one name, told reporters late on Tuesday that the last hiker was feared dead. "23 people are suspected to have died. We all prayed they all could be rescued but there was nothing we could do. God and nature had made a decision," he said.

Marapi, which means "Mountain of Fire", was still billowing a column of smoke into the sky on Wednesday morning before another eruption just after midday local time (0500 GMT), an AFP jour-

nalist said. Officials monitoring the volcano had also detected at least five further eruptions on Tuesday as the search went on.

'Some jumped'

Fifty-two people had been rescued since the eruption and some of the survivors have described their panic after it started. "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 and then immediately ran away as everyone did. Some jumped and fell. I took cover behind the rocks, there were no trees there," Suharyono said on Tuesday evening that two of the 75 hikers were police officers, one of whom survived. He suspected the other had been killed.

"They both just wanted to see the volcano, they were off duty," he said. "One of them survived and had a broken arm, he is being treated by doctors. For the other one, we suspected he died. Let's wait for confirmation."

The head of Indonesia's volcanology agency, Hendra Gunawan, said Marapi has been at the second level of a four-tier alert system since 2011, and a three-kilometre exclusion zone had been imposed around its crater.

He appeared to blame hikers after the eruption for going too close to the crater, saying the agency recommended no activity in that area.



AGAM: A woman (2nd L) is comforted by family members after receiving information her relative had died on Mount Marapi when it erupted on December 3, at the Batu Palono hiking post in Agam. -- AFP

The official number of hikers given by officials was sourced to an online registration system but officials warned there could have been more on illegal routes.

"Maybe there were hikers who were not registered, and sometimes illegal hikers did not want to pay, they

just climbed," said Suharyono. Indonesia experiences frequent seismic and volcanic activity due to its position on the Pacific "Ring of Fire", where tectonic plates collide. Marapi is the most active volcano on Sumatra and one of nearly 130 active volcanoes in the Indonesian archipelago. -- AFP

N Korean defector plans new life after high-risk escape

SEOUL: One stormy night in May, Kim loaded his family into his home-made wooden boat and sailed away from North Korea, hoping to give his children a life of freedom. Tens of thousands of North Koreans have fled to South Korea since the peninsula was divided by war in the 1950s, but most go overland to neighbouring China first.

Defecting by sea is extremely rare and seen as far more dangerous than land routes, with only a handful of people making it across the de facto maritime border, the Northern Limit Line. But Kim, a 31-year-old fisherman who asked that AFP use only his surname for security reasons, was confident he could pull it off—and, after two failed attempts, he finally managed to get his family of nine out of the country.

For months, he studied border patrol patterns and waited until an opportunity arose: when North Korea started lifting its coastal blockades after the COVID pandemic lockdown. "I studied the terrain and weather conditions and set out on the worst night when there was a sea warning in effect," he told AFP in Seoul. Everyone in his family—even his three-year-old—worked together to ensure the success of their escape, he said.

"It feels like I was born a second time," Kim said. "In the North, planes flying in the sky were something



SEOUL: (FILES) Defector and former North Korean diplomat Thae Yong Ho (L) and fellow defector member of the National Assembly Ji Seong-ho attend a job fair for North Korean defectors, in Seoul. -- AFP

I only saw in my dreams, in movies and in TV dramas, but now I can actually ride it and it feels like I've been born in my next life."

After months of debriefing, Kim is now ready to move on with his new life, and attended a major job fair for North Koreans organised by authorities in South Korea—the first such event in nine years. Some defectors have struggled to integrate. Decades of division coupled with South Korea's rapid economic development, mean there are linguistic, cultural and practical challenges to overcome.

The job fair is one of many initiatives organised by the government that seek to assist defectors. Kim was

visibly blown away by dozens of job possibilities at the fair held at the COEX Convention Centre, in which about 100 companies and public institutions took part.

"Since I come directly from the North, I'm quite surprised that such a culture exists," he said, clutching a pile of employment brochures. Kim, who spent years working in North Korea's fishing industry, said he had long dreamed of being a ship navigator—something that was impossible in his former home.

North Korea's shipping industry is tightly controlled, with access to jobs very restricted, and dependent on having the right background and connections. "For ordinary people, (becoming a navigator) could only be a grandiose dream," Kim said. "But here, I heard that anything is possible if you put in a little effort, so I'm going to give it a try."

'Absurd brainwashing'

Kim had led a quiet, diligent life in North Korea, working towards owning his own boat one day. He started off as a crew member on a fishing boat and then learned to dive to make more money. Kim eventually earned enough to build a wooden boat, which he operated for around five years before setting out on his risky sea voyage to South Korea.

He told AFP that he decided to defect after his children returned home one day from an "absurd brainwashing session". "I wanted them to be able to do, to say, and to see whatever they want, which basically does not exist in North Korea," Kim told AFP.

"I wanted to show them that there is a better world, that there is a bigger world out there," he said. "You can lead a stable life in North Korea now if you plan well and work hard, but there is no freedom." -- AFP

police later clarified there were only two. Another body was still being identified. "I call that place 'killer curve'... it was already the second Ceres bus that fell off there," said Cadio, referring to the bus company.

"With the many number of deaths that road must be abandoned... and make another road to make that area safe." The heavily forested ravine was around 30 metres (100 feet) deep, Cadio said.

Train said the bus "fell from a high place", resulting in many casualties. "Based on the witnesses, it was a mechanical failure. The driver lost control, possible brake failure," Train said. Cadio visited the hospital where survivors were being treated for their injuries. She promised government assistance for medical and funeral expenses of victims.

Train said the search and rescue operation had finished and authorities would now focus on retrieving the bus. "We searched for the bodies until this morning," Train said. "It was tiring to go up and down." Deadly road accidents are common in the Southeast Asian nation, where drivers frequently flout the rules and vehicles are often poorly maintained or overloaded. -- AFP

17 people killed in Philippines bus crash

MANILA: Seventeen people died and 11 were injured when a passenger bus careened off a road on a "killer curve" and plunged down a mountain in the central Philippines, officials said Wednesday. The bus was travelling in Hamtic municipality in Antique province when the crash happened Tuesday afternoon, provincial disaster agency head Roderick Train told AFP. Seven people were in critical condition in hospital and four others were stable, Train said, describing the section of road as "accident prone". One Kenyan national was among those killed, and a second Kenyan was among those critically injured.

Governor Rhodora Cadio earlier told radio station DZRH there were four Kenyans on board the bus that was carrying mostly residents of Antique. Local

Philippines names militants in Catholic mass bombing

MANILA: Philippine police named two Filipino members of a pro-Islamic State militant group on Wednesday as suspects in the deadly bombing of a Catholic mass in the country's insurgency-plagued south. Four people were killed and 50 were wounded in Sunday's attack on worshippers gathered inside a university gym in Marawi, the country's largest Muslim city, which was besieged by militants in 2017.

The Islamic State group claimed the bombing, which President Ferdinand Marcos blamed on "foreign terrorists". Police said previously they were chasing four men in connection with the assault, which the military has described as a possible revenge attack for their operations against militant groups in the region.

The two suspects named on Wednesday—Kadapi Mimbasa and Arsani Membisa—belonged to the Dawlah Islamiyah-Maute group, police regional director Brigadier General Allan Nobleza told a news conference.

A third man, still unidentified, acted as a lookout for the attackers, Nobleza said. "We are mobilising all our resources to ensure that the perpetrators are put behind bars so they could answer the crimes that they have committed," Nobleza told reporters. Maute was one of the pro-IS groups that 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. Witnesses told police that Mimbasa and Membisa wore face masks when they entered the gym before Sunday's service and were seen acting suspiciously, Nobleza said.

The men were already wanted by police for illegal possession of explosives and murder, he said. 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



HAMTIC: This handout photo taken on December 5, 2023 and released on December 6 by the Iloilo City Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office shows rescue personnel working at the scene where a bus plunged into a ravine in Hamtic town, Antique province, central Philippines. -- AFP

4 Rohingya killed in Bangladesh refugee camp shootout

COX'S BAZAR: Four Rohingya refugees were killed during a gunfight between two insurgent groups in Bangladesh, police said Wednesday, in the latest sign of deteriorating security in the country's overcrowded relief camps. Bangladesh is home to around a million members of the stateless and mainly Muslim minority, most of whom fled a 2017 military crackdown in Myanmar that is now subject to a UN genocide probe. The dozens of squalid refugee camps housing the Rohingya have emerged as a battleground between rival armed groups who have used the settlements as staging posts for drug trafficking and human smuggling.

Local police chief Shamim Hossain told AFP that an hourlong shootout took place between the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) and Rohingya Solidarity Organisation (RSO) on Tuesday night. "Four Rohingya refugees were killed and two Rohingya were seriously injured," he added. Neither group gave immediate comment on the clash. The RSO has been challenging the larger and more established ARSA for control of the camps since the start of the year, coinciding with a crackdown on ARSA by Bangladeshi security forces. Violence has long been a fact of life for those living in the refugee settlements.

Police say more than 60 Rohingya refugees have been killed in Bangladesh camp clashes this year, including women and children. The United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) said Sunday it was "alarmed by the continuing deterioration of security conditions in the camps". Malnutrition is also widespread, with the UN food agency saying a funding shortfall this year had forced it to cut rations by a third. Those Rohingya remaining in Myanmar face severe persecution by authorities who deny them citizenship and access to healthcare. The desperate situation both there and in the Bangladesh camps has prompted thousands of Rohingya to embark upon dangerous and often deadly sea trips to Southeast Asian countries to escape. More than 1,000 landed in Indonesia's westernmost province last month, the biggest wave of Rohingya since 2015. Nearly 350 Rohingya died or went missing last year while attempting hazardous sea crossings, the UNHCR has estimated.

Meanwhile, more than one hundred Indonesians protested Wednesday against Rohingya refugees who arrived on a western island by boat last week, calling for them to be relocated and clashing with police. The mostly Muslim Rohingya are heavily persecuted in Buddhist-majority Myanmar, and thousands risk their lives each year on sea journeys to try and reach Malaysia or Indonesia. The last month has seen a spike in journeys to Indonesia's westernmost province of Aceh from Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh—a voyage of about 1,800 kilometres (1,120 miles) -- with more than 1,000 arrivals in the biggest such wave since a 2017 Myanmar military crackdown.

A group of 139 refugees including women and children landed on Sabang island on Saturday, but locals threatened to push them back to sea and demanded that authorities move them. They were then relocated to a dock where they were kept in tents.

On Wednesday dozens of police blocked a group of around 150 protesters who were trying to breach a gate and pushing officers to get to the area where the refugees were sheltering, according to footage shared on social media. "The people can convey their aspirations. We were only securing (the area). We directed our personnel for security," said Sabang police chief Erwan, who like many Indonesians goes by one name. "The situation is safe and under control. The people were pushing the fence because they wanted to go in," he said, referring to the area where the refugees are staying. After the protesters left, the Rohingya refugees performed a dusk prayer at the site, according to a video shared with AFP by the United Nations refugee agency (UNHCR). "Thank God the Sabang government continues to uphold humanitarian values. Protection for the Rohingya refugees continues to be given," said UNHCR official Faisal Rahman. Many Acehnese, who themselves have memories of decades of bloody conflict, have long been sympathetic to the plight of their fellow Muslims. But some say their patience has been tested, claiming the Rohingya consume scarce resources and occasionally come into conflict with locals. -- AFP

Business

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 7, 2023

UN slams COP28 'posturing' as fossil fuel debate sizzles

Pressure is mounting as UN negotiations near end

DUBAI: UN climate chief Simon Stiell on Wednesday accused nations of "posturing" at the COP28 talks in Dubai, raising the temperature on negotiators sparring over the thorny issue of fossil fuels. Pressure is mounting near the end of the first week of the UN negotiations hosted by the UAE, with Europe's climate monitor confirming that 2023 will be the hottest year in recorded history.

The European Union called for COP28 to "mark the beginning of the end" of planet-warming fossil fuels. The latest draft of a global climate agreement is "probably" expected on Wednesday before it is finalized—in theory—on December 12, according to two people familiar with the negotiations, but a definitive timeline remains unclear.

The fate of oil, gas and coal—the main drivers of human-caused planet heating—has been the biggest sticking point on the agenda, and divisions around their future have dominated the conference.

"We have a starting text on the table, but it's a grab bag of ... wish lists and heavy on posturing," Stiell said. "At the end of next week, we need COP to deliver a bullet train to speed up climate action. We currently have an old caboose chugging over rickety tracks," he told reporters.

Battle lines have previously been drawn on whether to agree to "phase out" or "phase down" fossil fuels. However the latest text includes a new phrase calling for an "orderly and just" phase-out.

The language could signal a consensus candidate as it would give countries different timelines to cut emissions depending on their level of development and reliance on fossil fuels. But there is another option: no mention at all of fossil fuels, which reflects opposition from nations including Saudi Arabia, Russia and China, according to several observers who attended the closed meetings.

India on Tuesday evening opposed naming specific sectors or energy sources, one observer said.



Simon Stiell

One person familiar with the talks said the word "orderly" came from COP28 president Sultan Al-Jaber, who also heads UAE national oil company ADNOC. Another observer said China agrees with the language.

Europe has called for a harder line

"I want this COP to mark the beginning of the end for fossil fuels," European climate commissioner Wopke Hoekstra said on Wednesday. "All 27 European member states want this to be part of the negotiated outcome," he added. Germany's climate envoy Jennifer Morgan told AFP that "it is necessary that every party move away from their red lines (and) into solutions".

"We need to roll up our sleeves and get it done," she added. Saudi Arabia's position has come under heavy scrutiny after the world's biggest oil exporter ruled out agreeing to even phase down fossil fuels.

The kingdom's chief climate negotiator Khalid Al-mehaid said Tuesday that the 2015 Paris Agreement was a "great success for all of us". "The challenge that we have today is how can we keep that train with all of its passengers," he added.

The Alliance of Small Islands States, which includes some of the world's most climate-vulnerable countries, called for "major emitters to enhance their commitments," including towards a fossil fuels phase-out. The new draft of the negotiated text expected on Wednesday must be brought to a large plenary meeting taking stock of the first week of talks ahead of a rest day on Thursday.

than double the \$9.8 billion it forecast in June. IATA forecasts \$25.7 billion in net profits in 2024 on a 7.6-percent rise in revenues to \$964 billion.

Walsh called the figures a "tribute to aviation's resilience" but said the industry's profits need to be put into perspective. A "net profit margin of 2.7 percent is far below what investors in almost any other industry would accept," he said.

Airlines will on average retain just \$5.45 for every passenger carried, according to IATA's calculations. "That's about enough to buy a basic 'grande latte' at a London Starbucks," said Walsh, who formerly ran IAG, the parent company of British Airways. "But it is far too little to build a future that is resilient to shocks for a critical global industry on which 3.5 percent of GDP depends and from which 3.05 million people directly earn their livelihoods," he added.

The situation will continue to vary considerably by region. US, European and Middle Eastern carriers are expected to continue to post profits in 2024, with Asian-Pacific airlines expected to return to profitability. African and South American carriers are expected to remain in the red. IATA said the optimistic outlook for the industry is supported by its survey data showing that nearly half of people's travelling habits have returned to pre-pandemic norms. One third reported travelling more and just 18 percent said they are still travelling less.

Furthermore, it said 44 percent of respondents said that they will travel more in the next 12 months than in the previous 12 months. Only seven percent said they will travel less and 48 percent expected to maintain similar levels of travel in the coming 12 months as in the previous 12 months.

This growth comes despite an increase in fares in 2023 as demand outstripped seat capacity, with airlines hobbled by some aircraft being out of ser-

against Italian companies. She told reporters at the G20 summit in Delhi in September that should Rome leave the project, it "would not compromise relations with China". Beijing says upwards of 150 countries stretching from Uruguay to Sri Lanka have signed up to the initiative, a central pillar of President Xi Jinping's bid to expand China's clout overseas.

Beijing says it has inked over two trillion dollars in contracts around the world, from high-speed rail tracks crisscrossing South East Asia and massive transport, energy and infrastructure works through Central Asia. Proponents hail it for bringing resources and economic growth to the Global South—but it has also been slammed for saddling poor countries with enormous debt.

It has also given Chinese infrastructure firms a foothold in many emerging economies. There are concerns, particularly among Western nations, that China is seeking to rebuild the global world order to its advantage, while opposition voices in BRI countries have also decried what they see as increasing Chinese influence in local politics. Meanwhile, Washington has warned that China could use the initiative as a pretext to build up military bases around the world in the name of protecting BRI investments. Italy, a member of the European Union, the G7 grouping of advanced economies and NATO, signed up in 2019 under the government of then prime minister Giuseppe Conte. — AFP



DUBAI: Environmental activists stage a protest with a earth globe during a demonstration at the venue of the COP28 United Nations climate summit in Dubai on December 6, 2023. — AFP

Meanwhile, the EU's Copernicus Climate Change Service said on Wednesday that 2023 will be the hottest on record after November became the sixth record-breaking month in a row. Last month smashed the previous November heat record, pushing 2023's global average temperature to 1.46C warmer than the pre-industrial era, the service said. There had been previous warnings this year could take the title of hottest year from 2016 -- particularly after re-

ords toppled in September and October—but this marks the first time it has been confirmed.

November also contained two days that were 2C warmer than pre-industrial levels. Not one such day had ever before been recorded. Copernicus head Carlo Buontempo said that "as long as greenhouse gas concentrations keep rising we can't expect different outcomes". "The temperature will keep rising and so will the impacts of heatwaves and droughts." — AFP

Record passengers as airline industry recovers from COVID

GENEVA: Airlines should carry a record number of passengers next year as the sector puts the COVID-19 pandemic behind it, the industry's top trade association said Wednesday, although profitability remains a concern.

The International Air Transport Association (IATA), in its traditional review of industry trends as the year draws to a close, said more normal growth patterns were expected from here on out as the sector has recovered to pre-pandemic levels. "People love to travel and that has helped airlines to come roaring back to pre-pandemic levels of connectivity," IATA's director general Willie Walsh said as the body forecast a record 4.7 billion people will take to the skies in 2024.

IATA noted this is a "historic high that exceeds the pre-pandemic level of 4.5 billion recorded in 2019." For this year, it expects 4.29 billion passengers, a small drop from its June forecast of 4.35 billion. Walsh said "the speed of the recovery has been extraordinary" but also noted it "appears that the pandemic has cost aviation about four years of growth." Aviation suffered immensely from the travel restrictions that countries imposed in a bid to slow the spread of COVID-19, with a number of airlines going out of business and others bailed out as the industry racked up \$183 billion in losses during the 2020-2022 period.

IATA raised its profit outlook, expecting airlines to post \$23.3 billion in net earnings in 2023, more



GENEVA: International Air Transport Association (IATA) senior Vice President Sustainability & Chief Economist Marie Owens Thomsen gestures as she delivers remarks during the IATA Global Media Day in Geneva, on December 6, 2023. — AFP

vice over engine issues and delayed delivery of new aircraft. IATA expects growth in fares to moderate in 2024, while fuel costs are expected to remain high and continue to account for nearly a third of costs.

As negotiators debate the thorny issue of fossil fuels at the COP28 climate summit, IATA said the airline industry will use 374 billion liters of fuel in 2024 and put 939 million tons of CO2 into the atmosphere. While the airline industry accounts for less than three percent of global CO2 emissions, it serves only a tiny percentage of the world's population. The sector hopes to shift to sustainable aviation fuels to achieve its 2050 net-zero target, but IATA expects they will account for just 0.53 percent of consumption compared to 0.2 percent this year. — AFP

Elon Musk's AI startup seeks to raise \$1bn

SAN FRANCISCO: Elon Musk is seeking to raise a billion dollars for his xAI artificial intelligence company that he hopes will compete with ChatGPT's Open AI. An official filing to the US Securities and Exchange Commission on Tuesday said the company that Musk created earlier this year had already gathered \$134.7 million and plans to raise \$1 billion overall.

The filing added that there was a firm agreement to raise the full funds needed to meet the target, indicating that Musk may have deals in place for the full billion. Musk last month offered a preview of his company's ChatGPT-like chatbot, called "Grok," which he said was trained on data from X, formerly Twitter, that Musk bought for \$44 billion a year ago. The wealthy entrepreneur and founder of electric carmaker Tesla started xAI in July after hiring researchers from OpenAI, Google DeepMind, Tesla and the University of Toronto.

He said that the company was missioned to "understand the true nature of the universe." Since OpenAI's generative AI tool ChatGPT exploded on the scene a year ago, the technology has been an area of fierce competition between tech giants Microsoft and Google, as well as Meta and start-ups like Anthropic and Stability AI. OpenAI reportedly secured commitments of \$13 billion from Microsoft earlier this year. Musk's funding round comes as OpenAI suffered a chaotic few days last month that saw CEO Sam Altman return as the strong man of the company after being dismissed for a few days. — AFP

Italy withdraws from China's Belt and Road project

ROME: Italy has withdrawn from China's vast Belt and Road infrastructure initiative, more than four years after becoming the only G7 nation to sign up, a government source said Wednesday. The long-expected decision was communicated to Beijing three days ago, according to Italian newspaper Corriere della Sera, which first broke the news.

Neither side has published an official communication, but an Italian government source confirmed to AFP that Rome had pulled out. The source gave no details beyond saying it was done in such a way as to "keep channels of political dialogue open".

Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni has long been opposed to Italy's participation in an initiative viewed by many as an attempt by Beijing to buy political influence—and whose benefits to Rome were limited. The deal was due to automatically renew in March 2024 unless Italy opted out by the end of this year.

But Meloni and her hard-right government were also wary of provoking Beijing and risking retaliation

US October trade deficit widens on decline in exports

WASHINGTON: The US trade deficit continued to grow in October due to a fall in exports, according to government data published Wednesday.

The overall trade gap of the world's biggest economy rose by 5.1 percent to \$64.3 billion, up from a revised \$61.2 billion in September, the Commerce Department said in a statement.

October's widening trade deficit was the result of a \$2.6 billion decline in the value of US exports to the world, while imports rose by \$500 million.

This was slightly below market expectations for the deficit to grow to \$64.4 billion, according to Briefing.com. Like much of the world, US consumers and businesses have been grappling with higher interest rates since the COVID-19 pandemic, as policymakers have looked to tackle inflation by tightening monetary policy. While these actions have had some success in slowing down inflation, they have also reduced demand for goods and services among consumers facing higher borrowing costs and ele-



vated goods prices. "The deficit remains about 45 percent wider than it was just ahead of the pandemic, though the process of normalization in the deficit is likely still in place," economists at Wells Fargo wrote in an investor note Wednesday.

"The outlook for trade flows going forward is likely one of moderation, given the trajectory for demand and growth will slow, both domestically and abroad," High Frequency Economics Chief US Economist Rubeela Farooqi wrote in a note to clients. The US deficit in goods with China, the world's second-largest economy, declined slightly in October to \$23.9 billion, down from \$24.1 billion a month earlier, the Commerce Department said. — AFP

Business

Gulf Bank participates in COP28, highlights sustainability initiatives

Conference involves 198 countries and attended by over 70,000 individuals

KUWAIT: In its ongoing commitment to instill sustainability principles in society, Gulf Bank actively participated in the State of Kuwait pavilion at the 28th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP28), part of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, held in Dubai from November 30 to December 12, 2023. The conference drew a substantial audience of over 70,000 participants from 198 countries, encompassing heads of state, government leaders, ministers, corporate officials, representatives from international organizations, academics, and media professionals.

- **Ahmed Al-Amir:** Our commitment to sustainability extends both within and beyond the bank through impactful initiatives.
- Our third annual sustainability report has been published, and we are initiating our ESG Strategy 2024/2030.
- Supporting the National Sustainability Agenda within Vision 2035, we actively participate in financing various sustainable development projects.

Significant this year is the conference's notable departure, shifting from mere negotiations to a concentrated pursuit of concrete solutions aimed at tackling the impacts of climate change, all the while advancing objectives related to sustainable development. During a visual presentation held in one of the conference sessions, Ahmed Al-Amir, Gulf Bank's Deputy General Manager for Corporate Communications, elaborated on the bank's endeavors to solidify sustainability principles both within and beyond its operations. These initiatives reached fruition with the publication of Gulf Bank's third annual Sustainability Report, highlighting noteworthy accomplishments in the realms of environmental stewardship, social responsibility, and corporate governance.

Al-Amir emphasized the bank's close collaboration in supporting and expediting the national sustainability agenda aligned with Kuwait Vision 2035. Gulf Bank strategically implements initiatives designed to significantly contribute to fostering a sustainable mindset within the community. This involves adopting responsible practices proactively in environmental, social, and corporate governance domains, alongside providing exceptional financial and banking services. Furthermore, Gulf Bank remains at the forefront of innovation, by offering cutting-edge digital solutions to meet the evolving needs of its customers.

A comprehensive ESG strategy

Highlighting the bank's ongoing initiatives, he emphasized the current development of its Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) Sustainability Strategy 2024/2030. This strategy is set to function as the foundational framework directing the bank's sustainability initiatives in the forthcoming phase. Concurrently, a sustainability committee has been established at the highest echelon within the bank, chaired by a member of the Board of Directors, to supervise the implementation of sustainability programs. Additionally, high-level training programs are being prepared for senior leaders in the bank, aiming to instill sustainability as a pivotal focus across all operations and services.

Al-Amir stressed on Gulf Bank's significant role in funding sustainable development projects, highlighting its position as one of the leading banks in Kuwait and the broader region. Specifically, he pointed to the bank's active involvement in financing an extensive portfolio of sustainable development projects.

Sustainability initiatives

Highlighting significant projects supported by Gulf Bank in Kuwait, Al-Amir remarked, "We played a key role in financing the Al-Shagaya renewable energy project and the Clean Fuels Project, addressing both local and international demand for clean fuels among numerous other sustainable endeavors."

Al-Amir further highlighted the bank's collaboration with five major cooperative societies and the Environment Public Authority in Kuwait, unveiling an



DUBAI: Ahmed Al-Amir elaborates on Gulf Bank's endeavors to solidify sustainability principles both within and beyond its operations.

impactful initiative for environmental sustainability. This initiative aims to foster a societal shift towards the use of reusable bags, reducing reliance on plastic bags. The initiative aligns with Goal No. 17 of the sustainable development goals, highlighting the importance of enhancing implementation methods through extensive state-level partnerships across different sectors. He also stressed Gulf Bank's continuous dedication to the annual Environment Month initiative, organized by the Scientific Center. This involvement encompasses activities commemorating World Recycling Day, World Water Day, World Aquatic Animals Day, and World Health Day.

Sustainable practices within the bank

In contrast, Al-Amir highlighted various initiatives implemented within the bank to cut-down on greenhouse gas emissions, decrease paper usage, advocate for environmental cleanliness, reduce waste, and shift towards energy-efficient lighting. He pointed out that, as part of an ambitious plan to make its branch network environmentally friendly and increase reliance on renewable energy, the bank has renovated several branches, including its

headquarters in the capital. Moreover, a new environmentally friendly branch is set to open in the Sabah Al-Ahmad area soon.

Additionally, the bank has maintained its dedication to recycling e-waste by partnering with a specialized recycling company, ensuring the safe disposal of around 22.3 tons of electronic waste.

"At Gulf Bank, we prioritize implementing the highest standards of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) sustainability to ensure that our operations, initiatives, and investments align with the optimal sustainability model both now and in the future," concluded Al-Amir.

The action plan for COP28 focused on four primary goals: accelerating a systematic, responsible, fair, and rational transition in the energy sector; establishing mechanisms for climate finance; ensuring the well-being of people and improving lives and livelihoods; and promoting inclusivity in all these endeavors. These objectives respond to the call for a 43 percent reduction in carbon emissions by 2030, followed by achieving net-zero emissions by mid-century, with the ultimate aim of limiting the temperature rise to 1.5°C.

EU plans 3-year delay on UK electric car tariffs

BRUSSELS: Brussels proposed Wednesday a three-year delay on tariffs on the sale of electric vehicles between Britain and the EU that was meant to kick in from January, in a major reversal of its previous position. The European Commission said it now wants a one-off extension, until December 31, 2026, after the EU automotive industry raised concerns about the massive costs that would arise from a post-Brexit 10-percent tariff. The commission's extension proposal must formally be approved by the EU member states. EU leaders are to hold a regular summit in Brussels next week.

The commission had initially strongly opposed such an extension, despite industry's pleas, requests from the British government and calls for pragmatism by EU lawmakers.

Its extension proposal included wording designed to make it legally impossible to put off tariffs beyond the December 2026 date. "Today's decision means that we skip an intermediate phase of somewhat strict rules of origin that would have applied from 2024 until the end of 2026," Commission Vice President Maros Sefcovic said.

"This removes the threat of tariffs on export of EU electric vehicles to the UK and vice versa on 1st January 2024." The change of stance was needed because of "circumstances not foreseen" when an EU-UK agreement regulating post-Brexit trade and ties was signed in 2020, Sefcovic said. He cited higher energy prices spurred by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine last year, high inflation, and big subsidies China and the United States deploy to boost their electric-vehicle industries.

The proposal, Sefcovic said, "supports the competitiveness of our industry and protect jobs in the European Union." "It's absolutely clear that this one-off extension cannot be repeated nor prolonged thanks to this mechanism," he said.

The European Union is particularly concerned about potentially unfair competition from cheaper Chinese electric vehicles. In October it formally launched an investigation into Beijing's subsidies for car manufacturers. Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen accused China in September of keeping the cost of Chinese electric cars "artificially low by huge state subsidies".

Britain formally left the European Union in January 2020 then, during a transition period, sealed the post-Brexit free-trade agreement with the bloc which came into effect in 2021. Under that deal, tariffs were to start on January 1, 2024, on vehicles that do not have at least 45 percent UK- or EU-made content in them, and with batteries that are at least 50-60 percent sourced from each of those territories, under "rules of origin".

Along with the extension proposal, the commission announced additional funding of up to three billion euros (\$3.2 billion) to boost the EU's battery-manufacturing industry. The EU's trade commissioner, Valdis Dombrovskis, said the proposal "provides much-needed predictability and stability to EU car- and battery-makers at a time of fierce global competitive pressure". — AFP

COP28 must mark 'beginning of end' of fossil fuels: EU

DUBAI: The UN's COP28 talks in Dubai must "mark the beginning of the end" of fossil fuels, the European Union's climate chief said Wednesday, as nations were divided over the issue. European climate commissioner Wopke Hoekstra said there was "still a lot of work ahead of us" as negotiators seek to reach a deal aimed at saving the goal of limiting warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius.



(From L) Deputy Governor for Financial Stability Sarah Breeden, Bank of England Governor Andrew Bailey, Head of Media and Stakeholder Engagement Katie Martin, and CEO of the Prudential Regulation Authority Sam Woods attend the biannual Financial Stability Report press conference, at the Bank of England, in London, on December 6, 2023. — AFP

Bank of England warns on fallout from rate hikes

LONDON: The Bank of England on Wednesday said its multiple interest-rate hikes aimed at cooling high inflation would prolong a cost-of-living crisis but stressed UK retail banks could contain the fallout. The BoE's Financial Policy Committee (FPC) said in a report that almost five million UK homeowners would see mortgage repayments soar over the next three years.

Retail banks tend to pass on BoE rate hikes, hitting customers whose home loans come with variable rates and those whose fixed-term deals are expiring. The FPC on Wednesday said "household finances remain stretched by increased living costs and higher interest rates, some of which has yet to be reflected in higher mortgage repayments".

"I want this COP to mark the beginning of the end for fossil fuels," he said at a news conference.

"This is a key part for the EU and ... of our negotiating mandate, meaning that all 27 European member states want this to be part of the negotiated outcome." Hoekstra noted that scientists have warned that the world must accelerate its emissions reductions this decade.

"We simply have to get rid of fossil fuels," he said. Hoekstra spoke as the UN talks approached their midway point, with a deal due to be finalized, in theory, on December 12. The latest draft agreement includes a phrase calling for an "orderly and just" phase-out of fossil fuels. But there is also another option to not mention the issue at all, language backed so far by Russia, Saudi Arabia and China, according to observers. — AFP

"Arrears for... credit remain low but are rising as the impact of higher repayments is felt by borrowers," it added. At the same time, it concluded that "the UK banking system is strong enough to support households and businesses, even if the economy does worse than expected".

The Bank of England began lifting its main interest rate from a record low of 0.1 percent at the end of 2021, when inflation started to creep higher as economies slowly emerged from Covid-19 lockdowns. It currently stands at 5.25 percent—the highest level in more than 15 years—following 14 hikes in a row. UK inflation surged to a 41-year peak at 11.1 percent in October 2022, stoked by spiking energy prices after the invasion of Ukraine by major oil and gas producer Russia. It has since dropped to 4.6 percent, but remains the highest level in the G7 rich nations and more than double the BoE's 2.0-percent target rate. While the BoE paused rates at its last meeting, some analysts still believe it could hike again if inflation remains stubbornly high. This at a time when the US Federal Reserve and European Central Bank are seen cutting rates early next year. — AFP

Southeast Asia banks on aviation boom

BANGKOK: Major airport expansion projects are taking off across Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam, and a new airline is set to launch next year—all banking on an expected boom in air travel in Southeast Asia, fuelled by Chinese and Indian tourists. But there are doubts about whether it will materialize in an uncertain economic environment and as worries about the impact of travel on climate change deepen. Thailand's Really Cool Airlines is expected to start flying between Bangkok and Japan around mid-2024, but CEO Patee Sarasin—a veteran of the region's cutthroat budget sector—says it has been a battle to launch a new carrier just after a pandemic. "It's a lot of money. It has been quite grueling to raise the funds," he told AFP.

"There are some points (where you say) 'why am I doing this?' It crossed my mind many, many times."

Patee ran budget carrier Nok Air for more than a decade, but while he is coy about the finer details of the new venture, he claims it may yet "change the aviation paradigm". He added: "Southeast Asia is going to be probably one of the centers of the universe in the future, with the slowdown in Europe, and in the US." Flying took a hammering globally during the pandemic as international travel all but shut down, but the industry is bullish about its bounceback, evidenced by a flurry of big-ticket orders at this month's Dubai Air Show and bumper profit jumps for the likes of Air France-KLM and Ryanair. Southeast Asia is becoming a hot property, with private and public players competing for an expanding market. The region currently accounts for 10 percent of global traffic—more than 500 million passengers in 2019. And Boeing expects this figure to grow around 9.5 percent a year over the next two decades, well above the global average of 6.1 percent.

Across the region from Bangkok to Hanoi, governments are splashing billions of dollars to update and expand airport infrastructure. A new terminal opened at Suvarnabhumi, Bangkok's main international airport, in September, and a third runway is being built. There are plans for a third terminal at the city's other airport, Don Mueang, as well as a doubling of capacity at Chiang Mai in the north, and expansion in the major island tourism hub Phuket. Cambodia has grand plans to make Phnom Penh's new \$1.5 billion airport, expected in 2025, a regional hub to compete with Bangkok and Singapore, with about 50 million passengers by 2050. — AFP



PHUKET: This photograph taken on November 18, 2023, shows a tourist taking a selfie on the Mai Khao Beach as an airplane lands at Phuket International Airport in the southern Thai island of Phuket. — AFP

Business

Boubyan Bank holds annual Lean Gallery Walk for internal improvement projects



Al-Mehri: We are glad to announce the implementation of Lean projects by Boubyan employees across various departments, making the Bank consistent with 'Continuous Improvement'



Al-Hussainan: The gallery is an opportunity to showcase the positive change that the Lean Methodology has on the Bank's development and growth

KUWAIT: Boubyan Bank organized its sixth annual Lean Gallery Walk for internal improvement projects implemented utilizing the Lean Methodology. The main objective is to encourage Boubyan employees towards continuous improvement by submitting opportunities of enhancement which will positively reflect on customer satisfaction and service.

The Gallery was launched by Adel Al-Majed, Vice-Chairman & Group Chief Executive Officer of Boubyan Bank Group, and Abdullah Al-Tuwaijri, CEO - Private, Consumer & Digital Banking, and Abdul-Salam Al-Saleh, CEO - Corporate Banking, Finance, Treasury, and Legal, along with a number of the bank's leaders and attendance from Kuwait University and STC.

Abdullah Al-Mehri, the bank's Chief Operating Officer, commented: "Boubyan Bank is committed on showing appreciation for its employees who are interested in change and improvement. The Management of Boubyan would like to thank everyone for their participation, and we will keep conducting this annual gallery in the future, God willing, to support and recognize staff accomplishments."

On his part, Abdullah Al-Hussainan, Assistant General Manager - Change Management Office at Boubyan Bank, stated: "Boubyan Bank always

seeks & encourages to improve its internal work process & environment, which shows the power of creativity and innovation of all employees of the bank, maintaining continuous process improvement concepts. "Lean methodology adopts well-studied approaches and practices that can change the traditional concept & mindset of streamlining workflows and achieve sustainable growth to contribute to the development and improvement of the bank & the employees. He went on to add: "The 'Lean Gallery Walk' for internal improvement projects aims to create a work environment that encourages employees to identify 'improvement opportunities' through the challenges employees face in their day-to-day tasks, and to transform them into Lean projects which can be implemented & will have positive impact on improving work processes which will ultimately have a positive effect on customers and employees."

Gallery for internal improvement projects

This year's gallery exhibited 11 projects & participants employees from various departments, who presented their projects during the gallery and answered queries from the attendees.

Lean is an international methodology aims of improving processes and reduce cost by minimizing waste, and focusing on customers and the



Adel Al-Majed and Boubyan leaders at the gallery.

quality of services and products. The bank's continuous improvement department trains groups of employees on the Lean methodology annually,

and offers them the necessary coaching and support to complete the project through specialized and highly competent employees in this field.

Moody's downgrades Hong Kong rating outlook to negative

HONG KONG: Ratings agency Moody's downgraded the outlook on Hong Kong's credit rating to negative from stable on Wednesday, following a similar change for China the day before. The city's economy was buoyed by China's post-pandemic reopening but recovery has slowed in the latter half of the year, with the government last month revising full-year growth estimates down to 3.2 percent.

Moody's said the "principal driver" of Hong Kong's negative rating outlook was the "tight linkage between the credit profiles" of the finance hub and China. "The change in Hong Kong's rating outlook reflects Moody's assessment of tight political, institutional, economic and financial linkages between Hong Kong and the mainland," the agency said in a statement.

This is the first time Hong Kong has lost its "stable" rating outlook since January 2020.

The agency said China's downside risks would translate to risks for Hong Kong's own creditworthiness, adding that changes in "institutional and political linkages" were a key element of the city's risks.

"Following signs of reduced autonomy of Hong Kong's political and judiciary institutions, notably with the imposition of a National Security Law in 2020 and changes to Hong Kong's electoral system, Moody's expects further erosion of the (city's) autonomy of political, institutional and economic decisions to continue incrementally," it said. "This ongoing process is currently reflected in Moody's assessment of the quality of Hong Kong's executive and legislative institutions."

Beijing imposed a sweeping national security law in Hong Kong after the former British colony saw huge and at times violent democracy protests in 2019. Authorities have since ousted opposition figures from the legislature and set up a "patriots-only" electoral system, which extends down to the local level.

Moody's also said the weakening trend growth in mainland China would affect Hong Kong's economy, including "through more slowly expanding opportunities for Hong Kong as the key regional economic and financial hub". "In turn, weaker growth in Hong Kong could erode the government's fiscal buffers, as support to the economy broadly leads to a rise in public spending," it added.

AFP has contacted the Hong Kong government for comment. The agency a day earlier downgraded its outlook for China's credit rating to negative citing rising debt in the world's second-largest economy and concerns over its battered property sector. Beijing's finance ministry said in response it was "disappointed with Moody's decision" and that the agency's concerns about growth prospects and fiscal sustainability were "unnecessary". — AFP

German travel group TUI books record year for sales

FRANKFURT: The world's largest tourism operator TUI said Wednesday it had seen record sales on the back of a strong 2023 summer season and signaled confidence for the coming year. The German group booked a net profit of 305.8 million euros (\$330 million) in its last financial year, which ran from October

2022 to September 2023, TUI said in a statement. The figure was more or less on a par with its results before the spread of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020, when heavy restrictions on international travel weighed heavily on the economy and especially the tourism sector. The return to form came on the back of record sales totalling 20.7 billion euros, a 25-percent increase on the previous year.

TUI, which offers everything from hotel stays to cruises and charter flights, welcomed 19.1 million guests over the course of the year, up from 16.7 million the previous year.

The group also saw its operating profit more than double to 977.2 million euros, from 408.7 mil-

lion euros. The group is confident about the current business year, targeting a 25-percent increase in its operating profit. Bookings for the upcoming winter holiday season in the northern hemisphere were up 11 percent year on year, with the prices for package holidays up five percent.

"The current booking trend lead(s) us to expect a further improvement in 2024," TUI CEO Sebastian Ebel said. The TUI group suffered record losses in 2020 and 2021 when the travel sector was pummeled by coronavirus restrictions.

TUI received state aid from the German government to help it through the crisis, which it paid off in full in April. — AFP

EU seeks deal on world's first AI law

BRUSSELS: The European Union will seek to thrash out an agreement on sweeping rules to regulate artificial intelligence on Wednesday, following months of difficult negotiations in particular on how to monitor generative AI like ChatGPT.

The EU is racing to approve the world's first comprehensive AI law after the issue took on greater urgency when the ChatGPT bot burst onto the scene last year, highlighting AI's dizzying advances.

ChatGPT wowed with its ability to produce poems and essays within seconds. AI proponents say the technology will benefit humanity, transforming everything from work to healthcare, but others worry about the risks it poses to society, fearing it could thrust the world into unprecedented chaos.

Brussels is bent on bringing big tech to heel with a powerful legal armory to protect EU citizens' rights, especially those covering privacy and data protection. The European Commission, the EU's executive arm, first proposed an AI law in 2021 that would regulate systems based on the level of risk they posed. For example, the greater the risk to citizens' rights or health, the greater the systems' obligations.

Negotiations on the final legal text began in June, but a fierce debate in recent weeks over how to regulate general-purpose AI like ChatGPT and Google's Bard chatbot threatened talks at the last minute. Some member states worry that too much regulation will stifle innovation and hurt the chances of producing European AI giants to challenge those in the United States, including ChatGPT's creator OpenAI as well as tech titans like Google and Meta. Negotiators from the European Parliament and EU member states will meet on Wednesday from 1400 GMT, with talks expected to last into the evening. Although there is no real deadline, senior EU figures have repeatedly said the bloc must finalize the law before the end of 2023.

EU diplomats, industry sources and other EU officials have warned the talks could end without an agreement as stumbling blocks remain over key issues. Others have suggested that even if there is a political agreement, several meetings will still be



needed to hammer out the law's technical details.

And even if EU negotiators agree, the law would not come into force until 2026 at the earliest.

The main sticking point is over how to regulate so-called foundation models — designed to perform a variety of tasks — with France, Germany and Italy calling to exclude them. "France, Italy and Germany don't want a regulation for these models," said German MEP Axel Voss, who is a member of the special parliamentary committee on AI. The parliament, however, believes it is "necessary... for transparency" to regulate such models, Voss said. Late last month, the three biggest EU economies published a paper calling for an "innovation-friendly" approach for the law known as the AI Act.

Berlin, Paris and Rome do not want the law to include restrictive rules for foundation models, but instead say they should adhere to codes of conduct.

Many believe this change in view is motivated by their wish to avoid hindering the development of European champions — and perhaps to help companies

such as France's Mistral AI and Germany's Aleph Alpha. Another sticking point is remote biometric surveillance — basically, facial identification through camera data in public places. The EU parliament wants a full ban on "real time" remote biometric identification systems, which member states oppose. The commission had initially proposed that there could be exemptions to find potential victims of crime including missing children. There have been suggestions MEPs could concede on this point in exchange for concessions in other areas. The EU's top tech enforcer, Thierry Breton, remains hopeful for an agreement.

"Significant progress has been made by both sides," Breton, the EU's internal market commissioner, said on Tuesday, pointing to the mandate given to Spain, which holds the rotating EU presidency, to conclude negotiations on Wednesday. Concerns over AI's impact and the need to supervise the technology are shared worldwide. US President Joe Biden issued an executive order in October to regulate AI in a bid to mitigate the technology's risks. — AFP

High speed rail in US west gets \$6 billion boost

LOS ANGELES: Proposed high-speed rail lines in the western United States moved a step closer to reality on Tuesday with the announcement of \$6 billion in government grants.

The cash will come from President Joe Biden's signature infrastructure bill aimed at revamping the country's creaking railways, roads and bridges, and is part of a plan to double the number of people taking the train by 2040. Half of the cash will go towards the construction of a high-speed line spanning 218 miles (350 kilometers) between Las Vegas and downtown Los Angeles, slashing the current five-hour car journey time to two-hours and 40 minutes.

The rest will be used to support a long-touted

line linking Los Angeles with San Francisco.

While high-speed rail is the norm in much of Europe and Asia, particularly in China and Japan, the United States has long lagged behind. But there has been a renewed emphasis on projects like this as the United States hurries to overhaul its polluting transport sector and make it more environmentally friendly and give them an alternative to gas-guzzling cars.

"California is delivering on the first 220-(mile per hour), electric high-speed rail project in the nation," said California Governor Gavin Newsom. "This show of support from the Biden-(Kamala) Harris Administration is a vote of confidence in today's vision and comes at a critical turning point, providing the project new momentum." A line linking Las Vegas with Los Angeles, America's second biggest city, has been mooted for almost two decades, during which time its proposed cost has ballooned.

The \$3 billion grant announced Tuesday represents a quarter of the price tag of the project to be built by Florida-based Brightline West, which press reports suggest could be up and running by 2028.

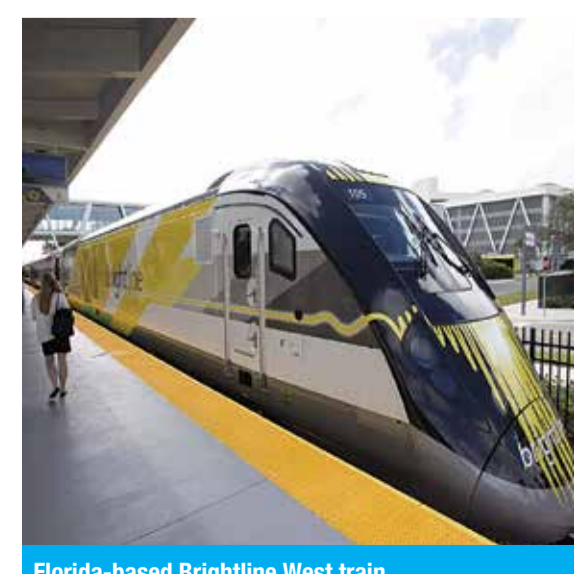
Nevada Senator Jacky Rosen said the line could re-

duce the number of cars making the journey by up to three million a year, slashing planet-warming carbon dioxide emissions by 400,000 tons annually.

"This historic high-speed rail project will be a game changer for Nevada's tourism economy and transportation," she said. "I'll bring more visitors to our state, reduce traffic on the I-15 (highway), create thousands of good paying jobs, and decrease carbon emissions, all while relying on local union labor." Wes Edens, chairman of Brightline, said the company was honored that the government had entrusted it with the project.

"This is a historic moment that will serve as a foundation for a new industry, and a remarkable project that will serve as the blueprint for how we can repeat this model throughout the country," he said.

"We're ready to get to work to bring our vision of American-made, American-built, world-class, state-of-the-art high speed train travel to America." Biden is expected formally to announce the grant when he visits Las Vegas this week. Last month the White House said there would be \$16.4 billion in new funding for 25 passenger rail projects in the country's northeast. — AFP



Florida-based Brightline West train.

Lifestyle



These handout photos courtesy of Rockstar Games show video grabs of the trailer of "Grand Theft Auto 6" video game. — AFP photos

'GRAND THEFT AUTO' TRAILER SOARS PAST 100 MILLION VIEWS

A trailer for the latest installment of blockbuster video game franchise "Grand Theft Auto" soared past 100 million views on YouTube on Wednesday, smashing records on its way. The trailer teased a 2025 release date for the sixth edition of the game — a full 12 years after GTA V, which is the second biggest-selling video game in history.

Such was the pent-up excitement that the trailer shot past 60 million views on YouTube within 12 hours, breaking a record claimed by American YouTuber MrBeast. He said in October a video he uploaded comparing houses of varying values had clocked up 60 million views in 23 hours, making it a record for a non-music video.

But the YouTuber, real name Jimmy Donaldson, posted on Tuesday on X, formerly Twitter: "The GTA 6 trailer just broke our record for most views on YouTube in 24 hours." However, the GTA VI trailer fell short of the overall YouTube record — South Korean boy band BTS

racked up more than 108 million views on the first day for their song "Butter" and 101 million for "Dynamite".

The trailer focused on a character named Lucia, freshly freed from prison in a Florida-like setting — making her the first playable woman character in a franchise long criticized for its depiction of women and minorities people. It took GTA VI more than 30 hours to pass 100 million views. Fans were near universal in their praise for the snippets of action — the YouTube upload has nine million likes — but many commented on the length of time between the fifth and sixth editions. "At this rate I've got about 3 GTAs left in my lifetime," wrote Youtubers The Slow Mo Guys in response to the trailer. — AFP



This illustration photo created in Los Angeles, California shows Rockstar Games' Grand Theft Auto 6 trailer played on computer screens.



This undated handout from The Capital Kiwi Project shows two kiwi chicks, born in the wild, west of Wellington. — AFP

Wellington welcomes first wild-born kiwi chicks in a century

Conservationists in New Zealand celebrated on Tuesday after discovering that kiwi chicks had been born in the wilds around Wellington for the first time in more than a century. The fluffy, flightless bird with a long distinctive beak is a beloved national symbol, but few New Zealanders have ever seen one in the wild. Kiwi are among the most vulnerable birds in New Zealand. The Department of Conservation estimates there are only about 26,000 brown kiwis left. Last year, the Capital Kiwi Project released a few dozen adult birds into the wild near Wellington, hoping to reestablish a population in the area. They have now discovered four chicks — who are believed to be the first born in the hills of Wellington in more than 150 years.

"This is very special for the team which has been working hard for the last few years," project founder Paul Ward told AFP. The chicks are a "massive milestone for our goal of building a wild population of kiwi on Wellington's back doorstep", he added. A project volunteer had a shock when he put his hand in a nest under a tree last week and pulled out a freshly-hatched kiwi chick, Ward said. "He was very pleasantly surprised when another shot past him. We found two last week and then another two today." The goal is for the fledgling chicks to reach a fighting weight of 800 grams, Ward said, to be large enough to ward off stoats, their natural predators. "We'll go out and give them some extra worms for Christmas to put on weight," Ward joked. An adult kiwi weighs about three kilograms. In order for kiwi to be able to return to the rugged hills south-west of Wellington, the project first had to rein in their predators. Local dog owners were invited to sessions to teach their pets to steer clear of kiwi while out for walks. —AFP

Norman Lear, sitcom king who changed TV - and America

Norman Lear was television's prolific genius whose trailblazing sitcoms in the 1970s and 1980s not only revolutionized US entertainment — they helped change the way a nation saw itself. With boundary-breaking shows like "All In the Family" and "The Jeffersons," Lear — who has died aged 101 — helped millions of viewers confront their deepest fears, frailties and prejudices, as well as their aspirations, with humor and humanity. Among his milestones was creating the first African American nuclear family regularly appearing on television: the Evans clan on "Good Times," beginning in 1974.

He injected the sensitive subjects of race, sexuality, class, inequality and politics like the anti-war movement into his work, breaking the sitcom mold and beaming modern visions of family life into millions of US households. Lear abandoned the idealistic representation of American families seen on shows like "Leave It to Beaver" (1957-1963) and instead adopted a more faithful, real-world depiction — and in so doing, he changed the face of television.

"What was new was that we were engaging in reality," the famed creator said in the 2016 documentary "Norman Lear: Just Another Version of You." By politicizing the personal and personalizing the political, Lear became an entertainment giant. Fellow comedy icon Mel Brooks hailed Lear as "the bravest television writer, director and producer of all time."

In the mid-1970s, at the height of his eight-decade career, Lear had five popular sitcoms airing in prime time — an era before cable or streaming, when Americans collectively consumed shows in real time. Broadcaster CBS

estimated at the time that a staggering 120 million Americans watched Lear programming each week.

The six-time Emmy Award winner wrote, produced, created or developed roughly 100 specials and shows including 1980s mega-hit "The Facts of Life" and the long-running "One Day at a Time." His revolutionary comedy also earned him a spot on president Richard Nixon's so-called enemies list.

Lovably irascible

Lear's most explosive creation was "All In the Family," a blue-collar comedy so audacious that its first episode, in early 1971, came with a disclaimer. The half-hour show featured abrasive patriarch Archie Bunker, lovably irascible but bigoted, narrow-minded and clashing relentlessly with his liberal relatives including son-in-law "Meathead," played by Rob Reiner.

It marked a TV paradigm shift. "Television can be broken into two parts, BN and AN: Before Norman and After Norman," writer and producer Phil Rosenthal said in the 2016 documentary.

Lear, donning his trademark porkpie hat, also produced or funded such big-screen classics as "The Princess Bride" and "This is Spinal Tap." But television was his magic medium. Never far from the surface in Lear's shows were the issues gnawing at American society: misogyny, racism, homophobia, women's rights and political division.

He dug deep into the exigencies of Black life. And while "Good Times" was intended as a white audience's window into Black America, "The Jeffersons" represented the American Dream for Black people. Over 253 episodes from 1975 to 1985, "The Jeffersons"



Television writer and producer Norman Lear attends the premiere of the HBO documentary "If You're Not In the Obbit, Eat Breakfast," May 17, 2017 at the Samuel Goldwyn Theatre in Beverly Hills, California. — AFP

portrayed African American success through an unapologetically Black couple "movin' on up" in New York society.

'Enemy' of the family?

Norman Milton Lear was born on July 27, 1922 into a Jewish family in New Haven, Connecticut. His mother emigrated from Russia as a child, and his father was a self-employed salesman who served time in jail and had a bigoted streak that embarrassed his son—but also served as source material. "A piece of him was Archie Bunker, a piece of him was Dad," Lear told the Television Academy Foundation.

He attended Emerson College in Boston but dropped out after a year to enlist in the US Army, flying 37 World War II bombing sorties as a radio operator and gunner. By 1949, Lear moved to Los Angeles, where he found television success writing for variety shows.

He also produced films including 1963's "Come Blow Your Horn" starring

Frank Sinatra, and in 1967 received an Academy Award nomination for best screenplay for "Divorce American Style." With "All In the Family" and the TV shows that followed, Lear's influence skyrocketed.

So did his concern about the mix of politics and religion. Criticism from conservative circles poured in. In addition to being on Nixon's enemies list, Lear said televangelist Jerry Falwell "called me the number one enemy of the American family." Lear pushed back against the burgeoning religious right political movement and in 1981 founded the People For the American Way group to promote pluralism, civic engagement, and freedom of expression and religion.

Lear's work ethic was legendary. Well beyond his 100th birthday, he collaborated with TV host Jimmy Kimmel on several "Live in Front of a Studio Audience!" specials in which star-studded casts performed remakes of classic Lear shows.

A pioneer on multiple fronts, Lear's portrayal of true-to-life traumas sealed his reputation. In a watershed moment on a 1972 episode of "Maude," the title character agonizes over terminating her pregnancy, a plotline that brought the abortion fight to prime time one year before the Supreme Court's landmark Roe v Wade ruling.

Half a century later, Lear — who married three times and had six children — told "E! Insider" the issues his sitcoms addressed carry equal resonance today. "The culture has shifted and changed... but the way families experience life is pretty much the same," he said. — AFP

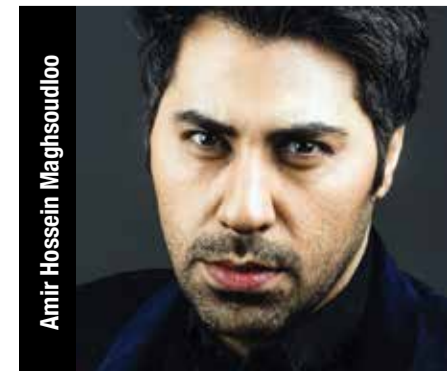
Iran arrests pop singer Tataloo

Iranian authorities have arrested famous pop singer Amir Hossein Maghsoudloo, known by his stage name Tataloo, after Turkish police turned him over to Iran, the judiciary said Wednesday. Maghsoudloo, 36, a singer, rapper and songwriter, had been living in Istanbul since 2018 following numerous arrests in the Is-

lamic republic and an official refusal to grant him a performing license.

Tataloo "was arrested with a court order after being turned over to Iran through the Bazargan border crossing" in the northwest of Iran, said the judiciary's Mizan Online news agency. It added that "numerous complaints had been filed against the singer, the most important

ones being complaints filed by under-18 youngsters and their families". Mizan charged that "Tataloo has taken extensive measures to spread corruption and prostitution among young people," alleging he had invited under-18-year-olds to his Istanbul residence. — AFP



Amir Hossein Maghsoudloo

Lifestyle

UNESCO recognizes Ramadan iftar on list of intangible cultural heritage

The UN cultural agency on Wednesday recognized iftar, the meal that breaks the daytime fast during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, on its list of intangible cultural heritage. The application for the socio-cultural tradition was jointly submitted by Iran, Turkey, Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan to the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. "Iftar (also called Eftari or Iftor) is observed by Muslims at sunset in the month of Ra-

madan, upon completion of all religious and ceremonial rites," said UNESCO. Iftar, which follows the sunset call to prayer during Ramadan, is associated with gatherings "strengthening family and community ties and promoting charity, solidarity and social exchange," it said.

The age-old community tradition was recognized by the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage that

has been meeting in Botswana since Monday. In several Muslim countries, it is customary to mark iftar by eating a date accompanied by tea. Recipes for dishes and pastries, however, vary greatly depending on the country. The UN body said that "the iftar practice is typically transmitted within families, and children and youth are often entrusted with preparing components of traditional meals". — AFP



This photograph shows sheep in Pontimia Pasture in the Swiss Alps during a monitoring program by Swiss NGO "OPPAL" to watch livestock against wolf.



Cuban singers sing a bolero at the malecon in Havana.



Cuban bolero singer Migdalia Hechavarría shows newspapers during an interview with AFP at her home in Havana.

As one of the greatest living exponents of romantic bolero music, 82-year-old Migdalia Hechavarría was thrilled Tuesday to hear that UNESCO has recognized it as an intangible cultural heritage of humanity, calling the musical form "identity, emotion and poetry turned into song." There was little else for Hechavarría to do except break into song. So she celebrated with an old bolero standard, "Me faltabas tu." "I sing it a cappella, I sing it with a tumba (drum), but always my bolero," she tells AFP at her home, because "it is the music that makes you live."



Cuban singer and songwriter Leo Vera speaks during an interview with AFP at his home in Havana.

With a voice that delights, Hechavarría has taken bolero around the world, singing with such stars as Omara Portuondo and the late Celia Cruz, Elena Burke, Cesar Portillo and Ignacio Villa (Bola de Nieve). "Bolero is a feeling. It's a soft, sweet thing, for people to enjoy, to fall in love," adds Hechavarría, who has been singing for 25 years at the Gato Tuerto, a bolero bastion in Havana.

UNESCO on Tuesday said bolero combines European poetic style with African rhythms and sentiments of native Americans, with songs passed down within families. On an island with genres such as Cuban son and rumba, singers also live and breathe bolero — often on street corners for the enjoyment of passersby. Drummer Pedro Luis Carrillo, 52, has been singing boleros on Havana's seaside esplanade for 30 years, and still admits surprise that the "wonderful music" enthralls tourists.

Cuban and Mexican

As a musical form, bolero was born in Santiago in southeastern Cuba at the end of the 19th century, and later took root as well in all of Mexico. The candidacy of bolero as intangible heritage of humanity was presented jointly

Rickshaw pullers eat food distributed by the non-profit organization Mehmankhana during nationwide lockdown imposed to curb the spread of the Covid-19 coronavirus in Lalmatia area of Dhaka.



An employee sews hems on loincloths in a production line at the Uniwax factory in Abidjan, Ivory Coast.



The bolero, poetry and love put to song in Cuba and Mexico



by Cuba and Mexico, which called it "an indispensable element of the sentimental song of Latin America." In a popular bar in Mexico City, Jose Antonio Ferrari, 72 years old and half a century singing boleros, performs "Sabor a mí." "The bolero is the soundtrack that moves the sensations and the most in-

imate fibers of the human being," he tells AFP.

In 1932 Consuelo Velazquez, known popularly as Consuelito, performed "Besame mucho," a song about unrequited love later sung by such luminaries as Nat King Cole, Frank Sinatra and the Beatles. The golden age of

Mexican cinema was also key in the diffusion of the genre, with interpretations by the legendary Pedro Infante, while Cuban bolero singers like Benny More and Rita Montaner made their careers in Mexico.

'As long as love exists'

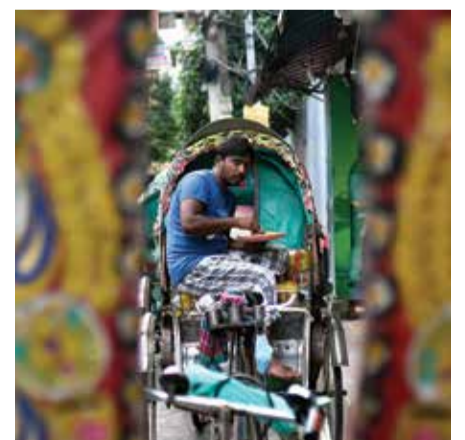
The Mexican singer Jose Jose, known as the nation's romantic voice, played Alvaro Carrillo, author of the bolero classic "Sabor a mí," in a movie of that name, and his compatriot composer Armando Manzanero played a key role in the albums of popular singer Luis Miguel that won two Grammys.

Since 1987, Cuba has organized the Golden Bolero Festival to promote the genre. In 2001, nearly 600 bolero singers from Cuba and abroad sang for

76 consecutive hours at the festival in what was billed as "the longest bolero in the world." Ferrari says that in Mexico, just as in Cuba, most bolero singers are over age 60 and must compete with lots of other musical styles in bars and cantinas. Even so, he is confident that "as long as love and heartbreak exist, there will be beautiful things like the bolero." — AFP



A rickshaw puller eats food distributed by the non-profit organization Mehmankhana during nationwide lockdown imposed to curb the spread of the Covid-19 coronavirus in Lalmatia area of Dhaka.



Mexican singers sing a bolero at a cantina in Mexico City.



Cuban bolero singer Migdalia Hechavarría sings during an interview with AFP at her home in Havana.



Peruvian artisan fisherman Cesar Melgarejo prepares a traditional ceviche for himself and colleagues with grey mullets.

ALL BLACKPINK MEMBERS RENEW CONTRACTS WITH LABEL YG

All members of the megastar girl group BLACKPINK renewed their contracts with YG Entertainment on Wednesday, the company said, ending speculation around their future and driving up shares in the leading K-pop label by over 20 percent. Rumors surrounding BLACKPINK—one of K-pop's most successful girl groups—and their potential future plans have abounded since the quartet's original contracts expired in August, with local reports even claiming in September that member Lisa rejected YG's renewal offer.

But YG announced on Wednesday that all members—Jenny, Lisa, Jisoo and Rose—had renewed their contracts with the company for “group activities”. “After careful discussion with BLACKPINK, we signed an exclusive contract for group activities based on deep trust,” the label said in a state-

ment sent to AFP.

“With YG's full support, BLACKPINK plans to repay the love of fans around the world with activities commensurate with their global status, including the release of a new album and a large-scale world tour,” it added. BLACKPINK, who first emerged out of South Korea's wildly popular K-pop scene in 2016, has also been recognized for the group's efforts on climate advocacy.

Last month, the members were given one of Britain's most prestigious honors by King Charles III, for their work for the COP26 climate summit in 2021. Their official YouTube channel has a staggering 92.3 million subscribers, making them one of the most subscribed artists in the world on the platform. BLACKPINK's other achievements include being the first-ever K-pop girl group to reach the top of the

US Billboard 200 chart, and the first Asian artists to headline prestigious music events such as Coachella.

YG, on the other hand, was at the centre of the notorious “Burning Sun” entertainment and sex scandal—which revolved around a Gangnam nightclub of the same name—that rattled South Korea in 2018. The label was hard hit when Seungri—a former member of popular boyband BIGBANG and co-director of Burning Sun—retired from show business in 2019 amid mounting criminal investigations.

He was later sentenced to 18 months in prison for offering women to potential investors for sexual services, among other charges. YG Entertainment's shares were up 24.58 percent to 59,800 won in afternoon trading in Seoul.—AFP



K-Pop band Blackpink's members, Lalisa “Lisa” Manoban, Roseanne “Rose” Park, Kim Ji-soo and Jennie Kim, pose with their medals following a special investiture ceremony to present them with Honorary MBEs (Member of the Order of the British Empire), at Buckingham Palace in London.—AFP

‘May December’, ‘American Fiction’, ‘Past Lives’ top Spirit Award nominations



(From left to right) South Korean actor Teo Yoo, South-Korean Canadian director Celine Song, US actress Greta Lee and US actor John Magaro pose on the red carpet for the film “Past Lives” in competition at the Berlinale, Europe's first major film festival of the year in Berlin.—AFP photos



(From left) US actors Charles Melton, Julianne Moore, Natalie Portman and US filmmaker Todd Haynes arrive for the premiere of “May December” at the Academy Museum of Motion Pictures in Los Angeles, California.

“May December,” “American Fiction” and “Past Lives” on Tuesday topped the nominations for the Spirit Awards, which honor lower budget films and are among the first significant pre-Oscars galas to unveil their shortlists. The three films earned five nods apiece, including best feature, and are expected to contend for various prizes early next year, such as the Oscars in March. Netflix drama “May December” stars Natalie Portman as a Hollywood actor who sets out to make a movie about a woman who became a tabloid sensation for her affair with an underage boy.

Loosely based on a true story, the film earned nominations for Portman, supporting star Charles Melton (“Riverdale”), director Todd Haynes, and best first screenplay. “American Fiction” stars Jeffrey Wright as an author whose attempt to mock virtue-signaling publishing executives by writing a stereotypical “Black” book backfires when it accidentally becomes a bestseller. Wright was nominated along with supporting actors Sterling K. Brown and Erika Alexander for the satire, while for-

mer “Succession” writer Cord Jefferson earned a nod for best screenplay.

“Past Lives” stars Greta Lee and Teo Yoo will compete in the gender-neutral best lead performance category. The critically acclaimed Korean-American drama portrays childhood friends who reconnect after taking vastly different paths through life. It also received directing and screenplay nods.

The other movies nominated for best feature were “All of Us Strangers,” “Passages” and “We Grown Now.” Major stars among the acting nominees were Jessica Chastain (“Memory”), Andrew Scott (“All of Us Strangers”) and Anne Hathaway (“Eileen”).

Movies with budgets over \$30 million are not considered for the Film Independent Spirit Awards, which aim to celebrate independent movies. The awards will be handed out at a ceremony in a giant tent by Santa Monica beach in California on February 25. Oscars voting ends two days later, and the season-capping 96th Academy Awards take place March 10.—AFP



(From left to right) South Korean actor Teo Yoo, US actress Greta Lee and US actor John Magaro attend a photocall for the film “Past Lives” in competition at the Berlinale, Europe's first major film festival of the year, on February 19, 2023 in Berlin.



US actor Jamie Foxx arrives for the premiere of “Just Mercy” at the Roy Thomson Hall during the 2019 Toronto International Film Festival Day 2 in Toronto, Ontario.—AFP

Jamie Foxx makes first public outing since medical scare

US actor Jamie Foxx made his first public appearance in Hollywood since suffering a mysterious medical emergency, telling an award show that he had not been able to even walk six months ago. Making a surprise appearance at the Critics' Choice Association's Celebration of Cinema and Television in Los Angeles Monday night, Foxx said he had “been through some things.” “It's crazy. I couldn't do that six months ago, I couldn't actually walk,” he told the audience. “I wouldn't wish what I went through on my worst enemy, because it's tough when you do... when it's almost over, when you see the tunnel,” Foxx added. The Oscar-winner did not explain the nature of the illness, which occurred in April in the state of Georgia, where the 55-year-old was filming a Netflix movie.

But he joked: “I saw the tunnel, I didn't see the light! It was hot in that tunnel too. I don't know what was going on... ‘S**t, am I going to the right place?’ I see the devil going, ‘C'mon!’” Foxx, an actor, comedian and Grammy-winning singer, won an Academy Award in 2005 for the Ray Charles musical biopic “Ray.”—AFP

Daddy cool: Swedish dads go viral as boy band

Five Swedish fathers singing capella pop songs while taking care of their young children have taken social media by storm, with their videos garnering tens of millions of views. The five men, all in their 30s, film their “Dad Harmony” sessions while hanging out with their kids at home in the northern town of Skelleftea. “This story all started at my bachelor party” in the summer of 2022, Peter Widmark, a 33-year-old who works in sales, told AFP in an interview.

“We were hanging out and singing

as we usually do when we hang out... (and) my brother filmed it and put it on TikTok with his seven followers,” he said. The next morning the dads discovered the video had been viewed 40,000 times. The number had skyrocketed to 20 million hits worldwide within a few weeks.

The five friends decided to start posting videos regularly, shot in their kitchens or on their sofas, often holding their little ones on their laps. Singing the chorus of Leonard Cohen's classic “Hallelujah”, one of the dads

can be seen holding his weeks-old newborn in his arms. “It's a soothing thing when we sing,” Widmark said, explaining why the children are usually so calm in the videos.

‘Typical Swedish guys’

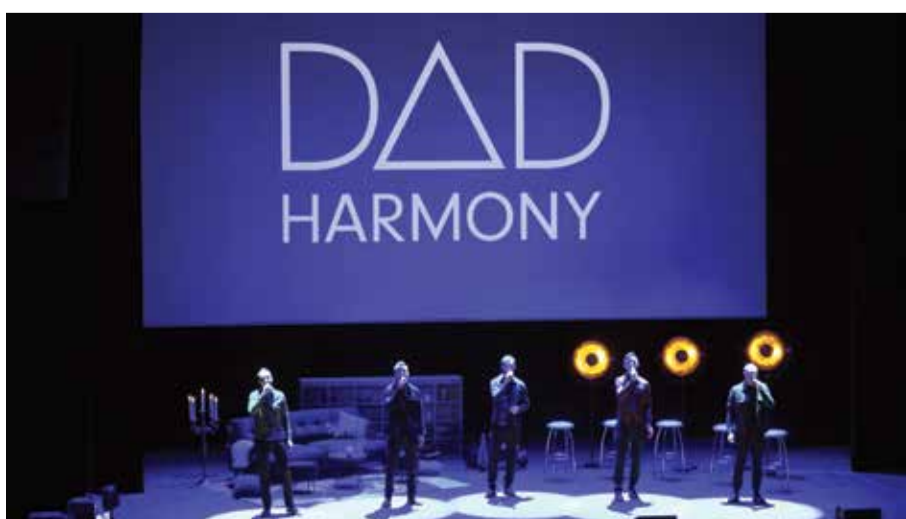
“We are typical Swedish guys,” said Widmark's brother Tomas, who is also part of the group, adding it was “not that unusual” for men in Sweden to spend a lot of time with their children. “Almost every guy in Sweden is used to taking paternity leave so it's

not a big deal for us,” he added. Each of the dads has two kids.

Dad Harmony's repertoire includes hits by Michael Jackson, the Beatles and popular Christmas songs. Since the end of November the group has been on a month-long tour criss-crossing Sweden to perform live shows each weekend—albeit without their kids. During the weeks, they go back to Skelleftea and continue to work at their normal jobs and spend time with their families.

“I just stumbled on their video on Instagram and I was mesmerized,” said

Louise Elgstrom, a 41-year-old fan who attended a recent show in the town of Norrkoping. She said their appeal lies in the fact that “they feel so natural and also (that they are) involving their children.” The dads vow their success won't go to their heads. “No televisions flying from the hotel rooms!” joked band member Sebastian Akesson. But the group has big dreams: they hope to line up tour dates in the United States and Asia, and say they would love to sing with Elton John one day.—AFP



Members of the band “Dad Harmony” (From left to right) Tomas Widmark, Peter Widmark, Sebastian Akesson, Michael Aberg and Adam Stenlund sing on stage during a concert in Norrkoping, Sweden.



Members of the band “Dad Harmony” (from left to right) Michael Aberg, Sebastian Akesson, Adam Stenlund, Peter Widmark and Tomas Widmark are pictured during an interview with AFP, in Norrkoping, Sweden.—AFP photos



Member of the band “Dad Harmony” Peter Widmark (center) is pictured during an interview with AFP, in Norrkoping, Sweden.

Sports

Sports bodies urge IOC to allow Russians as neutrals

Russian, Belarusian athletes face sanctions from a multitude of sports

LAUSANNE: Representatives of international sports federations and national Olympic committees on Tuesday called for Russian and Belarusian athletes to be admitted under a neutral flag for the 2024 Games in Paris "as soon as possible". During the Olympic summit in Lausanne, athlete representatives also asked for "clarity" on the issue, according to a statement published after the meeting. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) still has to make a final ruling on whether athletes from Russia and Belarus, a key ally for Moscow in its offensive on Ukraine, will be permitted to compete next summer.

The IOC has repeated its stance that a decision will be taken "at the appropriate time". Athletes from the two countries have faced sanctions from a multitude of sports since Russia launched its assault on Ukraine in February of 2022. However, over the past year a number of Olympic sports have eased restrictions, allowing them to return to competition under certain conditions.

In March, the IOC lifted an outright ban on Russian and Belarusian athletes, allowing them to

compete as neutral athletes provided they did not support the Ukraine conflict and had no ties to the military. The IOC on Tuesday "confirmed that the participation of such AINs (individual neutral athletes) in the Olympic Games could happen only under the existing strict conditions". "Neither the qualification system developed by the respective International Federations nor the number of allocated quota places to a sport will be changed for AINs with a Russian or Belarusian passport," it added.

The IOC suspended the Russian Olympic Committee (ROC) on October 12 for violating the territorial integrity of the membership of Ukraine by recognizing illegally annexed territories. ROC has recognized regional organizations from four Ukrainian territories annexed since Russia's invasion began in 2022. Russia's Olympic body last month launched an appeal against its suspension by the IOC at the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS). In September, officials voted to allow Russian and Belarusian athletes to compete at next year's Paralympics under a neutral flag after deciding against an outright ban. — AFP



LAUSANNE: A player scoring a try by jumping into Lake Geneva from a floating rugby field during the Water Rugby Lausanne in Lausanne, western Switzerland. — AFP

News in Brief

Jaguars Lawrence suffers injury

MIAMI: Jacksonville quarterback Trevor Lawrence suffered a high ankle sprain during the Jaguars' defeat to the Cincinnati Bengals but there is no timetable for his return, head coach Doug Pederson said Tuesday. Lawrence was injured during the fourth quarter of the Jaguars' 34-31 overtime loss on Monday, leaving the field for treatment after team-mate Walker Little inadvertently stepped on his ankle. Pederson gave a positive outlook for Lawrence's injury on Tuesday, saying the quarterback would be re-evaluated later in the week. "It's a right high ankle sprain," Pederson said. "Everything's stable, everything looks good. We'll see where he is in a couple of days." Pederson was cautious about the possibility that Lawrence could return for the Jaguars' fixture against the Cleveland Browns on Sunday. "I'm not going to put that timetable on Trevor." — AFP

France to ramp up hotel checks

PARIS: France will not cap hotel prices during the Olympics this summer but instead increase checks to make sure visitors get their money's worth, a minister said on Wednesday. Some 15 million visitors are expected for the Olympics in July and August, and the Paralympics in August and early September. Hotels have considerably marked up their prices for rooms during the Olympic Games from July 26 to August 11. The minister responsible for tourism, Olivia Gregoire, told Sud Radio the government would in no way seek to limit these rates. "There was never any price cap during the Olympics or Paralympics in London, Rio or even Beijing," she told Sud Radio. Instead 900 inspectors, around a third of those working for the government's anti-fraud agency, will be tasked with "checking prices, sanitary conditions and the smooth running of the Olympic Games", she said. — AFP

Trackhouse replaces RNF

PARIS: Trackhouse Racing will replace RNF as an Aprilia affiliate team in MotoGP next year, the American team announced on Tuesday. Trackhouse, which already competes in NASCAR, will retain Miguel Oliveira and Raul Fernandez, who both competed with RNF this season, as its two riders. "Joining the MotoGP world championship is a very exciting moment for our young company," said Trackhouse founder and owner Justin Marks in a statement. "Trackhouse has worked from day one to recognize unique and compelling motorsport opportunities and being able to expand to a global series like MotoGP is a massive step in scaling the company." Marks added that Trackhouse wanted to "help grow and amplify this amazing sport to millions of new fans in North America and beyond." The RNF team was excluded from the 2024 championship for "repeated infractions and breaches" affecting the competition's image, organisers said last week, the day after the final Grand Prix of the season, in Valencia. — AFP

Miami, China to host races

PARIS: The Miami and Chinese Grands Prix will host sprint races in the 2024 Formula One season, organizers announced on Tuesday. There will be six sprints for the second straight year, after the format was added in 2021 to three race weekends. The Azerbaijan and Belgian races will miss out on the Saturday sprint having held one each last year. "The addition of Shanghai will be a challenge for the teams and drivers as Formula One heads back to China for the first time since 2019, while a sprint in Miami will add a new dimension to an enthralling weekend," said Mohammed Ben Sulayem, president of motorsports' governing body the FIA. The United States, Austrian, Brazilian and Qatari Grands Prix will again host sprints, which offer eight championship points to the winner. — AFP

F1 Academy head 'deeply insulted' as FIA launches probe

PARIS: F1 Academy head Susie Wolff has rejected any suggestion of wrongdoing after motor sport's governing body announced an investigation into potential conflict of interest believed to centre on her and husband Toto Wolff, the Mercedes team boss. Without naming any individuals or teams, the FIA said it was "aware of media speculation centered on the allegation of information of a confidential nature" being passed to an F1 team principal from a member of Formula One Management (FOM) personnel.

"The FIA compliance department is looking into the matter," the governing body said in a press release on Tuesday. The spotlight has fallen on Toto Wolff, the high-profile and outspoken boss of the

Mercedes team, and his wife Susie. She is managing director of the F1 Academy, the women's competition administered by FOM, the company that holds the sport's commercial rights. Toto Wolff's team "wholly rejected" suggestions of wrongdoing and Susie Wolff issued a strongly worded statement on social media defending herself.

She wrote on Instagram that she was "deeply insulted but sadly unsurprised" by the claims. She called the allegations "rooted in intimidatory and misogynistic behavior, and focused on my marital status rather than my abilities". "Throughout my career in motor sport I have encountered and overcome numerous obstacles and I refuse to let these baseless allegations overshadow my dedication and passion for F1 Academy," she said.

She added: "In the strongest possible terms, I reject these allegations." Toto Wolff's team similarly rejected the claims, which initially surfaced in an F1 publication. "We note the generic statement from the FIA this evening, which responds to unsubstantiated allegations from a single media outlet," a spokesper-



Susie Wolff

son said in a statement. "The team has received no communication from the FIA compliance department on this topic. "We wholly reject the allegation in the statement and associated media coverage, which wrongly impinges on the integrity and compliance of our team principal." — AFP

Ronaldo rested as Al Nassr top group

DUBAI: Al Nassr rested Cristiano Ronaldo and started the majority of their foreign contingent on the bench as they concluded the Asian Champions League group campaign with a 1-1 draw away to Istiklol on Tuesday night. The Saudi Arabian side, looking to rebound from Friday's Saudi Pro League defeat to arch-rivals Al Hilal, had already qualified for the knockout stages as Group E winners.

With progress secured with one matchday to spare, Nassr manager Luis Castro chose to leave Ronaldo out of the squad for the match in Dushanbe, while he named among his substitutes the likes of Sadio Mane, Aymeric Laporte, Otavio and Anderson Talisca. Istiklol took the lead at the Pami Stadium just after the half hour when midfielder Alisher Dzhalilov fired a fine low shot into the bottom corner. The hosts, yet to win in this season's competition, were hoping for three points to lift them off the bottom of the group.

However, Abdulrahman Ghareeb leveled five minutes into the second half, the Nassr winger converting a close-range volley at the second time of asking following an initial stop from Istiklol goalkeeper Rustam Yatimov. Castro did send for Talisca, Nassr's second-top scorer this season behind Ronaldo, in the 74th minute, and Ivory Coast midfielder Seko Fofana and Portugal winger Otavio late on but the visitors could not snatch the win.

Scorchers red-hot favorites to win 3rd Big Bash League

SYDNEY: Perth Scorchers head into the 13th edition of Australia's Twenty20 Big Bash League as overwhelming favorites to win a third title in a row but a confident Brisbane Heat believe they have the depth to go all the way. Adam Voges' Scorchers beat Heat in the final last season by five wickets with four balls left in front of a record 53,886 fans in Perth for an unprecedented fifth crown. They again boast a strong squad, with English batters Zak Crawley, Laurie Evans and Stephen Eskinazi joining a formidable bowling attack including Lance Morris, Jhye Richardson and Ashton Agar.

Voges has also drafted in giant left-arm quick Liam Haskett after he took 13 wickets at 29.15 in four

Sheffield United reappoint Wilder

LONDON: Chris Wilder admits he faces a "huge challenge" to keep Sheffield United in the Premier League after returning as Blades manager following Paul Heckingbottom's dismissal on Tuesday. Heckingbottom is the first boss to be sacked in the Premier League this season, with 11 defeats in 14 league games leaving United bottom of the table, four points from safety. Reeling from a 5-0 hammering at relegation rivals Burnley at the weekend, the club have turned to former boss Wilder in a bid to avoid relegation.

Wilder is a popular figure at Bramall Lane after



Nassr's Portuguese forward #07 Cristiano Ronaldo

Nassr ended the group stage unbeaten, with four victories and two draws.

In the group's other match, Qatar's Al Duhail put an end to Persepolis' chances of qualifying by recording a 2-1 victory at the Azadi Stadium in Tehran - an encounter which stretched to a remarkable 107 minutes overall. Michael Olunga scored the winner with seven minutes of normal time remaining, moments after Giorgi Gvlesiani missed a penalty for the home side. The result did not impact the overall standings in the group, though, with two-time runners-up Persepolis finishing second and Duhail third. In Group A, leaders Al Ain cemented their place at the summit with a 2-1

win away to Turkmenistan's Ahal. The victory in Ashgabat means the UAE side, winners of the competition in 2003, won five of their six matches. Al Ain were already guaranteed to go through to the last 16 as group winners. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia's Al Fayha rounded off their campaign with a 4-1 victory at Uzbek club Pakhtakor to finish second in Group A. The 10 group winners and the six best second-placed teams advance to the knockout rounds, with the East Asia side of the groups concluding next week. The last 16 begins in February, while the competition concludes with a two-legged final in May. — AFP

Sheffield Shield appearances, including the scalps of Test stars Usman Khawaja and Marnus Labuschagne. "To finish the way we did (last season), in front of a crowd that loud and passionate, was incredible," said Eskinazi, who plays English county cricket for Middlesex and with Welsh Fire in the Hundred. "We've got an awesome squad, a great supporter base and we're hungry, so I'm excited to be on board and keen to get stuck in."

They open their defense in Geelong against Aaron Finch's Melbourne Renegades on Sunday. The eight-team tournament kicks off with Heat hosting Melbourne Stars at the Gabba on Thursday, ahead of a December 14-18 pause for Australia's opening Test against Pakistan in Perth. A four-game finals series will lead into the decider on January 24 -- a Wednesday, only the second time it will be played mid-week. Heat wicketkeeper-batter Jimmy Peirson is in confident mood as they chase a first title since 2012-13.

"We've been in a final, we've played in front of 50,000 people, we know what to expect, and we did

representing the club as a player and guiding them from the third tier to ninth in the Premier League during his first spell in the dugout. The boyhood Blades fan left United by mutual consent in March 2021 after almost five years in charge. Wilder has since had unsuccessful spells at Middlesbrough and Watford, but his return to Sheffield has reignited his passion for management.

"I am going to give it my all, I am more enthusiastic and determined than I have ever been," he said. "Sheffield United are getting me at my best as well. "For me this is a huge challenge personally, and I am rubbing my hands together to try and help the club get out of the position we are in. "We are up against it, everyone in the world thinks we are done and dusted. We have always had that underdog tag, that mentality." Wilder is back

it with a group that wasn't at its strongest either. So we know we can do it," he said. They are boosted for their opener by Khawaja and Labuschagne before the duo departs for Test duty. England's Sam Billings and Paul Walter, along with New Zealander Colin Munro, are their three overseas picks. The Stars have the huge added bonus of big-hitting allrounder Glenn Maxwell, who missed all of last season with a fractured leg, returning to bolster their batting.

Three-time champions Sydney Sixers meet Hobart Hurricanes first up, with Steve Smith available before he too leaves for the Pakistan series. The event has however been hit by some top names pulling out, including Afghan leg-spinner Rashid Khan, the world's number one ranked T20 bowler and a mainstay of the Adelaide Strikers. Khan has a back injury that requires minor surgery. England batter Harry Brook also withdrew from the Stars over workload concerns while South Africa's Quinton de Kock is set to miss the Renegades' first two games because of commitments in the Abu Dhabi T10 league. — AFP

in Yorkshire on a survival mission after United failed to build on last season's promotion from the Championship.

Heckingbottom, appointed permanent manager in November 2021, guided the club back to the Premier League with a second-placed finish in the second tier. But the humiliation at Burnley - United's third loss by five goals or more this season including an 8-0 thrashing by Newcastle - proved the final straw for angry supporters, who turned on Heckingbottom before the axe fell on the boss on Tuesday. "After slipping to the bottom of the table and a number of disappointing results and performances, it is felt that a change is needed to give the club a boost and every possible chance of remaining in the Premier League beyond this season," said United chief executive Stephen Bettis. — AFP

Sports

Netherlands, Germany cruise into Women's Nations League finals

Heartbreak for England despite beating Scotland 6-0

PARIS: Germany and the Netherlands booked their places at the Women's Nations League finals, where they will also fight for spots at the 2024 Olympic Games, but there was heartbreak for England who miss out despite beating Scotland 6-0 on Tuesday. The Germans drew 0-0 in Wales but secured their passage thanks to Iceland's 1-0 win over Denmark. The Netherlands needed a 95th minute goal from Damaris Egurrola to see them to a 4-0 win over Belgium which meant they edged England on goal difference in Group A1 after the World Cup runners-up hammered the Scots in Glasgow.

The Dutch and the Germans will join France and world champions Spain in the semi-finals which take place in February. The two finalists will qualify for the 2024 Olympics. If France, who are guaranteed a place as hosts of Paris 2024, reach the final, the team winning the third-place play-off will also progress. England, who were hopeful of gaining an Olympic place for a Great Britain team which would have included their Scottish opponents, and the Netherlands went into the final round of games level on points but with the Dutch holding a two-goal advantage.

England quickly laid on the pressure, with Alex Greenwood and Beth Mead bracketing two goals in two minutes from Lauren James to give them a 4-0 half-time lead. The Dutch, meanwhile, were only leading 1-0 through a 34th minute goal from Lineth Beerensteyn. The English compounded their position when Fran Kirby added a fifth four minutes into the second half. At that point, England had a two-goal advantage over the Dutch, but they then ran into some determined defense from the Scots who also went close, forcing a fine save from Mary Earps. Beerensteyn added a second to give the Dutch hope, but the evening changed dramatically in stoppage time.

First, Egurrola found the back of the net to give the Dutch the advantage. That was followed by Lucy Bronze scoring a sixth for England but, even as they were celebrating, Egurrola snatched a second in Tilburg to send the Netherlands through. "(Coach) Sarina (Wiegman) made sure we knew what was happening, and we knew what we were supposed to do," said England forward Mead. "We got the goals late on, we thought we had maybe gotten over the line but unfortunately it wasn't meant to be."

Germans held

The Germans were level on 12 points with Denmark in Group A3 going into the game although their better head-to-head record meant they simply needed to match the Danes' result against Iceland. In the end, the Danish fell short with Karolina Vilhjalmsdottir, who plays in the Bundesliga for Bayer Leverkusen, where she is on loan from Bayern Munich, striking in the 77th minute in Viborg to give Iceland a 1-0 win.

The Germans struggled to get a grip on their game against Wales and in the end were fortunate to come away with a point.

"I thought we were the better team. We had the better chances and hit the post so, overall, I'm very pleased," Wales manager Gemma Grainger told the BBC. "It's a real moment when you say we had the better chances against Germany." Wales, however, finished bottom of the group with this single point and are relegated to Group B. World champions Spain had already qualified for the finals as Group A4 winners and were missing the injured Alexia Putellas, which may account for their sleepy start against Sweden. Julia Zigiotti Olme put the visitors ahead in the first minute af-



MALAGA: Spain's midfielder #10 Jennifer Hermoso (left) fights for the ball with Sweden's defender #13 Amanda Ilestedt during the UEFA Women's Nations League group A4 football match between Spain and Sweden on December 5, 2023. — AFP

ter non-existent defending at a corner.

Salma Paralluelo levelled 10 minutes later but more slack defense allowed Kosovare Asllani and Stina Blackstenius to put Sweden 3-1 up after half an hour. Athenea del Castillo pulled one back for Spain who then turned the game around with three goals

in the last 12 minutes, two from Mariona Caldentey, the other from Fiamma Benitez, to win 5-3. Group A2 winners France, who had also booked their place in the finals, earned a hard-fought 1-0 win in Portugal, Grace Geyoro with the winner in the third minute of additional time at the end of the game. — AFP

Under-fire Ten Hag urges Utd hierarchy to keep faith in him

LONDON: Erik ten Hag urged Manchester United's hierarchy to keep faith with him on Tuesday as his track record proves he is the right man to rebuild the troubled club. Ten Hag is under fire following a turbulent start to a season that began with high hopes after the Dutch boss led United to their first trophy in six years last term. Having won the League Cup, reached the FA Cup final and finished third in the Premier League, Ten Hag was expected to mastermind a title challenge.

But instead, Saturday's limp 1-0 loss at Newcastle was United's 10th defeat in 21 matches in all com-

petitions, leaving them five points adrift of the Premier League's top four. United, who host Chelsea on Wednesday, are also in grave danger of being eliminated from the Champions League when they face Bayern Munich in their last group match next week. Adding to Ten Hag's problems, reports have emerged that a section of United's squad have become disillusioned with his intense training sessions and hard-line discipline.

United were furious not to have been given a right to reply to the reports. And Ten Hag came out fighting when he faced the media on Tuesday, insisting he would eventually show that United's owners, the Glazer family, were right to hire him last year. "There will be always tough times in every journey. We are in the right direction," he said. "I know we will get there where we want

to be. Because...see my record. "Everywhere where I was, every season, I got my targets, so if we stick together, stick to the plan and the strategy, we will get where we want to be."

'We are together'

Ten Hag managed Go Ahead Eagles and Utrecht before flourishing at Ajax and earning his move to Old Trafford. The 53-year-old won three league titles during his time in charge of the Dutch giants, who he led to the Champions League semi-finals in 2019. Asked what the realistic timeframe is for getting United back to similar heights, Ten Hag said: "First of all, I can't say in this club we are waiting for two, three years. "This club the aim is, the demand is and the standards should be that you win every game. "I demand of my team, my players to win every game.

Doesn't matter who the opponent is, and I will stick to that. That brought us last year very far. "That mentality I don't want to change this because that will be a drop-off in culture."

Despite the reports, Ten Hag believes he has the players' full backing heading into another crucial week. "Oh yeah, I never had the idea they don't (back me) because I know they would have dropped me against Fulham or Burnley if it was the other situation," he said. "Of course negativity is never good. You have to take care it never kills the energy. "But I don't care because I know, and all the players know, we are the biggest club in the world, or one of the biggest clubs, then you know you get a lot of attention. "We are together in that. There's no way that you are alone there. You are together in that boat." — AFP

Guardiola predicts City will win Premier League

LONDON: A bullish Pep Guardiola says he believes Manchester City will win a record fourth consecutive Premier League title despite a three-match winless run. The defending champions have drawn their past three league games, against Chelsea, Liverpool and Tottenham, and are three points behind leaders Arsenal ahead of Wednesday's match at Aston Villa. City have been unusually leaky in defense, conceding eight goals over those three matches as they prepare for a tough test against Unai Emery's men, who have won their past 13 home league games in a row. Guardiola admitted that last season's treble winners need tighten up at the back but said they were still not losing many games.

The City boss said despite their stumbles he was confident his men were on track to become the first team in English top-flight history to win four league titles in a row. "The motivation is to do it better," he said at his pre-match press conference on Tuesday. "I learned from where I come from that if you want to win you have to do it better than the opponent. "We have to do much better. We have to try and not concede chances, or goals. "My feeling today is we will win the Premier League, if you ask me. If we play at the level of Liverpool or Tottenham we are going to win it again."

"The people don't believe it after three draws but we are going to do it again, knowing it is not easy because no team have done it yet. That's why the difficulty is there." City will be without suspended midfielder Rodri for the trip to Villa Park - they lost all three games earlier this season when he was previously suspended. John Stones will be fit to return and Guardiola admitted he



Manchester City's Spanish manager Pep Guardiola

could push the England international into midfield in place of the Spaniard.

"We don't deny how important he is but he's not there, suspended, like Jack (Grealish), so we will find the best solution to compete against Aston Villa," said Guardiola. Guardiola defended his team after the club were charged by the Football Association 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, with the Norwegian criticizing

Hooper in a social media post.

Guardiola said he did not know how the club would react to the FA charge. But he added: "We have behaved incredibly in these years, especially this season, how we behaved in our not-good results. The decisions sometimes are in favor, sometimes against (us), but we behaved even after the game. "The comments from my players (were) about accepting that we can do better - and me first. It's what I want to see of my club, of my team. "After that, we will accept all the decisions of the Premier League or whatever." — AFP

Pochettino warns Chelsea to beware wounded United



Mauricio Pochettino

LONDON: Mauricio Pochettino has warned Chelsea to beware of a backlash from wounded Manchester United when they face Erik ten Hag's troubled team on Wednesday. United suffered another setback in their spluttering campaign when they were beaten 1-0 at Newcastle last weekend. The loss, which left United five points adrift of the Premier League's top four, came just days after they blew the lead in a damaging 3-3 draw at Galatasaray in the Champions League.

Ten Hag's men are in grave danger of being eliminated from the Champions League in their final group stage match against Bayern Munich next week. But before then they must fight to get their domestic form back on track, with Chelsea visiting Old Trafford before United host Bournemouth on Saturday. Despite United's struggles, Chelsea boss Pochettino is adamant they remain a side to be feared.

"I wouldn't say it is a good moment to go there. We're going to face a team that's going to be tough because they want to win," Pochettino told reporters on Tuesday. "They have very good players. They have pace with their offensive players and so we cannot allow them to transition. "I think we need to be clever because they have pace through Marcus Rashford and Alejandro Garnacho who can transition really fast. "We need to try to dominate and put pressure by playing in their half. That will be the challenge for us."

Chelsea are five points behind United after a slow start of their own this term. Pochettino was linked with becoming United manager prior to Ten Hag's appointment last year. He refused to be drawn on whether he was happy to have avoided the myriad of on and off-pitch problems that have hampered Ten Hag. "You try to make me talk too much! I don't want to make a mistake. I'm not the person to talk about what is going on at different clubs. I'm happy here in this project," he said. — 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
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764

Change of Name

I, **Sarafraz** Backapatna Sulaiman (Passport No. T8277581) do hereby change my daughter's name from Amani, (Passport No. T8282959) to Amani (as given name) Sarafraz (as surname) for all purposes. She will henceforth be known in the name Amani Sarafraz and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all her documents. **7-12-2023**

I, **Vinod Kumar** Panchal holder of Indian Passport No. P6279413 having permanent address V P O Kherwara near Sitlamata temple Udaipur

Rajasthan residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as (given name) Vinod Kumar and (surname) Lohar. **#4570 7-12-2023**

I, **Mahboob Basha Shaik**, father of Aisha Syed holding of her Passport number V6086715 resident in 2/361 Sastri Nagar Akkayapalli, Kadappa have change my daughter name Aisha Syed to Given name Aisha surname Shaik. **#4569- 5-12-2023**

Messi named Time's 'Athlete of the Year'

Eight-time Ballon d'Or winner makes instant impact on Miami's fortunes



NASHVILLE: Teammates hold up Inter Miami's Argentine forward #10 Lionel Messi as they celebrate after winning the Leagues Cup final football match against Nashville SC. Lionel Messi has been named on December 5, 2023 Time magazine's 'Athlete of the Year' for 2023 after a trailblazing season marked by an eighth Ballon d'Or award and his ground-breaking move to Major League Soccer's Inter Miami. — AFP

LOS ANGELES: Lionel Messi has been named Time magazine's "Athlete of the Year" for 2023 after a trailblazing season marked by an eighth Ballon d'Or award and his ground-breaking move to Major League Soccer's Inter Miami. Time said the Argentine superstar had already had a transformative impact on the American sporting landscape, which has been historically slow to embrace football.

"Lionel Messi this year managed to do what once seemed impossible, when he signed with Inter Mi-

ami: turning the US into a soccer country," Time commented. The 36-year-old Messi made his debut for Miami in July following an acrimonious departure from Paris Saint-Germain. The World Cup-winner also rebuffed a lucrative move to Saudi Arabia in favor of a new chapter in MLS.

The eight-time Ballon d'Or winner made an instant impact on Miami's fortunes, playing a pivotal role in helping the team win the expanded Leagues Cup, a cross-border competition for teams from

MLS and Mexico's top flight. Messi finished the campaign with 11 goals in 14 appearances across all competitions, but an injury towards the end of the season meant he was unable to help Miami force their way into the playoffs. Messi was quoted by Time as saying that his first preference after PSG had been a fairytale return to Barcelona, but that move stalled over the club's finances.

"I tried to return, and it did not happen," Messi said, adding that he was also "thinking a lot"

about joining the wave of overseas players who have headed to the Saudi Pro League. "It was Saudi Arabia or MLS, and both options seemed very interesting to me," Messi told the magazine. Time said Messi's arrival had driven a surge in attendances, ticket prices, merchandise sales and viewership, revealing that on the day of his debut, subscriptions to Apple TV - which retains exclusive rights to MLS - had jumped by 110,000, a 1,700% increase over the previous day. — AFP

Lakers trounce Suns as Bucks romp past Knicks

LOS ANGELES: LeBron James scored 31 points as the Los Angeles Lakers won a thrilling duel with the Phoenix Suns 106-103 on Tuesday to advance to the semi-finals of the NBA's in-season tournament. James produced a trademark clutch fourth quarter performance with 15 points in a victory that sends the Lakers into a last-four showdown with the New Orleans Pelicans in Las Vegas on Thursday.

In Tuesday's other quarter-final, Giannis Antetokounmpo and Damian Lillard combined for 63 points as the Milwaukee Bucks advanced to the semi-finals with a 146-122 rout of the New York Knicks. But the game of the night was unquestionably in Los Angeles, where James and the Lakers held off a ferocious second-half fightback from Kevin Durant and the Suns to prevail in a classic. The Lakers dominated the first half to lead by 12 at the break, up 59-47.

But the Suns roared back in the third quarter, outscoring the Lakers 35-24 to make it a one-point game heading into the fourth. The 38-year-old James though was in no mood to surrender victory and found his scoring touch to shepherd the Lakers over the line. Austin Reaves nailed a superb three-pointer to give the Lakers a four-point advantage with 15 seconds on the clock. Durant cut the gap to two points with a reverse layup but missed with a last-gasp attempted buzzer beater that would have forced overtime.

"I've been there a lot in my career and I understand the assignment," James said of his ruthless fourth-quarter display. "I was happy I was able to make a couple of plays, but the big shot came from AR (Austin Reaves) to take us up by four... that was big-time." James finished with 31 points from 12-of-25 shooting, with 11 assists and five rebounds. Anthony Davis added 27 points with 15 rebounds while Reaves added 20 points in a scintillating cameo from the bench. Durant led the Phoenix scoring with 31 points while Grayson Allen and Devin Booker finished with 21 points apiece for the Suns.

Giannis, Lillard shine
Milwaukee advanced to a showdown against the



LOS ANGELES: LeBron James #23 of the Los Angeles Lakers takes a shot against Jusuf Nurkic #20 and Kevin Durant #35 of the Phoenix Suns in the second half during the 2023 NBA In-Season Tournament quarterfinals on December 05, 2023. — AFP

Indiana Pacers in Thursday's other semi-final after pulling clear of the Knicks with a huge third quarter. Antetokounmpo led the Milwaukee scorers with 35 points while Lillard weighed in with 28 points, including 5-of-7 from three-point distance. Antetokounmpo finished with 10 assists and eight rebounds. Malik Beasley (18 points), Khris Middleton (14), Bobby Portis (13) and Cameron Payne (12) all made double figures for Milwaukee.

Antetokounmpo was heartened by a display which provided more evidence that the former NBA Most Valuable Player's blockbuster partnership with summer signing Lillard is starting to gel. "Game by game we are getting more comfortable." Antetokounmpo said of his on-court chemistry with Lillard. "We have a lot of games ahead of us. "As we play more minutes we're going to be more comfortable together... at the end of the day I think me and him are setting the tone for the whole team." New York were led by a 41-point display from Julius Randle while Jalen Brunson finished with 24 points. — AFP

Arsenal win in 7-goal thriller

LONDON: Arsenal moved five points clear at the top of the Premier League after Declan Rice's last-gasp goal capped the leaders' thrilling fightback in their 4-3 win against Luton on Tuesday. Rocked by a pair of costly blunders from keeper David Raya, Mikel Arteta's side trailed 3-2 in the second half of a pulsating clash at Kenilworth Road. But Arsenal roared back to consolidate their lead at the top of the table thanks to Kai Havertz's equalizer and Rice's header deep into stoppage-time.

The wild celebrations from Arteta and his players underlined the significance of a gritty escape that will fuel the belief Arsenal can finally win their first title since 2004. "I'm so happy. We knew it would be a big battle here, we made it hard for ourselves the way we conceded the goals," Arteta said. "The spirit of the team, how we fought, showed our quality in the right moments and never gave up. We went for it and got our rewards

today. "Big compliments to Luton, it was a tough night. I've spoken with the team, and they are all jumping."

Gabriel Martinelli had opened the scoring for Arsenal, with Luton's Gabriel Osho equalizing and Gabriel Jesus restoring the visitors' advantage just before half-time. Elijah Adebayo scored Luton's second equalizer soon after half-time thanks to the first of Raya's mistakes and Ross Barkley benefitted from another error from the Spaniard. But England midfielder Rice had the last word to give Arsenal six successive wins in all competitions since their controversial VAR-aided defeat at Newcastle.

Second-placed Liverpool can close back to within two points of Arsenal if they win at bottom-of-the-table Sheffield United on Wednesday. Arteta's men have been road warriors since the start of last season - winning 17 away games in that period—and the Gunners' first trip to Kenilworth Road for 32 years brought their first victory at the venue since 1984. They struck first in the 20th minute when Bukayo Saka weaved his way down the right flank for a low cross that Martinelli met with a scuffed finish into the bottom corner from 12 yards. — AFP



LUTON: Arsenal's English midfielder #41 Declan Rice celebrates after scoring his team fourth goal during the English Premier League football match between Luton Town and Arsenal on December 5, 2023. — AFP