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UN calls for aid but no truce

Zionists strike Gaza, keep up massacres and executions



GAZA: Medics care for an injured Palestinian child following Zionist bombardment at the Kuwaiti Hospital in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on Dec 22, 2023. — AFP

GAZA: Palestinians wept and prayed for their dead on Saturday after fresh Zionist strikes followed a UN Security Council resolution that demanded more aid be allowed into Gaza but did not call for an immediate halt to fighting. Clouds of grey and black smoke rose over Khan Yunis city in the south after strikes in the morning, and live AFPTV images showed black smoke drifting over the territory's north.

The health ministry in Gaza said at least 20,258 people had been killed in the Palestinian territory since the start of war with the Zionist entity on Oct 7. The latest toll includes 201 fatalities in the past 24 hours, the ministry said. Most of the dead are women and children.

The health ministry said dozens of Palestinians were killed this week and publicly "executed" during a Zionist military operation in the north of the Gaza Strip. The Zionist "massacre resulted in the death of dozens" of people in the Jabalia camp and Jabalia town, ministry spokesman Ashraf Al-Qudra said in a statement. "They also executed dozens of citizens in the streets," he added. The ministry also reported 18 people killed in a strike on

a house at the central Nuseirat refugee camp, and said other targets were hit up and down the Gaza Strip.

The bombardments came after the Security Council approved a resolution demanding "immediate, safe and unhindered" deliveries of life-saving aid be rushed to Gaza "at scale". It also called for creation of "conditions for a sustainable cessation of hostilities," but did not seek an immediate end to combat. Members had wrangled for days over the wording.

At Washington's insistence, they toned down some provisions and avoided calling for a ceasefire that would stop the war. It is still unclear what, if any, impact the vote will have on the ground where Gazans have been forced into crowded shelters or tents, struggling to find food, fuel, water and medical care. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said a "humanitarian ceasefire" is the only way for aid "to be effectively delivered". The issue is not the number of aid trucks, he said, but "the way (the Zionist entity) is conducting this offensive is creating massive obstacles" to aid distribution.

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NEWS IN BRIEF

Birds on runway cause delays

KUWAIT: Some flights at Kuwait International Airport were delayed as airport workers cleared some birds from the runway in accordance with international aviation safety procedures, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation said in a statement on Saturday. (See Page 3)

Visit to Rawdah only once a year

RIYADH: The Saudi ministry of hajj and umrah said in a statement on Saturday that the permit to visit the Rawdah (the area between the tomb of the Prophet PBUH and his pulpit) in the Prophet's Mosque in Madinah can only be issued once a year per person. The permit can be obtained through the Nusuk or Tawakkalna apps, provided the applicant is not COVID-19 positive or came in contact with a person infected with the virus, the ministry noted.

Canada to welcome some Gazans

OTTAWA: Canada will take in extended families of Canadians in war-torn Gaza for up to three years, Immigration Minister Marc Miller announced. The move, which is due to take effect on Jan 9, will allow Canadians to reunite with spouses or common-law partners, children and grandchildren regardless of age, siblings and their immediate families, as well as parents and grandparents. — AFP

Twins for woman with double uterus

WASHINGTON: A 32-year-old woman from Alabama who was born with two uteruses and became pregnant in both gave birth to twin girls on different days, she announced on Friday. "Our miracle babies were born!" Kelsey Hatcher wrote in a post. The first one, named Roxi Layla, was born on Tuesday at 7:49 pm. She was joined by Rebel Laken on Wednesday at 6:09 am. — AFP

Drone strike hits ship off India's coast

DUBAI: A drone strike damaged a ship off the coast of India on Saturday but caused no casualties, two maritime agencies said, with one reporting the merchant vessel was linked to the Zionist entity. The attack caused a fire on board, said the British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations, or UKMTO. Ambrey, a maritime security firm, said the "Liberia-flagged chemical/products tanker... was (Zionist entity)-affiliated" and had been on its way from Saudi Arabia to India.

Both agencies said the attack occurred 200 nautical miles southwest of Veraval, India. They did not name the vessel. The Indian navy said it had responded to a request for assistance. "An aircraft was dispatched and it reached overhead the vessel and established safety of the involved ship and its crew," a navy official told AFP. "An Indian navy warship has also been dispatched so as to provide assistance as required."

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the strike which came amid a flurry of drone and missile attacks by Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels on a vital shipping lane in the Red Sea in solidarity with Gaza. The Houthis have declared themselves part of an "axis of resistance" of Iran's

Continued on Page 6

Yemen rivals agree truce, peace process

DUBAI: Yemen's warring parties have committed to a new ceasefire and agreed to engage in a UN-led peace process to end the war, the UN envoy for Yemen said Saturday. The announcement by UN special envoy for

Yemen, Hans Grundberg, marks the latest step to end the deadly nine-year war that has killed hundreds of thousands of people and triggered one of the world's worst humanitarian crises.

It follows recent meetings by Grundberg in Saudi Arabia and Oman with Rashad Al-Alimi, head of Yemen's Saudi-backed presidential council and Mohammed Abdul Salam, the chief negotiator of the Iran-backed Houthi rebels. Grundberg said he "welcomes the parties' commitment to a set of measures to implement a nation-wide



SANAA: Yemenis brandish weapons and Palestinian flags during a march in solidarity with the people of Gaza in the Houthi-controlled capital on Dec 22, 2023. — AFP

ceasefire... and (to) engage in preparations for the resumption of an inclusive political process," according to a statement by his office.

The envoy "will now engage with the parties to establish a road map under UN auspices that includes these commitments and supports their implementation," the statement added. Yemen has been gripped by conflict since the Iran-backed Houthi rebels took control of the capital Sanaa in 2014, triggering a Saudi-led military intervention in support of the beleaguered government the following year.

A UN-brokered ceasefire that took effect in April 2022 brought a sharp reduction in hostilities. The truce expired in October last year, though fighting largely remains on hold. Grundberg will now "engage with the parties to establish a roadmap under UN auspices" that includes these commitments. It includes commitments to pay civil servants' salaries, open routes into the rebel-blockaded city of Taz and other parts of Yemen

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Pak ex-PM Khan granted bail but remains jailed

ISLAMABAD: Former Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan was granted bail Friday in a case alleging he leaked state secrets, lawyers said, but he remained jailed on other charges ahead of an election due in February. Meanwhile his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party was barred from using the cricket bat symbol on ballot papers, depriving them a vital campaign tool in a nation where adult literacy rates lag. Khan — detained since August — alleges the powerful military is colluding with dynastic par-

ties that have long dominated Pakistan to crush his populist movement and prevent him from standing for office. The 71-year-old former elite cricketer has been pummeled by a barrage of legal cases since being ousted in April 2022 after falling out with the top brass, and has twice been jailed.

"The case has completely collapsed, and Imran Khan and Shah Mahmood Qureshi have finally been granted bail," lawyer Salman Safdar told reporters outside court, referring to Khan's former foreign minister held over the same case. Prosecutors allege the pair mishandled a diplomatic cable sent by Pakistan's ambassador to the United States.

The top court said "there are not reasonable grounds for believing" an offence under the colonial-era Official Secrets Act, which carries a possible 14-year prison term or death sentence, was

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LAHORE: A poster of Pakistan's ex-prime minister Imran Khan is seen through cables on Dec 18, 2023. — AFP



Local

Family consultant gives advice on parenting in this digital era

'Set boundaries on children's screen usage'

By Ghadeer Ghloom

KUWAIT: Modern parents find themselves immersed in a digital territory, where they strive to raise their children to become responsible individuals. With the vast mix of devices and online content, parents need to strike a balance between embracing the benefits of the digital realm and avoiding its potential pitfalls. Kuwait Times interviewed education and family counselor Hussein Akbar to help parents equip their children with necessary skills and knowledge to thrive in the digital landscape.

Kuwait Times: How can parents set boundaries and establish healthy limits on their children's screen time in the digital age?

Akbar: It is important for parents to set boundaries on their children's screen usage, and to achieve this, they must be firm in establishing fixed schedules for screen time. However, it is crucial to explain the reasons to the children and clarify the motivations behind this measure, emphasizing that the goal is their safety. It is also recommended for parents to use real-life stories that illustrate the dangers of excessive device usage.

KT: What measures can parents take to ensure the safety and security of their children online and protect them from harmful content?

Akbar: Initially, it is necessary to acknowledge the difficulty of constantly monitoring children and imposing numerous restrictions. While some restrictions are necessary to ensure children's safety, the most important thing is for parents to create motivation for their children to utilize devices optimally and educate them about the dangers and risks associated with these devices. In addition, instilling religious values can lead them towards self-monitoring.

KT: How can parents enhance digital awareness in their children and teach them safe and responsible Internet usage skills?

Akbar: Through communicating with their children about potential risks and addressing all their questions, parents can impose certain rules, such as setting a limit on the number of hours to spend behind screens and periodically monitoring their activities.

KT: What are the best ways to communicate and engage with children in the digital age, and how can parents establish an open conversation about the challenges and risks of the digital world?

Akbar: To mitigate the negative effects of Internet use, parents may direct their children towards useful websites and guide them on how to obtain accurate information. It is also acceptable for parents to seek help from teachers or friends in guiding their children and informing them about the risks of Internet use. It is important to highlight the role modeling plays in children's lives, as when children see their parents using the Internet inappropriately or excessively, they may not respond to their parents' guidance because their behavior contradicts their words.

KT: How can parents assist their children in developing a healthy balance between screen time and other outdoor and social activities?

Akbar: Parents should provide children with external activities such as joining sports clubs and educational institutes or arts and crafts, and encourage their participation in these activities. In this way, a child's day can be filled with productive things. Parents must also consider their children's feelings and provide for their basic and psycholog-



Hussein Akbar



ical needs, as they may turn to social media pages in search of self-validation or to seek recognition from followers due to a lack of those needs.

Discovering children's talents at an early age reduces the chances of electronic addiction. Feeling a sense of responsibility towards their children,

giving them attention and time and meeting their needs is the way to ensure the child's well-being. Sometimes it is good for parents to participate with their children in using the Internet, such as playing games, so they can know the friends of their children who they play with frequently.

Journalists Association congratulates new Amir

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Journalists Association would like to congratulate His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. The Association appraised in its statement the historical content of HH the Amir's speech, which assured clearly serious accountability within a constitutional and lawful framework, as well as fixing letdowns that have been around the legislative and executive authorities. The association has placed high value on the speech of HH the Amir to continue the good path of previous rulers, which assures that Kuwait is the main center and ensures its leadership in all fields. The association concluded its statement by wishing HH the Amir a bright future leading the nation.

Czech Ambassador Jarislav Siro congratulates new Amir

On the occasion of his installation as the 17th Amir of Kuwait, I would like to express heartfelt and sincere congratulations to HH Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on behalf of the Czech President, the government of the Czech Republic and myself. We wish His Highness all the best in confronting all challenges that are in front of him and the country. May his leadership be accompanied with traditional wisdom and honor for the benefit of Kuwait and its people, as well as of the region and the whole world. At the same time, I would like to express my confidence that excellent relations, which so happily exist between our two countries, nations and leaderships, will continue to flourish and deepen.



Wrestling with environmental crossroads in Kuwait and beyond

By Mariam Al Ayyoub

KUWAIT: In a world teetering on the precipice of environmental crisis, the notion of sustainability has emerged as a clarion call. However, the quest for ecological harmony is not without its contradictions, and nowhere is this paradox more evident than in the arid landscapes of Kuwait. Kuwait, a nation synonymous with oil wealth and rapid modernization, finds itself at a crossroads where development aspirations clash with the imperatives of environmental preservation. The global discourse on sustainability, often marked by lofty ideals and grand commitments, starkly contrasts with the ecological challenges faced by Kuwait and its counterparts around the world.

On the global stage, climate change stands as an undeniable threat, its effects reverberating from the melting ice caps in Antarctica to the wildfires raging through the Amazon rainforest. It is a shared predicament that demands a collective response, transcending borders and political affiliations. Yet, amidst this global urgency, individual nations grapple with the intricacies of their own environmental narratives.

Kuwait, a nation nestled in the heart of the Arabian Peninsula, confronts its environmental paradox with a complex interplay of economic interests, climatic realities, and the imperative to secure a sustainable future. The dichotomy between being a major oil exporter and a nation vulnerable to the impacts of climate change encapsulates the global struggle to balance economic growth with environmental responsibility.

In Kuwait, the specter of rising temperatures poses a tangible threat, exacerbating water scarcity and challenging traditional agricultural practices. The rapid urbanization and infrastructure development, while emblematic of progress, cast a shadow on the delicate ecosystems that once defined Kuwait's landscape. It is a microcosm of the global tension between economic advancement and environmental stewardship.

One of the critical issues on Kuwait's environmental landscape is water scarcity. Despite its wealth, Kuwait faces the harsh reality of limited freshwater resources, relying heavily on desalination plants for potable water. The ecological toll of desalination, coupled with excessive water consumption, paints a stark picture of the delicate balance between development and sustainability.

The controversy deepens as Kuwait grapples with waste management. Rapid urbanization has led to an upsurge in consumerism, resulting in a corresponding surge in waste generation. The challenge lies not only in waste disposal but in fostering a culture of recycling and reducing environmental impact. While governmental initiatives are underway, the pace of change is often at odds with the urgency demanded by the environmental crisis.

The global phenomenon of plastic pollution, symbolized by vast islands of debris in the oceans, is mirrored in Kuwait's struggle with single-use plastics. The convenience of these materials clashes with their devastating environmental consequences, echoing a broader global dilemma on how to curtail the pervasive use of plastics.

As the world grapples with the imperative to reduce carbon emissions, Kuwait's reliance on oil as its economic backbone becomes a contentious point. The paradox lies in the reality that the very resource that fueled Kuwait's economic ascent is now a catalyst for environmental challenges. The nation faces the daunting task of diversifying its economy while navigating the socio-economic consequences of this transition.



KUWAIT: Pigeons take cover under the shade of trees on the seafont of Kuwait City. In a world teetering on the precipice of environmental crisis, the notion of sustainability has emerged as a clarion call. However, the quest for ecological harmony is not without its contradictions, and nowhere is this paradox more evident than in the arid landscapes of Kuwait. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Skyline of Kuwait City

The environmental paradox extends beyond Kuwait's borders, implicating global actors in a web of interconnected challenges. The discourse on sustainability often takes center stage in international forums, where commitments are made, and targets are set. However, the implementation of these aspirations encounters hurdles, with nations prioritizing economic interests and geopolitical strategies over environmental imperatives.

The controversial reality is that, despite global agreements and pledges, many nations continue to prioritize short-term gains over long-term sustainability. The extraction of finite resources, deforestation, and the proliferation of environmentally damaging industries persist, underscoring the contention between economic growth and ecological responsibility.

In Kuwait and around the world, the controversy lies not only in acknowledging the urgency of environmental issues but in mustering the political will and societal changes necessary for effective solutions. The discourse on sustainability is a complex

tapestry woven with threads of economic considerations, political maneuvering, and societal behaviors.

The path forward demands uncomfortable conversations and radical shifts in perspective. It requires nations, including Kuwait, to reassess their developmental trajectories, placing environmental considerations at the forefront of policy-making. The controversy lies in the necessity for systemic change, challenging entrenched norms and reimagining a future where economic prosperity coexists harmoniously with ecological well-being.

The environmental controversy in Kuwait and globally is not merely a clash of ideologies; it is a battle for the very survival of our planet. It necessitates a collective introspection, transcending borders and political affiliations. The paradoxical interplay between economic development and environmental sustainability is a Gordian knot that demands unraveling. In Kuwait's arid landscapes and on the global stage, the controversy underscores the imperative for decisive action to ensure a sustainable future for generations to come.



Turkey grants six countries visa-free entry

ANKARA: The Turkish government has announced a visa-free regime for citizens of six countries in a move that mainly aims at promoting tourism in the country. The six countries are: the United States, Canada, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia, and Sultanate of Oman, under a decree published in the Official Gazette of Turkey. Citizens of these countries will be given the privilege of visa-free entry for tourist visits up to 90 days within any 180-day period. The decree was made as per Article 18 of the Law 6458 on Foreigners and International Protection. — KUNA

Local



Zain's booth in the expo.



Zain offers a wide range of products and solutions.

Zain offers latest products and solutions at MAX TECH Expo

Company welcomes visitors at Hall 6 in Kuwait Int'l Fair

KUWAIT: Continuing to actively join the community's biggest tech gatherings, Zain announces its participation in MAX TECH Expo, the newest technology event in Kuwait. Through its dedicated booth, the company offers customers and visitors a wide range of the latest digital solutions, smart devices, and competitive offers daily at Hall 6 of the Kuwait International Fair in Mishref until Tuesday 26 December.

Zain's participation in this event reflects its interest in being actively present at the biggest gatherings of the local tech community, where companies and entities from both the public and private sectors connect with customers and tech enthusiasts to showcase their solutions, present their products and services, and offer their exclusive promotions all under one roof.

In its dedicated booth at MAX TECH Expo, Zain offers a wide range of innovative products, smart devices, and digital solutions, covering every customer's needs. The company's offerings include smartphones, tablets, and accessories;

gaming consoles, PCs, and related gadgets; smart home and Internet of Things (IoT) devices, along with Zain's latest and most competitive offerings and promotional campaigns for postpaid and prepaid customers. MAX TECH Expo features many tech companies and service providers, offering telecom and internet services, smartphones and computers, video game consoles and PCs, cameras and photography equipment, and more.

The event also features innovative solutions for smart homes, IoT devices, home entertainment systems, e-payment platforms, cybersecurity applications, cloud solutions, e-commerce platforms, networks and digital infrastructure systems, wearables, CCTV and security devices, audio equipment, and VR tech. In addition, many ministries and government entities are present to showcase their successes in digital transformation. MAX TECH also targets gaming enthusiasts, with many e-sports championships and competitions being organized in six major online games. Winners are set to receive valuable cash prizes.



Dedicated section for gaming enthusiasts.

Kuwait ranks eighth in macroeconomic index

ABU DHABI: Kuwait has made progress in the Arab Economic Competitiveness Index for 2023, coming eighth in the macroeconomic index compared to ninth place in the previous classification, the Arab Monetary Fund (AMF) said. The AMF added in the seventh issue of the Arab Economies Competitiveness Report 2023, issued Friday, that Oman, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the UAE, Kuwait, and Bahrain occupied the advanced positions, respectively, in the Arab Economic Competitiveness Index.

Four Arab countries kept their positions for 2019–2022 compared with 2018–2021, while competitiveness positions have improved in nine Arab countries, namely Jordan, the UAE, Algeria, Iraq, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait, Libya, and Yemen, the report of which KUNA obtained a copy said. Competitiveness in four other Arab countries declined, it said, referring to the fact that the UAE keeps first place in the Arab Economic Competitiveness Index, thanks to its advanced rank in macroeconomic, investment environment, and attractiveness indices, followed by Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Kuwait, and Bahrain.

On the monetary and banking sector index, Qatar ranked first, benefiting from its advanced position in the indicators of credit granted to the private sector and non-performing loans, it noted. Kuwait obtained second place in this index as it made progress in the non-performing loans decline and foreign asset growth rate indices, followed by Morocco, it stated. The report went on to say that Kuwait got the 11th position in the investment attraction and environment index and the second in public revenue to the GDP index.

The report said that many Arab countries have adopted multiple national strategies and visions with the aim of enhancing productivity, improving



KUWAIT: Kuwaitis and expats walk inside the Avenues Mall, the country's largest shopping centre. Kuwait has made progress in the Arab Economic Competitiveness Index for 2023, coming eighth in the macroeconomic index compared to ninth place in the previous classification, the Arab Monetary Fund (AMF) said. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

the efficiency of produced goods, and focusing on productive sectors. The Arab countries are seeking to develop service sectors, facilitate business environments, and boost infrastructure to address challenges that impede their competitiveness. The report focused on Arab countries' national efforts aiming to achieve economic stability and enhance sustainable economic development in order to improve living conditions for Arab citizens.

It indicated that Arab countries focus on education and workforce training to ensure providing the required skills for the foreign sectors and services, as well as improve massive infrastructure through major projects like port facilities and logistics services. The Arab Economic Competitiveness Index aims to measure the competitiveness of Arab countries in light of economic and international factors. It has two main indices: the macroeconomic sector and the environment and investment attractiveness index. Each index consists of a set of sub-indices. — KUNA

of Higher Education. (6) No prior scholarship was taken to obtain the same degree.

The social allowance and the children's allowance shall be paid to students according to the following periods: 5 years to obtain a university degree, except for those on scholarships to medical colleges; they are allowed for 2 additional years, 2 years to obtain a master's degree, and 3 years to obtain a doctorate degree. Social allowance and the children's allowance for students will be provided for an additional year, provided an application is submitted to the authority with the reasons and justifications for this and will be accompanied by the necessary approvals.

For a scholarship for training, the training should be vocational and in the field of work. The training program should be within the annual training plan provided by the employer to the Public Authority for Manpower. An application must be submitted to the manpower department, accompanied by supporting documents for the training, its duration, field, and place of convening for research and study by the concerned department.

Ministry issues decisions on allowances and scholarship

KUWAIT: First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled Al-Sabah issued a decision regarding the disbursement of the social and children's allowances for students on scholarship, whether for study or training, as well as those delegated for treatment abroad and their companions.

The employer may grant the worker a paid study leave with the continued payment of the social allowance and the children's allowance prescribed for workers in non-governmental entities, according to the following conditions: (1) Approval of the employer. (2) The employer continues to pay the scholarship student's wages. (3) The scholarship must be to obtain a higher qualification. (4) Qualifications must be in the field of work. (5) Approvals must be obtained from the Ministry

Kuwait, GCC mull standardized Gulf test for expatriates

KUWAIT: Kuwait and other GCC countries have reached an agreement to standardize professional tests and develop a mechanism for creating unified Gulf tests for expatriate workers. Informed sources said that Kuwait has completed the test's preparation for 100 professions and is now following up on the preparation for another 200 professions.

Kuwait has become a pioneer in the field of occupational description and the application of professional tests at all levels. There are 25 professions on which a ministerial decision is being taken by the Manpower Authority, according to which expatriate workers are tested before entering the country. Professionals will attend workshops and undergo tests before entering GCC countries to ensure their efficiency before practicing. The extent of GCC standardization of tests is being studied, and various recommendations have been submitted to the Council of Ministers of Labor and Social Affairs in preparation for their approval.

Meanwhile, the Kuwaiti government will form a technical team whose task is to discuss the mechanisms and procedures and crystallize them with executive recommendations to be submitted to the Council of Ministers in preparation for the work of the unified Gulf tourist visa approved by the leaders of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries in their last meeting in Qatar.

Similar to the Schengen visa regulations that bind the member states of the European Union, the new regulations provide visitors and residents of any one of the six GCC countries with the ability to access the other countries using the same document. The new visa policies will make it easier for tourists and newcomers to travel between the GCC nations, boosting the industry's status as a catalyst for economic expansion. According to the sources, Kuwait is eager to work closely with the GCC nations to ensure execution and coordination. It will also create new prospects for investment in the tourism sector in each of the member states.

Air traffic disrupted as birds gather near airport runway

KUWAIT: The General Directorate of Civil Aviation said that air traffic at Kuwait International Airport has returned to normal after some incoming and departing flights were delayed earlier on Saturday due to the closure of the airport runway for a "limited period" to deal with a gathering of birds near the runway. The spokesman of Civil Aviation Abdullah Al-Rajhi told the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) that some flights departing from and arriving at Kuwait airport were delayed due to a gathering of some birds near the airport runway, which was closed for a limited time to take all relevant safety measures.

Al-Rajhi, who is also the director of the department said the concerned bodies in the Department have taken all the approved international air safety measures to deal with the situation in order to prevent any accidents that the aircraft or its engines may suffer during takeoff or landing. He confirmed the reopening of the runway "after confirming the safety of all precautionary measures." — KUNA

Accidents leave 2 dead

KUWAIT: A vehicle collision along the Doha Link road resulted in the death of one person. On Saturday afternoon, the Sulaibikhat Fire Station Fire Brigade received a report about a vehicle collision on the Doha Link Road. Officials from the Kuwait Fire Force rushed to the scene and rescued the survivors. In another development, Ministry of Interior personnel received a report about a 4-wheeler bike that flipped in the Sabiya Desert. The accident caused the death of a Kuwaiti man and injured another person.

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P.O.Box 1301 Safat, 13014 Kuwait.

Email: info@kuwaittimes.com

Website: www.kuwaittimes.com

Rejecting ceasefire 'is a permit' to kill Gazans

CAIRO: Arab League Secretary General Ahmad Abul-Gheit said on Saturday that the rejection of an immediate cease-fire in Gaza is tantamount to "a permit for killing," affirming Arab efforts to end the war would not stop. Abul-Gheit said in a statement that the resolution issued by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) calling for a truce and carving out humanitarian corridors to relieve the Gazans "is short of the aspired objective that is a full cease-fire in the strip."

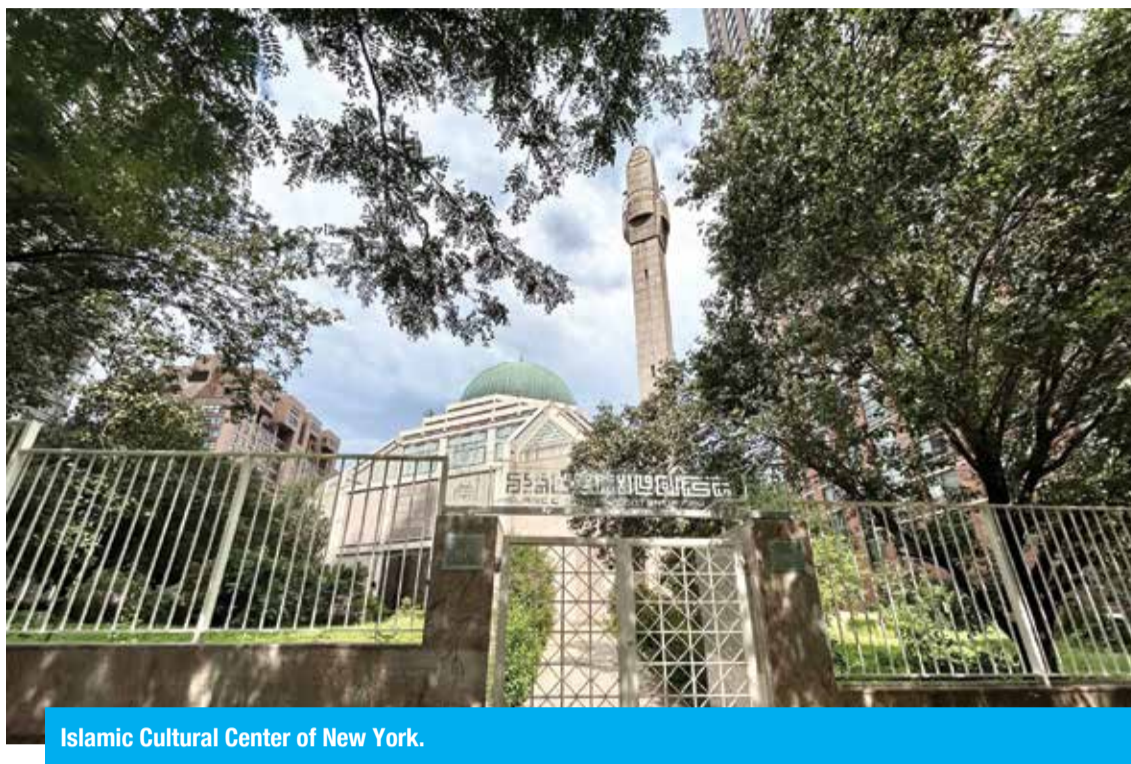
Any step toward alleviating civilians' hardships in the Gaza Strip is a move in the right direction; however, the humanitarian catastrophe cannot be tackled with partial measures "or tranquilizers to absorb the international public's wrath" regarding the occurrences in the enclave, the Arab League chief stated. The UNSC resolution, passed in the past hours, is aimed at preventing hunger in the Gaza Strip and rescuing human beings, particularly women and children, from a catastrophic situation, but it is insufficient to halt the Zionist offensive, considering in particular that it does not call for a cease-fire, the Arab League secretary general said.

The resolution was passed after procrastination, heeding Zionist desire, he said, stressing that "what's required is not only the dispatch of humanitarian aid to the strip but also achieving a viable cease-fire." Basically, what is needed is protection of the civilians from the continuing bombardment, starting a major operation to relieve hundreds of thousands of people who are deprived of minimal necessities, he emphasized further.

Meanwhile, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation welcomed the adoption of the UN Security Council Resolution (2720), which demands immediate, safe, and unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance at scale directly to the Palestinian civilian population throughout the Gaza Strip. The resolution, passed earlier today by 13 votes with two abstentions, is a significant step towards a durable cessation of hostilities in Gaza: it should be implemented immediately, the OIC said in a statement on Friday evening.

The organization urged the international community, particularly the Security Council, to force the occupation forces to abide by the resolution immediately and fully. It called for speeding up the delivery of essential humanitarian aid to the civilian population in Gaza, reaffirming opposition to any forced evacuation of the Gazans. It reiterated the call for ending the brutal attacks and genocide being perpetrated by the occupation army against the Palestinian people across the occupied territories, notably the Gaza Strip. — KUNA

Islamic Cultural Center holds funeral prayer for late Amir



Islamic Cultural Center of New York.

NEW YORK: The Islamic Cultural Center of New York held on Friday absentee funeral prayer for the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. Kuwait's Consul General in New York Azzam Al-Asfoor expressed, in statements to KUNA, sincere condolences to the political leadership, Kuwaiti people and the

Al-Sabah Family over the demise of the father of all, Sheikh Nawaf.

Al-Asfoor recalled the traits, stances and humanitarian role of Sheikh Nawaf, praying to Allah the Almighty to bestow mercy upon his soul and bring solace to all Kuwaitis. Meanwhile, the Consul voiced sincere wishes to His Highness the Amir



Ahmad Zaker, the center's Imam



Kuwait's Consul General in New York Azzam Al-Asfoor

Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to complete the path of goodness and development as well as maintain stability, security and prosperity in Kuwait, and protect it from all harm. Ahmad Zaker, the center's Imam, and all worshippers prayed to Allah to bestow mercy upon Sheikh Nawaf's soul. — KUNA

People's fear of ageing

By Ghadeer Ghloom

KUWAIT: Ageing is one inevitable truth that looms ahead of every living creature. Yet, many humans tend to be consumed by fear and detest this natural process, rather than embracing and celebrating the wisdom and experience that grows within them. The fear of ageing stems from multiple factors including the media industry, one's unhealthy lifestyle and preconceived notions. Kuwait Times spoke to psychologist Dr Ali Al-Baghlani to unlock the true potential of this phenomenon.

Dr Baghlani said there are several factors that make people fear ageing, including having an unhealthy lifestyle, such as lack of movement and activity, which leads to muscle weakness, changes in facial features, memory loss and many other traits associated with weakness and frailty. However, all of these characteristics closely related to ageing may not necessarily be the main



Dr Ali Al-Baghlani

elements of this stage. On the contrary, we may see people who still maintain their usual activity and preserve the vitality of their youth despite being in advanced stages of life. Thus, one wonders what is the reason for this paradox.

According to Dr Baghlani, the answer lies in the fact that society's culture has associated these unpleasant traits with ageing, completely ignoring the healthy and balanced lifestyle throughout one's life, which result in preserving an individual's health for a longer period and enjoying a more comfortable life free from diseases.

Not to mention the depiction of old



age in the media, exposing it as a period of weakness and diminished physical and mental strength, for which people must buy products and do things to hide this natural process. This leads to fear and a lack of desire to reach this stage of life, which can be a period of reaping the rewards of a healthy lifestyle, achieving increased psychological equilibrium and giving back in various forms after experiencing different life experiences.

Giving back can be a form of gratitude that Allah mentioned in His wise

book, "...until, when he reached maturity and reached [the age of] forty years, he said, 'My Lord, grant me the ability to be grateful for Your favor which You have bestowed upon me and upon my parents and to do righteousness of which You approve. And admit me by Your mercy into [the ranks of] Your righteous servants.'" Therefore, we must change the concepts associated with ageing to be seen as concepts of intellectuality and wisdom, as well as psychological and spiritual balance.



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Helping hand? Impact of AI on designers

By Zainab Al-Mashoor

KUWAIT: While technology has been rapidly advancing in the realm of visual arts, the advent of artificial intelligence (AI) has significantly impacted various industries, standing at the forefront of creative expression and reshaping the landscape for designers. AI, being fed algorithms alongside countless images and data, has learned to recognize prominent objects in various tasks and requested artwork. It goes beyond being a mere tool, swiftly and cost-effectively creating personalized designs and liberating designers from routine tasks, ultimately serving as a guide to introduce new ideas and enhance creativity.

With continuous upgrades in AI, it has become a valuable aid in improving designers' ability to focus on their creative aspects. By feeding algorithms, thousands of images and selecting the most prominent objects, AI has learned to recognize and make selections in any given photo. Now, this knowledge can be compiled into a machine learning algorithm, which ships with the latest version of Photoshop.

As AI becomes increasingly pivotal, designers face a dilemma, with some embracing the opportunities it presents, some expressing concerns

about job security, and others grappling with ethical considerations. In the media and design field, opinions vary.

Morad Azmy, a designer with 10 years of experience, initially had skepticism about AI's potential to replace a designer's job. However, with its upgrades, he acknowledges that AI has enhanced his creative aspects, making tasks more efficient and time saving. While AI can handle repetitive tasks, Azmy emphasizes that it cannot replace a designer entirely, as the designer is a holistic package essential for delivering complete projects.

According to a client, Shaikh Jaber, AI is a valuable tool that makes tasks easier and more cost-effective. He sees the potential of AI delivering necessary results but acknowledges the importance of a human designer. Jaber notes that AI lacks emotional support and communication skills, which are crucial in delivering projects effectively.

Digital Marketing Specialist Tarek Al-Tantawi views AI as an upgraded version of technology, emphasizing its role in thinking faster, providing solutions and offering tips for problem-solving. However, he raises concerns about the accessibility of data stored in AI servers, highlighting potential risks to confidentiality. Tantawi underscores that while AI contributes significantly to technology, a substantial 40 percent of success relies on one's hard work.

AI has become an invaluable tool for designers, enhancing creativity and efficiency. However, concerns persist regarding its ability to fully replace human designers, potential risks to data confidentiality and the need for emotional and communication skills in creative endeavors.





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Zionist entity orders evacuation of Palestinians in central Gaza

'This is wrong. Everything that Netanyahu is doing is wrong'

BUREIJ, Palestine: Grabbing blankets and their meagre belongings, thousands of Palestinians fled from the center of the Gaza Strip to the south Friday to escape relentless Zionist bombings. Many had recently sought refuge in central Gaza's Bureij refugee camp in search of safety after having been uprooted several times since the Zionist entity launched its military campaign on the besieged strip in October.

Donkey carts creaked with their belongings as they passed through the streets. Families pushed babies in prams and led elderly relatives through the crowd, packing winter blankets for the road ahead. "This is not a life: no water, no food, nothing," said Walaa al-Medini, who had been injured in a strike on her home in Gaza City and uses a wheelchair. "My daughter died in my lap, and I was rescued from under the rubble after three hours," she said. "Our house, along with everything around us, was destroyed." She said she had not slept properly for 40 nights. "My message to the world is for them to look at us, to see us, to see how we are dying. Why aren't they paying attention?" An evacuation order issued Friday by the Zionist army told residents in the Bureij refugee camp to "leave immediately for their own security" and head towards Deir al-Balah city further south.

'No safe place'

The Zionist entity's bombardment and ground assault has displaced some 1.9 million Gazans according to UN figures, over three-quarters of the population. It has put most hospitals in the

besieged territory out of action. Nine remain partly functioning, the World Health Organization says.

At Aqsa hospital in central Gaza, medical staff rushed to find space for patients streaming through the doors on stretchers from another refugee camp in Al-Maghazi. In the packed hospital, they treated an injured boy on the floor. A baby screamed in a cradle on the ground, blood smeared across its tiny forehead.

The Gaza health ministry says more than 410 people had been killed in Zionist bombardment over 48 hours. Parts of Gaza City have seen street-by-street combat between Zionist soldiers and Hamas fighters.

The Zionist military campaign on Gaza has so far killed more than 20,057 people, according to the Gaza health ministry, mostly women and children. The Zionist entity says it is in response to an attack carried out by Hamas men on southern parts of the entity in early October. Around 1,140 people have died in the attack or in subsequent attempts of the Zionist military to eliminate the attackers.

With swathes of Gaza reduced to rubble, the displaced have been forced into crowded shelters or tents, and are struggling to find food, fuel, water and medical supplies. At the Bureij refugee camp, Salem Yussef planned to make the journey south to Rafah.

Displaced from Gaza City, he said he first took refuge at the Al-Shifa hospital, then spent a month and a half at the Nuseirat refugee camp in the center of the besieged territory. The Zionist entity has repeatedly told Palestinians to make their



DEIR AL-BALAH: Residents of the refugee camp of Bureij arrive in Deir al-Balah in the central Gaza Strip following an evacuation order, on Dec 22, 2023. — AFP

way to areas in the narrow Gaza Strip it says are safe, but strikes have continued to devastate these areas.

"They tell us it's safe, but there's no safe place," Yussef said. He said he

hoped Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu "stops the crimes and killing of innocent people and stops claiming to hit (Hamas armed wing Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades) locations when he can't

even reach them. I also hope he stops the killing of children and the destruction of people's homes over their heads," he said. "This is wrong. Everything that Netanyahu is doing is wrong." — AFP

War dampens Christmas spirit in south Lebanon

QLAYAA, Lebanon: In the Lebanese Christian border village of Qlayaa, the priest urged his parish to keep the Christmas spirit alive despite clashes between Hezbollah and the Zionist entity forcing many to flee. Nestled among lush, green fields and flowing olive groves, Qlayaa has echoed to the sound of bombing on an almost daily basis since Oct 7.

"Of course we are upset and bothered by the war ... but we want to feel the joy of Christmas," father Pierre Rai told a dwindling number of parishioners in Qlayaa's Maronite Saint George Church. "So long as we have decided to remain in this village, and in other southern Lebanon border villages, we must live and enjoy each thing in its right time." For nearly three months, Zionist rockets have been falling close to Qlayaa, which lies less than five kilometers (three miles) from the border. So far, however, the Christian villages in the area have been spared destruction.

Since the Zionist entity launched its attack on Gaza, more than 140 people have been killed on the Lebanese side, most of them Hezbollah fighters but also including more than a dozen civilians, three of them journalists, according to an AFP tally. Despite the violence, the church has put up lights, a life-sized manger and is planning recitals and activities for the community's children. A massive Christmas tree decorated with red ornaments sits in the village's empty square, with reindeer statues nearby.

'Rather die here'

Lebanon's south is home to a plethora of religious communities, but it is mainly dominated by the Shiite Hezbollah movement. The region was battered by a years-long Zionist occupation that ended in 2000 and again in the 2006 war between Hezbollah and the Zionist entity. Residents along the border are used to "difficult times", said father Antonios Farah, "but we have decided that this year we will celebrate Christmas as usual". "This is our way to pray for peace," he said,



QLAYAA, Lebanon: A priest leads mass at a church in the village of Qlayaa, on the southern border with the Zionist entity, on Dec 21, 2023. — AFP

dressed in a black robe and sitting in the church.

The streets of the small village are usually bustling with visitors around Christmas, when many of those living abroad return. But this year, "only about 60 percent of the village population is still here" with none of the expatriates coming home, he said, adding that the streets were deserted after nightfall.

According to updated figures from the International Organization for Migration, the hostilities have displaced more than 72,000 people in Lebanon, most of them in the country's south. Qlayaa resident Suzy Salameh, 47, has put up a voluminous tree in her home and said she was praying for peace. "We are trying to celebrate Christmas despite ... the war, the bombings," she said, standing beside a conifer decorated with silver ornaments, garlands and purple lights. "God willing, the birth of Jesus will bring about peace in our country and in all the countries around us."

But not everyone in the village was so optimistic. In a house close to the church, Layla Wana sat alone with her husband under a big Christmas tree. "We're not feeling the Christmas spirit at all," said Wana, 67, dressed in a black tracksuit. "Some of our children are abroad, others are in Beirut," she said. "But we will remain in our house and we will not leave, even if it means we will die here." — AFP

tarpaulin sheet covering his flour cargo.

Mohamed Ali, another driver who arrived from Cairo with a stockpile of biscuits, said the "Egyptian secret service had given instructions to speak as little as possible" before entering Gaza. Heavily armed Zionist soldiers accompanied by sniffer dogs randomly check the goods. Late Friday, after the UN Security Council approved a much-delayed resolution calling to boost aid into Gaza, the Zionist entity's top diplomat said the inspections will continue. "(The Zionist entity) will continue to inspect, for security reasons, all humanitarian assistance to Gaza," Foreign Minister Eli Cohen said in a statement.

Last week, the Zionist entity approved the temporary delivery of aid via Kerem Shalom, opening a new route for supplies to ease congestion at the Rafah crossing between Egypt and Gaza after weeks of international pressure. According to the Zionist army, on average, 80 trucks enter Gaza daily through the Kareem Abu Salem crossing, known as Kerem Shalom in the Zionist entity.

Earlier this week, UN official Tor Wennesland said that the Zionist entity's "limited" steps to allow aid into Gaza were "positive, but fall far short of what is needed to address the human catastrophe on the ground". And the United Nations warned on Thursday that the war since Oct 7 is pushing Gazans towards famine. — AFP

Gaza-bound aid trucks endure wait at border

KAREEM ABU SALEM: Awaiting inspection by Zionist soldiers, a miles-long queue of aid trucks bound for the war-battered Gaza Strip is held up for hours at a recently reopened but since bombarded crossing. The trucks arrive from Egypt, loaded with crucial food and humanitarian supplies for Gaza's besieged and hungry population.

The vehicles wait on the Zionist side of the Kareem Abu Salem crossing, which on Thursday was hit by a deadly Zionist strike more than two months into the Zionist attack on Gaza.

One by one, Egyptian truck drivers enter a large parking lot to have their goods checked under the watchful eye of the Zionist military, which on Friday organized a media tour of the narrow border crossing. Truck driver Said Abdel Hamid seemed unfazed by the wait, saying he was "proud to bring help to my Palestinian brothers" as he removed the



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International

US Supreme Court declines to speed up Trump's immunity claim

Unexplained decision expected to push back former president's election interference trial

WASHINGTON: The US Supreme Court declined on Friday to immediately hear former president Donald Trump's claim that he is immune from prosecution, potentially delaying his 2020 election interference trial. Special Counsel Jack Smith had asked the nation's highest court to take up the immunity case on an expedited basis, bypassing the federal court of appeals. The Supreme Court, which has a 6-3 conservative majority, including three justices nominated by Trump, denied the request in a one-line order that did not provide any reason for the decision. The 77-year-old Trump, the frontrunner for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination, is currently scheduled to go on trial on March 4, 2024 on charges of conspiring to overturn the Nov 2020 election won by Democrat Joe Biden.

Trump's lawyers have repeatedly sought to delay the trial until after next year's election, including with the claim that a former president enjoys "absolute immunity" and cannot be prosecuted for actions he took while in the White House.

US District Judge Tanya Chutkan, who is to preside over Trump's March trial, rejected the immunity claim on Dec 1, saying a former president does not have a "lifelong 'get-out-of-jail-free' pass."

"Defendant's four-year service as Commander in Chief did not bestow on him the divine right of kings to evade the criminal accountability that governs his fellow citizens," she added.

Trump's lawyers appealed Chutkan's decision to the US Court of Appeals for the DC Circuit and Smith, the special counsel, asked the Supreme Court to step in and hear the case itself. "This case presents a fundamental question at the heart of our democracy: whether a former President is absolutely immune from federal prosecution for crimes committed while in office," Smith said in a filing to the Supreme Court. "It is of paramount public importance that respondent's claims of immunity be resolved as expeditiously as possible — and, if respondent is not immune, that he receive a fair and speedy trial on these charges," he said.

Appeals court hearing

With the Supreme Court's rejection of Smith's request, the appeals court will now first hear the immunity case. Carl Tobias, a law professor at the University of Richmond, said this could make it difficult to maintain the March trial date.

Tobias noted the Supreme Court had agreed to "fast-track" appeals in 19 cases

over the past four years and it was unclear why the justices had declined to do so here. Trump welcomed the Supreme Court's move and said he was looking forward to presenting his arguments before the appeals court. "Of course, I am entitled to Presidential Immunity," he said in a post on his Truth Social platform.

"I was President, it was my right and duty to investigate, and speak on, the rigged and stolen 2020 Presidential Election," he said, repeating his baseless claims to have won the election. The DC appeals court has scheduled arguments for Jan 9 and its ruling is expected to eventually reach the Supreme Court, whose current session ends in June.

Trump's lawyers are also expected to ask the nation's highest court to rule on a decision by the Colorado Supreme Court that would keep the former president off the Republican primary ballot in the western state.

The Colorado court ruled Tuesday that Trump had incited an insurrection — the Jan 6, 2021 attack on the US Capitol by his supporters — and was therefore ineligible to hold office again. The US Supreme Court has already agreed to hear a challenge to the use of a law behind one of the charges lodged against Trump and hundreds of his supporters who took



WATERLOO: Republican presidential candidate and former US President Donald Trump gestures as he leaves a campaign event on Dec 19, 2023 in Waterloo, Iowa. — AFP

part in the attack on the Capitol.

Trump was indicted in Washington in August for conspiracy to defraud the United States and obstruction for his efforts to upend the results of the 2020 election. He faces similar election-related charges in Georgia and has been indicted

in Florida for alleged mishandling of top-secret documents after leaving the White House. Trump was impeached by the Democratic-majority House of Representatives following the attack on the Capitol for "incitement of insurrection" but was acquitted by the Senate. — AFP

Indonesia presidential candidate pledges change from Widodo

SERANG, Indonesia: As one of Indonesia's leading presidential candidates is driven away from a campaign stop, locals surround his car, screaming his name and jostling to kiss his hand through the window. Anies Baswedan, a former governor of the capital Jakarta, is in a three-way battle ahead of February's vote to lead the world's third largest democracy and fourth most populous nation, with polls showing him rising toward a spot in a potential second-round runoff.

In his first interview with foreign media since registering to run last month, the 54-year-old told AFP that he is the candidate for change. He has sought to paint himself as an alternative to the other two candidates, front-runner and current defense minister Prabowo Subianto and Ganjar Pranowo, who has the backing of incumbent President Joko Widodo's party.

Both have promised to largely carry on the current administration's policies. "We offer a change. We offer the concept of equality in policymaking," Baswedan said from his car in western Java. "More and more people realize that we need change." That includes strengthening the country's corruption eradication commission and distributing wealth more fairly, Baswedan has pledged. His campaign slogan — "fair, prosperous Indonesia for all" — promises economic development felt by everyone, not just the Indonesian elite, he said. Achieving that goal would take a "commitment for good governance, starting from the top leader," he said.

On foreign policy, he chided Widodo for never attending the United Nations General Assembly in person, promising that he would represent Indonesia at the annual gathering of world leaders. "How come we don't



SERANG, Indonesia: Presidential candidate Anies Baswedan (center) poses for pictures with students after a public dialogue during his campaign rally on Dec 21, 2023. — AFP

want to join the village's meeting when our land is the fourth largest in the village?" he asked, referring to Indonesia's 270 million people. "Indonesia must be present and Indonesia must play its part. We'll be active."

'Ethics start from the head'

That message appears to be catching on with voters, with Baswedan — an independent candidate backed by three political parties — rising in recent polls as Pranowo's numbers have fallen. The former university rector is now closing in on Pranowo, 55, for the second runoff spot to challenge Subianto, 72.

An independent poll published on December 10 showed 22.3 percent of Indonesian respondents would choose Baswedan, up from 19.6 percent in October. Pranowo's support slid from 26.1 percent to 23.8 percent in the same interval. Baswedan — popular with conservative Muslims in the Muslim-majority country — was accused of stoking religious divisions in the race for governor of Jakarta in 2017, when he defeated a Christian rival backed by Widodo. "You can see our record. — AFP

Czechs mourn Prague university shooting victims

PRAGUE: Church bells rang, flags flew at half mast and masses were held across the Czech Republic on Saturday, a day of national mourning for the victims of a deadly shooting at Prague's Charles University. A heavily armed 24-year-old student killed 14 people and then himself at the Faculty of Arts on Thursday. The lone gunman also wounded 24 others, including three foreigners.

The gunfire sparked frantic scenes of students running from the attacker, with some escaping onto the roof and then jumping onto a balcony below, while others clung to top-floor windows from ledges. Daily life halted for a minute of silence for the victims in the EU and NATO member country at noon (11:00 GMT) on Saturday. "We are all trying to build heaven on earth, but the reality of life shows us that evil exists," said Prague Archbishop Jan Graubner, celebrating a mass for the victims at the Gothic St Vitus Cathedral at Prague Castle.

Students attending the mass said top politicians were present, including President Petr Pavel, and that many in the cathedral were in tears. "The life of each person in its uniqueness enriches and becomes a part of the lives of others, and its loss is therefore irreplaceable," Charles University rector Milena Kralickova said at the mass, her voice breaking.

A choir singing at the mass was led by David Eben, a musician and musicology teacher at the Faculty of Arts. His department lost its director, Lenka Hlavkova, a mother of two, in the carnage.



PRAGUE: People mourn at a makeshift memorial for the victims outside the Charles University in central Prague, on Dec 22, 2023. — AFP

Two-month-old victim

Since the shooting, people have lit thousands of candles for the victims at makeshift memorials set up in Prague and other cities. During the mass on Saturday, Faculty of Arts students brought eighteen roses to the altar — 14 for the university victims, one for the gunman and three for other people he had killed.

Police said that the gunman appeared to have killed a randomly chosen young man and his two-month-old daughter in a Prague forest on Dec 15. "A ballistic analysis proved the gun used in the ... forest was IDENTICAL with a gun found at the university gunman's home," police said on X.

On Thursday, he killed his father in a village west of Prague where the family lived, and then left for the capital, leaving a suicide note, police said. Police launched a manhunt for him, but appeared to have missed him at the university, searching a Faculty of Arts building where he was expected to attend a lecture, while the gunman walked into the faculty's main building nearby. — AFP

UN calls for aid but no...

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Immediately after the UN vote, the Zionist entity again vowed to fight on until Hamas is "eliminated" and captives are freed. "(The Zionist entity) will continue the war in Gaza," said Foreign Minister Eli Cohen, insisting it was legal and just.

At Nasser Hospital in Khan Yunis, men gently led a weeping woman who had seen the bodies of relatives. A man crouched down in tears, his hand resting on a black body bag. Outside, others prayed before another corpse. "What is going on in the corridors of the UN Security Council is nothing more than theatre and farce," Rafat Al-Aydi said, standing before the bodies which lay under a bush of bright red flowers. "This is a genocide."

Allies, including the United States which provides the Zionist entity with billions of dollars in military aid, have increasingly pressured the Zionist entity to avoid civilian casualties. The UN estimates the fighting has displaced 1.9 million of Gaza's 2.4 million population. World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said a majority of those uprooted from their homes were now going "entire days and nights without eating", and "famine is looming".

A one-week truce that Qatar helped mediate, with support from Egypt and the United States, ended on

Dec 1. It saw 80 Zionist captives released from Gaza captivity in exchange for 240 Palestinian prisoners. The Zionist entity has repeatedly told Palestinians to make their way to areas in the tiny territory it says are safe, but even when they do residents say they still have been bombarded.

Many Gazans have been forced to move multiple times. On Friday thousands fled central Gaza after an army evacuation order. It warned residents of Bureij, a refugee camp established about 70 years ago, to move "for their own security" towards Deir al-Balah city further south. Donkey carts creaked with their belongings. Families pushed babies in prams and led elderly relatives through the crowd. They packed winter blankets for the road ahead.

The UN agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, said the latest evacuation order would affect more than 150,000 people. "The (Zionist) army just orders people to move into areas where there are ongoing air strikes," Thomas White, UNRWA's Gaza director, wrote on social media. At Deir al-Balah's Al-Aqsa Hospital ambulances arrived with more bodies and wounded after an overnight strike.

Friday's UN resolution only passed thanks to US and Russian abstentions. It requests the appointment of a UN humanitarian coordinator to oversee and verify third-country aid to Gaza. But the Zionist entity would retain operational oversight of aid deliveries. Hamas described the resolution as "an insufficient measure that does not respond to the catastrophic situation created by the Zionist war machine". — AFP

Zionist-Hamas war on Oct 7 have prompted major firms to reroute their cargo vessels around the southern tip of Africa, despite the higher fuel costs of much longer voyages. The Houthi rebels have launched more than 100 drone and missile attacks, targeting 10 merchant vessels involving more than 35 different countries, according to the Pentagon.

On Saturday, an official in Iran's Revolutionary Guard warned of the forced closure of other waterways unless the Zionist entity halted its war with Hamas. "With the continuation of these crimes, America and its allies should expect the emergence of new resistance forces and the closure of other waterways," Mohammad Reza Naqdi said, quoted by Iran's Tasnim news agency. Among the waterways he mentioned was the Mediterranean Sea. He did not elaborate. — AFP

Yemen rivals agree truce...

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and resume oil exports, according to the statement. "Yemenis are watching and waiting for this new opportunity to provide for tangible results and progress towards lasting peace," Grundberg said. "The parties have taken a significant step. Their commitments are, first and foremost, an obligation to the Yemeni people." The agreement comes amid a flurry of attacks by the Houthi rebels on key shipping lanes in the Red Sea in solidarity with Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, where the Zionist entity is fighting Hamas.

The Houthis have pledged to attack Zionist-linked vessels or ships heading to Zionist ports unless an end is brought to the Zionist-Hamas war that started on Oct 7. They have launched more than 100 drone and missile attacks, targeting 10 merchant vessels involving more than 35 different countries, according to the Pentagon. The attacks by the rebels are imperiling a transit route that

carries up to 12 percent of global trade, prompting the United States to set up a multinational naval task force to protect Red Sea shipping.

The Houthi "military actions hinder progress towards a peaceful resolution," Mohammed Albasha, a senior Middle East analyst for the US-based Navanti Group, told AFP. "The Houthis have transitioned... to becoming aggressors targeting civilian assets," he said. The latest agreement also coincides with a push by Saudi Arabia to extricate itself from the conflict, despite slim hopes of a lasting peace.

The oil-rich monarchy gave a signal this year by resuming ties with Iran, which backs the Houthis against the Saudi-supported government in a proxy war. The Saudi-led intervention's stated aim was to protect civilians from Houthi attacks, restore the government and stop Yemen becoming a safe haven for Iranian-backed forces.

Eight years in, the rebels control swathes of the country and command an impressive arsenal of weapons that they have used to attack Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, another coalition member. Many analysts are pessimistic that Riyadh's plans for a downsized military role will bring peace to Yemen, which remains deeply fractured along religious, regional and political lines. — AFP

Drone strike hits ship off...

Continued from Page 1

allies and proxies targeting the Zionist entity over its war with Hamas. Last month, a Zionist-owned cargo ship was hit in a suspected drone attack by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps in the Indian Ocean, according to a US official. The Malta-flagged vessel managed by a Zionist-affiliated company was reportedly damaged when the unmanned aerial vehicle exploded close to it, according to Ambrey.

The Red Sea attacks on shipping since the start of the

Pak ex-PM Khan granted bail but...

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committed by Khan. "There are sufficient grounds for further inquiry into their guilt of said offence, which is to be finally decided by the learned trial court," the judgement said. PTI said Khan remains incarcerated over numerous separate graft cases, with scant chance he will leave prison to contest elections due Feb 8. "The prospect of him obtaining relief in the near future appears to be very slim," party lawyer Khalid Yousaf Chaudry told AFP.

Khan rose to fame in cricket-crazed Pakistan captaining the nation to victory against England in the 1992 ODI World Cup final, using the triumph to springboard his political career and found PTI. PTI has long used the cricket bat as a symbol, and in a nation where the adult

literacy rate is just 58 percent, according to World Bank data, icons are vital to identify parties on ballot papers.

But late Friday the electoral commission said PTI was "declared ineligible to obtain the election symbol for which they have applied" because they failed to hold internal party polls obeying their constitution. A PTI lawyer said they would challenge the decision, which comes just seven weeks before polling day. Nonetheless PTI submitted Khan's nomination papers in his hometown, despite the electoral commission disqualifying him from contesting over a graft conviction earlier this year. Other candidates will be able to challenge his nomination on the basis of his disqualification.

The fate of politicians in Pakistan has historically ridden on their relationship to the military establishment, which has directly ruled the country on several occasions. Hugely popular Khan rose to power in 2018 with the backing of the army. But when he was ousted by a parliamentary no-confidence vote he claimed generals had conspired with Washington to end his term. He publicly touted diplomatic documents as supposed evidence for his claims. — AFP

International

Migrant influx on Mexico border poses conundrum for Biden

Allies, rivals slam federal government for 'refusing' to secure US-Mexico border

WASHINGTON: US border patrol and several states have found themselves overwhelmed lately, lacking resources to manage the thousands of migrants arriving from Mexico every day — a crisis that has exposed President Joe Biden to intense attacks from his Republican opponents. Border officials have in recent weeks counted some 10,000 daily crossings — an uptick from preceding months, which had already seen migrants arrive at an accelerating clip. There were more than 2.4 million migrant interceptions via land in the year from October 2022 to September 2023.

On Tuesday, authorities closed railroads at Eagle Pass and El Paso, Texas due to a "resurgence" of undocumented migrants entering the United States via freight trains. Border crossings by car have been suspended at Eagle Pass since early December, as have entry points in California and Arizona, with border police saying they had to move personnel away from those checkpoints to focus on processing irregular entries.

Accusing Biden of "deliberate inaction" on the border issue, Texas Republican Governor Greg Abbott this week approved a controversial law criminalizing illegal entry into his state. Abbott, a staunch supporter of Donald Trump, hosted a signing ceremony in front of a section of border wall in the city of Brownsville, a nod to the former president's flagship project and intense 2024 anti-immigration platform.

The law, set to go into effect in March, makes it a crime to illegally enter Texas from a foreign country, punishable by six months in prison — or up to 20 years, in the case of repeat offenders. It gives Texas state law enforcement the ability to arrest migrants and deport them to Mexico — a power normally reserved for federal authorities.

In response, several human rights organizations,

including the influential ACLU, immediately filed lawsuits challenging the Texas law's constitutionality. Even political allies in border states have taken Biden to task over migration, with Arizona's Democratic Governor Katie Hobbs saying, "the federal government is refusing to do its job to secure our border and keep our communities safe." Earlier this month, Hobbs announced she would send Arizona National Guard troops to the border to help pick up some of the slack.

A 'broken' system

The reasons for this recent uptick in migration are not totally clear. Customs and Border Protection have blamed "smugglers peddling disinformation to prey on vulnerable individuals." Several migrants in Texas told AFP there has been gossip swirling that a total closure of the US border was imminent, which could have fueled some recent crossings. "There were rumors that from the 20th (of December), they wouldn't let anyone else in," said 32-year-old Yurianis Alexmar Camacho, who had come from Venezuela with her husband and four children.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas will travel to Mexico in the coming days to meet with President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador in an effort to stem this incessant flow, the White House announced Thursday. "The president understands that we have to fix this immigration system. It has been broken for decades now," White House spokeswoman Karine Jean-Pierre said the same day.

Biden said earlier this month he was prepared to compromise with congressional Republicans on a border plan — they have demanded a concrete tightening of immigration policy in exchange for agreeing on a new aid package for Ukraine.



EAGLE PASS: Immigrants wait to be processed at a US Border Patrol transit center after they crossed the border from Mexico in Eagle Pass, Texas on Dec 20, 2023. — AFP

The situation is fraught for Biden as he begins his 2024 White House reelection campaign in earnest: in addition to criticism from the right, which says he is too soft on immigration, the president's progressive supporters expect him to stay far away from his predecessor's policies on migrants, who are mostly fleeing poverty and violence in Latin America. But he will have to face the issue head-on one way or

another, and soon, as there is no sign the steady flow of arrivals will let up.

Panama said earlier this month that since the start of 2023, half a million people — or double the number from last year — had crossed into its territory through the jungle at the perilous Darien Gap the separates the country from Colombia. The vast majority were headed for the United States. — AFP

France grounds plane over likely 'human trafficking' of Indians

VATRY, France: French police were questioning two men Friday a day after officials grounded a Nicaragua-bound plane carrying more than 300 Indian passengers over suspected "human trafficking," prosecutors said. The Airbus A340 had flown in from the United Arab Emirates on Thursday, landing at Vatry airport in eastern France for a technical stopover.

It was held by French authorities after an anonymous tip-off that it was carrying passengers "likely to be victims of human trafficking," the Paris prosecutors office told AFP. The two men in custody were among the passengers.

"Identity checks are being carried on the 303 passengers and on the cabin crew," said the prosecutor's office. They were also checking the conditions in which the passengers were being transported and the purpose of their journey. A source close to the case said that minors were among the passengers.

The national anti-organized crime unit JUNALCO is leading the investigation, said prosecutors. According to a source familiar with the case, the passengers might have planned to travel to Central America in order to attempt illegal entry into the United States or Canada.

After landing in France, they were first kept on the aircraft, but then let out and given individual beds in the terminal building. They were set to remain at the airport overnight Friday, local authorities said. The Indian embassy in France said in a statement on X, formerly Twitter, that the authorities in Paris had informed them of the situation. "Embassy team has



VATRY: This photograph taken on Dec 23, 2023, shows the Airbus A340 which was grounded over suspected "human trafficking" at Vatry airport, north-eastern France. — AFP

reached & obtained consular access," it added. "We are investigating the situation, also ensuring wellbeing of passengers." On Friday, police and gendarmes cordoned off the entire airport and white tarpaulin sheets covered the bay windows of the airport's arrivals hall, an AFP journalist at the scene noted.

'nothing wrong'

The prefecture in the north-eastern department of Marne said the A340, operated by Romanian company Legend Airlines, "remained grounded on the tarmac at Vatry airport following its landing" on Thursday. Legend Air has a small fleet of four aircraft, according to the Flightradar website.

The plane had been due to refuel and was carrying 303 Indian nationals who had probably been

working in the UAE, it said. Liliana Bakayoko, who said she was a lawyer for the airline, told AFP the company believed it had done nothing wrong, had committed no offence "and is at the disposal of the French authorities". But the airline would take legal action if the prosecutors file charges, she added.

The Vatry airport, located 150 kilometers (90 miles) east of Paris, serves mostly budget airlines. Border police can initially hold a foreign national for up to four days if they land in France and are prevented from travelling on to their intended destination. French law allows for that period to be extended to eight days if a judge approves it, then another eight days in exceptional circumstances, up to a maximum of 26 days. Human trafficking carries a potential sentence of up to 20 years in France. — AFP

Pro-peace candidate barred from Russian presidential ballot

MOSCOW: Russia's Central Electoral Commission on Saturday rejected an application by a candidate calling for peace to stand in next year's presidential elections. The commission cited "mistakes in documents" submitted by Yekaterina Duntsova, a former journalist and city councilor campaigning "for peace and democratic processes", Russian television reported. The commission's chief, Ella Pamfilova, said the members unanimously rejected Duntsova's bid to stand in polls that President Vladimir Putin is expected to win comfortably.

Putin confirmed this month that he would participate in the election, scheduled to be held over three days beginning March 15. The commission said Duntsova could not go on to the next stage of gathering thousands of supporters' signatures. Pamfilova told her: "You are a young woman, you have everything ahead of you."

Duntsova, 40, had filed documents to stand in the March race as an independent candidate. She was required to provide documents proving that a group of at least 500 people had held a meeting backing her. "A people's initiative is not needed, is not welcomed," Duntsova told journalists afterwards, saying she would not have time to file another application as an independent candidate. She wrote on social media that she would file an appeal against the ruling with the Supreme Court.

She also urged the leadership of liberal party Yabloko to nominate her as its candidate. Yabloko, Russia's oldest democratic party, "should not stand on the sidelines. Russians should have a choice", she wrote on Telegram. Duntsova told journalists on Saturday "we are now waiting for some official, public answer on whether (Yabloko) are prepared to support me so we meet the deadline" of Jan 1.

Yabloko's co-founder Grigory Yavlinsky said in a YouTube video broadcast on Saturday that the party is not nominating any candidate. The 71-year-old was unable to comment on Duntsova's request for nomination, saying he "had no idea" about her.

Candidates from political parties lacking MPs in the national parliament, like Yabloko, have a less arduous procedure to participate than independents. They have to gather signatures of 100,000 supporters by the end of January, while independent candidates have to find 300,000. — AFP

US paramedics found guilty in 2019 death of Elijah McClain

WASHINGTON: A jury in the western US state of Colorado on Friday found two paramedics guilty of negligent homicide in the death of a Black man who was put in a chokehold and injected with ketamine during his arrest, US media said.

The August 2019 death of Elijah McClain, an unarmed 23-year-old Black man, died several days after a struggle with police and after being injected with the sedative by attending paramedics, in a case that caused widespread anger at the time.

The jury found the two paramedics, Jeremy Cooper, 49, and Peter Cichuniec, 51, guilty of criminally negligent homicide, the Washington Post reported. McClain died after police in the city of Aurora re-

sponded to a call about a "suspicious" Black male "acting weird" in the street and wearing a ski mask.

One officer said McClain, who was unarmed, had reached for another officer's gun. No evidence was produced to support this claim. McClain's family told media he had been out buying iced tea, and often wore the mask to stay warm because he suffered from anemia. In October, a jury found a white police officer guilty of criminally negligent homicide in the case, while another two officers were cleared. McClain's death occurred months before the killing of another Black man, George Floyd, in Minneapolis in May 2020, triggered nationwide protests over racism and police brutality.

The paramedics' lawyers argued that their clients had simply followed protocol in administering the drug, but prosecutors said they had ignored their training in handling distressed patients. "There was no indication that Elijah needed ketamine, and you've heard multiple experts say that giving it was for no medical purpose," prosecutor Shannon Stevenson said in closing arguments, media reported. — AFP

Security Council voices 'alarm' at violence in Sudan

WASHINGTON: The UN Security Council expressed "alarm" at growing violence in war-torn Sudan on Friday, a day after it reported that seven million people have been displaced by the conflict.

In a joint statement, the Council "strongly condemned" attacks on civilians and the spread of the conflict "into areas hosting large populations of internally displaced persons, refugees, and asylum seekers." "The members of the Security Council expressed alarm at the spreading violence and deteriorating humanitarian situation in Sudan," the statement said, reflecting the worsening situation in the country. In addition to the seven million internally displaced people, the UN said Thursday another 1.5 million had fled into neighboring countries.

Since fighting broke out on April 15 between army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and his former deputy, Rapid Support Forces (RSF) commander Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, the city of Wad Madani, 180 kilometers (110 miles) south of Khartoum, had become a haven for thousands of displaced people during the conflict. But the Security Council said fighting had spread there too, causing refugees to flee once again. "According to the International Organization for Migration, up to 300,000 people have fled Wad Madani in Al-Jazira state in a new wave of large-scale displacement," UN secretary-general's spokesman Stephane Dujarric said Thursday.

As the rival security forces battle for the city's strongpoints, shopkeepers boarded up their stores this week to ward off looters while women disappeared from the streets for fear of sexual violence. The Council called on the warring parties to allow for "rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access throughout Sudan." — AFP



WEST HOLLYWOOD: People gather at a candlelight vigil to demand justice for Elijah McClain on the one year anniversary of his death on Aug 24, 2020. — AFP

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SUNDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2023

South Lebanon small businesses defy Zionist bombs to stay open

'I hid behind the fridge in the restaurant'



KFAR KILA, Lebanon: Lebanese Hussein Murtada prepares food in his restaurant in the village of Kfar Kila near the border with Zionists. In Kfar Kila, nestled among olive trees, some houses have been completely destroyed, and the sound of nearby bombardment rumbles through the air. — AFP

KFAR KILA: In a falafel joint in south Lebanon, Hussein Murtada prepared flat-bread snacks for his few remaining customers as Zionist surveillance drone buzzed above the border village of Kfar Kila. "We work under the bombs. A few days ago, a shell fell 200 meters from here. Shrapnel hit the shopfront and the wall," said Murtada, 60, pointing to the damage. "I hid behind the fridge in the restaurant" during the bombardment, he told AFP.

Since the Zionist-Hamas war began on October 7, Lebanon's Hezbollah group has been carrying out near-daily cross-border assaults in support of its ally Hamas. Zionist entity has been responding with its own bombardments in mostly tit-for-tat exchanges that have been largely contained to areas near the frontier, although fears remain of a broader conflagration.

More than 140 people have been killed on the Lebanese side, according to an AFP tally, most of them Hezbollah fighters but also including more than a dozen civilians, three of them journalists. On the Zionist side, four civilians and seven soldiers have been killed, authorities have said. In Kfar Kila, nestled among olive trees, some houses had been completely destroyed, and the sound of nearby bombardment rumbled

through the air. Just one grocery store was still open in Murtada's area, and the streets were largely deserted after many villagers fled.

'Disrupted'

Frying falafel in hot cooking oil, Murtada said he was determined to stay open, even if just for the few passing cars and ambulances. "I serve food to anyone who is hungry, even those who can't pay," he said, cutting tomatoes and pickles to go with an order. Lebanon, gripped by a crushing four-year economic crisis, can ill-afford another full-blown conflict between Zionists and Hezbollah. The two fought a month-long war in 2006.

A UN Development Program report this week said the hostilities had already led to "considerable physical losses, mainly of buildings, houses, commercial entities, infrastructure, services, and utilities" in south Lebanon border villages. "Economic activity and local businesses are either disrupted or have had to shut down or relocate." The World Bank warned on Thursday that "the current conflict and its spillovers into Lebanon are expected to quickly reverse the tepid growth projected for 2023 as the economy returns to a recession".

kourabiedes - the almond biscuits habitually offered this time of year - Hatzis, a popular pastry shop in Athens, is nearly empty save for a few tourists.

It's a similar story in Thessaloniki, Greece's second-largest city, 500 kilometers to the north. In the city market, Petros Elmaliotis has few illusions that his stock of nuts will sell out soon. In past years, people would throng his stand. But this year demand is limited. "There were six of us at the stand to serve people. Today there are only two," he told AFP. People "cut back on what they don't consider necessary." In November, the annual inflation rate dropped to 3 percent, down from the average 9.65 increase for 2022.

But food prices continue to gallop higher, up by 9 percent in November from the same month last year.

At his petrol station in the village of Taybeh, Ali Mansur was waiting for customers who dared to brave the bombardments. He said his village, just across the border from the Zionist kibbutz community of Misgav Am, is under constant Zionist drone surveillance. Hezbollah, an Iran-backed Shiite Muslim group, does not have a visible military presence in villages along the frontier. On December 11, an elderly local official was killed in Taybeh when an unexploded shell hit him on his balcony. "As long as the strikes are far away, we work to earn a living," said Mansur, aged around 50.

In nearby Adaysseh, Ahmad Tarrab said he had been serving burgers at a small restaurant until last week. "We had stayed open since the start" of the war in October, said Tarrab, 23. But an employee was wounded when a "shell fell in front of the restaurant, and two others behind it", he said, pointing to shrapnel in front of the establishment, whose sign was also damaged. Tarrab later told AFP he decided to flee. According to the International Organization for Migration, the violence has displaced more than 72,000 people in Lebanon, mostly in the country's south. While the majority are staying with host families, more than 1,000 are staying in shelters, according to the UN agency. — AFP

Meat is up 8.1 percent, fruit by 12 percent, and milk, cheese and eggs by nearly 5 percent. And olive oil has jumped by over 31 percent in a year, fuelled by poor harvests in global leader Spain. "What is happening is unprecedented," said Christos Dimitriadis, a 69-year-old retired civil servant shopping at a Thessaloniki supermarket.

"How are we supposed to live?" he wondered, pointing to 14-euro olive oil tins that he says used to cost a maximum of four euros two years earlier. The jump in food prices comes after Greeks have already experienced a brutal fall in their living standards over the last 15 years due to the austerity measures imposed to keep the country in the euro-zone following its sovereign debt crisis.

Deceptive recovery

Outwardly, the country is doing great. The Economist magazine on Monday ranked Greece at the top of 35 countries with the best economic performance for the second year in a row. Under the pro-business policies of conservative Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis - who was comfortably re-elected to a new four-year term in June - the former eurozone laggard has also regained its investment-grade borrowing rating from global agencies Fitch and S&P.

But despite receiving 289 billion euros since 2010 in three international bailout packages, the weaknesses in the Greek economy remain glaring. Public debt remains pharaonic at 160 percent of national output. Salaries remain well below the European average, weighing on purchasing power. And prices in Greece were on average 5.5 percent higher than the average in the European Union in 2022, according to Eurostat. For basic products like milk, cheese and eggs, prices were nearly 39 percent higher than the European average last year. — AFP

Tesla launches Shanghai massive battery project

SHANGHAI: Tesla officially launched a massive battery factory project in Shanghai on Friday, the US electric car maker's second plant in the Chinese city, state media reported. The project was announced in April after Tesla chief Elon Musk presented a vague but ambitious plan to investors to turbocharge growth. Company representatives signed an agreement to acquire land for the factory on the outskirts of Shanghai on Friday morning, according to state news agency Xinhua. The plant is expected to make 10,000 units of Tesla's Megapack batteries per year, and "break ground in the first quarter of 2024 and start production in the fourth quarter", Xinhua said.

The US electric car maker says its Megapacks are intended to store energy and stabilise supply for power grids, with each unit able to store more than 3 megawatt-hours of power. The plant will be Tesla's second factory in the Chinese city after its massive Shanghai Gigafactory, which broke ground in 2019. Musk visited China earlier this year, meeting with senior officials in Beijing and visiting the Shanghai Gigafactory. Musk's interests in China have long raised eyebrows in Washington, with President Joe Biden saying in November that his links to foreign countries were "worthy" of scrutiny. — AFP



CALIFORNIA: A Tesla car recharges its battery at the Petaluma Supercharger in Petaluma, California. — AFP

Prices bite into Greek Xmas even as economy improves

THESSALONIKI: Greece's traditional Christmas sweets made of icing sugar, honey and powdered almonds tantalize shoppers ahead of the festive season as they do every year. But with prices for the delicacies currently up by seven to 10 percent amid a general cost-of-living crisis, it's not certain whether consumers will be able to afford them this year. At a cost of nearly 24 euros (\$26) a kilo for a box of



THESSALONIKI: A woman buys vegetables at a stall as people shop in the local market in the northern city Thessaloniki. — AFP

Business

Boeing delivers first plane to China airline since 2019

787 Dreamliner plane delivered to Juneyao Airlines

SHANGHAI: The first Boeing plane delivered to a Chinese airline since 2019 landed in Shanghai on Friday, according to tracking site flightradar24. Boeing said that the 787 Dreamliner plane was being delivered to Juneyao Airlines. The jet departed from Everett, Washington, and landed at Shanghai Pudong International Airport at 4:25 pm local time, data from flightradar24 showed.

Boeing has rated China a crucial growth market, but deliveries ceased throughout the lengthy grounding of the 737 MAX following two crashes. China was among the first countries to ground the plane after two fatal accidents involving its flight control software in 2018 and 2019, and was the last major Boeing market to rescind the ban.

Boeing executives have at times suggested that diplomatic tensions between Beijing and Washington played a role in the pause on deliveries of new jets even after Chinese officials moved to allow MAX planes already in China to resume service. In addition, China's zero-tolerance COVID-19 policies in the first three years of the pandemic had "reduced demand for airplanes in general", Boeing Chief Executive Dave Calhoun said last year.

Calhoun said in July that while Boeing is "not dependent" on more China deliveries, the US company

was hopeful that it could soon hand new planes to Chinese carriers. Boeing has some 85 737 MAX jets that are already built, but not delivered to designated Chinese carriers. "We continue to support our customers in China and will be ready to deliver for our customers when that time comes," a Boeing spokesperson said Thursday of the MAX.

Domestic challenger

Beijing abruptly dropped its strict travel curbs a year ago, with domestic and international travel rebounding in recent months. Pre-booked international trips were 20 times higher during China's annual October holidays than in the same period last year, and domestic trips over four times, according to data from Trip.com, China's largest online travel provider.

Boeing in September forecast that China will need 8,560 new commercial planes through 2042, accounting for 20 percent of the world's airplane demand. But Beijing hopes its new domestically produced passenger jet, the C919, will challenge foreign models like the Boeing 737 MAX and the Airbus A320, though many of its parts are sourced from abroad. The C919 made its debut outside mainland China earlier this month when it was put on display at Hong Kong International Airport. — AFP



SHANGHAI: A Juneyao Airlines Boeing 787 Dreamliner plane lands at Shanghai Pudong International Airport on December 22, 2023. — AFP



SHENZHEN: A man walks past the Tencent headquarters in Shenzhen, in China's southern Guangdong province. — AFP

China unveils new gaming curbs; tech stocks tumble

SHANGHAI: China announced new plans to restrict the online gaming industry, sending shares in tech giants including Tencent tumbling. New draft restrictions published online by the regulator are aimed at limiting in-game purchases and compulsive playing behavior. Following the news, Tencent dropped over 10 percent in Hong Kong, while rival NetEase was down more than 20 percent.

Beijing first moved against the gaming sector in 2021 as part of a sprawling crackdown on big tech, including a strict cap on the amount of time children could spend playing online. An end to a freeze in gaming licences had raised hopes that the focus on the industry had subsided. But the draft regulations announced Friday would introduce limits on recharging

in-game wallets and abolish features meant to increase gameplay time such as rewards for daily log-ins.

Pop-ups warning users of "irrational" playing behavior would also have to be introduced. The draft regulations also reiterate a ban on "forbidden online game content... that endangers national unity" and "endangers national security or harms national reputation and interests". Tencent is the global leader in the sector in terms of revenue, dominating the Asian market and investing in game studios across the world. While its stock plummeted Friday, some independent game studios said the regulations could prove an opportunity.

Cheng Gong, CEO of Chengdu-based Hanjia Songshu, said studios that focus more on innovation and high-quality user experience might benefit. "The industry felt a bit like bad money driving out good money in the past," he told AFP. "Everyone is focusing on getting players to top up more. Only the ones with the most revenues can afford to spend more money on advertising and hence they would get more players topping up in return," he added. "It's a vicious circle." — AFP

of 582,000, however, the report added. The median sales price of new homes sold also rose, reaching \$434,700 in November. Analysts noted Friday that home sales data can be volatile and subject to revision. While the latest weakness appears to reflect elevated mortgage rates earlier in the year, rates have since come down. This, combined with the persistent lack of supply in existing properties - which forms the bulk of the market - could still bolster new home sales in the coming months.

According to home loan finance company Freddie Mac, the popular 30-year fixed-rate mortgage remained below seven percent for a second week straight as of Thursday. It averaged 6.7 percent. Rates were above seven percent for 17 consecutive weeks prior, Freddie Mac added. This is "bringing potential homebuyers who were previously waiting on the sidelines back into the market and builders already are starting to feel the positive effects," the company added. — AFP

US new home sales slow more than expected

WASHINGTON: Sales of new US homes cooled more than anticipated in November, slipping to the lowest level in a year, according to government data released Friday. The market for new properties has been boosted in recent months by a lack of existing homes, as high mortgage rates dissuaded homeowners - who previously locked in lower rates - from putting their real estate up for sale. Last month, sales of new single family houses came in at a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 590,000, around 12 percent below October's figure, the Commerce Department said.

This was slightly above November 2022's pace

White House urges 'serious scrutiny' of US Steel takeover

WASHINGTON: A proposed deal that would see US Steel Corp bought by Japan's Nippon Steel should be closely investigated by American authorities, the White House said, warning it could have national security implications. Unveiling the planned transaction this week, the two companies depicted the deal as a marriage of the holders of top technologies that would boost steel output and accelerate efforts toward decarbonization.

But US Steel's possible sale abroad has triggered furious criticism in Washington and from trade unions. President Joe Biden "believes the purchase of this iconic American-owned company by a foreign entity—even one from a close ally—appears to deserve serious scrutiny in terms of its potential impact on national security and supply chain reliability," National Economic Advisor Lael Brainard said in a statement.

The White House's intervention came as the companies asked the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States (CFIUS) -- an interagen-



TOKYO: The logo of Nippon Steel Corp. is seen at an office building where the company's head office in Tokyo. — AFP

cy body established to review foreign takeovers of US firms—to evaluate Nippon's \$14.1 billion acquisition of Pittsburgh-based US Steel. "We look forward to a successful review," a statement from US Steel's media office said. "This is a strongly positive development for American steel, American jobs and America's national security," it said. Brainard said President Biden's administration "will be ready to look carefully at the findings of any such investigation and to act if appropriate." — AFP

Japan's inflation slows to 2.5% as energy bills drop

TOKYO: Japanese consumer inflation slowed to 2.5 percent year-on-year in November, down from 2.9 percent the previous month, as electricity and gas bills declined, government data showed. The figure for the world's third-largest economy, which excludes volatile fresh food prices, was in line with market expectations in a Bloomberg survey. It is the lowest increase in prices since July 2022, as electricity and gas bills declined while the cost of accommodation and telecommunications rose, according to the internal affairs ministry.

The data comes after the Bank of Japan (BoJ) earlier this week maintained its long-standing, ultra-loose monetary policy and offered no guidance on its plans for the new year, sending the yen down against the dollar and boosting stocks. Inflation slowed "as prices of (processed) food soared the previous year, while price increases (for November) have somewhat settled down," chief economist Yoshiaki Shinke of Dai-ichi Life Research Institute told AFP. "The same can be said for electricity and gas bills," he said.

Speculation had been swirling for weeks that central bank officials would shift away from negative

interest rates and their tight grip on bond yields as prices tick above the central bank's two-percent inflation target. BoJ governor Kazuo Ueda has repeatedly said that "a virtuous cycle of wages and prices" is needed to confirm that the bank's inflation target can be achieved sustainably, referencing an expected rise in wages early next year after annual union negotiations. Stripping out fresh food and energy, Japan's prices rose 3.8 percent, in line with market expectations, after a 4.0 percent rise in October.

Japan, like other economies around the world, has seen prices rise on the back of the Ukraine war, while a weaker yen has also made imports more expensive. Unlike other major central banks that have raised interest rates, the Bank of Japan has stuck to its ultra-loose monetary policy in the expectation that inflation will ease, adding pressure on the yen. After dipping to nearly 152 yen against the dollar in late October, the Japanese currency has gradually rebounded as speculation grows that the central bank may end its super-loose monetary policy early next year.

While the yen's recent appreciation against the dollar had "little impact" in November's consumer price index, it could have an effect "in the coming months", Shinke of Dai-ichi Life said. The interest rate gap between Japan and the United States—a key factor that has driven the yen lower against the greenback—is also expected to narrow as the US Federal Reserve has held rates steady after a lengthy series of hikes to battle inflation, hinting it will finally cut rates next year. — AFP



TOKYO: A woman cycles past a petrol station showing the price of a liter of regular petrol along a street in Tokyo. — AFP

US targets banks that help Russian war in Ukraine

WASHINGTON: The United States said it will impose sanctions on foreign banks that support Russia's war in Ukraine, in a new bid to exert pressure on Moscow as it diversifies from the West to China. Under an executive order signed by President Joe Biden, the United States will slap so-called secondary sanctions against financial institutions that back companies already targeted for supporting Russia's defense industry.

"We are sending an unmistakable message: anyone supporting Russia's unlawful war effort is at risk of losing access to the US financial system," Jake Sullivan, Biden's national security advisor, said in a statement. Sullivan said the new sanctions will "continue tightening the screws on Russia's war machine and its enablers," adding that earlier measures have "significantly degraded" Russia's military, long seen as among the world's most formidable and which in recent months has relied on imports from sanctioned North Korea and Iran.

But Russia since the start of the war has been rapidly working to reduce exposure to the West, shifting away from trade in dollars, euros, sterling and yen. China's largest banks meanwhile have extended billions of dollars worth of credit in renminbi to Russia since the war as Western institutions exit.

Deputy Treasury Secretary Wally Adeyemo said that major banks in countries such as China, Turkey

and the United Arab Emirates have largely made efforts to avoid running afoul of US sanctions, and that the new measures would target smaller institutions. Russia has been setting up front companies to hide purchases through third countries, Adeyemo said in an interview with CNBC. "They're not going through big companies in these countries. They're going through small firms to get things like micro-electronics and machine tools and engine parts," he said. "But all of these companies still have to use the financial system."

Russia weathering blow

Russia's economy has taken a hit from the pressure but is still on a growth trajectory, with the International Monetary Fund in October forecasting that its economy would expand 1.1 percent in 2024. A key target has been Russia's oil exports, with Western powers agreeing to a cap of no more than \$60 a barrel. The US Treasury Department said Thursday that the cap brought down Russia's tax revenue from oil and petroleum goods exports by 32 percent between January and November, compared to a year ago.

But other assessments have been less rosy on the impact. A recent study by the Kyiv School of Economics found that compliance with the price cap has been virtually non-existent due to widespread fraud. The new effort at secondary sanctions comes as the G7 group of industrialized democracies balks at seizing Russian government assets to support Ukraine, a potentially major means of pressure backed by the United States. Direct US assistance to Ukraine could also soon dry up, with Congress yet to approve a request by the Biden administration due to an unrelated dispute on immigration policy. — AFP

Business

Key US inflation gauge cools as rate cut looms

US manufactured goods orders bounce on transport boost

WASHINGTON: A measure of inflation favored by the US Federal Reserve weakened in November on lower energy prices, government data showed Friday, providing further reassurance to policymakers keen to rein in price increases. The personal consumption expenditures (PCE) price index rose 2.6 percent from a year ago in November, markedly below October's 2.9 percent figure, the Department of Commerce said.

Compared with a month prior, the index decreased 0.1 percent—the first drop since early 2020 -- on the back of a slump in energy prices and lower food costs. "Today marks a significant milestone, with inflation over the last six months at the pre-pandemic level of two percent," US President Joe Biden said in a statement. With the volatile food and energy segments removed, "core" PCE inflation cooled to an annual rate of 3.2 percent, down slightly from October as well. This adds to data indicating that inflation is coming down as the US central bank holds interest rates at a 22-year high to firmly lower inflation back to its long-term two percent target.

With consumption and the jobs market remaining relatively resilient, hopes of a so-called "soft landing" where inflation comes down without triggering a damaging recession have risen. Biden added: "A year ago, most forecasters predicted it would require a spike in joblessness and a slowdown to get inflation down. I never believed that." But he warned that the government's work is "far from finished," with many households still squeezed by elevated costs—vowing to urge companies to pass on savings as prices moderate.

'Encouraging'

Calling the data "encouraging reading," economist Michael Pearce of Oxford Economics said they signaled that consumption growth is slowing to a more sustainable pace while pressures from inflation melt away. Friday's numbers also showed that consumption ticked up 0.2 percent from a month prior in

November, while personal incomes increased too. A bounce in payroll growth and robust wage increases helped push personal incomes up, with spending rising as well. "That allowed the personal saving rate to rise a bit," Pearce added. "We think households will continue to rebuild saving into next year." From October to November, the core PCE price index inched up 0.1 percent, the Commerce Department said.

Rate cuts on horizon

"Barring some unforeseen shock to prices, the Fed is done raising rates this cycle and the expansion should continue well into the New Year," said economist Robert Frick of the Navy Federal Credit Union. Pearce added that with price pressures "weakening fastest in the services sector and with inflation set to fall further over the coming months, rate cuts are coming into view." But even as the data fuels optimism, Pantheon Macroeconomics chief economist Ian Shepherdson warned of the risks that inflation falls below officials' target more quickly than expected. "Against that backdrop, markets will push even harder for the Fed to ease by more than their current 75 basis points forecast next year, and policymakers will have little choice but to follow their lead," he said.

Goods orders bounce

In another development, orders of major US manufactured goods surged in November, government data showed on Friday, bolstered by the transportation segment. New durable goods orders jumped 5.4 percent from October to November to \$295.4 billion, the Commerce Department said, significantly higher than analysts had anticipated. The increase comes as fresh orders of nondefense aircraft and parts surged 80.1 percent from a month ago. Overall, orders of transportation equipment were up 15.3 percent.

But when the transportation sector was excluded, new orders rose just 0.5 percent. "Boeing received an order from Emirates for 90 aircraft, but we also expect a rebound in the auto component, where or-



NEW YORK: An elderly Chinese woman sells fruits and vegetables in Chinatown in New York. — AFP

ders fell by six percent between August and October, thanks to the UAW strike," said analysts at Pantheon Macroeconomics in a recent note, referring to the United Auto Workers union. The UAW union reached agreements to end a six-week strike in late October, reaching deals with Detroit's "Big Three" automakers over better pay and working conditions. "Markets will like the jump in headline durable goods orders, but it will have little immediate bearing on fourth quarter economic growth," Pantheon said.

Analysts added that the key figure from this data

set would be nondefense capital goods shipments, excluding aircraft, "which are a direct input to the equipment investment component of GDP." Rubeca Farooqi, chief US economist at High Frequency Economics, added that business investment and equipment spending slowed in the third quarter, while fourth quarter data pointed to "slightly less positive momentum in shipments." Higher borrowing costs could weigh on companies, she said, although acknowledging that a lowering of interest rates next year may provide support over time. — AFP

Eurostar trains resume after surprise Channel tunnel strike

PARIS: High-speed trains running the Channel Tunnel resumed service on Friday after French unions ended a wildcat strike that had stranded vacationers and held up freight just days before Christmas. The surprise walkout by workers that blocked the tunnel sparked hours of chaos at rail hubs in Paris and London.

Neither side detailed the terms of the agreement or the issues on the negotiating table, but before the strike, French operator Gellink said unions had demanded a tripling of the end-of-year bonus of 1,000 euros (\$1,100). Eurotunnel unions later announced they were ending their action after negotiations with management that "bore results that satisfy us". High-speed services leaving London, Paris and Brussels "have gone back to normal today", Eurostar said Friday. Eurostar had said it would add six extra trains between Friday and Sunday after it had been forced to cancel 30 scheduled trains.

At Gare du Nord station in Paris and St Pancras in London—the main hubs for cross-Channel passenger train travel—frustrated travelers dashed to change their reservations during the strike, or find alternative transportation. "We support people who want to strike ... but we have to tell people (ahead of time)," said Isabelle Margat, 41, a British translator living in France. "There are lots of people here who simply want to celebrate Christmas with their family."

'Disneyland with the kids'

All services between Paris and Brussels and Paris and London were scrapped after the surprise strike, which appeared to catch even the St Pancras station reception and security off guard as they tried to clear platforms of passengers waiting to board. Thomson Mouana, from South Africa, who had three children with him, had been in the UK on holiday but needed to leave for his flight home. "This is disturbing us. We don't have the money and we don't know what to do." "We must get to South Africa but now we are stuck."

English traveler Sam Boyal said: "We were going to Disneyland (outside Paris) with the kids... it's just too stressful. You can't drive suddenly with three kids, you've got to plan that." Eurostar employees used megaphones to tell stranded passengers at the Gare du Nord station in Paris that all trains for the rest of the day were cancelled. At Calais in northern France, vehicle queues more than a kilometer long formed at the entrance to the French terminal where cars and trucks board trains to reach Folkestone on the other side of the Channel.

The Channel Tunnel, which opened in 1994, carries passengers on Eurostar trains as well as cars and freight vehicles on special cargo shuttles. Eurostar is owned 55.75 percent by French state-owned SNCF Voyageurs, 19.31 percent by a Quebec public investment bank, 18.5 percent by Belgian operator SNCB and 6.44 percent by US-based Federated Hermes Infrastructure. It almost went bankrupt during the COVID-19 pandemic but was saved with a 290-million-euro bailout from shareholders including the French government. — AFP



LONDON: Passengers board a Eurostar train at St Pancras International station in London. — AFP



Senior executives attend the signing ceremony.

NBK, Shomoul Holding Company ink financing facility agreement

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK), as part of a consortium of four banks, has formally inked a SAR4.35 billion financing deal with Shomoul Holding Company to fund Phase 1 of the Avenues Khobar project. The consortium including Arab National Bank, Saudi Awwal Bank (SAB), and Riyad Bank were among the banks engaged in financing the project, in collaboration with Saudi Arabia's Tourism Development Fund (TDF) aims to fund Phase 1 of the Avenues Khobar project, encompassing both the commercial mall and a multifunctional tower.

The signing ceremony was attended by senior executives, including Isam J Al-Sager, Vice Chairman and Group CEO of National Bank of Kuwait Group, Mohammed Al-Shaya, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Shomoul Holding Company, Qusai Al-Fakhri, Chief Executive Officer at Tourism Development Fund, Louai

Al-Zaher, Head of Wholesale Banking Group at Arab National Bank, Mohammed Abu Al-Najia, Executive Vice President, Corporate Banking at Riyad Bank, and Mohammed Al-Mohsen, Regional Head of Multinational Corporate at Saudi Awwal Bank.

The ceremony was attended by Shaikha Al-Bahar, Deputy Group CEO of NBK, and Sulaiman Al Marzouq, Deputy CEO of NBK-Kuwait, and Sulaiman Al-Fulaij Deputy Head, Domestic Corporate Banking Group. The Avenues Khobar, located at the crossroads of King Saud Road and Prince Sultan Road in the heart of Al-Khobar's northwestern sector, is a ground-breaking project. It ranks among the Eastern Province's most extensive and pioneering endeavors, set to redefine shopping and entertainment paradigms. This project is projected to greatly elevate the region's tourism sector and service offerings.

Spanning a leasable area of 70,000 square meters, this vast expanse encompasses 8 distinct shopping zones, 10 cinema halls, and exclusive entertainment zones. Additionally, the project features two towers: the first tower hosts a hotel, while the second tower accommodates a hotel, conference halls, office spaces, and a substantial parking area capable of housing over 6,000 vehicles.

Shomoul Holding Company has recently announced

that Al Kifah Contracting Company and Al Ahmadiya Contracting Company were chosen as the main contractors of the project, with a contract value of SAR3.660 billion. Shomoul Holding Company was established in 2014 as a joint venture involving three key entities: Al-Mabaneh Company, Al-Fawzan Group, and Al-Shaya Group, resulting in a Saudi-Kuwaiti cooperation. This strategic partnership draws on these partners' substantial knowledge and experience in GCC and the Middle East.

NBK maintains its prominent position as the major financial institution for funding mega transactions and projects in Kuwait and throughout the region, thanks to its strong balance sheet and extensive expertise. Moreover, its enduring success is underpinned by the exceptional and long-standing relationships it cultivates with clients, fostering sustainable and mutually beneficial partnerships, in the local and international markets.

Continuing its legacy, NBK actively pursues opportunities within the local and regional landscapes. Leveraging its historical leadership in spearheading significant collaborations and funding pivotal strategic initiatives across various sectors, NBK solidifies its pioneering role as the bank of choice for major local and regional corporations, aiding in financing their expansion endeavors.

ABK completes KD 50 million bond issuance

KUWAIT: Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) has achieved a new milestone with the successful issuance of KD50 million Subordinated Tier 2 Bonds, set to mature over a 10-year period and callable after 5 years. This endeavor is anticipated to fortify ABK's capital base and propel the bank forward while leveraging on the strength of the Kuwaiti economy. Jointly led by ABK Capital, Kamco Invest, and Kuwait Financial Centre "Markaz", the bond issuance garnered exceptional interest, oversubscribed by 2.2 times.

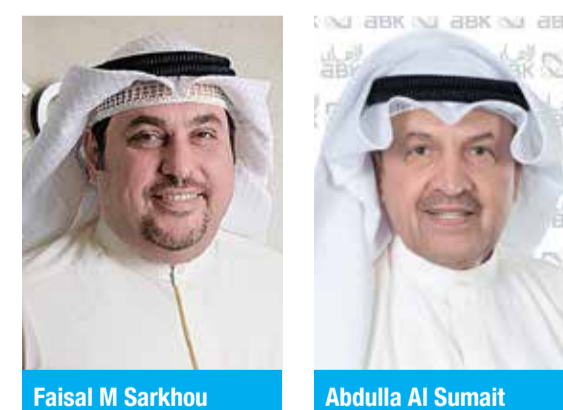
This overwhelming response underscores the trust placed by investors in the quality of the offering, the venerable reputation of the Bank, and the efficacy of the joint distribution by the lead managers. The bond comprised two tranches: a Fixed Rate Tranche and a Floating Rate Tranche, each with a principal amount of KD 25 million. The Fixed Rate Tranche offers coupons at 6.25% per annum, while the Floating Rate Tranche offers a coupon rate of 2.25% above the CBK Discount Rate. Capital Intelligence have conferred a 'BBB' rating with a stable outlook on ABK's Subordinated Tier 2 bonds, acknowledging the Bank's strong credit fundamentals, including high asset quality, robust coverage ratios, satisfactory capitalization, and an adequate liquidity and funding profile supported by a stable customer deposit base.

Commenting on the occasion, Abdulla Al Sumait, Acting Group Chief Executive Officer at ABK, said, "This accomplishment is a testament to the confidence investors have in ABK and our commitment to sustained growth and innovation. It highlights our commitment to maintaining a strong capital base and furthering our strategic initiatives. We are grateful for the significant response received and look forward



Ali Khalil

Dr Husayn Shahrur



Faisal M Sarkhou

Abdulla Al Sumait

ward to utilizing this capital to drive our growth and support the development of Kuwait's dynamic financial landscape."

Dr Husayn Shahrur, CEO of ABK Capital, said, "I am pleased with the resounding success of the Subordinated Tier 2 Bonds issuance, which follows ABK's significantly oversubscribed rights issue earlier this year that we also participated in. These extremely well received issuances are a reflection of the market confidence in ABK's consistent performance. This achievement will undoubtedly bolster our growth strategy and support ABK's objectives." He added, "ABK Capital strives to continue building on its presence as a prominent and reputable investment company in Kuwait, and intends to leverage and enrich its clients' investment journey and aims to build even stronger long-term ties with them, through global partnerships and innovative investment solutions." Faisal Sarkhou, CEO of Kamco Invest, said, "We take pride in our engagement in the Bank's two capital market transactions this year; the rights issue that was oversubscribed by 3.31 times during the third quarter along with this bond issuance.

These milestone transactions reflect the resilience of ABK and demonstrate the confidence in both Kuwait's economic prospects and its banking sector. Our role as investment bankers in efficiently managing such transactions is vital for the

growth of the capital markets in Kuwait and the MENA region. We are grateful for the hard work of our Debt Capital Markets teams in this transaction as well as the collaboration of the Joint Lead Managers." Ali Khalil, CEO of Kuwait Financial Centre "Markaz", said, "As we complete yet another bond issuance, we are pleased that the transaction has received great attention from investors in view of the excellent reputation of ABK and the professional expertise of Markaz and the other lead managers. We value our solid relationship with ABK and we seek to maintain and reinforce this relationship through the continuous cooperation between us.

Markaz assisted a number of local companies from various sectors in issuing bonds and sukuk to obtain financing required to support its businesses through our Investment banking team of highly qualified professionals with extensive experience, outstanding technical execution capabilities, and in-depth industry knowledge that enables us to continue serving the needs of capital market players, businesses, and investors." In closing, Al Sumait said, "We extend our gratitude to the Central Bank of Kuwait, the Capital Markets Authority (CMA), and our joint lead managers – ABK Capital, Kamco Invest, and Markaz – for their instrumental role in the successful completion of this transaction."

Lifestyle

French engineer and entrepreneur Gustave Eiffel will forever be remembered for building the much-loved tower that has dominated the Paris skyline for over a century. But the father of the Eiffel Tower also designed hundreds of other landmarks across the globe, and even patented a system of underwater "bridges" to run under the Channel. Here are five things to know about the engineer and inventor, who died 100 years ago on Dec 27, 1923, at the age of 91.

Bonickhausen Tower?

Eiffel designed the tower that would bear his name for the World Fair in Paris in 1889. But the tower, which came to symbolize France, could very easily have had a German name. Eiffel, who had German roots, was born Alexandre Gustave Bonickhausen dit Eiffel in 1832 in Dijon but he dropped the German part of his surname after the 1870 Franco-Prussian war, fearing it could damage his career.

Erected in record time, the 7,000-tonne, 300-m "Iron Lady" was the tallest human-made structure in the world for four decades. Commenting on its place in history, the Bureau International d'Expositions, which organizes World Expos, says it "marked the pinnacle of iron architecture, and set the pace for the skyscraper frenzy that would follow in the 20th century".

Projects on five continents

The Tower came towards the end of Eiffel's career, during which he built around 500 structures across five continents. He built his reputation as a builder of railway bridges but also used his metal wizardry to build the Pest railway station in Hungary, lighthouses in Finland and Madagascar, the structure of the Saigon Central Post Office in Ho Chi Minh City and the iron framework of the Statue of Liberty in New York. He also designed portable bridges, delivered around the world in kits.

Channel tunnel 100 years early

Never short of ideas, Eiffel proposed to build what he described as a bridge under the Channel to link France with Britain. His 1890 design envisaged a system of concrete-coated metal tubes built on supports resting on the seabed. The project never saw the light of day, but 104 years later the Channel Tunnel linking Britain and France, which measures 169 Eiffel Towers placed end-to-end, was launched to great fanfare.

Panama fiasco

Eiffel was as much an entrepreneur as engineer. In 1887, his company won the contract to build locks for the Panama Canal – the biggest deal of his career. But poor management by Ferdinand de Lesseps, the Frenchman who had overseen the successful Suez Canal, caused the project to collapse, resulting in one of the biggest financial scandals of 19th century. De Lesseps and Eiffel were both charged with fraud and sentenced to prison and hefty fines. Although their convictions were later overturned, Eiffel's reputation had taken a battering and he retired from business.

Radio Eiffel

He devoted the last 30 years of his life to scientific research, with a particular focus on meteorology and aerodynamics. The wind tunnel he built in a hangar at the foot of the Eiffel Tower was used to test more than 20 planes. It is still used today by the construction, aviation, shipping and automotive industries to test the effects of wind and air.

He also used research to save his illustrious tower, which was commissioned on the understanding that it be dismantled after 20 years. He installed a meteorology station on the third floor, but it was the addition of a giant radio antenna in 1921 that saved it from the wrecking ball. — AFP

Gustave Eiffel: French tower builder who sparked skyscraper frenzy



Combination of 4 pictures of Eiffel Tower's construction. From left to right, the Eiffel Tower photographed on June 14, 1888, July 10, 1888, Dec 26, 1888 and Jan 20, 1889. — AFP photos



This photograph taken on Dec 19, 2023 in Paris shows a general view of the Eiffel Tower.



This picture taken on Nov 7, 2000 in Paris shows the bust of Frenchman Gustav Eiffel near a pillar of his tower.



The Garabit Viaduct in the central France village of Ruynes-en-Margeride is seen in a snowy landscape on Dec 15, 2008. The viaduct was built by Gustave Eiffel in 1884, five years before the Eiffel Tower.



Paris' Eiffel Tower is photographed at dawn on Jan 6, 2017.



View of the Nuestra Señora del Rosario Cathedral, the main temple of the city of Tacna, in south Peru on Dec 20, 2023. The cathedral was constructed in 1875 by the French firm of Gustave Eiffel.

Jo Koy to host Golden Globes awards show

Comedian and actor Jo Koy will host the newly revamped Golden Globes, organizers announced Thursday, as the US awards show seeks a clean slate. The stand-up, who starred in "Easter Sunday" and Disney's "Haunted Mansion", said he was excited to be overseeing the party that kicks off three months of movie industry ceremonies. "I've stepped onto a lot of stages around the world in my career, but this one is going to be extra special," he said. "This is that moment where I get to make my Filipino family proud."

The Golden Globes is hoping its 81st edition will be something of a reboot for a brand that has spent the last few years in Tinseltown's doghouse. A 2021 Los Angeles Times expose showed that the awards' voting body – the Hollywood Foreign Press Association – had no black members.

That revelation triggered the airing of a wide range of other long-simmering criticisms about the HFPA, including allegations of amateurism and corruption. Earlier this year, the awards' assets and trademarks were purchased and overhauled by a group of private investors including US billionaire Todd Boehly, and the HFPA was disbanded. Hollywood-based former HFPA members have been banned from accepting gifts, and are now paid a salary to vote for their favorite films and shows. More than 200 non-member (and unpaid) voters from 75 countries around the world have also been added to the Globes mix.

This month organizers revealed "Barbie" and "Oppenheimer" – the unlikely pair of films that dominated the box office and spawned countless internet memes this summer – topped its nominations. The two blockbusters – collectively dubbed "Barbenheimer" after their theatrical releases happened to fall on the same date – now have a strong start to Hollywood's film awards season, which ends with the Oscars in March. Other movies that proved popular with Globes voters were "Killers of the Flower Moon" and "Poor Things," both earning seven nominations, and "Past Lives" with five.

One of the United States' biggest national television networks, CBS, has stepped in to become the new home of the Globes, after long-standing host NBC ended its deal to broadcast the event. CBS bosses will be hoping for vastly improved ratings, after the 2023 Globes slumped to a new low of just 6.3 million viewers, even as other shows such as the Oscars recovered from pandemic viewership nadirs. — AFP

Actor Charlie Sheen attacked in his Malibu home, suspect arrested

Actor Charlie Sheen was attacked in his luxury Malibu home, police said Friday, with the suspect arrested and charged with assault and burglary. Officers were called to the "Two and a Half Men" star's home for a "battery/disturbance," Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department said in a statement. "Upon contacting the parties involved, deputies identified Charlie Sheen as a victim of assault," the statement said.

Suspect Electra Schrock was arrested for assault with a deadly weapon, force likely to create great bodily injury and residential burglary, the

sheriff's office said. Entertainment outlet TMZ said Schrock, 47, is one of Sheen's neighbors, who had "forced her way into his home and attacked him when he opened the door." "We're told she ripped Charlie's shirt and attempted to strangle him," the title reported, adding that Sheen was seen by paramedics but not taken to a hospital.

TMZ said this was not the first confrontation between the neighbors, reporting that previous incidents had included a sticky liquid being squirted on Sheen's car. Sheen, 58, is the son of actor Martin Sheen and notorious for being a Hollywood bad boy with episodes of substance abuse, destructive violence and relationships with porn actresses.

He has appeared in films including "Platoon," "Wall Street" (alongside his father) and "Young Guns." His television career has included "Spin City" and "Two and a Half Men," a series loosely based on his hard-partying reputation. — AFP

Kyrgyzstan backs new flag, says 'smiling' sun to aid growth

Lawmakers in tightly-controlled Kyrgyzstan have backed a proposal to modify the country's flag so that it will feature sun rays, arguing the move would boost the economy. The poor, landlocked republic of 6.7 million people in Central Asia has been dogged by political volatility for much of the three decades since it became independent from the Soviet Union in 1991.

Kyrgyzstan's flag, adopted in 1992 after the Soviet collapse, currently features a yellow orb – representing a traditional nomadic yurt – against a red background, surrounded by lines emanating from the center. In November, parliament speaker Nurlanbek Shakiev put forward a bill to change the emblem in order to make those lines "clearly reminiscent of sun rays".

Supporters of the change, including President Sadyr Japarov, argued that the current design too closely resembled a sunflower, and that this had kept Kyrgyzstan from fulfilling its potential as a "developed and independent" state. "There was a public opinion that our flag resembled a sunflower, and in this context the country could not get up from its knees," Japarov said in October.

"There were even cases of foreigners coming to visit us, saying that probably sunflowers grew in large quantities in our republic," he added. "From now on it will be



Demonstrators protest against the changing of the Kyrgyz national flag in Bishkek on Dec 9, 2023. — AFP

as if the sun is shining and smiling at us," he said in October, speaking in favor of the changes.

Fifty-nine lawmakers in parliament on Wednesday approved the alterations with only five voting against. Japarov has been in power since 2021, when he was sprung free from prison by supporters and quickly moved to consolidate power. Dozens of people opposed the change to the flag and demonstrated against the move in the capital Bishkek earlier this month.

Kyrgyzstan has vast natural resources but, like several Central Asian nations, many of its citizens depend on remittances from migrants working abroad. The World Bank says Kyrgyzstan needs to implement reforms on "private sector development and job creation, spur international trade, and encourage fiscal sustainable energy production" to achieve strong economic growth. — AFP

Minnesota gets new flag after complaints of racial insensitivity



This handout photo provided by the Minnesota Historical Society on Dec 20, 2023 shows a mock-up of Minnesota's new state flag. — AFP

The Midwestern US state of Minnesota has unveiled a new flag after ditching its old one that depicted a farmer beside a rifle and a Native American on horseback. Criticized for years as racially insensitive, the old flag is being replaced by a light blue and dark blue design with a white star, based on an idea by local artist Andrew Prekker. Prekker said Tuesday that he hoped "that every Minnesotan of every background – including the Indigenous communities and tribal nations who've been historically excluded – can look up at our flag with pride and honor."

The previous flag, which included the state seal containing the controversial imagery, was described as "a cluttered genocidal mess" by state lawmaker Mike Freiberg. The new flag's dark blue pattern echoes the shape of the state and its light blue represents Minnesota's lakes, according to the design commission, which received 2,600 submissions on changing both the flag and the state seal.

The commission produced a new seal featuring the state bird – a loon – alongside waves, rice and mountains. If approved by the local legislature, the new flag will be officially raised on Minnesota's annual statehood day in May. — AFP

Lifestyle

Antarctic octopus DNA reveals ice sheet collapse closer than thought

Scientists investigating how Antarctica's ice sheets retreated in the deep past have turned to an innovative approach: studying the genes of octopuses that live in its chilly waters. A new analysis published Thursday in Science finds that geographically-isolated populations of the eight-limbed sea creatures mated freely around 125,000 years ago, signaling an ice-free corridor during a period when global temperatures were similar to today.

The findings suggest the West Antarctic Ice Sheet (WAIS) is closer to collapse than previously thought, threatening 3.3-5 m of long-term sea-level rise if the world is unable to hold human-caused warming to the 1.5 degrees Celsius target of the Paris Agreement, said the authors. Lead author Sally Lau of James Cook University in Australia told AFP that as an evolutionary biologist focused on marine invertebrates, "I understand and then apply DNA and biology as a proxy of changes to Antarctica in the past."

Turquet's octopus made an ideal candidate for studying WAIS, she said, because the species is found all around the continent and fundamental information about it has already been answered by science, such as its 12-year-lifespan, and the fact it emerged some four million years ago.

About 15 cm long excluding the arms and weighing around 600 gm, they lay relatively few, but large eggs on the bottom of the seafloor. This means parents must put significant effort into ensuring their offspring hatch – a lifestyle

that prevents them traveling too far away. They are also limited by circular sea currents, or gyres, in some of their modern habitats.

'Tipping point close'

By sequencing the DNA across genomes of 96 samples that were generally collected inadvertently as fishing bycatch and then left in museum storage over the course of 33 years, Lau and colleagues found evidence of trans-West Antarctic seaways that once connected the Weddell, Amundsen and Ross seas. The history of genetic mixing indicated WAIS collapsed at two separate points – first in the mid-Pliocene, 3-3.5 million years ago, which scientists were already confident about, and the last time in a period called the Last Interglacial, a warm spell from 129,000 to 116,000 years ago.

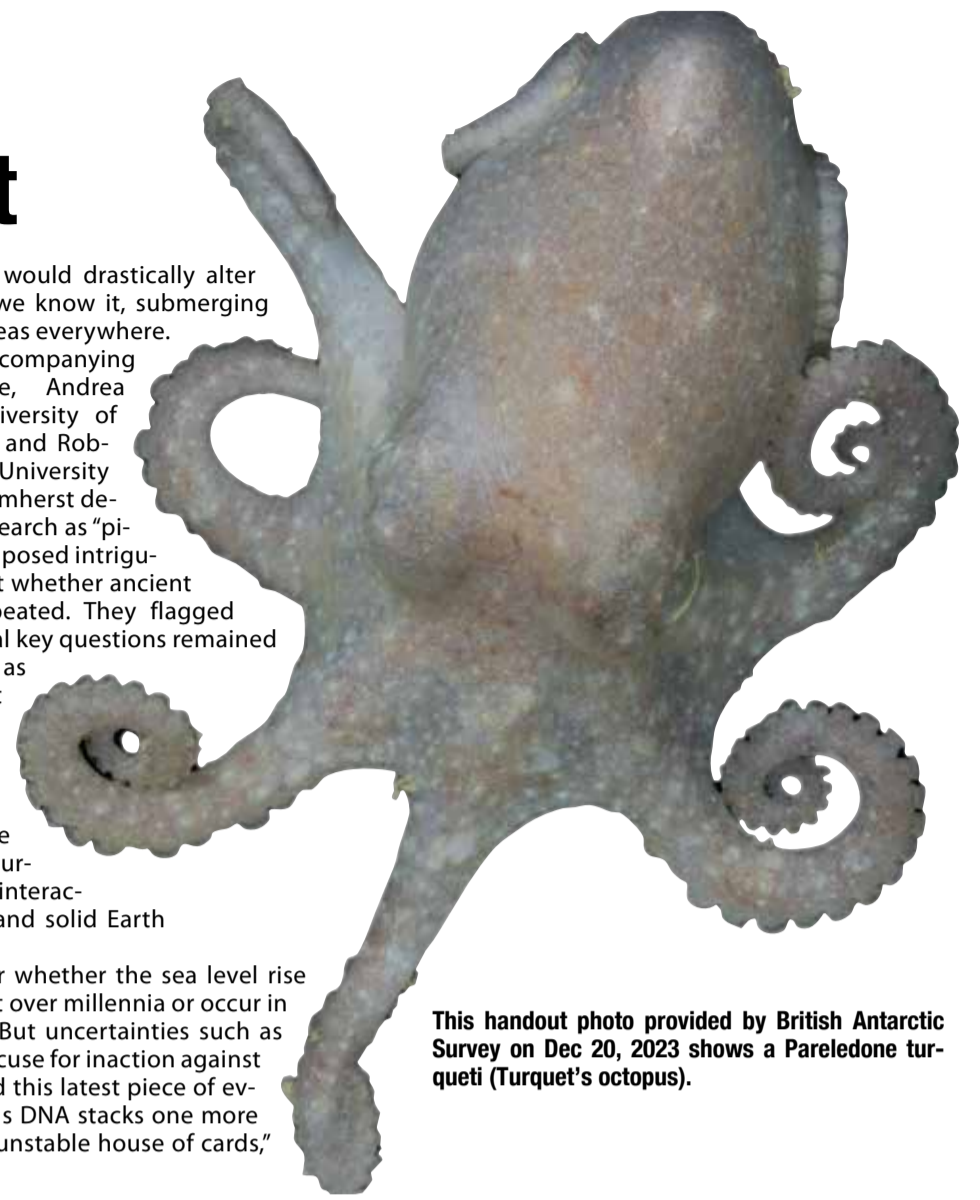
"This was the last time the planet was around 1.5 degrees warmer than pre-industrial levels," said Lau. Human activity, primarily burning fossil fuels, has so far raised global temperatures by 1.2C compared to the late 1700s. There were a handful of studies prior to the new Science paper that also suggested WAIS collapsed sometime in the past, but they were far from conclusive because of the comparatively lower resolution genetic and geological data.

"This study provides empirical evidence indicating that the WAIS collapsed when the global mean temperature was similar to that of today, suggesting that the tipping point of future WAIS collapse is close," the authors wrote. Sea

level rise of 3.3 m would drastically alter the world map as we know it, submerging low-lying coastal areas everywhere.

Writing in an accompanying commentary piece, Andrea Dutton of the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Robert DeConto of the University of Massachusetts, Amherst described the new research as "pioneering", adding it posed intriguing questions about whether ancient history will be repeated. They flagged however that several key questions remained unanswered – such as whether the past ice sheet collapse was caused by rising temperatures alone, or whether other variables like changing ocean currents and complex interactions between ice and solid Earth were also at play.

It's also not clear whether the sea level rise would be drawn out over millennia or occur in more rapid jumps. But uncertainties such as these can't be an excuse for inaction against climate change "and this latest piece of evidence from octopus DNA stacks one more card on an already unstable house of cards," they wrote. — AFP



This handout photo provided by British Antarctic Survey on Dec 20, 2023 shows a Pareledone turqueti (Turquet's octopus).

Storm clouds are finally gathering over Zimbabwe's biggest animal reserve, but it has come too late for more than 110 elephants that have died in a searing, extended drought. There is little that Simba Marozva and other rangers at the Hwange National Park can do except cut the tusks off the rotting corpses before poachers find them. With the black clouds in recent days promising life-saving rains, the rangers may not find all of the victims of the drought on their daily hunts.

The 14,600-sq-km park – bigger than many countries – is home to more than 45,000 savanna elephants, so many that they are considered a threat to the environment. The scene is still heart-breaking. Blackened corpses scar a landscape where the rains have been more than six weeks late and scorching temperatures have regularly hit 40 degrees Celsius.

Tinashe Farawo, spokesperson for the Zimbabwe national parks authority, Zimparks, said "the old, the young and the sick" have been worst hit. Some have fallen in dried-up waterholes, some spent their final hours in the shade of a tree. Many are infant elephants – but all that is left is the shriveled skin over the rotting carcass.

Grim tusk collection

The intact tusk is a sign that it was a natural death. But there is a heavy stench around the elephants, that have attracted growing attention in recent years. On average, an elephant drinks more than 200 litres of water and eats some 140 kilos of food a day. More than 200 elephants died in a 2019 drought but the rangers say it could be worse this time once the end of the summer arrives.

Hwange is part of the Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area covering parks in Angola, Botswana, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe. All have borders on the Okavango and Zambezi river basins. An aerial survey started in 2022 estimated the region's elephant population at 227,900 animals. While tens of thousands of elephants have been slaughtered across Africa by poachers and hunters since the 1970s, the Kavango-Zambezi conservation area is considered a success story with numbers mainly growing.

That has increased pressure on Hwange's resources while climate change has emerged as a new risk. The estimated 100,000 elephants in Zimbabwe is twice the capacity of its parks, conservationists say. Farawo said Zimparks said 112 elephant deaths had been confirmed since September.

Overpopulation threat

He said the numbers were not surprising given the huge size of the elephant population in Hwange. "We have high temperatures and we have no water. They are bound to be stressed and die." Climate change has increased the number of droughts, he added. "It's not only elephants which are affected, there are also other animals. Elephants can be easily noticed because of their size." Farawo said the parks authority was also concerned that the elephants had become "overpopulated" and "are destroying the habitat."

Hwange, covered in dry grass, leafless trees and some desert-like open areas, has 104 solar-powered boreholes across the park to reach further

Heartbreak in Zimbabwe park: Elephants' desperate hunt for water



An elephant drinks water from a swimming pool at a tented camp on the boundaries of Hwange National Park. — AFP photos



Game ranger Simba Marozva removes a tusk from a decomposed elephant that died of drought in Hwange National Park.



A decomposed elephant that died of drought.

into the water table that falls lower each year. But it has not been enough, and the drought which has hit several southern African countries, has been worsened this year by the El Niño phenomenon.

The hunt for water has taken elephants danger-

ously close to human habitations on the fringes of Hwange. They have drunk in desperation from swimming pools in private homes and risked drinking at water holes contaminated by dead animals. Dried-up water holes are forcing elephants

and other wildlife to walk long distances for food and water. Some have crossed into Botswana and other neighboring countries where many deaths have also been reported.— AFP



Elephants feed as it starts to rain in Hwange National Park.

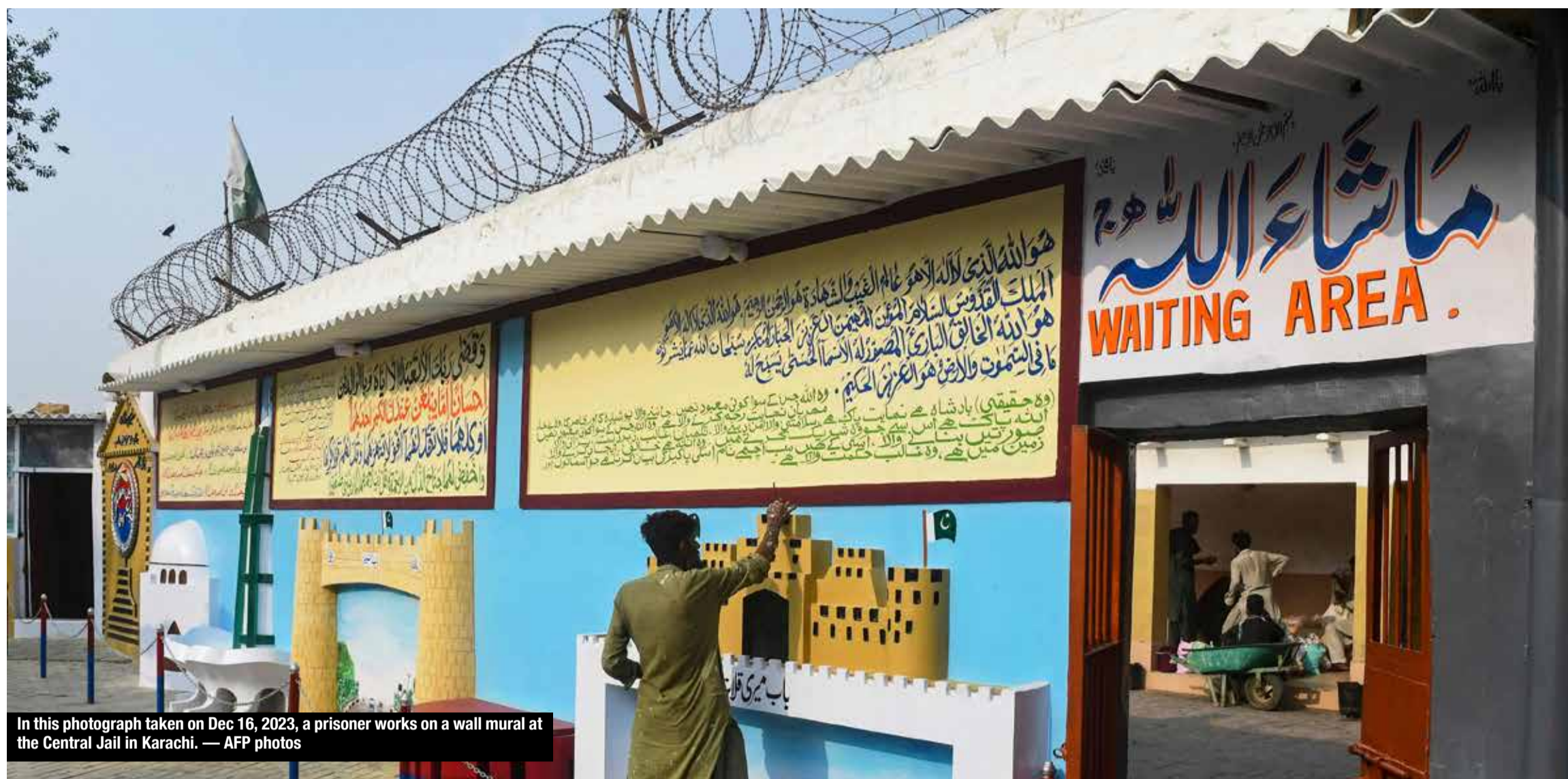


This aerial view shows a juvenile elephant carcass that died due to drought at a depleted watering hole in Hwange National Park in Hwange, northern Zimbabwe on Dec 16, 2023.



A carcass of baby elephant that died due to drought.

Inmates sell art from Pakistani prison



In this photograph taken on Dec 16, 2023, a prisoner works on a wall mural at the Central Jail in Karachi. — AFP photos



Mohammad Ijaz, an artist and a former convict, guides his students at the Central Jail in Karachi.



A police officer looks at a wall laden with artworks by prisoners.



Ijaz paints a canvas at the Central Jail.

Karachi's colonial-era prison is adorned with murals of rural Pakistani life, painted by convicted murderers and kidnapers locked away from the world but learning their craft inside its walls. A rehabilitation art and music program has seen some inmates sell their work for several thousand dollars at exhibitions supported by the local arts council, according to prison chiefs.

"Before I was jailed, it was another life with no responsibility and immaturity," Mohammad Ijaz told AFP from the prison studio. "But I have found the true meaning of life since being jailed. They have taught us that life is full of colors and the colors themselves speak."

Ijaz, who declines to give details about his conviction under a penal code covering kidnapping and abduction, says he is about halfway through a 25-year sentence. Despite being locked up, he has earned huge sums from his art depicting horses – funding his mother's pilgrimage to Makkah and his sister's wedding. "In the beginning, my family didn't believe me that I had become an artist," said the 42-year-old, who now teaches other prisoners. "When they saw us in the exhibition, they were happy."

The art program was launched at Karachi Central Jail in 2007, and aims to reform inmates serving long sentences or those on death row. Prisoners can also learn languages such as Arabic, English or Chinese, as well as hand embroidery and beadwork. "Engaging



Prisoners take part in a music practice at the Central Jail in Karachi.



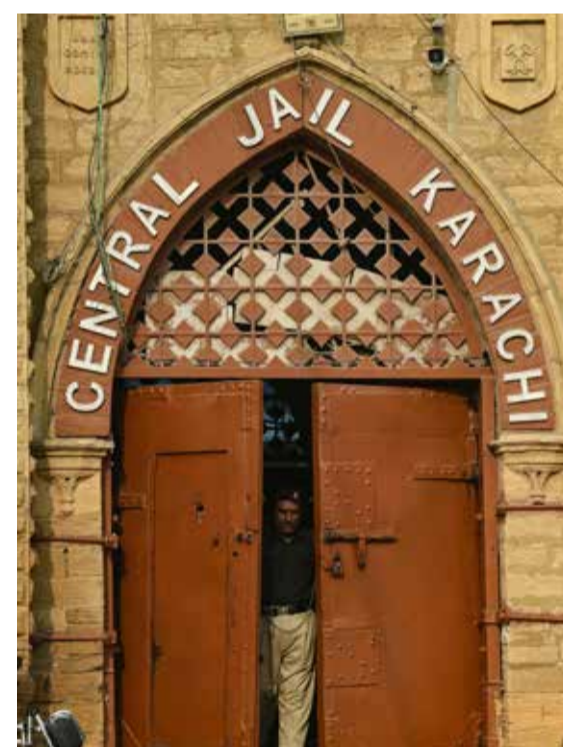
Prisoners work on a painting.

them in constructive pursuits kind of polishes them," senior prison official Ammad Chandio told AFP. "It helps them reflect upon their past, what crime, what sin or what violation of law they had committed. Any art that is being produced inside the correctional facility, it is actually the property of the inmates, and any proceeds that come from the sale of these products, the property of those inmates."

Prisons across Pakistan are often dangerously overcrowded with limited access to water, sanitation and food, but central jails in major cities generally receive better funding. "Efforts to rehabilitate prisoners should

be at the fore, the purpose of penal punishments is to help them become better citizens," said Sarah Belal, executive director of Justice Project Pakistan.

Mehtab Zakir is serving a murder sentence handed down five years ago but his family still depends on him for financial support. "I know I haven't wasted time here, at least we have learnt something," said the 34-year-old. "I feel happy when I finish a painting and it gives me confidence that at least I can do something." — AFP



A policeman closes the main door of the Central Jail.

N Macedonia's Roma Rock School strikes chord against prejudice

Crunchy guitar riffs reverberate through an apartment block in downtown Skopje – the sound of the silence on discrimination in North Macedonia being well and truly broken. At the Roma Rock School, children of all ages and backgrounds are brought together to learn, jam and overcome deep divisions in the hugely diverse Balkan country.

The school offers courses in music theory and instrument and voice classes along with rehearsal space for aspiring young musicians. "All of this is free of charge for all the students. One of the main missions is breaking the stereotypes through music," co-founder Alvin Salimovski told AFP. "I think that the only functional and effective way to do that is through music, something that we proved over the years."

One of the school's main focuses has been recruiting children from Skopje's largely Roma neighborhood of Suto Orizari – or Shutka – where poverty and a lack of opportunities have remained stubbornly entrenched. Despite traditionally providing the musicians who play at weddings, feasts and funerals – as well as some of the country's most beloved singers – just 13 ethnic Roma have graduated from the University of Skopje's Faculty of Music since its establishment in 1966.

Indeed, North Macedonia's Roma community has remained largely excluded from formal education in the arts despite the community's rich histo-



Students guitarist Mursel Hiseini, guitarist Nevrus Bajram, drummer Sefo Murat, singer Gijulzar Kadri and clarinetist Ruzdi Ahmetovski attend a band rehearsal. — AFP photos

ry of music and performance. "At this moment we work with mixed bands of Roma and Macedonian children, but we are open," Salimovski said. "One of our goals is making music with bands of different ethnicities."

'Friendships, music and learning'

Currently, Roma Rock School works with around 60 students between the ages of 10 and 19. Students can learn a range of instruments including guitar, bass, drums and wind instruments along with instruction on band arrangements. Initially, many of the bands formed at the school focused on playing covers of popular songs, but over the years they have started writing original pieces, including compositions that feature traditional Roma influences.

The school's music director Nevrus Bajram, 30, is

a guitar player in one of the country's most popular hardcore metal bands, Smut. In the small makeshift studio packed with a menagerie of instruments, Bajram hangs out with his students, giving them advice and coaching them on techniques to help synchronize with the others in the band.

"Many people are surprised when they see our approach, especially when it comes to the relationship between teacher and student. We try to remove that barrier," Bajram said. "We have a mission and vision for happiness, to create something that will outlast us." But the lessons learned at the Roma Rock School are not just intended for the classroom. Every year its students perform at festivals, participate in summer schools and host friends from similar organizations. — AFP



Students guitarist Nevrus Bajram (left) and drummer Sefo Murat attend a band rehearsal at the Roma Rock School.



Roma Rock School co-founder Alvin Salimovski poses in front of the logo of the school in Skopje on Nov 6, 2023.

Sports

Bangladesh coast to historic win in third ODI against New Zealand

Young has been in superb touch in the series

NAPIER: Bangladesh's pace attack shredded New Zealand's batting on a green Napier pitch to record a historic nine-wicket win in the third and final one-day international on Saturday. Having been well beaten in the first two matches to cede the series, Bangladesh produced a remarkable form reversal at McLean Park to dismiss the hosts for just 98 in 34.1 overs.

The run chase was a procession, with captain Najmul Hossain Shanto scoring an unbeaten half-century as they coasted to 99-1 in 15.1 overs. It was Bangladesh's first ODI win over the Black Caps on New Zealand soil, where they had lost the 18 previous fixtures since their first attempt in 1990.

Shanto said victory would be a source of pride and was just reward for the improvements he believes his eighth-ranked team are making. "Really proud of the boys playing in this match," he said. "Before we started this series we really believed that we could win the series."

"The last couple of matches we played well but we couldn't finish. Today the boys played some good cricket and we got the result." Shanto's contribution began with him winning the toss and inserting the Black Caps on a lush, bouncy surface which also offered sideways movement—and his seamers responded.

Three of them picked up three wickets as New Zealand were skittled for



NAPIER: Bangladesh pose for a team photo after their match win during the third one-day international (ODI) cricket match between New Zealand and Bangladesh at McLean Park in Napier on December 23, 2023. — AFP

their lowest total in 45 ODIs between the teams. Tanzim Hasan Sakib (3-14) and Soumya Sarkar (3-18) both bagged career-best figures while Shoriful Islam's 3-22 included the scalp of top-scoring Will Young, caught in the gully for 26. Sakib said his methods were simple. "I tried to bowl wicket to wicket and I tried to bowl line and length. The wicket did the rest of the work. It really helped me."

Young has been in superb touch in the series, scoring 105 and 89 in the

wins in Dunedin and Nelson respectively. Captain Tom Latham (21) put on 36 with Young for the third wicket but his dismissal—clean bowled by Islam—sparked a collapse which saw the last eight wickets fall for 40 runs, many of them to wayward shots.

There was an early blemish in the run chase when opening batter Sarkar—who scored 169 in a losing cause in Napier on Wednesday—was forced to retire hurt for four because of an eye

problem. Loose New Zealand bowling meant there were few problems from that point, with Shanto (51 not out) putting on 69 with opener Anamul Haque, who was the only batsman dismissed when edging paceman William O'Rourke on 37. O'Rourke had earlier been struck for four successive boundaries by the free-hitting Shanto in the 11th over of the innings.

New Zealand had rested a number of senior players for the series and

Latham said some of his newer squad members will have learned a lot. "Obviously it was a very below-par performance," he said.

"Bangladesh found a way to bowl on that surface and managed to get plenty out of it. We weren't able to build any sort of pressure and put it back on them so it's pretty disappointing." The teams will prepare for a three-match T20 international series, starting in Napier on Wednesday. — AFP



Dean Elgar

Ex S Africa's captain Elgar to end career

JOHANNESBURG: Former South Africa Test captain Dean Elgar announced Friday that he will retire from international cricket after a Test series against India starting next week. The 36-year-old, who has hit more than 5,000 Test runs including 13 centuries, will play his last Test at the Newlands ground in Cape Town starting January 3.

"As they say, 'all good things come to an end', and the Indian home series will be my last, as I have made the decision to retire from our beautiful game," Elgar declared. "The Cape Town Test will be my last. My favourite stadium in the world. A place I scored my first Test run against New Zealand and hopefully my last too."

Media reports said his decision came after Elgar was told he was not part of coach Shukri Conrad's long-term plans. Elgar made his debut against Australia 12 years ago, failing to score in each innings. Since then he has become known as a stubborn batter, his 5,146 runs making him South Africa's eighth highest scorer. He hit a career best 199 against Bangladesh in 2017.

Elgar was captain from May 2021 until January this year, leading South Africa to third place in last year's World Test Championship with a notable 2-1 home series win over India. Cricket South Africa chief executive Pholeisi Moseki said Elgar has "represented his country with honour".

"His grittiness and determination are two qualities that really stood out; and these are attributes that all South Africans can relate to." Director of cricket Enoch Nkwe added that in the current age of power-hitting, "he is a real old-school cricketer that can dig in, absorb and fight. I have no doubt the game will dearly miss him." He has always given everything for his country and never showed any fear, no matter the opposition. — AFP

Schwarz wins Madonna di Campiglio slalom

MADONNA DI CAMPIGLIO: Marco Schwarz edged to the top of the overall men's World Cup standings as he won Friday's Madonna di Campiglio slalom. Austria's Schwarz came back from sixth following the first run in the Dolomites, clocking a combined time of one minute, 40.51 seconds to nudge Frenchman Clement Noel down to second.

Schwarz's first win of the campaign also moved him top of the slalom standings on 140 points. "Winning here is one of the best Christmas gifts I could have given myself," said Schwarz. The 28-year-old leads compatriot Manuel Feller, who finished fifth on Friday, by 35 points in the slalom standings.

Kuwaiti sports figure picked SG of Arab ice hockey body

KUWAIT: The recently launched Arab Ice Hockey Federation has chosen Secretary-General of the Kuwait Winter Games Club Mishal Flaiteh as its Secretary-General for a four-year term, announced the Arab body. Members of the Kuwait-based federation's committees were also selected during its recent meeting in Morocco, its chairman Faheed Al-Ajmi of Kuwait said in a press statement on Saturday. In addition, the federation is in the process of finally agreeing

on the agenda of Arab ice hockey championships at the levels of national teams and sports clubs with a view to developing the skills of Arab male and female athletes, and preparing them for planned continental and international competitions, he said. Al-Ajmi revealed that the federation is seeking to encourage joint cooperation and share experience in the fields of training, referee ship and sports management in a bid to spur and promote ice hockey in the Arab world. For his part, the federation's new secretary-general Mishal Flaiteh spoke highly of the fledgling body as a significant step towards developing this sport in Arab countries, vowing that it would be given much attention in the future. He voiced much gratitude and appreciation to the federation's general assembly for having trusted him, promising to do his utmost to develop Arab ice hockey. — KUNA



Mishal Flaiteh



Faheed Al-Ajmi

Pakistan spinner Ali hospitalized in Australia

MELBOURNE: Pakistan spinner Noman Ali was recovering Saturday after being rushed to hospital with acute appendicitis, with the veteran ruled out of the rest of their series against Australia. The 37-year-old, who did not feature during a heavy defeat in the

opening Test in Perth, suffered severe abdominal pain on Friday. "Noman Ali complained of sudden and severe abdominal pain yesterday, leading to examinations and scans in emergency that confirmed a diagnosis of acute appendicitis," the Pakistan Cricket Board said. "On surgeon's advice, he underwent Laparoscopic Appendectomy today."

Ali, who has played 15 Tests, the last of which was against Sri Lanka in July, was "stable and doing fine", but will take no further part in the three-Test series which resumes in Melbourne next week. It is another blow for the visitors after pace bowler Khurram

Shahzad was ruled out of the series on Thursday.

The 24-year-old impressed on his debut in Perth, finishing with match figures of 5-128 in the 360-run loss. But he complained of discomfort and scans showed a stress fracture in the ribs along with an abdominal muscle tear.

Pakistan already had a weakened bowling attack after speedster Naseem Shah was omitted from the tour due to a long-term injury. Spinner Abrar Ahmed missed the Perth Test with leg discomfort, but could return for the second match in Melbourne that begins on December 26. — AFP

Khawaja insists armband was not political

MELBOURNE: Australia's Usman Khawaja said Friday that a black armband he wore in the first Test against Pakistan was for a "personal bereavement" and not politically motivated, after the star batter was reprimanded by the International Cricket Council (ICC).

The 36-year-old donned the armband during the team's 360-run victory in Perth, a move seen at the time as support for people in Gaza, where thousands have been killed. He had wanted to wear shoes emblazoned with the hand-written slogans "Freedom is a human right" and "All lives are equal" during the match, saying he had been hit hard by the Zionist-Hamas conflict.

But Khawaja, who is Muslim, was told that it flouted ICC rules on messages that relate to politics, religion or race. He covered the messages with tape and wore the armband. Khawaja insisted he told the ICC during the match that it was for a personal bereave-

ment and no hidden meaning. However, the ICC said it breached their clothing and equipment regulations.

"Usman displayed a personal message (armband) during the first Test match against Pakistan without seeking the prior approval of Cricket Australia and the ICC to display it, as required in the regulations for personal messages," the ICC said late Thursday.

"This is a breach under the category of an 'other breach' and the sanction for a first offence is a reprimand," Khawaja said he would not wear an armband during the second Test in Melbourne next week, but remained defiant.

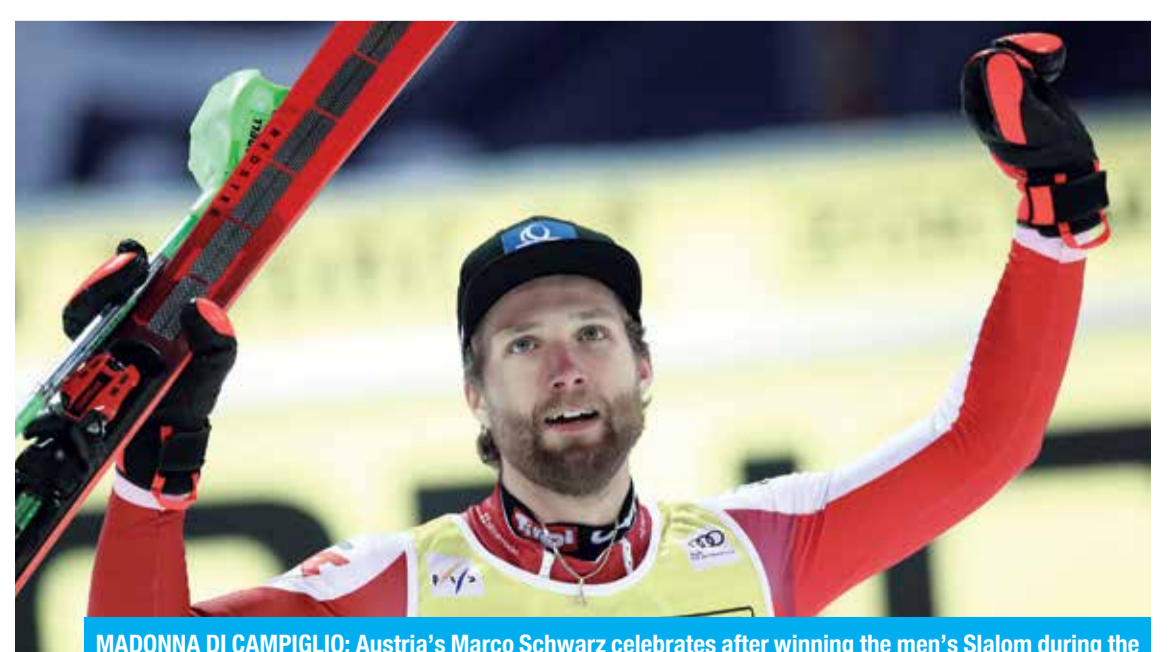
"No, I'm not wearing it again. As I said to the ICC, the armband was for a personal bereavement," he told reporters in Melbourne. "The armband was different to my shoes. The shoes were very obvious. At the end of the day I didn't wear the shoes. I respected the rules and procedures and left it at that."

He added that being reprimanded for the armband "makes no sense" and pointed to other players who had previously put stickers on their bats and names on their shoes without approval and escaped punishment, urging the ICC to be more consistent.

"I will just be asking and contesting that they (ICC) make it fair for everyone and they have consistency in how they officiate. That's all I ask for, and from my point of view, that consistency hasn't been done yet," he said. — AFP



Usman Khawaja



MADONNA DI CAMPIGLIO: Austria's Marco Schwarz celebrates after winning the men's Slalom during the FIS Alpine Ski World Cup event in Madonna di Campiglio. — AFP

Sports

Sixers' Joel Embiid continues dominant run, Nuggets outlast Nets

Golden State Warriors and Sacramento Kings notch convincing home victories

LOS ANGELES: Joel Embiid shook off an ankle injury to score 31 points and grab 10 rebounds Friday, propelling the Philadelphia 76ers to a 121-111 NBA victory over Toronto with his 13th straight game with at least 30 points and 10 boards. Embiid, the reigning NBA Most Valuable Player, had plenty of support with Tyrese Maxey and Tobias Harris scoring 33 points apiece for the 76ers.

Embiid scored just two points in the first quarter after twisting his ankle in an awkward landing under the basket. After a brief trip to the locker room, he finished the first half with 11 points, three rebounds, six assists and five turnovers.

Harris kept the Sixers afloat, scoring 24 first-half points to help them take a 61-58 lead at the break after the Raptors had led by as many as 15. Embiid came alive in the third period, scoring 17 straight 76ers points in a run that included a three-pointer that put the Sixers up 90-77.

Despite the occasional grimace of discomfort, Embiid extended the NBA's longest stretch of 30-point, 10-rebound games since Kareem Abdul-Jabbar had 16 straight in 1971-72. Embiid put his slow start down to lack of aggression. "I think I took two shots in the first six or seven minutes, but I just let the game come to me," he said. "I didn't force anything."

"It came to me and then in the third quarter, I just found opportunities and made a few shots." The Raptors, led by Pascal Siakam's 31 points, got the deficit down to three late in the third before the Sixers pulled away again. Maxey added 10 assists and Harris added eight rebounds and seven assists to his season-high in points as the Sixers won for the eighth time in their last nine games. Nurse said

he wasn't surprised the Sixers came out a little flat after beating Western Conference leaders Minnesota on Wednesday behind a 51-point performance from Embiid.

"It wasn't just (Embiid)," Nurse said. "It was everybody. Then Joel got going ... he started punching through, started making some jumpers ... he just finally got in his rhythm and got the shooting going." Nurse said the team would keep an eye on Embiid's ankle with a Christmas Day game at Miami coming up to start a four-game road trip. "I'm sure it'll be sore tomorrow," Nurse said. In Brooklyn, Jamal Murray scored 32 points and Nikola Jokic added 31 points with 11 rebounds as the reigning champion Denver Nuggets held off the Nets 122-117.

Aaron Gordon added 18 points and Michael Porter Jr. scored 15 for the Nuggets, who won their third straight. Cam Thomas led the Nets with 23 points. Cameron Johnson added 17 as seven Brooklyn players scored in double figures.

Red-hot Curry

The Golden State Warriors and Sacramento Kings notched convincing home victories. Warriors star Stephen Curry made a season-high eight three-pointers on the way to 30 points, sitting out the entire fourth quarter in a 129-118 victory over the Washington Wizards and former Warrior Jordan Poole. Sacramento's Domantas Sabonis had his fourth triple-double of the season with 28 points, 11 rebounds and 11 assists to help the Kings to a 120-105 victory over the Phoenix Suns, who were led by 28 points from Kevin Durant.

Houston's Alperen Sengun scored 22 points and



PHILADELPHIA: O.G. Anunoby #3 of the Toronto Raptors guards between Tobias Harris #12 and Marcus Morris Sr. #5 of the Philadelphia 76ers during the first quarter at the Wells Fargo Center. — AFP

grabbed 15 rebounds in the Rockets' 122-96 thrashing of the injury-hit Dallas Mavericks. The Mavs were without their star duo of Luka Doncic and Kyrie Irving, as well as Dereck Lively, Dante Exum, Josh Green and Maxi Kleber.

In Miami, Tyler Herro scored 30 points and Dun-

can Robinson added 21 of his 27 in the fourth quarter to fuel the Heat in a 122-113 victory over the Atlanta Hawks. The Heat, who trailed by 11 early in the third quarter, withstood a 30-point, 13-assist double-double from Atlanta's Trae Young, his sixth straight game with at least 30 points and 10 assists. — AFP

Pochettino warns returning players Chelsea 'not a charity'

LONDON: Mauricio Pochettino has warned his Chelsea players that Premier League football is "not a charity" and they cannot expect to come straight back into the team after injury. The London club have been hit hard by absences this season and are languishing in 10th place in the Premier League ahead of Sunday's match at Wolves.

Belgium international Romeo Lavia, who joined from Southampton in August in a £58 million (\$74 million) deal, is yet to make his debut for the club while France forward Christopher Nkunku made his bow as a substitute in Tuesday's League Cup win over Newcastle following knee surgery. Chelsea manager Pochettino confirmed Lavia, 19, could be included in the squad at Molineux but added the 26-year-old Nkunku, who scored in the penalty shootout victory against Eddie Howe's side, was still short of full fitness.

"All players after a big period out, they are desperate to be involved," Pochettino said Friday. "They can be involved, but at which level? It's easy

to say 'I want to play' but we are competing, and it's serious, the competition. After six months, like Nkunku and like Lavia, they need to understand that to be involved they need to train really, really hard every day. They need to make an impact every time they go on the pitch. It's not like we are playing pre-season games."

"The player needs to understand that it's not a charity thing, we're not playing for a joke. We need to win. Sometimes it's difficult for people to understand the environment of the players," Pochettino explained if Nkunku did not play against Sheffield United last week, when he was an unused substitute, it was "not because we didn't believe in him or Lavia."

"It's because there are players that have been fit and training for six months who are more ready to make an impact than these guys," he added. "It's about the moment, today. Who is ready to compete and provide the things we expect?"

"It annoys me sometimes. People around the player complain. Come on. The club is disappointed that it's invested in (players) to perform and to score goals. To get the right balance in this business is important," Pochettino confirmed captain Reece James would be out for "several weeks", likely stretching to months, after undergoing surgery on a hamstring injury.

He also gave his backing to Chelsea's refusal to



Mauricio Pochettino

have anything to do with a revived European Super League. The Blues were one of six Premier League clubs signed up to a breakaway league in 2021, though the project quickly collapsed. "My thoughts are the same as the club statement," Pochettino said. "I support the decision of the club." — AFP

Jovic saves point for ailing Milan at Salernitana

MILAN: Luka Jovic saved a point for AC Milan at Salernitana with his last-gasp leveller in Friday's 2-2 draw at Serie A's bottom club. Serbia forward Jovic lashed home his third goal in as many league games from Olivier Giroud's deft knock-down to stop third-placed Milan from falling to an embarrassing defeat.

Antonio Candreva seemed to have shot Salernitana to a shock win when his long-distance effort squirmed under usually reliable Milan goalkeeper Mike Maignan in the 63rd minute. Candreva also set up Federico Fazio's leveller after Fikayo Tomori had nodded the away side ahead in the 17th minute.

Jovic's equaliser leaves Salernitana four points behind Udinese who sit just outside the relegation zone and are at Torino on Sunday. Meanwhile Milan risk losing further ground on league leaders Inter Milan who are eight points in front of their local rivals ahead of Sunday's clash with Lecce at the San Siro. "The hardest thing to do here was to throw away this match and that's what we did," coach Stefano Pioli told DAZN. "We were controlling the match but we got distracted and at this level you can't do that."

Pioli's team are also now looking over their shoulders in the top-four battle as Fiorentina closed to



SALERNO: AC Milan's Serbian defender #82 Jan-Carlo Simic controls the ball during the Italian Serie A football match between Salernitana and AC Milan at the Arechi Stadium in Salerno. — AFP

within three points in fourth after winning 1-0 at Monza thanks to an early Lucas Beltran strike. Milan also lost Tomori to injury, the 30th of what seems to be a cursed season for the seven-time European champions.

Bologna host Atalanta high on confidence after knocking Inter out of the Italian Cup and can move two points behind Milan in fourth with a win on Sunday. Inter's closest rivals Juventus are four points off

the pace and take on entertaining Frosinone in Sunday's opening fixture.

Earlier Lazio strolled past Empoli to snap a five-match winless streak away from home, with Matteo Guendouzi and Mattia Zaccagni netting in a 2-0 win at lowly Empoli. Maurizio Sarri's side lost both Ciro Immobile and midfield talisman to injury midway through the first half but did enough to beat Empoli, who are one point behind Udinese in 18th. — AFP

VAR frustrates Emery as Villa miss chance to top table

LONDON: Aston Villa missed the chance to go top of the Premier League, with manager Unai Emery proclaiming VAR was "too much" after Nicolo Zaniolo's late goal salvaged a 1-1 draw at home to struggling Sheffield United on Friday.

The visitors kicked off bottom of the table, with Birmingham club Villa having won their last 15 home games in the Premier League. But Cameron Archer, sold by Villa to the Blades in pre-season, stunned the home fans at Villa Park by opening the scoring in the 87th minute with a close-range shot.

Substitute Zaniolo rescued a point for Villa with a header seven minutes into stoppage time. Villa needed a win to go top of the Premier League for the first time since August 2011, having not led the table at this stage of the season for 25 years.

But they remained behind leaders Arsenal on goal difference despite dominating possession and having the better of the game's chances. Leon Bailey had the ball in the net early in the second half but it was ruled out by the video assistant referee, with VAR also rejecting three Villa penalty claims.

"I am very happy and very proud of the players," Emery told the BBC. "It was very difficult to keep our winning record. They defended really well." He added: "I accept VAR always. But only today I think it was too much. It was not necessary to review two or three times in the first half. And the goal, it was not necessary. Normally we can accept this goal."

"We are disappointed with the result today but we are accepting it. We have to focus for the next match against Manchester United, it will be incredible." Sheffield United manager Chris Wilder said: "Being greedy, and the manner of their goal as well, (I wanted three points) but we'd have definitely have settled for a point before the game. He added: "There's plenty to work with with the players and this result gives me great hope."

Villa's first brush with replay rejection Friday came when Ollie Watkins was shoved by Vini Souza, with another penalty appeal turned down by VAR when George Baldock blocked Watkins' header from the ensuing corner. Villa thought they had gone ahead in the 58th minute when Watkins intercepted as United tried to clear a corner and exchanged passes with Jacob Ramsey. The England striker then crossed for Bailey to sweep in but the goal was disallowed when Ramsey was ruled to have fouled Blades goalkeeper Wes Foderingham at the corner.

Another VAR reprieve for the visitors came 15 minutes later when Baldock came through a handball review. United struck three minutes from the end of normal time. Vini Souza's free-kick found Gustavo Hamer and the midfielder's fine piece of skill took John McGinn out of the game. — AFP

Classifieds

Clinics & Hospitals

Clinics

| | |
|----------------|----------|
| Kaizen center | 25716707 |
| Rawda | 22517733 |
| Adaliya | 22517144 |
| Khaldiya | 24848075 |
| Kaifan | 24849807 |
| Shamiya | 24848913 |
| Shuwaikh | 24814507 |
| Abdullah Salem | 22549134 |
| Nuzha | 22526804 |

| | |
|---------------------|----------|
| Industrial Shuwaikh | 24814764 |
| Qadisiya | 22515088 |
| Dasmah | 22532265 |
| Bneid Al-Gar | 22531908 |
| Shaab | 22518752 |
| Qibla | 22459381 |
| Ayoun Al-Qibla | 22451082 |
| Mirqab | 22456536 |
| Sharq | 22465401 |
| Salmiya | 25746401 |

Hospitals

| | |
|--------------------|----------|
| Sabah Hospital | 24812000 |
| Amiri Hospital | 22450005 |
| Maternity Hospital | 24843100 |
| Mubarak Al-Kabir | 25312700 |
| Chest Hospital | 24849400 |
| Farwaniya Hospital | 24892010 |
| Adan Hospital | 23940620 |
| Ibn Sina Hospital | 24840300 |

Change of Name

I, MOHAMMAD, holder of passport no. T8766760 do hereby change my name to **RAJENDRA REDDY** (as given name) **MARRIPATI** (as surname) for all purposes. I will henceforth be known in the name **MARRIPATI RAJENDRA REDDY** and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents. **(#4575) 22-12-2023**

I, SHAHINFAR, holder of Indian Passport No. M0404462 having permanent address Vpo Khodan, Teh Garhi, Banswara, Rajasthan, 327022, India residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as under Given Name: **SHAHEEN** And Surname: **KHAN**. **(#4574) 21-12-2023**

Man City cruise to first Club World Cup triumph

European clubs have won 22 consecutive games at the Club World Cup



JEDDAH: Manchester City's English defender #02 Kyle Walker lifts the trophy after the FIFA Club World Cup final football match between Brazil's Fluminense and England's Manchester City at the King Abdullah Sports City in Jeddah. — AFP

JEDDAH: Manchester City won the Club World Cup for the first time to end 2023 with five trophies after a 4-0 win over Fluminense in Jeddah on Friday. City's victory extended European clubs' domination of the competition since 2012 and was never in doubt once Julian Alvarez opened the scoring inside the first minute.

Nino's first-half own goal realistically ended the Brazilians' dreams of an upset, before Phil Foden and Alvarez rounded off the scoring in the final 20 minutes. After clinching the treble of the club's first ever Champions League, Premier League and FA Cup last season, City also lifted the UEFA Super Cup for the first time in August.

Pep Guardiola also made history as the first coach to lift the Club World Cup on four occasions and with three different clubs after previously winning the competition twice at Barcelona and once in charge of Bayern Munich.

"To win the treble was truly special, but to win two more trophies and now hold these five major titles shows the unique mentality of this team," said Guardiola. "As a manager it is what I am most proud of: That we are always there. No matter how much we win, no matter what trophies we lift, we are there again to fight for the next one."

City's poor Premier League form before flying out to Saudi Arabia had raised Fluminense hopes that Guardiola's men could be vulnerable. But the growing chasm between Europe's elite clubs and the rest of the world thanks to huge financial imbalances in the global game was instead exposed.

European clubs have won 22 consecutive games at the Club World Cup. City laboured for 45 minutes to break down Japan's Urawa Reds in the semi-final before cruising to a 3-0 win. This time, they needed less than 45 seconds.

Alvarez scored the fastest goal ever in a Club

World Cup final as he chested into an unguarded net after Nathan Ake's shot came back off the post. At just 23, the Argentine added to his remarkable haul of silverware that includes the World Cup and Copa America at international level, the Copa Libertadores during his time at River Plate, plus Premier League, Champions League, FA Cup and UEFA Super Cup medals during just over a year at City.

Rodri injury worry

Fluminense were then dealt the killer blow when captain Nino turned Foden's cross into his own net after Rodri's pass opened up the Brazilian defence. Ederson was called into action to maintain City's two-goal lead before the break as the Brazilian international made a stunning save from Jhon Arias' header.

But his opposite number Fabio was the busier goalkeeper. The 37-year-old kept the score down

and saved Fluminense's blushes. Fabio turned Jack Grealish's fiercely struck effort behind before half-time and twice denied Foden early in the second half.

City were able to coast through the second period to end a glorious year on a high, but victory could come at a cost. Rodri was forced off with an injury 20 minutes from time. City have lost all three Premier League games this season when the influential Spanish midfielder has been absent and they travel to in-form Everton on December 27.

However, that did not take the shine off a marquee 12 months that marks the high-point in a trophy-laden 15 years since City's fortunes were transformed by a takeover from Abu Dhabi's Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan. Alvarez was the creator for City's third as Foden slid in to meet his driven cross.

And the man deputising for the injured Erling Haaland rounded off the scoring two minutes from time with his 10th goal of the season. — AFP

West Ham pile on misery for woeful Man Utd

LONDON: Manchester United crashed to a dismal 2-0 defeat at West Ham as goals from Jarrod Bowen and Mohammed Kudus piled renewed pressure on under-fire boss Erik ten Hag on Saturday. Ten Hag's side were blown away by West Ham's late strikes at the London Stadium, condemning them to an eighth Premier League loss already this season.

United, languishing in eighth place, have managed just one win in seven games in all competitions. They have lost three of their last four matches and failed to score in any of them for the first time since 1992.

It is another bitter blow for Ten Hag, whose increasingly tenuous hold on his job will surely be the first thing for Jim Ratcliffe to resolve when the British billionaire finally completes the purchase of 25 percent of the club. Ratcliffe is reportedly set to take control of United's football operations as part of the deal with the American owners and he will arrive at Old Trafford to find the club at one of the lowest ebbs in its illustrious history.

It has been a wretched second season for Ten Hag, whose team have been eliminated from Europe after finishing bottom of their Champions League group, while also crashing out of the League Cup. Ten Hag believes United can "change the story" once key players return from injury.

But this pitiful surrender against a team thrashed 5-1 by Liverpool's reserves in the League Cup quarter-finals on Wednesday underlined the depths United have sunk to under the beleaguered Dutchman.

After serving guests raw chicken last month, the local council this week confirmed that United's food hygiene rating has been slashed from five to one. The unfortunate diners aren't the only ones connected



LONDON: West Ham United's Mexican midfielder #19 Edson Alvarez (R) vies with Manchester United Northern Irish defender #35 Jonny Evans (L) during the English Premier League football match between West Ham United and Manchester United at the London Stadium, in London on December 23, 2023. — AFP

with United to be left with a queasy feeling this season. United have lost 13 games in all competitions this season—their most defeats before Christmas since 1930-31 when they finished bottom of the table. Arresting their steep decline looks beyond Ten Hag at present.

With Diogo Dalot, Harry Maguire Victor Lindelof and Raphael Varane all absent, 19-year-old Willy Kambwala made his United debut in central defence. West Ham were quick to test United's raw French youngster as Emerson advanced for a low strike that forced Andre Onana into a save.

Marcus Rashford was left on the bench for a second successive game after scoring just two league goals this season, but United's lacklustre attack was hardly improved by his exile. Bereft of rhythm and confidence, Ten Hag's men laboured to establish even a semblance of momentum as they failed to build on last weekend's gritty draw at Liverpool. — AFP

Vlahovic fires Juve one point behind leaders Inter Milan

MILAN: Dusan Vlahovic shot Juventus to within one point of Serie A leaders Inter Milan with the decisive strike in Saturday's 2-1 win at Frosinone. Serbia forward Vlahovic headed home the winner with nine minutes remaining at the Stadio Benito Stirpe after Jaime Baez had equalised for the hosts following Kenan Yildiz's opener early in his first Juve start.

Massimiliano Allegri's side now await the result of Inter's home clash with Lecce later on Saturday, which Inter have to face without injured star striker Lautaro Martinez and Italy left-back Federico Dimarco.

Vlahovic, who has had a tricky season, is now on six league goals and was unlucky to end the match without a brace when his precision 89th-minute strike was ruled out for offside. "There was the desire to win, to help the team and make the fans happy in that goal," Vlahovic told DAZN.

"A striker is obviously not happy when they don't score, or not consistently, but I work hard every day to give something to the team." Teen starlet Yildiz became Juve's youngest ever foreign Serie A goalscorer with his stunning near-post finish, which came after he weaved his way past three defenders.

Germany-born Yildiz, 18, a reported target for Arsenal and Liverpool, came in for injured Federico Chiesa and said he now has to take his teammates out to dinner to celebrate. "For me, this is too great, thanks to everyone. To the fans, they are crazy, look at them!" he said.

The one negative note for Juve was Alex Sandro and Manuel Locatelli both suffering injuries. Alex Sandro had to leave the field midway through the first half with cramp, the Brazilian defender already having missed most of the season with a hamstring injury.

It was Frosinone's first defeat at home since they lost to Napoli in the first week of the season. They hammered the Italian champions 4-0 in the Italian Cup in midweek. Eusebio Di Francesco's side are 14th on 19 points, seven points above the relegation zone. — AFP



FROSINONE: Juventus' Polish forward #14 Arkadiusz Milik (C white) shoots the ball in front of Frosinone's Italian defender #30 Ilario Monterisi during the Italian Serie A football match between Frosinone and Juventus at the Benito Stirpe stadium in Frosinone on December 23, 2023. — AFP