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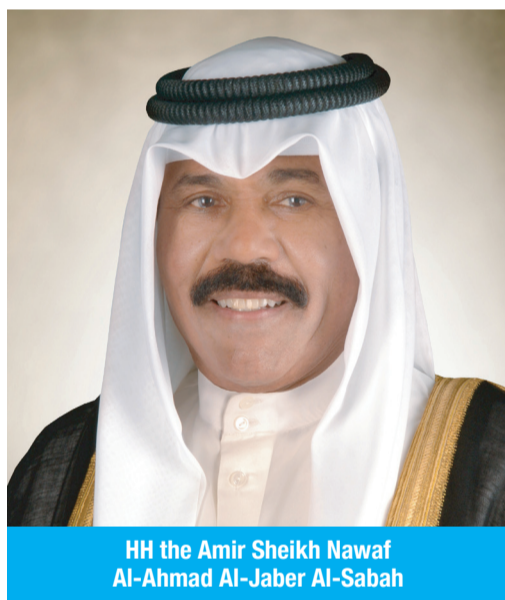
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# New residence law proposes jail term, KD 2,000 fine for violators

## New 10-year residence proposed for investors, landlords

### Amir's health stable



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

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

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The National Assembly's Interior and Defense committee on Thursday approved major amendments to residence law for foreigners which propose a one-year jail term and a fine of up to KD 2,000 for visitors who overstay in the country. The new amendments also propose raising the daily fine for residency violators from KD 2 to KD 4 from the second month onward. It also proposes long-term residency for foreign investors and landlords from 10 to 15 years which can be renewed for similar duration.

The Assembly panel said on Tuesday it has approved all the amendments and sent its report to the National Assembly for debate and approval in a regular session slated for December 19-20. Interior

Minister Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled Al-Sabah was quoted as saying on Wednesday that once those amendments become effective, the Ministry will remove all restrictions on issuing all types of visas including dependent and family visas.

If approved by the Assembly on December 19 or 20, they will become effective around one month later when published in the official gazette. One of the amendments stipulates that foreigners on a visit visa can stay in the country for three months and must leave unless they get a residency permit. Violators will be penalized for up to one year in jail or a fine between KD 1,000 and KD 2,000.

Residency violators will be asked to pay a KD 2 fine per day in the first month and then KD 4 per day from the second month onward. Foreigners caught working for businessmen who did not recruit them

will be fined KD 3,000. Parents of newborn babies have four months to obtain a residence for the baby, or will be fined KD 2 per day in the first month and KD 4 in the second month onward for those who violate that period.

Under the amendments, foreign wives of Kuwaitis who are divorced or become widows and have children can sponsor themselves for a normal residence. Foreign investors, landlords, widows or divorced wives of Kuwaitis who have children in addition to foreign husbands and children of Kuwaiti women are entitled for a 10-year residency. Domestic helpers can stay outside the country for four months and if they exceed this duration, their residency will be cancelled. The amendments provide full authority for the interior minister to change fees related to new residency, renewals and visit visas.

### Zionist ambassador to Britain rejects two-state solution

LONDON: Zionist ambassador to Britain said Thursday that Zionists would not accept a two-state solution with the Palestinians after the war with Hamas in Gaza ends. The conflict, now in its third month, began after the Palestinian group's unprecedented October 7 attacks. In response, Zionists began a relentless bombardment and ground invasion that has killed 18,608 people, mostly women and children, according to the Hamas-run health ministry's latest toll.

Tzipi Hotovely told Sky News that she did not believe in the long-standing position of the UK government and the United Nations that an independent Palestinian state should be established. "The answer is absolutely no," Hotovely said when pressed on the issue. "Zionist entity knows today, and the world should know now that the reason the Oslo Accords failed is because the Palestinians never wanted to have a state next to Zionist entity."

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GAZA: Smoke billows over the northern Gaza Strip during Zionist bombardment on Dec 14, 2023. — AFP

### KIPCO sells its GIG stake for KD 256m

KUWAIT: Kuwait Projects Company (KIPCO) announced on Thursday the completion of the sale deal of its entire stake of 46.3 percent of Gulf Insurance Group (GIG) to Fairfax Financial Holdings for KD 256 million (around \$832 million). The company said in a press conference that its net profit from the deal amounted to KD 73 million (about \$237 million) and that the purchase price was set at KD 2 per share, provided that 54 fils are deducted from this amount, which is the value of the cash distributions that GIG worked to distribute in 2022.

KIPCO CEO Sheikha Dana Nasser Al-Sabah said that the company's success in completing the transformational merger deal has led to the growth of its investment portfolio. Since then, the company has been considering opportunities to exit or invest in order to achieve the ultimate goal of growth and create greater value for company's shareholders, she added. She added that the sale of KIPCO's stake to GIG is an evidence of the company's successful strategy of acquiring and expanding companies then exiting them in a timely manner based on the remunerative financial return.

KIPCO was established in 1975 and listed on the Kuwait Stock Exchange in 1984 and its authorized capital is KD 504 million (about \$1.5 billion). Its purposes are to own shares of Kuwaiti or foreign companies, as well as own shares in limited liability or foreign companies, or participate in the establishment, management, lending and guaranty of these companies with others. — KUNA

### Climate deal has 'no immediate impact' on Gulf oil

DUBAI: An agreement to "transition away" from fossil fuels may be a landmark moment but don't expect quick changes among the major producers of the Gulf, where the deal was hammered out. After the UN's COP28 climate talks in Dubai, Saudi Energy Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman immediately played down the text, insisting it would have "no im-

pact on exports" from the country that ships more oil than any other. The deal "doesn't impose anything" on oil-producing countries and allows them to cut emissions "according to their means and their interests", the minister said.

It is not an "agreement on the immediate or progressive elimination of fossil fuels, but a process of transition", he told Saudi TV channel Al Arabiya Business on Wednesday. The prince had earlier voiced staunch opposition to including a phasing-down of fossil fuels in the Dubai text, which ultimately omitted any mention of "phase-down" or "phase-out". Striking a deal that appeases nearly 200 countries—even though some critics were not in

Continued on Page 6



DUBAI: People walk outside Expo City in Dubai during the United Nations Climate Change Conference COP28. — AFP

### US House launches impeachment inquiry against president

WASHINGTON: The US House of Representatives voted Wednesday to formalize an impeachment inquiry into President Joe Biden, escalating Republicans' battle with Democrats ahead of the 2024 election in a move Biden himself slammed as a "baseless" stunt. Republicans, seizing on Biden's son Hunter's controversial international dealings, have yet to provide evidence of corruption by the president, and the Democratic-led Senate would

be unlikely to convict him even if the inquiry did lead to an actual impeachment trial.

Regardless, the procedure guarantees Republicans a new, high-profile platform to attack Biden as he campaigns for reelection - and to distract from the federal criminal trials facing his almost certain challenger Donald Trump. The vote of 221 to 212 was along strict party lines, with every Republican voting for it and every Democrat against. Conservatives accuse Biden's troubled son Hunter of influence-peddling - effectively trading on the family name in pay-to-play schemes during his business dealings in Ukraine and China. The allegations against Hunter Biden refer to incidents that took place before his father became president, and the White House has stressed there has been no wrongdoing.

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US President Joe Biden





## Local

# Food companies promote Kuwait national products

## Firms participate in international exhibitions, discover latest updates

CAIRO: Kuwaiti food companies said that participating in international exhibitions is a great opportunity to promote national products outside Kuwait, discover the latest updates in the food industry, and cooperate with major international companies. The Kuwaiti companies are participating in the 8th International Exhibition for Food and Beverages (Food Africa) under the Public Authority for Industry's umbrella, held in Cairo between December 12 and 14, said companies' spokespersons in a statement to Kuwait News Agency (KUNA).

The exhibition offers innovative ways to showcase small and midsize food businesses and discover wide investment opportunities in international

markets, said Bint Manahi Ready Meals factory founder Hanadi Al-Hajri. Bint Manahi Factory produces products for several countries in the MENA region and seeks to expand its brand to other markets through the Food Africa exhibition, added Al-Hajri. The factory specializes in high-quality, authentic, ready-made frozen products, including traditional Kuwaiti dishes.

Bader Al-Daihani, representative for the Aqwat Factory for Pastries and Sweets, stressed the importance of participating in the Food Africa exhibition to show high-quality Kuwaiti products and become acquainted with developments in the food industry through experts in the field. He praised the

efforts of the Public Authority for Industry for improving the quality of food products and providing the opportunity for Kuwaiti factories to participate with more major Arab companies specializing in the food industry.

Assistant Chief of Exported Sales at Kuwait Flour Mills and Bakeries Company Badria Al-Rashed said that this is not the first time the company has participated in the Food Africa exhibition, an important international food industry exhibition. According to Al-Rashed, the level of organization and number of expert traders, exporters, and importers from all around the world are impressive, contributing to the spread of the company and the increase of

its market shares, thanks to the exchange of experience between major companies at the local and international levels.

Most of the products displayed in the Kuwaiti pavilion are flour, pasta, biscuits, baked goods, and olives, she said, pointing out that the products received great praise from the exhibition's audience. Food Africa began late Tuesday, with over 900 companies representing 32 countries participating, Kuwait being one of them (official exhibition partner). The Kuwaiti side of the exhibition contained 12 specialized factories in the food industry, including dairy, baked goods, packaging, coffee grinding, spices, olives, sweets, and ready-made foods. — KUNA

## Govt holds program for disabled people

KUWAIT: The Kuwait government is keen on reinforcing values of human rights and raising awareness of people with mental disabilities in the work force, the National Diwan for Human Rights affirmed. The National Diwan, as part of this awareness, held a training program in collaboration with 360 Mall on Wednesday to raise awareness about mentally disabled people and include them in the workplace. The program was also in collaboration with Center 21 for Special Needs, which picked a few of its members to work in different stations and shops around the mall.

This initiative seeks to include mentally disabled people—who struggle to find relevant jobs—in the work force, said National Diwan for Human Rights Council member Ali Al-Thuwaini in a statement to Kuwait News Agency (KUNA). The National Diwan for Human Rights wishes to raise public awareness for the mentally disabled and provide them with a safe environment to achieve their career dreams, he added.

Center 21 is glad to work with 360 Mall and the National Diwan for Human Rights on this important initiative to achieve its goal of integrating mentally disabled people into the work force as well as empowering them and their capabilities, said Center 21 for Special Needs General-Director Nabil Al-Nassar. This initiative comes as part of The National Diwan's mission to reinforce rights and bring equality to disabled people in all aspects of life, most importantly work, as well as enable and empower them to achieve their goals. — KUNA



Assistant Secretary General for the Prevention Sector at Nazaha Abrar Al-Hammad is pictured with other top officials during the event. — KUNA

## Nazaha showcases its anticorruption digital efforts at CoSP 10

WASHINGTON: Kuwait Anti-Corruption Authority (Nazaha) showcased its digital transformation efforts to counter corruption and boost transparency during participation at the 10th Conference of State Parties (CoSP) held in Atlanta, US, on December 11–15.

The CoSP is the main policymaking body of the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC). While providing a visual presentation titled "digital transformation and bolstering transparency in anticorruption in Kuwait," Assistant Secretary General for the Prevention Sector at Nazaha Abrar Al-Hammad highlighted Kuwait's efforts to establish digital infrastructure and the collection of data at government institutes, an effort enabling the launch of digital and cloud services in Kuwait as well as bolstering information security.

She indicated that the idea focused on streamlining services for citizens by separating between service providers and recipients, which in turn would provide the utmost transparency in accordance with international standards of anticorruption and ease of obtaining data and services. Al-Hammad tabbed the Sahel (easy) government application in Kuwait, saying that it provided a unified platform for government services, enabling citizens and residents alike to apply for government transactions and documents with ease, as the namesake of the aforementioned application suggested.

The Sahel application boosted productivity on the part of employees and provided more transparency in government transactions, affirmed Al-Hammad. Services highly susceptible to corruption were linked to the Sahel application to prevent malpractice and stop any attempt at bribery in the public sector, she said, noting that the application had received favorable reviews from users.

Nazaha's chairman, Abdulaziz Al-Ibraheem, headed the Kuwaiti delegation to the CoSP 10. The conference is attended by over 2,000 participants from government, regional, and international bodies, as well as representatives from the public and private sectors and civil society, in addition to the youth. The conference reviews national and international efforts in anticorruption as well as challenges facing the implementation of the UNCAC. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Spain Embassy held a reception to mark the end of the six-month Spanish Presidency of the Council of the European Union, which lasted from July 1 until December 31, 2023.

## Spain hands Presidency of Council of European Union to Belgium

KUWAIT: The Spain Embassy in Kuwait held a reception at the residence of Spanish Ambassador Miguel Moro Aguilar to mark the end of the six-month Spanish Presidency of the Council of the European Union, which lasted from July 1 until December 31, 2023. This landmark event was also attended by Anne Koistinen, Ambassador of the European Union to Kuwait, and Christian Dooms, Ambassador of Belgium to Kuwait. Belgium will take over the Presidency of the Council of the European Union on January 1, 2024, for another period of six months.

The Presidency of the Council rotates among the EU member states every six months. During this six-month period, the EU Member State that holds the Presidency of the Council of the European Union determines the agenda and priorities of the Council as well as presides over its meetings to broker compromises among the EU Member States.

Speaking at the event, Ambassador of Spain Miguel Moro Aguilar began his address by mentioning the complex, turbulent international context of the Spanish Presidency, plagued with geopolitical tensions and the wars and terrible suffering caused in Gaza or in Ukraine. According to Moro Aguilar, one of the strategic goals of the Spanish Presidency in this volatile scenario was precisely to strengthen the strategic autonomy of the European Union, as reflected in the "Granada Declaration," approved at the informal European Council of October in Granada, Spain, and in the organization of the Third Summit of the European Political Community.

Particular attention was also paid to the strengthening of EU relations with Middle Eastern and North African countries as well as with the Gulf region,



where the EU-GCC Ministerial meeting in Muscat in early October offered a great occasion for an impulse in the relations between the two blocs. Regarding Kuwait, Moro Aguilar said, we are glad to see that the EU, under this semester, has experienced a significant improvement in the visa procedures for Kuwaitis, a reality that is already paving the way for a closer people-to-people relationship.

The EU and Kuwait also held a recent fruitful human rights dialogue and political consultation in Brussels, opening promising avenues for future collaboration in the different domains. We are almost ready in a few weeks to pass the baton to our Belgian friends, with whom we have already collaborated closely in the last few months to guarantee a smooth, effective transition. Our high appreciation goes as well to Ambassador Koistinen and her team at the EU Delegation for their valuable efforts and the good teamwork in the last period."

For her part, EU Ambassador Anne Koistinen thanked the Spanish Embassy for their role played locally during the last six months. Koistinen praised cooperation with the Spanish Embassy, including the preparation of a very generous Schengen visa cascade for Kuwaiti nationals and holding a joint visit for EU Ambassadors to the Shagaya Renewable Energy Complex on October 25. She further

elaborated that during the upcoming Belgian Presidency, the EU Delegation will continue to play an important role in organizing and hosting regular meetings of 16 EU Member States Ambassadors in Kuwait. This is an important platform for EU Member States to exchange views and coordinate their work in Kuwait.

In his address, Ambassador of Belgium Christian Dooms began by thanking his Spanish colleague, Miguel Moro Aguilar, for the hard work he and his team have carried out to advance on the European agenda in Kuwait. He is confident that this will facilitate a smooth transition to the Belgian Presidency.

"The three key words on the agenda of the Belgian Presidency are "protect, strengthen, and prepare." These priorities will be structured around six themes: (1) Protection of the rule of law, democracy, and unity. (2) strengthening competitiveness. (3) A just ecological transition. (4) Strengthening the social and health programs of the EU. (5) Protection of individuals and borders. (6) Promoting Europe on the world stage". The Ambassador of Belgium concluded his remarks by mentioning some specific actions and initiatives that will be taken in the Middle East/Gulf Region, such as strengthening the EU's partnership with the Gulf States and working towards stability in the Gulf Region.



KUWAIT: Participants are pictured during the event.

## 4,500 acute heart attacks recorded in seven months

KUWAIT: Kuwait Heart Foundation (KHF) said 4500 acute heart attacks were registered during the last seven months, according to a scientific study that started in May, adding that the study will continue until the number of participants reaches 10,000 patients. The age groups will be identified. The causes include smoking and chronic diseases.

Chairman of the Gulf Heart Foundation (GHF) and Member of the Board of KHF, Dr Mohammad Zubaid, told journalists following the opening of the 15th conference that is organized by GHF in cooperation with KHF and has participation from the Gulf, Arab, and foreign countries. The summit will discuss the latest in heart disease and have consultations about diseases.

He said that 20 percent of heart attack patients arrive at hospitals in ambulances, compared with 90

percent in Europe, which affects the speed of treatment and affirms the need to intensify the awareness aspect of how to deal with heart attacks. He said the conference will discuss several issues related to the achievements made in GCC countries to expand the benefit, be it at the treatment level or surgeries. Heart diseases are the main cause of deaths locally, globally, and around the world.

Kuwait has worked for the past 15 years on making all heart and chronic diseases medications available in all its health facilities to make it easy for patients to have access to medicines at any time and any place, which has had a positive effect on the success of medication strategies in the country. Dr Zubaid revealed that a heart transplant operation was made this year and another last year in Kuwait, expecting the flourishing of heart transplant operations in the country in cooperation with GCC countries to advance health services globally.

Zubaid said GHF (which was founded 21 years ago) is proud of all that it has achieved, adding that it has made several achievements, including the encouragement of science. The society cooperated with the European Heart Association, the American Heart Association, and the Heart Association Inter-



national, enabling cardiologists in the Arabian Gulf to set for the European Heart Association test, which will enable doctors to get recognized certificates.

Meanwhile, KHF Secretary General Dr Rashed Al-Owayesh said KHF seeks to advance medical services through such conferences by discussing the most recent results of specialized research in the field of heart diseases. He said KHF was founded in 1982 to promote awareness about the importance of maintaining heart safety and avoiding heart diseases.



Local

# Zain the 'Platinum Sponsor' of SpeakUp Kuwait's 3rd season

Company's Innovation Campus (ZINC) hosts program's training sessions for youth

**KUWAIT:** In support of aspiring programs that effectively develop young people's skills, Zain announced its return as a Platinum Sponsor of the third season of SpeakUp Kuwait, the initiative that empowers university students and fresh graduates to acquire personal and professional skills. The program, which comes in collaboration with the Youth Public Authority, features notable local mentors and experts who share their experiences, passions, and skills with the young participants.

Zain announced its support to the program for the third year running during the press conference held at the Academy of Arts and Media for Youth in Al Daiyaa. In attendance were Zain Kuwait's Corporate Relations Department Manager Hamad Al Musaiibeh, SpeakUp Kuwait founder Dina Al Wuhaib, and Acting Deputy Department Manager of Youth Projects in the Youth Public Authority Saleh Al Selmi. The Zain Innovation Campus (ZINC) hosts all the training sessions and workshops of SpeakUp Kuwait's third season.

The program targets university students and fresh graduates, and focuses on developing various personal skills that are equally important to

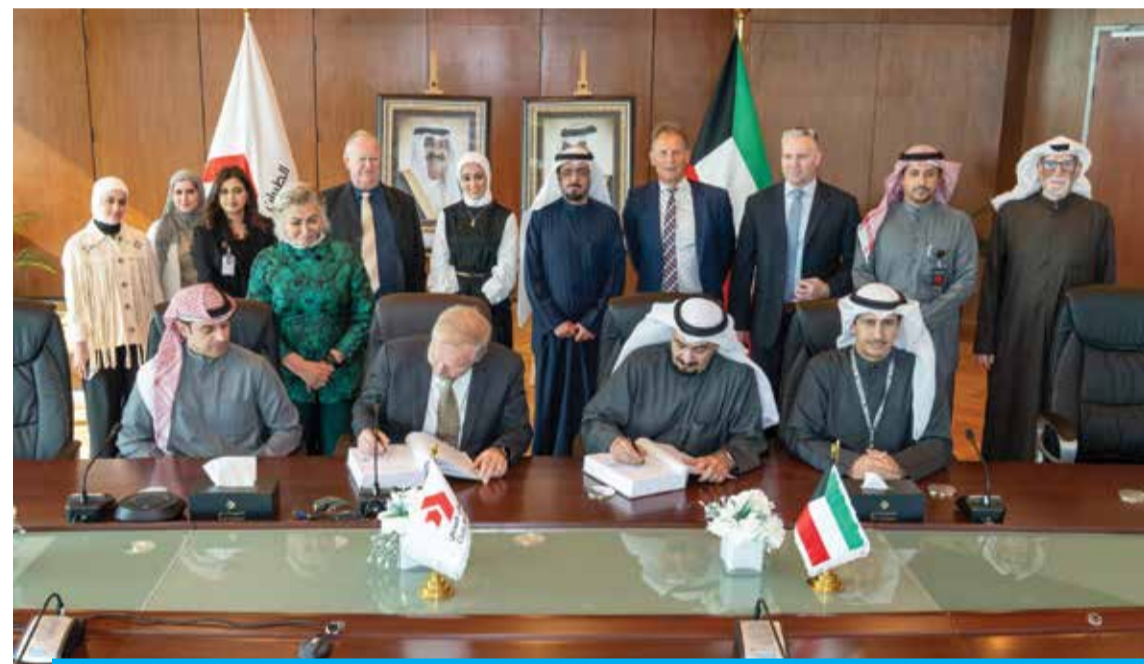
technical skills in any successful career. The topics covered by the program include public speaking, emotional intelligence, communication, as well as social, management, business, and professional skills. SpeakUp Kuwait features many mentors and experts in various fields to share their experiences and passions with the participants during the sessions and workshops at ZINC.

Zain continues to support this program since its inception three years ago to reflect its commitment in being an active supporter of the most vibrant sectors in the community like youth, education, entrepreneurship, and innovation. The company seeks to shoulder initiatives that embrace young people, work to develop their skills, and empower them to be confidently prepared for their future careers to contribute to progressing the nation's socio-economic scene.

In its previous seasons, SpeakUp Kuwait achieved great success, having featured many notable talented names from the local community to share their experiences and skills with the young participants. Zain also took the opportunity to sit down with the students, listen to their thoughts, and inspire them to pursue their passions.



Hamad Al Musaiibeh, Dina Al Wuhaib, and Saleh Al Selmi during the press conference.



Kuwait Civil Aviation signs contract on airport surface observation for KD 6.7 million. — KUNA

## Civil Aviation signs KD 6.7m contract

**KUWAIT:** The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) signed a deal worth KD 6.7 million (\$21.7 million) with Finland's Vaisala company to execute a project on surface observation systems and airport meteorological systems at Kuwait International Airport. In a statement to KUNA on Thursday, DGCA's Acting Director-General Emad Al-Jalawi said the project aims to develop forecast surveillance around the airport's three runways to enhance flight safety.

On his part, DGCA's deputy director-general for planning and projects affairs, Saad Al-Otaibi, said the project will provide better visibility along the runways while also presenting thorough information on wind speed and humidity rate. In the same context, Vaisala's Vice President for Meteorology and Aviation, Weather, and Environment, Panu Partanen, told KUNA that "this contract with DGCA for three runways at Kuwait International Airport is the largest single airport instrumentation contract for Vaisala ever. "It includes design, manufacturing, delivery, installation, maintenance, technical support, and user training," he added. The project is set to be launched in February 2024 and will be fully operational in 2025. — KUNA

## 'A call' to stop dumping cats

By Passant Hisham

**KUWAIT:** Left behind, and almost completely forgotten, are hundreds of stray cats who were in safe homes and lived amongst families who used to nurture them with an abundance of love and care. But, with no prior notice, these cats ended up being dumped in the streets by uncommitted families who got tired of bearing their responsibilities.

Alina Lazaryeva, founder of the Kuwait Animal Aid Organization, and Zahraa Mortada, a Kuwaiti cat adopter, shared their experience with three cats that almost died in the streets until they came to rescue them. The three cats are Scottish folds, which is the most tossed breed, according to Lazaryeva. Not only do they share a similar appearance, but they also share a common tragedy that deserves to come to light.

### Toby, the affectionate cat

Nine months ago, Mortada spotted Toby, a 5-year-old cat who was left neglected with sticky hair near her neighborhood. Since she had already raised two cats before, it was easy for her to spot a house cat at first glance. "The cat looked very sad. You could tell that the cat doesn't belong here," said Mortada. She could feel this in how the cat craved human connection. It admired being petted, and once someone got close to it, the cat playfully rolled on the back and rubbed its body against the legs.

At first, Mortada thought that Toby was lost from his family, and they would certainly come back for it. But, after being left there for weeks, she came to the realization that the cat, if not rescued, would end up alone in the streets forever. Mortada tried to catch Toby several times, but it used to always flee. Out of fear, it started getting sick. She took the cat to the vet, and that's when it was diagnosed with a virus in his respiratory system, which caused a severe infection in his mouth and clogged the nose, preventing it from eating for days. Toby had severe acne on his chin and scars on his body. It also suffered from severe diarrhea.

During its first days in Mortada's house, Toby seemed completely traumatized and couldn't even meow for once. It used to fear any kind of noise, no matter how low-pitched it was, and resisted all attempts to play. After a while, Toby got well. After a long journey of treatment, Mortada considered Toby a blessing.



Andromeda

### Tiger, the one-eyed cat

On her side, Lazaryeva shared her personal stories about rescuing two cats from death. Tiger, a cat who carried its lifeless soul in his exhausted body, was found in an electricity booth abandoned by either pet shops or owners in the Friday Market area. "The cat had zero vision or hope for life. It was just waiting to die," said Lazaryeva. It almost lost both eyes due to feline viruses, and the back was full of scars due to attacks by street dogs.

It took 3 months of treatment for the cat to recover and gain partial vision. Lazaryeva got too attached to the cat. "Tiger is a hero for me. It has so much strength to fight even when there is no hope. It is just one happy kitty who truly loves everything alive," she said.

### Andromeda, the mother of kittens

In an attempt to find shelter from the cruelty of people and feral cats in the streets, Andromeda, a 9-month-old mother cat, was found by Lazaryeva, fearfully hiding in a pet shop with her little kittens around. Suffering from extreme malnourishment and dehydration, Andromeda was struggling to breathe, with heavy discharge on its nose and eyes. "It could not stand or move, but I saw the cat wanted to live, so I did my best to help," said Lazaryeva.

It seemed that the whole family caught the same

## Minister inspects 5th Ring Road project

**KUWAIT:** The Minister of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy and Acting Minister of Public Works, Dr Jassem Al-Ostad, inspected on Thursday the stages of completion and implementation of the road project between the Fifth Ring Road, Al-Ghazali Road, and Mohammed bin Al-Qasim Street, which aims to alleviate traffic congestion.

The minister said in a press release that the project engineer made a presentation about the stages of completion of the project, which amounted to 3.89 percent, as it is expected to be completed in May 2024. She added that the project is developing the in-



tersection (Al-Ghazali) with the Fifth Ring Road and includes the construction of a bridge passing over Al-Ghazali Street to facilitate traffic to and from the Avenues complex. He explained that the project will develop the Fifth Ring Road with Airport Street and make a new road connecting the Fifth Ring Road which is parallel to the Airport Road. — KUNA



## CAN 'Dream Day' Campaign raises cancer awareness

**KUWAIT:** Cancer Awareness Campaign (CAN) organized an awareness campaign at the National Bank of Kuwait Children's Hospital to raise awareness about cancer. Dr. Maryam Al-Otaibi, a consultant oncologist and member of the Executive Committee of the Nation-

al Cancer Awareness Campaign (CAN) responsible for the awareness campaign (We are with You), stated that the Dream Day event drew smiles on the faces of children and supported their psychological state.

The CAN campaign was organized with the help of the organizing team from the National Bank of Kuwait Children's Specialized Hospital, in cooperation with the Health and Interior Ministry and the Kuwait Fire Force. Al-Otaibi said that the event included several different activities to demonstrate the importance of spreading health awareness and to educate the community on the importance of early detection, treatment, and an increased cure rate.



Tiger- the one eyed cat

virus that left the mother in a very critical condition and affected the kittens' bodies. The doctors told Lazaryeva that probably the mother wouldn't make it, yet despite the odds, Andromeda later surprised everyone with a fast recovery. It got fully cured, and I was vaccinated. Andromeda's story touched an American rescuer. "It is a very sweet cat. It surprises me how they have become so loving after what they went through," said Lazaryeva.

If Lazaryeva and Mortada hadn't come to rescue these cats, perhaps their fates would have taken a completely different course. "They were lucky to be saved, but there are plenty in the streets who are still left unnoticed. It's important to note that house pets can hardly survive the challenging conditions outside, as their minimum survival instincts and abilities cannot help them resist the attack of other street animals and can easily make them vulnerable to virus infections," said Lazaryeva.

She advised people to accept animals in their families. Tossing can be prevented in many cases by trying to find other solutions to rehoming them, such as contacting rescue shelters, reaching out for the organization's platform on Instagram, "Kuwait Animal Aid," or even offering them for adoption on their personal social media platforms. If people really tried, they could always find another way to avoid risking the lives of these little creatures, she said.

## Fungal infection 'most common skin disease' during rainy season

**KUWAIT:** The head of the dermatology department at Mubarak Al Kabeer Hospital and treasurer of the Kuwait dermatologists association, Dr Manar Al-Anzi, said that fungal infection is one of the most common diseases during the rainy season. Dr Al-Anzi added in a press statement that fungal infections are spreading due to increased humidity, which provides ideal conditions for them, pointing out that cold weather and low humidity rates lead to dry skin, cracking, itching, and eczema.

She stressed the need to preserve the skin during this period of the year by using moisturizing creams, which are preferably applied immediately after bathing on a daily basis, avoiding bathing with very hot water and replacing it with lukewarm water, and reducing the time spent in the shower. She pointed out the importance of eating vegetables and fruits of all kinds because they contain antioxidants and vitamins, and the need to eat a lot of foods rich in vitamin C, which stimulates the efficiency of the immune system to fight skin diseases in the winter season.

She pointed out that the activities of the annual conference of the Kuwaiti dermatologists association will be launched next Saturday under the auspices of the Minister of Health Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadi, and highlight the latest scientific research in the diagnosis and treatment of widespread skin diseases such as atopic dermatitis, acne, and psoriasis.

Al Anzi, who is the chairman of the scientific committee of the conference, considered it the largest conference in the state of Kuwait for dermatology, lasers, and cosmetology. She indicated that it will shed light on the latest scientific findings in dermatology and its treatment, hair and nail diseases, aesthetic medicine, laser therapy, biological treatments for psoriasis, atopic eczema, vitiligo, alopecia, skin surgery, and laser therapy.

She explained that the conference will include several activities, including more than 25 workshops and 90 lectures with the participation of 60 international lecturers from inside and outside Kuwait, pointing out that it aims to encourage scientific research and contribute to the best ways to improve health services in this field. — KUNA



# Kuwait highlights painful Palestine reality at Geneva's Refugee Forum

## Kuwaiti, Iranian FMs discuss developments in Gaza



Kuwaiti and Iranian FMs discuss Gaza developments in Geneva meeting. — KUNA photos

GENEVA: Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Sabah highlighted the painful reality of the Palestinian people, speaking of the forced eviction and systematized violence and urging the international community for immediate intervention to arrive at a ceasefire and allow for the delivery of aid. Sheikh Salem spoke at the Global Refugee Forum in Geneva, sponsored by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), affirming Kuwait's support for all efforts and endeavors to help refugees and displaced people.

The Minister, in recognition of the immensity of the risks and challenges faced by refugees, called for putting forth active and sustainable mechanisms to address current and emerging situations. The state of Kuwait is quite proud of the strategic and exemplary relationship it has with UN-

HCR, as it is also proud of its status as one of the largest donating countries, he mentioned. Sheikh Salem also addressed the ongoing unprecedented conditions, conflicts, and natural catastrophes, saying this requires international will and partnership.

Furthermore, the Kuwaiti Minister took note of the recent and worrisome UNHCR reports stating that the number of refugees and displaced people around the globe had reached 117 million. The top diplomat renewed Kuwait's firm, unwavering stance by the Palestinian people in their struggle towards attaining the full legitimate rights of an independent state. He also addressed the United Nations' Security Council's failure to adopt a resolution calling for a ceasefire, as well as its failure to heed UN Secretary General's warnings about the total collapse of international peace and security.

In spite of this, Sheikh Salem expressed his hope that political and diplomatic efforts could culminate in improving the humanitarian situation of Palestinians and urged the UNSC to mobilize its capabilities towards the protection of civilians. The Foreign Minister underscored political negotiations and preventative diplomacy as imperative mechanisms for addressing the root causes of regional conflicts.

He also called for pressuring parties involved in conflicts to take responsibility and adhere to the stipulations of UN and international law, saying that evading retribution is not a viable option in armed conflicts. Sheikh Salem took the opportunity to hail the role of UNHCR in bettering the lives of refugees, especially in relation to educational and healthcare pursuits, reaffirming Kuwait's full support for active international partnership.

### Geneva meeting

Meanwhile, Kuwait's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, met on Thursday with his Iranian counterpart, Hossein Amirabdollahian, on the sidelines of the Global Refugee Forum 2023 in Geneva. During the forum, which kicked off in Geneva on Wednesday, both sides discussed the latest developments in the occupied Palestinian territories and explored ways to end the Zionist occupation attacks on Gaza.

Sheikh Salem reaffirmed Kuwait's solidarity with the Palestinian people and its continuous fight for their rights to establish the independent state of Palestine, calling on the importance of strengthening the international joint action for an immediate ceasefire and the entry of humanitarian aid. The meeting also discussed the bilateral relations between both countries and explored various topics of common interest. — KUNA

## WAIPA congratulates Kuwait after election

NEW DELHI: World Association of Investment Promotion Agencies (WAIPA) CEO and Executive Director Ismail Ersahin congratulated Kuwait on Wednesday after being elected as vice president of the WAIPA Steering Committee. A statement from WAIPA said that WAIPA CEO Ismail Ersahin congratulated Kuwait and other member countries, which have been elected to leadership posts at the General Assembly of the Association at the World Investment Conference being held in New Delhi. "On behalf of WAIPA, I am delighted to announce these results and congratulate the members who have been elected to these important posts.

The Steering Committee plays an essential role in helping to guide and support WAIPA in its mission to support IPAs globally, and I am looking forward to working with these colleagues from around the world to provide best-in-class services to our member agencies," he said. In the election yesterday, Invest India was re-elected to the Presidency of WAIPA, while Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority and Switzerland Global Enterprise were elected jointly as vice presidents.

Bangladesh Investment Development Authority was elected as regional directorship of South Asia, while Invest Korea was elected to represent East Asia and South East Asia. Other regional directorships are as follows: Central America and Caribbean, PRODOMINICANA, Sub-Saharan Africa, Ghana Investment Promotion Center, MENA, General Authority for Investments and Free Zones (Egypt), Central Asia, AZPROMO (Azerbaijan), EU, Invest Finland, Eastern Europe, Invest Cyprus, Oceania, and Trade and Investment Queensland.

The WAIPA is an international body representing government agencies charged with attracting inward investment. The 27th World Investment Conference being held in New Delhi is the flagship event of WAIPA and brings together government officials, business leaders, and high-level representatives of multilateral institutions to discuss the current global challenges and opportunities posed by foreign direct investment.

The WAIPA was created in 1995 in Geneva to empower and support investment promotion agencies in the work they do to develop their economies. The association, with 140 member agencies representing around 100 nations, also functions as a voice for IPAs internationally, in addition to serving as a bridge between the public and private sectors. — KUNA



## Assistant FM, Luxembourg diplomat discuss relations

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Assistant Foreign Minister for European Affairs Ambassador Sadiq Marafi discussed with Director of Political Affairs at the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg Ministry of Foreign Affairs Veronique Dockendorf ways to enhance bilateral relations between the two countries. In a statement, the Foreign Ministry conveyed the two sides' aspiration for more cooperation in all fields and international forums. The statement also conveyed Luxembourg's congratulations to Kuwait on its membership in the Human Rights Council for the period between 2024 and 2027. — KUNA

## 5th hajj and umrah exhibition kicks off

KUWAIT: The fifth hajj and umrah exhibition kicked off on Thursday with the participation of 42 campaigns and will continue for a week at the Exhibition Grounds in Mishref under the patronage of the Minister of Information and Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi. The undersecretary of the Ministry of Awqaf, Dr. Badr Al-Mutairi, told the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) that this came after the completion of the screening process for the registration of pilgrims, explaining that the exhibition meets all the needs of pilgrims in Kuwait and the services provided to them.

Al-Mutairi added that the exhibition allows Kuwait pilgrims to get acquainted with the campaigns, which makes it easier for them to get the services provided by those campaigns in terms of prices and providing all their needs to perform hajj. He stated that it was agreed with the concerned authorities in Saudi Arabia that it would start early and adhere to the deadlines set.

Assistant Undersecretary of the Ministry of Awqaf for Media and Foreign Relations Mohammed Al-Alim said in a similar statement to KUNA that registration has been made on the electronic hajj platform. Al-Alim confirmed that the pilgrims were accepted and sent text messages to accept them and inform them of the hajj and umrah exhibitions so that they could choose the appropriate campaigns for them through the exhibition. He pointed out that the hajj and umrah departments are present at the exhibition to answer all pilgrims' queries and provide them with legal and administrative issues and guidance.

The director of the hajj and umrah affairs department at the ministry, Saltam Al-Mazin, said that the central registration of hajj has been developed for the past year by providing pilgrims with multiple options and prices — up to a maximum of 250 pilgrims per campaign. Al-Muzain pointed out that the registration this year has been added to the authentication through the central registration platform to confirm the choices and wishes of each pilgrim. He pointed out that there are health precautions and requirements for vaccinations. The most important is the corona vaccination, in accordance with the procedures of the competent authorities in Saudi Arabia. The exhibition will last for a week. — KUNA



KUWAIT: The fifth hajj and umrah exhibition begins at the Exhibition Grounds in Mishref, with the participation of 42 campaigns. — KUNA

## Kuwait Relief Society inaugurates water project in Yemen

ADEN: The Kuwait Relief Society has launched a water project (benefiting 5,000 people) in the Shamatayn district in the south of Yemen's Taiz governorate as part of the ongoing 'Kuwait by Your Side' campaign for the ninth consecutive year. In a press statement, Abdulaziz Al-Shaibani, Director of the Shamatayn Directorate, praised the efforts exerted by Kuwait to support the Yemeni people in general and the residents of Taiz governorate in particular.

He praised the role of the Kuwait Relief Society in the environmental sanitation sector, pointing out the importance of this achievement. The director of the relations and media department of the executive wisdom association, Adel Aklan, said, "This is the second project supported by Kuwait in the same deprived rural geographical area after the opening of a water project in the Al-Shubaa area in the Al-Muafer Directorate."

He pointed out that the project included drilling an artesian well with a depth of 293 meters to ensure a permanent abundance of water in the area. He expressed his deep thanks for the role of the Kuwait Relief Society in supporting this important development project and various other projects in the education, health, and environmental sanitation sectors, as well as other sectors. — KUNA



ADEN: The Kuwait Relief Society launches a water project in the south of Yemen's Taiz governorate. — KUNA



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Chinese mourners use AI to digitally resurrect the dead

## EU leaders battle Orban over funding package for Ukraine

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Smoke billows over the northern Gaza Strip during Zionist entity bombardment on December 14, 2023. — AFP

# Will Zionist entity try to force Gaza's population into Egypt?

## The scenario evokes dark historical memories of the 'Nakba'

**JERUSALEM:** With most Gazans displaced and Zionist entity forces pushing deeper into the Palestinian territory, UN officials and Middle East leaders have raised the specter of its residents being expelled to Egypt. That scenario evokes dark historical memories of what the Arab world calls the "Nakba" or catastrophe — the mass displacement of Palestinians during Zionist entity's creation 75 years ago.

More than two months of fighting have forced nearly 85 percent of Gaza's 2.4 million people from their homes, according to the United Nations, with many fleeing to the now overcrowded far-southern city of Rafah. Here is a look at the controversial question around the future of Gazans:

### Who is raising the alarm?

Filippo Grandi, head of the UN refugee agency, warned Wednesday that pushing Gazans across the frontier would be "extremely destabilizing for Egypt". "It's very important to insist that this evacuation of people beyond (the border) must not be promoted, must not

be advanced, forced," the UNHCR chief told journalists in Geneva.

Speaking in Qatar on Sunday, UN chief Antonio Guterres had also warned of "increased pressure for mass displacement into Egypt". His remarks echoed those of Philippe Lazzarini, head of the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, who warned "the developments we are witnessing point to attempts to move Palestinians into Egypt".

Writing in the Los Angeles Times, the UNRWA chief said the unfolding reality followed widespread destruction in northern Gaza and Zionist entity ordering civilians in the southern city of Khan Yunis to flee even further towards the border. Egypt, Jordan and Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas have previously warned against attempts to force Gazans out of the coastal territory, while Zionist entity and the United States have dismissed the idea.

"There is not, never was and never will be a Zionist entity plan to move the residents of Gaza to Egypt," a spokesperson for the Zionist entity's defense ministry office responsible for Palestinian

civilian affairs told AFP. Some members of the Zionist entity government have, however, publicly supported the idea of Gazans leaving the Palestinian territory en masse. Writing on Facebook last month, extreme-right Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich said he welcomed the "voluntary migration of Gaza Arabs to the countries of the world".

Zionist entity Intelligence Minister Gila Gamliel said that one "option" after the war would be "to promote the voluntary resettlement of Palestinians in Gaza, for humanitarian reasons, outside of the Strip". Former Zionist entity officials have suggested in TV interviews that Egypt could build vast tent cities in its Sinai desert, with international funding.

### What's the legal view?

Expelling civilians is banned under the Geneva Conventions, which form the core of international humanitarian law. "If it's done in the context of an armed conflict, then it's a war crime," said Sheila Paylan, an international human rights lawyer and former advisor to the United Nations.

Under the statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), the "deportation or forcible transfer of population" is listed as a crime against humanity. Leaders do not have to declare that people must leave in order for it to count as a forced transfer, Paylan said: "If you make the conditions impossible for people to live, then they have no choice."

There have been multiple successful convictions over the forcible displacement of civilians, she said, including at the ICC, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, and the Special Court of Sierra Leone.

### What's the historical perspective?

Abbas has said driving out Gaza's people would amount to a "second Nakba", referring to the forced displacement of more than 760,000 Palestinians during the war that coincided with Zionist entity's creation in 1948.

Their descendants make up the majority of Gaza residents, while nearly six million Palestinian refugees in the region are registered with UNRWA. During the 1967 Ar-

ab-Zionist entity War in which Zionist entity captured the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, there were further displacements.

### What do other countries say?

Days after the outbreak of war, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi said Gazans must "stay steadfast and remain on their land". Egypt was the first Arab nation to sign a peace treaty with Zionist entity, in 1979, followed by Jordan in 1994.

Speaking at the same Doha conference as the UN chief, Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi decried Zionist entity's "systematic effort... to empty Gaza (of) its people". Zionist entity's top ally, the United States, has supported the military campaign but said Gazans should not be forced out.

Following conversations with leaders across the Middle East, top US diplomat Antony Blinken in October said the idea of pushing Palestinians into Egypt "is a nonstarter". "We do not support it," Blinken said in an interview in Cairo with the Saudi-owned Al-Arabiya television network. — AFP

## Washington shows signs of strains with Zionist entity

**WASHINGTON:** The administration of President Joe Biden has begun to publicly air its differences with the Zionist entity government over the conduct of the war in Gaza, expressing its exasperation even as it remains largely steady in its support.

Biden referred this week to "indiscriminate bombing" in Gaza, underscoring his frustration with conservative Zionist entity Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, whose government Biden agrees is starting to lose global support. The Democratic US administration is even beginning to talk about a "timetable" for how long Zionist entity's high-intensity military operations can continue.

Warnings have multiplied in recent weeks, with senior US officials such as Vice President Kamala Harris and Secretary of State Antony Blinken speaking of the "far too high" number of Palestinian civilians killed, and the gap between commitments made by Zionist entity to respect civilian lives and the reality on the ground.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin recently warned Zionist entity of what is at stake: "In this kind of a fight, the center of gravity is the civilian population. And if you drive them into the arms of the enemy, you replace a tactical victory with a strategic defeat." But Washington, Zionist entity's main diplomatic and military ally, has been careful not to openly criticize its ally, and has resisted calls for a ceasefire, which it said would benefit Hamas, despite international pressure.

Indeed, the United States appears increasingly isolated in its support, as evidenced by Tuesday's vote in the UN General Assembly calling for such a ceasefire, passed by 153 member states, with only the US and nine other states voting against and 23 abstaining.

The trigger for the war was the bloody October 7 assault by Hamas militants on Zionist entity. Since then, the Biden administration has pressed its ally to unblock humanitarian aid for people in Gaza, work to free hos-



JENIN: Mourners carry the body of a Palestinian man killed during a Zionist entity raid on the Jenin refugee camp during his funeral in Jenin. — AFP

tages kidnapped by Hamas on the day of the attack, and adopt a more targeted military strategy. In private, US diplomats have made no secret of their dissatisfaction with Zionist entity's conduct of the war.

As a sign of the US pressure on Zionist entity, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan will visit Zionist entity on Thursday and Friday, the White House said. "I will certainly be talking to the PM, the war cabinet and senior Zionist entity officials about timetables, about how they are thinking about that," Sullivan told the Wall Street Journal on Tuesday, suggesting a shift from the "high intensity military operations of the kind we have seen over the past weeks."

For his part, Biden at the White House on Wednesday received for the first time families of US hostages held in Gaza by Hamas, a senior official said.

If there is a shift in the US position toward Zionist entity, it may reflect the domestic political situation as well. "There is a lot of pressure on the Biden administration among his own party and constituency" on policy toward Zionist entity, said James Ryan, director of the Middle East program at the Foreign Policy Research Institute, a nonprofit think tank.

But any shift also signals "a tacit admission" of limited US ability to influence the Zionist entity government, he added. Differences also loom over views on what happens after the war ends. — AFP

## Yemen rebels fire missile at cargo ship in Red Sea

**DUBAI:** Yemen's Houthi rebels fired a missile at a cargo ship en route to Saudi Arabia on Thursday but missed, a US official and a private intelligence firm said. No one was hurt in the incident involving the Maersk Gibraltar, which was sailing from Salalah, Oman to Jeddah, said the Danish shipping giant.

"The crew and vessel is reported safe," Maersk said in a statement, adding that the company was "still working to establish the facts of the incident". A US official said "we have indications that a missile was fired at the Maersk Gibraltar from a Houthi-controlled area of Yemen, and that it hit the water and missed the ship". The official was speaking on condition of anonymity as he wasn't authorized to make the statement publicly.

The attack came amid a near-daily stream of drones and missiles fired at ships by the rebels, who say they are supporting the Palestinian side in the Zionist entity war in

the Gaza Strip. Maersk said that "the recent attacks on commercial vessels... are extremely concerning."

"The current situation puts seafarer lives at risk and is unsustainable for global trade. As it cannot be solved by the global shipping industry on its own, we call on political action to ensure a swift de-escalation." Intelligence firm Ambrey said that the Hong-Kong flagged, Marshall Islands-owned ship was fired upon 45 nautical miles off the coast of Mocha, and also said that the crew was unharmed.

"Ambrey understands that the parent company has cooperated with a Zionist carrier but this particular vessel was not assessed to be Zionist-operated at the time of writing," the firm said in a statement. The Houthis have said they would target any ships travelling off the coast of Yemen with links to the Zionist entity. They did not immediately claim responsibility. The attack occurred near Bab-el-Mandeb, the strait between Yemen and northeast Africa leading to the Red Sea, a key route toward the Suez Canal and the Zionist entity's southern port of Eilat.

The Maersk Gibraltar is a 340-metre (1,115 foot) container ship built in 2016, according to MarineTraffic.com. Like they did with several other vessels recently, the Houthis first ordered it to dock in a Yemen port before firing on it when it did not comply, Ambrey said. — AFP

## Wagner chief says Russia 'retreating' from Ukraine attacks

**MOSCOW:** Moscow's forces are retreating in Ukraine's east and south following Kyiv's counteroffensive, the head of Russia's Wagner mercenary group said Friday.

The comments contradict recent assessments by Russian President Vladimir Putin that Ukraine was suffering "catastrophic" losses and that there was a lull in fighting. "On the ground now ... the Russian army is retreating on the Zaporizhzhia and Kherson fronts. The Armed Forces of Ukraine are pushing back the Russian army," Yevgeny Prigozhin said on social media.

The Kremlin last year claimed to have annexed the southern Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions despite not fully controlling them, and Ukraine has posted limited gains there recently. "We are washing ourselves in blood. No one is bringing reserves. What they tell us is the deepest deception," Prigozhin added, referring to the Russian military and political leadership. The 62-year-old Western-sanctioned businessman close to the Kremlin, who has become a prominent figure in Russia's operation in Ukraine, is also a vehement critic of Moscow's policies there.

His forces, bolstered by tens of thousands of prison recruits, played a central role in Russia's capture of the Donetsk region town, Bakhmut, the longest and likely bloodiest battle of the conflict. In an escalation of his Kremlin-critical rhetoric, Prigozhin also undermined the very premise of Putin's decision to launch the military operation in Ukraine. —AFP



## International

# EU leaders battle Orban over funding package for Ukraine

## Zelensky urges Europe's leaders not to hand Russia a political victory

BRUSSELS: Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orban threatened Thursday to veto an EU plan to boost aid and open membership talks for Ukraine, as President Volodymyr Zelensky urged Europe's leaders not to hand Russia a political victory. The EU's 27 leaders were focused at a crunch summit in Brussels on granting Kyiv a four-year 50-billion-euro (\$55-billion) funding package and an agreement to launch formal EU talks for Ukraine on joining the bloc.

But Orban, an authoritarian nationalist already embroiled in a row with Brussels over democratic standards in his own country, arrived apparently determined to make good on his threat to derail proceedings by using his veto to block both measures. "There is no reason to discuss anything because preconditions were not met," Orban said. "We're not going to move away from this."

The European Commission has advised the 27 leaders that Ukraine is making good progress towards enacting the necessary judicial reforms to meet EU standards. Most EU leaders want this week's summit to approve the start of formal membership talks, in a sign of solidarity with Ukraine 22 months after Russia launched an all-out invasion.

They also want to approve the financial aid package for Kyiv. But any decisions must be unanimous and Orban said that firstly, any aid would have to be enacted outside the EU budget and that secondly he would not allow membership talks to begin. He said Ukraine might meet more of the reform criteria needed to hit EU standards by March, but suggested that a decision on funding could wait until after June's European elections. Zelensky, in an impassioned plea via videolink, told the leaders "now is not the time for half-measures or hesitation". He said failure to open membership talks with Ukraine would be used by Russian President Vladimir Putin "against you personally, and against all of Europe."

"Don't give him this first – and only – victory of the year," the Ukrainian leader urged. Beyond Orban, other EU leaders stressed the need for unity and to send a strong signal of support for Ukraine, which has already seen Washington's support threatened by maneuvers in the US Congress.

The situation on the battlefield in Ukraine is no more promising for Kyiv. Russia's President Vladimir Putin boasted on Thursday that he has 617,000 troops in Ukraine, and that their positions are improving. But unless Orban backs down quickly, the EU summit—slated for Thursday and Friday—could fail or drag on into the weekend.

"I have packed many shirts," Finnish premier Petteri Orpo said. Lithuania's President Gitanas Nausėda said the summit was "a historic chance to take a credible decision regarding the start of negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova". He accused Hungary of abusing the European summit's unanimity rules, and insisted that Ukrainians and Moldovans deserve their chance to begin EU accession talks. "We must make progress in this accession process," Germany's Chancellor Olaf Scholz said.

Across Brussels, at NATO HQ, alliance secretary general Jens Stoltenberg warned that the West must continue supporting Ukraine in order to protect the rest of Europe. "If Putin wins in Ukraine, there is real risk that his aggression will not end there. Our support is not charity—it is an investment in our security," he said. Kyiv is desperately seeking to improve the narrative after Zelensky failed in Washington earlier this week to win over Republican lawmakers blocking support from the United States. Critics have accused the Hungarian leader of holding Kyiv's survival hostage in a bid to force Brussels to release billions of euros of EU funds frozen over a rule of law dispute.

In what some saw as a last-minute concession the

Suzuki, New Agriculture Minister Tetsushi Sakamoto took over after Ichiro Miyashita also tendered his resignation. Michiko Ueno, a special adviser to the prime minister, also left office along with five deputy ministers.

"The public's doubts are around me over political funds, which is leading to distrust in the government. As an investigation is going on, I thought I wanted to set things right," Nishimura told reporters.

Kishida said on Wednesday he would deal with the allegations "head-on". "I will make efforts like a ball of fire and lead the LDP to restore the public's trust," he told reporters. Kishida's poll ratings are the worst for any premier since the LDP returned to power in 2012 because of voter anger about inflation, as well as his handling of a string of earlier scandals. A new poll published by Jiji Press on Thursday showed public support for Kishida's cabinet at just 17.1 percent, down 4.2 percentage points. The kickbacks at the centre of the latest scandal 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

worked in the office of an LDP lawmaker told broadcaster ANN, his face concealed and voice disguised. The kickbacks scandal implicates the largest faction within the LDP, which was headed by ex-premier Shinzo Abe before his assassination last year. The grouping headed until recently by Kishida himself was also suspected of failing to declare more than 20 million yen in the three years to 2020, the Asahi Shimbun daily reported. Kishida's poll ratings have tumbled since being chosen as a safe pair of hands by the squabbling LDP in October 2021. He already carried out a reshuffle in September and last month announced a stimulus package worth 17 trillion yen (\$117 billion) to boost the flagging economy and ease the pain from rising prices. The 66-year-old 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.

Analysts said that jettisoning members of the LDP's biggest faction, with around 100 members, could make his job even harder. "This may not necessarily give Kishida more freedom in governing, as the break with the Abe faction could complicate the administration's management," Naofumi Fujimura, professor of political science at Kobe

University, told AFP. "The scandal has significantly undermined public support for the LDP and the Kishida government. However, it remains uncertain whether it will result in a change of government, especially given the currently low public support for opposition parties," he said. — AFP



DUBAI: Palestinian representative Haneen Jarr speaks about her family's plight during the Naqba (The Catastrophe) at the United Nations Climate Conference (COP28) at Expo City. — AFP

"million-dollar question" said Cinzia Bianco, a visiting fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations. "The UAE benefit from the production of fossil fuels, but they have already embraced that transition, way before the other producers," she said.

"It was easier for them than it was for the Saudis, who have still not embraced it to the same extent, to be the shepherd of a compromise position." Krieg said the Saudi opposition "has to be seen in the light of growing intra-Gulf competition and was an attempt to undermine the prospect of COP28 becoming successful." "However, considering that the global consensus was so strong and overwhelming, Saudi did not want to be seen as the odd-one out."

For the UAE, COP28 was not just about environmental benefits, said Kristian Ulrichsen, fellow for the Middle East at the Baker Institute in Houston, Texas. "The UAE invested a lot of political and diplomatic capital in COP28 and wanted precisely this kind of landmark statement that would associate the UAE with setting the global agenda and forging a new consensus for the road ahead," he said. — AFP



BRUSSELS: Ursula von der Leyen (left), Emmanuel Macron (second left), Roberta Metsola (center left), Evika Siliņa (center), Minister Petteri Orpo (center right) and Kyriakos Mitsotakis (right) talk as they attend a roundtable meeting of the European Council at the European headquarters in Brussels, on December 14, 2023. — AFP

European Commission, the EU's executive, agreed on Wednesday to unblock 10 billion euros of that cash. Another 21 billion euros still remain out of Orban's grasp. Arriving at the summit, Orban insisted that, for Hungary, Ukraine and the funding are not linked. "That's not our style," he said.

The summit also has to consider the membership dreams of Moldova and Georgia, two other ex-Sovi-

et states menaced by Moscow. Moldova is hoping leaders will green-light its starting talks to join as well. Georgia is aiming to reach the step behind that, becoming an official candidate for membership.

Even if Ukraine and Moldova are granted talks, the protracted process of joining the EU would involve years—if not decades—of major reforms and vetting before full membership. — AFP

## Japan PM replaces four ministers over kickbacks scandal

TOKYO: Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida replaced four ministers Thursday as the unpopular leader reels from a major corruption scandal in the ruling party. The furor centers on alleged kickbacks of 500 million yen (\$3.4 million) in the faction-riven Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), which has governed the world's third-largest economy almost uninterrupted for decades.

Media reports suggested that prosecutors would begin raiding offices and interviewing dozens of lawmakers later this week. Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno was replaced by former foreign minister Yoshimasa Hayashi, a high-ranking member of Kishida's LDP faction.

Ken Saito replaced Yasutoshi Nishimura as Economy and Industry Minister while Takeaki Matsumoto returned to his old post as internal affairs minister, replacing Junji



TOKYO: Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida speaks during a news conference at the Prime Minister's Office in Tokyo on December 13, 2023. — AFP

University, told AFP. "The scandal has significantly undermined public support for the LDP and the Kishida government. However, it remains uncertain whether it will result in a change of government, especially given the currently low public support for opposition parties," he said. — AFP

## Zionist ambassador to Britain rejects...

Continued from Page 1

"They want to have a state from the river to the sea," she added. The Oslo Accords, signed between Zionists and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1993 aimed to bring "peaceful coexistence" to Zionists and the Palestinians. The agreement was based on UN resolutions that said the Palestinian people had the right to self-deter-

mination. "Why are you obsessed with a formula (the two-state solution) that never worked, that created this radical people on the other side," Hotovely added.

She said the Palestinian Authority had still not condemned Hamas's attack. "It's now two months after the war started. It's such a big problem." UK Prime Minister Sunak said in response that he didn't agree with Hotovely's remarks. "Our long standing position is that the two state solution remains the right outcome here," he told reporters. Sunak said he had told Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that his country "must take every available precaution to protect innocent civilian lives". — AFP

## Climate deal has 'no immediate...

Continued from Page 1

the room when it was passed—followed some deft deal-making by the COP28 presidency. The United Arab Emirates' official WAM news agency called it a "win-win for all", describing COP28 as a "watershed moment in the fight against climate change". For French Energy Minister Agnes Pannier-Runacher, it was also an exercise in realpolitik. The deal's phrasing was "a very elegant way by the different negotiators to find a way out for all parties... nobody loses face and it's the climate and the planet that win".

Saudi Arabia and the UAE are investing in renewable energy and have pledged to decarbonise their domestic economies—not including the fossil fuels they sell abroad. They are also, like other oil producers including the United States, building up their capacities to cater for an expected rise in demand.

However, the realities of a post-oil future and the economic opportunities of the energy transition are not lost on the Gulf monarchies, analysts say. "They'll keep producing and exporting oil for decades," Ben Cahill, senior fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies' Energy Security and Climate Change Program, told AFP. "But the UAE is also investing to create a more diversified energy system and sees itself as a global player in financing the energy transition."

Andreas Krieg, a political risk analyst specializing in the Middle East, said it was a "significant and trend-setting statement" as it was agreed in the UAE under a COP28 president, Sultan Al-Jaber, who is CEO of oil giant ADNOC. "I think this is a shift in narrative for the hydrocarbon rentier states of the Gulf, who understand that the intent of phasing out fossil fuels will be reality-checked by a fairly stable demand for oil and certainly gas in the coming decades outside of the developed world," he said.

How Saudi Arabia was brought on board is the

## Newly-confident Putin vows victory in Ukraine

MOSCOW: President Vladimir Putin talked up Russia's offensive in Ukraine Thursday as he staged a marathon press conference a week after saying he plans to stay in the Kremlin until at least 2030. Clearly bolstered by Kyiv's recent struggles on the battlefield, the 71-year-old looked relaxed as he brushed off nearly two years of Western sanctions and reaffirmed his maximalist goals in Ukraine.

"There will be peace when we achieve our goals," Putin said, speaking at his first traditional end-of-year appearance since Russia shocked the world by sending troops into Ukraine in February 2022. Those goals "are not changing", he insisted, "the de-nazification and de-militarization of Ukraine, and its neutral status." Russian forces were "improving their position on almost the entire line of contact" in Ukraine, he said. Putin's four-hour appearance on national television comes at one of the lowest points for Kyiv in the conflict, which

has claimed tens of thousands of lives and erased entire cities across Ukraine's south and east.

Ukraine's summer counteroffensive petered out without making much progress and its Western support is fraying due to growing fatigue amid some US lawmakers and frictions within the European Union. Putin appeared to point to these, stressing that nearly two years of Western sanctions and international isolation had done little to hurt Russia's economy or morale. "There is enough for us not only to feel confident, but to move forward," Putin said. The echoes of Russia's military operation reverberated in the grand Moscow hall where hundreds of journalists passed four police checkpoints to hear Putin speak. Russia said it had downed nine Ukrainian drones heading for Moscow just hours before Putin's event was set to kick off.

Ukraine said it had shot down all but one of the 42 Russian drones that attacked Odessa, in a barrage that wounded 11 people. Putin's choreographed call-in show was cancelled last year as Moscow reeled from military failures, with Ukraine managing to repel the Kremlin's initial assault on Kyiv and then regaining territory in the east and south. Ukraine's strong resistance and support from its allies had surprised observers around the world and in Moscow, where many had expected to take Kyiv in a few days. But almost two years into his offensive, Putin appears to be sensing the tide turning in his favor. — AFP

## US House launches impeachment...

Continued from Page 1

Biden himself responded immediately after the vote, accusing Republicans of stalling on key fronts — such as funding government — while obsessing over scoring political points ahead of the election. "Instead of doing anything to help make Americans' lives better, they are focused on attacking me with lies," Biden said in a statement. "Instead of doing their job on the urgent work that needs to be done, they are choosing to waste time on this baseless political stunt that even Republicans in Congress admit is not supported by facts."

Republicans insist the work has merit. "As President Biden continues to stonewall lawful Congressional subpoenas, today's vote of the full House of Representatives authorizing the inquiry puts us in the strongest position to enforce these subpoenas in court," said House Speaker Mike Johnson and other members of Republican leadership. "The American people deserve answers," they said in a joint statement. "This impeachment inquiry will help us find them."

### 'Zero evidence'

Hunter Biden, whose chaotic personal life and business dealings have become a magnet for right-wing conspiracy theories and media investigations, issued an angry statement in Washington. "My father was not financially involved in my business," he

said. A Yale-trained lawyer and lobbyist-turned-artist whose life has been marred by personal tragedy, alcoholism and crack cocaine addiction, Hunter Biden was speaking to reporters from Capitol Hill, after refusing to attend a closed-door hearing led by Republicans just inside. Egged on by Trump — who was impeached twice, including for his attempts to overturn the results of his 2020 election loss to Biden — the Republican Party first began probing a possible Biden impeachment earlier this year. Hearings began late September, leading to the decision to hold Wednesday's vote.

House Oversight Committee Chairman James Comer charged Wednesday that the investigations so far have "revealed how Joe Biden knew of, participated in, and benefited from his family cashing in on the Biden name around the world." Experts interviewed during the proceedings, however, said there was no evidence to justify a Biden impeachment. And Democrats say the Republicans are playing pure politics. "There is zero evidence that President Biden has engaged in any wrongdoing," House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries said Tuesday.

The US Constitution provides that Congress may remove a president for "treason, bribery or other high crimes and misdemeanors." Impeachment by the House, which is the political equivalent of a criminal indictment, would spark a trial by the Senate, with the president losing his job if convicted — an unlikely scenario for Biden given the chamber's Democratic control. Although three US presidents have been impeached — Andrew Johnson in 1868, Bill Clinton in 1998, and Trump in 2019 and 2021 — none has ever been removed from office by the Senate. — AFP



## International

# Chinese mourners use AI to digitally resurrect the dead

## Firms claim to have created 'digital people' from audiovisual

**TAIZHOU, China:** At a quiet cemetery in eastern China, bereaved father Seakoo Wu pulls out his phone, places it on a gravestone and plays a recording of his son. They are words that the late student never spoke, but brought into being with artificial intelligence. "I know you're in great pain every day because of me, and feel guilty and helpless," intones Xuanmo in a slightly robotic voice.

"Even though I can't be by your side ever again, my soul is still in this world, accompanying you through life." Stricken by grief, Wu and his wife have joined a growing number of Chinese people turning to AI technology to create lifelike avatars of their departed.

Ultimately Wu wants to build a fully realistic replica that behaves just like his dead son but dwells in virtual reality. "Once we synchronize reality and the metaverse, I'll have my son with me again," Wu said. "I can train him... so that when he sees me, he knows I'm his father."

Some Chinese firms claim to have created thousands of "digital people" from as little as 30 seconds of audiovisual material of the deceased. Experts say they can offer much-needed comfort for people devastated by the loss of loved ones. But they also evoke an unsettling theme from the British sci-fi series "Black Mirror" in which people rely on advanced AI for bereavement support.

Wu and his wife were devastated when Xuanmo, their only child, died of a sudden stroke last year at the age of 22 while attending Exeter University

in Britain. The accounting and finance student, keen sportsman and posthumous organ donor "had such a rich and varied life", said Wu.

"He always carried in him this desire to help people and a sense of right and wrong," he told AFP.

Following a boom in deep learning technologies like ChatGPT in China, Wu began researching ways to resurrect him. He gathered photos, videos and audio recordings of his son, and spent thousands of dollars hiring AI firms that cloned Xuanmo's face and voice.

The results so far are rudimentary, but he has also set up a work team to create a database containing vast amounts of information on his son. Wu hopes to feed it into powerful algorithms to create an avatar capable of copying his son's thinking and speech patterns with extreme precision.

Several companies specializing in so-called "ghost bots" have emerged in the United States in recent years. But the industry is booming in China, according to Zhang Zewei, the founder of the AI firm Super Brain and a former collaborator with Wu.

"On AI technology, China is in the highest class worldwide," said Zhang from a workspace in the eastern city of Jiangning. "And there are so many people in China, many with emotional needs, which gives us an advantage when it comes to market demand." Super Brain charges between 10,000 and 20,000 yuan (\$1,400-\$2,800) to create a basic avatar within about 20 days, said Zhang.

They range from those who have died to living



**JIANGYIN, China:** This photo taken on November 8, 2023 shows Zhang Zewei, founder of AI firm Super Brain which specializes in digital replicas of the dead, has footage of him taken by a colleague as he demonstrates the creation of a video using artificial intelligence in Jiangyin, China's eastern Jiangsu province. — AFP

parents unable to spend time with their children and — controversially — a heartbroken woman's ex-boyfriend. Clients can even hold video calls with a staff member whose face and voice are digitally overlaid with those of the person they have lost.

"The significance for... the whole world is huge," Zhang said. "A digital version of someone (can) exist forever, even after their body has been lost."

Sima Huapeng, who founded Nanjing-based Sil-

icon Intelligence, said the technology would "bring about a new kind of humanism". He likened it to portraiture and photography, which helped people commemorate the dead in revolutionary ways. Tal Morse, a visiting research fellow at the Centre for Death and Society at Britain's University of Bath, said ghost bots may offer comfort. But he cautioned that more research was needed to understand their psychological and ethical implications. — AFP

## Seoul scrambles jets after Chinese, Russian warplanes approach

**SEOUL:** South Korea's military said Thursday it scrambled fighter jets as two Chinese and four Russian military planes entered its air defense zone, an area wider than the country's airspace. The Chinese and Russian planes entered and exited the Korea Air Defense Identification Zone (KADIZ) in the East Sea, also known as the Sea of Japan, from 11:53 am (02:53 GMT) to 12:10 pm, Seoul's Joint Chiefs of Staff said.

But "there was no invasion of airspace", it added, and the South Korean military identified the planes "before they entered KADIZ, and deployed air force fighter jets to take tactical measures in preparation for contingencies".

An air defense identification zone is a broader area than a country's airspace in which it tries to control aircraft for security reasons, but the concept is not defined in any international treaty.

China's foreign ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning described the incident on Thursday as "a routine flight activity". "As far as I know, I think this was a routine flight activity by Chinese military aircraft above international waters, which is understandable and in accordance with international law," she told a regular press briefing. China and Russia are North Korea's traditional allies, and Washington warned last month that military ties between Pyongyang and Moscow were "growing and dangerous".

The United States has called on Beijing — the North's biggest economic benefactor — to restrain Pyongyang. US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said last week that Washington and allies Seoul and Tokyo would "stand up" for stability across the Taiwan Strait, a sensitive waterway separating Taiwan from China.

The three allies also reiterated their commitment to freedom of navigation in the disputed South China Sea. China has in recent years ramped up military



**A South Korean Air Force F-35A fighter jet takes off during an air drill as part of the annual Ulchi Freedom Shield joint military exercise between South Korea and US in South Korea in this Defense Ministry hand-out image.**

and political pressures on democratic Taiwan, which it claims as its territory.

To reinforce that both the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea are international waterways, Washington and its Western allies have increased "freedom of navigation" crossings by naval vessels, angering Beijing. Nuclear-armed North Korea last month put a military spy satellite into orbit, with Seoul saying it did so with Moscow's help, in return for supplying weapons for use in Russia's war with Ukraine. The satellite launch fractured an inter-Korean military agreement established to de-escalate tensions on the peninsula, with both countries ramping up security along the demilitarized zone separating them.

In June, South Korea deployed fighter jets in response to Chinese and Russian warplanes near its airspace, as the two countries conducted joint air force patrols over the Sea of Japan and the East China Sea. Military jets from Moscow and Beijing also entered and exited Seoul's KADIZ in November last year, prompting the South to scramble its fighter jets.

Similar to the incident on Thursday, none of them violated South Korea's airspace at that time. — AFP

## Hong Kong issues bounties for five for security crimes

**HONG KONG:** Hong Kong police on Thursday issued bounties of HK\$1 million for each of five activists accused of national security crimes and currently living overseas, adding they would be pursued "till the end". All five are living abroad after Beijing imposed a sweeping national security law on the financial hub in 2020 to quell dissent after massive, and at times violent, pro-democracy protests.

"All of them, who have already fled overseas, have continued to commit offences under the national security law that seriously endanger national security," said Chief Superintendent Li Kwai-wah of Hong Kong's National Security Department. He added that they "betrayed their country, betrayed Hong Kong, disregarded the interests of Hong Kong people, and continue to endanger national security even when abroad". "We have placed bounties of HK\$1,000,000 (\$128,000) on each of them," Li told reporters at a press conference, in which he showed pictures of the group.

Among them was prominent activist Simon Cheng, who is currently in Britain and founder of the civil society group Hongkongers in Britain. The other four named were Frances Hui, Joey Siu, Fok Ka-chi and Choi Ming-da. Their charges include incitement to secession, incitement to subversion and foreign collusion, said Li.

Hong Kong's National Security Department will "pursue them till the end", Li said.

"For those who want to financially support these people, I urge them to think twice, to avoid drawing trouble to themselves." The national security law — which has reshaped Hong Kong society and busted down the legal firewall that once existed between the special autonomous region and mainland China — has the power to hold accused people accountable across the world. But Hong Kong authorities have not specified how enforcement abroad is possible. — AFP

## Schoolgirl seeks to kill teacher with knife at French school

**RENNES, France:** A 12-year-old schoolgirl threatened a teacher with a knife in an apparent murder attempt at a French school on Wednesday, prosecutors said, the latest incident in the country's increasingly tense education system. No one was injured in the incident during English class in the northwestern city of Rennes but prosecutors said they have opened a criminal investigation into attempted murder.

Born in 2011, the schoolgirl "came to class armed with a large knife with the apparent intention of killing her English teacher," said Rennes prosecutor Philippe Astruc. "During the lesson, in class, she brandished the knife at the victim who fled running," before the girl was disarmed by staff of the Hautes Ourmes junior high school, he added.

"The pupils, shocked, were immediately moved to safety," the local education authority said.

At a press conference, Astruc showed drawings of a kitchen knife, which he said was 17 centimeters (6.7 inches) long. The girl underwent psychiatric examinations in hospital which concluded that "the minor was 'dangerous for herself' and that her condition required care in a specialized environment", Astruc said in a statement Wednesday.

The prosecutor had previously said it appeared the "psychological or even psychiatric aspect" seemed "dominant in the act" by the girl. The suspect is the eldest of four children in a family of Mongolian origin with residency in France and who arrived in Rennes in 2012. Tensions have been rising in schools in France, which has large Muslim and Jewish communities, sometimes linked to the war between the Zionist entity and Palestinian Islamist group Hamas. In October, a radicalized Islamist stabbed his former teacher to death in the northern town of Arras. — AFP



**CAIRNS, Australia:** Holloways Beach resident Lisa Methven watches the storm across the Coral Sea as Cyclone Jasper approaches landfall in Cairns in far north Queensland on December 13, 2023. — AFP

## Australian disaster crews tally damage from Cyclone Jasper

**CAIRNS, Australia:** Disaster-response teams fanned out across northeastern Australia on Thursday, counting the cost of a tropical cyclone that flooded major highways, uprooted trees, and left 40,000 without power. Coastal regions were battered by damaging winds and swamped by flooded rivers as Tropical Cyclone Jasper barreled in off the Coral Sea on Wednesday evening.

Although the storm was running out of steam by Thursday morning, government meteorologists warned it was still whipping up "intense rainfall and damaging wind gusts". "This is an evolving situation because the rainfall has not stopped yet and is likely to continue well into today and this evening," forecaster Laura Boekel told reporters. "If we see this

fall in a short period... that's when we can see that dangerous and very life-threatening flash flooding."

Queensland Fire and Emergency Services said chainsaw-wielding disaster response crews had been dispatched to clear major roads clogged by fallen trees and downed powerlines.

State treasurer Cameron Dick said 40,000 homes and businesses remained without electricity on Thursday morning, including 25,000 in the resort city of Cairns. Floodwaters inundated the rural town of Mossman around midnight Wednesday after a swollen river burst its banks — forcing a small number of evacuations. Queensland state disaster coordinator Shane Chelepy told reporters there had been "no serious injuries or loss of life" reported in the wake of the cyclone.

Rough surf, strong winds and heavy rain pelted the seaside town of Palm Cove, where usually bustling restaurants and high-end hotels battened down the hatches and waited for the storm to pass. Uprooted vegetation littered the town's coastal promenade and rows of coconut palms and melaleuca trees bowed under the strain of Jasper's gusts. — AFP

### News in Brief

#### 16 dead in Venezuela pile-up

**CARACAS:** At least 16 people died and six more were seriously injured after a fiery 17-vehicle pile-up on a highway in Venezuela, officials said Wednesday. "So far there are 16," the country's fire chief Juan Gonzalez said when asked about the death toll in the crash on the Gran Mariscal de Ayacucho highway, which connects the capital, Caracas, with the east of the country. The accident occurred when a speeding truck smashed into a line of cars that had come to a standstill because of a previous accident, in which no one was injured, officials said. — AFP

#### Philippines departs 180 Chinese

**MANILA:** The Philippines deported 180 Chinese nationals on Thursday after they were detained in a raid on a suspected sex-trafficking and online scam operation in the capital Manila, officials said. Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese and Filipino nationals were among the nearly 600 people found inside a compound during the operation in October. A massage parlor, karaoke rooms and a restaurant were found in the building operated by a business that authorities said was licensed as an internet gaming company. Several women were "rescued" during the raid, police said. The Chinese nationals deported did not have work permits and had been "engaging in online scams", Presidential Anti-Organized Crime Commission Undersecretary Gilberto Cruz said. — AFP

#### EU to resettle nearly 61,000 refugees

**GENEVA:** The European Union has committed to resettling nearly 61,000 refugees in some of its member countries over the next two years, European Home Affairs Commissioner Ylva Johansson said on Thursday. "We have, since 2015, resettled and through humanitarian admission programs giving protection to 175,000 people in the European Union," Johansson told a press conference on the margins of the United Nations' Global Refugee Forum in Geneva. "And now, I am happy to announce that for 2024 and 2025 I have, from 14 member states, pledges for resettlement and humanitarian admission (for) ... almost 61,000 people," she said. — AFP

#### Mobsters nabbed in Italy

**ROME:** One of Italy's most dangerous fugitives has been captured at a party, Italian police said on Thursday, while another mobster was arrested while shopping in a supermarket. Gaetano Angrisano, 31, was sentenced to 10 years in prison for drug trafficking 18 months ago and was on the interior ministry's "100 most dangerous fugitives" list. Naples police said. A powerful member of a clan in the notorious Scampia neighborhood of the southern Italian city, he had been "a ghost" who "escaped handcuffs for a year and a half", it said. But after establishing he would be at a party in a social housing complex on Wednesday night, some 250 policemen surrounded the block so that "no-one could get in or out". — AFP

#### German army orders 62 Airbus copters

**PARIS:** The German army has signed a contract for 62 multi-role military helicopters and taken options on another 20, Airbus said Thursday in what the company said was the largest order for the H145M. A German defense ministry spokeswoman confirmed the order was signed on Wednesday after being approved by the parliament's budget committee. The amount of the transaction was not provided, but according to other media could reach 2.7 billion euros (\$3.0 billion). The H145M is the military version of Airbus's light twin-engine H145 helicopter. — AFP



## Business

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2023

## OPEC+ grip on oil market loosening: IEA

## Slowing demand growth and rising US crude production cited

PARIS: Slowing demand growth and rising US crude production will make it more difficult for OPEC+ to continue to prop up prices, the IEA said on Thursday. The OPEC+ cartel, led by Saudi Arabia and Russia, has been restraining production to maintain prices but the latter have recently slumped due to the weakening of the global economy and increases in output outside the bloc.

"The continued rise in output and slowing demand growth will complicate efforts by key producers to defend their market share and maintain elevated oil prices," the International Energy Agency said in its monthly report on the oil market. The Paris-based IEA, which advises oil-consuming nations, noted that prices had fallen by around \$25 per barrel since September highs.

It pointed to US output defying expectations that

it would fall but instead rising above 20 million barrels per day (mbd), record Brazilian and Guyanese production, and an increase in exports by OPEC-member Iran. The OPEC+ group's share of the oil market will slide to 51 percent this year—the lowest since the bloc's creation in 2016, the IEA added.

Meanwhile, "evidence of a slowdown in oil demand is mounting", it said. Oil demand growth had slowed from an increase of 2.8 mbd year-on-year in the third quarter to 1.9 mbd in the fourth quarter, it added. The fourth quarter forecast was revised down by 0.4 mbd from its previous estimate.

## Demand for oil slowing

For 2023 overall, oil demand growth is set to come in at 2.3 mbd. "The slowdown is set to continue in 2024, with global gains halving to 1.1 mbd, as GDP



growth stays below trend in major economies," said the IEA. Efficiency improvements and a booming electric vehicle fleet have also been lowering oil demand, it added.

"The increasingly apparent loss of oil demand growth momentum reflects the deterioration in the

macroeconomic climate—in the wake of higher interest rates as well as the fading rebound from COVID-induced lows," it said. It sees world global domestic product (GDP) growth declining further from the already below-trend level of 3.0 percent in 2023 to 2.6 percent in 2024, with China slowing from 5.0 percent to 4.2 percent. The growth slowdown in China, the world's second-largest economy, is important for the oil market as it accounted for 80 percent of the global increase in oil demand in 2023 according to the IEA. The IEA also noted that the price of Russia's main grade of oil fell sharply last month to below the \$60-per-barrel cap set by a coalition of Western nations. Combined with a drop in shipments, the IEA said Russia's export revenues fell 17 percent month-on-month to \$15.2 billion, adding this was the lowest level since July. — AFP

## ECB, BoE pause again, warn on inflation

FRANKFURT/LONDON: The European Central Bank froze borrowing costs again on Thursday but warned that inflation could pick up again in the near term, in an apparent pushback against market hopes of early rate cuts in 2024. The second consecutive pause keeps the ECB's benchmark deposit rate at a record high of four percent following a historic streak of hikes to tame runaway prices. The Bank of England also on Thursday held its key interest rate and warned it will remain high to tackle inflation, indicating in contrast with the Federal Reserve that cuts were unlikely any time soon. The British central bank's monetary policy committee (MPC) voted 6-3 in favour of keeping the rate at 5.25 percent, the highest level in more than 15 years, it said in a statement.

The US central bank had also frozen borrowing costs on Wednesday but signaled that it would start cutting rates next year and sparked a broad markets rally. "Monetary policy would need to be sufficiently restrictive for sufficiently long to return inflation to the two percent target sustainably in the medium term," stated the minutes from this week's BoE gathering.

They added: "The committee continued to judge that monetary policy was likely to need to be restrictive for an extended period of time." UK inflation dropped sharply in October to 4.6 percent, but remains the highest level in the G7 rich nations and more than double the BoE's 2.0-percent target rate. November data is due next Wednesday.

The Frankfurt institution said rates were at levels that if "maintained for a sufficiently long duration" would make a "substantial contribution" to bringing inflation back down to the two-percent target.

Governor Andrew Bailey, in a letter to finance minister Jeremy Hunt, added Thursday that there



FRANKFURT: President of the European Central Bank (ECB) Christine Lagarde addresses a press conference following the meeting of the governing council of the ECB in Frankfurt am Main, western Germany, on December 14, 2023. — AFP

was "still some way to go" in policymakers' efforts to drag inflation down. Inflation had surged to a 41-year peak at 11.1 percent in October 2022, stoked by spiking energy prices after the invasion of Ukraine by major oil and gas producer Russia and sparking a cost-of-living crisis in Britain.

Six MPC members voted in favor of no change—but three called for an increase to 5.5 percent and cited "evidence of persistent inflationary pressures". The BoE had also frozen borrowing costs at its previous gatherings in September and November, snapping a series of 14 hikes, as inflation slowed. The outlook darkened this week as official data showed the UK economy shrank by more than expected in October in a broad-based decline, hitting reverse as high interest rates took their toll.

Eurozone inflation slowed faster than expected in November to a two-year low of 2.4 percent, after peaking at around 10 percent last year. But the ECB cautioned against declaring victory too soon. "While inflation has dropped in recent months, it is likely to pick up again temporarily in the near term," it said, amid

concerns about rising wages in the 20-nation currency club. The ECB's warning will likely be aimed at cooling investor expectations of faster rate cuts next year.

Speculation had mounted after the US Federal Reserve held its rates on Wednesday and indicated that it expected three rate cuts next year.

The much-sought-after dovish tilt sparked a broad markets rally with Wall Street soaring to record highs. But analysts expected ECB president Christine Lagarde to use her press conference later Thursday to push back against hopes of a similar signal from Frankfurt. "Markets will probably have to correct some of their over-optimistic rate cut expectations once the ECB has spoken," said Berenberg bank economist Holger Schmieding. The Bank of England found itself in a similar position on Thursday. It too left its key rate unchanged, at 5.25 percent, and warned that the rate would remain high "for an extended period" to tackle inflation. "Unlike the Federal Reserve, the Bank of England is clearly reluctant to endorse market pricing for rate cuts in 2024," said ING economist James Smith. — AFP

## Meta rolls out Threads in EU

BRUSSELS: Facebook owner Meta's text-based app Threads arrived in the European Union on Thursday, months after its global launch in July, Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg said. Threads is a spin-off of the Instagram photo app and is intended to be a rival to X, formerly known as Twitter, after that platform alienated many users and advertisers following Elon Musk's purchase last year.

"Today we're opening Threads to more countries in Europe. Welcome everyone," Zuckerberg said on Thursday. Threads went live in 100 countries earlier this year but not in the EU. Meta officials cited regulatory clarity as the reason for delaying the social network's arrival in Europe.

Meta has repeatedly come under the EU's regulatory microscope, especially over concerns about how it uses people's data to serve highly targeted advertising. The European Union has bolstered its legal armoury to rein in Big Tech, with stricter rules to protect European users online and to boost competition in an industry dominated by US giants.

More than 100 million people had joined Threads within a week of its launch that excluded the EU.

Meta said that now EU users can create a Threads profile connected to their Instagram account, but they can also use the app without a profile to browse, share and even report content, as part of the compa-



WASHINGTON: This photo illustration created in Washington, DC, on July 6, 2023, shows the logo for Threads, an Instagram app, next to its page on the App Store. — AFP

ny's compliance with EU rules. They cannot, however, interact with Threads content nor post without an Instagram sign-on. Instagram has some two billion users around the world.

Threads said it had added new features since its launch including a "Following Feed", the ability to edit a post, search with keywords and tag topics.

Under a landmark law known as the Digital Markets Act (DMA), the EU named Meta as a "gatekeeper", and its Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp face tougher curbs. The stricter rules especially impact the world's biggest online companies. They include Meta, Google's Alphabet, Amazon, Apple, TikTok parent ByteDance and Microsoft. Zuckerberg said a day earlier that Threads had

pressed pause on interest rates, while the dollar lost ground. Frankfurt's DAX index vaulted to 17,003.28 and the Paris CAC 40 struck 7,653.99, but both later dropped back for small gains as the ECB and the BoE elected as expected to hold fire on rates even while warning the inflation battle is not yet won. ECB president Christine Lagarde warned that policymakers should not "lower our guard" in fighting inflation in comments dousing market hopes of early drops in interest rates next year. She added rate cuts had not been discussed on fears inflation could pick up again in the near term. In addition, the ECB cut its growth forecasts

begin tests where users' posts will also be available on similar text-based and open-source rival social networks like Mastodon.

"Making Threads interoperable will give people more choice over how they interact and it will help content reach more people. I'm pretty optimistic about this," Zuckerberg said in a Threads post.

Interoperability is also an EU goal. Under the DMA, the most popular messaging services will have to make it possible for users to send messages to other apps. Meta is challenging the EU's designation of its instant messenger service Messenger as a "core platform service" and for its Facebook Marketplace also coming under the DMA's scope. The company has struggled to comply with the strict rules of a 2018 EU data privacy regulation. It hopes that by offering paid ad-free subscriptions in Europe for Facebook and Instagram for users unwilling to have their personal data harvested it will help to avoid further issues.

Threads chief Adam Mosseri also said this week that the app would extend its fact-checking program next year. "We currently match fact-check ratings from Facebook or Instagram to Threads, but our goal is for fact-checking partners to have the ability to review and rate misinformation on the app. More to come soon," he said on Threads.

Another milestone EU law is the Digital Services Act, which forces digital giants to aggressively police content online in the EU, including misinformation, disinformation and hate speech, against the risk of major fines. AFP is involved in a partnership with Meta providing fact-checking services in Asia-Pacific, Europe, the Middle East, Latin America and Africa. — AFP

for this year and next, given the impact of a slew of recent rate hikes to the current benchmark deposit record high of four percent.

London's FTSE 100 stood 1.3 percent ahead mid-session after the BoE decided to keep its key rate at a 15-year pinnacle of 5.25 percent as UK inflation declines yet remains elevated, the judgment being monetary policy will likely need to be restrictive for an extended period. Amid such caveats, "there were no (market) fireworks," noted Craig Erlam, senior market analyst with Oanda, whose global conclusion was the central banks "didn't give investors much to get excited about." — AFP

## EU probes App Store, Google Play

BRUSSELS: The EU demanded on Thursday that Apple and Google provide more details on how they identified risks concerning their respective software hubs, the App Store and Google Play. The request for information is the first step in a process begun under the EU's Digital Services Act (DSA), but does not itself indicate there have been legal violations or a move towards punishment.

The European Commission said it wanted "more information on how" Apple and Google "have diligently identified any systemic risks concerning the App Store and Google Play". It also wants the companies to demonstrate that they have complied with rules on digital marketplaces and transparency about adverts in order to protect users online.

Apple and Google must respond by January 15. The DSA is one of the EU's mammoth new laws to bring big tech to heel, with stricter rules on policing content online and ensuring that digital consumers have a safer experience. The commission has already launched a slew of other probes against big online platforms, such as Amazon, seeking information about how they are complying with the DSA. If a platform violates the DSA, it risks a fine of up to six percent of global turnover. — AFP

## US retail sales pick up in November

WASHINGTON: Retail sales in the United States rose unexpectedly last month, according to government data released Thursday, with consumer spending holding up in the face of higher interest rates. Sales in the world's biggest economy edged up 0.3 percent in November to \$705.7 billion, from a revised 0.2 percent drop in October, said the Commerce Department.

US consumption has been more resilient than anticipated even as the central bank embarked on an aggressive campaign to ease demand and rein in inflation by hiking rates rapidly.

But with inflation coming down, the Federal Reserve held interest rates steady at the end of its latest meeting on Wednesday as policymakers assessed the state of the economy. Compared with the same period a year ago, retail sales were 4.1 percent higher, according to the Commerce Department report.

Sales at gasoline stations slipped 2.9 percent from October to November, likely on the back of lower gas prices, while those at electronics and appliances stores dropped 1.1 percent as well.

Restaurants and bars sales meanwhile jumped 1.6 percent in November, and those at motor vehicles and parts dealers rose 0.5 percent. "That is a good sign that spending on other discretionary services is holding up well," said Michael Pearce, lead US economist at Oxford Economics, on the food and drink spending. The data reported so far for the fourth quarter "are pointing to a slowing in consumption" from the third quarter, said Rubeca Farooqi, chief US economist at High Frequency Economics.

But the rate is still strong, she added, noting that a strong labor market and cooling inflation should help to prop up spending. "The resilience of the consumer provides credibility to the Fed achieving a soft landing," said Nationwide chief economist Kathy Bostjancic, referring to a scenario where inflation comes down without triggering a damaging recession. But robust consumption "should also be a signal to markets that the Fed is not likely to cut rates as quickly," she added. There is "no sign of an imminent collapse in consumption," according to economist Kieran Clancy of Pantheon Macroeconomics. But areas like auto sales are seeing a slowing trend as higher financing costs weigh on purchases, he noted. Pantheon said in an earlier report that auto sales have "been more or less flat since the start of this year." — AFP

## Europe stocks rally on Fed pivot, as ECB, BoE press pause

LONDON: European equities leapt Thursday with Frankfurt and Paris briefly striking all-time peaks, after the Federal Reserve sent Wall Street soaring on a pivot toward interest rate cuts next year.

London also rallied as the Bank of England joined the European Central Bank and again



# 'Where is the money?' COP28 deal throws spotlight on funding

## IEA: Global clean energy investments need to reach \$4.5tn a year by 2030

PARIS: After COP28's landmark call for the world to move away from fossil fuels, experts say the pressure is on to fast-track—and fund—the global energy transition. The agreement was a compromise wrestled out of countries with sharply conflicting interests by the oil-rich United Arab Emirates, hosting COP28 in the last days of the hottest year humans have recorded so far. It calls for "transitioning away from fossil fuels in energy systems, in a just, orderly and equitable manner"—after three decades without naming the main driver of planet-heating pollution.

With rapidly-accelerating climate impacts slamming communities across the planet, observers said this was both a major milestone and the very minimum needed to steer the world onto a safer track.

The bigger challenge will be turning the promise of the COP28 agreement into sweeping global decarbonisation that comes close to the goal of limiting warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius from preindustrial levels. COP28's goal to triple global renewables capacity and double the rate of energy efficiency improvements by 2030 will require significant investment, particularly in developing countries least responsible for warming. An editorial in Indonesia's Jakarta Post on Thursday called on rich polluters to scale up finance.

"COP28, where is the dough?" it asked. The Dubai text acknowledged that trillions of dollars are needed by debt-stricken developing countries to meet their climate targets this decade as they face worsening warming impacts. But Senegal's climate envoy Madeleine Diouf Sarr, Chair of the Least Developed Countries Group, said it "fails to deliver a credible response to this challenge", calling for 2024 UN climate talks to work to close the gap.

Countries in Dubai were tasked with responding to a damning assessment of progress on the world's existing flagship climate promise—the 2015 Paris deal's commitment to limit warming to "well below" 2C and preferably to the safer 1.5C threshold. At 1.2 degrees of warming, scientists have said climate change was a major driver of the extreme heat that has scorched across the planet this year and stoked massive fires in parts of Canada.

It increased the severity of devastating drought in the Horn of Africa—and then exacerbated catastrophic flooding in the same region. "Until fossil fuels are phased out, the world will continue to become a more dangerous, more expensive and more uncertain place to live," said Friederike Otto, senior Climate Science lecturer at the Grantham Institute, Imperial College London.



DUBAI: Teresa Ribera, the ecology transition minister of current European Union president Spain, talks to the press at the United Nations climate summit in Dubai on December 13, 2023. — AFP

Before COP28, Earth was heading towards disastrous heating of between 2.5C and 2.9C by 2100, according to the UN Environment Programme (UNEP). The Dubai decision had not changed the reality that the world is not on track, said its Executive Director Inger Andersen.

"Now the hard work of decarbonisation must begin," Andersen said, calling for greater financial support for poorer countries in their energy transitions. Observers said a lack of specifics on finance in the COP28 text sets the stage for the issue to dominate COP29 talks next year in Azerbaijan and ups the pressure for sweeping climate-focused reforms of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. Nicholas Stern, of the Grantham Research Institute at the London School of Economics, said countries should respond to the COP28 decision with "a huge increase in investment" in clean energy and green growth.

That is particularly needed in developing countries, except China, which face an estimated \$2.4 trillion annual cost by 2030 to meet their climate and development priorities. The International Energy Agency estimates global clean energy investments need to reach \$4.5 trillion a year by 2030. That is a steep increase

from the \$1.8 trillion this year, helped by policies in the United States, Europe, China and India.

IEA chief Fatih Birol called on countries to follow through on COP28 with more "concrete policies", in a post on X, formerly Twitter. Nevertheless, "spectacular" growth of technologies like wind and solar, as well as electric vehicles, has enabled the IAE to forecast that world fossil fuel demand will peak this decade. That prognosis has been shrugged off by fossil fuel producers.

They plan to continue to expand oil, gas and coal despite the message from climate scientists that this would push the world beyond the 1.5C target. Observers say loopholes in the Dubai text include the focus on fossil fuels for energy—potentially leaving out polluting products like plastics and fertilisers—as well as a nod to gas as a "transition fuel". Bill McKibben, the founder of environmental campaign group 350.org, said while the COP28 call to shift from fossil fuels may seem like "the single most obvious thing one could possibly say about climate change", it could give activists a powerful new argument. "We need to insist that the clear, plain meaning of the language is, the fossil fuel era is over," he wrote in his newsletter. — AFP

## US-China friendship carries climate summit

DUBAI: The scene would be unthinkable elsewhere these days—US and Chinese envoys, smiling and embracing, hailing their friendship as leading the world together in the right direction. But the spirit of cooperation was on full display in Dubai, where a UN climate summit on Wednesday sealed a historic if watered-down agreement to begin to transition away from oil, gas and coal, the main culprits in the planetary crisis.

Hailing the summit as a success, US climate envoy John Kerry—the former secretary of state, senator and presidential contender—was joined by a beaming Xie Zhenhua, his retiring Chinese counterpart whom he has known for years. Kerry had welcomed Xie a month earlier for a long weekend at the Sunnyslands resort in the California desert, where the two countries—together responsible for 41 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions—agreed on outlines of climate action that partly served as a basis for the nearly 200-nation Dubai deal.


Xie recalled their work together on another major climate accord, in Paris eight years ago, and said he brought his grandson—himself eight years old—to Dubai to meet Kerry, who turned 80 on Monday during the negotiations. His grandson wanted to say "happy birthday to my good friend Mr. Kerry," Xie said. Stepping up to embrace the silver-haired American, Xie said, "I would like to invite you to join me to wish my good old friend good health and a happy life."

It was a far cry from the "wolf warrior" diplomacy for which China has recently become known, with shrill, loaded pronouncements attacking the United States and its influence in the world.

While tensions have eased, with Presidents Joe Biden and Xi Jinping meeting last month in San Francisco, the two powers remain at loggerheads on a wide range of issues.

At the height of the round-the-clock negotiations in Dubai, when Xie and Kerry said they were working together, the State Department was issuing a statement denouncing what it saw as aggressive moves by Beijing against the Philippines in the South China Sea.

Climate change should be seen as a "universally accepted humanitarian issue" and "not a bilateral, strategic question in terms of the South China Sea or other kinds of things," Kerry said.—AFP



شركة الصفاة للاستثمار  
AL SAFAT INVESTMENT COMPANY

# KUWAIT BOURSA WEEKLY REPORT

WEEK ENDED ON 14 DECEMBER 2023

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| No. | Ticker                       | Sector                 | Price Movement & Performance |             |           |          |       |             |            |        |          |               | Valuation Multiples * |      |      |       |      |
|-----|------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------------|-------------|-----------|----------|-------|-------------|------------|--------|----------|---------------|-----------------------|------|------|-------|------|
|     |                              |                        | Open Price                   | Close Price | Week High | Week Low | Range | Volume      | WTD Change | WTD %  | YTD %    | Support Level | Resistance Level      | P/E  | P/B  | Yield | Beta |
| 101 | National Bank of Kuwait      | Banking                | 880                          | 907         | 916       | 876      | 40    | 30,668,967  | 29         | 3.30%  | -11.66%  | 895           | 913                   | 13.2 | 1.71 | 3.7%  | 1.02 |
| 102 | Gulf Bank                    | Banking                | 265                          | 274         | 279       | 265      | 14    | 56,249,166  | 14         | 5.38%  | -7.80%   | 270           | 281                   | 13.3 | 1.25 | 3.5%  | 1.32 |
| 106 | Kuwait International Bank    | Banking                | 146                          | 150         | 152       | 146      | 6     | 29,662,157  | 4          | 2.74%  | -16.27%  | 147           | 150                   | 15.7 | 0.57 | 2.4%  | 1.11 |
| 107 | Burgan Bank                  | Banking                | 167                          | 178         | 180       | 167      | 13    | 43,731,376  | 11         | 6.59%  | -14.66%  | 176           | 185                   | 18.7 | 0.67 | 4.3%  | 1.36 |
| 108 | Kuwait Finance House         | Banking                | 701                          | 716         | 723       | 698      | 25    | 98,357,151  | 15         | 2.14%  | -4.30%   | 704           | 725                   | 17.8 | 1.84 | 2.3%  | 1.17 |
| 109 | Boubyan Bank                 | Banking                | 581                          | 597         | 603       | 581      | 22    | 8,446,635   | 16         | 2.75%  | -20.70%  | 593           | 616                   | 36.9 | 2.40 | 0.9%  | 1.20 |
| 201 | Kuwait Investment            | Financial Services     | 126                          | 129         | 131       | 126      | 5     | 5,573,912   | 2          | 1.57%  | -15.13%  | 125           | 129                   | 7.7  | 0.61 | 3.8%  | 1.82 |
| 204 | National Investments         | Financial Services     | 227                          | 240         | 249       | 224      | 25    | 20,494,932  | 13         | 5.73%  | 1.27%    | 237           | 244                   | 78.3 | 1.12 | 11.6% | 2.05 |
| 205 | Kuwait Projects              | Financial Services     | 118                          | 113         | 121       | 112      | 9     | 71,348,179  | -4         | -3.42% | 0.89%    | 110           | 116                   | 29.8 | 0.68 | 0.0%  | 1.02 |
| 212 | Arzan Financial Group        | Financial Services     | 208                          | 200         | 215       | 196      | 19    | 128,472,028 | -7         | -3.38% | 77.39%   | 195           | 202                   | 30.5 | 1.43 | 1.9%  | 1.17 |
| 222 | Aayan Leasing and Investment | Financial Services     | 170                          | 170         | 173       | 167      | 6     | 70,422,852  | 0          | 0.00%  | 27.82%   | 168           | 171                   | 8.7  | 1.17 | 4.4%  | 1.64 |
| 252 | Al Imtiaz Investment         | Financial Services     | 61.0                         | 57.9        | 61.0      | 57.0     | 4.0   | 2,974,487   | -3.0       | -4.93% | -22.70%  | 57.1          | 59.1                  | NM   | 0.37 | 15.6% | 1.36 |
| 401 | Kuwait Real Estate           | Real Estate            | 205                          | 196         | 208       | 196      | 12    | 62,361,975  | -8         | -3.92% | 86.93%   | 193           | 198                   | 16.3 | 1.35 | 1.4%  | 1.08 |
| 413 | Mabaneer                     | Real Estate            | 817                          | 812         | 830       | 812      | 18    | 2,691,711   | -8         | -0.98% | 1.50E-02 | 811           | 838                   | 17.1 | 1.79 | 1.6%  | 1.03 |
| 418 | The Commercial Real Estate   | Real Estate            | 104                          | 102.0       | 105       | 102.0    | 3.0   | 21,297,172  | -2.0       | -1.92% | 6.23%    | 102           | 105                   | 20.8 | 0.64 | 2.8%  | 0.62 |
| 501 | National Industries          | Financial Services     | 191                          | 197         | 200       | 190      | 10    | 19,152,412  | 7          | 3.68%  | -4.68%   | 194           | 199                   | 18.1 | 0.94 | 2.4%  | 1.62 |
| 505 | Gulf Cable                   | Industrials            | 1,270                        | 1,338       | 1,345     | 1,252    | 93    | 2,640,082   | 77         | 6.11%  | 10.12%   | 1,319         | 1,350                 | 14.1 | 1.24 | 4.5%  | 1.04 |
| 506 | HEISCO                       | Industrials            | 869                          | 850         | 879       | 840      | 39    | 5,688,732   | -15        | -1.73% | 38.66%   | 846           | 858                   | 23.8 | 2.16 | 2.4%  | 0.92 |
| 514 | Boubyan Petrochemical        | Basic Materials        | 616                          | 600         | 620       | 588      | 32    | 6,761,009   | -20        | -3.23% | -25.00%  | 588           | 604                   | 12.8 | 1.24 | 10.1% | 0.95 |
| 603 | Agility                      | Industrials            | 529                          | 519         | 529       | 515      | 14    | 21,836,988  | -6         | -1.14% | -27.92%  | 500           | 520                   | 15.7 | 0.75 | 0.0%  | 1.52 |
| 605 | Zain                         | Telecommunications     | 488                          | 491         | 503       | 488      | 15    | 28,767,809  | 3          | 0.61%  | -12.79%  | 487           | 495                   | 9.9  | 1.72 | 7.1%  | 0.63 |
| 623 | Human Soft Holding           | Industrials            | 3,090                        | 3,099       | 3,123     | 3,044    | 79    | 620,753     | -15        | -0.48% | -7.56%   | 3,065         | 3,100                 | 9.2  | 3.42 | 12.3% | 0.64 |
| 642 | ALAFCO                       | Industrials            | 178                          | 178         | 181       | 175      | 6     | 1,885,565   | 3          | 1.71%  | -12.32%  | 171           | 178                   | NM   | 0.77 | 0.0%  | 1.17 |
| 654 | JAZEERA                      | Consumer Discretionary | 1,310                        | 1,360       | 1,400     | 1,310    | 90    | 1,390,846   | 51         | 3.90%  | -28.42%  | 1,300         | 1,405                 | 23.8 | 8.94 | 5.7%  | 1.45 |
| 813 | GFH Financial Group          | Financial Services     | 75.6                         | 76.4        | 77.2      | 75.6     | 2     | 10,756,607  | 0.9        | 1.19%  | 0.53%    | 74.7          | 76.6                  | 8.3  | 0.87 | 6.4%  | 1.37 |
| 821 | Warba Bank                   | Banking                | 177                          | 184         | 186       | 176      | 10    | 15,242,923  | 8          | 4.55%  | -19.35%  | 169           | 188                   | 25.4 | 0.99 | 1.6%  | 1.14 |
| 823 | Mezzan Holding               | Consumer Staples       | 513                          | 527         | 527       | 502      | 25    | 3,950,074   | 20         | 3.94%  | 34.10%   | 519           | 541                   | 12.8 | 1.51 | 2.3%  | 0.45 |
| 824 | Integrated Holding           | Industrials            | 482                          | 496         | 508       | 480      | 28    | 4,454,390   | 16         | 3.33%  | 34.05%   | 485           | 499                   | 35.3 | 2.05 | 3.0%  | 0.68 |
| 826 | Shamal Az-Zour               | Utilities              | 176                          | 174         | 176       | 173      | 3     | 1,504,937   | -2         | -1.14% | -7.45%   | 174           | 176                   | 13.6 | 1.47 | 6.8%  | 0.23 |
| 827 | Boursa Kuwait                | Financial Services     | 1,699                        | 1,716       | 1,749     | 1,686    | 63    | 987,360     | 17         | 1.00%  | -16.37%  | 1,700         | 1,770                 | 22.4 | 5.69 | 4.9%  | 0.91 |
| 830 | AL GHANIM                    | Consumer Discretionary | 1,025                        | 1,032       | 1,050     | 1,015    | 35    | 2,879,571   | 7          | 0.68%  | 28.20%   | 1,010         | 1,033                 | 10.8 | 3.72 | 6.7%  | 0.63 |

\* As of end of week closing



## Business

# Tesla files recall on two million vehicles to fix autopilot software

## Recall affects models across Tesla's portfolio

**NEW YORK:** Electric car maker Tesla has initiated a recall of over two million vehicles in the United States and Canada due to risks associated with the autopilot software, national regulators said Wednesday. In cases where vehicle operators misuse Tesla's driver-assistance program or fail to recognize when the system won't work well, "there may be an increased risk of a collision," said a notice from the US National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

The recall affects models across Tesla's portfolio and will be addressed by an "over-the-air software remedy" typically performed remotely and not involving a trip to a repair shop.

"While not concurring with the agency's analysis," Tesla agreed to "voluntarily administer a recall" to resolve the matter, NHTSA said. Tesla co-founder and chief executive Elon Musk has spoken bullishly over the years of the potential for cars to reach full autonomy, but the company's official guidelines says drivers must remain at the wheel while using Autopilot. After a two-year probe, NHTSA found that Autopilot "can provide inadequate driver engagement and usage controls that can lead to foreseeable misuse of the system."

"NHTSA's investigation remains open as we monitor the efficacy of Tesla's remedies," an agency spokesperson said. "Automated technology holds great promise for improving safety but only when it is deployed responsibly; today's action is an example of improving automated systems by prioritizing safety."

Tesla did not respond to an AFP request for comment. Tesla's Autopilot program has spurred numerous government investigations as well as media exposés focusing on misuse or vulnerabilities.

The system has also been targeted in lawsuits. In October, a California jury rejected a plaintiff's suit

against Tesla which claimed that a fatal 2019 crash was the result of the company's "reckless and negligent behavior." Michael Brooks, executive director of the Center for Auto Safety, an NGO, said the recall announcement would likely reduce crashes.

But he faulted the NHTSA for not addressing a pattern of Autopilot failing to detect emergency vehicles. The agency has probed this issue following crashes, but did not mention it in the notice.

"This fits neatly into the established pattern where Tesla markets greatly advanced vehicle capabilities up to the point of full autonomy, but then blames inattentive drivers when those vehicles ultimately fail to achieve that promise," Brooks said in an email. The recall covers 2.03 million Tesla vehicles and includes Models S, X, Y and 3. Authorities in Canada said they were recalling 193,000 vehicles there.

Tesla says Autopilot should be used by "a fully attentive driver, who has their hands on the wheel," according to its website. But the program's name has been criticized as misleading, and widely-seen social media posts have featured joy rides by users flouting the official guidelines.

Critics, such as Jennifer Homendy, head of the National Transportation Safety Board, a US watchdog agency, criticized both Tesla and NHTSA for not taking safety seriously regarding Autopilot's vulnerabilities. Through the "over-the-air update" remedy, the company will install additional alerts to encourage drivers to keep their hands on the steering wheel. Remedies could include additional checks on user engagement "and eventual suspension from Autosteer use if the driver repeatedly fails to demonstrate continuous and sustained driving responsibility while the feature is engaged," according to the NHTSA document. Shares of Tesla were up 0.3 per-



**FREMONT, United States:** Cars are seen on the assembly line during a tour of the Tesla Giga Texas manufacturing facility ahead of the "Cyber Rodeo" grand opening party on April 7, 2022 in Austin. -- AFP

cent in afternoon trading after holding in negative territory. CFRA Research analyst Garrett Nelson called Tesla's action "a non-event," adding "headlines calling this a 'recall' are misleading. Instead, it is a quick over-the-air update of Autopilot software." But Neil Saunders of GlobalData rated the news as "something of a setback" for Tesla.

"While Tesla refutes some of the NHTSA's claims, this will raise some questions in consumer minds about technology around self-driving and driver assistance," Saunders said. "Given that the problems can be resolved via a software update this isn't a financial disaster for Tesla and the issues should be quickly fixed." — AFP

## Youngsters crave jobs ahead of DR Congo vote

**KINSHASA, DR Congo:** Gedeon, 22, driving his auto-rickshaw through the bustling streets of DR Congo's capital Kinshasa, said he never imagined he would end up doing the job he does. Like many young people in the deeply impoverished central African nation, he said he had high hopes that the government can deliver a better future.

"I want to go back to school," said Gedeon, who has worked as a rickshaw driver for five years.

He wants to become an electrical engineer, he explained, but poverty stopped him from attending university. Voters are due to go to the polls on December 20 in the Democratic Republic of Congo. President Felix Tshisekedi, 60, is running for re-election. Young people—many of whom suffer from chronic underemployment—make up an important voting bloc. Over 60 percent of the country of 100 million people are under 20 years old. AFP interviewed several young Congolese people ahead of the vote, with most asking for a return to peace in the conflict-torn country—and jobs. Raphael Rubangiza, 18, linked the upcoming vote to hopes for a better job market.

He said that voting "competent people" into office would mean "we'll have opportunities, we'll have jobs". But Rubangiza, who studies civil engineering in Kinshasa, is under few illusions. Many graduates "end up selling phone credits," he said.

The DRC is one of the poorest countries in the world, despite its vast mineral wealth. About two thirds of the population survives on under \$2.15 per day, according to the World Bank. The major candidates for the presidential election have all pledged to deliver more jobs. Tshisekedi has promised to create 6.4 million new jobs if he wins a second term. Precise figures are hard to come by, but unemployment is believed to be rampant. Valery Madianga, a researcher at a Kinshasa-based think tank, estimated the youth unemployment rate at about 70 percent.

Many thousands of people graduate every year

## UK utility giant Thames Water names new boss

**LONDON:** Struggling UK utility firm Thames Water on Thursday announced that Chris Weston, a former senior executive at British Gas owner Centrica, will be the new boss charged with solving its financial problems. Weston, who worked at Centrica for 13 years, will take over as chief executive on January 8, replacing interim co-bosses Cathryn Ross and Alastair Cochran.

They stepped in when former boss Sarah Bentley resigned in June having left the country's largest water supplier on the brink of emergency nationalization. Thames Water chairman Adrian Montague said Weston had a "proven track record working in regulated environments, turning round business performance and improving customer experience".

Former soldier Weston said his focus would be on "delivering the turnaround that the business has outlined and improving performance over the next few years." Cochran on Tuesday told MPs that more time was needed to turn around its fortunes after announcing a slump in profits and mounting debt. Thames Water supplies 15 million customers in London and the Thames Valley area of southeast England and has net debts of nearly



**Election campaign banners are pictured along a road in Kinshasa on December 14, 2023. -- AFP**

only to enter a job market with vanishingly few opportunities, either in the private or public sector.

Prisca Musangi, 27, studied law in Kinshasa but cannot find work. "We, young graduates, want to join and have careers in public institutions without having to be recommended," she said, referring to the nepotism that often rules who is hired. Alfred Bopando, a 29-year-old head of a finance and communications company, likewise said he wanted the next president to "give work to young people".

He is fed up with empty pledges: "We can no longer tolerate promises," Bopando said.

Floribert Anzuluni, one of the youngest of the presidential candidates running in the election, who wants to tackle youth unemployment, agreed. "This situation cannot be resolved through promises," the 40-year-old said. "To create jobs, you need to create companies."

Ending conflict in the DRC is also top of the agen-

da for many young voters. Beni Mingi, 25, a postal worker in Kivu in the west of the country, said he wants radical change.

"Those who were given power have done nothing," he said. "In terms of security, there are always wars." Armed groups plague much of eastern Congo, a legacy of regional wars that flared during the 1990s and 2000s. One such group, the M23, has captured swathes of territory in the region since launching an offensive in late 2021.

In the eastern city of Goma—which is almost surrounded by the M23 -- law student Brave Kafumbiri said that restoring stability was a priority. Future leaders must "put an end to the M23, either militarily or diplomatically," the 25-year-old said. "We finish our studies, we don't have work, there's insecurity in the whole of the east of the country, the population lives on less than \$2 a day," he said, summing up the problems. — AFP



**Climate activists hold hands together during a protest against fossil fuels during the United Nations Climate Change Conference COP28 in Dubai on December 12, 2023. -- AFP**

## Asia's climate activists lukewarm on COP28 deal

**MANILA:** Far from the standing ovation delivered by delegates in Dubai, activists in some of Asia's most climate-vulnerable nations responded to the COP28 agreement with disappointment on Thursday. The deal, approved by nearly 200 countries on Wednesday, contains their first call for a transition from fossil fuels, language hailed by US President Joe Biden as a "milestone".

Lavetanalagi Seru, a Fiji-based climate activist, acknowledged the language was "an incremental step in the right direction". However, "it falls short of climate justice and equity for our frontline communities", he said.

It "continues to allow for dangerous distractions and loopholes... which is deeply disappointing". Representatives from some of the most climate-vulnerable nations in the world—small island states which face inundation by rising seas—were not even in the room when the deal was approved.

Marshall Islands negotiator John Silk described the deal as a "canoe with a weak and leaky hull, full of holes". "We have to put it into the water because we have no other option."

In Bangladesh, regularly ranked as one of the countries most vulnerable to climate change, activist Sohanur Rahman also worried about what the deal leaves undecided. "Though we demanded phasing out fossil fuels, they adopted transitioning away," said Rahman, executive coordinator of YouthNet, Bangladesh's largest youth network for climate justice. "It remains a question as to how they'll implement it. More actions are needed on this. It has many loopholes."

Among the concerns expressed by experts is a lack of clear goals for what countries should do on the move away from fossil fuels and by when. The language also leaves a role for "transitional fuels"—seen as code for natural gas—and addresses fossil fuel use in energy, not industrial areas such as plastics production or fertilizer. It also preserves a place for coal power if it is "abated", meaning its emissions are captured or limited by technology—something activists fear will be used as a license to continue polluting. "The final outcome of COP28 is not enough," said Mitzi Jonelle Tan, a climate justice activist with Youth Advocates for Climate Action Philippines.

"It is a stab in the back after being promised that this would get us on track for the 1.5C (above pre-industrial levels) limit of safety. It hurts us all."

"We need a just and equitable fossil fuel phase-out that's funded and fair." The conference declared an early win with the launch of a "loss and damage" fund that will help countries cope with climate disasters. But there was less detail or money on the table for countries facing growing climate impacts and mounting debts while struggling to pay for energy transitions to meet their climate goals. — AFP

£15 billion (\$19 billion).

Last week the company said its profit after tax tumbled 57 percent to £172.3 million in the six months to the end of September. Its precarious financial situation worried the government so much earlier this year that it fuelled speculation about a possible public rescue plan.

In July, Thames Water received assurances of £750 million of new shareholder funding between now and 2025, short of the £1 billion it was seeking on top of the £500 million it secured in March.

Thames, which blames its situation on regulatory limits on price increases for customers, says it would need a further £2.5 billion of support between 2025 and 2030. It also wants its creditors to extend the maturity on a debt of £190 million, which matures in April next year. The UK's water companies have been criticized for a number of years for wastewater discharges into rivers and the sea because of a lack of investment in upgrading sewage networks, many of which date from the 19th century.

Improvements will cost billions but the firms have accumulated more than £60 billion in debt since they were privatised in 1989 under prime minister Margaret Thatcher. — AFP



**Chris Weston**

## Norway central bank raises interest rate

**STOCKHOLM:** Norway's central bank raised its main interest rate by a quarter percentage point to 4.5 percent on Thursday, warning that inflation remains too high. Norges Bank said that the policy rate would likely be kept at that level for some time ahead given its current assessment of the outlook and the balance of risks, and suggested it might not need to raise rates much further, if at all. "The policy rate is likely close to the level required to return inflation to target within a reasonable time horizon," it said in a statement following a meeting of its monetary policy committee.

Other main central banks are holding rates as high interest rates bring down inflation and economies are slowing. The US Federal Reserve on Wednesday signaled it would likely cut rates three times next year. Norway's central bank's forecast has its policy rate staying around 4.5 percent until autumn 2024 before gradually moving down.

Norges Bank Governor Ida Wolden Bache acknowledged that the Norwegian economy was cooling down but said inflation remained too high. Consumer prices excluding volatile energy prices and adjusted for tax changes came in at 5.8 percent in November. "An increase in the policy rate now reduces the risk of inflation remaining high for a long period of time," she said. — AFP





Adzone Global for Advertising company is the official media sponsor of the "Our Media Role" exhibition which was organized by the Faculty of Arts at Kuwait University - Department of Media, under the patronage of the Director of Kuwait University, Prof. Dr. Mishari Al-Harbi, and the General Supervisor, Dr. Hussein Ibrahim.

The company stated that our "media role" this year, in its second consecutive edition, has met with great success compared to the previous edition, through the presence of ambassadors of participating countries, officials, and faculty members, as the number of participating parties in it reached more than 260 governmental and private entities and public benefit associations after that it was 240 last year.

The Director of Public Relations at Adzone Company, Ms. Manal Al-Ali, expressed that Ad Zone Advertising and Publicity's pride in sponsoring this exhibition, which proved successful for the second year in a row.

Adzone is a Kuwaiti company represented by Mr. Muhammad Rumaih Al-Dujaini, covering all governorates and regions of Kuwait, it was and still is always a pioneer in supporting efforts aimed at developing human capital, represented by Kuwaiti youth, in order to preserve the interest of the university and the interest of Kuwait.

Adzone Advertising stated that the increase in the number of participating parties came due to the positive interaction that the exhibition received through social media and among the colleges of Kuwait University, as those parties were keen to highlight their role in the field of public relations and provide the appropriate environment for the student after university life. It is also an opportunity to exchange Media expertise among all these institutions.

The exhibition lasted for 3 days and was able to attract more than 25 thousand students, male and female, who exchanged experiences and learned about the media policies and strategies used by various private and governmental bodies in the media field, in a way that enriches their experiences, refines their skills, and prepares them to enter the labor market in the future.





## Lifestyle



Costumes from the movie are on display at the world premiere of "Rebel Moon - Part One: A Child of Fire" at the TCL Chinese Theatre in Hollywood, California.--AFP photos



Actor Sky Yang attends the world premiere of "Rebel Moon - Part One: A Child of Fire" at the TCL Chinese Theatre in Hollywood, California.

## Zack Snyder creates his own 'Star Wars' with 'Rebel Moon'

If Zack Snyder's new Netflix sci-fi movie epic "Rebel Moon" looks and feels a lot like a "Star Wars" film, that's because it was originally pitched as one. From its humble villagers in a far-flung galaxy battling planet-destroying imperial overlords, to its superheated swords, and even its title, the similarities with George Lucas's creation are unavoidable.



US actress Auli Cravalho attends the world premiere of "Rebel Moon - Part One: A Child of Fire" at the TCL Chinese Theatre in Hollywood, California.



Beninese-US actor Djimon Hounsou attends the world premiere of "Rebel Moon - Part One: A Child of Fire" at the TCL Chinese Theatre in Hollywood, California.



South Korean photographer actress Bae Doona attends the world premiere of "Rebel Moon - Part One: A Child of Fire" at the TCL Chinese Theatre in Hollywood, California.



Characters from the movie pose at the world premiere of "Rebel Moon - Part One: A Child of Fire" at the TCL Chinese Theatre in Hollywood, California.

But when Snyder's pitch to Lucasfilm a decade or so ago didn't work out, the director went ahead and created his own sprawling, mythology-packed universe instead—something that he now sees as a huge blessing. "When it turned out that that wasn't gonna work out, my wife and producing partner Deborah said to me, 'this is the best news that you possibly could have gotten,'" recalled Snyder.

"The process of creating this world, though exhausting and very time-consuming—and really the amount of detail is insane—has been incredibly rewarding," said the director of "300" and "Watchmen." "Because it does give you the ability to deconstruct sci-fi icons and tropes that you're used to."

The result is perhaps the most audacious step yet in a wildly popular if divisive career that has seen Snyder rework zombie classic "Dawn of the

Dead," and radically overhaul beloved superheroes like Superman and Batman in films like "Man of Steel" and "Justice League." "Rebel Moon" is a rare, \$160 million-plus gamble on something new, in an era when Hollywood increasingly depends on established brands and franchises—known as "intellectual property," or "IP."

"The double-edged sword of IP is that, on one hand, it's familiar, everybody knows what it is," said Snyder. "On the other hand, it's familiar, everybody knows what it is," he joked.

**'Zack's new world'**  
"Rebel Moon – Part One: A Child of Fire" will be released on Netflix on December 22, with a second movie out

in April. It follows Kora (Sofia Boutella), a mysterious stranger who crashes her spaceship in the furthest reaches of the universe, and finds herself defending the peaceful villagers who took her in from the tyrannical Imperium.

She and naive farmer Gunnar (Michiel Huisman) assemble a team of fighters, from die-hard insurgents, to a cocky mercenary (Charlie Hunnam) who owns a speedy spaceship and values his own safety and fortune over the fate of the rebellion.

If some of those characters sound familiar, cast members insist that they are far, far away from a certain well-known galaxy. "I don't think anyone said the words 'Star' and 'Wars' on set," said Ed Skrein, who plays the villain-

ous Admiral Atticus Noble. "We never mentioned it." Snyder devised detailed backstories for every character, planet and even the spaceships' machinery.

The filmmakers created three unique languages for their universe's various cultures and creeds. "It was pretty clear to us from the beginning that Zack had this whole world and this universe that he wanted to create, that he'd been working on for decades," said Huisman. "This is a new original. This is Zack's new world."

### 'Danger'

One stark way in which "Rebel Moon" differs from "Star Wars" is its more adult tone, with spectacular violence and sexuality. One early scene takes place in a vividly imagined brothel. Those themes will be even more

prominent in a "director's cut" to be released next summer. "Right now in the current version, it's more as a texture of danger, or an element of the exotic," said Snyder.

"In the director's cut version, those are very front and center. Really, that's what it's about." Netflix has already announced a companion video game, and a graphic novel and an animated film are also in the works.

Snyder's hope is that the franchise can take on a sprawling life of its own, just as Lucas's once did. "My dream for it on one hand is to follow the story all the way. That's the main thing that drives me," he said. "I feel like there's a whole universe of comic books that I'd like to create for this world. My hope is that it's an inexhaustible thing."—AFP

## 'Barbie' director Greta Gerwig to head 77th Cannes Film Festival jury

The Cannes Film Festival announced Thursday that Greta Gerwig, director of summer blockbuster "Barbie", will preside over the jury at its 77th edition in May. The 40-year-old Gerwig, also an actor and screenwriter, takes the baton from Sweden's Ruben Ostlund, whose jury awarded the 2023 Palme d'Or to courtroom drama "Anatomy of a Fall". She is the first American woman filmmaker to take on the role, the festival said in a statement.



(FILES) US actress and writer Greta Gerwig arrives for The Albies hosted by the Clooney Foundation at the New York Public Library in New York City. — AFP

Gerwig's presence will provide a youthful flair to Cannes, which has not had such a young president since 1966, when it was led by then-31-year-old Sophia Loren. She is also the first woman since actor Cate Blanchett in 2018 to assume the prestigious position, where men remain over-represented. "I love films—I love making them, I love going to them, I love talking about them," Gerwig said in a statement. "As a cine-

phile, Cannes has always been the pinnacle of what the universal language of movies can be". Aside from "Barbie", a vivid feminist satire about the all-conquering line of plastic dolls, Gerwig has also directed "Lady Bird" (2017) and "Dr March's Daughters" (2020). She is currently working on an adaptation of "The Chronicles of Narnia" for Netflix. The festival described Gerwig, who has starred in more than two dozen films, as a heroine for modern times who has rattled the status quo.

"This is an obvious choice, since Greta Gerwig so audaciously embodies the renewal of world cinema," said Cannes boss Iris Knobloch and festival delegate Thierry Fremaux "Beyond the seventh art, she is also the representative of an era that is breaking down barriers and mixing genres, and thereby elevating the values of intelligence and humanism," they added.

In announcing a high-profile woman director, the world's largest film festival stole back the spotlight from its younger competitor, February's Berlinale. The festival in the German capital on Monday announced its own jury president, 40-year-old Mexican-Kenyan actor Lupita Nyong'o, the first black person named to the role. In choosing Gerwig, Cannes is also highlighting its continued ties with the powerful American film industry. The Cannes Film Festival has yet to unveil the rest of the jury or the films in the official selection.—AFP



French actor and newly-minted Russian citizen Gerard Depardieu poses after holding a press conference dedicated to the launch of the first Russian film festival in Nice, southeastern France. — AFP

## Actor Depardieu stripped of Quebec honor

French cinema legend Gerard Depardieu was stripped of Quebec's top honor on Wednesday over his "scandalous" comments against women recently broadcast in a report. "The scandalous remarks made by Gerard Depardieu in front of the cameras shocked the international public, with good reason. His behavior tarnishes the reputation of the members of the National Order of Quebec," Francois Legault, the leader of the Canadian province, said in a statement. "I therefore took the decision to order his removal from the Order, effective immediately," he said.

Depardieu has faced mounting accusations of sexual harassment. And earlier this month 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 sexualising a small girl riding a horse. A fellow actor filed a sexual assault complaint in September against Depardieu, adding to a string of allegations targeting the French actor. In 2020, he was charged in Paris after allegations of rapes and sexual assaults.—AFP

## Smallest Rembrandt portraits shown in Amsterdam museum

Two tiny portraits by Rembrandt that had been lost to the world for 200 years and sold recently at auction for \$14 million made their debut Wednesday at Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum. The 20-centimetre high (eight-inch) oval portraits depict an elderly plumber named Jan Willemsz van der Pluym and his wife Jaapgen Carels. The couple, painted in an unusually intimate style for Rembrandt, were friends of the artist's family and came from his hometown of Leiden in the Netherlands.

The paintings are the smallest known portraits by the 17th-century Dutch master, who was better known for much larger works commissioned by wealthy families. The portraits were acquired by the Holterman family at a

Christie's auction for more than £11 million in July and have been handed to the Rijksmuseum on long-term loan.

"The Rijksmuseum has the largest and most representative collection of Rembrandt paintings in the world," said owner Henry Holterman in a statement. "I feel that these works belong in the museum," he said. Experts from the Rijksmuseum used X-rays, infrared photography, and paint sample analysis to prove that the portraits were indeed painted by Rembrandt. The portraits also exhibit a similar style to other works painted by Rembrandt at the time, "especially in the construction of the facial features and the loose brushwork", said the museum.—AFP



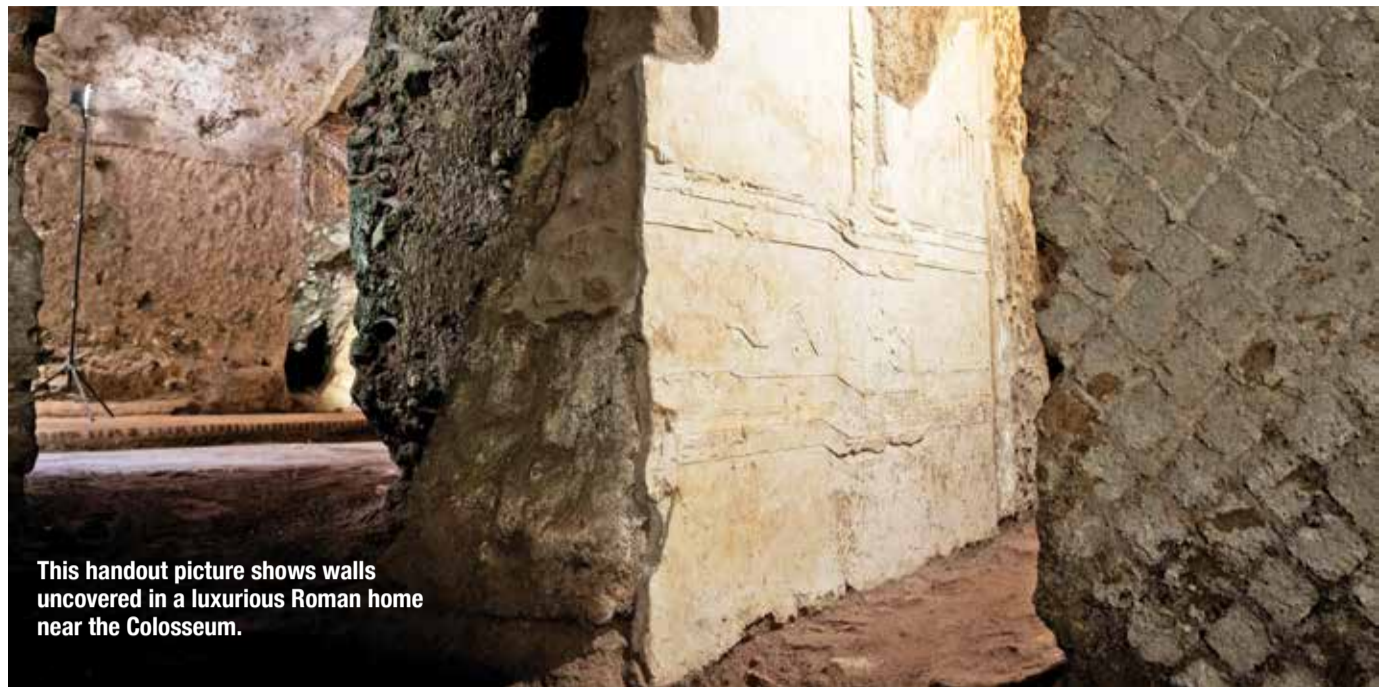
This photograph in Amsterdam at the Rijksmuseum, shows the two smallest portraits that Rembrandt ever painted. — AFP



Lifestyle



This handout picture released by the Italian Culture Ministry shows mosaics uncovered in a luxurious Roman home near the Colosseum. — AFP photos



This handout picture shows walls uncovered in a luxurious Roman home near the Colosseum.

# ANCIENT ROMAN HOME WITH 'UNPARALLELED' MOSAIC FOUND IN ITALY

Italian archaeologists have uncovered a luxurious Roman home near the Colosseum, boasting an "unparalleled" mosaic featuring shells, marble and precious glass, the culture ministry said Tuesday. Three large ships ride waves in the mosaic towards a coastal city, its walls dotted with small towers and porticoes in a scene suggesting the owner of the more than 2,000-year-old home, or domus, had been victorious in battle. The building, which dates to between the second half of the 2nd century BC and the end of the 1st century BC, is "an authentic treasure", Culture Minister Gennaro Sangiuliano said in a statement.

grotto, which was used during the summer months, the ministry said.

The owner, a nobleman likely to have been a senator, would have entertained guests with "spectacular water games", thanks to lead pipes set between the decorated walls, it said. But what "makes the discovery exceptional is... an extraordinary wall covered with a so-called 'rustic' mosaic unparalleled in terms of the chronology and the complexity of the scenes depicted," it added.

### Trumpets, warships, tridents

A "complex sequence" of scenes are depicted through "different types of shells, Egyptian blue tesserae, precious glass, minute flakes of white marble or other types of stone", according to the ministry. Among the vines and lotus leaves lie piles of weapons with Celtic-type trumpets, warships, and tridents, "alluding perhaps to a double



This handout picture shows mosaics uncovered in a luxurious Roman home near the Colosseum.

triumph, terrestrial and naval, of the owner of the domus".

There is "a fascinating depiction" of a landscape, complete with coastal city

and a cliff, simulated with travertine rock, facing "the sea ploughed by three large ships, one of which has raised sails". "The representation of a coastal city

could allude to a warlike conquest by the owner of the domus, belonging to an aristocratic personage, presumably of senatorial rank," the ministry said. Archaeologists also uncovered a white stucco "of the highest quality" in the adjoining reception room.

"We will work intensively to make this place, one of the most evocative in ancient Rome, accessible to the public as soon as possible," said Alfonsina Russo, head of the Colosseum Archaeological Park.

The domus is an early example of "luxuria", the displaying of wealth and rank through sumptuous villas and lifestyles. It also supports historical sources which describe the extensive residences of great Roman senatorial families in the north-western area of the Palatine, one of the city's seven hills. — AFP



This handout picture shows amphorae uncovered in a luxurious Roman home near the Colosseum.



This handout picture shows shells in mosaics uncovered in a luxurious Roman home near the Colosseum.



This handout picture shows mosaics uncovered in a luxurious Roman home near the Colosseum.

## Notre-Dame in Paris to get unique fire protection system



This photograph shows the vault of the nave of the Notre-Dame de Paris Cathedral, during its reconstruction after the fire that destroyed the Cathedral April 15, 2019.

Paris' Notre-Dame will be equipped with a unique fire protection system when it reopens next year, the head of the body charged with rebuilding the cathedral after a devastating blaze said Wednesday. The landmark church, badly damaged by a fire in 2019, is to reopen in December 2024 after extensive repairs. "All precautions have been taken for a complete rethink of its fire protection," Philippe Jost, president of the Rebuilding Notre-Dame de Paris public body, told a parliamentary commission.

Notre-Dame will notably be equipped with a vaporization system, currently being installed below the roof

and in the spire, that Jost said would immediately stop any outbreaking fire from spreading. "This is a first for a cathedral in France," he said. President Emmanuel Macron promised last week that work on the monument would be completed in time for the December 2024 reopening date.

Macron had initially promised to have Notre Dame restored within five years, in time for the Paris Olympics next summer. But after early setbacks in the rebuilding effort, he set a new deadline. Restoration of the UNESCO-listed building, which had 12 million visitors a year, has hit several snags since people around the world watched

aghast as its steeple crashed down in the blaze on April 15, 2019.

Jost said Notre-Dame would attract some 14 million visitors per year following its reopening. Notre-Dame's new spire has started to emerge against the French capital's skyline and is expected to be fully completed when the city hosts the Olympics.

More than five years after the blaze, investigating judges are still looking into what sparked it. An initial enquiry pointed to it probably being an accident, with an electrical fault or a cigarette among the theories. — AFP



This photograph taken from atop the Notre-Dame de Paris Cathedral shows the structure of the building during reconstruction work, on the Ile de la Cite in Paris.



French President Emmanuel Macron visits the reconstruction work, and the cross atop the newly rebuilt spire, at Notre-Dame de Paris Cathedral, on the Ile de la Cite in Paris. - AFP photos



## Who doughnut? Australian woman charged over Krispy Kreme truck theft

An Australian woman was charged Thursday with stealing a parked truck stuffed with 10,000 Krispy Kreme doughnuts. Police said the unmarked delivery truck had stopped for fuel on the outskirts of Sydney when a 28-year-old woman allegedly hopped inside and made off with the freshly baked booty.

Detectives followed a trail of crumbs to a suburban carpark, where they found the abandoned vehicle more than a week later. The woman was arrested on Thursday, and police said she would just be charged with taking a truck without its owner's consent. Police said the doughnuts were "destroyed". — AFP



## Sports

# Warner slams 164 as Australia take control against Pakistan

## Khawaja wears black armband in Gaza protest

PERTH: Veteran opener David Warner hammered a gritty 164 to silence the critics and steer Australia to 346-5 against an inconsistent Pakistan attack in the first Test at Perth on Thursday. The 37-year-old batted for much of day one before finally departing to Aamer Jamal, two balls after smashing the debutant for six.

At stumps, Mitchell Marsh was unbeaten on 15 and Alex Carey not out 14. Pakistan have never won a Test series in Australia and have failed to win a Test in the country since 1995, with Shan Masood's side again facing a daunting task. Their bowlers showed flashes of brilliance and were rewarded with the wickets of Usman Khawaja (41), Marnus Labuschagne (16), Steve Smith (31) and Travis Head (40).

But until Jamal struck, they had no answer to a near-flawless Warner who smashed 16 fours and four sixes in a majestic 211-ball innings. He padded up under pressure to score runs with an emotional goodbye from Test cricket at the third Test in Sydney in front of his hometown fans his stated goal.

In the lead-up, former Australian paceman Mitchell Johnson questioned whether Warner deserved a hero's farewell given his recent poor red-ball form and involvement in the 2018 ball-tampering scandal. With his back against the wall in his 110th Test, Warner responded in typically swashbuckling fashion.

"People make comments, but you get one with it. You have to just go out there and score runs and today I did that," said Warner. "I don't feel any extra pressure, any other points I have to prove. If people are out to get you or make a headline out of your

name, so be it. I can't worry about that, I've got to worry about what I do for the team."

After Pat Cummins won the toss and opted to bat, Warner took a confident single off his first ball in an opening over from Shaheen Shah Afridi that leaked 14 runs and never looked back. On a pitch offering bounce, he quickly settled in to bring up his half-century off just 41 balls with a boundary from Faheem Ashraf.

His strike rate slowed after lunch as he moved towards a 26th Test ton, reaching three figures with an uppercut boundary off Jamal, celebrating with his trademark leap and putting his finger to his mouth. "It was a nice, little quiet shush," Warner said of his celebration, referring to the criticism. It was his first century since a battling 200 against South Africa at the Melbourne Cricket Ground a year ago.

### Solidarity

He was dropped by Khurram Shahzad soon after bringing up his milestone but was otherwise in command until Jamal tempted him with a short ball and he was caught near the ropes by Imam-ul-Haq. Khawaja, wearing a black armband in solidarity with the people of Gaza, was happy to play second fiddle in a 126-run opening stand.

He had a massive let-off on 25 when dropped but departed when Pakistan's bowlers picked up their game after lunch, caught by wicketkeeper Sarfaraz Ahmed off Afridi's bowling. Labuschagne looked in good nick, racing to 16 when he was beaten by a ball pitched up by Ashraf and given out lbw.



PERTH: Australia's David Warner (C) plays a shot during the first day of the first Test cricket match between Australia and Pakistan at Optus Stadium in Perth on December 14, 2023. — AFP

Smith clattered a four through midwicket off his second ball to signal his intent but, after effortlessly making 31, he was deceived by a delivery from Shahzad and got a faint edge to the diving Ahmed. It was a maiden Test wicket for the debutant.

Head cashed in with a quick 40 before top-edging straight to Agha Salman, ensuring Jamal too earned a first Test wicket. "I still believe we are in the game," said Jamal. "We are planning to get them out in the first hour tomorrow morning." — AFP

## No guilt for Eddie Jones after taking Japan job

TOKYO: Eddie Jones said Thursday that he did not "feel any guilt at all" about becoming Japan's head coach, six weeks after he walked out on the Wallabies. Jones quit his native Australia after leading them to a dismal showing at the Rugby World Cup, and repeatedly denied reports that he was set to take over in Japan.

Australian media had reported that the 63-year-old had interviewed for the job during the Wallabies' World Cup campaign in France. Jones's appointment on Wednesday sparked a furious reaction in the Southern Hemisphere, with former All Blacks great Sonny Bill Williams branding the coach "a disgrace".

Jones said he did not regret his actions, telling reporters "it sits well with me". "I wish Australia all the best," he told a packed press conference in Tokyo. "I feel terrible about the results, because I wanted to go back and change Australia. But I don't feel any guilt at all about this process."

Jones repeated his claim that he had not interviewed for the Japan job until December. He said his online meeting with a recruitment company shortly before the World Cup was to "share my experiences of Japan". Jones said "everyone is entitled to their own opinion" but he did not feel the need to apologize to Australian fans.



TOKYO: Eddie Jones poses with a ball during a photo session at a press conference after being named as Japan rugby head coach in Tokyo on December 14, 2023. — AFP

"The only thing I can control is what I did, and it sits well with me — I don't have a problem with it," he said. "If people feel like that, that's their judgement. I can't control that." Jones quit the Wallabies after two wins from nine Tests since taking over in January, including a worst-ever World Cup performance where they failed to make it out of the pool phase. His insistence on fast-tracking rookies at the expense of veterans badly backfired in high-pressure games, as did a revolving door of unproven captains.

### Japan identity

Jones will officially begin his second stint in charge of Japan on January 1. He previously coached them for three years from 2012 and led them to their historic win over South Africa at the 2015 World Cup. Jones said his aim was to turn Japan into a team "that has a real identity".

"Any great team in any sport, it doesn't matter what shirt they play in, you can see clearly the team that they are," he said. "I think we need to develop that with Japan, so that's going to be one of the major focuses going forward."

Under Jones, Japan stunned South Africa 34-32 in a match that became known as the "Miracle of Brighton". That was only Japan's second win at a World Cup, and they also went on to beat Samoa and the USA that year before exiting at the pool stage.

They reached the quarter-finals on home soil in 2019 under Jones's successor Jamie Joseph, but exited at the group stage at this year's tournament in France. Jones targeted a return to the World Cup knock-out round in 2027 and said Japan "need to play the game faster than the opposition". — AFP



## Third edition of horse dressage begins tomorrow

KUWAIT: The third edition of horse dressage will take place at Kuwait Riding Center Saturday with support and sponsorship by Kuwait Equestrian Federation with large participation by riders coinciding with the arrival of some new horses in

addition to the increasing interest in the "horse taming" sport, as the tournament include five levels from beginner to the advanced.

Rider Sheikhha Fajer Al-Sabah chairs the dressage committee of Kuwait Equestrian Federation with members - Alaa Al-Sultan, Abdullah Al-Awadhi, Naseeba Al-Muoshherji, Dana Buresli and Abdullah Al-Amer. Sheikhha Fajer Al-Sabah said the league is of eight rounds, and the intention is to bring in international referees to organize training rounds for riders and coaches, besides having the technical director to carry out training for coaches and riders from the start of the season and teach

## Leinster wary of potential 'sting' before Sale visit

PARIS: Four-time winners Leinster host Sale in the second round of Champions Cup on Saturday with a cautious mindset despite last weekend's statement win over double holders La Rochelle. The Irish province beat the French club, their nemesis in the two previous finals, to open the campaign before travelling to northern England, where they can take a big step towards reaching the last 16.

Sale top the English Premiership and began their Champions Cup season with an impressive 28-5 win over Stade Francais in Salford which included a fine performance from England centre Manu Tuilagi. "You can't take your foot off the throat at all in this competition or you'll get stung," Leinster attack coach Andrew Goodman told reporters this week.

"They're one of the form teams in the Premiership, Manu's back in the mix there and they have some strike power right across the field," the New Zealander added. La Rochelle, coached by former Ireland fly-half Ronan O'Gara, are licking their wounds from their first Champions Cup defeat since May 2021.

This Saturday, they switch the wet and windy French winter on the Atlantic coast for 24 degrees

## Farrell to stay as Ireland coach

LONDON: Andy Farrell has signed a two-year contract extension to keep him as Ireland head coach until the end of the 2027 Rugby World Cup, it was announced Thursday. The former England dual-code international has won a Six Nations Grand Slam and a Triple Crown since succeeding Joe Schmidt in 2019, as well as overseeing a Test series victory in New Zealand.

Farrell also took the side to the top of the world rankings, although the recent World Cup in France ended with Ireland again failing to make the last four

Celsius (75 degrees Fahrenheit) in Cape Town, as they play the Stormers. South Africa winger Dillyn Leyds left his hometown in the Western Province in 2020, having graduated from the Stormers' academy.

"I know the coaching staff really well. I worked with them since I was 16 years old. They've had a big role not just in my life as a rugby player but as a human being as well," Leyds told AFP. "They're good guys and I often chat with them to see how they're going, exchanging ideas. I think I'll keep some of our plans to myself for next weekend," the 31-year-old added.

### 'Job to do'

Leyds returns to Cape Town on a long weekend with Friday a newly created public holiday to celebrate the Springboks' fourth Rugby World Cup win. "Cape Town is a good place to be in December, it's summer over there now, heading into the festive season there's lots of parties everywhere but we need to do a job at the end of the day," Leyds said.

"Nothing would make me happier than going back to Cape Town and getting a win over the Stormers and then share a drink with my good mates after the win," he added. Another highlight of the second round is record five-time winners Toulouse's trip to Harlequins, who are buoyed from Sunday's scintillating 31-28 win at Racing 92.

Scotland full-back Blair Kinghorn is set for his second Toulouse appearance after scoring on his debut last weekend, days after arriving from Edin-

burgh in a mid-season deal. "It's been fairly crazy. It's all happened really quickly," Kinghorn told AFP on Monday. "Trying to get accommodation sorted, your medical, visa."

"All whilst trying to learn the calls, the language, a new set of boys," the 50-time international added. Racing, meanwhile, travel to Belfast to take on 1999 winners Ulster while Bath, who won it a year earlier in 1998, travel to Cardiff. — AFP



them how to do the dressage test as recognized internationally to receive the maximum points possible for each required move.

Meanwhile, rider Abdullah Al-Amer said "we encourage show jumping riders to participate in the dressage tournaments as it is the nucleus and foundation of equestrianism, and we have many riders of show jumping riders who participate in the dressage tournaments". He said horse taming is among the basic pillars of barrier jumping and the ability of the rider to tame his horse correctly and effectively will make it easier for him during show jumping championships.



ECCLES: Sale's English centre Manu Tuilagi (C) is tackled during the European Rugby Champions Cup Pool 4 rugby union match between Sale Sharks and Stade Francais Paris. — AFP

burgh in a mid-season deal. "It's been fairly crazy. It's all happened really quickly," Kinghorn told AFP on Monday. "Trying to get accommodation sorted, your medical, visa."

"All whilst trying to learn the calls, the language, a new set of boys," the 50-time international added. Racing, meanwhile, travel to Belfast to take on 1999 winners Ulster while Bath, who won it a year earlier in 1998, travel to Cardiff. — AFP

one which my family and I are delighted to continue." IRFU performance director David Nucifora said he was delighted to have retained the current World Rugby coach of the year

"Over the course of the last four years Andy has helped drive the highest standards for the men's national team," Nucifora said. "It's testament to the positive environment which he and his backroom team have fostered that Ireland has enjoyed such a sustained period of success in recent times."

By the time Farrell's extended contract ends, he will have spent 11 years in Dublin. The finishing date of his new deal also leaves open the possibility of Farrell succeeding England head coach Steve Borthwick, whose contract with the Rugby Football Union also ends after the 2027 World Cup in Australia. — AFP



## Sports

# Man City go for full house of trophies at Club World Cup

## US will host the first expanded Club World Cup

**JEDDAH:** Pep Guardiola is hoping to complete his trophy haul as Manchester City manager at the Club World Cup in Saudi Arabia as the Gulf Kingdom shows off its wares in hosting a major international football tournament for the first time.

City travel to Jeddah, the host for all seven matches in the tournament, looking to add a first Club World Cup to the treble of Champions League, Premier League and FA Cup they won last season. "We miss just one trophy to finish the circle and win all the titles City can have," said Guardiola, who has already won the competition three times during his spells at Barcelona and Bayern Munich.

"We will go there and prepare because for us it is a dream." Despite a recent four-game winless streak in the Premier League, City are strong favorites to lift more silverware. Not since Corinthians beat Chelsea in 2012 have the Champions League winners failed to lift the Club World Cup.

No matter who emerges victorious from the final on December 23, there will be a new name on the trophy. Fluminense are South America's representatives after winning the Copa Libertadores for the first time last month.

However, the major threat to City could come from the rise of Saudi as a sporting hotbed. Al-Ittihad have only qualified due to their status as champions of the host nation but boast a wealth of previous Club World Cup winners in Karim Benzema, N'Golo Kante and Fabinho.

Benzema became the first player to ever score

in four Club World Cups as Al-Ittihad swept aside Auckland City 3-0 in the first round on Wednesday. Next up they face against African champions Al Ahly of Egypt in the quarter-finals. The winner of the other quarter-final between Mexico's Club Leon and Urawa Red Diamonds will meet City when they enter the competition at the last four.

### Saudi's sporting ambition

Benzema, Kante and Fabinho were just some of the star names who have recently swapped top European clubs for the riches on offer in the Saudi Pro League. That was just the beginning of an offensive to turn the country into a football powerhouse.

Saudi is set to host the 2034 World Cup and looks almost certain to also be awarded future versions of a revamped Club World Cup. This will be the final edition of the current format before it expands to a 32-team tournament every four years from 2025.

The United States will host the first expanded Club World Cup as it prepares for to welcome the World Cup the following year. However, Saudi is then expected to step in to add to its growing portfolio of major sporting events that includes a Formula One Grand Prix, major boxing bouts, tennis and golf events.

The conservative desert monarchy is also lining up a bid for the Olympic Games. A string of other sporting interests include Premier League club Newcastle United and LIV Golf. A huge investment in sport is designed to promote Saudi's international reputation, diversify its economy and promote tourism. — AFP



**BELGRADE:** Manchester City's Spanish manager Pep Guardiola (C) and Manchester City players celebrate after winning the UEFA Champions League Group G day 6 group stage football match between Crvena Zvezda (Red Star Belgrade) and Manchester City at the Red Star stadium in Belgrade. — AFP

## Man City star Hamilton elated by debut goal

**LONDON:** Micah Hamilton said he had been left struggling for words following his goalscoring debut for Manchester City in the Champions League. Once a ball-boy with the English giants, the 20-year-old seized his chance after manager Pep Guardiola made several changes to the team for Wednesday's concluding 'dead' group-stage match away to Red Star Belgrade.

Hamilton opened the scoring in the first half with a fine strike and also secured a late penalty as holders City won 3-2 to end Group G with six wins from six. "I don't even know what to say," City academy graduate Hamilton told the club's website.

"I started just trying to ease into the game and then the moment came and I just took the opportunity. I didn't know what to do to celebrate! "It's not even sunk in yet. I'm just taking it all in. It's amazing."

Manchester-born Hamilton joined City at the age of nine. Injuries delayed his entry into the first team but Hamilton showed his class in Belgrade alongside fellow academy 'graduates' Rico Lewis and Oscar Bobb, the scorer of City's second goal.

"I've played with (Rico) right through the age groups and now to be doing it on the big stage is something mad," said Hamilton. "And the same with Oscar. "Two top players. To have them there by my side felt so good."

"The academy system is top at City and especially when you train with the first team day to day, you improve every day. They make you feel comfortable



**BELGRADE:** Manchester City's English midfielder #92 Micah Hamilton runs with the ball during the UEFA Champions League Group G. — AFP

and welcome and I just felt myself on the pitch. "I'm just going to keep my head down, keep working and hopefully chances will come."

Hamilton and Bobb gave City a 2-0 lead before Hwang In-beom pulled a goal back for Red Star. Calvin Phillips, making a rare start, restored City's two-goal advantage with an 85th-minute penalty before Aleksandar Katai headed in a

late consolation for the hosts.

This was Phillips' first goal for City since his move from Leeds last year. There has been speculation the England midfielder could leave during the January transfer window, with Guardiola saying: "I don't know what is going to happen. Now he is here. There are a lot of games until the end of January, hopefully he can help us." — AFP

## Barcelona, Lyon ease to wins in Women's Champions League

**PARIS:** Barcelona and Lyon both maintained their 100-percent records in the Women's Champions League group stage on Wednesday with victories over Rosengard and Brann respectively. Holders Barcelona powered to a 6-0 thrashing of Rosengard in Sweden to stay three points clear of second-placed Benfica at the top of Group A.

An own goal from Jessica Wik gave Barca the lead, before strikes from Spanish World Cup winners Salma Paralluelo and Patricia Guijarro all but ended the game as a contest before half-time. Women's Ballon d'Or winner Aitana Bonmati added a fourth in the 62nd minute and late goals for Mariona Caldentey, with a penalty, and Martina Fernandez completed the rout.

"We work hard every day to keep improving. We played a solid match at a difficult ground and got a big win," said Caldentey. The other game in the group saw Benfica edge out Eintracht Frankfurt 1-0 thanks to Marie-Yasmine Aïdoud d'Anjou's second-half winner.

Lyon strengthened their grip on Group A with a 3-1 victory over Norwegians Brann. Kaddiatou Diani put home side Lyon ahead in the sixth minute and the result was never in doubt once Ada Hegerberg had netted her record-extending 61st Champions League midway through the first half.

Diani completed a double less than three minutes after the interval and Lyon eased to the win despite Justine Kielland's consolation for Brann. Lyon sit three points clear of Brann at the half-way mark of the group stage, with St Polten and Slavia Prague a further five points adrift after playing out a 0-0 draw in Austria. — AFP

## NFL expands overseas games and books Brazil contest in 2024

**NEW YORK:** NFL team owners voted on Wednesday to stage a 2024 regular-season game in Brazil and approved boosting the number of international contests from four to eight starting in 2025. In a meeting in Dallas, the league awarded its first regular-season game in South America to Sao Paulo's Corinthians Arena, home of Brazilian soccer side Corinthians and a venue for the 2014 FIFA World Cup and 2016 Olympics.

"Bringing the NFL to new continents, countries and cities around the world is a critical element of our plan to continue to grow the game globally," NFL commissioner Roger Goodell said. "Brazil has established itself as a key market for the NFL and we're excited to be playing in Brazil and Sao Paulo for the first time."

The NFL will play five regular-season games next year internationally, including Brazil and three contests in London — two at Tottenham Hotspur Stadium and the third a Jacksonville Jaguars home game at Wembley Stadium.

The NFL will also play in Germany for a third consecutive season, returning in 2024 to Allianz Arena in Munich. NFL officials have visited Madrid to discuss Spain as a possible site for an NFL game next year at the Santiago Bernabeu, the home of soccer giants Real Madrid, and having the option of playing more games globally could hasten the league's push for international growth.

"Becoming a global sport is a major strategic priority for the league and 32 teams," said Goodell. The NFL said new markets and host cities and stadiums for the extra global games would be revealed later. "As a league, we welcome the update to this resolution that will ultimately see us play more games internationally than ever before, helping us to expand our global footprint and connect our teams and athletes with new audiences," said Joel Glazer, chairman of the NFL's International Committee and owner of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. — AFP



**VAL GARDENA:** First placed US' Bryce Bennett, second placed Norway's Aleksander Aamodt Kilde and third placed Switzerland's Marco Odermatt pose on the podium after winning the men's downhill replacing Zermatt-Cervinia's race, during the FIS Alpine Ski World Cup in Val Gardena. — AFP

## Bennett snatches surprise win in first downhill of the season

**VAL GARDENA:** American skier Bryce Bennett was the surprise winner of the first men's World Cup downhill of the season at Val Gardena in Italy on Thursday. The 31-year-old Californian, who was 35th in the downhill rankings last year, edged favourite Aleksander Kilde by just 0.03 seconds to claim only his second World Cup win.

His previous success also came in the same event at Val Gardena two years ago as did his first notable finish, a fourth place in 2018. "I like this piste," said Bennett, still in disbelief at his

sudden change in fortune. "My goal was to finish among the top 30, or even aim for the top-15, I didn't expect this result at all."

"But when I woke up this morning, I said to myself that I had to put aside all my doubts and it worked." Marco Odermatt, who won the giant slalom at Val d'Isere on Saturday, completed the podium, finishing 0.05sec behind Bryce.

Odermatt, who is still waiting for his first World Cup downhill success, is now level with Marco Schwarz at the top of the overall standings with 160 points, 36 ahead of Manuel Feller. Thursday's downhill was only the third event in the men's calendar to be completed with seven of the nine cancelled because of bad weather.

Wearing bib 34, Bryce benefitted from faster conditions, particularly at the bottom of the Saslong, warmed by the sun. He deprived Kilde, silver medal-

list in the 2023 world championships in the discipline, of a fourth victory in the Dolomites resort.

"I didn't ski fast enough to win. I did well in some sections, a little less well in others," admitted Kilde, who has won three of the previous five downhills in Val Gardena. A second downhill, this time over the entirety of the formidable Saslong, is scheduled for Saturday during a busy programme of four events in four days. On Friday, the men will switch to super-G.

Prior to last Saturday's giant slalom, the only other race to go ahead was a slalom in Gurgl, Austria. The season's giant slalom opener in neighbouring Soelden was cancelled, before two downhills in Zermatt-Cervinia (Switzerland/Italy) were also scratched. The races at the American resort of Beaver Creek — two downhills and a super-G — were wiped out by heavy snowfall and high winds. — AFP



## PSG in last 16 despite Dortmund draw

Porto qualifies for Champions League last 16 as Newcastle exit



**DORTMUND:** Borussia Dortmund's German defender #15 Mats Hummels (L) and Paris Saint-Germain's French forward #07 Kylian Mbappe vie for the ball during the UEFA Champions League group F football match between BVB Borussia Dortmund and Paris Saint-Germain in Dortmund, western Germany. — AFP

**PARIS:** Paris Saint-Germain and Porto qualified for the Champions League last 16 on Wednesday as Newcastle bowed out of Europe after losing 2-1 at home to AC Milan. PSG drew 1-1 away to Group F winners Borussia Dortmund to go through as runners-up after Milan came from behind to beat Newcastle at St James' Park and eliminate Eddie Howe's side.

Newcastle, who needed to win and for PSG to drop points to keep their first Champions League campaign in 20 years alive, took the lead through a brilliant Joelinton strike in the first half.

But Christian Pulisic equalised on the hour and substitute Samuel Chukwueze broke Newcastle hearts with an 84th-minute winner, although it wasn't enough for Milan to overhaul PSG. "We gave everything to the match. I can't ask for anything more (in terms of) commitment, effort, physical exertion. Unfortunately for us it wasn't to be," said Howe.

The French champions, in danger of a first group stage exit since the Qatari takeover in 2011, fell be-

hind when Karim Adeyemi scored early in the second half in Germany. Warren Zaire-Emery came to the rescue for PSG five minutes later after Kylian Mbappe weaved into the box, his pass deflected out to the teenager who advanced towards goal before slamming home a powerful shot.

Mbappe, whose PSG future will again come into sharp focus in January, had an effort ruled out for offside but the point was enough in the end for the visitors, who finished level on points with Milan but progressed thanks to a better head-to-head goal difference. "We're far from the finished article," said PSG captain Marquinhos. "We're going to have to prepare well and prepare better because bigger opponents are on the way."

### Porto complete line-up

Porto made the last 16 at the expense of Shakhtar Donetsk after a 5-3 win over the Ukrainians. The hosts only needed to avoid defeat at the Estadio do

Dragao to progress from Group H with Barcelona, and an early Galeno goal put Porto ahead.

Danylo Sikan hauled Shakhtar level but Galeno netted again before Mehdi Taremi made it 3-1 to the Portuguese side. An own goal gave Shakhtar a lifeline but 40-year-old Pepe eased Porto nerves with his team's fourth and Francisco Conceicao then put the game to bed, with Eguinaldo bagging a late consolation. "In Porto, we never play for a draw, even though that result also suited us. The manager said this match would be like a final and we had to win. Mission accomplished," Galeno told CNN Portugal.

Royal Antwerp claimed a famous 3-2 win over Barcelona as George Ilenikheneta netted a stoppage-time winner. The Belgians twice led courtesy of goals from Arthur Vermeeren and Vincent Janssen but Barcelona replied through Ferran Torres and Marc Guiu, who looked to have salvaged a draw before Ilenikheneta's heroics.

Manchester City became just the second English

club to win all six Champions League group stage games with a 3-2 victory at Red Star Belgrade. Twenty-year-old Micah Hamilton and Oscar Bobb scored their first goals for the club before Hwang In-beom pulled a goal back for the Serbian champions.

Kalvin Phillips scored his first City goal with a late penalty as Aleksandar Katai struck a consolation for Red Star in added time. Defending champions City had already wrapped up top spot in Group G ahead of RB Leipzig, who won 2-1 at home to Switzerland's Young Boys.

Benjamin Sesko and Emil Forsberg got the goals for Leipzig either side of Ebrima Colley's equaliser in a frenetic five-minute spell in the second half. Atletico sealed first place in Group E as Antoine Griezmann and Samuel Lino struck in a 2-0 victory over runners-up Lazio. Celtic ended a 15-game winless streak in the group stage with Gustaf Lagerbielke's late header earning Brendan Rodgers' team a 2-1 victory over Feyenoord. — AFP

## Giannis scores 64 in stormy Bucks win, Lakers down Spurs

**LOS ANGELES:** Giannis Antetokounmpo erupted for a career-high 64 points as the Milwaukee Bucks avenged last week's in-season tournament exit to the Indiana Pacers with an ill-tempered 140-126 victory on Wednesday.

Former NBA Most Valuable Player Antetokounmpo was in scintillating form, shooting 20-of-28 from the field with 14 rebounds, three assists and four steals as the clash between the two highest-scoring teams in the NBA lived up to its billing. Milwaukee were dumped out of the in-season tournament semi-finals in Las Vegas last week by the Pacers and were clearly determined to avoid a repeat of that loss before their home crowd at the Fiserv Forum.

The simmering tension between the teams boiled over in the fourth quarter when Indiana's Aaron Nesmith wrapped an arm around Antetokounmpo's neck as he drove for the basket. Milwaukee's Bobby Portis flew in to defend his team-mate before being dragged away in an ugly melee that involved officials and coaching staff from both benches.

The acrimony flared again after the final buzzer, with Antetokounmpo and other Milwaukee players racing off the court to confront members of the Pacers team. Antetokounmpo, whose 64 points marked a franchise record, later re-emerged back onto the court to remonstrate with Pacers star Tyrese Haliburton. Pacers coach Rick Carlisle said the post-game fracas was triggered over a misunderstanding about the game-ball, snaffled by the Pacers after their Congolese rookie Oscar Tshiebwe scored his first NBA point off the bench.

"We were not thinking about Giannis's franchise record so we grabbed the ball and a couple of min-



**SAN ANTONIO:** Victor Wembanyama #1 of the San Antonio Spurs shoots against Christian Wood #35 of the Los Angeles Lakers in the second half at Frost Bank Center. — AFP

utes later several of their players ended up in our hallway," Carlisle said. "There was a big fracas, melee whatever. I don't think any punches landed but our general manager got an elbow in the ribs from one of their players. "Unfortunately situation. It didn't need to escalate to that. "Third time we've played these guys in the past two to three weeks so things are heated and I understand all that. But for it to come into the hallway—it didn't need to happen that way."

### Wemby rally falls short

Elsewhere, Anthony Davis scored 37 points as the Los Angeles Lakers held off a dazzling late rally led by French prodigy Victor Wembanyama to edge past the San Antonio Spurs 122-119. The Lakers, missing LeBron James after Tuesday's defeat in Phoenix, looked to be cruising after leading for almost the entire game and opening up a 20-point advantage early in the

fourth quarter at San Antonio's Frost Bank Center.

But a stunning fightback by the home team— who erupted for 45 points in the final quarter—left the Lakers clinging on towards the end of regulation before they eventually scraped home. Number one draft pick Wembanyama, denied his much-hoped-for match-up with James, excelled down the stretch with 14 points including two back-to-back three-pointers and a free throw that helped San Antonio get to within one point with 22 seconds remaining.

The San Antonio rally fell just short however, with Davis nailing four straight free throws to give the Lakers a five-point cushion in the closing seconds, effectively sealing the game. Wembanyama, who arrived in the NBA this season being hailed as a once-in-a-generation talent, finished with 30 points, 13 rebounds, three steals and six blocks, earning admiration from Lakers linchpin Davis. — AFP

## Tennis legend Noah 'super excited' at Paralympics challenge

**PARIS:** Former Grand Slam winner Yannick Noah described his appointment Thursday as captain of France's men's wheelchair tennis team at the 2024 Paris Paralympics as "a fantastic adventure". The 63-year-old, who won the 1983 French Open before helping his country to Fed Cup and Davis Cup successes as skipper, was handed the role for his home Games by the French Tennis Federation (FFT) on Thursday.

"It's a fantastic adventure," said Noah in an FFT press release. "I'm super excited. We're currently in a phase where we're getting to know each other. "We're eight months away from the Games and for now the goal is to improve on a daily basis."

Noah's success at Roland Garros in 1983 remains the last Grand Slam win by a Frenchman and he is keen to share his experience with the wheelchair players. "Yannick will take on this challenge because he's a man for challenges," FFT's president Gilles Moretton told reporters. "He's shown that. He's a leader of people," he added. Noah has already taken part in several training courses with the team which includes Stephane Houdet, Paralympic doubles champion in Beijing, Rio and Tokyo.

"The idea of being captain came from Stephane," said Noah. "He told me: 'you played individually, you won the Davis Cup, the Fed Cup but you're not a real crazy person because you never came with us.' "I was upset and I said to myself, what a good idea." After retiring, Noah installed himself as a favourite with a new generation of fans, this time as a singer. He has released 13 albums, six of which went to No.1 in France, selling over 4 million copies. He also performed at Bob Geldof's Live 8 concert in 2005. The Paris Paralympic Games run between August 28-September 8. — AFP