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By B Izzak

Amir's health stable



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

KUWAIT: The health condition of HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah remains stable, said the Amiri Diwan on Thursday. In a statement, Amiri Diwan Minister Sheikh Mohammad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah also prayed to Almighty Allah to bestow good health and swift recovery upon HH the Amir.

HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received Wednesday a phone call from Qatari Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani to ask about the health condition of HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. Sheikh Tamim wished HH the Amir everlasting wellbeing. HH Sheikh Mishal thanked the Qatari Amir for his sincere and fraternal sentiments and good gesture. He also wished Sheikh Tamim everlasting wellbeing and further progress and prosperity for Qatar. — KUNA

KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Fahad Al-Sabah on Thursday ordered an urgent probe into the case of a man who was allegedly illegally arrested and tortured by the ministry of defense intelligence. The order came after MP Marzouq Al-Ghanem sent a series of questions to the minister of defense, saying that a man was illegally detained and tortured to force him to make false confessions.

The defense minister asked the army headquarters to form a special committee to investigate the case to clarify what exactly happened. Later, Ghanem said the ministry should have launched an investigation much earlier and not half an hour after receiving his questions. In his questions, Ghanem said he learned that a Kuwaiti citizen, whom he named, was arrested and detained by the ministry of defense intelligence and security authorities for two days on December 4-5.

Ghanem said the man was tortured physically and mentally to force him to make false confessions. The lawmaker asked the minister if the arrest case was correct and if the arrest was made based on an official warrant. He also asked if any official or department in the ministry had issued written or verbal orders for the man's arrest. Ghanem asked if the man was arrested in accordance with the legal procedures followed by authorities. He also asked if the man was tortured, handcuffed, blindfolded and sexually assaulted during his detention. He also asked if the state security service took part in the man's interrogation.

Meanwhile, Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Al-Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Thursday a copy of the credentials of new US Ambassador to



KUWAIT: Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Al-Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Thursday a copy of the credentials of new US Ambassador to Kuwait Karen Sasahara. — KUNA

Kuwait Karen Sasahara. The foreign minister wished the new ambassador good luck in her mission and further cooperation between the two friendly countries. The latest regional and international developments were discussed during the reception.

In a related development, MP Abdulkareem Al-Kandari announced he's postponing his plans to

file a grilling motion against Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem, after HH the Amir was admitted to hospital. In a statement, Kandari explained that the grilling, which objected to the selection of US ambassador Sasahara who had served previously in occupied Jerusalem, must be debated with the knowledge of the head of state.

Fatah in freefall as Hamas fights Zionist entity

RAMALLAH: Fatah, the largest Palestinian party, has seen its popularity plunge during the war between the Zionist entity and Hamas in Gaza, from where the Islamists violently ousted rivals Fatah in 2007. Fatah's chosen path of negotiations has not brought about the Palestinian state promised by the Oslo Accords of 1993, and Hamas — after choosing violence instead — has seen its popularity soar.

Fatah chief Mahmoud Abbas has led the Palestinian Authority — which has partial administrative control in the Zionist-occupied West Bank — since its creation in 1994. But the PA is now weakened like never before, and Palestinian political divisions run deeper than ever since the Zionist-Hamas war began on Oct 7.

The old guard in the West Bank where Fatah holds sway wants calm to prevail so talks can take place — and so they do not jeopardize the positions and advantages they enjoy under the PA. But the younger generation there says it has nothing left to lose and wants to revive the armed wing of Fatah, the Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades.

Above all, they want an end to security cooperation agreements between the PA and the Zionist entity, which they deem to be a betrayal of the Palestinian cause. "Oslo gave us a shot of anesthetic," said one senior Fatah official who spoke to AFP.

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17,170 killed as urban fighting rages in Gaza

GAZA: Heavy urban combat raged in and around Gaza's biggest cities on Thursday as the bloodiest-ever war between the Zionist entity and Palestinian group Hamas entered its third month since the fighters' attack on Oct 7. An increasingly dire humanitarian situation prompted United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to invoke a rare measure to seek a ceasefire, sparking anger from the Zionist entity.

The death toll has soared to 17,177 according to the Gaza health ministry, and vast areas of the besieged territory

have been reduced to a rubble-strewn wasteland of bombed-out or bullet-scarred buildings. Zionist forces have encircled major urban centers in their vow to destroy Hamas over its unprecedented attack in October when militants broke through Gaza's militarized border.

Backed by air power, tanks and armored bulldozers, Zionist troops were fighting Hamas in Khan Yunis, the biggest city in southern Gaza, as well as in Gaza City and the nearby Jabalia district of the north. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said troops had closed in on the Khan Yunis home of Hamas' Gaza chief Yahya Sinwar, 61, vowing "it is only a matter of time until we find him".

Air strikes also rained down on Rafah city in the far south, near the Egyptian border. The area has become a vast camp for many of the 1.9 million internally

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GAZA: The body of two-year-old Muhammad Saleh Farhat and others killed in Zionist bombardment overnight lie at Al-Najjar hospital in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on Dec 7, 2023. — AFP

Putin, MBS urge oil cooperation; Raisi visits Russia

RIYADH/MOSCOW: The leaders of Saudi Arabia and Russia used a rare face-to-face meeting to urge oil producers to stick to pledged supply cuts, a joint statement said Thursday. Russian President Vladimir Putin's trip to the Saudi capital a day earlier came as oil prices continued to slide, with US oil finishing below \$70 per barrel for the first time since July. Analysts have begun to consider the possibility that Saudi Arabia could abruptly decide to open the spigots, recalling a move by the kingdom in 2014 to counter rising US production.

Meeting in Riyadh, Putin and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman highlighted the work of the 23-member OPEC+ group of oil producers "in enhancing the stability of global oil markets". "They stressed... the need for all participating countries to adhere to the OPEC+ agreement, in a way that serves the interests of producers and consumers and supports the growth of the global economy," said a



MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin meets Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi at the Kremlin on Dec 7, 2023. — AFP

statement from the official Saudi Press Agency.

The OPEC+ bloc unveiled fresh supply cuts after a virtual meeting last week, with Russia saying it would slash oil exports by 500,000 barrels a day between January and March, having already introduced a cut of 300,000 barrels a day earlier this year. Saudi Arabia said it would extend

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Greece, Turkey vow to work on improving ties

ATHENS: Greece and Turkey on Thursday restarted high-level talks to reduce chronic tensions in their relations as the Turkish president visited Athens for the first time in six years. "There is no problem that cannot be solved between us," Recep Tayyip Erdogan said during a media appearance with Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, adding that he wanted to turn "the Aegean into a sea of peace and cooperation". "We want to further develop the positive momentum in our relations," Erdogan said.

Erdogan was in Athens for the first time since 2017 after a long period of tension marked by disputes over migration, energy exploration in the Aegean and territorial sovereignty. Erdogan

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Takamul 1 exercise unites Gulf



KUWAIT: Troops from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries participate in a joint military exercise titled "Integration 1" at the Al-Adra' area northwest of Kuwait City on December 6, 2023. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

KUWAIT: Secretary General of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf, Jassem Al-Budaiwi, confirmed that the exercise (Takamul 1), which concluded on Wednesday in Kuwait, represents ongoing Gulf's harmony and coordination. Al-Budai-

wi said in a statement to reporters after the conclusion of the exercise that the leaders of the GCC countries pay great attention to joint military action and provide this sector with everything that would achieve Gulf integration in this area.

He praised the Gulf spirit during the military training in conjunction with the conclusion of the 44th Gulf summit in Doha. The exercise was held under the supervision of the Unified Military Command and with the participation of the Gulf Cooperation Council

countries. Al-Budaiwi lauded the United Gulf Command's commitment to achieving military integration.

The Unified Military Command in the GCC supervises all military institutions. This is the first (Takamul 1) exercise since the establishment of

the command. The upcoming exercises will involve the naval and air forces. The (Takamul 1) events started on November 26 and came after the decision of the Supreme Military Committee of the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council. — KUNA

Kuwait backs OPEC+ decisions on voluntary output cuts

KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Oil Dr. Saad Al-Barak renewed Kuwait's support for the decisions of the OPEC+ alliance on the reduction of oil output, affirming commitment to an additional voluntary cut of 135,000 bpd as of January 1 until the end of March 2024. The new reduction will bring Kuwait's total output down to 2.413 million bpd, he said in a press conference on Wednesday.



Dr Saad Al-Barak

Al-Barak, also minister of state for economic and investment affairs and board chairman of Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC), commended the precautionary measures adopted by the recent OPEC and non-OPEC ministerial meetings to maintain the balance and stability of the oil market. The State of Kuwait will remain an active partner in the Declaration of Cooperation (DoC) between OPEC and non-OPEC countries, he added. — KUNA

Anti-corruption rankings 'improving'

KUWAIT: Head of the Anti-Corruption Authority (Nazaha) Abdulaziz Al-Ibrahim announced Thursday that around 99.6 percent of those under its financial disclosure regulations have submitted their documents in reflection of the country's improved anticorruption protocols and rankings. In his speech at Nazaha's third forum commemorating International Anti-Corruption Day, to be marked on December 9, Al-Ibrahim stated that Nazaha has succeeded in implementing and improving laws that would help Kuwait better counter corruption.

Al-Ibrahim said new laws contributed to further promotion of transparency and cracking down on corruption, citing laws on restricting conflict of interest and amending the legislative elections' law. He also mentioned that Kuwait was awarded two points in the international ranking for combating corruption, "the Corruption Perceptions Index."

He said that one point was added to Kuwait for holding second place in the Middle East and North Africa (MIENA) region in the World Justice Project (WJP) and the other for going up eight ranks in the International Institute for Management (IIM) compared to their first year of membership. Private organizations, government institutions, and private sector entities all participated in the third forum, along with a representative from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). — KUNA

Meteorologist forecasts cool weekend evenings

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti weather is expected to have warm mornings with cloudy and cool temperatures in the evenings over the weekend, the Kuwait Meteorology Department said on Thursday. The department director, Abdulaziz Al-Qarawi, said in a statement that the weather maps' data indicated humidity and increasingly patchy, cloudy skies on Friday evening, in addition to mild southeastern winds. Al-Qarawi mentioned that the weather on Friday morning would be warm and cloudy, with unstable winds ranging between 6 and 24 km/h and temperature highs between 27 and 29 degrees, and sea tides between 1-3 feet. Friday evening would see cooler temperatures between 11 and 13 degrees, with tides between 1-4 feet.

Saturday morning is expected to be warm and cloudy, with light south and southeastern winds and a temperature ranging between 26 and 28 degrees. Meanwhile, Saturday evening would lean towards cooler temperatures, clearer skies, and a shift in wind direction becoming northwestern between 8 and 32 km/h with a chance of rain, Al-Qarawi said. — KUNA

FM receives new envoys



KUWAIT: Kuwait Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received a copy of the credentials of new US Ambassador to the country Karen Sasahara. — KUNA photos



Kuwait Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Thursday a copy of the credentials of new Italian Ambassador to the country Lorenzo Morini.



Minister of Foreign Affairs received a copy of the credentials of the Ambassador of Tunisia to Kuwait Mohammed Karim Boudali during a meeting at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs General Office.



Foreign Minister received a copy of the credentials of the Ambassador of the Republic of Myanmar to Kuwait Chan Aye during a meeting at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs General Office.

Kuwait ambassador presents credentials to Pope Francis

VATICAN: The ambassador of Kuwait to Switzerland and Liechtenstein, Yaqub Al-Sindh, presented his credentials (as a non-resident ambassador of Kuwait) to the Vatican to Pope Francis. Ambassador Al-Sindh said in a statement to the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) on Thursday, following the presentation of his credentials, that the political leadership in Kuwait is keen on strengthening bilateral relations with the Holy See. Sindh conveyed the greetings and wishes of Kuwait's political leadership to the Pope. Pope stressed that diplomatic missions are noble and important, especially in a world beset by crises and wars, pointing to the urgent need for vital and great role in bringing people closer and finding peaceful and appropriate solutions to issues. — KUNA



Kuwait defends rights, freedoms

TANGIER: Kuwait is keen on defending human rights and freedoms, considering them one of the main pillars of security, stability, and development in society, stated Kuwaiti lawmaker Hamdan Al-Azmi. In statements to reporters on the sidelines of his participation in the official launch event

of the Arab plan for human rights education and inculcation in the Moroccan city of Tangier, Al-Azmi boasted that the State of Kuwait, since its independence, has been eager to set guarantees for protecting basic human rights and freedoms, starting with clear constitutional articles.

The National Assembly (parliament) translated these constitutional articles into binding legal and regulatory texts and established institutions to defend human rights, such as the parliamentary human rights commission, Al-Azmi noted. He added that Kuwait also joined many regional and international

human rights agreements and conventions with a view to consolidating the foundations of a democratic state where citizens and residents enjoy all constitutional rights and freedoms.

The Arab plan for human rights education was launched Tuesday in Tangier with the participation of delegations from various Arab countries, representatives of the Arab Parliament, the Arab League, and concerned regional and international organizations. In addition to MP Al-Azmi, lawmakers Khaled Al-Otaibi and Dr. Mohammad Al-Huwaila represented Kuwait at the event. — KUNA

Local

4th edition of Mirzaam launched

Kuwait's largest, most inclusive interior design and decor exhibition

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: Founder and organizer of Mirzaam Expo Eng Farah Al-Humaidhi announced the launch of the fourth edition of Mirzaam Expo, Kuwait's largest and most inclusive interior design and decor exhibition. The expo will take place at Kuwait International Fairgrounds from Dec 12 to 16 in Halls 5, 6 and 7. On the sidelines of the launch ceremony held on Wednesday at Al-Andalus Complex, Humaidhi revealed that at least 15 percent of Mirzaam's revenues are allocated for marketing, simultaneously with the creation of a comprehensive media plan to bolster sponsors and participants, starting by hosting an unusual press conference for the official announcement in the local and international print, audio and visual media.

She indicated the unconventional press conference for Mirzaam 4 is distinguished by taking the media and sponsors through banners telling the story of Mirzaam — about its founding and evolving journey. Media and sponsors were introduced to the launch of Mirzaam's first edition in 2019 and over the past four years, and 70 percent of former partners are still participating with Mirzaam.



Eng Farah Al-Humaidhi, the founder and organizer of Mirzaam

Humaidhi elucidated that Mirzaam consistently prioritizes being the premier and ultimate destination for individuals seeking the latest and distinctive trends in the realm of interior design. Every year, the exhibition endeavors to provide a unique and unparalleled experience for its visitors, solidifying its position as a hub for innovation and inspiration in the ever-evolving world of interior aesthetics.

"This year it will include more than 230 local companies, in addition to more than 300 international brands covering more than 30 categories in the world of interior design and decor. The expo extends over an area exceeding 25,000 square meters, making it the largest and most important expo of its kind, where it is expected to have 400,000 visitors this year," she added. Humaidhi emphasized that visitors have the convenience of discovering a comprehensive array of offerings all in one place. From interior and exterior finishes to furniture, accessories, kitchens and various home essentials, the diverse range of products aims to cater to every aspect of home design and functionality. This one-stop destination ensures that individuals seeking to enhance their living spaces can seamlessly explore and acquire everything they require under one roof.

Humaidhi revealed that Mirzaam 4 is cooperating with the 2nd edition of the Kutayba Alghanim Design Award, the 2023 Furniture Design Competition, supported by Alghanim Industries and Safat Home, which



Eng Farah Al-Humaidhi, the founder and organizer of Mirzaam poses for a photo with Hanan Zubaid, Head of Marketing at BNK Automotive - Volvo

focuses on the skills and creativity of young designers in the Gulf region. "Mirzaam 4 will include a special corner to display the nominated designs and the best design will be chosen. After that, Safat Home will manufacture the winning product and display it in all its branches across Kuwait," she explained. Humaidhi added the expo presents visitors with opportunities to win valuable prizes while shopping at the exhibition, including the grand prize of a Volvo car, as well as KD 10,000 in cash prizes and more than 10 valu-



Farah Al-Humaidhi (center) poses for a group photo with Zain's team. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Banner shows the support for Palestine.



Waleed Al Khashti with Farah Al-Humaidhi.

able prizes provided by Mirzaam's sponsors. Participating companies are also set to offer exclusive offers and products to visitors during the exhibition. Humaidhi asserted Mirzaam 4's unwavering commitment to the Palestinian cause, emphasizing that Mirzaam was one of the first donors to support people in Gaza through its participation in the Kuwaiti Red Crescent campaign dedicated to upholding Palestinian rights.

She underscored the heartfelt connection between Kuwaitis and Gaza, affirming that Mirzaam has set up a special corner for collecting public donations for the "Help Palestine" campaign organized by the Kuwait Red Crescent Society. This strategic move aims to foster support and solidarity, channeling resources towards bolstering Palestinian steadfastness in Gaza. To enhance the overall experience for visitors, particularly families and women, Humaidhi highlighted the allocation of a children's area with educational and recreational activities, along with a place for breastfeeding mothers.

To foster innovation, a competition for the best pavilion has been organized and expanded to three categories: Most aesthetic, most creative design and most sustainable. Winners, chosen by public vote after jury selection, will be announced at the closing ceremony on Dec 16. Mirzaam collaborates with "Dawrat" to enhance the educational aspect, managing lectures with interior design specialists. The public can engage in conversations, and the lectures are free for visitors, expressing gratitude to sponsors, notably Zain and Volvo Cars, emphasizing their continued support.

Kuwait Times and Kuwait News are the media sponsors of the fourth edition of Mirzaam Expo.



Zain Kuwait's Chief Corporate Communications and Relations Officer Waleed Al Khashti poses with Zain's team.



Farah Al-Humaidhi (center) poses for a group photo with Safat Home's sponsors.



DGCA to develop air transportation

KUWAIT: The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) affirmed Thursday its willingness to develop adequate infrastructure for air transportation that meets modern international standards. This came in a statement to KUNA by the Deputy Director-General of Civil Aviation, Saad Mohammed Al-Otaibi, on occasion of International Civil Aviation Day, which falls on the commemoration of the Convention of International Civil Aviation (Chicago Convention) signed on December 7, 1944.

Al-Otaibi also said that the DGCA adopted a strategy that is future-proof and compatible with the International Civil Aviation Organization's (ICAO) policies, assuring the importance of strengthening national manpower and boosting state revenue from this sector. He pointed out the importance of Kuwait participating in celebrating this day as a representation of civil aviation.

Al-Otaibi indicated that the DGCA continues to support the ICAO's program and policies while keeping up with the best international practices. He further expressed his hopes for the DGCA to become an independent technical committee, which he believes will achieve the strategic objectives successfully. The ICAO was founded in April 1948. It is one of the United Nations organizations, and its main headquarters are in Montreal, Canada. Its objective is to develop air navigation technologies and the air transportation industry to maintain its safety. — KUNA

Kuwait sends 36th aid flight to Gaza

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti humanitarian aid airplanes took off Thursday to Al-Arish airport carrying 40 tons of various supplies to provide relief to people in the Gaza Strip, including 130 tents and four ambulances, bringing the total number of Kuwaiti air bridge flights to 36. The plane load will be delivered to the Egyptian Red Crescent in Al-Arish airport, near Rafah crossing border, which in turn will deliver it to the Palestinian Red Crescent, stated deputy director of Kuwait Society for Relief Omar Al-Thuwaini to KUNA.

He noted that this is the eleventh flight of the society within the Kuwait Air Bridge, supervised by other participating Kuwait Charity Societies, saying that so far it has carried 290 tons of humanitarian aid, 165 tons of medical supplies, 60 tons of mobilized clinics, including 31 ambulances, 75 tons of flour, dates, and canned food, in addition to 49 tons of shelter supplies. Al-Thuwaini commended the efforts made by Kuwaiti governmental authorities, charities, and everyone who donated to meet the urgent needs of Gazans. — KUNA

Italian chef shares success stories behind his restaurants in Kuwait

Marco Fiorot visits Kuwait Times and Kuwait News

By Passant Hisham

KUWAIT: Marco Fiorot, an Italian chef and first Italian owner of a restaurant in Kuwait, visited Kuwait Times and Kuwait News on Thursday, where he toured some departments, played a food game with team members and engaged in a conversation with Kuwait Times, talking about his background and revealing the inspiring success stories behind his restaurants.

He shared how he never expected to become a chef, as his childhood dream was to become an engineer, which he pursued in college. But, whilst working as a parttime waiter at an Italian restaurant during his college years, he realized his passion had suddenly shifted towards the hospitality industry.

After graduating, Fiorot worked as a fulltime waiter for a few more years, which enriched him with new skills and knowledge of the industry. With the vast amount of experience that he gathered in Italy, he decided to add his fingerprints to the Kuwaiti market in 2016 by opening the first branch of his restaurant Vigonovo, named after his beloved hometown in northern Italy.

"You breathe Italy in it, from the music to the style...it's like you are walking in Florence and seeing one of those tiny shops on the left and right that maybe have 10 tables only, where you get to have the very traditional taste of things," he said.

Fiorot described his restaurant as a very cozy place that spreads warm vibes in every part of it, where a personalized experience is provided for everyone, as there's a human connection between the staff and the customers. "Our customers, we know them by name; we know if they want sparkling water or natural water; we know if they like spaghetti or Bolognese...we know everybody's taste. It's like a family," he said.

In 2021, Fiorot opened his second restaurant, Giulia, which he dedicated to his younger sister. The significance of this restaurant's name goes back to a special memory. "When I was 7 years old, I went to my mother and told her, 'Mama I want a sister and I



Marco Fiorot in the archive room of Kuwait Times.

want to call her Giulia," he reminisced. According to him, one can easily feel the romantic and sweet atmosphere of the place by looking at his sister's photos on the wall or by spotting the logo made of hearts that is printed on the restaurant banner, on the serving plates and even on staff uniforms.

Fiorot's burger shop marks the latest project that he is about to proudly bring to the market of Kuwait in less than a week. Fiorot chose to define it as "not too fast fast-food", as he believes it will be very distinctive from other classic fast-food restaurants, providing fresh and real food. He pointed out that everything other than the meat and cheeses will be handcrafted in the restaurant's kitchen, from bread to ketchup to mayonnaise, etc. "I am very excited to open it because it will be something new to the market for people to enjoy something different," he said.



Fiorot wears traditional Kuwaiti attire during an interactive game with Kuwait Times.



A childhood memory of Fiorot with his sister Giulia, whom he dedicated one of his restaurants to.

Fiorot believes that Italian cuisine is the second top choice for Kuwaiti citizens and residents, and he aims to always keep adding value to the city by bringing authentic food and creating remarkable experiences for them. Fiorot sent this final message to his customers: "There's nothing I love more than serving people and creating memories...If today is your birthday and you celebrate it at my restaurant, it's my responsibility to make this memory unforgettable. So, we entertain people, we deliver emotions. This is what I love."

UNHCR expresses gratitude to media representatives

By Ghadeer Ghloom

KUWAIT: In a show of appreciation for their commitment to humanitarian causes across the globe UNHCR's Representative in Kuwait Nisreen Rubaian organized a lunch gathering for local media representatives on Thursday. During the event, Rubaian warmly welcomed the guests and extended her heartfelt gratitude for their attendance. She emphasized the crucial role of the media in raising awareness about the plight of refugees, noting that the UNHCR consistently advocates for their rights.

Reflecting on the past year's humanitarian challenges, Rubaian remarked: "In 2022, we high-



Nisreen Rubaian takes a group photos with UNHCR team members and media representatives.

lighted the plight of 89 million displaced individuals, discussing crises in Ukraine, Afghanistan and more. Sadly, 2023 has proven to be a year wrought with disastrous humanitarian crises from start to finish — from earthquakes in Turkey, Syria and Morocco to floods in Libya and the problems in Sudan, alongside the ongoing tragedy in Palestine that we are currently witnessing through media platforms, where innocent lives of children, women and men continue to be lost."

Rubaian also acknowledged Kuwait's significant support for UNHCR throughout 2023, affirming the state's reputation as a champion of humanitarian aid. "Kuwait has long been synonymous with humanitarian support. Hence, I extend my gratitude

not only to the Kuwaiti government but also to local humanitarian organizations and the private sector, which have collaborated with us to shed light on forgotten refugees such as those in Rohingya camps in Bangladesh. In a recent conference held in Geneva, Kuwait reaffirmed its commitment to UNHCR by pledging one million dollars for the beginning of 2024," she said.

Rubaian concluded her remarks by thanking the media representatives for their invaluable contribution. She acknowledged them as friends and expressed her appreciation for the strong bond they share. She noted that without their dedication, UNHCR's message could not reach the wider public.

LuLu Group sends relief aid to Gaza

CAIRO: Leading retail conglomerate, LuLu Group has lent a compassionate hand to the people of Gaza, sending much-needed relief materials. The first batch of aid consists of 50 tons of food products and other essentials such as medicines and hygiene products were handed over to the Egypt Red Crescent authorities in Cairo.

Dr. Rami El Nasser, Chief Executive Officer of the Egypt Red Crescent received the aid from LuLu Egypt and Bahrain Director Juzer Rupawala, Regional Director Husefa Qureshi, and LuLu Egypt Manager Hatim Sayeed. The Red Crescent authorities will deliver these items in Arish town through the Al Rafah border. Dr. Rami El Nasser welcomed the initiative and expressed his gratitude to LuLu Group and its Chairman Yusuff Ali for this timely support for the people of Palestine.

LuLu Group is also a key partner of UAE's "Tar-



ahum for Gaza" relief campaign, and has set up special aid centers at various LuLu supermarkets to collect & send various aid materials in association with Emirates Red Crescent. LuLu Group is closely working with other Gulf countries' Humanitarian-based agencies for similar initiatives. Recently LuLu Group Bahrain donated BD25,000 (approx. Dhs. 250,000) to the Royal Humanitarian Foundation in support of the Bahrain National Campaign.



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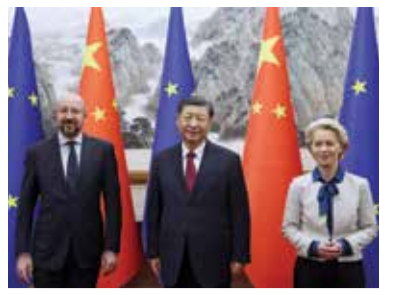


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EU tells China differences must be addressed

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Republicans round on surging Haley in fiery US primary debate

'My approach is different: No drama, no vendettas, no whining'



TUSCALOOSA: (From left) Former governor of New Jersey Chris Christie, former governor from South Carolina and UN ambassador Nikki Haley, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis and entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy participate in the fourth Republican presidential primary debate at the University of Alabama on Dec 6, 2023. — AFP

TUSCALOOSA: Republican presidential hopefuls sought to halt surging Nikki Haley's momentum in an acrimonious fourth primary debate Wednesday, as they made their pitches to be considered the most viable alternative to runaway frontrunner Donald Trump. The former president — who is seeking 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. In Trump's absence, former UN ambassador Haley touted her rising polling numbers to argue that she had supplanted Florida Governor Ron DeSantis as Trump's understudy, six weeks ahead of the first nomination vote.

"We have to stop the chaos but you can't defeat Democrat chaos with Republican chaos. And that's what Donald Trump gives us," she said as she pitched a more professional administration than the Trump

presidency. "My approach is different: No drama, no vendettas, no whining."

Only two other candidates qualified for the show-down — tech entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy and former New Jersey governor Chris Christie — and a less cluttered stage gave the rivals time to drill into their opponents' policies and records.

Haley's rise has been attributed 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 billionaire Democratic donor Reid Hoffman.

But she went into the debate with a target on her back, as DeSantis and Ramaswamy characterized her as being in the pocket of corporate interests and weak on China, with Ramaswamy repeatedly calling her "corrupt."

'Obnoxious blowhard'

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 leading a criminal conspiracy to steal the 2020 election, mishandling classified documents, obstructing justice 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 Haley has gained the upper hand on DeSantis in some of the early states that matter for building momentum.

Christie has been Trump's loudest critic by far — but is languishing around 2.5 percent in polling averages. The ex-governor used his opening remarks to attack his opponents for giving Trump a pass, referring to the former president as Voldemort, the antagonist in the "Harry Potter" books who "shall not be named."

"This is an angry, bitter man who now wants to be back as president because he wants to exact retribution on anyone who has disagreed with him, anyone who has tried to hold him to account for his own

conduct," Christie said. Ramaswamy enjoyed a surge in donations and headlines thanks to a rambunctious showing in the first debate that ingratiated him to the party's Trumpist base, but is down from a September polling peak. He was heckled by the audience at the University of Alabama as he echoed Trump's false claims of widespread fraud in the 2020 election and was booed as he attacked Haley on supporting Ukraine against the Russian invasion.

"This is a woman who will send your kids to die so she can buy a bigger house," Ramaswamy said, to even louder boos. In a rare show of unity, Christie defended Haley and called Ramaswamy "the most obnoxious blowhard in America" as the pair got into a shouting match.

Discussion of foreign policy was dominated by speeches of support for Zionist entity in its response to the deadly October 7 attacks by Hamas militants — and tough talk on China. "Deterring China's ambitions is the number one national security task that I will do as president, and we will succeed," DeSantis said. "The 21st century needs to be an American century. We cannot let it be a Chinese century." — AFP

UK PM insists Rwanda migrants plan 'will work'

LONDON: UK leader Rishi Sunak defiantly insisted on Thursday that his latest immigration plan will work, as the issue threatened to tear apart his ruling Conservatives, putting his premiership in jeopardy. Sunak came out fighting after his government's latest attempt to deport asylum seekers to Rwanda sparked the resignation of his immigration minister who said it did not go far enough.

His ex-interior minister Suella Braverman also said the law was destined to fail, and urged Sunak to change course on immigration — a major political battleground in next year's expected general election. At a hastily convened news conference in Downing Street, the prime minister sought to appease right-wing Tories who want him to withdraw Britain from the European Court of Human Rights, to stop courts blocking removals.

He also denied that a vote on the Rwanda legislation expected in parliament next week would amount to a confidence vote on his leadership. "This bill blocks every single reason that has ever been used to prevent flights to Rwanda from taking off," Sunak told reporters. "The only extremely narrow exception will be if you can prove with credible and compelling evidence that you specifically have a real and imminent risk of serious and irreversible harm." The bill — drawn up after Supreme Court judges last month ruled the deportation plan was illegal as Rwanda was not a safe country — could be voted on by MPs for the first time on Tuesday.

It compels judges to treat Rwanda as a safe country and proposes giving UK ministers powers to disregard sections of human rights legislation. The proposals have sparked fresh concerns from opposition parties and human rights groups while Rwanda warned it would withdraw from a bilateral treaty signed only on Tuesday if the UK does not respect international law. A feisty Sunak asserted the primacy of the UK parliament on the issue and also said he would not allow a "foreign court" to dictate what Britain could do. "This bill will work...



LONDON: Britain's Prime Minister Rishi Sunak hosts a press conference inside the Downing Street Briefing Room, in central London, after Britain and Rwanda sign a new treaty to transfer illegal migrants to the African country. — AFP

we will get flights off the ground, we will deter illegal migrants from coming here and we will finally stop the boats," he added.

'Finish the job'

The issue is widening schisms in an already heavily fractured Tory party that has served up four prime ministers in just over four years. The divisions between right-wingers and moderates have worsened since Britain voted to leave the European Union in 2016, largely on a promise to "take back control" of its borders. Braverman, sacked by Sunak last month after several incendiary comments, has warned that the Tories face "electoral oblivion" if the Rwanda bill fails. "It's certainly going to require a big effort from Sunak and the government to fend off a rebellion," Chris Hopkins, politics director at polling firm Savanta, told AFP.

Sunak ducked a question about whether he would call an early election — which must be held by January 2025 — if he loses the vote, as some Westminster watchers are speculating. "I want to finish the job. Finishing the job means getting this legislation on the statute book," he added. Sunak has bet his pledge to "stop the boats" on the Rwanda scheme, which has been stuck in the courts since the first deportees were pulled off a flight at the last minute in June 2022 after an injunction from the European Court of Human Rights. — AFP

Three killed in Vegas university shooting

LAS VEGAS: Three people were killed and another seriously injured by a gunman who was shot dead by police at a US university on Wednesday. The incident at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, a short distance from the gambling hub's tourist-packed Strip, was the latest in the United States, where gun violence is a part of the fabric of daily life.

"Three of the victims are confirmed deceased," Las Vegas Sheriff Kevin McMahill told a press conference. He said a fourth victim had been critically injured by the shooting but that condition later upgraded to stable.

The identity of the shooter was not immediately released, but CNN and the Los Angeles Times, quoting law enforcement sources, said he was a 67 year old career college professor with links to schools in Georgia and North Carolina. But it was not clear what affiliation he had with the Nevada university where the shooting took place.

US President Joe Biden in a statement decried the latest "horrific act of gun violence" to terrorize a college campus. Police responded within minutes to reports of an active shooter at 11:45 am (1945 GMT), McMahill told a press conference.

Two officers "immediately engaged the suspect in a shootout" and the suspect "was struck and is deceased at this time," said university police chief Adam Garcia. The incident began as an outdoor gathering of students was taking place.

"Students were playing games and eating food, there were tables set up for them to build Legos," said McMahill. "If it hadn't been for the heroic actions of one of those police officers who responded, there could have been countless additional lives taken." Police did not provide any further information on the identities of the victims or gunman, and are in the process of notifying next-of-kin.

One woman told local broadcaster KVVU that she had heard a series of loud noises and fled into a building on the campus, from which she was later evacuated by police. "I was just having breakfast and then I heard three, like, loud booms," she told the station. "Then two more, and then police showed up there and ran inside... but then after two minutes boom, boom, boom, more shots. So I ran into a basement, and then we were in the basement for 20 minutes."

Officers were continuing to search the campus, which will remain closed through Friday, but "there is no more ongoing threat to our community," the sheriff said. Las Vegas is a gambling and entertainment hub that attracts millions of visitors every year, many of whom come to see large, high-profile events. — AFP



LAS VEGAS: People surveil the situation following a shooting at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, campus in Las Vegas. — AFP

International

Zionist strike on journalists in Lebanon warrants 'war crime' probe

'No journalist should be targeted or killed for carrying out their work'

BEIRUT: The Zionist strike that killed one journalist and wounded six others in Lebanon merits a "war crime" investigation, rights groups Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch told AFP on Thursday.

Reuters journalist Issam Abdallah, 37, was killed instantly in the strike on October 13 in the south of the country near the Zionist border. The others present—two more Reuters journalists, two from Al Jazeera, and two from AFP—were all injured.

AFP photographer Christina Assi, 28, was seriously wounded, later had a leg amputated and is still in hospital. Independent investigations by both rights groups concluded, like an AFP investigation published earlier on Thursday, that the first strike that killed Abdallah and severely wounded Assi was most likely a tank round fired from the Zionist entity.

Amnesty said the strikes "were likely a direct attack on civilians that must be investigated as a war crime." "Those responsible for Issam Abdallah's unlawful killing and the injuring of six other journalists must be held accountable," said Aya Majzoub, Amnesty's deputy regional director for the Middle East and North Africa. "No journalist should ever be targeted or killed simply for carrying out their work. The Zionist entity must not be allowed to kill and attack journalists with impunity."

HRW said the two Zionist strikes "were apparently deliberate attacks on civilians, which is a war crime". Under international humanitarian law, "it is forbidden in any circumstances to carry out direct attacks against civilians", it said. The group's inves-

tigation indicated that the journalists were "well removed from ongoing hostilities, clearly identifiable as members of the media, and had been stationary for at least 75 minutes before they were hit".

Amnesty said images it verified showed "the seven journalists were wearing body armour labelled 'press', and that the blue Reuters crew car was marked 'TV' with yellow tape on its hood".

"The evidence strongly suggests that the Zionist forces knew or should have known that the group that they were attacking were journalists," HRW's Lebanon researcher Ramzi Kaiss said. "This is an unlawful and apparently deliberate attack on a very visible group of journalists."

'Justice and accountability'

Speaking at a press conference in Beirut, Dylan Collins, the other AFP journalist wounded in the attack, said: "I know they (the investigations) won't bring Issam back to life. I know they won't help Christina walk again.

"But what I do hope is that they at least will mark the start of some sort of process of justice and accountability." He shared a message from Assi that said: "We chose journalism with a mission to deliver the truth, and despite the inevitable costs, our commitment remains unwavering. Nothing can silence us." Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati said in a statement his government would "take all measures to include" the conclusions of the investigation "in the complaint



BEIRUT: Journalists and relatives of the victims attend a joint press conference held by Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International in Beirut on December 7, 2023 on independent investigations they conducted on the Zionist strike that killed one journalist and injured six others in southern Lebanon. -- AFP

filed before the UN Security Council".

Since the war between the Zionist entity and Palestinian militant group Hamas began on October 7, 63 journalists and media workers have been killed -- 56 Palestinians, four Zionists and three Lebanese,

the Committee to Protect Journalists says. The New York-based rights group on Thursday called for "an immediate, independent, and transparent investigation that holds the perpetrators to account" for the strike on journalists in Lebanon. — AFP

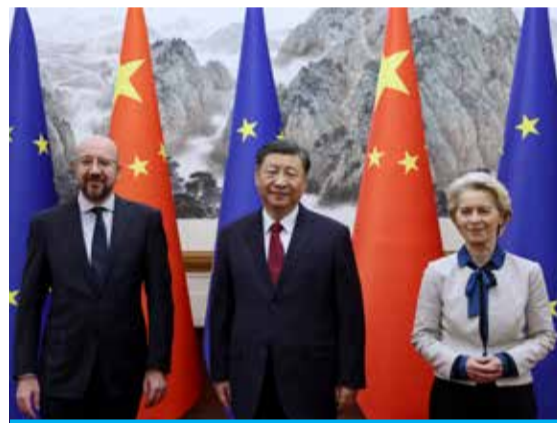
EU tells China 'differences' must be addressed

BEIJING: EU President Ursula von der Leyen told Chinese leader Xi Jinping on Thursday that the bloc and its biggest trading partner must address their differences, in the first in-person EU-China summit in over four years. Underlining Beijing's challenges in getting Europe onside, news broke on the eve of the summit that Italy—the bloc's third-largest economy—had withdrawn from its vast Belt and Road infrastructure initiative.

China and the EU have ramped up diplomatic engagement this year in an attempt to steer post-pandemic recovery and repair damaged ties, with a number of its commissioners visiting Beijing to restart high-level dialogue.

In opening remarks, Von der Leyen, flanked by European Council President Charles Michel and EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell, told Xi "there are clear imbalances and differences that we must address". "At times our interests coincide," she said, pointing to EU-China cooperation on artificial intelligence and climate change. "And when they do not, we need to address and responsibly manage the concerns that we have," she said.

Michel, in turn, said the bloc was seeking a "stable and mutually beneficial" relationship with China. But, he said, the EU would also "promote our European values including human rights and democracy" at the summit.



BEIJING: This handout photo shows China's President Xi Jinping (C) receiving European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen (R) and European Council President Charles Michel ahead of the 24th EU-China Summit in Beijing. — AFP

A day before the meeting in Beijing, Italy said it had formally withdrawn from the BRI, a central pillar of Xi's bid to expand China's clout overseas. 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 economic benefits to Rome were limited. Asked about that decision on Thursday, Beijing slammed the "smearing" and "undermining" of the project. The EU hopes meetings on Thursday will also provide a chance to discuss areas of common interest. In his opening remarks, Xi urged his European visitors to "jointly respond to global challenges". — AFP

How EU wants to reshape its asylum system

BRUSSELS: EU negotiators from member states and the European Parliament on Thursday will hold intense discussions around reforms the bloc wants to apply to its migration and asylum policies. The aim is to try to achieve a breakthrough before the end of December with a view to adopting the new rulebook before EU elections happening in June next year, in which migration is expected to be a key issue. Here are some main areas of the reform under discussion:

Solidarity mechanism

The EU currently applies what is called the "Dublin regulation" to decide which EU country is responsible for an asylum-seeker, based on where and how they entered and family ties. Typically that means the country where they entered the EU. But that has placed big stress on southern EU countries, especially Greece, Italy and Malta, which have seen many land and sea arrivals in recent years.

A mandatory solidarity mechanism seeks to share around responsibility in the bloc by having all member states take in a certain number of asylum-seekers arriving in the outer-rim countries.

If they choose not to, they could give money or other material or personnel contributions to those that do. The European Parliament is giving priority to relocations, which it wants to be almost automatic when it comes to sea rescues. That is what Italy wants too, but other EU countries are reticent. A country's "solidarity"

contribution would be mainly worked out on the basis of its population, GDP, and the number of asylum applications it gets.

Surge response

Another regulation in the package is establishing an emergency response in the event of an unexpected migration surge—the same sort of refugee crisis the EU faced in 2015-2016 when more than two million asylum-seekers entered the bloc, many of them from war-torn Syria and Afghanistan.

It would require member states to apply lesser protections for asylum-seekers, making it possible to hold them longer than usually permitted in detention centres on the EU's external borders. The European Council representing member countries wants the rules to address the "instrumentalisation" of migratory flows by outside countries, which Belarus and Russia have been accused of employing as a tactic to destabilise the EU.

Earlier filtering

The pact would have migrants crossing the external borders into the EU subject to identity, health and security checks, so that it could be determined much earlier whether they should receive an accelerated or normal asylum application process, or be sent back to their country of origin or transit. This procedure would apply to asylum-seekers with lower chances of receiving protection status, based on them coming from countries whose nationals, on average, succeed in less than 20 percent of cases where asylum applications are lodged.

Their applications would be processed rapidly in centres not far from the EU's external borders—meaning mostly land frontiers and airports—so they could be quickly sent back if their request is judged to be unfounded or inadmissible. — AFP

Fatah in freefall as Hamas fights...

Continued from Page 1

on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak on the issue. "Leaders who might have influence have too many personal interests linked to the Palestinian Authority, and can't take the risk of speaking out against its president" Abbas, the official said.

Abbas, 88, is widely unpopular in the West Bank, where the Zionist-Hamas war has led to increased popular support for Hamas. On Oct 17, Palestinian police used tear gas against protesters chanting "Get out!" and "The people want the fall of the president!" According to researcher Xavier Guignard, "for the demonstrators, either because of its inaction or its security cooperation, the Authority is increasingly seen as conforming with (Zionist) policy".

He told AFP there is "denunciation of the fact that Mahmoud Abbas was incapable of reacting to what is happening in Gaza." The Palestinian president — whose mandate expired in 2009 — cannot alienate the international community on which it is counting for help in reaching a settlement with the Zionist entity.

According to another Fatah official, who spoke on the same terms of anonymity, the party "leaders are careful not to show any sign of support for Hamas for what it did" on Oct 7. Fatah, by choosing negotiation rather than violence, has little to show for this policy. Zionist settle-

ments — regarded as illegal by the United Nations — continue to gain ground in the West Bank, and Zionist strikes on Gaza keep the human toll mounting.

After Abbas succeeded Fatah founder Yasser Arafat, who died in 2004, the Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades were sidelined. Most of its fighters had been killed in clashes or attacks, or jailed by the Zionist entity, many for life. Marwan Barghouti — presented by the Zionist entity as leader of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades — is the Palestinian prisoner best known across the world, and his name is most often raised in the context of a prisoner-hostage exchange.

The Zionist entity says fighters still hold 138 captives inside Gaza. Hamas seeks to exchange them for the roughly 7,800 Palestinians jailed by the Zionist entity. Barghouti is serving a life term in a Zionist prison for his role in anti-Zionist attacks. "He is the only one who can bring Fatah back together," said a former member of the Fatah security forces, also speaking on condition that his name not be used because he was not authorized to speak on the matter. "He is accepted by Hamas and he is popular on the street."

In diplomatic circles, Barghouti is seen as the only man who can reconcile Palestinians and revive the Palestinian Authority. While war rages in Gaza, the Zionist entity has intensified its military operations in the West Bank, where at least 258 Palestinians have been killed since Oct 7, according to the PA. Among that toll are five Fatah fighters killed in Nablus on Nov 18.

They represent a younger Palestinian generation, born after the Oslo Accords or during the second intifada, an uprising between 2000 and 2005, which says it no longer believes in diplomacy. — AFP

relations with Iran at a meeting with his Iranian counterpart Ebrahim Raisi, as the two discussed the Zionist-Hamas war. Since launching its assault on Ukraine, Moscow has sought to deepen its economic and political ties with Tehran, both of which have been sanctioned by the West.

"Our relations are developing very well. Please convey my best wishes to leader (Ayatollah Ali) Khamenei," Putin told Raisi, referring to Iran's head of state. "Thanks to his support, we have gained good momentum over the past year," Putin said. Western countries have accused Tehran of supporting Russia's offensive in Ukraine by providing it with large quantities of drones and other weaponry. The two also discussed the Zionist-Hamas war, which has drastically ratcheted up tensions between the Zionist entity and Arab states in the Middle East. "It is very important for us to exchange views on the situation in the region, especially with regard to the situation in Palestine," Putin said. — AFP

17,170 killed as urban fighting...

Continued from Page 1

displaced Palestinians — 80 percent of Gaza's population. One of those displaced from a refugee camp in Gaza City to Rafah, Ahmad Hajjaj, said: "The situation is getting worse and worse. There is no political solution, and nothing to live off."

Eight more air strikes hit Rafah overnight. AFP journalists saw around 20 corpses in white body bags, including a child, at its Nasser hospital, while men gathered nearby to pray. Mass civilian casualties in the war 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 Gaza.

On Wednesday, the Zionist entity approved a "minimal" increase in fuel supplies to prevent a "humanitarian collapse and the outbreak of epidemics". But Guterres invoked the rarely-used Article 99 of the UN's charter, calling on the Security Council to push for a ceasefire. The secretary-general said he feared "public order (would) completely break down soon due to the desperate conditions" in Gaza. Zionist

Foreign Minister Eli Cohen responded that this would help Hamas and that Guterres was "a danger to world peace".

Four more Zionist soldiers were killed, raising the toll inside Gaza to 87, said the military. Hamas released footage of its fighters shooting AK-47 assault rifles and grenade launchers from abandoned buildings in what it said was Gaza City, and said it was battling Zionist troops "on all axes of the incursion into the Gaza Strip". Hamas said it had destroyed two dozen military vehicles in Khan Yunis and in Beit Lahia in the territory's north. An AFP livecam showed heavy grey clouds rising over northern Gaza after explosions. Rocket fire from inside Gaza has continued to target the Zionist entity, where the projectiles have been intercepted by air defenses. Fighting in Khan Yunis means aid distribution has virtually stopped in the city, leaving Rafah the only area "where limited aid distributions took place" on Wednesday, UN humanitarian agency OCHA said. Hamas declared a "state of famine" in northern Gaza, saying no aid had arrived there since Dec 1.

Zionist rights group BTselem said the "minuscule amount of aid" allowed into Gaza was "tantamount to deliberately starving the population". "We are dying here, without even the need for rockets and bomb strikes. We are dead already, dead from hunger, dead from displacement," said Abdelkader Al-Haddad, a Gaza City resident now in Rafah. — AFP

Greece, Turkey vow to work on...

Continued from Page 1

had earlier questioned century-old treaties that set out Aegean sovereignty, and Turkish and Greek warplanes regularly engage in mock dogfights in disputed airspace.

The discovery of hydrocarbon resources in the eastern Mediterranean has further complicated ties, with Ankara angering Athens in 2019 by signing a controversial maritime zone deal with Libya. Last year, Erdogan accused Greece of "occupying" Aegean islands and threatened: "As we say, we may come suddenly one night." The tension prompted Mitsotakis to announce a military buildup in naval and air force equipment, and sign defensive agreements with France and the United States.

But relations have improved since February, when Greece sent rescuers and aid to Turkey after a massive earthquake killed at least 50,000 people. On Thursday, Mitsotakis acknowledged that relations had been "dangerously threatened" in past years but



ATHENS: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan meets Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis during an official visit on Dec 7, 2023. — AFP

were now on a "calmer path". "I feel a historic debt to utilize the opportunity to bring the two nations side by side, as are our borders," Mitsotakis said.

The two leaders agreed on a roadmap for political dialogue, low-level fields of cooperation and confidence-building steps, the Greek prime minister said. Greek and Turkish ministers held a meeting of the high cooperation council, a bilateral body that last convened in 2016. — AFP

Putin, MBS urge oil cooperation...

Continued from Page 1

its voluntary production cut of one million barrels per day over the same period. Iraq, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Kazakhstan, Algeria and Oman agreed to make smaller cuts.

Cooperation between Russia and Saudi Arabia on supply cuts has at times drawn the ire of Washington. Putin's trip on Wednesday, which also included a stop in the United Arab Emirates, was only his third outside the former Soviet Union since he invaded Ukraine in Feb 2022. Putin and Prince Mohammed also expressed "deep concern about the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza", where the Zionist entity launched military operations.

Meanwhile, Putin on Thursday praised his country's

International

Russian girl, 14, shoots dead classmate, commits suicide

Fatal attacks at educational facilities have become increasingly common

MOSCOW: A 14-year-old girl shot dead a classmate and injured five people before killing herself at a secondary school in the Russian city of Bryansk near the Ukraine border on Thursday. School shootings are relatively rare in Russia, which has strict gun laws, but fatal attacks at educational facilities have become increasingly common in recent years.

The Kremlin and officials in Moscow have voiced growing concern after previous attacks, with President Vladimir Putin blaming the incidents as a US import. "A 14-year-old girl brought a pump-action shotgun to school, which she used to shoot her classmates," Russia's Investigative Committee said in a statement.

"As a result, two people died—one of them the shooter—and there are five wounded," it added. Footage filmed by schoolchildren and shared by Russian state media showed pupils barricading themselves inside a classroom, stacking desks against a door.

The teen's motives were still being established in addition to how she got the weapon, authorities said, with the local governor calling the incident a "tragedy." Authorities did not name the shooter, but said her victim was a female classmate.

The shooting took place in Bryansk's Gymnasium Number Five, a secondary school in the city's suburbs. "The motives behind the crime and all the circumstances are being established," the Investigative Committee, which probes major crimes, said. Russian news agencies reported that the girl's father had

been taken in for questioning and that the family's apartment was searched.

'Irreparable loss'

The governor of the Bryansk region, Alexander Bogomaz, called the shooting a "terrible tragedy." He said the five wounded were minors and were taken to a local children's hospital. "Two of them have light injuries. Three others have medium ones," he said. "My sincere condolences to the parents of the girl who died at the hands of the girl shooter. This is an irreparable loss," he said. Bogomaz said her family and the families of the injured will be given "all necessary assistance."

Bryansk is a city of some 370,000 people in southwest Russia. The border Bryansk region—including Bryansk itself—has since the summer been targeted by regular Ukrainian drone attacks, and occasional shelling. Russia has tightly controlled its school system since sending troops to Ukraine, making patriotism a priority and teaching children about its Ukraine offensive. It has also tightened its already strict gun ownership laws following a series of school shootings between 2019 and 2021. In western Russian city of Izhevsk in September last year, a gunman killed 18 people at a school. In 2021, a 19-year-old shooter killed nine people in a school in Kazan, in Tatarstan. That same year, a teenager killed six people at a university in the Urals city of Perm. — AFP



BRYANSK: Emergency vehicles are seen on the grounds of Gymnasium Number Five following a shooting, in Bryansk on December 7, 2023. A Russian 14-year-old girl shot dead a classmate and injured five people before killing herself in a secondary school in the city of Bryansk. — AFP

Dozens injured in Seychelles blast at explosives depot

MAHE: A huge blast at an explosives depot in Seychelles on Thursday injured dozens of people and brought down buildings, prompting the country's "shocked" president to declare a state of emergency. The archipelago—famous for its idyllic white beaches and high-end tourism—is also grappling with flooding and landslides due to heavy rainfall. President Wavel Ramkalawan said, ordering citizens to stay at home.

The blast happened in the Providence industrial area in Mahe, the largest island in the Indian Ocean nation, causing huge damage at the site and to surrounding areas, the presidency said in a statement. "Following an explosion at the CCCL explosives store that has caused massive damage... and major destruction caused by flooding due to heavy rains, the president has declared a State of Emergency for today the 7th December," the presidency said.

"All schools will be closed. Only workers in the essential services and persons travelling will be allowed free movement. This is to allow the emergency services to carry out essential work," the statement added. The explosion, which occurred before dawn, was heard several kilometres (miles) away, with the force of the blast smashing windows of nearby homes, banks and shops. "I was shocked when I arrived early in the morning. The police and the army (have taken) control of the area," Ramkalawan told a press briefing.

"Sixty-six people have been admitted to hospital," he said. Footage broadcast on television showed broken glass and sheet metal debris scattered on site. "Many people are in a state of shock, and we strive to provide them with psychological support,"



MAHE: People gather next to damaged infrastructure following an explosion at the Providence industrial area in Mahe on December 7, 2023. — AFP

China's Xi to visit Vietnam next week

BEIJING: Chinese President Xi Jinping will visit neighbouring Vietnam next week to push for deeper ties between the socialist neighbours, Beijing's foreign ministry said on Thursday. Xi's state visit will take place next Tuesday and Wednesday, foreign ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying said in a statement.

The Chinese president was invited by Vietnam's top leaders Nguyen Phu Trong and Vo Van Thuong, she added. Xi will meet with Vietnam's top leadership and "discuss bringing China-Vietnam relations to a higher position", Beijing said.

"We will push for deepening and solidifying the comprehensive strategic cooperation between the

Ramkalawan said, adding that the blast could have resulted in many more casualties had it occurred during the daytime.

"Seychelles learned a lesson today and we must do something to change the situation," he said, vowing to re-assess storage standards for explosives in the country. Police have launched an investigation into the causes of the explosion.

Floods and landslides

The international airport is still operational and ferry services between islands are running for visitors, the tourism-dependent country said on its official Visit Seychelles account on X, formerly Twitter. The Seychelles Broadcasting Corporation (SBC) reported that heavy rains on Wednesday night caused serious damage in several areas of Mahe.

Photos on SBC's official Facebook account showed collapsed houses, fallen trees, landslides and severe cracks along the surface of roads in Mahe. A former British colony, the Seychelles is made up of 115 islands and according to 2021 World Bank data is the richest African country as measured by per capita gross domestic product, with tourism and fishing the biggest contributors to the economy.

However, around 40 percent of the country's 98,000 inhabitants live in poverty. Mahe, where the capital Victoria is located, is home to 87 percent of the country's population. Parts of Africa—particularly Kenya, Somalia and Ethiopia—have experienced heavier rainfall than usual since October, linked to the El Nino weather phenomenon.

According to the UN, the situation has been exacerbated by the combined impact of El Nino and the Indian Ocean Dipole—a climate system defined by the difference in sea surface temperature between western and eastern areas of the ocean.

El Nino is typically associated with increased heat worldwide, as well as drought in some parts of the world and heavy rains elsewhere. El Nino last occurred in 2018-2019 and was followed by an exceptionally long La Nina—El Nino's cooling opposite—which ended earlier this year. — AFP

Azerbaijan leader calls snap presidential vote for February 7

BAKU: Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev on Thursday called snap presidential elections in February, in a move expected to extend the decades-long authoritarian rule of his family. Aliyev's popularity is soaring after his military recaptured the breakaway Nagorno-Karabakh region from Armenian separatists in a lightning offensive in September.

A decree published by the presidency ordered officials to hold a "snap election" on February 7 next year. Elections had previously been scheduled for 2025. A state-run pollster recently said 75 percent of the population approve of Aliyev's handling of the Karabakh conflict, which saw the mass exodus of ethnic Armenians living in the long-disputed mountainous territory.

"Aliyev's approval ratings had always been high, and they skyrocketed after the victorious military operation in Karabakh in September," independent political analyst Farhad Mamedov told AFP. "He is at the peak of his popularity." Aliyev sent troops to Karabakh on September 19 and after just one day of fighting Armenian separatist forces that had controlled the disputed region for three decades laid down arms and agreed to reintegrate with Baku.

Azerbaijan's victory marked the end of the territorial dispute, which saw Azerbaijan and Armenia fight two wars—in 2020 and the 1990s—that have claimed tens of thousands of lives from both sides. It also sparked fears—particularly among Armenians—of a broader conflict in the region in which Azerbaijan could aim to create a land corridor to its Nakhchivan exclave through Armenian territory. Aliyev insists Baku has no territorial claims to Armenia and rules out a fresh conflict. The arch-foe countries are now negotiating a comprehensive peace treaty, but the Western-mediated talks have so far failed to produce a breakthrough.

'Unchallenged dynasty'

Aliyev, 61, has ruled the energy-rich country with an iron fist since 2003, when he succeeded his father, Heydar, a former KGB officer and Communist-era boss. He was last re-elected with 86 percent of votes in a snap election in April 2018. All leadership polls held in Azerbaijan under Aliyev's rule were denounced by opposition parties as fraudulent.

Supporters have praised the Aliyevs for turning a republic once thought of as a Soviet backwater into a flourishing energy supplier to Europe. But critics argue they have crushed the opposition, stifled media, and used their power to amass a fortune that funds a lavish lifestyle for the president and his family. Rights activists have recently decried the arrest of several high-profile journalists known for investigations into corruption among the political elite. In 2009, Azerbaijan adopted constitutional amendments that removed the two-term limit to the presidential mandate, meaning Aliyev could potentially become a president for life.

In 2016, -- after a constitutional referendum at which presidential terms were extended from five to seven years—he appointed his glamorous wife Mehriban Aliyeva as first vice president. The amendments drew criticism from constitutional law experts of the Council of Europe rights watchdog as "severely upsetting the balance of powers" and giving the president "unprecedented" authority.—AFP



BAKU: (FILES) Picture shows Azeri's President Ilham Aliyev dressed in military outfit and raising his fist during a televised address to the nation. — AFP



HONG KONG: (FILES) Pro-democracy activists Agnes Chow (C) and Joshua Wong (R) speak to the press after they were released on bail at the Eastern Magistrates' Courts in Hong Kong on August 30, 2019. — AFP

HK activist recalls years of repression

OTTAWA: Agnes Chow was trapped in Hong Kong, had her passport seized and was branded a "foreign agent" after years as one of the city's most prominent democracy activists. Then, she said, police offered her an unexpected way out. Pen a letter of repentance and travel to mainland China to view the headquarters of tech giant Tencent and other Chinese achievements—and in exchange, she would be allowed to study in Canada. A leading voice in 2012, 2014 and 2019 protests against Beijing's increasingly authoritarian rule in Hong Kong, Chow was jailed for seven months until 2021 and remained in legal limbo with a charge of "collusion" hanging over her head. "It was very, very scary," the 27-year-old said of her decision to travel with Hong Kong security officers to the mainland city of Shenzhen in August, gambling that the authorities would keep their side of the bargain. "I was told by the police not to tell any people... not my lawyer, not my family, not any of my friends," she told AFP in a video call from Toronto, where she broke her years-long silence this week to say she will jump bail and remain in Canada.

After her trip to Shenzhen, where she was repeatedly photographed, Chow was told to write another letter thanking the officers for showing her the greatness of China. About a month later, authorities returned her passport and allowed her to fly to Canada. But the terms of Chow's bail still required her to return periodically to Hong Kong, where she no longer felt safe. "I love Hong Kong so much but at the same time... I feel like Hong Kong for me is also a place of fear," she told AFP. In a social media post on Sunday, Chow revealed that she would remain indefinitely in Canada, citing "the situation in Hong Kong, my personal safety, my physical and mental health". In response, Hong Kong's government vowed to pursue her "for life." In a press briefing Tuesday, Hong Kong leader John Lee said police had been trying to "give lenient treatment" to Chow. But the former activist refuted that notion. "For the past three years, there was nothing lenient... My freedom, my daily life, and my basic rights were all deprived," she said. "Foreign agent of whom? Which country? Obviously we can see that the government is just using the national security law or the legal system of Hong Kong as a political tool to smear and to suppress political dissidents."

Template for repentance

Following the massive, sometimes violent, pro-democracy protests in 2019, authorities have clamped down on activists like Chow. Dozens of people have been charged under a sweeping national security law Beijing imposed in 2020, including pro-democracy media tycoon Jimmy Lai and campaigner Joshua Wong.

Stranded in Hong Kong and unable to find steady work because of her criminal record, Chow said the most she could do was to stay "at home and to cry and to wait". When she received an offer from a postgraduate program in Canada early this year, she asked the police to return her passport. They asked her to write a series of letters—first detailing her travel request and then repenting for her years of activism. "They had a template. What I had to do was just to copy what they typed in my handwriting," she said, adding that she was asked to express "regret" for her participation in the pro-democracy movement.—AFP

Business

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 8, 2023

COP28 head presses nations to reach climate 'compromise'

Conference strives to reach a deal by early next week

DUBAI: The Emirati head of the UN's climate conference pressed countries on Wednesday to strive for common ground and reach a "historic" deal by early next week, giving negotiators days to untangle disagreements over the fate of fossil fuels. It is rare for UN climate talks to end as scheduled but COP28 president Sultan Al-Jaber set the ambitious goal of having a deal in place by 11 am (0700 GMT) on Tuesday, the last official day of the conference.

He urged the nearly 200 nations represented at COP28 to work with a "spirit of compromise", step out of their "comfort zones and find common ground to deliver a high ambition and balanced outcome".

COP28 kicked off last week with the landmark launch of a loss and damage fund for nations devastated by climate change. But the first week of negotiations ended on Wednesday with delegations unable to produce an updated version of a draft agreement that was published the previous day.

The text includes language on phasing out fossil fuels, which the European Union, the United States, island nations and African countries support. But it also has an option to leave the issue off the final text, a position backed by China, Saudi Arabia and other Arab nations.

Scientists warn that greenhouse gas emissions—the bulk of which come from burning fossil fuels—must fall by 43 percent by 2030 from 2019 levels for the world to reach the ambitious goal of limiting warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius. "I will continue to ask parties to bring bridging proposals on fossil fuels, renewables and energy efficiency, in line with the science," Jaber said at the end of a plenary session capping the first week. Climate campaigners have viewed Jaber with deep suspicion due to his position as the head of

UAE national oil firm ADNOC, but he has sought to ease concerns by stating that a phase down of fossil fuels was "inevitable".

The COP28 conference takes an official day off on Thursday before resuming on Friday, with ministers taking over the final days of negotiations. UN climate chief Simon Stiell complained that the draft text was a "grab bag of... wish lists and heavy on posturing". "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 added. The Alliance of Small Island States, which includes some of the world's most climate-vulnerable countries, called for "major emitters to enhance their commitments".

"If we fail, the consequences will be catastrophic," the alliance's chairman Cedric Schuster said. The latest text includes a new phrase calling for an "orderly and just" phase-out. One person familiar with the talks said the word "orderly" came from Jaber. 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. During closed-door talks on Tuesday, Saudi Arabia again opposed any mention of fossils, saying it would avoid "the trauma of explaining our position... that is well noted and clear", according to meeting participants.

With flagrant divisions coming to the fore, 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. 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



DUBAI: COP28 president Sultan Ahmed Al-Jaber (center), Chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Jim Skea (right) and COP28 director of communications Sconaid McGeachin (left) attend a press conference at the United Nations climate summit in Dubai. — AFP

done." US climate envoy John Kerry said there were still "complicated issues" to resolve but it was "time for adults to behave like adults and get the job done".

A new report by the EU's Copernicus Climate Change Service provided a stark reminder of what is at stake as it reported that 2023 will be the hottest on record. November became the sixth

record-breaking month in a row. It smashed the previous November heat record, pushing 2023's global average temperature to 1.46C warmer than the pre-industrial era, the service said. Copernicus head Carlo Buontempo said that "as long as greenhouse gas concentrations keep rising we can't expect different outcomes". —AFP

Mideast airlines post 24% jump in Oct traffic: IATA

KUWAIT: Middle Eastern airlines posted a 24.1 percent rise in October 2023 traffic compared to a year ago. Capacity rose 22.2 percent and load factor climbed 1.2 percentage points to 80.6 percent. There was little impact at the regional and global levels from the Zionist entity's war on Palestine despite reduced airline operations to/from the Zionist entity, according to a report by the International Air Transport Association (IATA).

The industry body, which represents some 300 airlines, expects air traffic to double in the Middle East to 550 million annual passengers by 2040.

Meanwhile, Middle Eastern carriers had the strongest performance in October 2023, with a 10.9 percent year-on-year increase in cargo volumes, according to the report. "This was a significant improvement from the previous month's performance (+2.5 percent), the IATA said in its latest data for October 2023 global air cargo markets.

Indicating that this is the third consecutive month of stronger year-on-year demand, the IATA report said that carriers in the region benefited from growth in the Middle East-Asia (+10.3 percent) and Middle



Dubai International Airport.

East-Europe markets (+17.1 percent). Capacity increased 15 percent compared to October 2022, the report added. IATA in its report stated that Asia-Pacific airlines saw their air cargo volumes increase by 7.6 percent in October 2023 compared to the same month in 2022. This performance was close to par with the previous month (+7.7 percent). Carriers in the region benefited from ongoing growth in international cargo ton-kilometers (CTKs) on three major trade lanes: Africa-Asia (+16.7 percent, the greatest annual growth since May), Middle East-Asia (+10.3 percent) and Europe-Asia (+8.5 percent).

Available capacity for the region's airlines in-

creased by 30 percent compared to October 2022 as more belly capacity came online from the passenger side of the business (a year ago, the key Asian markets of Japan and China were still largely under severe COVID-19 travel restrictions). Global demand, measured in CTks, increased by 3.8 percent compared to October 2022. For international operations, the demand lagged slightly at 3.5 percent. After a continuous 17-month decline, cargo yields ticked-up in September and continued into October with a 2.6 percent month-on-month gain, remaining well-above pre-pandemic levels, the report added.

Bitcoin rally shines spotlight on investor risks

LONDON: A much-anticipated US approval of wider bitcoin trading has helped the world's biggest cryptocurrency reach 20-month heights, risking however pain for new investors unaccustomed to its volatility.

Bitcoin this week reached above \$44,000 for the first time since April last year, yet still remains far from a record-peak of almost \$69,000 in 2021. The recent surge has been driven by speculation around the creation of a so-called exchange-traded fund for the asset, which would directly track the price of bitcoin. Spot bitcoin ETF would allow more of the general public to invest in the cryptocurrency without having to directly buy it.

"The introduction of bitcoin ETFs has the potential to improve market accessibility for institutional and non-professional investors, by providing (them) with a regulated path," Jeff Billingham, director of strategic initiatives at crypto group Chainalysis told AFP. While bitcoin and rival digital tokens are attracting new younger investors, the Pew Research Center in March reported that overall, only 17 percent of US adults had invested in or used cryptocurrency.

This was largely unchanged compared with the previous two years. When looking at young adults, they appear to hold a greater interest in cryptocurrency compared with traditional investors, according to French data. A total 54 percent of new retail investors in France own cryptocurrency compared with 25 percent of traditional ones, according to a study published last month by French financial watchdog AMF.



ISTANBUL: This illustration photograph taken on July 19, 2021 in Istanbul shows a physical banknote and coin imitations of the Bitcoin crypto currency. —AFP

Simon Peters, market analyst for eToro, said that while he could not comment on rival platforms, his company has witnessed a recent "uplift in crypto activity".

It appears some investors have not been put off by recent scandals within the sector, notably the collapse of Sam Bankman-Fried's FTX empire, which sent prices crashing at the end of last year. "There are no more scandals in crypto than in traditional finance," said Thomas, a 36-year old worker in logistics. The problem lies in a "professional market made open to amateurs" attracted by "hype" and "unable to master the technical side", he told AFP.

Christian, a 30 year-old marketing consultant, said it was like "playing the lottery" when he "made all the mistakes" on entering the crypto arena in 2021. He recalled investing in about 30 cryptocurrencies ahead of their launch and "without really knowing what it was all about". —AFP

China slams 'smearing' of Belt and Road project

BEIJING: China on Thursday slammed what it called the "smearing" of its Belt and Road infrastructure project after Italy said it would withdraw four years after it became the only G7 nation to sign up. "China firmly opposes smearing and undermining of cooperation on the joint construction of the Belt and Road," foreign ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said. Beijing is also opposed to "confrontation and division among camps that causes separation", Wang added. The foreign ministry did not directly comment on Italy's decision to withdraw from Beijing's vast BRI project, a central pillar of President Xi Jinping's bid to expand China's clout overseas.

But Wang pointed to the more than 150 participating countries as evidence of it being the "most popular international public product and the largest international cooperation platform in the world today". He also noted that Italy had sent representatives to Beijing's BRI forum in October.

"This embodies the huge appeal and global influence of jointly constructing the Belt and Road," he said. An Italian government source confirmed to AFP on Wednesday that Rome had pulled out of the initiative. Proponents of the BRI praise it for bringing resources and economic growth to the Global South. But critics have long pointed to opaque pricing for projects built by Chinese companies, with countries including Malaysia and Myanmar renegotiating deals to bring down costs. —AFP

Google looks to take generative AI lead with Gemini

SAN FRANCISCO: Google on Wednesday infused its Bard chatbot with a new-generation artificial intelligence model called Gemini, which it touts as being able to reason better than ChatGPT and other rivals. The search engine juggernaut is aiming to take the generative AI lead from ChatGPT-maker OpenAI as that company deals with the aftermath of a boardroom coup that saw chief executive Sam Altman fired and then rehired within a matter of days.

Google has for years discreetly developed AI powers but was caught off guard when OpenAI late last year released ChatGPT and teamed up with Microsoft to make its capabilities available to users worldwide. "This is incredible momentum, and yet, we're only beginning to scratch the surface of what's possible," Google chief executive Sundar Pichai said in a release.

"This new era of models represents one of the biggest science and engineering efforts we've undertaken as a company." It is the first AI model to outperform human experts in certain benchmarks involving problem solving, math, physics, history, law, medicine and ethics, Google DeepMind vice president of product Eli Collins said during a briefing.

A demonstration showed Gemini recognizing what it was shown, from a person acting out a "Matrix" movie scene to someone drawing a duck and then holding up a rubber duck.

Gemini commented on what it was shown, making comparisons, drawing conclusions, and offering suggestions. Performance of an "Ultra" version of Gemini "far exceeds" that of other state-of-the-art models in 30 benchmark tests measuring capabilities such as image understanding or mathematical reasoning, according to Collins. A "Pro" version of Gemini built into Bard is designed to handle a wide range of tasks. A "Nano" version is tailored for smartphones, coming first to Google's top-of-the-line Pixel 8 handset. Google raced out its own Bard chatbot earlier this year, continually updating the chatbot based on people's feedback, according to Bard vice president Sissie Hsiao.

"All of that rapid innovation is bringing us to what we see as a truly transformative moment," Hsiao said during the briefing. "With Gemini, Bard is getting its biggest upgrade yet." Bard will use Gemini for more advanced reasoning, planning, and understanding capabilities, a demonstration showed. It will be available in English in more than 170 countries and territories, with more languages added soon, according to Hsiao. —AFP





The Burgan Bank team with the American United School of Kuwait (AUS) students during their visit.



Hessa Hussain Al-Najadah, Senior Manager - Corporate and CSR Communications at Burgan Bank at the fourth blood donation campaign in partnership with Ahmadi governorate.

Burgan Bank concludes another year of support for 'Let's Be Aware' campaign

Campaign as part of bank's expansive social responsibility program

KUWAIT: On its mission to uphold its institutional promise to remain "Driven by You", and promote the prosperity of its communities, Burgan Bank continues to invest in its robust positive impact program. In social responsibility, just like everything else it does, the bank seeks to lead with innovation and adopt progressive strategies to create real value for its people – especially its customers. As a bank, Burgan understands that a major area that helps it deliver real value, and drive tangible positive change, is the area of financial literacy.

In 2023, Burgan Bank concluded the third year of its unwavering support for the "Let's Be Aware" (Diraya) banking awareness campaign – launched in 2021 by the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) and the Kuwait Banking Association (KBA), with the unanimous participation of Kuwaiti banks. Burgan's proactive contribution to the growth and success of the campaign continues to unfold in correspondence to the Bank's comprehensive social responsibility program.

Looking back on Burgan Bank's con-

tributions to the country-wide banking awareness campaign, Kholoud Al-Feeli, Deputy General Manager – Marketing and Communication at Burgan Bank, said: "Our success as a bank begins and ends with serving our customers and community members. While this shows in our relentless effort to develop new products and services that introduce creative solutions to the market's rising challenges and needs, it also manifests in our diverse social responsibility initiatives, which we embark on with the sole purpose of contributing to the overall growth of our community members. This greatly overlaps with the goals of CBK's 'Let's Be Aware' campaign, which aims to turn financial literacy into common knowledge across all circles of the community."

Throughout the year, Burgan Bank played an active role in spreading the "Let's Be Aware" campaign messages through its numerous channels, including social media, radio, website, media news releases, ATM and in-branch screens, and in-app notifications. The bank also made a point of spreading awareness through

direct interactions with the public; be that through its on-ground presence at different events it sponsors, or when hosting students from educational institutions during field visits to the bank.

"With every passing day, the banking industry plays a bigger role in people's lives beyond safekeeping and growing their hard-earned wealth. The technologies that we build our products and services around are centered on convenience and accessibility; and while this guarantees that customers can go about their daily lives with more ease and seamlessness, it also poses the risk of fraud if people are not careful and vigilant enough. And that's where our role as committed partners in the Diraya campaign comes in."

Building on the same understanding of the market's diversity and preferences, Burgan Bank utilized varied channels of communication to reach the widest audience possible, whereby some channels take a more personalized and concise approach, such as app push notifications, while others address a public audience,

such as social media, radio appearances on Marina FM, and news releases. The diversity in messaging also extended to include engaging forms of communication, such as social media competitions, that ensure the active participation of the public audience in the awareness campaign and not restricting their roles to that of the passive receivers.

Al-Feeli explained: "When we are present among our community members, we seize the opportunity to make valuable conversations with the public around the best-suited banking services for their needs, the safest practices especially for the use of banking cards, and of course key precautions to avoid falling victim to fraud and phishing attempts. We were honored to be present in person among our community on numerous occasions this year, from the Dar Al-Athar Al-Islamiyyah festivals to Flare Festival, Pop-Up by COMFEST, and many others."

Among the market segments that the bank dedicates plenty of attention to are the young adults who rely heavily on technology in their day-to-day lives. For

this reason, Burgan Bank was delighted to host a group of junior and senior students from the American United School of Kuwait (AUS) on a tour of the Bank's head office, which introduced them to the diversity of functions and operations that, together, produce the services they rely on in my many aspects of their lives.

Following the same belief, Burgan Bank participated as a platinum sponsor in the Career Growth Fair organized by the American University of Kuwait (AUK), where representatives of Burgan's Human Resources Department were available on-ground to inspire students, answer their questions, and hold deeper discussions with prospect interns and fresh graduate job seekers.

With a new year approaching, Burgan Bank is gearing up to maintain its dedicated contribution to the success of the "Let's Be Aware" banking awareness campaign through new and creative approaches that guarantee the widespread reach of the campaign's messages and the adoption of its recommendations across Kuwait.



شركة الصفاة للاستثمار
AL SAFAT INVESTMENT COMPANY

KUWAIT BOURSA WEEKLY REPORT

WEEK ENDED ON 7 DECEMBER 2023

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No.	Ticker	Sector	Price Movement & Performance										Valuation Multiples *				
			Open Price	Close Price	Week High	Week Low	Range	Volume	WTD Change	WTD %	YTD %	Support Level	Resistance Level	P/E	P/B	Yield	Beta
101	National Bank of Kuwait	Banking	880	878	883	871	12	14,326,082	-7	-0.79%	-14.48%	870	885	12.8	1.67	3.8%	1.02
102	Gulf Bank	Banking	253	260	261	250	11	33,217,775	7	2.77%	-12.51%	256	261	12.4	1.17	3.7%	1.31
106	Kuwait International Bank	Banking	146	146	147	145	2	14,422,437	0	0.00%	-18.50%	143	147	15.3	0.56	2.5%	1.11
107	Burgan Bank	Banking	172	167	173	166	7	30,221,662	-3	-1.76%	-19.93%	165	170	17.5	0.63	4.5%	1.36
108	Kuwait Finance House	Banking	699	701	701	693	8	39,078,592	2	0.29%	-6.31%	695	704	17.2	1.79	2.4%	1.18
109	Boubyan Bank	Banking	585	581	588	579	9	8,664,395	-2	-0.34%	-22.82%	579	593	35.9	2.33	1.0%	1.20
201	Kuwait Investment	Financial Services	132	127	132	126	6	3,865,457	-3	-2.31%	-16.45%	125	129	7.6	0.60	3.8%	1.82
204	National Investments	Financial Services	224	227	230	218	12	10,694,672	4	1.79%	-4.22%	220	227	72.2	1.03	12.6%	2.05
205	Kuwait Projects	Financial Services	113	117	119	112	7	35,299,752	4	3.54%	4.46%	116	122	29.8	0.68	0.0%	1.01
212	Arzan Financial Group	Financial Services	197	207	207	194	13	102,852,477	11	5.61%	83.60%	202	208	29.8	1.39	2.0%	1.17
222	Aayan Leasing and Investment	Financial Services	165	170	171	162	9	42,428,734	6	3.66%	27.82%	168	171	8.6	1.16	4.4%	1.64
252	Al Imtiaz Investment	Financial Services	58.1	60.9	61.7	57.6	4.1	8,634,734	3.4	5.91%	-18.69%	60.1	62.0	NM	0.38	15.0%	1.36
401	Kuwait Real Estate	Real Estate	184	204	206	183	23	63,210,394	18	9.68%	94.56%	198	206	16.3	1.36	1.4%	1.08
413	Mabaneer	Real Estate	838	820	840	815	25	2,408,419	-18	-2.15%	2.50E-02	811	838	16.9	1.77	1.6%	1.04
418	The Commercial Real Estate	Real Estate	103	104.0	105	102.0	3.0	11,386,270	0.0	0.00%	8.31%	102	105	20.6	0.63	2.8%	0.63
501	National Industries	Financial Services	190	190	193	187	6	10,538,833	4	2.15%	-8.06%	190	194	17.7	0.91	2.5%	1.62
505	Gulf Cable	Industrials	1,295	1,261	1,295	1,251	44	2,779,735	-34	-2.63%	3.79%	1,260	1,290	13.3	1.17	4.7%	1.04
506	HEISCO	Industrials	846	865	867	808	59	5,331,819	28	3.35%	41.11%	858	878	23.9	2.17	2.3%	0.92
514	Boubyan Petrochemical	Basic Materials	630	620	636	617	19	3,933,566	-29	-4.47%	-22.50%	604	633	11.7	1.33	9.6%	0.96
603	Agility	Industrials	540	525	540	523	17	5,408,308	-15	-2.78%	-27.08%	520	536	16.1	0.76	0.0%	1.53
605	Zain	Telecommunications	495	488	498	483	15	18,934,034	-1	-0.20%	-13.32%	487	503	9.9	1.71	7.1%	0.63
623	Human Soft Holding	Industrials	3,013	3,114	3,114	3,010	104	797,209	103	3.42%	-7.11%	3,100	3,160	9.0	3.36	12.6%	0.64
642	ALAFCO	Industrials	180	175	182	175	7	1,216,187	-3	-1.69%	-13.79%	171	178	NM	0.78	0.0%	1.17
654	JAZEERA	Consumer Discretionary	1,318	1,309	1,396	1,282	114	1,741,497	30	2.35%	-31.11%	1,300	1,405	22.9	8.63	5.9%	1.44
813	GFH Financial Group	Financial Services	77.4	75.5	77.4	75.4	2	8,610,417	-1.5	-1.95%	-0.66%	74.7	76.6	8.3	0.87	6.4%	1.37
821	Warba Bank	Banking	179	176	179	176	3	3,730,816	-3	-1.68%	-22.86%	169	188	24.6	0.96	1.6%	1.14
823	Mezzan Holding	Consumer Staples	501	507	524	500	24	3,226,277	-10	-1.93%	29.01%	490	519	12.8	1.51	2.3%	0.45
824	Integrated Holding	Industrials	451	480	499	448	51	3,977,768	31	6.90%	29.73%	464	485	34.4	2.00	3.1%	0.66
826	Shamal Az-Zour	Utilities	177	176	177	174	3	818,357	-2	-1.12%	-6.38%	176	179	13.6	1.47	6.8%	0.23
827	Boursa Kuwait	Financial Services	1,694	1,699	1,730	1,671	59	617,312	5	0.30%	-17.20%	1,640	1,700	22.1	5.63	5.0%	0.90
830	AL GHANIM	Consumer Discretionary	1,055	1,025	1,070	1,020	50	3,130,420	-23	-2.19%	27.33%	1,010	1,033	11.0	3.77	6.6%	0.64

* As of end of week closing

China says exports rise for first time in seven months

Country navigates a troubled recovery from COVID-19

BEIJING: Chinese exports rose in November for the first time in seven months, officials said Thursday, as the country navigates a troubled recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the reading compares with a low base from last year when authorities were still wedded to a zero-COVID policy that hammered output and business activity, while a surprise drop in imports highlighted weak consumer activity at home.

Overseas shipments edged up 0.5 percent on-year to \$291 billion, the General Administration of Customs (GAC) said, marking their first increase since April. The figure was much better than analysts' forecasts and followed a 6.4 percent slump in October.

"The improvement in exports is broadly in line with market expectation," said Zhiwei Zhang, president and chief economist at Pinpoint Asset Management. But while exports were now seeing "sequential growth", he added that "it is unclear if (they) can contribute as a growth pillar into next year".

"The European and US economies are cooling. China still needs to depend on domestic demand as the main driver for growth in 2024," he told AFP in a note. Chinese exports—long a key growth driver—have largely been in decline since last October except for a short-lived rebound in March and April.

Shipments to the United States plummeted nearly 14 percent last month while those to the European Union plunged 11 percent. But exports to Russia jumped more than 50 percent, underscoring Beijing's economic rapprochement with its staunch ally despite its invasion of Ukraine.

Imports painted a bleaker picture, sliding 0.6 percent to \$224 billion in November and marking

a return to contraction. They had seen a surprise jump in October, bucking a forecast sharp drop and marking the first month of year-on-year growth since late last year. It was hoped the rise could be a signal that consumer sentiment was recovering.

"Domestic demand is not really improving, even as we compared it to a low base last year," Woei Chen Ho, an economist at United Overseas Bank, told Bloomberg News. "There is also no discernible improvement trend in exports despite a slightly better than expected export growth," she added. "Taken together, it suggests a weak recovery trend in China."

The world's second-largest economy expanded a moderate 4.9 percent in the third quarter, slightly less than Beijing's five percent target, which is one of the lowest in years. Officials have struggled to sustain a recovery from the impact of the pandemic, even after removing draconian containment measures at the end of 2022. Exports have been hit by weak global demand, while a debt-fueled property crisis and low consumption have caused headaches at home.

Consumer prices shrank 0.2 percent in October, marking a return to deflation following a modest rebound from the summer. Meanwhile, some of the nation's biggest real estate developers owe hundreds of billions of dollars and are teetering on the brink of bankruptcy.

On Tuesday, Moody's downgraded the outlook on China's credit rating to "negative" from "stable", citing the country's rising debt. The ratings agency said the decision reflected growing evidence that Beijing will prop up financially stressed local governments and state-owned enterprises.

This, it added, was "posing broad downside risks to China's fiscal, economic and institutional strength".



YANTAI, China: Buick cars are seen before being loaded onto a ship for export at the port in Yantai, in China's eastern Shandong province on December 7, 2023. -- AFP

Ting Lu, chief China economist at Japanese bank Nomura, said Thursday that property woes remained "the single largest drag affecting China's

economy". "Despite the multitude of stimulus measures announced recently, we believe it is still too early to call the bottom," he said in a note. — AFP

NBK warns against WhatsApp invitations with suspicious links

KUWAIT: Within its dedicated endeavors to promote financial literacy among different segments of society, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) continues supporting the "Let's Be Aware" campaign introduced by the Central Bank of Kuwait, in cooperation with Kuwait Banking Association (KBA).

In this regard, NBK disseminates messages to raise community awareness about the fraudulent ways used by scammers to hack customers' bank accounts, by inviting them to join WhatsApp groups which include suspicious links. As soon as the users click the link, they are transferred to a fake webpage asking them to enter their phone number and activation code. After that, the user's personal WhatsApp will be accessible to the scammers, who typically use it to request financial assistance from friends, family members, and joined groups by sending direct payment links, making it appear as authentic messages from the user.

NBK warns customers to respond to such invitations, asking them to beware of clicking suspicious links to join unverified groups, or sharing any personal information like bank account numbers, activation code, passwords/PINs, or OTPs with anyone, including registered contacts, before contacting them directly to verify their identity.

NBK intensifies sharing educational material and awareness content including posts, news and video clips on all its social media platforms and other digital channels, as well as reposting CBK's related communications. The bank always urges customers to avoid sharing any banking information with any person, emphasizing that it will never ask customers for personal information.

NBK always strives to spread financial literacy among wider segments to maximize exposure of the campaign's messages. To this end, it makes use of its tremendous capabilities in com-

municating with customers including all its digital platforms, which are the most popular among all Kuwaiti banks.

NBK makes consistent efforts to educate customers, regarding this as a crucial part of its strategy. To this end, it always uses all communication channels to advise them to keep their passwords/PINs and financial/personal account information strictly confidential, and not to share them with anyone impersonating a bank employee. NBK is a key supporter and partner in all CBK's campaigns and initiatives to increase financial and banking awareness among different segments of society. As a leading financial institution

in Kuwait, NBK frequently organizes various activities to raise awareness on all topics related to the banking sector, as well as various training courses for its employees to enhance their experience in the areas of combating fraud and financial crime.

As a leading financial institution in Kuwait and across the region, NBK firmly observes its responsibilities towards the communities it serves. It is always taking the initiative to provide all necessary support to important and strategic campaigns, like the "Let's Be Aware" campaign, which serve the interests of the national economy and society at large.

الحملة التوعوية المصرفية



dirayakw

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Passersby walk in front of a display showing the foreign exchange rate between the yen and other currencies in Tokyo.

Yen jumps more than 1% against dollar on policy talk

TOKYO: The yen surged more than one percent against the dollar on Thursday after comments from the head of the Bank of Japan stoked speculation it will tighten its ultra-loose monetary policy. Governor Kazuo Ueda said handling monetary policy "will become even more challenging from the year-end and heading into next year", Bloomberg News reported. The unit strengthened to 145.54 per dollar in the afternoon, from about 147.35 late Wednesday.

Most other major central banks have pressed ahead with a campaign of interest rate hikes in a bid to tame prices. But the BoJ has refused to shift from its long-term program of sub-zero borrowing costs in order to kickstart the world's number three economy.

Japanese policymakers have for several months hinted that they are willing to adopt a more normalized policy, such as minor tweaks to its yield curve control scheme, which sees the bank control the band within which government bonds are allowed to move. Analysts have said the BoJ's outlier policy is harming the economy by skewing the bond market and weakening the yen, in turn making imports more expensive.

Higher interest rates outside Japan have also prompted investors to invest money elsewhere and any tightening in BoJ policy could see money flowing back, hitting assets elsewhere such as US Treasuries and stocks. Ueda gave no indication of new evidence showing progress toward hitting the bank's price target, sticking largely to his previous comments about not seeing enough certainty yet and pointed to the need for wage increases, Bloomberg reported.

"We may not be at a stage to talk about an exit now, but to ensure it will go smoothly when it happens we will make efforts to convey information shortly beforehand," Ueda said. Ueda's remarks come a day after his deputy, Ryozi Himino, hinted that a tightening of policy may be getting closer and played down fears over the potential negative impact of a rate hike. The BoJ's next policy board makes its next decision on December 19. — AFP



DUBAI: US Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry (center) arrives to visit the Ukraine pavilion at the United Nations climate summit in Dubai on December 6, 2023. — AFP

Are COPs useful? A defense from five participants

DUBAI: In recent years, there have been growing questions about whether the climate talks known as COP are useful. Here, five participants at this year's COP28 defend the meetings, insisting that without them, the planet would be in much worse shape.

"Some people have suggested here or there that the Paris Agreement hasn't worked because we are behind and we have a distance to go," Kerry told a press conference Wednesday. "But I would argue to everybody and I think the evidence is clear, that to the contrary, it has worked because I remember that before Paris... we were headed to 3.7 to 4 degrees of warming of the planet."

"With the cooperation of people all over the world... we are now substantially more on track," he said.

● Rana Adib, director of REN21, a network of experts on renewable energy

"The COP is a necessary process. From the energy point of view, the process has been far too slow, particularly given the climate emergency."

"Though it might be hard to believe, this is the 28th COP, and renewable energy and energy efficiency have never been mentioned in the texts," she told AFP. "So I would say, the number is: 27 COP meetings without a mention of renewable energy, with COP28 being the first COP during which renewable energy could—and should—be in the final text."

"There is a potentially historic moment to seize, given the international mobilization on the objective of tripling renewable energy capacity and doubling energy effi-

ciency... However, it's necessary that it be integrated into the COP28 final text."

● Fati N'Zi-Hassane, Africa director of Oxfam International
"COP is still a place where multilateralism prevails. In times like these, it's important to say that a country like the Seychelles, the least populous country in Africa, has the same access to the microphone as any developed country. They have the same rights as the big countries or economies."

"Beyond that, you have to look at the COPs as an iterative process, where we crystallize the layers of agreement and advances. For example, COP15 in 2009, in Copenhagen, that was the moment when we decided to reduce greenhouse gases and on the creation of a Green Climate Fund, which is not sufficiently funded... but which needed to exist."

● Gustavo Pinheiro, senior associate for E3G in Brazil
"We wouldn't even have knowledge about climate change," without the COP process, Pinheiro told AFP. "Knowing the facts of climate change is a result of the convention, of this process. Yes, the negotiations are tough, yes it takes a long time, yes it's hard to coordinate and build a consensus among 195 parties, but it's the best humanity has managed to do to solve the problem. And at least we know the problem."

"It's the same with democracy, yes there are challenges, but it's the least worst system of governance that we managed to put together."

● Laurence Tubiana, architect of the Paris accord
"All the people who are around the table are lawyers, they know that when they sign something, it will have to then be implemented," Tubiana told AFP. "Perhaps we could say, when it comes down to it, that no one is going to bring us before the Court of International Justice. But it can come up under our national laws, and in fact that happens. So people are careful about what they sign. It's a legal commitment." — AFP

'Unabated': A word to split the world at COP28

PARIS: The outcome of the most important climate negotiations in years could rest on the ambiguity surrounding one linchpin term, according to experts: "unabated fossil fuels".

With the world experiencing its hottest year on record and devastating heat, wildfires and flooding battering communities across the planet, negotiators at the COP28 talks must hammer out a response to a UN assessment that countries are far from meeting their climate targets. Ditching coal, oil and gas for cleaner energies is essential if the world is to meet its goal of limiting global warming and avoiding the most catastrophic climate impacts.

Among the menu of hotly contested options negotiators have picked over this week include an agreement to accelerate "efforts towards phasing out unabated fossil fuels" and to cut their use to reach net-zero by around mid-century. There is also an option of a "rapid phase out of unabated coal power" this decade. The problem, experts say, is in specifying what this actually means.

"Terms like unabated, they have no clear meaning at the moment," Lisa Fischer, an analyst with the think tank E3G said at a briefing this week.

Abated is generally understood as capturing emissions before they go into the atmosphere. A footnote in the most recent benchmark report of the UN IPCC scientific advisory body said unabated fossil fuels are those "without interventions that substantially reduce" greenhouse gas emissions.

That can include capturing at least 90 percent of carbon dioxide from power plants, or up to 80 percent of the methane that leaks during energy production and transport, the report suggested. Discussions of abatement largely centre around Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) technologies that trap emissions from power stations or industrial facilities. This is touted by the fossil fuel industry and major producing countries, including oil-rich COP28 host the United Arab Emirates. COP28 president Sultan Al-Jaber, who also leads the UAE's national oil company ADNOC, has said climate diplomacy should focus on phasing out emissions—not necessarily the fossil fuels themselves. — AFP

Business



KUWAIT: Marino Maganto (right), CEO of IKEA Kuwait, Jordan and Morocco and Ali Sabree Al-Ali, the General Manager of HOMZ Mall, inaugurate Kitchen Pop-Up at Homz Mall.



IKEA team poses for a group photo.

IKEA opens Kitchens Pop-Up at Homz Mall

Unveiling luxurious and personalized kitchens with exceptional service

KUWAIT: IKEA, the leading home furnishing brand, inaugurated its Kitchens Pop-Up at Homz Mall marking a new milestone in the history of IKEA in Kuwait. The IKEA Kitchens Pop-Up, which opened earlier this week, was inaugurated by Marino Maganto, CEO of IKEA Kuwait, Jordan and Morocco.



"We are really excited to open the first IKEA Kitchens Pop-Up in Kuwait! Our ambition is to be closer to the people of Kuwait, where people live and shop. We want to make it easier and more convenient to shop in IKEA. In the last three years we have opened three shops in 360, Assima and Al-Khiran Mall and one of the biggest IKEA stores in the region, in The Warehouse Mall, Sabahiya. And today we continue this journey by opening this IKEA Kitchens Pop-Up in Homz Mall," said Maganto.

Homz Mall is located in one of the most popular home furnishing shopping areas of Kuwait and is a key destination for all home-related needs, where the people of Kuwait can shop conveniently in a luxurious and beautiful environment.

"So, what is IKEA Kitchens Pop-Up? First, I would like to highlight the first impression. This is a different IKEA! Today, we want to surprise you, we

want to impress you. We want you to think, is this really IKEA?" said Maganto.

"Our wonderful team of designers has been inspired by the luxury fashion designers to create these beautiful, unique, high quality, luxurious kitchens, to support you in creating the kitchen of your dreams. In every kitchen you will find inspiration in the luxury feeling, in the exciting palette of colors and patterns, in the carefully selected noble materials and in the attention to details and craftsmanship," explained Maganto.

This IKEA Kitchens Pop-Up and these kitchen designs are unique in all the Middle East, so we want to make sure everyone has the opportunity to come and enjoy their visit. The pop-up offers very different styles: beautifully modern or wonderfully traditional kitchens, or a beautiful sustainable kitchen made of recycled plastic bottles. The kitchens also include solutions to help save energy, water, and reduce food waste or even grow own herbs to add to cooking.

"Unique kitchens are made with the purpose of taking you on the journey of creating your own personalized dream kitchen. Our expert kitchen consultants will help make this dream a reality," said Maganto. IKEA Kitchens Pop-Up offers a wide range of personalized services from measuring, planning, designing and selecting colors, to choosing the best combination of accessories and interior organizers to suit each customer's taste and needs. From advising how to make the most of your space, to installing and finishing everything just on time ready for you to start cooking. We are with you every step of the way.

"And of course, we don't stop here! We are so proud of our kitchens, that we continue being by your side, offering 25 years of guarantee in all IKEA Kitchens. So, you don't have to worry about anything except who you want to show your new kitchen to first," concluded Maganto.

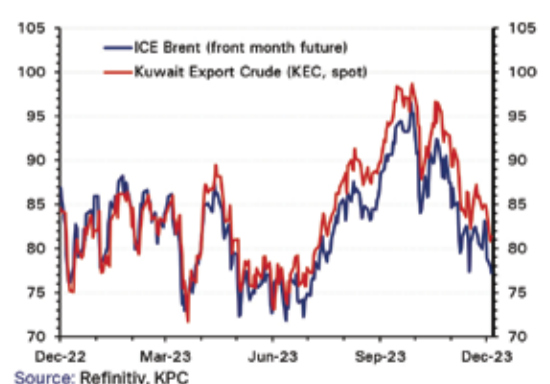


NBK ECONOMIC REPORT

Oil prices fall despite deeper supply cuts by OPEC+

KUWAIT: Brent futures closed lower for a second month in a row in November, dropping 5.2 percent m/m (-3.6 percent ytd) to settle at \$82.8/bbl amid weaker sentiment linked to ongoing concerns over global economic growth and a potential oil market surplus in 2024. Even OPEC+'s end-month announcement of deeper supply cuts in Q1 2024, which took the markets by surprise after the meeting was delayed due to disagreements over African members' quota reductions, was not able to arrest the decline; prices instead retreated further following a convoluted explainer and skepticism that the cuts would be enacted given that they were largely voluntary and not group-wide. Local marker Kuwait Export Crude (KEC) closed -7 percent m/m at \$84.9/bbl (+3.5 percent ytd).

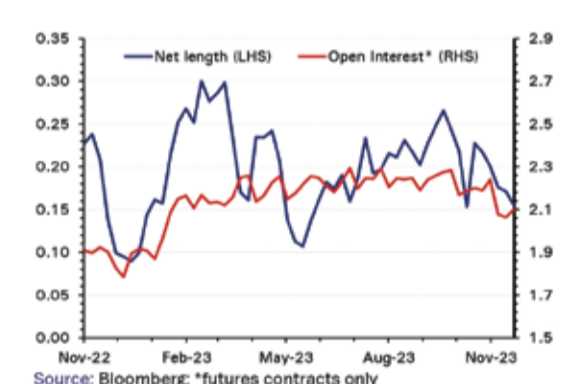
Chart 1: Oil prices (\$/bbl)



November saw a marked build-up of bearish positions in the futures market as speculators reckoned on a weaker outlook with US Fed rate policy remaining tight, underwhelming Chinese data and flatlining European activity. Commercial crude inventories in the US were also on a run of six consecutive weekly increases, implying that oil consumption was being outpaced by supply. By November 21 in the futures and options markets, there were almost twice as many 'shorts' (contracts betting on prices falling) as there had been a month earlier. Net length, (the difference between the number of 'longs' and 'shorts') had consequently receded to its lowest level in six weeks.

In terms of market fundamentals, however, according to the International Energy Agency (IEA), oil demand growth is on track to record a robust 2.4 mb/d in 2023, upwardly revised by 100 kb/d in November's IEA monthly report.

Chart 2: Brent money manager net length (million futures and options contracts)



This is in large part due to stronger-than-expected demand in China, which accounts for a massive 75 percent (1.8 mb/d) of demand growth. China set a new consumption record in September of 17 mb/d. Total global demand is about 102 mb/d.

The IEA's view for 2024, however, is less upbeat, with global demand growth slowing to 930 kb/d, a very steep deceleration. China once again accounts for 75 percent of the growth (+700 kb/d). The IEA's estimate for demand growth is not shared by other energy reporting agencies, however, most divergently by OPEC+, which pegs growth in 2024 more than twice as high at 2.2 mb/d (from 2.5 mb/d in 2023). That said, with OPEC+ not only rolling over but deepening production cuts for 2024 ostensibly to prevent stocks building, for the sake congruity, its oil demand growth projections for next year will likely have to be pared back substantially in its upcoming December oil market report.

On the supply side, combined data from OPEC secondary sources and S&P Global show aggregate OPEC+ production (quota-bound members) rising to 36 mb/d (+106 kb/d m/m) in October. Gains were driven by Kazakhstan, Angola (+51 kb/d) and Nigeria (+17 kb/d to 1.42 mb/d), the latter punching through its downwardly revised quota of 1.38 mb/d for 2024 — a major bone of contention between the African producer and the OPEC Secretariat — for the second month in a row. Meanwhile, Iraq, at 4.33 mb/d, stood out once again as the least compliant OPEC member, producing 109 kb/d (+2.6 percent) above its quota. Outside of quota-bound members, Iran, skirting US sanctions, continued its output-raising course, pumping 3.12 mb/d in October, a fresh 5-year high. The Islamic Republic has brought back more than 1 mb/d of crude since early 2021 and has proven to be an increasingly consequential mitigator of OPEC+'s supply tightening efforts.

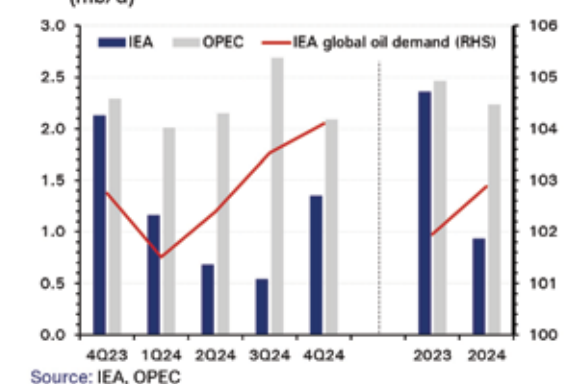
Further complications for OPEC+ supply management were in evidence ahead of last week's ministerial meeting, with Nigeria and Angola rejecting OPEC's June 2023 decision to reduce their output quotas for 2024 (to reflect eroded production capacity). The dis-

agreement forced a delay to the meeting, and the issue remains unresolved for Angola, which saw its 2024 quota subsequently reduced further. Nigeria appears to have accepted an upwardly revised quota of 1.5 mb/d. The meeting ended with the announcement that 8 OPEC+ members including Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the UAE, Iraq and Russia had agreed to deepen and/or extend their voluntary cuts from this year into Q1 2024. Total 'cuts' committed are about 2.2 mb/d, though only Algeria, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Kuwait and Oman will be required to lower output in Q1 — by about 533 kb/d of physical crude barrels in aggregate. For the other participants: Saudi Arabia's cut is actually a rollover of its 1 mb/d 'lollipop' from July 2023; the UAE's nominal 163 kb/d cut commitment is offset by an increase of 200 kb/d to its quota for 2024, agreed to in June 2023 (resulting in a net increase in output of 37 kb/d in Q1); and Russia's pledge of 500 kb/d, of which 300 kb/d is an extension of its existing crude cut and 200 kb/d is a new cut on refined products, is calculated off of exports not production.

Markets were not impressed, neither with the convoluted cuts explainer nor the voluntary nature of the cuts, which left them to the discretion of members rather than collective OPEC+ cuts. As Saudi Prince Abdulaziz hinted, however, these supply reductions could be extended beyond Q1, which may need to happen to balance the market amid expectations of softer demand growth. The net effect of these cuts should see the market revert to a deficit in Q1, of just under 0.4 mb/d (assuming full compliance and production among non-quota-bound members remains at October 2023 levels), but this could slip back into a surplus in Q2 if the cuts are not extended.

Overall, with the expectation of a tighter market, backstopped by OPEC+ supply cuts once again, oil prices should find more support going forward. Oil demand growth is softening, however, and non-OPEC supply especially in the US is gaining, so the tussle between bullish and bearish impulses looks set to continue into 2024. Market volatility looks par for the course.

Chart 3: Global oil demand growth projections (mb/d)



US oil prices slide below \$70 a barrel

NEW YORK: US oil prices finished below \$70 a barrel for the first time since July on Wednesday on a mixed day for global equities, as traders pondered hopes for interest rate cuts from the European Central Bank and the US Federal Reserve. West Texas Intermediate oil for delivery in January fell 4.1 percent to finish at \$69.38 a barrel. The drop came as markets eyed signs of weakening demand amid skepticism that the OPEC+ coalition's efforts will meaningfully restrain supply.

Analysts have begun to consider the possibility that Saudi Arabia could abruptly decide to open the spigots, recalling a move by the kingdom in 2014 to counter rising US production.

"There's increasing fears that the Saudis will just let loose with supply. They have a lot of spare capacity now because of how much they've cut back production wise," said John Kilduff of Again Capital. "So it's another bearish factor for the market."

Frankfurt's DAX stocks index hit a fresh record high, passing the 16,600 level for the first time, and in Paris the CAC 40 rose as sliding German factory orders added to hopes of an interest-rate reduction from the European Central Bank. "Risk-on sentiment is driving price action this morning amid growing expectations that the European Central Bank could cut rates early next year," said Victoria Scholar, head of investment at trading firm Interactive Investor. "Markets are pricing in an almost 90-percent chance of a cut from the ECB in the first quarter of 2024."

Equity investors digested additional data pointing to a softening US labor market, rekindling hopes of a Fed rate reduction. Following Tuesday's below-forecast job openings data, on Wednesday jobs data from payrolls firm ADP also came in softer than expected, and trade data showed a considerable drop in exports. Markets rallied in November on growing hope that with inflation continuing to fall and other parts of the economy easing, the Fed will be able to slash rates in 2024, with some suggesting as soon as the first quarter.

But US markets had another downcast session Wednesday, with all three major indices retreating.

Asia enjoyed some much-needed buying, with Tokyo up two percent and Sydney one percent higher. Hong Kong, Sydney, Singapore, Seoul, Bangkok, Mumbai, Wellington, Taipei and Jakarta were also on the rise. Shanghai fell, with sentiment dented after Moody's on Tuesday warned it had downgraded its outlook for China's credit rating owing to the country's rising debt levels and concerns over its battered property sector. — AFP

Lifestyle



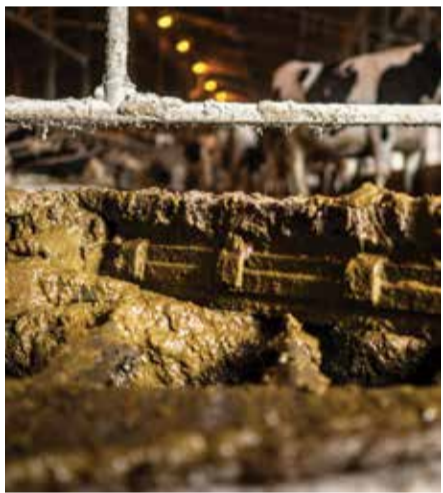
This picture shows a milk cow eating at a dairy farm in Taiki of Hokkaido Prefecture.



This picture shows a machine collecting cow manure at a dairy farm in Taiki of Hokkaido Prefecture.



A staff member checks up a rocket engine before a test, which uses biomethane as fuel, at the test site of satellite-launch startup Interstellar Technologies, in Taiki of Hokkaido Prefecture.



This picture shows a machine collecting cow manure at a dairy farm in Taiki of Hokkaido Prefecture.

Japan's space industry opened potentially an udder-ly new chapter on Thursday with a start-up testing a prototype rocket engine that runs on fuel derived purely from a plentiful local source: cow dung. The experiment saw the engine blast out a blue-and-orange flame 10-15 metres (30-50 feet) horizontally out of an open hangar door for around 10 seconds in the rural northern town of Taiki. The liquid "biomethane" required was made entirely from gas derived from cow manure from two local dairy farms, according to Interstellar Technologies chief executive Takahiro Inagawa.

"We are doing this not just because it is good for the environment but because it can be produced locally, it is very cost effective, and it is a fuel with high performance and high purity," Inagawa told AFP. "I do not think it is an exaggeration to assume this will be replicated ...all over the world," he said. "We are the first private business to do this." Interstellar, which hopes to be able to put satellites in space using the fuel, teamed up with industrial gas producer firm Air Water.

It works with local farmers who have equipment on their farms to process their cow dung into biogas which Air Water collects and turns into the rocket fuel. Resource-poor Japan "must secure domestically produced, carbon-neutral energy now", said Tomohiro Nishikawa, an engineer at Air Water. "The raw material from this region's cows has so much potential. Should something change in international affairs, it's important that Japan has an energy source that it has already in hand," he added.

'Moon Sniper'

Japan's space agency JAXA launched in September its "Moon Sniper" mission but the sector has been plagued by problems in recent years with two failed missions — one public and one private. Japan has also had setbacks with its launch rockets, with mishaps after liftoff of the next-genera-



This picture shows dairy farmer Eiji Mizushita speaking to the media at the farm in Taiki of Hokkaido Prefecture.

tion H3 in March and the normally reliable solid-fuel Epsilon last October.

In July, the test of an Epsilon S rocket, an improved version of the Epsilon, ended in an explosion 50 seconds after ignition. Biogas derived from cow manure is already being used for fuel around the world, including to run buses in the Indian city of Indore, instead of more polluting conventional sources.

It helps mitigate the enormous environmental footprint of agriculture, which Greenpeace says is responsible for 14 percent of greenhouse gas emissions worldwide. Burning biogas

also releases greenhouse gases, but so does leaving it to degrade naturally, while runoff from farm animals pollutes waterways and soil.

Air Water's biomethane is already being used by a local dairy and other factories, to heat local homes and to run trucks and ships as pilot programs. Among participating local farmers is Eiji Mizushita, 58, who raises some 900 milk cows that collectively generate over 40 tons (80,000 pounds) of dung every day.

His farm has an industrial system to automatically collect the waste, ferment

it, and turn it into biogas, fertilizer and recycled bedding materials for his animals. Sales of biogas expands Mizushita's income by about one percent, but he said the effort is worth it. "I'm excited to think that our cow waste could be used to make it fly," he said of the rocket. "We need to properly dispose of and use manure. I also think that the government and society should take a more serious look at the importance of natural renewable energy and encourage its production." — AFP



A group of media members attend a preparation for the test of a rocket engine, which uses biomethane as fuel, at the test site of satellite-launch startup Interstellar Technologies, in Taiki of Hokkaido Prefecture. - AFP photos



This picture shows the back of a lorry carrying liquid biomethane to be used as fuel for the rocket, at a gas processing factory operated by Air Water Group in Obihiro of Hokkaido Prefecture.

Japan to legalize cannabis-based medicines

Japan's parliament has passed a bill to legalize cannabis-based medicines in a landmark revision of its stringent drug laws, while toughening its ban on recreational use of marijuana. The changes to Japan's cannabis and narcotics control laws passed on Wednesday in the upper house will pave the way for the lifting of a ban on medical products derived from cannabis. Cannabis-based medicines, produced with the active ingredient cannabidiol, or CBD, are already used overseas to treat various conditions such as severe epilepsy.

This is a win for patient groups that have campaigned for access to these medicines. However, the changes amount to a tightening of Japan's already tough cannabis policy. Marijuana consumption was criminalized, closing a loophole that officials partly blamed for a recent rise in cannabis-related arrests.

Prior to the revisions, inhaling marijuana had been technically legal, whereas possessing it was punishable by a jail term of up to five years. The loophole was originally introduced to prevent farmers from being arrested for accidentally inhaling psychoactive smoke when growing hemp. But alarmed by the recent spike in arrests over cannabis, especially among

young people including teens, authorities decided to take things up a notch.

Under the revised laws, those caught using or possessing marijuana can face a prison sentence of up to seven years. Health ministry statistics show the number of arrests related to cannabis hit a record 5,783 in 2021, with a marked rise among teens and those in their 20s. And according to a 2020 police probe into 748 people arrested over marijuana possession, nearly 30 percent cited the lack of penalties against consumption as an emboldening factor.

"As more and more young people gravitate toward abusing marijuana, we hope this revision will put a brake on the trend," top government spokesman Hirokazu Matsuno said Wednesday after the bill cleared parliament.

Japan's CBD market has flourished in recent years, swelling from just \$3 million in industry value in 2015 to an estimated \$59 million in 2019, according to Tokyo-based research firm Visiongraph. The new rule against consumption will leave CBD products unregulated, as it will only target THC - the psychoactive substance that makes people high, a health ministry official told AFP. — AFP



People take part in a march to call for the legalization of cannabis (marijuana) in the streets of Shibuya in Tokyo. — AFP

Pakistan zoo shut down after mystery tiger attack

A zoo in Pakistan has been shut down after a man was mauled to death by tigers in an attack discovered during routine cleaning, officials said Thursday. The body was found on Wednesday morning in Bahawalpur's Sherbagh Zoo in the eastern province of Punjab after staff spotted one of the three tigers with a shoe in its mouth.

"The zoo is closed right now as we determine how the man got in," Ali Usman Bukhari, a senior officer of the province's wildlife department, which operates the zoo, told AFP. The condition of the body suggests the attack happened late Tuesday night. "The autopsy report has not been released, however evidence gathered from the enclosure points towards him being alive when he was attacked by the tigers," Bukhari said.

"The tigers did not go out of the den to attack the man, he jumped into their enclosure," he said. "If we find a security lapse, we will address it. If need be, we will hire private security guards." The victim has not been identified and no family member has come forward to claim the body.

Speaking to media outside the zoo after the body was discovered on Wednesday, senior local government official Zaheer Anwar said all staff had been accounted for. "Our assessment so far is that this appears to be a lumatic, because a sensible person would not jump into the den," he said.

"You can see the den is secured. There are stairs behind the den, maybe he jumped from there." The three tigers present in the den when the body was discovered have been restricted to a smaller space while evidence is collected. The zoo was built in 1942 by the ruling royal family of the former princely state of Bahawalpur and costs adults 50 rupees (18 cents) to enter. — AFP

Malaysia trapping tigers after three people killed

Malaysia has started trapping and relocating tigers after three people were killed by the critically endangered creatures in the past two months, officials said Thursday. Eleven cage traps and 20 cameras have been installed in recent weeks in the forested area of Gua Musang district, in the northeastern state of Kelantan, where the deadly attacks happened. There have been five attacks resulting in four deaths in Gua Musang since 2021, Mohamad Hafid Rohani, director of the Wildlife and National Parks department in Kelantan, told AFP.

Three of the killings were in October and November this year. "We are very concerned. This is the worst tiger-related deaths in decades in Malaysia," Hafid said. The traps — rectangular cages wrapped in palm leaves so they blend into the forest — have been set up in "hot spots" where attacks took place.

One has been placed in a palm oil plantation. Live goats are kept in enclosures nearby to lure the tigers into the traps with their bleating. The Malayan tiger is classified as critically endangered by protection group the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

WWF Malaysia estimates there are fewer than 150 of the animals still left in the wild. Hafid said 35 tigers were estimated to live in Kelantan. Attacks on humans by the tiger are rare, but such incidents have been known to occur in areas where developments encroach on the animals' habitat.

Last month, one female tiger was trapped and taken to the National Wildlife Rescue Centre in neighboring Perak state, Hafid said. But Hafid admitted that

officials were "not certain if it was responsible for any of the attacks on humans".

'Sad situation'

Two of the people killed since 2021 were plantation workers while the other victims were residents, Gua Musang police chief Superintendent Sik Choon Foo said. Choon Foo said post-mortem examinations of the victims and "tiger footprints" found at the scene of each killing pointed to the big cats as culprits. A female tiger that seriously injured a man in July 2021 was caught and placed in a sanctuary, said Hafid.

But the tiger responsible for a deadly attack in January 2022 was shot dead after it went for wildlife officials, he said. Wildlife officials have warned residents to stay indoors or go outside in groups.

About 3,000 Malayan tigers once roamed the country's jungles in the 1950s, and the big cat is regarded as Malaysia's national animal. But its population has declined over the decades due to a loss of habitat from development and agricultural expansion, as well as poaching.

Wildlife Conservation Society country director Mark Rayan Darmaraj said one reason for the attacks on humans could be the decline in the wild boar population — one of the tiger's main prey — due to African Swine Fever. Rayan said relocating the big cats was a "sad situation", but it was the "most practical measure" for creatures that have been confirmed to have attacked or killed humans to prevent them from striking again. — AFP



A Malayan Tiger takes a dip at the National Zoo in Kuala Lumpur. — AFP



A baker prepares traditional Lebanese manoushe flatbreads, at a bakery in Tabarja north of Beirut.



A baker removes traditional Lebanese manoushe flatbreads from the oven.

UNESCO recognizes Lebanese flatbread manoushe



A baker prepares a mixture of thyme, sumac, toasted sesame seeds, salt and olive oil, to be spread on a disc of dough to make traditional Lebanese manoushe flatbreads, at a bakery in Tabarja north of Beirut.

The UN cultural agency on Wednesday said it was adding Lebanon's iconic flatbread, manoushe, to its list of intangible cultural heritage. The Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, convening in Botswana since Monday, approved the inscription of the renowned bread "topped with a mixture of thyme, sumac, toasted sesame seeds, salt and olive oil". "The quintessential Lebanese breakfast, manoushe is a flatbread prepared in homes and specialized bakeries, and enjoyed by people of all backgrounds," UNESCO said.

The flatbread is often topped with a soft cheese called labneh, as well as tomatoes, cucumbers, olives and mint leaves. "While preparing the dough, the practitioners pray that it will rise, with Muslims reciting the beginning of Fatiha and Christians reciting several prayers

and making the sign of the cross before letting the dough rest," the UN agency added. "The manoushe is eaten across communities, reflecting the symbolic idea of living together among the Lebanese," said Bahjat Rizk, Lebanon's cultural attaché at UNESCO.

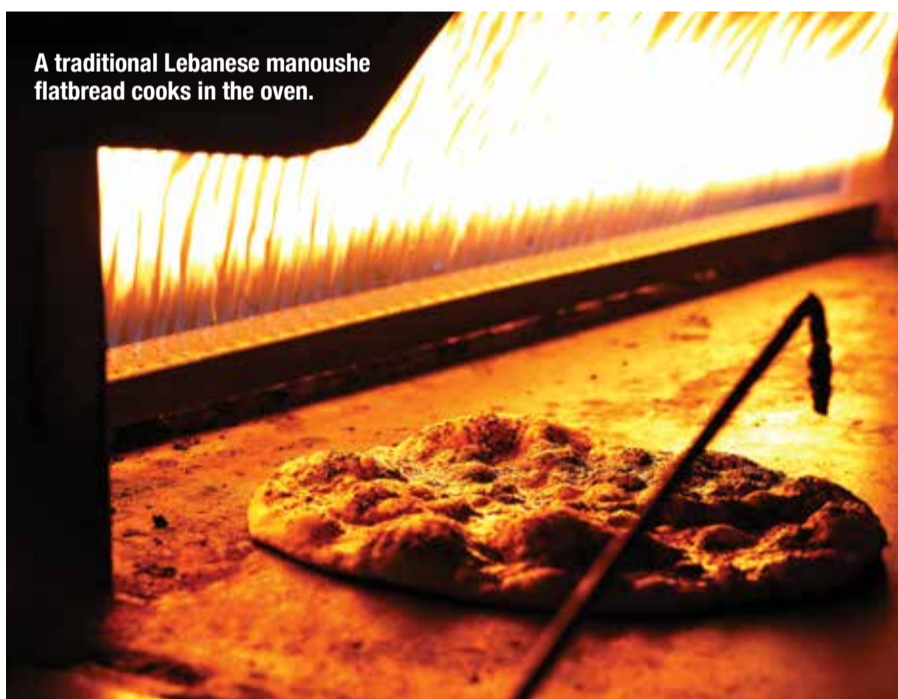
"The bakeries that prepare this dish are spread throughout the country," he told AFP. Manoushe remains one of the least expensive food options in a country struggling from a severe economic crisis since 2019. "The preparation of manoushe for sale in small bakeries also contributes to local economic development," UNESCO said. A popular street food, manoushe can also be found in bakeries around the world thanks to the Lebanese diaspora. Lebanon submitted its application to UNESCO to inscribe manoushe in March 2022. — AFP



A baker puts a traditional Lebanese manoushe in the oven.



A traditional Lebanese manoushe flatbreads topped with mint, tomatoes and olives are displayed on the counter of a bakery. — AFP photos



A traditional Lebanese manoushe flatbread cooks in the oven.



A baker spreads a mixture of thyme, sumac, toasted sesame seeds, salt and olive oil on a disc of dough to make a traditional Lebanese manoushe flatbread.

UNESCO backs renovation of barracks of papal Swiss Guard

UNESCO has backed a multi-million-euro plan to renovate the barracks of the papal Swiss Guard within the Vatican, a World Heritage Site, organizers said Thursday. An assessment by experts for the UN cultural agency was "overall very positive," Jean-Pierre Roth, president of the foundation set up to oversee the renovation, told reporters. Some "ar-

chitectural elements" had still to be defined in the 44-million-euro (\$47.4 million) project, he said.

The Swiss Guards, the world's oldest practicing army who currently number about 125, was founded by Pope Julius II in 1506 and is renowned for its blue, yellow and red striped uniform. Under plans launched in 2016, the foundation aims to demolish the

19th-century buildings that house the pope's personal protection force and construct new facilities.

The project, which is due for completion by 2029, was originally forecast to cost 42 million euros, Roth said. He said the foundation had received some 48.5 million Swiss francs (around 51.5 million euros), in donations and pledges. With UNESCO's approval, the proj-

ect has "cleared a decisive hurdle," allowing detailed planning to begin in 2024, the foundation said in a statement. The Vatican has the final say, with construction expected to begin in 2026. The foundation said UNESCO had recognized the dilapidated state of the current barracks, which are plagued by damp and comprise of cramped rooms without individual bathroom facilities.

The UN body also recognized the Swiss Guards as "one of the living institutions that contribute to the outstanding universal value of the Vatican as a cultural heritage site," the foundation said. Recruits must be unmarried, male, Swiss, practicing Catholics, aged between 19 and 30 and at least 1.74 meters tall. — AFP



This photo shows new Swiss Guards preparing for daily training in the Vatican Armory at the Pontifical Swiss Guard headquarters, in the days leading up to the swearing-in ceremony of new Swiss Guard recruits at the Vatican. - AFP photos



A recruit takes his oath during the swearing-in ceremony for new recruits of the Pontifical Swiss Guard during a ceremony at the San Damaso courtyard in the Vatican.



This photo shows Swiss Guards within daily training in the quarters of the Pontifical Swiss Guard, a few days before the swearing-in ceremony of new Swiss Guard recruits at the Vatican.

Sports

Disgraced former Spanish football chief 'forcefully kissed' England star

Rubiales' behavior 'inexcusable and unacceptable'

News in Brief

LeBron slams US gun laws

LAS VEGAS: LeBron James called for tougher US gun laws on Wednesday after a shooting at a Las Vegas college campus left three people dead as the Nevada city prepared to host the NBA's in-season tournament finale. James, who has been an outspoken advocate for tighter gun control legislation over the years, was speaking after arriving in the gambling hub for the Los Angeles Lakers' semi-final clash with the New Orleans Pelicans on Thursday. The 38-year-old superstar spoke to reporters just hours after a gunman killed three people and left one critically injured in a shooting at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas earlier Wednesday. "First of all, my condolences go to the families that lost loved ones, families and friends and everything," James said. "It just goes back to what I said before about guns in America. I think it's such a longer conversation, but we keep dealing with the same story, this same conversation everybody single time it happens, and it just continues to happen. — AFP

Santos' first-ever relegation

SAO PAULO: Iconic Brazilian club Santos, cradle of late football legend Pele, were relegated to the second division Wednesday for the first time in their history, just shy of the first anniversary of his death. Santos suffered a 2-1 defeat at home to Fortaleza in their final league match of the season, sealing their fate as the last of the four teams condemned to the "B Series" league next year. The home of Pele and Neymar finished their lackluster season in 17th place, on 43 points - one shy of Bahia, who dodged relegation with a 4-1 win over Atletico Mineiro, and 27 short of Sao Paulo giants Palmeiras, who claimed their second straight league title. Luis Suarez-led Gremio finished in a surprisingly strong second place on 68 points, thanks to a brace from the Uruguayan striker in their 3-2 win against Fluminense. Santos's relegation comes less than a year after three-time World Cup-winner Pele's death on December 29, 2022, at age 82. — AFP

Wallabies star winger quits

SYDNEY: Rising Wallabies star Mark Nawaqanitawase announced Thursday he will jump codes and join rugby league powerhouse Sydney Roosters, with beleaguered Rugby Australia voicing disappointment. NSW Waratah Nawaqanitawase, 23, played 11 Tests and was a standout performer for Australia in their disastrous World Cup campaign under Eddie Jones in France this year. "We're delighted to have secured Mark's services and look forward to welcoming him to our club in 2025," Roosters head of recruitment Daniel Anderson said in statement of the two-year deal. It follows Roosters' outside back Joseph Suaalii making the switch to rugby union and the Waratahs, which will take effect at the end of 2024. "We are disappointed — Mark has been a strong player over the last 12 months," Rugby Australia chief executive Phil Waugh said. "However, the outside backs are a position of strength for us, with great depth coming through. We are confident we are well-stocked with talented wingers for the future." — AFP

Bayern, Zaragoza seal deal

BERLIN: Bayern Munich have reached an agreement to sign Spain winger Bryan Zaragoza from La Liga side Granada next summer, the German champions announced on Wednesday. The agreed fee for the 22-year-old winger is a reported 15 million euros (\$16 million) and Bayern said he will pen a five-year deal running until 2029. "Bryan is one of Spain's up-and-coming players and has been on our radar for a while," Bayern's sporting director Christoph Freund said. "He'll increase our attacking options. We wish him the best of luck for the rest of the season with Granada and look forward to him joining us in the summer." Zaragoza has scored five goals and laid on two assists in 14 league matches this season, including netting a double in the 2-2 draw with Barcelona in October. In the same month, Zaragoza made his debut for Spain, coming off the bench at half-time in a 2-0 win over Scotland. — AFP

Australian Open entry list

MELBOURNE: Showstopper Nick Kyrgios and former US Open champion Emma Raducanu were notable absentees Thursday from the 2024 Australian Open entry list, but Rafael Nadal and Naomi Osaka are set for their Grand Slam comebacks. Fiery Australian Kyrgios, the one-time world number 13, had knee surgery in January and then aborted plans to return at Wimbledon after tearing a ligament in his wrist. Australian Open boss Craig Tiley recently said he expected Kyrgios to be at the opening Grand Slam of the year in "some form" and he could be granted a wildcard. Briton Raducanu was also missing from the automatic entry list. The 21-year-old, who stunned the tennis world when she won the US Open as a qualifier aged 18, has been out of action since April after undergoing operations on both wrists and an ankle. She pulled out of her scheduled comeback at an exhibition tournament in Macau this month, but was targeting the beginning of 2024 for her return. — AFP

LONDON: Disgraced former Spanish football federation president Luis Rubiales behaved inappropriately towards England players after the Women's World Cup final, according to Football Association chairwoman Debbie Hewitt. World governing body FIFA in October imposed a three-year ban from all football activities on Rubiales over his conduct at the match, which included kissing Spanish player Jenni Hermoso without her consent. European champions England lost the final in Sydney 1-0.

FIFA has now published its findings into the case, saying it had been tempted to impose a more severe sanction. The FIFA disciplinary committee said Rubiales had acted with "a sense of complete impunity" at the game on August 20. "The committee could not stress enough that - regardless of the emotional state he was in during and after the match - (Rubiales') behavior was inexcusable and unacceptable, especially considering his high rank within the football ecosystem at the time," it said.

Hewitt was asked to give evidence and the report includes a summary of her submission. According to the report, Hewitt said Rubiales "cupped and stroked" the face of England's Laura Coombs and "seemingly forcefully kissed Lucy Bronze on her face" at the presentation ceremony. Hewitt added she "felt deeply uncomfortable and embarrassed" at the way Rubiales greeted the Spanish players, which included tapping one on the bottom.

According to the report, she also noted Rubiales kissing Hermoso "fully and forcibly on the mouth". In his response, Rubiales accused Hewitt of "blatantly" lying or "speaking from ignorance" in relation to the kiss. Rubiales, who resigned from his position in September after initially vowing not to stand down,



SYDNEY: File picture shows President of the Royal Spanish Football Federation Luis Rubiales carrying Spain's Athenea del Castillo Bevide on his shoulder as they celebrate winning the Australia and New Zealand 2023 Women's World Cup final football match between Spain and England. — AFP

indicated his intention to appeal against the ban on the day it was issued. Five days after resigning as Spain's football chief, Rubiales appeared before

a judge investigating a complaint of sexual assault over the Hermoso incident. Rubiales has repeatedly insisted the kiss was consensual. — AFP

Embiid hits 50 points as Sixers sink Wizards

LOS ANGELES: Joel Embiid shrugged off the lingering effects of illness to score 50 points as the Philadelphia 76ers defeated the Washington Wizards 131-126 in the NBA on Wednesday. Reigning NBA Most Valuable Player Embiid missed the Sixers' last two games due to ill health but returned with a bang to deliver a season-high performance in a slender victory on the road. It was the second monster performance by Embiid against the Wizards this season after the Cameroon-born star dropped 48 points against Washington on November 6.

Embiid, who also had 13 rebounds and seven assists, revealed after Wednesday's win he was still not fully fit. "I didn't feel good. My chest was killing me," Embiid said. "I started to feel better in the second half but I was struggling." The win saw the Sixers improve to 13-7 to remain in fourth place in the Eastern Conference, two games back from top-of-the-table Boston. Tyrese Maxey backed Embiid with 26 points while De'Anthony Melton added 19.

Jordan Poole led the Washington scorers with 23 points as the Wizards slumped to their 17th defeat of the season to remain second from bottom in the East. Elsewhere Wednesday, Ni-

kola Jokic bagged a triple double but was unable to stop the NBA champion Denver Nuggets falling to a 111-102 defeat to the Los Angeles Clippers. The Nuggets sprinted into a 15-point lead early in the first quarter, but Los Angeles roared back with a 40-point second quarter before outscoring Denver 32-20 in the fourth to complete an impressive win.

Jokic finished with 22 points, 15 rebounds and 10 assists with Jamal Murray leading the Denver scoring with 23 points. But the Clippers powered to victory behind 25 points from Paul George - including five three-pointers - with James Harden chipping in with 20. In other games, Luka Doncic put on a show with 40 points, 11 rebounds and 10 assists - including a first-half triple-double - as the Dallas Mavericks pounded the Utah Jazz 147-97. Doncic's virtuoso performance - the 60th triple-double of his career - helped take him past the legendary Larry Bird into ninth place on the NBA's all-time rankings for triples.

"I did that? It's pretty amazing," Doncic said when informed of his overtaking of Bird's triple-double mark. "I don't know what to say, honestly. We all know who Larry Bird was so it's pretty special," the 24-year-old Slovenian said. The Mavericks im-



Joel Embiid

proved to 12-8 with the win while Utah fell to 7-14. San Antonio's dismal start to the season continued with a 102-94 loss to the Minnesota Timberwolves.

The Spurs' 15th consecutive defeat leaves them rooted to the foot of the Western Conference on 3-17. San Antonio's number one draft pick Victor Wembanyama finished with 12 points from 4-of-13 shooting, but was upstaged by French compatriot Rudy Gobert, who posted 16 points with 20 rebounds for the Wolves, who lead the Western Conference at 16-4. Spurs coach Gregg Popovich bemoaned his team's inability to shoot anything from three-point

range. Spurs made just eight of 36 attempts from outside the arc.

"We gave them a good run, but if you shoot eight from 36 you're going to have a tough night," Popovich said. In Portland, 31 points from Steph Curry helped the Golden State Warriors to a 110-106 win over the Trail Blazers. The Warriors improved to 10-11 with the victory, while Portland sunk to 6-14. In Detroit, Desmond Bane erupted for 49 points as the Memphis Grizzlies cruised past the Pistons 116-102. Memphis improved to 6-14 while Detroit fell to 2-19 to remain bottom of the East. — AFP

German Cup upsets continue; Stuttgart kick Dortmund out

BERLIN: Stuttgart won 2-0 at home to boot Borussia Dortmund out of the German Cup last 16 on Wednesday, as third-tier Saarbruecken, who previously eliminated Bayern Munich, knocked out Eintracht Frankfurt. Alongside Bayern, Dortmund and Frankfurt, holders RB Leipzig are also out, with only three of the remaining eight teams playing top-division football. "We have to be honest, it was a footballing catastrophe," said Dortmund captain Emre Can. "We are Dortmund, there has to be more. It can't go on like this, we need to have some serious discussions."

Dortmund, beaten 2-1 by Stuttgart at the same venue in November, were outclassed by a dominant home side who won thanks to second-half goals from Serhou Guirassy and Silas. Guirassy now has 18 goals in 13 games in all competitions this season. English teenager Jamie Bynoe-Gittens had the ball in the net for Dortmund shortly after Guirassy's goal, but the effort was ruled out by VAR for offside.

With Dortmund pushing for an equalizer, Stuttgart striker Silas carved through some sleepy defending to score a second and seal his side's progress to the quarter-finals. Winners in 2021, Dortmund have now been eliminated in the last 16 in five of the past seven years. Stuttgart's win came shortly after five-time German Cup winners Frankfurt lost 2-0 away at Saarbruecken, conceding second-half goals to Kai Bruenker and Luca Kerber.

A "mega proud" Saarbruecken coach Ruediger Ziehl said "that's just crazy", while Bruenker told Sky Germany "tonight I'll enjoy a beer and we'll celebrate like beasts." Frankfurt debutant Noel Fekke was sent off late on for lashing out at defender Marcel Gaus just six minutes after coming on as a substitute. Saarbruecken, who are 11th in the third division, beat Bayern 2-1 at home in the second round last month. In



STUTTART: Stuttgart's Congolese forward #14 Silas Katompa Mvumpa (center) scores the 2-0 goal past Dortmund's Swiss goalkeeper #01 Gregor Kobel next to Dortmund's German defender #04 Nico Schlotterbeck (left) during the German Cup (DFB Pokal) round of 16 football match between VfB Stuttgart and Borussia Dortmund in Stuttgart. — AFP

the German capital, Hertha Berlin beat Hamburg on penalties to reach the last eight.

Hertha's Fabian Reese scored the opener and then found the net again in the 90th minute to send the match to extra time, after Hamburg's Immanuel Pherai and Laszlo Benes had given the visitors a first-half lead. Hertha academy product Ransford Koenigsdoerffer scored for Hamburg and English defender Jonjoe Kenny struck late for the hosts to send the match to penalties. Koenigsdoerffer had his spot-kick

saved and Reese scored immediately afterwards to secure victory.

Hertha join Bayer Leverkusen in the quarter-finals after the Bundesliga leaders won 3-1 at home over second-tier Paderborn. Despite having two goals ruled out for offside, Leverkusen eased past Paderborn thanks to strikes from Victor Boniface, Exequiel Palacios and Patrik Schick. Sebastian Klaas pulled one back late for the visitors. Fortuna Duesseldorf, Borussia Moenchengladbach, St Pauli and Kaiserslautern all reached the last eight on Tuesday. — AFP

Sports

Zain proud to support jet ski world champion Abdulrazzaq

Kuwaiti athlete brought home two titles from UIM world championship



Al Abdulrazzaq raises Kuwaiti flag on the first-place podium.



Zain is a main supporter of local athletes in all sports.

KUWAIT: Reflecting its endless commitment to support national talents and empower Kuwaiti athletes, Zain continues to sponsor Kuwaiti jet ski world champion Yousef Al Abdulrazzaq, who recently brought home two top titles from the UIM World Jet Ski Championship 2023 held at Lake Toba, Indonesia. Zain has been supporting Al Abdulrazzaq's professional career for the past 15 years, and the company is both thrilled and proud of the recent achievements by the world champion.

Throughout his glittering career, Al Abdulrazzaq has attained a long list of titles and accolades from local, regional, and international arenas, competing with the best pro racers from around the world. During his recent spell at the UIM World Championship 2023 at Lake Toba, Indonesia, Yousef Al Abdulrazzaq won the first-place title in the SLALOM GPI category and the third-place title in the overall points standings in the RUNABOUT GPI category. He competed with 25 pro racers representing 22

nations. Al Abdulrazzaq is currently preparing to join several notable championships and competitions in powerboating throughout the remaining season. Zain wishes the champion all the best in his upcoming regional and international participations, where he will surely raise the Kuwaiti flag high in the biggest sporting arenas.

Throughout his professional career, Al Abdulrazzaq achieved many notable accolades in the biggest events organized by the Union Internationale Mo-

tonautique (UIM), the world's governing body of powerboating. The company is proud to support him for over 15 years, reflecting its endless confidence in the talents of local athletes. As a private sector leader, Zain constantly looks to identify and support excellence across the local sports sector. The company continues to put Kuwaiti sports and athletes at the forefront of its priorities and pledges to continue motivating them to achieve all the recognition and support they deserve.

Suarez fires double to end Brazil adventure

RIO DE JANEIRO: Luis Suarez scored twice in his farewell match for Gremio as the Brazilian side defeated Fluminense 3-2 at the Maracana Stadium in Rio de Janeiro on Wednesday. The 36-year-old Uruguayan football icon, who has been linked with a move to join close friend Lionel Messi at Inter Miami, scored in the 43rd minute and then bagged a second with a cheeky panenka from the penalty spot in the 64th minute.

The victory ensured Gremio finished second in the Brazilian championship, two points behind champions Palmeiras as the season drew to a close on Wednesday. It marked a fitting finale to what has been a dazzling season in Brazilian football for Suarez, who cut short his two-year deal with Gremio after one season saying the calendar was too much for his aging body.

Leading Gremio as captain, Suarez played in 54 of the club's 64 matches in 2023, scoring a total of 29 goals. He ended the year as the second-highest goal scorer in the Brazilian league, with 17, inspiring down-on-its-luck Gremio to an unexpectedly solid season. Suarez has declined to comment on rumors linking him to a move to join former Barcelona teammate Messi in Miami, saying he wants to focus first and foremost on his family and his health.

"I love this job, but it's hard waking up in pain every morning," he said last weekend. "I'm hard-headed and I want to keep playing, but I don't know what comes next." Those comments came after he scored the lone goal in Gremio's win over Vasco in his final home match, earning an emotional standing ovation from the sold-out crowd. His stint at Gremio could have been a lame swan song, coming after a return to his boyhood club, Nacional, last



RIO DE JANEIRO: Gremio's forward Uruguayan Luis Suarez (2nd left) and Fluminense's midfielder Ganso (2nd right) fight for the ball during the Brazilian Championship football match between Fluminense and Gremio on December 6, 2023. — AFP

year, and tearful exit with Uruguay in the group stage of the 2022 World Cup.

Instead, Suarez shone in the club's first season back in top-flight play after a painful relegation, helping them to the Rio Grande do Sul state championship and state winners' cup titles—the latter courtesy of a Suarez hat trick. Porto Alegre soon caught "Suarezmania": the striker was named an honorary citizen, and the state government gave him a medal. Attendance at Gremio's stadium meanwhile doubled, and the club registered record sales of jerseys and other paraphernalia.

Brendan Rodgers. And he took his opportunity as Celtic remained unbeaten in the league this season. "He works ever so hard at his game so he's ready when he comes on," said Rodgers. "I was very, very pleased for him. He's taken his goals really well." Oh deflected in Cameron Carter-Vickers shot to open the floodgates after just five minutes.

Hibs had held the Scottish champions when the sides met in Edinburgh in October, but there was little hope for the visitors once Matt O'Riley made it 2-0 midway through the first half. Luis Palma's penalty and a classy finish from Oh put the outcome beyond doubt early in the second period. Christian Doidge grabbed a consolation for the visitors,

who remain in fifth. The in-form Abdallah Sima was Rangers' hero at Tynecastle as Philippe Clement's men kept the pressure on their Glasgow rivals at the top of the table.

The Brighton loanee latched onto James Tavernier's through ball and coolly chipped Zander Clark for the only goal on 34 minutes for his 12th goal of the season. But Rangers were thankful to a fine save from Jack Butland made a fantastic save from Kenneth Vargas late on to secure all three points. Aberdeen slipped to second bottom after a 1-0 home defeat to Kilmarnock. Chris Kane's injury-time winner moved St Johnstone out of the bottom two with a 1-0 victory over St Mirren. — AFP

Defending champions Urawa crash out of Champions League

HANOI: Japan's defending champions Urawa Red Diamonds tumbled out of the Asian Champions League in the group stage on Wednesday after losing 2-1 to Hanoi FC in their final game. The three-time champions needed to win to stand any chance of progressing but they fell behind early in the second half to already eliminated Hanoi in Vietnam. Bryan Linssen equalized in the 65th minute but Pham Tuan Hai slotted the winner from the penalty spot three minutes from time to bundle the Japanese side out of the tournament.

The result leaves Urawa, who beat Saudi Arabia's Al Hilal in May to win last season's title, with no chance of playing in continental competition next term. They missed out on qualification through the domestic J-League on Sunday when Sanfrecce Hiroshima pipped them to third place with a 96th-minute goal on the final day.

"It's a very difficult result to accept - we needed to win tonight if we wanted to repeat as champions," said Urawa goalkeeper Shusaku Nishikawa. "We wanted to win and it's frustrating that we couldn't do that for the fans who came here to support us." Even a win might not have been good enough for Urawa, who went into the game guaranteed to finish second in their group behind South Korea's Pohang Steelers. They looked to be on their way when they were awarded a penalty in the 10th minute for a handball by Hanoi's Dao Van Nam.

But goalkeeper Nguyen Van Hoang dived to his left to deny Danish defender Alexander Scholz with a brilliant stop. Dao atoned for his mistake by heading Hanoi into the lead from close range after a corner in the 53rd minute. Dutch striker Linssen turned home Takuya Ogiwara's cross for the equalizer but Ogiwara then tugged down Nguyen Hai Long to give Hanoi a penalty that Pham slammed home. "I wasn't able to help the team out by saving that late penalty and that's something for me to reflect on," said Nishikawa. Pohang drew 1-1 with China's Wuhan Three Towns in the day's only other game. — AFP

Celtic thrash Hibs; Rangers edge past Hearts 1-0

GLASGOW: Celtic remain eight points clear at the top of the Scottish Premiership after Oh Hyeon-gyu scored twice in a 4-1 win over Hibs, while Rangers were 1-0 winners away at Hearts on Wednesday. South Korean international Oh was handed a rare start with Kyogo Furuhashi left on the bench by

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 under: given name vinod kumar and surname lohar. **#4570 7-12-2023**

Aston Villa overpower stuttering City; Fulham hammer Forest 5-0

McTominay's double delivers big win for Ten Hag; Liverpool win



BIRMINGHAM: Manchester City's Brazilian goalkeeper #31 Ederson sees a shot from Aston Villa's Brazilian midfielder #06 Douglas Luiz hit the post during the English Premier League football match between Aston Villa and Manchester City on December 6, 2023. — AFP

LONDON: Aston Villa beat champions Manchester City on Wednesday to extend their remarkable winning run at home as Liverpool closed to within two points of leaders Arsenal with victory at Sheffield United. Elsewhere, Scott McTominay scored twice as Manchester United beat Chelsea 2-1 and Fulham hammered Nottingham Forest 5-0, heaping the pressure on manager Steve Cooper. Villa, who have now won 14 league games in a row at Villa Park, scored the only goal of the game in the 74th minute, when Leon Bailey's shot took a huge deflection off Ruben Dias.

The win, which lifts Unai Emery's men into third place, means they equal a club record for consecutive home victories in league competition, previously achieved in 1903 and 1931. "We have to

be excited but we need to keep the balance," Emery told Amazon Prime. "For now we have to be focused on Arsenal on Saturday. I want us to be a team with a winning mentality and be balanced. "We are aware of where we are in the table. But behind us is Manchester City, Manchester United and Tottenham and it is going to be very difficult." Pep Guardiola's off-color team, aiming for an unprecedented fourth consecutive top-flight title, are now winless in four games and six points behind Arsenal.

Last year's treble winners, missing the suspended Rodri, have now won just three league games in their past nine. They are unbeaten in their past 43 matches in which the Spain midfielder has played but their four defeats in all competitions this season have all come when

he has been serving a ban. Guardiola said City must find a way to win without their talisman. "In these years we have found a way to win games but we struggled a bit and we have to find a way. It is my job to find a solution," he told the BBC. "The dynamic changes by winning games. When a team is better you have to recognize it."

Ominous Liverpool

Liverpool, looking increasingly dangerous, saw off basement club Sheffield United 2-0. Virgil van Dijk opened the scoring at Bramall Lane, turning home a Trent Alexander-Arnold corner in the 37th minute from near the penalty spot. The visitors dominated possession but failed to break through again until midfielder Dominik Szoboszlai made the points safe in time added on.

The victory takes Jurgen Klopp's team to 34 points - just two behind Arsenal, who beat Luton 4-3 on Tuesday. The Liverpool boss hailed a "very mature and resilient performance" against a side once again under the management of Chris Wilder, who returned to the club on Tuesday following the sacking of Paul Heckingbottom. Manchester United secured a priceless three points, shrugging off a rare penalty miss from Bruno Fernandes in the first half. Chelsea's Cole Palmer finished an impressive team move on the stroke of half-time to cancel out McTominay's opener.

But the Scotland international headed home Alejandro Garnacho's cross for his second with about 20 minutes left to lift United to sixth in the table, just three points behind City. Manager Erik ten Hag,

who dropped out-of-form Marcus Rashford, brushed off rumors of dressing room unrest, saying he did not care "about the noise". "When you are not on top form on the day, you get beaten," he told the BBC. "You need to be at your best. When you are not, you get killed. We know that and we need the right attitude every game."

Nottingham Forest, in their second season back in the Premier League, slumped to a fourth straight defeat at Fulham. Alex Iwobi and Raul Jimenez scored two goals apiece and Tom Cairney completed the humiliation in the final minutes. Brighton recorded a 2-1 home win against Brentford courtesy of goals from Pascal Gross and Jack Hinshelwood, while Bournemouth notched their third win in four games, beating Crystal Palace 2-0. — AFP



MARSEILLE: Marseille's Portuguese forward #09 Vitorinha (2nd right) shoots towards the goal during the French L1 football match between Olympique Marseille (OM) and Olympique Lyonnais (Lyon) at the Stade Velodrome on December 6, 2023. — AFP

Marseille ease past beleaguered Lyon

PARIS: Marseille eased to a 3-0 win over beleaguered Lyon on Wednesday in a Ligue 1 game that was rescheduled from October after the away team bus was stoned on its approach to the Velodrome. Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang set up Vitorinha and Panama international Amir Murillo for first-half goals before the Gabonese striker added his team's third on 55 minutes to seal a convincing victory.

Lyon appealed unsuccessfully last month to play the game on neutral ground and league officials took no action against Marseille as a club because the incidents did not occur inside the stadium. No Lyon fans were allowed to attend the rearranged clash following a resurgence of football-related violence in France, the latest incident resulting in the death of a Nantes supporter at the weekend. The original fixture on October 29 was

called off just as it was supposed to kick off as then-Lyon coach Fabio Grosso was left with cuts to the face that required stitches after being hit by broken glass.

Lyon last week dismissed former World Cup winner Grosso after the Italian oversaw just one win in seven games, replacing him with the club's academy director Pierre Sage. The seven-time French champions have lost both matches under their interim coach and remain rooted to the foot of the table, six points from safety. "You just need to look at the standings to know we're in danger," said Sage, the fourth man to take charge of Lyon this season. "But I don't think there's no hope left. We have a duty to work and try and pick up points. But today we understand why we're at the bottom." Earlier on Wednesday, French league officials banned Lyon supporters from attending the club's next away match after some made Nazi salutes and shouted monkey cries at the Marseille crowd the day of the postponed match. Three Lyon supporters were arrested and placed in custody in Marseille this week as part of an investigation by local authorities for "provoking racial hatred and racial insults". — AFP

Qatar national team sack coach Queiroz

DOHA: Qatar's football association announced on Wednesday it had terminated the contract of national team coach Carlos Queiroz, replacing him with Spain's Tintin Marquez, without elaborating on the reasons behind the move. In a succession of statements on X, formerly Twitter, the Qatar Football Association (QFA) announced it had cut ties with Portugal's Queiroz before swiftly announcing the appointment of his replacement.

"Carlos Queiroz's tenure of the Qatar national team has ended amicably by mutual agreement between the two parties," the QFA said, expressing "sincere gratitude" to the outgoing coach for "his unwavering dedication, leadership, and contributions during his tenure". Queiroz was appointed to his position last February on a four-year contract with the aim of qualifying for the 2026 World Cup. The appointment followed Qatar's disappointing performance in the 2022 World Cup on home soil in which they suffered three defeats in three matches in the group stage under the stewardship of Spanish coach Felix Sanchez.

A former Real Madrid and Portugal coach, Queiroz had led Qatar to two victories in the first two matches of the 2026 World Cup qualifiers, beating India 3-0 and securing a comfortable 8-1 victory over Afghanistan. In the aftermath of the Afghanistan victory, Queiroz wrote on Instagram that his team's performance had been "competent, serious and ambitious". "What's next? We want to do more and better. We want to train and be better prepared... Now we start our pre-preparation camp for the Asia Cup," he added.

In all, over 12 matches with Qatar, Queiroz's record stands at five wins, two draws and five losses. The QFA has said Spain's Lopez, who coaches Qatar Stars League team Al Wakrah, will lead the Gulf state into the Asian Cup which it will host beginning in January. "The coach will be in charge of the Qatar national team at the 2023 Asian Cup



Carlos Queiroz

which will be hosted in Qatar," the QFA said in a statement. "The Qatar Football Association expresses gratitude and appreciation to Al Wakrah Sports Club for their cooperation and consent in facilitating Coach Marquez Lopez's appointment," the Qatar football body added. — AFP