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All types of visas to open soon

MP questions ministers for not replacing expats with Kuwaitis

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 affairs minister Wednesday. Sheikh Mohammad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah expressed wishes of good health and rapid recovery for HH the Amir. — KUNA

KUWAIT: Interior Minister Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled Al-Sabah on Wednesday promised to open all types of visas for expats, especially dependent visas, following the approval of amendments to the residence law by the National Assembly next week, a lawmaker said. MP Abdulwahab Al-Essa, head of the Assembly's committee entrusted to improve the business environment in the country, said the minister's pledge came after a meeting with him during which he explained major problems facing expats and local businesses because of the long closure of visas.

Essa said he has received many complaints from the private sector about the adverse impact of stopping dependent visas for expats on the market and expats themselves. He added he asked the Assembly for permission to study the impact of freezing dependent visas and other visas on the private sector, small businesses and the market in general.

"We have found that Kuwait has become a swamp of expat single men, as high-qualified and skilled people



Sheikh Talal Al-Sabah



Abdulwahab Al-Essa

have deserted the country as a result of the freezing of dependent visas," Essa said in a statement. Skilled expats working in Kuwait were readily and immediately leaving Kuwait whenever they got any job opportunity in other Gulf states or anywhere else "because no expat is prepared to continue living here without their wives and children", he said. "So, expats left here are most-

ly the ones not needed by other countries," the lawmaker explained.

Essa said the closure of visas has also triggered a shortage of manpower, leading to a rise in the cost of manpower and eventually negatively impacting the cost of construction. He said he took all these complaints to the interior minister during the meeting. "I told him directly that decisions on

residency issues in Kuwait should not only take into consideration security and military factors. The economic factor must play an important role in those decisions," he said.

"The minister was very understanding and promised me that after the National Assembly approves (amendments to) the residency law in the next session (Dec 19-20), and once they become effective, the minister will scrap all restrictions on the issuance of visas in Kuwait," Essa said. Lifting restrictions will not only include family visas, but will reopen the country and bring commercial life back to normal, he said.

The lawmaker also said he met with the head of the Assembly's interior and defense committee, which is studying amendments to the residency law, and he was promised the draft law will be ready for debate on Dec 19-20.

Meanwhile, MP Mohammad Al-Sayer criticized on Wednesday ministers for not speeding up the replacement of expats in government jobs with Kuwaitis. He said ministers told him that they have dismissed many

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NEWS IN BRIEF

Iran waives visas for Kuwaitis

TEHRAN: Iranian Minister of Cultural Heritage and Tourism Sayyid Ezzatollah Zarghami said Wednesday his country decided to cancel the requirement of entry visas for nationals of 32 countries, including Kuwait. The unilateral decision falls in the framework of Iran's policy of opening up to the world, IRNA news agency quoted the minister as saying during a cabinet meeting. Confirming the move, Deputy Minister of Cultural Heritage and Tourism Ali-Asghar Shalbafian said the nationalities that no longer need visa to enter Iran include Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, UAE, Qatar and Lebanon. — KUNA

OPEC sees record oil demand

PARIS: The OPEC oil cartel said Wednesday that it expects healthy growth in global demand for crude as the COP28 climate conference agreed on a transition away from fossil fuels. It said global oil demand should grow by 2.2 million barrels per day next year to an average of 104.36 mbd. "Oil demand is expected to be supported by resilient global GDP growth, amid continued improvements in economic activity in China," OPEC said in its regular monthly report on the oil market. Demand in the industrialized nations in the OECD is expected to increase by 0.3 mbd to reach an average of 46.1 mbd, but still remain below the record set in 2019. — AFP

Zionists kill 6 in West Bank

JENIN: Zionist forces killed six Palestinians in the occupied West Bank city of Jenin Tuesday, Palestinian health officials reported, and the Zionist entity's military said it carried out an operation targeting an explosives-manufacturing facility. The health ministry said five people were killed in a Zionist operation in the morning, while the sixth was a man who was shot in the thigh and later died after Zionist forces prevented him from reaching hospital in time. — AFP

Zionists face heat as UN demands Gaza ceasefire

GAZA: The Zionist entity declared on Wednesday its determination to continue its Gaza war "with or without international support", after it came under mounting pressure, with even key backer the United States criticizing the "indiscriminate" bombing. Now in its third month, the war has left Gaza in ruins, killing more than 18,600 people, mostly women and children, according to the latest toll from the health ministry, and causing "unparalleled" damage to its roads, schools and hospitals.

The UN General Assembly overwhelmingly passed a non-binding resolution Tuesday demanding a ceasefire, backed by 153 of 193 nations — surpassing the 140 or so that have routinely condemned Russia for its invasion of Ukraine. While the United States voted against the resolution, it was supported by allies Australia, Canada and New Zealand, who, in a rare joint statement, said they were "alarmed at the diminishing safe space for civilians in Gaza".

The Palestinian envoy to the United Nations Riyad Mansour said the vote marked "a historic

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GAZA: Hani Abu Jamea mourns over the body of his daughter Sidal, who died overnight while sleeping in a tent from shrapnel that hit her in the head following Zionist bombardment, at the Kuwaiti Hospital in Rafah on Dec 12, 2023. — AFP

COP28 deal calls for fossil fuel transition

DUBAI: The world for the first time on Wednesday approved a call to transition away from fossil fuels as UN negotiations in Dubai tackled the top culprit behind climate change, but at-risk countries said far more action was needed. After 13 days of talks and several sleepless nights in a country built on oil wealth, the Emirati president of the COP28 summit quickly banged a gavel to signal consensus among 194 countries and the European Union.

"You did step up, you showed flexibility, you put common interest ahead of self-interest," said COP28 president Sultan Al Jaber, whose role as head of

the United Arab Emirates' national oil company had raised suspicion among many environmentalists. Describing the deal as bringing "transformational change", Jaber said: "We have helped restore faith and trust in multilateralism, and we have shown that humanity can come together."

EU climate chief Wopke Hoekstra called the agreement "long, long overdue", saying it had taken nearly 30 years of climate meetings to "arrive at the beginning of the end of fossil fuels". But with the UN talks requiring consensus, Jaber carefully calibrated the text to bring onboard countries from islands that fear extinction from rising sea levels to oil giant Saudi Arabia, which led the charge to keep exporting its petroleum.

Toughening language from an earlier draft that was roundly denounced by environmentalists, the agreement calls for "transitioning away from fossil



DUBAI: COP28 president Sultan Ahmed Al-Jaber applauds with other officials during the UN climate summit on Dec 13, 2023. — AFP

fuels in energy systems, in a just, orderly and equitable manner". It asks for greater action "in this critical decade" and recommitments to no net greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 in hopes of

meeting the increasingly elusive goal of checking warming at 1.5 degrees above pre-industrial levels. The planet has already warmed by 1.2 degrees

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KPC 2040 strategy 'ambitious'

Final communiqué outlines measures to reduce CO2 emissions

DOHA: Kuwait Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Oil Dr Saad Al-Barrak said Tuesday that the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation's (KPC) 2040 strategy program is robust and ambitious about energy transition and carbon emission reduction. Addressing a ministerial debate of the 12th Arab Energy Conference in Doha, the minister, who doubles as Minister of State for Economic and Investment Affairs, said the region's countries are serious about the issue of renewable and clean energy, boasting that Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Egypt, the UAE, Jordan, and Algeria are leading this transition.

Al-Barrak, also KPC's Board Chairman, said the Middle East and North Africa countries, though rich in oil and gas resources, have boosted their renewable energy capabilities to 57 percent between 2022 and 2023. Pointing out attempts to reduce reliance on oil as a source of energy, the minister wondered about the insistence on depriving many people and countries, mostly developing countries, of being the source of an economy that can take them within 30 years to come to a life where they can enjoy welfare, security, and stability.

He added that Africa needs around \$25 billion annually for investment in energy until 2030, noting that many African people and others are still without access to electricity. Bahraini Minister of Oil and Environment Mohammad bin Daina said that the energy transition is not meant to serve the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change but to serve people. He added that fuel is a basic part of some countries' economies and incomes, so it should be maintained and consumed in a balanced way.

For his part, the Director-General of the Arab Planning Institute, Abdullah Al-Shami, said that there are many challenges pertinent to energy, including steady growth in the question of cities and demand for housing that consumes



Kuwait Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Oil Dr Saad Al-Barrak

29 percent of oil and gas. He added that oil-exporting countries, which are mostly in the Middle East, are locked in several problems, including high oil production costs, a lack of necessary oil technology, and low foreign investment. The 12th Arab Energy Conference kicked off in Doha on Monday, with the participation of many officials, including Kuwait's oil minister.

Reducing CO2 emissions

Meanwhile, the 12th Arab Energy Conference, organized by the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC) in Doha over the past two days, recommended tapping into the carbon resources of the member states while protecting the environment. The energy ministers of the OAPEC member states agreed on a final communiqué that outlined steps for leveraging clean energy to reduce carbon dioxide CO2 emissions in a bid to reach carbon neutral emissions by 2050. They highlighted the need to integrate the efforts to develop the energy sector, protect the environment, and achieve sustainable development into the developmental policies of OAPEC members.

The development plans need to en-



Energy ministers of the OAPEC pose for a group photo. — KUNA

sure balanced use of natural resources, diversification of the resources of the economy, and prioritizing environmental protection, the communiqué noted. The conferees agreed to work together to deepen the concept of sustainable development in the oil industry through the acquisition of the latest technologies related to energy efficiency and clean fuels. Regarding fossil fuels, they affirmed that they would continue to be the main source of energy for decades despite the ongoing efforts to promote renewable energies, according to the communiqué.

The ministers called for increasing investment in the oil and gas industry to avoid possible instability in the energy market and prioritizing the role of nuclear energy, as one of the most reliable

energies, in the national strategies of the OAPEC member states. They also asserted the importance of upgrading and increasing the efficacy of the oil refineries as an initial step towards the production of environmentally friendly oil by-products. They called for expanding the production of hydrogen to build more competitive economies and strengthening cooperation among the petrochemical companies of the OAPEC member states.

The conference recommended drawing the energy policy in a way that could ensure rationalization of consumption and diversification of the sources of energy without affecting economic development policies. It underscored the role of strategic partnerships among the government and private sector companies as a main

catalyst for economic development based on carbon cycling. It also highlighted the need to employ the latest technologies and applications of the fourth industrial revolution, including artificial intelligence, to increase the operating capacity of the oil and gas sector.

Kuwait's Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Oil, and Minister of State for Economic and Investment Affairs, Dr Saad Al-Barrak, took part in the two-day conference, chaired by Qatari Minister of State for Energy Affairs and Managing Director and CEO of Qatar Energy, Eng. Saad bin Sherida Al Kaabi, with OPEC's Secretary-General Haitham Al-Ghais attending. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is scheduled to host the 13th OPEC conference in 2027. — KUNA

Kuwait, UN tackle human trafficking and smuggling

KUWAIT: The National Standing Committee on the implementation of the national strategy for the prevention of trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants represented by the Ministry of Justice signs a declaration of intent with the United Nations Office on drugs and crime for the GCC region, and holds its eighth meeting.

The undersecretary of the Ministry of Justice Hashim Al-Qallaf, deputy chairman of the committee, and after coordinating the visions with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, signed a declaration of intent with the United Nations Office on drugs and crime for the GCC region, where the delegation of the office is headed by Judge Dr Hatem Ali. This cooperation aims to move forward in strengthening the frameworks of future partnership between the two parties in the field of combating trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants. This is based on the keenness of the National Standing Committee on the implementation of the national strategy for the prevention of trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants, chaired by His Excellency the minister of justice and the minister of State for Housing Affairs, to implement the national strategy for the prevention of trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants, especially the third axis related to building partnerships and internal, regional and international cooperation.

He stressed that this cooperation comes in implementation of the vision of the state of Kuwait in strengthening cooperation frameworks and building partnerships with



Kuwait, UN representatives sign agreement preventing human trafficking and immigrant smuggling. — KUNA

international and regional organizations, especially the United Nations and its various organs, and that this cooperation is the first building block towards expanding the horizons of future cooperation in this important field.

He also pointed out that Kuwait spares no efforts to combat trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants through many mechanisms. Kuwait issued Law No. 91 of 2013 on combating trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants, followed by the adoption by the Council of ministers in 2018 of the national strategy for the prevention of trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants, and directed the establishment of a standing committee to implement it.

The committee issued in 2019, the national referral system for the prevention of trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants, which includes several stages beginning with the identification of victims document them, then refer them to the competent authorities for investigation, initiate a public lawsuit to punish the perpetrators according to deterrent provisions, and finally reintegration or voluntary return.

Deputy FM meets UN representative to Iraq



KUWAIT: Deputy Foreign Minister, Ambassador Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah on Wednesday met with Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for Iraq, Claudi Gordon. Sheikh Jarrah and Gordon discussed ways of cooperation and coordination between Kuwait and United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), a foreign ministry statement said. — KUNA



AUK students at Kuwait Times Editorial Department.

AUK students tour Kuwait Times and Kuwait News

By Ghadeer Ghloom

KUWAIT: American University of Kuwait students from different disciplines visited Kuwait Times and Kuwait News to dive into the world of journalism. Whether they are majoring in engineering, psychology or English, the possibilities in the field of journalism are endless if one has the passion and potential. Sheetal Swamy from the Alumni Department at AUK organized this trip with Kuwait Times to give students a taste of real-life journalism and meet real journalists for an eye-opening experience, showcasing how limitless the potential of journalism truly is.

Kuwait Times and Kuwait News video reporter and content creator Dhoha Al-Isa took the students on a tour around the newspaper's multiple departments to learn about the role of each department in bringing news to the world. The students were also given a brief



AUK students take pictures of their precious keepsake.

on Kuwait Times' 62-year history, and every student received their own copy of Kuwait Times' first edition. From the newsroom to the meeting room to the archives room where Kuwait Times keeps its priceless historical documents for the past 62 years, Issa took the students to the press, artistic co-working space and ultimately the studio. One-to-one interviews with students were hosted in the studio to be shared on Kuwait Times' social media platforms.



Group picture of Kuwait Times team with AUK students. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Dhoha Al-Isa introduces AUK students to the work behind the scenes at Kuwait Times.



AUK students looking through the archives.

Local

Zain showcases latest smart home innovations at the Mirzaam Expo

Zain Smart Home welcomes visitors in Hall 6 at Kuwait Int'l Fair



Hamad Al Musaibeh and Farah Al Humaidhi with Zain's team.



MEW's team showcasing sustainable solutions at the Zain Smart Home.

KUWAIT: For the fourth year running, Zain returns as a Platinum Sponsor of the latest season of Mirzaam Expo, Kuwait's top interior design and home decoration event. Through its dedicated booth at the expo, dubbed the Zain Smart Home, the company showcases a wide range of the latest smart home innovations, automation technologies and sustainable solutions. The Home welcomes visitors daily in Hall 6 at the Kuwait International Fair in Mishref until Saturday, 16 December.

Mirzaam Expo is the most anticipated gathering of its kind for all things related to home decoration, furnishing and design. The fourth season is the biggest yet in its history, with over 300 booths covering over 30 categories for interior and exterior design, home furnishing, decoration, and more. As it does every year at Mirzaam, Zain participates through its dedicated booth, which the company has designed to resemble a miniature house with several rooms and halls that mimic those of real houses, giving visitors a unique experience to try out the latest smart home solutions.

Customers can choose the products that best serve their home-planning needs, whether they're building a new home or want to upgrade their existing one. Zain's booth covers all smart home needs, like automation solutions and sustainable applications that turn traditional homes into smart, enviro-friendly ones. This enhances convenience, comfort, energy efficiency, and security by allowing homeowners to automate and control different aspects of their home in a smart, automated way.

The offerings at the Zain Smart Home cover a wide range of products and services, including security solutions, surveillance cameras, sensors, smart lighting, home appliances, smartphone accessories, as well as a dedicated gaming section with the latest consoles, gaming PCs, and accessories. This year, Zain has also collaborated with the Ministry of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy to promote the ministry's latest campaign, Waffer, for raising awareness of energy conservation. The company has dedicated a section of its

booth for the ministry's team, who provides informative advice and valuable consultation to visitors on how to implement sustainability tools and practices in their existing or future homes.

Mirzaam's huge success in the past drove Zain to continue supporting it, as the company prides itself for being a top supporter of homegrown projects that foster creativity and innovation in the community. In addition, being Kuwait's top digital service provider that serves the biggest family of subscribers, Zain was keen on adding value to the expo by offering the best world-class smart home solutions. The fourth season of Mirzaam Expo is the biggest in its history, with over 25,000 sqm of space across three halls at the Kuwait International Fair, Mishref. Over 300 booths covering over 30 categories serve all visitor needs for interior and exterior design, home furnishing, decoration, and more.

The expo also offers exciting draws, valuable prizes, and other entertainment programs to the crowds throughout its period. Mirzaam gathers decoration



Zain offers the latest smart home solutions.

experts, designers, suppliers, professional contractors, and specialists that offer all services and needs related to designing and decorating homes, offices, commercial projects, and more. The event also features many panel discussions, seminars, and other programs that reveal the secrets of the art of interior design and discuss the latest decoration trends.

Mirzaam expo features Kutayba Alghanim design award finalists

KUWAIT: The showcase at the Mirzaam Expo, a collaboration between Alghanim Industries and their distinguished furniture brand, Safat Home, provides a significant platform for twelve up-and-coming designers from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). As finalists in the Kutayba Alghanim Design Award, these talented individuals have the unique opportunity to display their innovative seating and table designs at one of the largest furniture and design events in Kuwait. This exhibition not only highlights the exceptional creativity and skill of these young designers but also underscores the commitment to nurturing emerging talent within the region's vibrant design landscape.

Abdullah Al-Omar, General Manager of Safat Home, shared his perspective on the event: "We at Safat Home are thrilled to display the works of these 12 talented designers at Mirzaam Expo. Their diverse designs, encompassing seating

and tables, reflect the dynamic and varied nature of design within the GCC. This showcase is more than a display of furniture; it's a celebration of innovative design concepts and fresh perspective, highlighting the emerging talent of the region. We believe these works will serve as a great source of inspiration for all visitors."

The Kutayba Alghanim Design Award, initiated by Kutayba Alghanim, Executive Chairman of Alghanim Industries, focuses on nurturing and promoting the creative talents of designers across the GCC. This edition of the award places a special emphasis on furniture design, bringing to light the vibrant and innovative design talent flourishing in the region.

Running from 12 to 16 December, the Mirzaam Expo's showcase of the Kutayba Alghanim Design Award offers visitors an exceptional chance to experience the unique blend of traditional and contemporary styles in furniture design crafted by emerging designers from the GCC. The event not only displays the artistic innovation of the region but also celebrates the rich diversity of design perspectives found across the Gulf. The Kutayba Alghanim Design Award booth is located at Mirzaam Expo at Kuwait International Fair between Hall 6 and 7.



Nazaha urges world to halt Zionist attacks

WASHINGTON: President of the Kuwait Anti-Corruption Authority (Nazaha), Abdulaziz Al-Ebraheem has urged the international community to double down on efforts to halt Zionist aggression on the besieged Gaza Strip. In an address to the 10th Conference of the States Parties (COSP10) to the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) in Atlanta, he said, "No sooner had we emerged from the grinding challenges of COVID-19 and other disasters worldwide, than we were shocked by the mass killing of our brothers in Gaza, who lack access to the basics of living, such as food, water, and electricity."

"The international community must adopt a firm response to the persistence of the Zionist occupation forces in their serious violations of international humanitarian law and the killing of thousands of innocent lives. All efforts must focus on reaching a durable ceasefire, ensuring unhin-

dered delivery of humanitarian aid, and preparing the ground for a comprehensive and permanent solution to the conflict," Al-Ebraheem stressed.

On the agenda of the COSP10, he said Kuwait has continued to upgrade its national legislation to ensure effective implementation of the UNCAC provisions since the previous session of the conference. In this context, Kuwait has adopted a new law to prevent conflicts of interest and amended the penal code to make it easier to specify the legal liability of artificial persons in graft charges, he pointed out. New legislation was also adopted to specify the rules of the National Assembly elections and identify the true beneficiaries within the framework of auditing parameters.

As part of its national strategy to combat money laundering and financing for terrorism (2022-2027), the State of Kuwait established the Financial Action Taskforce (FATF) to strengthen the fight against corruption and trans-border crime. Kuwait spares no effort in implementing the content of the declaration of principles adopted by the UN General Assembly Special Session against Corruption, as well as the declarations of Marrakesh, Abu Dhabi, and Sharm El-Sheikh, he added.

Led by Al-Ebraheem, Nazaha's delegation to the COSP10 includes Assistant Secretary-Gen-



President of Kuwait Anti-Corruption Authority (Nazaha) Abdulaziz Al-Ebraheem

eral for Auditing Sector Abrar Al-Hammad, Office Director of Nazaha President Khaled Al-Rumaihi, and Head of International Organizations and Conferences Affairs Dept. Dhari Buyabes. The current Conference of the States Parties marks the 20th anniversary of the UNCAC, adopted by the UN General Assembly in October 2003. — KUNA

Kuwait Airways passes IATA's IOSA program

KUWAIT: Kuwait Airways said Tuesday it has successfully passed the International Air Transport Association's (IATA) Operational Safety Audit (IOSA) Program. Kuwait's national carrier said in a press release that the IOSA Program certificate is one of the significant criteria for evaluating the safety of the aviation industry, adding that it greatly contributes to improving safety performance and leading to cost savings.

It added that to be IATA members, airlines must obtain this program's certificate, which is based on the assessment of risks and promotion of audit efficiency and aims at developing aviation safety. The IOSA Program is an internationally recognized and accepted evaluation system designed to assess the operational management and control systems of an airline.

The IOSA audit creates a standard that is comparable on a world-wide basis, enabling and maximizing the joint use of audit reports. This has saved the industry over 6,400 redundant audits and continues to lead to extensive cost savings for IOSA-participating airlines. All IATA members are IOSA registered and must remain registered to maintain IATA membership. Kuwait Airways was established in 1953 and operated its maiden flight on March 16, 1954. It is wholly owned by the government of Kuwait. — KUNA

DGCA, STERELA ink KD 6.2m weather monitoring deal

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) signed a contract with the French company STERELA to implement the automatic weather monitoring system at Kuwait International Airport at a value of around KD 6.2 million. The contract was signed by the Kuwaiti side, Acting Director-General of Civil Aviation Emad Al-Jalawi, and by the Frenchman, CEO of STERELA's Robert Bousquet.

Deputy Director General for Planning and Proj-

ect Affairs at DGCA Saad Al-Otaibi told Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) after signing the contract that the project, which has a completion period of 1,095 days followed by 4 years of warranty and maintenance, aimed to develop the country's air and marine navigation systems.

Al-Otaibi explained that the project was a system to provide meteorological information such as temperature, wind direction speed, humidity, air quality, measuring tides, and sea temperature. It is noteworthy that the system provides this data through 38 land and sea stations distributed throughout the country and its territorial waters, said Al-Otaibi. He also pointed out that this information was used for the safety of air and marine navigation and for the safety of citizens and residents. This data is also provided to various parties in the country. — KUNA



KUWAIT: The Kuwait Directorate General of Civil Aviation signs a contract with the French company STERELA to implement the automatic weather monitoring system at Kuwait International Airport. - KUNA

Kuwait Times
Established 1961

THE LEADING INDEPENDENT
DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF
ESTABLISHED 1961

Founder and Publisher

YOUSUF S. AL-ALYAN

Editor-in-Chief

ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-ALYAN

EDITORIAL : 24833199-24833358-24833432

ADVERTISING : 24833199 Extn. 301

CIRCULATION : 24833199 Extn. 220

ACCOUNTS : 24833199 Extn. 125

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8 Kuwait banks among largest in the Arab world

BEIRUT: An analytical study by the Union of Arab Banks (UAB) showed that eight Kuwaiti banks will be ranked among the top 100 Arab banks in 2022. With combined assets of \$343 billion, the eight banks' capital came to about \$35.8 billion, said the Beirut-based UAB. The National Bank of Kuwait (NBK), Kuwait Finance House (KFH), Burgan Bank, Gulf Bank (GBK), Ahli United Bank of Kuwait (AUB), Kuwait Commercial Bank, Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait, and Kuwait International Bank are the eight banks that UAB mentioned in the list.

As stated in the report, the highest capital in the area was NBK, followed by KFH and Burgan Bank in third place. When it came to total assets, KFH was the biggest bank. According to data released by "The Banker" magazine in November 2023, the UAE has the highest record of all Arab countries, with 18 banks among the top 100. Egypt came in second with 11 banks, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain with 10 banks each, Qatar and Jordan with nine banks, Kuwait, Oman, and Morocco with eight banks each, Tunisia with six banks, Lebanon with two banks, and Palestine with one bank.

A number of 22 Islamic banks were also identified by the survey, and they were spread as follows: five banks from Qatar, four from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, three from Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain, two from Egypt, and one from each of Jordan and Oman. The rankings were based on the major capital of 2022. — KUNA

Kuwaiti envoy to SA presents credentials

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Ambassador Salem Al-Shibli presented his credentials as an Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the State of Kuwait on Wednesday to the Acting President of the Honorary Missions in International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO), Luvuyo Ndimeni. The two sides also delved into relations between the two countries, the Kuwait Embassy in South Africa said in a statement. Ambassador Al-Shibli noted the importance of strengthening bilateral relations between the two countries, which will celebrate their 30th anniversary of relations in 2024. Ndimeni expressed his sincere wishes and success for the ambassador in his duties and in serving the interests of the two countries and peoples. — KUNA

Kuwait pavilion at 'Food Africa 2023' exhibition attracts visitors, specialists



CAIRO: The Kuwait special pavilion at the eighth session of the Food Africa 2023 exhibition in Cairo attracted the interest of food industry specialists and visitors interested in Kuwaiti products. The pavilion included 12 fac-

ories specializing in the food sector, including dairy, bakery, packaging, roasting, and grinding of fine coffee, spices of all kinds, natural oils, sweets, and food supplies. The exhibition took place in Egypt's international exhibition center,

and its activities will continue until December 14 with the participation of more than 900 companies represented by 32 countries, including the State of Kuwait, the "official partner of the exhibition." — KUNA

DCO members approve Kuwait's presidency for organization in 2025

RIYADH: Members of the Digital Cooperation Organization (DCO) approved, in their administrative meeting on Wednesday, Kuwait's presidency of the organization for 2025. This came in the DCO second administrative video meeting, headed by the Chairperson of the Digital Cooperation Organization and Minister of Transportation and Telecommunications of the Kingdom of Bahrain, Mohammad Al-Kaabi, and with the presence of ministers and officials from representatives of member states and the Secretary-General of the Organization, Deemah Al-Yahya.

During the meeting, the DCO's third general assembly was announced to be held in the Bahraini capital, Manama, on January 31, 2024, with the approval of Kuwait's presidency of the organization for 2025, in addition to discussing the DCO's administrative and financial reports for 2023. The decisions of the second General Assembly meeting, which was held on February 5, 2023, in the Saudi capital, Riyadh, were also reviewed.



Members of the Digital Cooperation Organization.

The Digital Cooperation Organization (DCO) is a global organization founded in November 2020 that aims to achieve social prosperity and the growth of the digital economy by unifying the efforts of its members to advance digital transfor-

mation and promote common interests. It brings together 15 countries: Bahrain, Bangladesh, Djibouti, Gambia, Ghana, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Nigeria, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Rwanda, and Saudi Arabia. — KUNA

Kuwait renews calls to end Zionist brutality

NEW YORK: Kuwait renewed its call for the international community to put an end to the brutal assault carried out by the Zionist occupation forces against the Palestinian people, especially in the Gaza Strip. This call came from Ali Behbahani—diplomatic attaché at the Kuwaiti permanent delegation to the United Nations headquarters in New York—at the UNGA meeting on urgent humanitarian assistance held late Monday.

Behbahani said that crises caused by armed conflicts and natural disasters had resulted in great suffering, requiring urgent relief aid and assistance. In this regard, the occupation's brutal assault on the Gaza Strip is threatening relief aid operations and UN staff tasked with this humane mission, he said. Behbahani affirmed that Kuwait was heavily involved in humanitarian aid and relief missions worldwide, providing assistance in this regard to those affected by wars and natural disasters.

Meanwhile, the Kuwaiti diplomat had mentioned the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED), in which he said that the fund had provided loans, grants, and technical assistance to all those who were eager to seek development and progress. The Kuwaiti diplomat also touched on Kuwait's charitable efforts, noting that the GCC country was among the chief contributors to regional and international relief aid efforts, making sure that urgent assistance would swiftly reach those in need.

On UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres invoking Article 99 of the UN Charter, Behbahani said that the disastrous situation in the Gaza Strip required the UNSC to impose an immediate ceasefire in the war-torn region. It is imperative for the world to put an end to the Zionist occupation's bloodlust actions against the Palestinian people to ensure peace in the Middle East and the world.

Absolute 'racism'

The West's position on the ongoing aggression on the Gaza Strip shows absolute "racism," said the Secretary-General of the Arab League, Ahmed Aboul-Gheit. In statements to reporters after casting his vote in the presidential elections in Egypt, Aboul-Gheit stressed that the West revealed its "ugly face" by supporting the occupation aggression against the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. He pointed to the position of some Western countries rejecting the UN Security Council resolution to stop the war on Gaza by using the vetoes.

On the other hand, Aboul-Gheit hailed the election process in Egypt, saying that it is a message addressed to the international community, especially in light of the circumstances that the Arab region is going through, that there is stability in an open society that is determined to continue achieving development in its country.

Kuwait's 39th Gaza relief

In another development, the 39th Kuwait Gaza humanitarian aid airplane took off on Tuesday to Egypt's Al-Arish airport carrying 40 tons of various supplies, including four ambulances, food supplies, and blankets. Director of Public Relations and Media Department at Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS), Khaled Al-Zaid, said in a statement to KUNA that the society's objective has always been to aid those in need, especially the people in Gaza.

Al-Zaid reminded people to donate through the society's website to help aid people in Gaza. He added that the KRCS would continue to send humanitarian aid to meet the needs of people in Gaza as well as to support them against the occupation forces' continuous bombardment. He praised the cooperation of both the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for providing all the necessary aircraft and making this procedure run successfully in solidarity with the people of Gaza. — KUNA



KUWAIT: A handout photo shows humanitarian relief aid bound for Gaza Strip as it is loaded into a Kuwait military airplane, at Kuwait International Airport. — AFP



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Smoke attack disrupts Indian parliament

In turf war between Venezuela and Guyana, Brazil plays big role

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KYIV: This photograph taken on December 13, 2023 shows destroyed cars next to a damaged residential building following a missile strike in Kyiv, amid Russian invasion of Ukraine. — AFP

Strikes on Kyiv injure dozens

Zelensky urge allies in EU and US to keep backing Ukraine

KYIV: A volley of Russian missiles wounded dozens of people and damaged a children's hospital on Wednesday in the worst attack on Kyiv in months, officials said, as Ukraine pleads for Western military aid. AFP journalists in the capital heard several explosions before dawn and air raid sirens sounded soon after that.

Ukraine's air force said it had downed all 10 missiles targeting the city and the health ministry said 53 people were wounded, including two children. Most injuries were caused by "glass shards, household items and the shock wave" as missile debris fell mostly in eastern parts of the city, the ministry said.

Interior Minister Igor Klymenko said a kindergarten building was also damaged. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky hailed the work of the military and pledged to bolster the country's air defences. "It is important for people, it is important for cities and it is important

for Ukraine," he said on social media. "Russia has once again confirmed its title as a shameful country that releases rockets at night, hitting residential areas, kindergartens and energy facilities in winter," he said.

Zelensky visits donors

The strikes came as Zelensky arrived in Norway to meet with leaders of the five Nordic nations, who are key donors. Ukraine "can't win without help," Zelensky told reporters following talks with Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Store. "But you can't lose, because (all) you have (is) your country," he continued.

With the counter-offensive launched by Ukraine in June failing to yield the anticipated results, Zelensky is trying to rebuild support among Ukraine's allies amid growing dissent and fatigue. At the same time, Russian forces have been on the offensive along different parts of the

front in eastern and southern Ukraine in recent days.

The Kyiv strikes came a day after a massive hacking attack on the country's top telecoms operator, which Ukrainian officials said may have been carried out by Russian security services. Zelensky earlier this week left Washington without managing to convince a divided Congress to approve a new \$60 billion aid package, saying only that he had received "positive" signals.

Speaking alongside Zelensky at the White House on Tuesday, US President Joe Biden said that the United States would "continue to supply Ukraine with critical weapons and equipment as long as we can."

"I will not walk away from Ukraine," Biden said, warning that a Ukrainian defeat would mean "would-be aggressors everywhere will be emboldened". The Ukrainian leader dismissed suggestions

he could concede territory taken by Russia since its February 2022 invasion to move any ceasefire closer.

The conflict is expected to be a key topic for a European Union summit this week where Ukraine is hoping for positive news on its bid for membership. Speaking in the European Parliament on Wednesday, EU chief Ursula von der Leyen urged the bloc's 27 leaders to back massive financial aid for Ukraine and Kyiv's ambitions for membership talks.

"We must give Ukraine what it needs to be strong today," the European Commission president told MEPs. EU leaders face a major challenge overcoming opposition from Hungary—Russia's closest ally in the bloc—to fresh support for Kyiv.

'Missile terror'

Wednesday's strike was the second in a week, after another strike during the night from Sunday to Monday in which

eight missiles headed for the capital were shot down. The strikes have come following a long period of relative calm for the capital. Wednesday's strike on Kyiv also damaged an apartment building which had to be evacuated and affected the water supply in one city district, officials said. The Kyiv City Military Administration said missile debris fell in three left-bank districts of the city.

"Same as on December 11, the enemy used ballistic weapons," the military administration said. "The enemy is intensifying the missile terror of Kyiv," it added. There were also strikes on Wednesday in the southern port of Odesa, where officials said nine Iranian-made Shahed drones had been downed. Two employees of a municipal car repair facility were injured by one of the downed drones and "a port infrastructure building was partially destroyed" by another, regional chief Oleg Kiper said. — AFP

Rain compounds suffering of displaced Gazans

RAFAH: Cold winter rains lashed war-battered Gaza on Wednesday, compounding the suffering of Palestinians forced from their homes and now huddling in flooded tents. Aziza al-Shabrawi tried in vain to get the rainwater out of her family's tent, pointing to her two children living in such precarious conditions.

"My son is sick because of the bitter cold and my daughter is barefoot. It's like we're beggars," said the 38-year-old. "No one cares, and no one helps." Temperatures dropped overnight as rain pummeled the war-wracked territory where many tents were swamped and many people were forced to sleep under plastic sheeting due to the lack of any better shelter.

Shabrawi is among some 1.9 million people displaced during more than two months of war, half of them children, with many fleeing to southern Rafah following orders from the Zionist entity's military. She was forced first to leave her home in the north-

ern Jabalia refugee camp, reaching the southern city of Khan Yunis, only to flee further to Rafah as Zionist entity troops pressed deeper into Gaza.

Rafah has become a vast camp for the displaced beside the Egyptian border, with hundreds of tents erected using wood and plastic sheets. "We spent five days outdoors. And now the rain has flooded the tents," said another displaced resident, Bilal al-Qassas. Gusts of wind shook the fragile structures, while people tried to reinforce them with more plastic sheeting. "Where do we migrate to? Our dignity is gone. Where do women relieve themselves? There are no bathrooms," said 41-year-old Qassas. "We've started to long for martyrdom. We don't want to eat or drink."

Since December 3, tens of thousands have reached Rafah, according to the United Nations humanitarian agency, where they face "extremely overcrowded conditions both inside and outside shelters". They are in "desperate need of food, water, shelter, health, and protection," the UN's OCHA said in a statement. "Without enough latrines, open-air defecation is prevalent, increasing concerns of further spread of disease, particularly during rains and related flooding." As the war intensified, many Gazans have fled their homes in just the clothes they were wearing, at a time when temperatures were considerably warmer. — AFP



RAFAH: Palestinian boys stand in their makeshift tent at a camp set up in a schoolyard in Rafah where most civilians have taken refuge on Dec 13, 2023, amid rain. — AFP

Tusk sworn in as Poland's new PM

WARSAW: Poland's president on Wednesday swore in Donald Tusk as the new pro-EU prime minister, putting an end to eight years of right-wing populist rule. Tusk, a veteran politician who already served as premier in the past, has pledged to restore Poland's position in the EU and to double down on efforts to provide more aid to neighbouring Ukraine.

The former European Council president is expected to travel to Brussels later on Wednesday to participate in the bloc's summit with fellow EU leaders. Tusk's Civic Coalition together with two smaller political groups forged an alliance that ousted the Law and Justice (PiS) from power, winning backing in the parliament in a vote of confidence Tuesday.

"Our homeland is a place of political and civic miracles," Tusk said after his cabinet was sworn in during a ceremony in Warsaw. He feted the record-high turnout of the October election that brought political change to the NATO member of 38 million people.

'Heart of the EU'

In his earlier keynote address to lawmakers, Tusk vowed to stand behind Ukraine "from day one" and denounced leaders "who speak of being fatigued by the Ukraine situation". He also promised to unblock billions of euros in EU funds earmarked for Poland and withheld due to rule-of-law infringements by the previous government who frequently clashed with Brussels while being accused of violating the constitution by opposition at home. After being appointed, Tusk referred to those tensions, pledging his government "will remain faithful to the provisions of the constitution".

Following the swearing-in ceremony, EU allies congratulated Tusk, with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz on Wednesday hailing his intention to "lead Poland back to the heart of the EU". Poland's ties with Germany were also strained, with PiS playing an anti-German card in the run-up to the election and launching repeated verbal attacks on Tusk personally and at his party. On Monday, PiS leader Jaroslaw



WARSAW: Poland's President Andrzej Duda (L) and newly appointed Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk (R) pose with a document that designates the Prime Minister and the ministers of the new government during a formal swearing-in ceremony at the Presidential Palace in Warsaw. — AFP

Kaczynski accused Tusk in the parliament of being a "German agent".

Open to cooperate

The new government is likely to face daily battles with the PiS, who still has allies in the central bank and the supreme court, as well as in several important judicial and financial state institutions. Polish President Andrzej Duda, also allied with the PiS, could potentially use blocking tactics to veto legislation drafted by the new coalition before his term ends in 2025.

But during the swearing-in ceremony Duda suggested he was open to cooperate with the new government. "I can assure you that I will certainly not oppose anything that serves the good of citizens and the Polish republic," Duda said.

Tusk's cabinet includes Radoslaw Sikorski as foreign minister—a job he has held in the past—as well as former ombudsman Adam Bodnar as justice minister. The PiS won the most seats in October's general election but failed to find viable coalition partners and secure backing for their minority government on Monday. While Tusk's Civic Coalition came second in the ballot but together with two pro-EU political groups, the Third Way and Left, garnered enough support to oust PiS. — AFP

International

'A new normal': Migrants huddle in open-air camps on US border

Border Patrol is not providing food, water, shelter or medical care

JACUMBA: Hundreds of migrants who cross into the United States from Mexico each day are being herded into open-air camps, where they have no access to food or water. And some are left to sleep on the open ground in a desert riddled with scorpions and snakes, activists say.

Campaigners say many will be there for days, waiting to be processed by an immigration system that is overwhelmed by — and under-prepared for — the sheer number of people. "We were told by border patrol that this is the new normal," Erika Pinheiro, executive director of the non-governmental Al Otro Lado, told AFP in Jacumba, California.

Pinheiro said authorities keep asylum-seekers confined in camps like this until they can be taken to an official processing center. In the Jacumba area, a total daily average of 800 people are in the three camps. "The migrants are told that they will be deported unless they stay in these camps," Pinheiro said.

"However, Border Patrol is not providing food, water, shelter or medical care. Sanitary facilities are abysmal." Al Otro Lado — whose name means "On the other side" — is one of a number of non-profits that bring food, water and blankets, and provide some medical care.

Protection

At this time of year, the daytime desert sun is fierce, but nighttime temperatures can plunge below freezing. The sites have some tattered tents, but other occupants AFP met this week huddled around fires for warmth, feeding them with scrappy branches they found nearby.

There were two dirty portable toilets which must be shared by women, men and children alike. US

Border Patrol officials who visit the camps distribute colored bracelets indicating the day on which a migrant first made contact.

These bracelets determine the order in which the wearers are allowed to board infrequent buses to the processing centers. Several migrants told reporters they had been there for a number of days. Earlier this month, a 13-year-old boy died at the camp, apparently from an accident, though the details were not immediately clear.

The bottleneck is the latest to develop since the US government introduced its CBP One app — an online system for would-be asylum-seekers to lodge their claim. Critics say the app, which for most people is the only way to secure any kind of appointment to see an asylum judge, is problematic.

"The app is only available in English, Spanish and Haitian Creole," said Pinheiro. "If you look around, you see a lot of people from countries that don't speak those languages," she added. During AFP's visit to the camp there were noticeable numbers of people from China, Turkey, Uzbekistan and Afghanistan, as well as some from Colombia, Ecuador and Peru.

One Chinese man who identified himself only as Jimmy for fear of government reprisals against his family in China, said he had crossed 10 countries over the last 35 days to reach the United States on a journey that had cost him \$12,000. On camera he was non-committal, but when the filming stopped, he was forthright. "China is not good, I don't want to live there," he told AFP.

Migration — legal and otherwise — will play a huge role in next year's presidential election, which is set to pit 81-year-old Democratic incumbent Joe



JACUMBA: Border patrol agents process migrants who entered the US illegally the day before taking them to a port of entry in Jacumba, California. Hundreds of migrants who cross into the United States each day are being herded into open-air camps. — AFP

Biden probably against 77-year-old Republican nativist Donald Trump. While Trump's fiery rhetoric on immigration — he has vowed he will use the military to completely shutter the border — plays well with his rightwing base, he has not provided a great deal of detail. For Biden, the issue is complicated as he tries to balance demands from many Americans for tougher controls with calls from the left of his party for a more humane immigration system.

Neither side seems ready to tackle the root-and-

branch reform of the system that critics say is really needed. For Pinheiro, the politicization of the issue is one of the major causes of the paralysis that condemns tens of thousands of people to grinding uncertainty in their quest for a new life in the United States. "Border Patrol, especially the union, is a partisan political organization, they are very pro-Trump," she said. "I think this is a manifestation of that political ideology, where they're trying to show that the border is out of control." — AFP

In turf war between Venezuela and Guyana, Brazil plays big role

BRASILIA: As tensions mount between Venezuela and Guyana, officials in distant Brasilia are watching their neighbors with increasing concern. "If there's one thing we don't want, it's a war in South America," Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva said last week.

Lula has emerged as a peace broker of sorts, determined to prevent the current war of words over the disputed Essequibo region from escalating into something deadlier. One of his closest advisors will take part in Thursday's summit between Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro and Guyana's Irfaan Ali, in the Caribbean nation of St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

Tensions have been rising ever since Caracas held a referendum December 3 on Essequibo, an oil-rich territory administered by Guyana for more than a century but claimed by Venezuela. Venezuela's appetite for the territory has been heightened by Guyana's recent tenders for oil exploitation in the area, where huge deposits were discovered by US giant ExxonMobil in 2015.

The border between Brazil and the Essequibo territory stretches for around 800 kilometers (500 miles), along six Brazilian municipalities where 140,000 peo-



CARACAS: This combination shows Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro (L) attending a press conference and Guyana's President Irfaan Ali speaking during a plenary session of the 9th Summit of the Americas in Los Angeles. — AFP

ple live, including around 40,000 indigenous people, mainly in the Amazonian state of Roraima. Venezuela and Guyana share around 700 kilometers (435 miles) of border, but this area is "almost entirely covered by jungle, offering neither the conditions necessary for the movement of troops with vehicles, nor the logistical support for an invasion," Paulo Roberto da Silva Gomes Filho, an expert in military science, told AFP.

Venezuelan access to Guyana is much simpler via Brazil's Roraima region: in the event of a ground offensive, the Venezuelan army would have to pass through Brazilian territory, he says. But Brazilian Defense Minister Jose Mucio warned on Monday: "under no circumstances can we allow one country to attack another using our territory". Last week, Brazil announced it was reinforcing its troop presence in the Roraima and sending armored vehicles there. — AFP

Embattled Harvard head to stay after anti-Semitism row

CAMBRIDGE: Harvard University's president, under fire over testimony she gave about anti-Semitism on campus, will remain in her job after a meeting of the institution's governing body issued a statement backing her on Tuesday. Claudine Gay has been engulfed by criticism after she declined to say unequivocally whether calling for genocide of Jews violated Harvard's code of conduct as she testified before Congress alongside the heads of MIT and the University of Pennsylvania.

"It depends on the context," she told lawmakers in one tense exchange. The Harvard Corporation, one of the university's two governing boards, said in a statement, "we today reaffirm our support for President Gay's continued leadership of Harvard University."

But the body did criticize the university's initial response to the Hamas October 7 attacks that the Zionist entity said killed 1,200 people inside the Zionist entity and saw around 240 people taken hostage. The Zionist entity's offensive has reduced much of Gaza to rubble and killed at least 18,200 people, mostly women and children, ac-

ording to the Hamas-run health ministry.

In the United States, the controversy has come amid a rise in attacks and violent rhetoric targeting Jews and Muslims, including at universities, since the Zionist-Hamas war erupted. "So many people have suffered tremendous damage and pain because of Hamas' brutal terrorist attack, and the University's initial statement should have been an immediate, direct, and unequivocal condemnation," the corporation said.

"Calls for genocide are despicable and contrary to fundamental human values. "President Gay has apologized for how she handled her congressional testimony," Rabbi Getzel Davis, a Harvard campus chaplain and member of the Hillel Jewish student movement, said in response to the corporation's announcement that "the most important thing for Jewish students at Harvard and Harvard Hillel is that the culture changes."

"We look forward to continuing to work with President Gay and other senior Harvard administrators on... enforcing policies to protect Jewish students," he said. University of Pennsylvania's president Liz Magill resigned in the wake of her responses to Congress, and pressure had mounted on Gay both inside and outside of Harvard to follow suit.

More than 70 lawmakers including two Democrats called for her resignation, while a number of high-profile Harvard alumni and donors have called for her departure. In excess of 700 Harvard faculty members signed a letter supporting Gay. — AFP

COP28 deal calls for fossil...

Continued from Page 1

and scientists say 2023 was likely the warmest in 100,000 years, as storms, droughts and lethal wildfires expand around the world.

John Silk, the negotiator from the Marshall Islands, had warned that the earlier draft marked a "death warrant" for his Pacific archipelago, which is just 2.1 m above sea level. Silk likened the final agreement to a "canoe with a weak and leaky hull, full of holes" but added: "We have to put it into the water because we have no other option."

The small islands did not block the Dubai deal, but a representative from Samoa criticized the language as too weak after contending the group had not arrived yet in the room at Dubai's sprawling Expo City when Jaber declared consensus. "We have made an incremental advancement over business as usual when what we really needed is an exponential step change in our actions," Samoan chief negotiator Anne Rasmussen said on behalf of the island nations, drawing a standing ovation and polite applause from Jaber.

But US climate envoy John Kerry hailed the deal as the clearest endorsement yet of 1.5 degrees and indicated he worked to win over Saudi Arabia. "I think there were times in the last 48 hours where some of us thought this could fail," Kerry said. But he said: "A number of countries that produce oil and gas — you know who they are — they stepped up and said, you know, we want this to succeed."

Saudi Energy Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman, speaking to Al Arabiya Business, praised the final language and said there was "no agreement on the immediate or gradual end of fossil fuels, but on a process of transition". Seeking to avoid the geopolitical tensions that have strained cooperation on other issues, Kerry also met ahead of COP28 with his counterpart from China, leading to a joint call by the world's two largest emitters to step up renewable energy.

A Chinese envoy said Wednesday that wealthy nations must still do more to help the developing world, a stance shared by Brazil, which will hold the 2025 climate talks in the Amazon. But the Dubai summit at its opening reached an agreement on another major part of the accord — setting up a loss



DUBAI: US climate envoy John Kerry and his Chinese counterpart Xie Zhenhua shake hands after a joint news conference at the end of the COP28 summit on Dec 13, 2023. — AFP

and damage fund to compensate countries hit hard by climate change.

The text stopped short of backing appeals during the summit for a "phaseout" of oil, gas and coal, which together account for around three-quarters of the emissions responsible for the planetary crisis. Environmentalists virtually all saw the agreement as a step forward, although many cautioned that there will still far more to do.

"We are finally naming the elephant in the room. The genie is never going back into the bottle and future COPs will only turn the screws even more on dirty energy," said Mohamed Adow, director of the Power Shift Africa think tank, referring to the annual UN climate meetings known as Conferences of the Parties. "Some people may have had their expectations for this meeting raised too high, but this result would have been unheard of two years ago, especially at a COP meeting in a petrostate," he said.

The agreement also made more explicit the near-term goals in the goal of ending net emissions by 2050. It called for the world to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 43 percent by 2030 compared with 2019 levels. But Jean Su of the Center for Biological Diversity, while seeing progress, said there were still "cavernous loopholes" including recognition of a role for "transitional fuels" — seen as code for natural gas.

The agreement tackles only fossil use in energy, not in industrial areas such as production of plastics and fertilizer. The deal backs a phase-down of "unabated" coal power — meaning it preserves a role for the dirty but politically sensitive energy source if there is use of carbon capture technology, panned by many environmentalists as unproven. — AFP

Zionists face heat as UN demands...

Continued from Page 1

day in terms of the powerful message that was sent from the General Assembly". The vote came after the Security Council — responsible for global peace and security — has repeatedly failed to make such a call.

Biden told a campaign event that the Zionist entity had "most of the world supporting it" immediately after Oct 7, but that "they're starting to lose that support by the indiscriminate bombing that takes place". Toning down his comments at a later news conference, the US president reiterated support for the Zionist entity and said only that "the safety of innocent Palestinians is still of great concern".

Despite the criticism from its main ally, the Zionist entity vowed to press on with its war on Hamas. "(The Zionist entity) will continue the war against Hamas with or without international support," said Foreign Minister Eli Cohen. "A ceasefire at the current stage is a gift to the terrorist organization Hamas, and will allow it to return and threaten the residents of (the Zionist entity)." Cohen told a visiting diplomat, quoted by his ministry.

Biden's national security advisor, Jake Sullivan, will travel to the Zionist entity on Thursday to meet Zionist premier Benjamin Netanyahu, who has said there is "disagreement" with Washington over how a post-conflict Gaza would be governed.

The UN vote came after Philippe Lazzarini, head of its Palestinian refugee agency, described the situation in Gaza as "hell on earth". The UN estimates 1.9 million of the territory's 2.4 million people have been displaced and are receiving goods from only around 100 aid trucks per day. Its hospital system is in ruins, and Hamas authorities said

All types of visas to open...

Continued from Page 1

expat advisors but they have failed to appoint Kuwaitis in their places. He called on them to speed up the process to create more jobs for citizens.

During Wednesday's session, MPs debated a draft law calling on the government to establish a state-owned advanced manufacturing holding company based on oil. MPs said the company will provide Kuwait with a new source of income to

Wednesday that vaccines for children had run out, warning of "catastrophic health repercussions".

UN satellite analysis agency UNOSAT said 18 percent of Gaza's infrastructure had been destroyed based on an image that was already more than two weeks old. The World Bank in a new analysis warned that "the loss of life, speed and extent of damage... are unparalleled". Already by mid-November, almost half of all roads and around 60 percent of communication infrastructure, health and education facilities had been damaged or destroyed, it said.

More air strikes hit Gaza and gun battles raged through the night, especially in Gaza City, the biggest urban center, and Khan Yunis and Rafah in the south, AFP correspondents said. Cold autumn rains lashed the territory, where millions have been displaced and many are living in makeshift plastic tents, as vital supplies of food, drinking water, medicines and fuel have run low in more than two months of siege and war.

Air raid sirens wailed in Sderot and other southern Zionist communities near Gaza as Palestinian fighters kept firing rockets, most of which have been intercepted by air defenses. In Khan Yunis, a center of heavy urban combat in recent days, a family gathered to mourn the death in a strike of Fayed Al-Taramsi, a father of seven. "How are we going to live after him?" one of his daughters said, crying and clutching his bloodied shirt. "He brought us to life."

The Zionist entity says it has lost 115 soldiers, including 10 in northern Gaza on Tuesday, its deadliest day since launching the ground assault on Oct 27. Hamas said Zionist forces raided a hospital in Gaza City on Tuesday. UN humanitarian agency OCHA had earlier reported fighting nearby and said about 3,000 displaced people were trapped inside. The UN World Health Organization's chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said he was "extremely worried" by reports of the raid, adding that his agency "urgently calls for the protection of all persons inside the hospital". — Agencies

help the country diversify its sources of income, which currently heavily depends on oil. The company is also expected to create many new jobs for Kuwaiti citizens.

MP Marzouq Al-Ghanem said the draft law aims to oblige the government to establish the project, and since the government has failed in implementing the idea, it is bound to fail in implementing the project. He added the government should be held accountable for its failures. Oil Minister Saad Al-Barrak said the government agrees to the draft law in principle and will submit its amendments to the legislation on Thursday. MPs then approved the draft law in the first reading and the second and final round of votes is expected after two weeks.

International

Xi says China, Vietnam must oppose attempt to 'mess up Asia-Pacific'

China blasts UK's 'malicious intentions' after Cameron meets HK dissident

HANOI: China and Vietnam should oppose any "attempt to mess up Asia-Pacific", President Xi Jinping said Wednesday during a trip to Hanoi, as Beijing seeks to counter expanding US influence with the communist nation.

The trip is Xi's first to neighbouring Vietnam in six years, and the two nations committed to deeper ties and signed more than 30 agreements, including a pledge to develop rail links between Vietnam and China. The two-day visit comes after Hanoi upgraded diplomatic ties with Washington when US President Joe Biden visited in September.

Xi said China and Vietnam "should be vigilant against and oppose any attempt to mess up Asia-Pacific", according to Xinhua, China's official state news agency. "We should strengthen coordination and cooperation in international affairs, and jointly maintain a sound external environment," Xi said.

Biden's visit was part of US efforts around the world to contain China's rising economic power—and to secure supplies of crucial materials needed for high-tech manufacturing. China and Vietnam said in a joint statement Tuesday they would "continue to deepen and increase bilateral relations".

They agreed to build a "community with a shared future", and said the visit was a "historic landmark in bilateral ties... contributing to peace and stability and development in the region and the world". Vietnam has long pursued a "bamboo diplomacy" approach, striving to stay on good terms with both China and the United States.

It shares US concerns about Beijing's increasing assertiveness in the contested South China Sea, but it also has close economic ties with China. Xi said

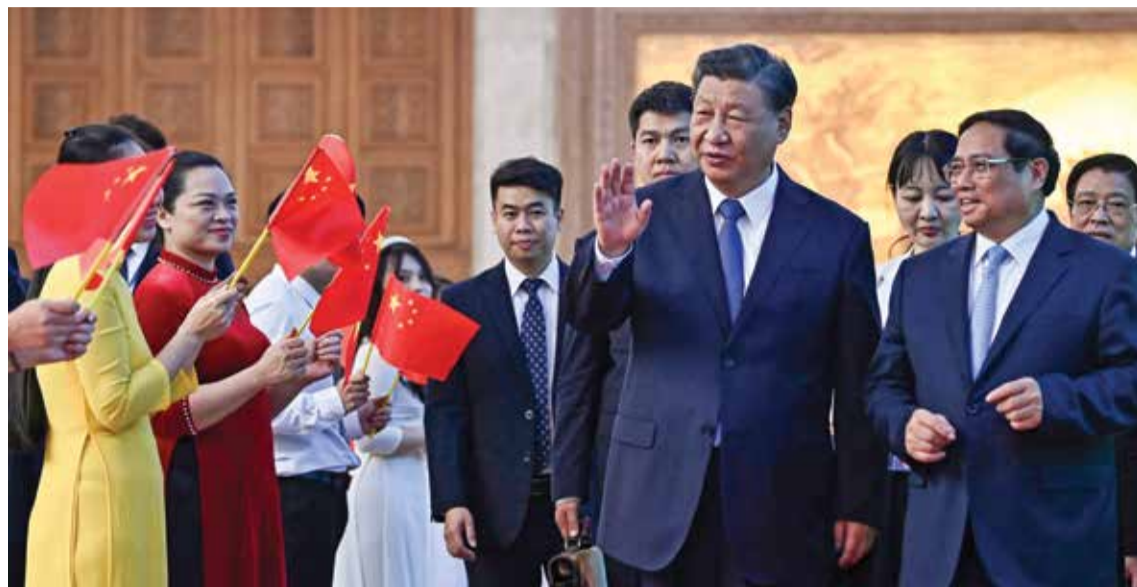
Wednesday that China was ready to work with Vietnam to "find a long-term solution to maritime issues" and help reach a "substantive and effective Code of Conduct in the South China Sea", according to Xinhua. On Wednesday, Xi laid a wreath at the mausoleum of revolutionary leader Ho Chi Minh and met with Vietnam's Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh and President Vo Van Thuong.

Chinh said Vietnam was committed to "supporting China to strongly develop, promoting its role as a major country with important contributions to the international community, supporting initiatives by comrade Xi Jinping for peace, cooperation and development in the world".

Meanwhile, China on Wednesday accused Britain of having "malicious intentions" toward Hong Kong after British Foreign Secretary David Cameron met with the son of jailed pro-democracy publisher Jimmy Lai.

Lai, a 75-year-old British citizen and founder of the now-shuttered tabloid Apple Daily, has been behind bars in Hong Kong since 2020, awaiting trial for alleged "collusion with foreign forces" under a controversial national security law. Cameron met with Lai's son Sebastian in London on Tuesday to "listen to his concerns for his father", the UK Foreign Office wrote on social media, adding that "the UK opposes the National Security Law and will continue to stand by Jimmy Lai and the people of HK".

"China urges the UK to earnestly respect the facts and the rule of law, and stop meddling in Hong Kong issues and China's internal affairs," Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said on Wednesday in response to the meeting.



HANOI: Vietnam's Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh (R) bids farewell to China's President Xi Jinping (C) after their meeting at the Government Office in Hanoi on December 13, 2023. -- AFP

Mao called the senior Lai "a driving force between the chaos in Hong Kong", referring to massive pro-democracy demonstrations in 2019. The UK's "double standards and malicious intentions are clearly exposed", Mao said. If convicted, Lai faces up to life in prison under the national security law, which Beijing imposed on Hong Kong in 2020.

The law's aim was to quash dissent, and prominent opposition lawmakers and democracy activists

in the semi-autonomous city have either fled abroad or been jailed in the three years since its passage. Initially scheduled to start a year earlier, Lai's trial for alleged collusion has been twice postponed and is now slated for December 18.

He has also been sentenced for attending four pro-democracy protests and for an additional charge of "fraud"—convictions that together came with sentences of more than seven years. -- AFP



SEOUL: This picture taken on April 9, 2023 shows South Korean Lee Kyung-woo (C), who was arrested on charges of kidnapping and murdering a woman, being escorted by authorities as he is transferred to the prosecution from a police station in Seoul. -- AFP

Crypto and ketamine: The murder that shocked South Korea

SEOUL: It reads like a K-drama plot: an ex-spy kidnaps a woman from an upscale district of Seoul over a crypto dispute, then kills her with drugs from a plastic surgery clinic. The case of purported spy-turned-hitman Lee Kyung-woo, who was sentenced to life in prison in October, has shocked South Korea, a safe and almost drug-free country where violent killings are rare.

The country has, however, had issues with crypto crime. It was home to fallen crypto king Do Kwon, currently in a Montenegro jail awaiting extradition over the spectacular multi-billion-dollar collapse of his Terra and Luna tokens. At the centre of the gruesome homicide case is another collapsed cryptocurrency called PURE, based in the Seychelles but run by a Korean who was arrested last month on fraud and market manipulation charges.

A couple who had lost at least a billion won (around \$760,000) in PURE hired hitman Lee—who claimed to be a former undercover agent for missions in North Korea—to kill the woman who had encouraged them to invest in the currency, and steal her digital assets.

For 70 million won, Lee masterminded the woman's kidnapping and murder. On March 29 this year, the victim was abducted from a street in the Seoul district of Gangnam, drugged, coerced into handing over her crypto passwords, and then killed, with her body buried in the countryside 140 kilometres (85 miles) from the capital. The ketamine used to sedate and then kill the 48-year-old woman came from Lee's wife, a nurse at a plastic surgery clinic, who gave it to him even though she was aware of his "intentions to commit a crime", court documents obtained by AFP showed.

"It is difficult to estimate the fear and pain the victim must have felt when she was abruptly kidnapped by strangers in the middle of Seoul... and dragged to the hills near Daejeon to die," judge Kim Seung-jeong of the Seoul Central District Court wrote in the ruling.

Spying claims

South Korea has long been regarded as one of Asia's crypto hotspots, but spectacular, criminal impositions like that of Do Kwon's tokens have shaken retail confidence and drawn official scrutiny to the sector.

Local officials have expressed concern over rising criminality linked to the industry, even this year creating a new inter-agency unit to fight crypto crime. Hitman Lee lost his health club business during the pandemic and poured his life savings into PURE—which lost 95 percent of its value in early 2021.

Court documents said that Lee felt he had to use "any means necessary" to make money. Lee told clients he was a former military agent for missions in North Korea, court documents showed. Citing a court hearing, local media have suggested his claim was true. Lee also claimed he could "resolve matters" for the couple "by engaging in illegal methods" and discussed potential plans for the murder that included hiring a Chinese hitman and stealing the victim's organs.—AFP

Smoke attack disrupts Indian parliament

NEW DELHI: India's parliament was halted Wednesday after a major security breach that saw two people disrupt proceedings by setting off a smoke canister inside the legislature. The pair were arrested by security, along with two others detained outside the building, after one man jumped onto the floor of the lower house of parliament from an overhead visitors' gallery.

Official footage from the session showed one man shouting slogans and vaulting over tables between stunned lawmakers before a device was set off that caused yellow smoke to billow into the chamber. The motives of the pair and how they managed to evade security checks were unclear, with police in New Delhi yet to release any details on the incident.

Parliament resumed after a brief adjournment,

with speaker Om Birla telling lawmakers that four people had been arrested for the disruption. "Both persons have been arrested and two others outside have also been arrested," he said.

Birla said that the parliament was "carrying out a thorough probe and the Delhi police too had been given necessary directions". He added that "there was nothing to worry about" and assured lawmakers that the smoke was not hazardous to human health.

Lawmaker Hanuman Beniwal said the "very serious episode" raised questions about the security of India's new parliament, inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi earlier this year. Beniwal said around 150 lawmakers were in the chamber at the time of the incident, and demanded a thorough inquiry into what happened.

The disruption came on the 22nd anniversary of an attack on the parliament's previous home in New Delhi. Five gunmen shot dead at least eight security personnel and a gardener in that assault, which also took place on the day of a parliamentary session.

Modi had paid tribute to the victims of that attack earlier Wednesday. "Their courage and sacrifice in the face of danger will forever be etched in our nation's memory," he said. -- AFP



MUMBAI: An art school teacher works on a painting along a pavement in Mumbai on December 13, 2023, depicting the security breach inside the lower house Lok Sabha in the capital, New Delhi. India's parliament was halted on December 13, after a major security breach that saw two people disrupt proceedings by setting off a smoke canister inside the legislature.—AFP

Thai MP jailed for 6 years on royal insult charges

BANGKOK: A Thai court on Wednesday sentenced a lawmaker from the progressive Move Forward Party to six years in jail on royal insult charges. Rukchanok Srinork was found guilty of lese majeste and breaching the Computer Crimes Act for reposting two messages on X, formerly Twitter.

MFP won the most seats in the May general election but was blocked from forming a government by conservative forces opposed to its pledge to reform the kingdom's tough royal defamation laws. "Rukchanok Srinork was sentenced to three years on a 112 (lese majeste) charge and three years on a Computer Crimes Act charge," MFP leader Chaithawat Tulathon told AFP.

The court later issued a statement confirming the charges and sentence. The court also announced it had granted Rukchanok, 29, bail with a 500,000 baht (\$14,000) security. Rukchanok rose to prominence riding a bike round Bangkok's traffic-clogged streets while campaigning for the May election.

Thailand has some of the world's strictest lese-majeste legislation, shielding King Maha Vajiralongkorn and his close family from criticism—but which critics say has been weaponised to silence dissent. The Computer Crimes Act has also been criticised by rights groups as giving overly broad powers to the authorities to restrict free speech.

There has been an upsurge in charges under the laws—known in Thailand as "112" after the relevant section of the criminal code—since youth-led pro-democracy street protests in 2020. Authorities have charged more than 250 activists with 112 and jailed some of the top leaders including Anon Numpu, a human rights lawyer who previously represented Rukchanok. -- AFP



Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida

Japan PM to tackle party scandal 'like a ball of fire'

TOKYO: Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said Wednesday he would tackle a major funding scandal within his party "like a ball of fire", with reports saying he will sack four ministers. The furor surrounds allegations of kickbacks of 500 million yen (\$3.4 million) within Kishida's Liberal Democratic Party, which has governed the world's number three economy almost uninterrupted for decades. Kishida, whose poll ratings are the lowest for any premier since the LDP returned to power in 2012, told a news conference that he planned to make personnel changes on Thursday, without giving details. "We would like to make personnel appointments tomorrow (Thursday). We are currently coordinating and having consultations as we speak," he said.

"We will tackle the various issues surrounding political funds head-on... I will make efforts like a ball of fire and lead the LDP to restore the public's trust." Media reports said that those to be axed include Kishida's right-hand man, Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno, and Yasutoshi Nishimura, the minister for economy, industry and trade. Others are internal affairs minister Junji Suzuki and agriculture minister Ichiro Miyashita, plus five deputy ministers, the Yomiuri Shimbun, Kyodo News and other media reported, citing unnamed government and party sources. All those set to be sacked are from the largest faction within the LDP which used to be headed by ex-premier Shinzo Abe who was assassinated last year.

'Easy and great'

The kickbacks allegedly went to party members who exceeded their ticket sales quotas for party fundraising events. "If you are confident of selling (tickets), if you sell more than you are obliged to sell, that will all become your income, so that's easy and great," a senior official who used to work in the office of an LDP lawmaker told broadcaster ANN, his face concealed and his voice disguised.

After the closure of the current parliament session on Wednesday, prosecutors will accelerate their investigation into the allegations, with plans of interviewing dozens of Abe-faction lawmakers, the Yomiuri daily said.

Another of those reportedly implicated is former Olympics minister Seiko Hashimoto. The scandal reportedly widened earlier this week to a faction within the LDP headed until recently by Kishida. The opposition filed a no-confidence motion in his cabinet on Wednesday but it was defeated with the government's majority. Kishida's poll ratings have tumbled since taking office in October 2021 because of voter unhappiness about inflation as well as a string of other scandals. This is despite a previous cabinet reshuffle in September and a stimulus package worth 17 trillion yen (\$17 billion) announced in November for the world's third-largest economy. Kishida can govern until 2025 but there has been speculation that he might call a snap election ahead of a likely tough internal leadership vote in the LDP next year. -- AFP

Business

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2023

Hasty gavel and standing ovation bring down curtain on COP28

Adoption greeted with less enthusiasm by small island developing states

DUBAI: The proud president of COP28 had no time left to lose. After two nights of fraught final negotiations, it took just five minutes for Sultan Al-Jaber, with the nervous bang of his gavel, to adopt a historic deal calling for a transition from fossil fuels. "I hear no objection? It is so decided," he announced at 11.15 am (0715 GMT) on Wednesday, to applause and a standing ovation from delegates, despite the disappointment expressed by some small island states about the final language.

The delegates gathered in the oil-rich UAE since November 30 barely had time to sit down before the deal was declared adopted. "It is the UAE consensus," Jaber proclaimed from the podium, visibly relieved at the result, after months of promising to secure a "historic" deal and weathering criticism for his dual roles leading the key climate conference while helming national oil company ADNOC. "We have language on fossil fuel in our final agreement, for the first time ever," he said, prompting even more vigorous applause.

Moments earlier, negotiators could be seen chatting happily in the enormous plenary room of the gigantic expo park in Dubai, where discussions ran a day longer than scheduled.

The relaxed atmosphere among the exhausted delegates, just four hours after the publication of the latest draft text, had suggested a favorable outcome despite the furor a day earlier over a draft that proposed reducing rather than abandoning fossil fuels. "The Saudis are on board, that's surprising, but the Chinese too, the Americans... it's unexpected," a European negotiator said just before the plenary began.

Nearby, the heads of the Saudi and Chinese delegations chatted and smiled. Their opposition to mentioning a "phase out" of fossil fuels had threatened to leave them isolated, with other nations demanding more ambition in a final text. But in the end, they found a way to agree to "transitioning away from fossil fuels in energy systems, in a just, orderly and equitable manner."

Until the last minute though, there was uncertainty. Would India, highly dependent on coal and notably quiet during the summit, oppose the compromise?

"I have mixed feedback," the negotiator ad-



DUBAI: Participants attend a COP28 plenary session at the United Nations climate summit in Dubai on December 13, 2023. — AFP

mitted, before the session opened and removed any final doubts that the text would be adopted. Still, for all the cheers and relief, the adoption was greeted with significantly less enthusiasm by small island developing states that are among the nations most at risk from climate change. Their representatives were not even in the room at the moment of adoption, apparently arriving late to the already delayed plenary.

"We didn't want to interrupt the standing ovation when we came into the room, but we are a little

confused about what happened. It seems that you just gavelled the decisions and the small island developing states were not in the room," said Samoa's representative Anne Rasmussen. She said the grouping was delayed as they tried to agree a coordinated position on the text, and declared the bloc unhappy with the final result.

"We have come to the conclusion that the course correction that is needed has not been secured." Lengthy applause and shouts of encouragement

followed Rasmussen's comments, from civil society groups at the back of the room, but also European and other delegates. "By all the tears of joy we just had in our eyes, we saw also that there were some tears from some of us in the rooms who might be not only tears of joy," acknowledged Germany's Foreign Minister Anna Baerbock. "We see you and we feel and see that for your children this might not be enough. And therefore this text is for us as the European Union, as Germany, just the starting point." — AFP

UAE's Jaber who brokered 'beginning of end' for fossil fuels

DUBAI: Sultan Al-Jaber, the UAE oil chief who headed COP28 in Dubai, promised that this year's UN climate talks would be "different". He did not disappoint. The towering Emirati, 50, was beaming in his grey dishdasha after he brought down the hammer on the first United Nations agreement calling for a transition away from fossil fuels. It ended a Conference of the Parties (COP) of contradictions in the oil-rich United Arab Emirates, which is one of the world's biggest producers of crude.

Jaber is CEO of oil giant ADNOC as well as being the UAE's climate envoy and minister of industry and advanced technology. He is also chairman of renewable energy company Masdar.

His naming as COP28 chief drew conflict-of-interest concerns at a time of increasingly stark warnings about the urgency of transitioning away from hydrocarbons to have a hope of keeping climate targets in view. Dozens of US and European lawmakers said Jaber's oil and gas links should disqualify him from the job. Hundreds of climate campaign groups called for him to quit either COP or ADNOC.

"COP28 is beset by a dark cloud of—entirely warranted—public skepticism," US Senator Sheldon Whitehouse said at the time. But Jaber will now claim vindication after presiding over a deal described by UN climate chief Simon Stiell as the "beginning of the

end" for fossil fuels. "Together, we have confronted the realities and we have set the world in the right direction," Jaber told the cavernous auditorium on the outskirts of Dubai. "We have given it a robust action plan to keep 1.5 within reach."

Before COP, Jaber was in less jubilant mood, bristling at accusations of a conflict of interest. "I'm someone who spent the majority of his career in sustainability, in sustainable economic development and project management, and renewable energy," he told AFP in July. Indeed, he founded state-owned renewable energy company Masdar a decade before he took the helm of ADNOC with a mandate to "decarbonise" and "future-proof" the gas and petrol giant. The stakes were exceptionally high for COP28.

The most ambitious goal of the 2015 Paris Agreement was to limit temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, although UN climate experts warned this year that we are hurtling towards breaching that guardrail in the 2030s. During months of frenetic travel that saw him criss-cross the planet, Jaber managed to win over some skeptics.

Harjeet Singh, of the influential coalition Climate Action Network International, said a turning point came in July, when Jaber wrote that "phasing down demand for, and supply of, all fossil fuels is inevitable and essential". "He's very straightforward, he's open to listening," Singh told AFP, though the pair "agree to disagree" on several issues. Those disagreements included the prominence given to fossil fuel lobbyists, whose accreditations numbered a record 2,456 in Dubai, according to campaign groups—more than every national delegation apart from the UAE and Brazil.

Another point of difference was Jaber's endorse-



DUBAI: COP28 president Sultan Ahmed Al-Jaber arrives for a plenary session during the United Nations climate summit in Dubai on December 13, 2023. — AFP

ment of controversial carbon capture technologies that trap emissions and store them permanently. ADNOC made a commitment in July to achieve carbon neutrality by 2045 for its own operations. But that target does not include emissions produced by the oil and gas burned by its customers, which account for the vast majority of its carbon footprint.

Jaber's COP started strongly when he passed a landmark loss and damage fund on day one, when the two-week meeting had barely started. Several pledges followed, including the UAE's \$30 billion private investment fund focused on climate projects in developing countries. Talks then went into overtime, after a dispute over including "phasing out" or "phasing down" fossil fuels, before a compromise was struck and hastily passed on Wednesday. — AFP

US wholesale prices stall in November

WASHINGTON: US wholesale prices were unchanged in November, according to government data published Wednesday, as a sharp drop in the energy index prevented an overall increase in producer costs. The lack of change in the monthly producer price index (PPI) in November followed a revised 0.4 percent decline in October, the Labor Department announced. This was slightly below market expectations, according to Briefing.com. "PPI inflation surprised to the downside in November, across measures," High Frequency Economics chief US economist Rubeela Farooqi wrote in a note to clients.

The index for final demand energy fell by 1.2 percent last month after a sharp decline a month earlier, while food saw a 0.6 percent monthly rise, and trade ticked down 0.2 percent. Stripping out food, energy, and trade, PPI increased by 0.1 percent month-on-month. "The data confirm the downtrend in inflation although consumer prices are moving lower more gradually," said Farooqi. She added that there was "nothing" in the PPI data that would change the likelihood of the US Federal Reserve voting to hold interest rates unchanged later Wednesday. — AFP

Palestinian economy severely impacted by war: World Bank

WASHINGTON: The Zionist entity war on Gaza is having a severe impact on the Palestinian economy, the World Bank said on Tuesday, adding that a sharp economic contraction is likely this year and next. "The loss of life, speed and extent of damages to fixed assets and reduction in income flows across the Palestinian territories are unparalleled," the World Bank said in a statement.

The conflict, now dragging into its third month, has resulted in the death of more than 18,400 people in Gaza, the majority of them women and children, according to the Hamas-run health ministry. The UN estimates 1.9 million of Gaza's 2.4 million people have been displaced by the war, half of them children. UN agencies and aid groups fear the Palestinian territory will soon be overwhelmed by starvation and disease, and are

pleading with Zionist entity to boost efforts to protect civilians.

In a new analysis published Tuesday, the World Bank estimated that, as of mid-November, around 60 percent of information and communication infrastructure as well as health and education facilities had been damaged or destroyed. And 70 percent of commerce-related infrastructure had been crippled or ruined. Almost half of all primary, secondary and tertiary roads were also damaged or destroyed, and more than half a million people were living without a home due to the conflict. Beyond the immediate human cost, the conflict has also "severely impacted the Palestinian economy," the World Bank said.

Gaza's contribution to the overall Palestinian economy, which includes the West Bank, had already shrunk from around 36 percent

in 2005 to just 17 percent last year, according to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics.

Zionist entity's decision to shut the door to Palestinian workers from the West Bank has put almost 200,000 people out of work. Despite Gaza's small contribution to the economic figures, the World Bank now expects the overall Palestinian economy to contract by 3.7 percent this year, down sharply from its pre-war forecast of a 3.2 percent increase.

Next year, the situation is expected to be even worse. Whereas the World Bank previously anticipated growth of 3.0 percent in 2024, it now expects an overall contraction of 6.0 percent—on the assumption that the severity of the conflict decreases next year. If the war drags on, the economic impact could deteriorate further. Following the onset of the war, prices in Gaza jumped by 12 percent, on average, in October, the Bank said, reflecting "pent-up demand for products that are increasingly difficult to find on the local markets." By contrast, consumer inflation in the West Bank rose by just 0.1 percent over the same period. — AFP



RAFAH, Palestinian Territories: This picture shows the damages following Zionist entity bombardment in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on December 13, 2023. — AFP

Business

Gulf Bank wins award for 'Best Prepaid Card Program in Kuwait'

Bank honored at Mastercard MENA East Business Forum

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank was honored with the prestigious "Best Prepaid Card Program in Kuwait" award for 2023 during the Mastercard MENA East Business Forum, held recently in Dubai. The ceremony, attended by numerous leaders in the regional banking industry, celebrated Gulf Bank's outstanding achievements.

Expressing his satisfaction, Mohammed Taqi, Assistant General Manager of Consumer Banking, remarked, "We are thrilled to receive this award, affirming the exceptional features of Gulf Bank's prepaid cards and our commitment to innovation and excellence in our product and services."

Taqi highlighted the user-friendly and secure aspects of the Gulf Bank Mastercard Prepaid Card, ideal for managing daily expenses. He emphasized its versatility and suitability for use by all family members, along with the added benefit of substantial discounts at various restaurants, cafes, and shops. The partnership between Gulf Bank and Mastercard resulted in the creation of two innovative prepaid cards: Mouj, the first prepaid bank card in the Middle East to offer cashback, and Red Plus, the pioneering prepaid card designed exclusively for youth in the region. These cards feature the most rewarding cashback program in Kuwait, contributing to an enriched overall customer experience. Taqi highlighted the distinctiveness of Gulf

Bank's cashback program, emphasizing its appeal by granting customers immediate cash rewards for both local and international spending. The cashback applies to various categories, encompassing supermarkets, fashion stores, restaurants, ticket reservations, hotels, and other expenses. Highlighting Gulf Bank's dedication to providing an unmatched customer experience through innovative and user-friendly services, Taqi reassured customers of forthcoming offerings tailored to their needs and aspirations. Gulf Bank's vision is to be the leading Kuwaiti Bank of the future. The Bank is constantly engaging and empowering its employees as part of an inclusive and diversified workplace in recognition of every employee's role in delivering customer excellence and serving the community at large. With its extensive network of branches and innovative digital services, Gulf Bank is able to give its customers the choice of how and where to conduct their banking transactions, all while ensuring a simple and seamless banking experience.

Gulf Bank is committed to maintaining robust developments in sustainability at environmental, social and governance levels through diverse sustainability initiatives, strategically selected to benefit the Bank both internally and externally. Gulf Bank supports Kuwait Vision 2035 "New Kuwait" and works with various parties to achieve it.



Gulf Bank's Assistant General Manager of Consumer Banking Mohammed Taqi receiving the award.

EU backs rules to improve app workers' conditions

BRUSSELS: The European Parliament and EU member states struck a landmark deal Wednesday to strengthen conditions for those working through apps, such as ride-hailing drivers. Once formally adopted, the law will be a global first covering the gig economy and part of the European Union's effort to give clarity to the status of millions of workers.

The hope is that courts across Europe will not hand down decisions that vary wildly, since there are now uniform rules for all 27 states. For many years, companies such as Uber have been able to dodge rules on minimum wage and holiday pay by arguing their workers are not employees but independent contractors. Under the new law, many platform workers in Europe could be reclassified as employees and therefore gain access to labor and social protection rights, the parliament said.



COLOMBO: A vendor sells vegetables at a market in Colombo on December 13, 2023. The International Monetary Fund revived its \$2.9 billion bailout for Sri Lanka on December 12 after the South Asian nation clinched a debt restructuring deal with China, its biggest official lender. — AFP

IMF resumes Sri Lanka bailout

WASHINGTON: The International Monetary Fund revived its \$2.9 billion bailout for Sri Lanka on Tuesday after the South Asian nation clinched a debt restructuring deal with China, its biggest official lender.

The IMF said its board had completed the first review of Sri Lanka's rescue package known as the Extended Fund facility (EFF) and released the second tranche of \$337 million to support economic policies and reforms. Sri Lanka had expected the progress review to be completed by September, but it was held up pending financial assurances from China, which holds 52 percent of the island's bilateral debt. IMF's mission chief for Sri Lanka, Peter Breuer, told reporters in Washington that Colombo had shared China's debt-restructuring offer with the IMF on a "strictly confidential basis." However, it fell within the IMF's debt sustainability targets for the island, he added.

He said policy reforms were starting

to bear fruit and the economy was showing signs of stabilization, but the key to a full and swift recovery was sustaining reform momentum. "We encourage the authorities to continue to build on these hard-won gains and further advance revenue mobilization," Breuer said. Colombo welcomed the latest IMF cash injection and reiterated its commitment to maintain unpopular reforms to raise taxes, scrap energy subsidies and privatize state enterprises.

"We are grateful to the cooperation of the official creditor committee... for agreeing in principle to the debt restructuring process," junior finance minister Shehan Semasinghe said. The island nation of 22 million people defaulted on its \$46 billion external debt last year after running out of foreign exchange to finance imports such as food, fuel and medicines. The country went to the IMF and secured the rescue loan spread over four years with the first instalment of \$330 million paid in March. With Tuesday's decision, Sri Lanka has received about \$670 million of the full loan of nearly \$3.0 billion. Last month, Colombo announced it had struck an "agreement in principle" with its lenders, including China, to restructure nearly \$6 billion in bilateral loans, a key to pressing ahead with IMF funding.—AFP

With eye on China, Dutch, Koreans vow stronger chip ties

THE HAGUE: The leaders of South Korea and the Netherlands vowed Wednesday to bolster co-operation in the critical semiconductor sector, amid growing tensions between China and the West over the technology. The two countries, which host some of the world's top tech companies, such as ASML and Samsung, pledged to forge a "semiconductor alliance" involving businesses, researchers and universities. Semiconductor chips are the linchpin of the global economy, pow-

ering everything from the smartphone in your pocket to your car, but they have also emerged as a geopolitical battleground. Several Western powers have imposed restrictions on exporting advanced chip-making equipment to China, fearing its use to develop high-tech weaponry. Beijing has described this as "technological terrorism". Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte told reporters: "We both have thriving technology sectors that are well matched." "ASML... makes machines for the microchips produced in South Korea. Our countries are now going to step up co-operation in this field," he said. Rutte also mentioned the "security risks" involved in the sector and stressed: "We must help each other protect the value chain." For his part, Yoon said the two countries wanted to "combine each other's strengths" in the semiconductor field but also emphasized the security aspect.—AFP



VELDHOVEN, Netherlands: King Willem-Alexander watches as South Korea's President Yoon Suk Yeol (center) and Peter Wennink (right), CEO of ASML, sign documents during a visit to ASML facilities in Veldhoven, the Netherlands, on December 12, 2023.—AFP

BDO demonstrates end-to-end sustainability services to support businesses

KUWAIT: BDO Al-Nisf & Partners, a leading audit, tax and consulting firm in Kuwait, organized a seminar on Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) on Dec 11, 2023. The seminar saw over 100 attendees from various sectors including private sector companies and regulatory bodies.

Dipankar Ghosh, ESG Partner at BDO, delivered a presentation on the latest global and regional developments on sustainability, best practices followed

by the large companies, risks and opportunities related to climate change, including update on COP28 summit.

Rami Al-Hadhrani, Partner at BDO presented his thoughts on the role of taxes in ESG. Asmaa Al-Zimami, of Environment Public Authority, also participated in the seminar and gave an overview of waste management. The seminar included a panel discussion session led by Ketan Puri, Manager at BDO, which included participation from Boursa Kuwait and the private sector.



KUWAIT: BDO Al-Nisf & Partners holds seminar on Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG).



UK economy hits reverse in October: Data

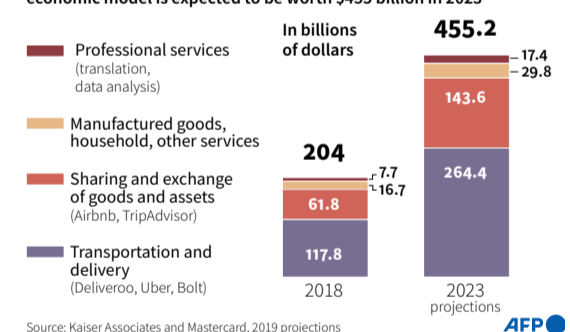
LONDON: Britain's economy shrank by more than expected in October in a broad-based decline, official data showed Wednesday, hitting reverse as high interest rates took their toll. Gross domestic product contracted 0.3 percent on sliding construction, manufacturing and services activity, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said in a statement on the eve of the Bank of England's latest rate decision.

That dashed market expectations for a milder decline of 0.1 percent and followed a 0.2-percent increase in September. Added to the gloom, the economy was flat in the three months to October, the ONS also revealed. "Services were the biggest driver of the fall with drops in IT, legal firms and film production—which fell back after a couple of strong months," noted ONS director of economic statistics Darren Morgan. "These were also compounded by widespread falls in manufacturing and construction, which fell partly due to the poor weather."

British finance minister Jeremy Hunt cautioned that a string of BoE rate hikes, aimed at dampening inflation, had impacted activity. "It is inevitable GDP will be subdued whilst interest rates are doing their job to bring down inflation," Chancellor of the Exchequer Hunt said in reaction to the data.—AFP

The global gig economy

Driven by platforms like Uber, Deliveroo, Bolt and Airbnb, this economic model is expected to be worth \$455 billion in 2023



At least 5.5 million people could be "wrongly classified as self-employed", the parliament said. There are around 28 million gig workers dependent on online platforms in Europe, and the number is expected to rise to 43 million in 2025. "This is a revolutionary agreement and the first legislative framework for digital platform workers," said MEP Elisabetta Gualmini, the rapporteur who spearheaded the text in parliament. "We have transparency and accountability for algorithms, we have better rights for the least protected workers in the world and we have fair competition for platforms," she added.

If a worker meets two out of five criteria set out in the legislation, it will be presumed they are an employee. The five criteria are: limits on how much workers can be remunerated, remote supervision of their work, control over what tasks they do, restrictions on their hours and control over their conditions, limits on their appearance or conduct.

The EU's member states can expand the list. Workers can lobby EU member states to expand the list as well. The lobby group Delivery Platform Europe, which represents Uber Eats and Deliveroo among others, had previously criticized the draft legislation. The text will become law once formally adopted by member states and the parliament. An Uber spokesperson said the company supported efforts to improve working conditions but hoped the text "delivers on these principles while ensuring legal clarity". "We remain committed to Europe and we'll keep advocating for a model that gives platform workers what they say they want: independence, benefits and flexibility."

The EU's jobs and social rights commissioner, Nicolas Schmit, welcomed the agreement. "The new rules we have agreed ensure platform workers, such as drivers and riders, receive the social and labor rights they are entitled to, without sacrificing the flexibility of the platform business model," Schmit said. The rules also say platform workers should be able to access information on how an app's algorithms work and how their behaviour affects decisions taken by automated systems.

And no platform will be able to sack workers or suspend accounts without human oversight, the parliament said. There are also stricter rules on personal data, forbidding platforms to process data including personal beliefs and private exchanges with colleagues. — AFP

Business

Aleid Foods completes acquisition of Al-Ashraf Foods for KD 20 million

Al-Mutairi: A qualitative step supporting our expansion in the food services sector

KUWAIT: Al-Eid Foods Company announced on Wednesday, in a press conference organized at its executive office, the signing of a contract to purchase 99 percent of the capital shares of Al-Ashraf Foods Company, owned by Dalqan Holding Group, and the completion of its acquisition deal for the value of KD 20 million and 500 thousand, in parallel with the success of its public offering to increase Aleid Foods Company's capital, authorized, issued and paid, from KD 18,617,287.200 to KD 30,331,572.900 through the issuance and allocation of 117,142,857 ordinary shares at the offering price of 175 fils (one hundred and seventy-five Kuwaiti fils) per share.

In the same context, the CEO of Aleid Food Company, Engineer Mohammed Al-Mutairi, confirmed that the acquisition of Al-Ashraf Foods Company is a qualitative step aimed at expanding Aleid operations in the food services sector in acceleration of the regional expansion plans 'Goals 25', pointing to the success of Al-Ashraf Food Company over the past ten years in enabling the company to become a major player in the food services sector by providing essential consumer food commodities, meat and frozen foods to small, medium and large food sector companies.

Al-Mutairi went on to explain the goals of expansion in the food services sector, the most important of which is supporting the vertical diversification in business sectors and sources of income for Aleid Foods Company, and creating valuable opportunities for products and partners to increase their market share and stimulate growth, in addition to enabling the regional expansion plans Goals 25, while ensuring sustainable results for partners and shareholders,

pointing to the advantages and results of the acquisition that will support the development plans for the year 2024 at the level of financial and operational returns, the most important of which is Aleid revenues exceeding the threshold of KD 60 million by the end of next year 2024.

This new step will result in the creation of a new leadership position for the company, an increase in Aleid's share profits by the end of 2024, and enhancing the continued growth of Eid's share profitability ensuring the sustainable dividends to shareholders, in addition to the importance of the acquisition in expanding the company operations and supporting Aleid's position as a major key player in the frozen foods sector. Hence, achieving the new leadership position as a supplier of whole frozen chicken catering, it is the largest distribution channel in Kuwait, in addition to enhancing the diversification of Aleid business lines to include the retail sector with a focus on raw materials, chocolate equipment, nuts, and sweets.

Al-Mutairi pointed to the principle of sustainability as a solid foundation for Aleid Foods' work in the food sector, including sustainability of quality of products, working values, relationship with the partners and suppliers, and its commitment to the development and progress, all the way to sustainability in profits and the relationship with investors and shareholders. All in the fulfillment of the Aleid Foods motto, "Continuous Growth".

Al-Mutairi concluded by extending his sincere thanks and gratitude to all the new owners, shareholders and investors for their continued trust, and thanks goes to Al-Hossam Legal & Partners for



KUWAIT: (From left) Metaab Al-Masoud, Investor Relations Manager, Mohammed Al-Mutairi, CEO of Aleid Foods, and Mohamed Al-Qadi, member of the Board of Directors during the press conference. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Legal Consultancy and Law Firm, the National Investments Company, and the asset evaluator BDO Kuwait for their appreciated efforts to complete the acquisition and subscription to raise the Aleid Cap-

ital, and finally special thanks to the company team for their efforts, dedication, commitment, and quick and accurate response to maintain a rapid pace for the subscription and acquisition.

Inditex heading for record annual earnings

MADRID: Zara owner Inditex reported a surge in third quarter profit on Wednesday thanks to dynamic sales and gradual price hikes they began introducing a year ago to tackle rising costs, setting itself up for a record annual profit. During the three months which ended on October 31, the world's biggest fashion retailer posted a net profit of 1.59 billion euros, a 22 percent increase on the same period a year earlier.

That came in slightly above the 1.56 billion euros predicted by analysts as Factset. The results mean that in the first nine months of the year Inditex earned 4.1 billion euros, equivalent to the record annual profit of 4.13 billion euros it posted in 2022.

Inditex, which owns seven brands including upmarket Massimo Dutti and teen label Stradivarius, pointed to strong sales, which grew by 11.1 percent over that nine-month period to reach 25.6 billion euros. The group, which has introduced price hikes to offset rising production costs due to inflation, said that it had seen "very satisfactory" growth "both in stores and online" and across all geographical areas.

Looking ahead, the group said it saw continuing "strong growth opportunities" given that sales continued to surge between November 1 and December 11 and were 14 percent higher compared with the same period last year. "Despite the expected slowdown in the coming quarters, good cost control together with the ability to raise prices are sustaining margins at record highs," a Bankinter analysts' note said.

"It's potential for organic growth is high." Inditex shares, which have surged almost 20 percent in value since the end of October, were trading 1.12 percent higher on Spain's Ibex 35 at 1000 GMT. — AFP

Argentina devalues peso by over 50% in shock measures

BUENOS AIRES: Argentina devalued its currency by more than 50 percent Tuesday in a set of "shock" measures aimed at reviving a crumbling economy and tackling triple-digit inflation. The government of President Javier Milei, a libertarian who swept from obscurity to the top office vowing to chainsaw spending, also announced cuts to generous state subsidies and a halt to all new public construction projects. In a pre-recorded video message, Economy Minister Luis Caputo took pains to explain to Argentines the causes of their decades of recurrent economic crises, debt, inflation and fiscal deficits.

Annual inflation is currently at 140 percent and poverty levels at 40 percent in Latin America's third-biggest economy. The government coffers are also empty, and Milei has repeatedly said: "There is no money."

Caputo said the country had an "addiction" to spending to more than it earns, and had posted a fiscal deficit for 113 of the past 123 years. "If we continue as we are, we are inevitably heading towards hyperinflation," said Caputo, adding that for the first time the government would tackle the problem "at its roots." This is "precisely so that we do not have to suffer these consequences anymore, so that we do not have to suffer more inflation, so that we do not have to suffer more poverty," said Caputo.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) -- to which Argentina owes \$44 billion—welcomed the measures. "These bold initial actions aim to significantly improve public finances in a manner that protects the most vulnerable in society and strengthen the foreign exchange regime," the IMF said in a statement.

Caputo announced the exchange rate would slide to 800 pesos to the dollar, from about 391 in recent days, a devaluation of a little over 50 percent. The Argentine government has for years strictly controlled the exchange rate of the peso to the dollar, which analysts have derided as an expensive fiction. There was no immediate mention of lifting the controls which have birthed a multitude of dollar exchanges and a thriving black-market where the dollar has



BUENOS AIRES: A woman walks past an image of one hundred US dollar notes in Buenos Aires on December 12, 2023. — AFP

sold for up to three times the official rate at times. "The devaluation was much, much more than I think most people had expected," said Nicolas Saldias, a senior analyst with the Economist Intelligence Unit, adding this would have "significant impacts on inflation." Milei and his government have doubled down on the message that inflation, and the general economic situation, will worsen significantly before they get better.

"We are going to be in poverty, and the situation is going to be much harder," said teacher Gabriel Alvarez, 57, reacting to the announcements. Caputo also announced a reduction in the state's generous subsidies of fuel and transport—with bus tickets costing only a few cents—without saying by how much. He said politicians had long supported the subsidies to "deceive people into believing that they are putting money in their pockets. But as all Argentines will have already realized, these subsidies are not free, but are paid with inflation."

Other spending cuts he announced include the

suspension of all state advertising for a year—which he said had cost 34 billion pesos in 2023. In addition "The state will not tender any more new public works, and will cancel approved tenders whose development has not yet begun.

"The reality is that there is no money to pay for more public works that, as all Argentines know, often end up in the pockets of politicians or businessmen on duty." He said infrastructure projects would be carried out by the private sector in future. Another measure would be canceling the renewal of public jobs contracts that were less than a year old. Milei has already slashed nine government ministries, which Caputo said would cut 34 percent of all political jobs.

However, in line with his promise to maintain welfare to the poorest, his government increased a child allowance and food card by 50 percent. Saldias said this was "a really clear signal of how severe the inflationary crisis is going to be." Argentines remain haunted by hyperinflation of up to 3,000 percent in 1989/1990 and a dramatic economic implosion in 2001. — AFP

Huawei unveils its first open-ear earbuds and largest tablet

KUWAIT: Huawei unveiled its latest tablets, laptops, and earbuds at the Huawei Innovative Product Launch event themed "Creation of Beauty" in Dubai on Wednesday. Among the new devices launched at the event were the Huawei FreeClip—a pair of fashionable earbuds with an open ear design, the Huawei MatePad Pro 13.2"—Huawei's largest tablet to date, a refreshed lineup of the MateBook D 16 laptops, and the PaperMatte Edition of the popular MatePad Air. This latest product launch follows in the footsteps of the "Fashion Forward" event in October, which saw the unveiling of a new lineup of wearable products.

"Technology can be a canvas for creativity. With the Huawei FreeClip, we are bringing fashion to wearable audio tech, turning them into a statement of style. It is the result of Huawei's continuous exploration and investment in creating groundbreaking innovations. We are also introducing the new Huawei MatePad Pro 13.2", a tablet that will help people unleash their creativity," said Pablo Ning, President of Huawei Consumer Cloud Service Global Ecosystem Development & Sales Department.

Huawei FreeClip

The FreeClip is Huawei's first open-ear earbuds that combine wireless audio and chic design in one versatile device that resembles jewellery. Users can enjoy the comfort of open-ear listening and express their personal style at the same time. Thanks to the



innovative C-bridge Design, they fit snugly along the curvature of the ear. The C-bridge Design is the centerpiece of the FreeClip that serves as the earbuds' clip and the connector between the acoustic and battery units. The FreeClip design is based on data from research done on 10,000+ human ears to refine the micron-level ergonomic design that has undergone 25,000+ reliability tests. This ensures that the earbuds stay on the ears even during the most intense physical activities.

The FreeClip's open-ear listening technology delivers clear and immersive sound without blocking the ambient noise. To minimise sound leakage and ensure privacy, the earbuds use a reverse sound wave system that intelligently adjusts the volume and cancels the sound waves that leak out of the earbuds.

The earbuds come in a shell-shaped charging case that has a pearlescent sheen and a smooth stone-like texture. The case offers a comfortable grip and a unique aesthetic that blends simplicity



and elegance. With the charging case, the FreeClip boasts a total music playback time of 36 hours. If the battery runs low, users can quickly charge the earbuds for 10 minutes and enjoy 3 hours of listening.

The price and availability of Huawei FreeClip will be announced from Huawei's online platforms as well as certified retailers.

Huawei MatePad Pro 13.2"

The MatePad Pro 13.2" brings some groundbreaking innovations to Huawei's tablet lineup. It features a vast flexible OLED screen and has an astonishing 94 percent screen-to-body ratio, making it the tablet with the highest screen-to-body ratio currently available. And the screen boasts a high refresh rate of up to 144Hz. With its incredibly lightweight and slim design, the tablet sets a new standard for tablets in terms of portability. It weighs only 580g and measures just 5.5mm in thickness, making it one of the thinnest tablets available on the market. The M-Pencil (3rd generation)

that comes with the tablet uses the breakthrough NearLink technology developed by Huawei. This technology helps make the M-Pencil (3rd generation) the first stylus in the industry with ultra-precise 10,000-level pressure sensitivity. This tablet is also a great tool for productivity-focused users as it supports the revolutionary Smart Magnetic Keyboard. This keyboard adapts to the user's and can be switched between three modes: Laptop Form, Split Form, and Studio Form.

The price and availability of Huawei MatePad Pro 13.2" will be announced from Huawei's online platforms as well as certified retailers.

Huawei MateBook D 16

The new MateBook D 16 brings an immersive large-screen experience with its 16-inch Eye Comfort FullView Display. Thanks to thin bezels all the way around it, it offers an expansive view with a high screen-to-body ratio of up to 90 percent, giving creators a larger canvas to work off and multitasking office workers a large workspace.

The MateBook D 16 packs a breakthrough in performance with the 13th Gen Intel Core i9 High Performance Processor. This gives users the ability to easily handle heavy multitasking such as programming, illustrating, and video editing. Designed for maximum comfort and optimized experience, the MateBook D 16 has a sleek and elegant construction with a futuristic Space Grey and Mystic Silver. It weighs just 1.68kg with a chassis as thin as 17mm. The laptop uses the Huawei Metaline that enables ultra-long-distance connections of up to 270 meters. The price and availability of Huawei MateBook D 16 will be announced from Huawei's online platforms as well as certified retailers.

Lifestyle



TikToker Vi Thi Anh holds a bag of noodles as she films a video at her workshop in Bac Giang province. - AFP photos



TikToker and farmer Luong Quang Dai uses mobile phone to shoot a video of his wife cooking for a TikTok video at his house in Bac Kan province.



A mobile phone is used to shoot a TikTok video of Anh sorting out noodles at her workshop in Bac Giang province.

Fed up with poor pay, Vietnam workers turn to TikTok

Vi Thi Anh spent half a decade doing monotonous low-paid work in industrial hubs near Vietnam's capital Hanoi, assembling mobile phones for global electronics companies including Samsung. Then she discovered she could earn vastly more hawking food products to thousands of followers as one of the country's growing cadre of TikTok livestreamers. Communist Vietnam's supply of cheap labor has attracted some of the world's top companies, but climbing salary expectations have enticed many young people to leap into the exploding business of social commerce — whether to boost their incomes or to extricate themselves from dead-end jobs.

Anh, 23, said she earned just \$400 per month in her "boring" factory job, barely enough to cover her rent and food, before she was laid off in 2021 thanks to falling orders from the West. She found another factory job, but soon "turned to full-time livestreaming so I could earn more for my family," Anh told AFP, the thick rice noodles she sells online laid out behind her, drying in the sun. On her TikTok channel, which has over 350,000 followers and 15 million likes, orders fly in for the \$4 noodle packs, made by her uncle.

"This pack of noodles is so colorful, but completely safe and delicious," Anh tells her audience, pointing to red, yellow and purple bundles. Between June and September this year, more than 118,000 people, mostly in the garment and footwear sector, lost their jobs in Vietnam, according to official figures. At her home in northern Bac Giang province, Anh said that like she did, workers fear "that if they are laid off, they have no way of earning a living". Livestreaming, she said, offers a way to ease that worry.

Booming e-commerce

Nearly 80 percent of Vietnam's 100 million people have access to the internet, and according to a recent survey by the data agency Statista, a similarly high percentage of Gen Z use TikTok. "Farmers, workers and students can easily start their own channels," said Nguyen Doan Ky, co-founder of the DC 3 Do agency, which offers social media and livestreaming services. "Online selling used to be only for businesses or shop owners. Now it is an opportunity for everyone." As in neighboring China, where farmers are making big money on TikTok, e-commerce is booming in Vietnam, with sales growth averaging 30 percent year

over year for the last decade. Vietnam is one of the world's top 10 growth markets and turnover is expected to reach more than \$20 billion this year, according to the ministry of industry and trade. Coming from the country's rural and mountainous north, Luong Quang Dai never imagined he would become an influencer with 420,000 followers online. He earns 10 times as much as he did before livestreaming thanks to his popularity on TikTok and Facebook, selling dried bananas, vermicelli noodles and a tea mix made in his neighborhood.

"We can save up to 100 million dong per month (\$4,000) and at the same time help create jobs and a stable income for relatives and friends," the 33-year-old told AFP from his farmhouse in the forests of Bac Kan province. In his youth, Dai spent two years trying to find a route out of the hard, spare life of a farmer, moving to the city in a familiar story of urban migration. But failing to earn enough for even basic necessities, he returned to his home in the countryside, where two-thirds of Vietnamese still live.

In addition to farming, he began to post videos on social media of him and his wife feeding chickens and harvesting bamboo in the depths of the forest.

The simplicity of the posts soon earned him an enormous following, and he began to sell his produce in huge quantities. "Social media has changed my life completely," Dai told AFP.

'Digital farmer'

Tran Thanh Nam, an education psychology expert, cautioned that although social commerce has become popular, TikTokers needed to keep updating their skill sets. "Businesses that take off in a short space of time... can also turn into failures quickly," he said. But he understood the appeal, he added. "Becoming a worker in a factory or industrial zone is a way to use up all one's youth and health... and they lose a lot of other opportunities."

According to state media, on TikTok alone there were 30 training programs on digital transformation that attracted thousands of learners in 2022. Among other blue-collar workers to have found an audience and a decent income is Loc Fuho — a former builder with 2.5 million followers who livestreams lessons in masonry and plastering. Dai is still happy to be a farmer, "but a digital one", who has influence and a good income. "I expect nothing more," Dai said. — AFP



Dai and his wife pose in front of a mobile phone for a TikTok video at his house.



Dai and his wife check orders of the goods they sell on Dai's TikTok channel.



Dai uses a mobile phone to shoot a video of his wife preparing food for a TikTok video.



Anh is filmed by her husband to shoot a TikTok video drying noodles at her workshop.

Nepali TikTok influencers reel after sudden ban

Nepali influencer Anjana Aryal went from homemaker to entrepreneur by sharing recipes on TikTok, but her lucrative business collapsed last month when the Himalayan republic banned the Chinese-owned short video app. Filming with her mobile phone in one hand and cooking with the other, Aryal rapidly became a social media star in Nepal last year, garnering millions of views from a following of nearly 600,000 people.



In this photo taken on Dec 4, 2023, Nepali influencer Anjana Aryal speaks during an interview with AFP at her residence in Lalitpur. — AFP photos

That all came to a sudden halt when Nepal banned TikTok to protect "social harmony", following similar restrictions imposed in other countries on concerns over data security, obscene content and its owner's alleged ties to the Chinese government. "My life changed a lot because of TikTok, a lot," Aryal, 39, told AFP from her home in Kathmandu. "So many recognize me because of TikTok wherever I go."

She earned nearly \$3,000 from endorsement deals just in October, more than double Nepal's average yearly income. Encouraged by her audience,

Aryal also started a business selling her own brand of pickles, which saw her inbox flooded with orders. But since the ban, Aryal and other prominent Nepali content creators have seen their revenue streams dry up, jeopardizing their livelihoods. "People were earning, running businesses or just being enter-

tained on TikTok. Everyone has been affected now and they don't know what to do," she said.

Owned by Beijing-based ByteDance, TikTok is one of the most popular social media platforms on the planet with more than one billion users. Its explosive growth has given its content creators and influencers an immense audience, and its editing features and AI-powered algorithm have proved particularly attractive.

But the algorithm is opaque and often accused of putting users into content silos, and the platform has also been blamed for spreading disinformation. It has faced intense scrutiny in the United States and other nations over user data security and the company's alleged ties to Beijing. Multiple countries have sought to tighten controls on TikTok, and the platform has been banned in neighboring India.

'Start from zero'

Growing criticism of the app has worried influencers around the world.

Some, such as those in Pakistan, have lost income because of periodic government restrictions on TikTok. Others in the United States have voiced fears to local media about losing thousands of dollars in income if bans are enforced. Nepal's government justified its ban on the platform by accusing it of damaging the Himalayan republic's social fabric.

It came days before a huge rally called by a prominent businessman who was using TikTok to organize a campaign demanding the reinstatement of Nepal's monarchy. Dozens of content creators staged a rally in Kathmandu demanding the ban be lifted last month. Advocate Dinesh Tripathi, who is challenging the decision in court, said the ban was an attack on people's freedom of speech because the government was fearful of "dissenting voices". "The state's first and foremost duty is to facilitate the people to exercise their rights and freedom, not prohibit it," he said.

Manish Adhikari, who uses TikTok to discuss cars and Nepali start-ups,

said he had several endorsement deals scuttled by the ban. "Brands started to call me... and I wondered if I was getting out of business, is my work going to stop?" Adhikari said. Adhikari has shifted to Instagram but the views and followings are a fraction of his earlier audience. "I lost all my audience because I was not as active on any other platform," he said. "Now I have to start from zero."

There are around 2.2 million TikTok users among Nepal's 30 million people, according to the Internet Service Providers Association. But Monayac Karki, founder of Nepali influencer marketing agency Uptrendly, said TikTok's popularity had been rising exponentially. He added that the ban had torpedoed a market with an estimated worth in excess of \$5 million each year for advertisers and content creators, and which was set to grow rapidly. "I really hope this ban is a temporary one and it will be lifted soon," he said. — AFP



Aryal packs jars of pickles at her residence.



Aryal shoots a video of jars of pickles.

Lifestyle



This handout picture shows marks on ancient paving stones in the Regio IX area of the site where a prison bakery has been discovered.



This handout picture shows marks on ancient paving stones and remains of a mill in the Regio IX area of the site where a prison bakery has been discovered.



This handout picture shows the Regio IX area of the site where a prison bakery has been discovered. — AFP photos

ARCHAEOLOGISTS DISCOVER 'PRISON BAKERY' IN ANCIENT POMPEII

Archaeologists excavating the ancient Roman city of Pompeii have uncovered a "prison bakery" where slaves and blindfolded donkeys were kept locked up underground to grind grain for bread, officials said this week. Underneath a house in the ruins they found "a cramped room with no view of the outside world and with small windows high in the wall, with iron bars, to let the light in", the Archaeological Park of Pompeii announced on Friday.

Archaeologists deduced they had found a "prison bakery", the UNESCO World Heritage Site near Naples, southern Italy, said on its website. They also discovered "indentations" in the floor "to coordinate the movement of the animals, forced to walk around for hours, blindfolded".

The house, on the 44-hectare site that is currently under excavation, was divided into a residential area "decorated with exquisite Fourth Style frescoes" and a "productive quarter", the bakery. Three skeletons were discovered in



This handout picture shows the remains of a mill in the Regio IX area of the site where a prison bakery has been discovered.

one room of the bakery, showing that the house was inhabited. The bakery, where slaves and animals were forced to perform the backbreaking task of turning the millstones, had no doors or communication with the outside world. 'Shocking' side of ancient world

"It is, in other words, a space in which we have to imagine the presence of people of servile status whose freedom of movement the owner felt the need to restrict," wrote Pompeii director Gabriel Zuchtreigel in a scholarly article. "It is the most shocking side of ancient slavery, the one devoid of both trusting relationships and promises of manumission, where we were reduced to brute violence, an impression that is entirely confirmed by the securing of the few windows with iron bars."

The public can view more evidence of this harsh daily life in an exhibition called "The Other Pompeii: Ordinary Lives in the Shadow of Vesuvius" which opens at the Palestra Grande in Pompeii on December 15. "(The exhibition is) dedicated to that myriad of individuals often forgotten by the historical sources, such as the slaves, who constituted the majority of the population and whose labor contributed in an important way not only to the economy, but also to the culture and social fabric of Roman civilization," the



This handout picture shows the Regio IX area of the site where a prison bakery has been discovered.

Pompeii authorities said.

Pompeii was devastated when nearby Mount Vesuvius erupted almost 2,000 years ago in 79 AD. The ash and rock helped preserve many buildings almost in their original state, as well as forming eerie shapes around

the curled-up corpses of victims of the disaster, thought to number around 3,000. Pompeii is the second most visited tourist destination in Italy after the Colosseum in Rome. — AFP

Netflix releases vast viewing data for first time

Netflix for the first time published detailed viewing figures about thousands of its shows and movies Tuesday, offering an unprecedented glimpse into the world-leading streaming platform's top hits and highest-profile flops. The report, which Netflix says will be repeated every six months, is a major departure for a company that has historically guarded its data closely, but came under renewed pressure to be more transparent during strikes this year by Hollywood writers' and actors' unions.



The Netflix logo is seen at the Netflix Tudum Theater in Los Angeles, California. — AFP

"This is a big step forward for Netflix and our industry," the company said in a press release. "We believe the viewing information in this report... will give creators and our industry deeper insights into our audiences, and what resonates with them." Since 2021, Netflix has released weekly Top 10 lists, and a regularly updated "most popular" leaderboard based on views within a title's first 91 days on the platform.

But the biannual new publication, entitled "What We Watched: A Netflix Engagement Report," goes further. A new spreadsheet contains data for all shows that were watched by Netflix users for more than 50,000 hours — that is 18,000 titles in total, representing 99 percent of all viewing on Netflix. The data only covers the period of January to June 2023, meaning that films and series released during that time fared better.

Topping the chart was season one of "The Night Agent," a US action-thriller that debuted in March, drawing more than 812 million hours watched globally. Other high-profile Netflix titles performing well were "Wednesday," "You" and "Bridgerton" spin-off series "Queen Charlotte." Non-English language shows were well-represented, generating 30 percent of all viewing — most notably Korean- and Spanish-language titles.

The lack of transparency among streaming platforms including Netflix, Apple and Prime Video has long been a bugbear of Hollywood agents, journalists and the stars themselves. But it came into stark focus during this year's Hollywood strikes.

Striking actors and writers, previously accustomed to receiving generous "residuals" whenever their shows drew large audiences on television networks, this summer demanded new mechanisms to similarly reward them for hit shows on streaming.

Deals struck with those unions to end the strikes did contain bonuses for successful shows, but did not require streamers to publicly release any data. Speaking to reporters Tuesday, Netflix co-CEO Ted Sarandos denied that the new initiative was triggered by talks with those guilds. — AFP

Miss Nicaragua pageant director quits amid treason charges

The Miss Universe Organization said Tuesday that the director of the Miss Nicaragua pageant has resigned, after her home country charged her with treason and conspiracy and jailed members of her family. Authorities in Nicaragua barred the director, Karen Celeberti, from returning to her homeland after the triumph of Nicaraguan Sheynnis Palacios in the global beauty contest.

Palacios was the first woman from Central America to win the title, and her victory sparked the largest celebrations in Nicaragua since street protests in 2018 jolted the government. But the Nicaraguan government was not pleased when, after Palacios' win, images posted on social media showed her at those anti-government protests.

More than 300 people were killed in the demonstrations, according to UN experts, and the government of President Daniel Ortega, in power since 2007, has since outlawed the right to protest. "This week, we accepted the resignation of Karen Celeberti, national director of Miss Universe Nicaragua. We thank her for her exemplary work with our organization for the past 23 years," the Miss Universe Organization said in a statement on its Facebook page.

Celeberti announced her retirement Monday night from Mexico, less than a month after the winner of her national pageant won the global crown



in El Salvador on November 18. Afterward, Celeberti was denied entry to Nicaragua, and police accused her of treason, conspiracy against the government and money laundering.

Her husband Martin Arguello and her son Bernardo Arguello Celeberti were also detained in Managua. Days after the Miss Universe coronation, Vice President Rosario Murillo, who is Ortega's wife, claimed that the opposition manipulated Palacios' triumph.

"We see the rude exploitation, and the crude and evil terrorist communication, that pretends to turn a nice and deserved moment of pride and celebration, into destructive coup-mongering,"

Murillo told official media. On November 25, the Miss Universe Organization asked the Nicaraguan government to "guarantee" the security of those affiliated with the local pageant.

In its remarks Tuesday, the organization said Celeberti "has asked fans to highlight Nicaragua's first international win as an achievement free of politics and regional distinctions, to be celebrated by all the country and the world." "We agree: Sheynnis Palacios is a remarkable woman, and we're glad to call her our Miss Universe 2023," it added. — AFP

Lifestyle



Cambodia's women tuk-tuk drivers fighting prejudice

Every day Roeung Sorphy deftly weaves through the streets of Siem Reap, zigzagging past cars, motorbikes and the occasional stray dog as she shepherds tourists to the famed Angkor Wat temple complex. But on the road to becoming one of Cambodia's tiny number of female tuk-tuk drivers, the 37-year-old who goes by the nickname Sopy has to dodge not only other road users, but also a barrage of taunts, misogyny and prejudice. Cambodia has taken legal and practical steps towards gender equality, but it remains a conservative, patriarchal society. Women are expected to run the home and family rather than seek paid work.

When Sopy first took to the streets, it was tough. "At first, they (male drivers) looked down on me... They said we women should stay at home and clean dishes," she told AFP, describing how she was verbally harassed and assaulted when competing for fares. "But we keep persevering," she said after she finished cleaning her tuk-tuk, passionately decorating it with blooming white lotus flowers.

She got her start after borrowing \$3,000 to buy her tuk-tuk, and has now been driving through the shaded roads

of Angkor Park for more than three years. "We cannot just rely on husbands," she said, urging more women to join the profession. "We will be strong like men," said Sopy, whose husband is also a tuk-tuk driver. She charges roughly \$15 per passenger for a tour around Angkor, a sprawling UNESCO World Heritage site. After years, her male colleagues have finally accepted her. "We have won their hearts, they've stopped discriminating against us. They think we are the same." "I love the job. I think all women can do it."

Still difficult

A 2020 US Agency for International Development report said women were being held back by low wages, poor working conditions, a lack of childcare and limited access to finance and training. To help women in the male-dominated field, well-known driver Kim Sokleang — better known as Tuk-Tuk Lady — last year founded the Siem Reap Remorque Driver Association.

Her group includes 20 female drivers, six of whom, like her, are single mothers. "Discrimination against Cambodian women still exists," Kim told AFP while waiting for passengers



Female tuk-tuk driver Kim Sokleang cleaning her tuk-tuk at her house in Siem Reap province.

at the Bayon temple. After getting a divorce in 2013, Kim began driving a rickshaw in the capital Phnom Penh to feed her two sons.

"On the first day, I did not have any passengers," Kim said, recalling how one woman refused to ride with her. Finding Phnom Penh tough, the 39-year-old moved to Siem Reap in 2015 to drive

tourists. Initially it was rough, Kim said, describing how she would sob in her tuk-tuk when she failed to get a fare.

"They think women are too weak to hold the steering wheel, and women cannot work like others," said Kim. But her perseverance paid off: Tuk-Tuk Lady is now lauded by local and foreign tourists visiting Cambodia's top tourism

destination. Norwegian visitor Stine Solheim and a friend said they felt "safe" with Kim driving them, and were impressed with her efforts to stand up for women. "They are really passionate about what they do and they really enjoy it and feel proud," she told AFP.

Challenging stereotypes

Two-wheeled carriages pulled by a motorbike, tuk-tuks are one of Cambodia's most famous means of transport. No official statistics exist, but NGO Independent Democracy of Informal Economy Association, estimates there are tens of thousands of tuk-tuk drivers working across Cambodia. "At first, as a woman, it was difficult to accept myself being a tuk-tuk driver. I never thought I could do it," said Sieng Meng, 36. Part of that is down to the lack of government support, said Kim.

"If Cambodian leaders come and ride Tuk Tuks," it would help fight prejudices, she said. Kim would like to see more women take up the career, and she plans to open a tuk-tuk restaurant when her team members retire. "I've been really successful being a tuk-tuk driver," she said. — AFP



Female tuk-tuk driver Kim Sokleang guiding her passengers to her tuk-tuk near the Angkor Thom south gate at the Angkor complex.



Female tuk-tuk drivers driving near the Bayon temple at the Angkor complex in Siem Reap province.



Female tuk-tuk drivers sitting on their tuk-tuk as they wait for passengers near the terrace of the elephants at the Angkor complex in Siem Reap province. — AFP photos

'Fall of the ogre': Depardieu sparks #MeToo moment in French cinema

For more than a year after rape allegations against French actor Gerard Depardieu, the film industry shrugged its shoulders and the cinematic legend with more than 200 titles to his name continued working. But the tide appears to be slowly turning. Mounting accusations of sexual harassment, as well as newly released footage of him making obscene comments, are finally forcing a debate about sexism and sexual violence in French cinema. In October the 74-year-old actor, known outside France for 1990 comedy "Green Card" and Netflix series "Marseille", had to put his career on hold.



In this file photo French actor Gerard Depardieu waves as he arrives at the Town Hall in Brussels for a ceremony as part of the 'Brussels International Film Festival' (Briff). — AFP

Six years after the start of the #MeToo movement in Hollywood that brought down producer Harvey Weinstein, the campaign has picked up momentum in France. "There will be an after-Depardieu, that much is clear," activist Laura Pertuy said. "At all levels, in all generations, people are starting to speak up, to say enough is enough, the system can't continue like this," said the secretary-general of Collectif 50/50, an association promoting gender equality in film. Depardieu had long made headlines for antics such as visiting Russia and Belarus, obtaining a Russian passport to protest a planned tax hike in France, or even delaying a 2011 flight after peeing into a bottle that overflowed. But accusations of sexual harassment or assault, all of which the actor has denied, have also crept into the news.

'Allowed to be a monster'

French actress Charlotte Arnould in late 2021 publicly accused the actor, a family friend, of raping her twice in 2018 when she was 22 and anorexic. She said

she weighed 37 kilos at the time. He was placed under formal investigation in December 2020 but not jailed. In April, French investigative website Mediapart published a report in which 13 other women accused him of molesting them between 2004 and 2022.

One of them, actress Helene Daras, in September filed a sexual assault complaint against Depardieu over an incident during a film shoot in 2007. And a documentary titled "The Fall of the Ogre" aired on Thursday on France 2 showed the actor on a 2018 trip to North Korea repeatedly making explicit sexual comments in the presence of a female interpreter and sexualizing a small girl riding a horse. The latest images have triggered some self-reflection.

"We are all a little guilty," Marc Missonnier, the head of the syndicate of French cinema producers, told France 2. "There was a certain tolerance, which was a mistake." Actress Anouk Grinberg, who has known Depardieu for decades, spoke out for the first time in October.

"Anyone who has ever worked with him knows he assaults women," the 60-year-old told Elle magazine, but people did not denounce him for fear it would damage their careers. "Everybody allowed him to be a monster," she told France Inter radio on Monday. She called for an end to "the other monstrosity... people in cinema who are indifferent to the harm done to women, to the humiliation they are subjected to."

Progress?

Depardieu in October denied any wrongdoing. "Never ever have I abused a woman," he wrote in Le Figaro newspaper. After the Mediapart article in April, the distributor and producer of "Umami", a film starring Depardieu as a chef, dropped him from promotional events. The movie tanked at the box office. Feminist protests disrupted several of his concerts of songs by late singer Barbara.

"We should not celebrate... Depardieu," a spokesman for France Television, the organization of public broadcasters, told France 2. But the group told AFP on Monday that "films with... Depardieu will continue to be bought and broadcast" as they included "masterpieces". One, Xavier Giannoli's award-winning "Lost Illusions" (2021), is to be shown on France 2 on Sunday. Depardieu is not the only figure of French cinema to have been accused of misconduct, but he is the most prominent. — AFP

'Promising' young French actor investigated over murder

An award-winning French actor is being investigated over the murder of a teenager at a drug dealing point in the southern city of Marseille, a judicial source said on Tuesday. Dylan Robert, a 23-year-old who wowed the Cannes film festival in 2018 and won the Most Promising Actor prize at France's equivalent to the Oscars the following year, has denied the accusations, which his lawyers said were based on "rumors".



Dylan Robert

The judicial source said Robert was facing charges of murder and attempted murder as part of an organized gang. Le Monde newspaper reported that he had been accused of driving the scooter used by someone who shot dead a 14-year-old "with no criminal record" using an assault rifle in 2021, during a fight between rival drug gangs in the north of Marseille. Robert was awarded for his role in "Sheherazade", a love story between teenagers in the port city.

In the first feature film by director Jean-Bernard Marlin, the non-professional actor plays a 16-year-old freshly out of juvenile detention whose path crosses with a former classmate who has become a sex worker. In 2020, Robert went on to act alongside several French A-list actors in another film, "DNA".

But he was detained the same year for his alleged role in the holdup of a restaurant two years earlier, and sentenced to thirty months in jail in 2022 for theft with violence. At the time, he had been under judicial supervision for around a year after spending 13 months in provisional detention over several violent robbery cases. — AFP

Patients regain much weight after stopping new obesity drug

A new generation of obesity drugs often delivers dramatic weight loss, but many patients wonder what happens when they stop treatment. One study published Monday in the Journal of the American Medical Association provides an answer: much of the weight comes back, signaling patients may be locked into long term dependence on the drugs. The research was based on weekly injections of tirzepatide, the compound in Eli Lilly's new weight loss drug Zepbound that was approved by the United States last month.

After 36 weeks, 670 adults achieved a notable mean weight loss of 20.9 percent. The group was then split into two, with half continuing on Zepbound, and the other half given a placebo. At 88 weeks, those on the placebo regained almost half of the weight they had lost, ending up 9.9 percent lower than their baseline.

Those on Zepbound continued to lose weight, ending 25.3 percent lower than where they had started. The trial patients were mostly women and had a mean age of 48, with a mean weight at the outset was 107.3 kilograms (236.6 pounds). All participants were encouraged to consume 500 calories less each day than they burnt and take at least 150 minutes of exercise per week. Common side effects were gastrointestinal issues including nausea, diarrhea, constipation and vomiting, said the study.

Growing evidence

Study authors, led by Louis Aronne at Weill Cornell Medicine, New York, said the results "emphasize the need to continue pharmacotherapy to prevent weight regain and ensure the maintenance of weight reduction." They added the latest research adds to four previous trials that showed "medications, including potent anti-obesity medications such as semaglutide, have demonstrated that weight is substantially regained" after stopping treatment.

Semaglutide is the active ingre-



This undated image released by Eli Lilly shows their weight loss drug Zepbound. — AFP

dient in Novo Nordisk's Ozempic and Wegovy, which, like Zepbound, are examples of so-called "GLP-1 agonists" that work by mimicking the function of a hormone that secretes insulin, slows down the emptying of the stomach, and suppresses appetite. Zepbound also contains another molecule that acts like the gut hormone GIP.

In response to the study, Lilly's Jeff Emmick said in a statement that "patients, providers and the public do not always understand obesity is a chronic disease that often requires ongoing treatment, which can mean that treatment is stopped once weight goals are met." GLP-1 agonists have been found to cut the risk of cardiovascular disease associated with obesity — but they also heighten the risk of gastrointestinal problems, studies show.

Though the rates of serious issues such as stomach paralysis are low, some experts fear that using the drugs for years or decades could change the benefit-to-risk calculus. Cost can also be a disincentive. Zepbound costs \$1,059.87 per month, and insurance companies often do not cover weight loss medications. Medicare, state subsidized insurance for the elderly, is barred from covering it. — AFP

Sports

Cricketer Khawaja vows to fight 'Gaza message' ban

A 'humanitarian appeal and not a political message'

News in Brief

La Liga's president re-elected

MADRID: The outspoken president of La Liga, Javier Tebas, has been re-elected to his position as head of Spanish football's two top divisions, the league said on Tuesday. Tebas, 61, had resigned in November in order to seek a fourth term and was the only candidate. He assumed the presidency of La Liga for the first time in April 2013 and was re-elected in 2016 and 2019. "The Electoral Commission of the National Professional Football League (La Liga)... has agreed to the definitive proclamation of Mr. Javier Tebas Medrano as President of the National Professional Football League, for a period of four years," La Liga said in a statement. Tebas, the former club president of Huesca, is credited with reforming Spanish football's TV rights bargaining by centralizing a system which previously relied on clubs negotiating individually. He has butted heads with the presidents of Real Madrid and Barcelona over their support for a proposed European Super League. — AFP

Al Ittihad win in Club WCup

JEDDAH: Karim Benzema's Al Ittihad secured progress from the first round of the Club World Cup with a convincing 3-0 win against Auckland City on Tuesday. Backed by a full house at home in Jeddah, Saudi Pro League champions Al Ittihad made short work of New Zealand's Auckland City, winners of the OFC Champions League. Brazilian Romarinho, N'Golo Kante and Benzema scored in the first half to book their team's place in the second round, where they will face Al Ahly of Egypt on Friday. The Saudi side made their dominance pay in 29 minutes when a clearance came invitingly onto Romarinho, whose firm strike glanced off an Auckland defender leaving the 'keeper stranded. Al Ittihad doubled their lead five minutes later when Kante thumped a right-footed volley into the back of the net following a weak clearance from a corner. The tie was effectively over with 40 minutes on the clock when five-time tournament winner Benzema tapped home after slick interplay down the right by Kante and Muhannad Al Shanqeeti. — AFP

Smith appointed Charlotte coach

MIAMI: Former Aston Villa manager Dean Smith has been appointed the new head coach of Major League Soccer club Charlotte FC, the team said on Tuesday. The 52-year-old Englishman, who also managed Norwich and most recently had a short spell with Leicester, replaces Italian Christian Lanzano who was fired in November after the team lost in the wildcard round of the MLS playoffs. "I'm honored to be appointed as the next head coach of Charlotte FC and cannot wait to start preparations for the 2024 season," Smith said in a club release. "Throughout the interview process, it was clear that this is an ambitious club with the right ingredients for success and I'm delighted to begin a new chapter in Charlotte. This is a unique opportunity to be part of a project with so much potential to take to new heights in Major League Soccer," he added. — AFP

Greek league president resigns

ATHENS: Vangelis Marinakis said Tuesday he was stepping down as president of the Greek Super League after the government announced matches will be played without spectators until February 12 following a series of violent incidents. "I have neither the time nor the desire to continue to be involved in the management of the league while the words of certain board members are not consistent with their actions," Marinakis, the owner of Olympiakos, wrote in a letter to the Greek league's board of directors. Shipping magnate Marinakis also owns English Premier League club Nottingham Forest. The Greek government on Monday said games will be played behind closed doors for the next two months as authorities step up security measures at stadiums to clamp down on violence. "I condemn unequivocally all forms of violence, both in society and in football," the 56-year-old Marinakis wrote in his resignation letter, assuring he wanted to rid Greek football "of the criminal elements that are killing it." — AFP

Lukaku banned for one match

MILAN: Romelu Lukaku has been given a one-match ban after being sent off late in Roma's dramatic draw with Fiorentina for a tackle on Christian Kouame, Serie A said on Tuesday. Lukaku was shown a straight red card in the 87th minute of Sunday's 1-1 draw in Rome after clattering into Kouame, leaving Roma with nine men after Nicola Zalewski was sent off midway through the second half. Ivory Coast forward Kouame was not seriously injured by the tackle and Lukaku was spared a potential three-match ban for violent conduct. That means that Lukaku will only miss Sunday's trip to high-flying Bologna, who are level on 25 points with fourth-placed Roma and have won their last four home matches. The Belgium striker's absence leaves Roma short-handed in attack as Paulo Dybala picked up the latest in a string of muscular injuries shortly after setting up Lukaku's fifth-minute opener. — AFP

PERTH: Australian cricketer Usman Khawaja vowed Wednesday to fight a ban on him wearing shoes during a match highlighting the plight of people in Gaza, saying it was a "humanitarian appeal" and not a political message. During training this week the 36-year-old opening batsman had hand-written slogans "Freedom is a human right" and "All lives are equal" on his footwear. Khawaja, who is Muslim, wanted to wear the shoes for the opening Test starting on Thursday in Perth against Pakistan, his birth country.

But governing body the International Cricket Council bans any messages during matches that relate to politics, religion or race. "Is freedom not for everyone? Are all lives not equal?" Khawaja subsequently said in an emotional video message on social media. "To me personally it doesn't matter what race, religion or culture you are, I'm just speaking up for those who don't have a voice. "The ICC have told me that I can't wear my shoes on field because they believe it's a political statement under their guidelines. "I don't believe it is so — it's a humanitarian appeal," he added. "I will respect their view and decision but I will fight it and seek to gain approval."

Cricket Australia said that it supported the players' right to express their opinions. "But the ICC has rules in place which prohibit the display of personal messages, which we expect the players to uphold," it said in a statement. Four days ago, Khawaja shared a video on Instagram from the children's charity UNICEF from Gaza. In the post he commented: "Do people not care about innocent humans being killed? Or is it the color of their skin that makes them less important? Or the religion they practise?"

In his message on Wednesday Khawaja noted the fierce reaction his stance had caused in some quarters. "But let's be honest about it, if me saying all lives are equal has resulted in people being offended to the point where they're calling me up and telling me off, well isn't that the bigger problem?" he said. In 2014 the ICC banned England all-rounder Moeen Ali from wearing wristbands saying "Save Gaza" and "Free Palestine" during a home Test. Australian Sports Minister Anika Wells said she believed Khawaja's shoes did not break the rules. "I think he has done it in a peaceful and respectful way," the Sydney Morning Herald quoted her as saying. — AFP



PERTH: Australia's Usman Khawaja attends a training session ahead of the three-match Test cricket series against Pakistan at Perth Stadium in Perth on December 11, 2023. — AFP

Wounded Jones has plenty to prove on Japan return

TOKYO: Eddie Jones has deep ties to Japan and led the country to its greatest rugby triumph, but the pugnacious Australian has plenty to prove after returning as head coach on Wednesday. The 63-year-old is revered in Japan for masterminding their "Miracle of Brighton" win over South Africa at the 2015 World Cup, one of the sport's biggest upsets. But his reputation has taken a beating after a disastrous 10-month spell in charge of the Wallabies that saw them exit the World Cup at the pool stage for the first time.

That came after he was sacked as England's head coach. Jones is likely to get a warm welcome in Japan, where he has family ties and spent large chunks of his professional life. Jones was born in Tasmania but his mother is a Japanese-American who was interned in a US camp after the attack on Pearl Harbor. His wife Hiroko is Japanese, the pair having met when they were teachers in Sydney.

He told The Australian in a recent interview that being apart from her while she lived in Japan was causing problems. "I think at 63 I don't want to get divorced," he said. Jones first coached in Japan in the 1990s and returned to lead Tokyo Sungoliath in 2009, before taking over the national

team three years later. He maintained a presence in the country even after leaving to take the England job in 2015, with a long-term consultancy role with Sungoliath. He recently told reporters in Yokohama that Japanese rugby had "always been my passion".

Fiery relationship

A tough coach who bases a lot of his work on the application of science, Jones turned Japan into bulldog-fit competitors for the 2015 World Cup. As well as the stunning triumph over South Africa, they also beat Samoa and the United States, but failed to advance past the group stage. Their achievements sparked a wave of rugby fever in baseball-mad Japan, with Jones hailed a hero. He was even hired as an adviser by Goldman Sachs Japan in the hope that he could reproduce his Midas touch in the world of finance. Jones - who suffered a stroke in 2013 halfway through his Japan stay - left to become England's first foreign coach, taking them to the 2019 World Cup final.

After a turbulent seven years there marked by numerous changes of playing and support staff, he was dumped in late 2022, only for the Wallabies to take the bait. But his insistence on fast-tracking rookies at the expense of



SAINT-ETIENNE: Australia's flanker Tom Hooper (center) holds the ball ahead of Australia's head coach Eddie Jones (right) during the captain's run training session at Stade Geoffroy-Guichard in Saint-Etienne, southeastern France. — AFP

veterans badly backfired in high-pressure games, as did a revolving door of unproven captains. His fiery relationship with Australian journalists didn't help. He told reporters to "go give yourselves uppercuts" before jetting off to the World Cup, a remark he later said he regretted.

Older and better?

Japan's players are unlikely to find that he has mellowed. His thirst for a challenge does not appear to have run dry either, telling reporters last month that he wants to implement major changes in Japanese rugby. "You're

going to have to be courageous and you're going to have to do things differently," he said.

A tenacious hooker at his beloved Sydney club Randwick, Jones never made the Wallaby side as a player. He came into his element as a coach, but his struggles with England and Australia have led some to question whether he still has the magic touch. Jones though has never been one for self-doubt. "In terms of experience and learning, the older you get, the better the coach you are," he said recently. "I am a much better coach than I was this time last year." — AFP

Warner in spotlight, under pressure ahead of Test farewell

PERTH: David Warner will take centre stage when the three-match series against Pakistan begins on Thursday ahead of what is expected to be the Australian opener's farewell to Test cricket. The 37-year-old has indicated that he plans to quit the five-day game after the third Test at his home Sydney Cricket Ground early next year. Warner has been a mainstay of the Australian team for more than a decade but his Test form is under intense scrutiny, scoring just one century since early 2020. Former team-mate Mitchell Johnson has said that he does not deserve to dictate the terms of his exit.

Querying why Warner should be given a "hero's send-off" in light of his poor Test form, former fast bowler Johnson wrote in a newspaper column: "Can somebody please tell me why?" Johnson also brought up Warner's central role in the notorious "Sandpaper-gate" ball-tampering scandal in 2018. In naming the Australia squad for the opening Test in Perth, chief selector George Bailey said that Warner had earned his place. But there are no guarantees beyond the first Test, putting Warner under pressure to score runs if he wants to go out on his own terms with an emotional send-off in Sydney.

"Davey's playing the first Test match and we'll go from there," said coach Andrew McDonald. "Until we have to make that decision it'll continue to I suppose bubble away and the speculation will be there." Pat Cummins' side are strong favorites against Pakistan as they kick off their defense of the World Test Championship. Winning the WTC was part of a triumphant year that also saw them retain the Ashes and win the one-day World Cup last month, with Warner Australia's leading

scorer. Pakistan have won only four Tests in Australia dating back to 1956-7 and none since 1995, when they sealed a 7-1 run victory in Sydney.

They have never won a Test series in the 12 times they have toured Australia. "They've gone through some transition with their coaching staff and management and I think in the last series they played, they played a more up-tempo brand in a bid to put more pressure on the bowling," said McDonald. "So I think we will see a little more of that. But like anything, if we execute well with the ball it's going to be difficult (for them) to be able to maintain that over long periods of time." On their last, two-Test tour in 2019, Pakistan were thrashed by an innings and five runs at Brisbane and an innings and 48 runs in Adelaide. Warner made 154 and 335 not out in his two knocks.

Pakistan rookies

Aside from Warner, Pakistan will need to tame one of the world's most potent bowling attacks in Cummins, Mitchell Starc, Josh Hazlewood and Nathan Lyon. Lyon is four wickets away from joining just seven other Test bowlers to breach the 500-mark, including fellow spin kings Muttiah Muralitharan, Shane Warne and Anil Kumble. Team director Mohammad Hafeez said Pakistan were in Australia not just to compete, but to win. "We have ticked most of the boxes in our training. Everyone on the team is excited to showcase their ability and eager to win," he said.

They will attempt to do so after a disastrous World Cup and chaos off the field, with the country's cricket board overhauling the national team and support staff. Shan Masood is now at the helm after Babar Azam resigned as skipper in all three formats and there are a slew of new faces. Azam spearheads their batting with Shaheen Shah Afridi the only fast bowler to have played in Australia before. Among the rookies are uncapped quick Khuram Shahzad, dashing left-hander Saim Ayub and all-rounder Aamer Jamal. — AFP



Sri Lankan Sports Minister Harin Fernando

Sri Lanka minister revokes sacking of cricket board

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka's sports minister has revoked the sacking of the country's cricket board over allegations of corruption, in an effort to end its suspension by the International Cricket Council. Harin Fernando's decision paves the way for the ICC to end its sanctions on the board for failing to prevent "government interference" in its administration of the game.

It is the latest episode in an affair that also prompted the sacking of Fernando's predecessor, who accused Sri Lanka's president of an assassination attempt. "I signed a gazette to revoke the decision appointing an interim committee for Sri Lanka Cricket, aiming to lift our ICC suspension," Fernando posted on X, formerly known as Twitter.

Fernando said he had also asked the ICC for its "observations" on an audit report into alleged corruption by the board during the T20 World Cup last year in Australia. There was no immediate comment from the ICC. Fernando's predecessor Roshan Ranasinghe sacked the elected board in November after accusing office-bearers of gross corruption, a charge they have denied and are challenging in court.

The ICC suspended Sri Lanka as a result, saying the board had failed to prevent political interference. The controversy over corruption in the board, the richest sporting body in the otherwise bankrupt nation, led to Ranasinghe's sacking late last month. Ranasinghe had been at loggerheads over the running of Sri Lanka Cricket with President Ranil Wickremesinghe, refusing the latter's demands to revoke the sacking of the board. — AFP



PERTH: Australia's David Warner attends a training session at Perth Stadium. — AFP

Sports

Turkish football to resume Dec 19 after referee attack

Club president rushes onto the pitch, punches referee

ISTANBUL: Turkey's football leagues will resume on December 19, ending a brief suspension caused by a violent attack on a referee, the federation announced on Wednesday. Matches were suspended hours after MKA Ankaragucu club president Faruk Koca rushed onto the pitch and punched referee Halil Umut Meler after the final whistle in Monday's first division match in the Turkish capital. Meler was released from hospital in Ankara on Wednesday, after undergoing observations and receiving a phone call from President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Turkish Football Federation chief Mehmet Buyukeksi said the sport's governing body will announce penalties for the altercation on Thursday. He told reporters that weekend matches will be rescheduled to help deal with the incident's repercussions. "We had decided to postpone the matches in all leagues indefinitely. With the decision we took today, all leagues will restart on Tuesday, December 19," Buyukeksi said.

Buyukeksi added he expected Meler, a respected 37-year-old with accreditation to referee international matches, to recover and join the officiating crew of the Euro 2024 championship to be held between June and July in Germany. "We expect Halil Umut Meler to take part in Euro 2024. There is no possibility of him quitting refereeing right now." Images of Monday's incident showed Koca rushing onto the pitch with a group of men and knocking out

Meler with a blow to the left side of his face.

Meler was kicked several times in the ensuing melee. Koca appeared to be incensed at Meler for sending off one of his players and then awarding a stoppage-time goal that allowed visiting Caykur Rizespor to leave Ankara with a 1-1 draw. Meler released a statement Tuesday saying Koca had threatened his life. "Faruk Koca punched me under my left eye and I fell to the ground. While I was on the ground, they kicked my face and other parts of my body many times," Meler said. "Faruk Koca told me and my fellow referees: 'I will finish you'. Addressing me in particular, he said: 'I will kill you!'"

Turkish football plunged into crisis following an on the pitch attack on a referee by a club president who was mentioned as a possible candidate for mayor of Ankara. The top-flight Super Lig indefinitely suspended matches and a court placed MKA Ankaragucu club president Faruk Koca and two others in pre-trial detention for "injuring and threatening a public official".

Images of Monday night's incident showed Koca rushing onto the pitch with a group of men and throwing a punch at referee Halil Umut Meler after he had blown the final whistle. Koca appeared to be incensed at Meler for sending off one of his players and then awarding a stoppage-time goal that allowed visiting Caykur Rizespor to leave the capital with a 1-1 draw. — AFP



ANKARA: This handout photograph shows Turkish Minister of Youth and Sports Osman Askin Bak (center left) visiting Turkish referee Halil Umut Meler (bottom) who was hospitalized after being punched by the President of MKE Ankaragucu Football Club, Faruk Koca. — AFP



Tomooh Sport Club leaves for Oman

KUWAIT: The Tomooh Sport Club of Mental Disabilities Athletics Team left for Oman to participate in the Sixth Oman Athletics Gathering. The



event is organized by Oman's Paralympic Committee and is scheduled from December 13th until December 17th in Muscat. Kuwait is participating with a delegation headed by board member Qaseema Al-Mousawi, club director Huda Al-Khalidi as an official, and Habbab Al-Hami as a coach.

Players Hassan Sameer T36, Haneen Al-Misbah, Abdullah Salmeen, and Ali Al-Shayee T20

will participate in the 100, 200, 400, and 1500 races and the long jumping competition. Qaseema Al-Mousawi said the team is ready for competition and that she is confident in the players' abilities. This event is a good opportunity for the players to compete and attempt new records. She thanked Oman's Paralympic Committee for the invitation.

Olympic surfing to be held in Polynesia despite row

PAPEETE: Next year's Olympic surfing competition will be held in French Polynesia as planned, the regional president has said, declaring a blazing row between organisers, authorities and environmental groups to be over. Polynesian leader Moetai Brotherson told AFP on Sunday that a meeting with environmental associations had yielded "a solution" allowing the contest to be held at Teahupo'o on the French Pacific island of Tahiti. "The solution we managed to get adopted tonight will allow the Games to be held here," he said.

Debate about the suitability of having the island host the competitions has made waves for weeks, reaching a high point early this month after a construction barge used to install a new judges' tower in the sea, supposed to reach a height of 14 meters, broke through part of a colorful coral reef during testing. This, critics said, was confirmation that the installation could damage the beach's fragile corals beyond repair. A petition against the new tower has gathered over 210,000 signatures.

While criticizing the testing for being "not well prepared", France's Sports Minister Amelie Oudea-Castera still ruled out any relocation of Olympic surfing events, saying there was "no plan B". France's Atlantic coast hosts some of Europe's most famous surfing beaches and local officials had been hopeful of hosting the event. When Tahiti was selected as the surfing site, dignitaries in coastal resorts in mainland France, such as Biarritz, were unimpressed—not least because of the cost and the carbon emissions involved in put-



PAPEETE: Polynesian pirogues escort traditional Hokule'a pirogue and crew as they arrive in the port of Tahiti, Papeete, French Polynesia. — AFP

ting a chunk of the Olympics in the South Pacific.

'Biggest names in surfing'

Brotherson on Sunday presented a plan in stages for construction of the new aluminium tower which is to be completed by May 13, he said, in time for a World Surf League (WSL) event seen as a dress rehearsal for the Olympics. During the talks with concerned parties he had won "unanimous backing from mayors, the surfing federation and even the associations, except one", Brotherson said.

There was also an individual surfer holding out "who thinks he represents the surfing community," Brotherson said. That surfer, Lorenzo Avventi—born and raised in Tahiti—said that "the biggest names in surfing" including Kelly Slater, Gabriel Medina, Felipe Toledo and Carissa Moore,

had signed the petition against the new tower. But Brotherson said they had done so "without having the right information".

In mid-November, the organizers and the Polynesian government revised their plans in order for the new tower to be lighter to "limit environmental damage". The president of the Paris Olympics organizing committee, Tony Estanguet, welcomed the backing for the Teahupo'o venue. He said new tests for the tower's installation would be run by experts with WSL experience and a new barge, and special attention "to avoiding damage to the corals". Tests would begin this week, and construction work could start by the end of the month, he said. He said he was "confident" that the tower would be erected by the month of May. The Summer Olympics' surfing events are scheduled from July 27 to 30. — AFP

Chiellini calls time on playing career

MILAN: Giorgio Chiellini brought the curtain down on a trophy-packed career on Tuesday after the Italy icon announced his retirement from football. Former Italy and Juventus defender Chiellini revealed he would be hanging up his boots at the age of 39 in a short post on social media accompanied by a video showing the highlights of his 23 years in the professional game. "You have been the most beautiful and intense journey of my life. You have been my everything," Chiellini wrote.

"With you I have travelled a unique and unforgettable path. But now it is time to start new chapters, face new challenges and write further important and exciting pages of life." Chiellini ended his career at Los Angeles FC in the Major Soccer League—his final match Saturday's MLS Cup final defeat to Columbus Crew—but he is best known for his exploits with Juventus and his country.

After joining Juve in 2005, Chiellini eventually became a cornerstone of the so-called "BBC" defence alongside Andrea Barzagli and Leonardo Bonucci. That defensive trio were key to propelling Juve back to domestic dominance after years in the doldrums following the 'Calciopoli' match-fixing scandal which exploded in the run-up to the 2006 World Cup.

Chiellini won nine consecutive Serie A titles between 2012 and 2020 and reached two Champions League finals with the Turin giants, who honoured him on social media with the message "Warrior, captain, champion. Thanks for everything big Giorgio!" Juve also posted a video depicting helicopters lifting a giant Juve jersey, emblazoned with 'Chiellini' and his squad number three, from the pitch at the club's Allianz Stadium.

Italy hero

Chiellini became a national hero after captaining Italy to triumph at Euro 2020, where under Roberto Mancini the Azzurri roared back from apparent footballing oblivion following their failure to qualify for the 2018 World Cup. A series of gutsy defensive displays in the latter stages of the continent-wide tournament culminated with a thrilling penalty shoot-out win over England in the final at Wembley.

The photo of him dragging back a scampering Bukayo Saka became one of the iconic images from the Euro for the Italians, who saw in Chiellini the continuation of a long tradition of rugged defenders who do whatever it takes to win. However, Chiellini quit international football last year after 117 international caps and his country failing to reach a second straight World Cup. In truth he had a mixed Italy career, reaching the Euro 2012 final—where Italy were outclassed by Spain, losing 4-0 - but having a difficult time at World Cup finals.

Italy exited in the group stage both in 2010 - when they were the defending champions—and 2014 before slumping to a historic play-off defeat to Sweden in 2017 which cost them a place in the 2018 tournament. Chiellini also suffered the ignominy of being bitten by Luis Suarez as Italy exited behind Uruguay and Costa Rica in 2014. His final Italy appearance came in the 2022 'Finalissima' match with Copa America champions Argentina, a few weeks after ending 17 years at Juve. He played the final two seasons of his career in the US with LAFC, where he won the 2022 MLS Cup before conceding the title at the weekend. — AFP

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

Hospitals

Sabah Hospital	24812000
Amiri Hospital	22450005
Maternity Hospital	24843100
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700
Chest Hospital	24849400
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010

Adan Hospital	23940620
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733

Adaliya	22517144
Khalidiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764

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

Change of Name

I, **ALI ASGER** holder of Indian passport No. W0763381 having permanent Address: Najampura PO, Sagwara Distt: Dungarpur, Rajasthan Pin: 314025 residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as under given name: Ali Asger and Surname: Ghaslet.

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MANCHESTER: Bayern Munich's German goalkeeper #01 Manuel Neuer makes a save during the UEFA Champions League group A football match between Manchester United and FC Bayern Munich at Old Trafford stadium on December 12, 2023. — AFP

Manchester United crash out of Champions League

Copenhagen advance to knockouts with Galatasaray win

PARIS: Manchester United crashed out of the Champions League on Tuesday and failed to even secure the consolation of a Europa League spot as Bayern Munich won 1-0 at Old Trafford. United were toothless as Harry Kane and his Bayern teammates only needed one penetrating move to create Kingsley Coman's winning goal. They finish bottom of Group A as FC Copenhagen took the second qualifying spot behind Bayern following their 1-0 win over Galatasaray in front of a delirious Danish crowd.

The defeat is sure to heap more pressure on United manager Erik ten Hag, but the damage to his side was done earlier in the season when they

failed to win three of their four games against Copenhagen and Galatasaray. "We didn't lose the campaign today. We had some good performances and also we made mistakes and individual errors from players," Ten Hag said.

"Today the performance was good, we didn't deserve to lose but we lost the game. The players gave everything," Kane meanwhile said he believes Bayern can make a strong run as they seek a seventh European crown in his first season in Germany. "We have the ability to go far in this competition," the England captain said. "We have to keep improving. I feel we have another level we can achieve. That is the ambition, to

go and win the Champions League."

Danish joy

In contrast to the gloom in Manchester, there was joy in the Danish capital as FC Copenhagen qualified for the last 16 of the Champions League for just the second time in their history. Lukas Lerager's 58th minute goal was enough to see off Galatasaray as the Danish side overcame the odds in a group few pundits had expected them to progress from. "I think it is an extraordinary achievement that a Danish team can advance. The group was so strong and full of so many world stars," Copenhagen coach Jacob Neestrup said. Reigning Italian champions Napoli se-

cured their place in the knockout phase by beating Sporting Braga 2-0 at home, with newly crowned African Player of the Year Victor Osimhen completing the job after Serdar Saatci's own goal.

Napoli finished second behind Group C winners Real Madrid, who had already won the group even before they beat Union Berlin 3-2 in the German capital. Kevin Volland put Union ahead, but Joselu scored twice for Real and although Alex Kral equalized, Dani Ceballos notched the winner for the 14-time European champions in the 89th minute. Last year's beaten finalists Inter Milan finished second after a goalless draw with Group D winners Real Sociedad. In the early

matches, a much-changed Arsenal were held 1-1 at Dutch league leaders PSV Eindhoven but still top Group B.

Eddie Nketiah fired a low shot into the corner to put Arsenal ahead, but Yorbe Vertessen curled in an equalizer. Sevilla finished bottom of that group after Lens scored a late winner in a 2-1 victory in northern France. It means the Spanish side won't even have the chance to add to their seven Europa League titles, with Lens grabbing third place in the group and a Europa League place. Benfica also secured a late ticket to the Europa League after they beat Salzburg 3-1 in Austria to clinch third place in Group D. — AFP



EINDHOVEN: PSV Eindhoven's Brazilian defender #17 Mauro Junior heads the ball during a UEFA Champions League group B football match between PSV Eindhoven and Arsenal FC at the Philips Stadium in Eindhoven. — AFP

Arsenal held at PSV Eindhoven

EINDHOVEN: A much-changed and lacklustre Arsenal were held 1-1 at Dutch league leaders PSV Eindhoven Tuesday, a result that still sees the Gunners top Champions League Group B. The pressure was off as both sides had already secured their ticket to the last 16 and Arsenal in particular appeared to lack a competitive bite at the Philips Stadium. PSV have been the runaway team to catch in this season's Eredivisie, winning all 15 of their matches and opening up a 10-point gap with nearest challenger Feyenoord.

And it was the Dutch side which started the brighter, a smart move down the right slicing open the Gunners' defence only for striker Ricardo Pepi to somehow contrive to miss from close range. Arsenal boss Mikael Arteta made eight changes from the side that lost 1-0 to Aston Villa in the Premier League at the weekend and the Gunners lacked organization at the back and penetration up front.

PSV created several first-half chances with slick interplay

and Belgian international striker Yorbe Vertessen hit the post with a fine header that had Arsenal goalkeeper Aaron Ramsdale beaten. Arsenal's first meaningful chance came with nearly half an hour gone, a speculative shot from Egyptian international defender Mohamed Elhenny fizzing just past the post.

But the London club took the lead just minutes before the break, as striker Eddie Nketiah was given too much space in the box and fired a low shot into the corner. One-nil to the Arsenal — against the run of play. Scoring an impressive 52 goals in domestic competition, PSV have lost only once this season — to Arsenal, who smashed them 4-0 at the Emirates Stadium in the reverse fixture. And they were back on level terms less than five minutes into the second half when another through-ball dissected the Arsenal midfield and Vertessen curled his shot expertly past Ramsdale.

The hosts continued to stroke the ball around with confidence and Ramsdale kept his side in the game with a fingertip save from Moroccan international Ismael Saibari. The Gunners were deprived of what would have been an undeserved win as Jakub Kivior's powerful header on 82 minutes was ruled out for offside. And PSV squandered a gilt-edged chance to snatch it at the death, Guus Til dragging his shot wide after being put through for a one-on-one with the keeper. — AFP

Exum, Doncic lead Mavs past LeBron and Lakers

LOS ANGELES: Luka Doncic produced another dazzling performance as the Dallas Mavericks brought LeBron James and the Los Angeles Lakers back down to earth with a 127-125 victory on Tuesday. Doncic rattled off his eighth straight 30-point game to finish with 33 points, 17 assists and six rebounds in a thrilling back-and-forth duel with the Lakers, who were playing their first game since winning the inaugural in-season tournament on Saturday.

An absorbing contest at Dallas' American Airlines Center home saw the lead change hands eight times, with the Lakers overturning a 15-point deficit with a huge third quarter to help open up a four-point lead early in the fourth. But Dallas' Dante Exum took over with a superb display in the final period that saw him rattle in 17 points - including five three-pointers - to carry the Mavs to victory. Exum finished with 26 points while Tim Hardaway Jr. added 32 points from the bench to support Doncic.

Anthony Davis led the Lakers scoring with 37 points from 15-of-21 shooting, with James adding 33. Doncic stayed in the game despite rolling an ankle and suffering a bloodied lip in a physical battle between the two Western Conference rivals. "I'm not going out in a game like this, no way," the Slovenian star said. "When you're playing against the best you want to stay on the court. "This was an amazing team win. We've got so many guys out, everybody stepped up, everybody played hard."

Green, Jokic tossed

Doncic admitted he was flattered by talk of him potentially emerging as a contender for the NBA's Most Valuable Player award — but insisted team success was more important than individual honors. "Of course, who wouldn't want to be MVP of the league?" Doncic said. "But obviously first is the championship... that's what's



DALLAS: LeBron James #23 of the Los Angeles Lakers shoots the ball during the game against Dallas Mavericks on December 12, 2023 at the American Airlines Center. — AFP

first on my mind for sure." The win saw the Mavericks improve to 15-8 for the season while the Lakers fell to 14-10 to remain sixth in the West. In other games, Draymond Green could be facing more disciplinary action from the NBA after being ejected for the third time this season in the Golden State Warriors' 119-116 defeat to the Phoenix Suns. Green, suspended for five games last month after grabbing Minnesota's Rudy Gobert in a choke hold, was tossed once again in the third quarter after wildly swinging an arm into the face of Phoenix player Jusuf Nurkic. — AFP