

NOTICE

Happy New Year to all our readers! Kuwait Times will not publish its print edition on December 31, 2023 and January 1, 2024. Readers can stay informed with breaking news and information via KuwaitTimes.com and our digital media channels on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, TikTok, LinkedIn and Threads.



Expats allowed to work part-time

Employees in private sector also permitted to work from home

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Interior Minister Sheikh Talal Al-Khalef Al-Sabah on Thursday issued a decision allowing expats in the private sector to work part-time jobs provided the original employer/sponsor allows them, the Public Authority of Manpower said in a statement. The decision takes effect from the start of next month, the authority said.

Under the decision, expats are allowed to work part-time for a maximum of four hours daily, except for the contracting sector, where there is no limit. To be able to do a part-time job, expats must obtain the approval of their employers and secure a work permit for that purpose from the Public Authority of Manpower.

According to the statement, the main aim of the

decision is to allow the better utilization of expat manpower already in Kuwait instead of new recruitment to help efforts underway to rebalance the demographic structure in the country, which is heavily tilted in favor of expats, who form over two-thirds of the population of 4.5 million.

Under current stringent employment rules, expat workers must stay with their sponsors under the so-called kafala system, and risk deportation if they are caught working for others. Kuwait seeks to create a balance between its native population of around 1.5 million and expats who are at least double this number in a series of procedures and steps aimed at cutting the number of foreigners in the country.

In another major step, the interior minister asked the Public Authority of Manpower to let employers allow

some of their employees to work from home in professions where workers can do the work without the need to be physically present in the office, the authority said. Online work will be carried out in accordance with guidelines to be set by the manpower authority.

Meanwhile, five Islamist and liberal political groups on Thursday issued a joint statement in which they strongly criticized calls to suspend the country's constitution and parliamentary life in order to amend the 61-year-old constitution. The call was made by Ali Al-Tarrah, a professor of sociology at Kuwait University, who said the constitution must be amended to cope with developments in the country and the region. The groups also called on civil societies and other political groups to condemn calls for suspending the constitution.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Motor insurance website launched

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Insurance Regulatory Unit announced Wednesday launching a website for issuing and renewing the mandatory third-party motor insurance certificates for private cars and motorbikes as of Jan 1, 2024. The website (www.beema.iru.gov.kw) allows car and motorcycle owners to issue new or to renew their insurance certificates through simple steps, Head of the IRU Mohammad Al-Otaibi said. The move is part of the state strategy for digital transformation of government services, he pointed out. Otaibi noted that during the website pilot period, car and motorbike owners have the choice to renew their insurance documents through the website or by visiting an office of authorized insurance firms across the country. — KUNA

Police station opens at airport

KUWAIT: The interior ministry announced on Wednesday that it inaugurated a police station at Kuwait International Airport (II) that will start work around-the-clock from Thursday. Those efforts come out of keenness of the security institution to achieve integration at all sites and prepare and modernize police stations to offer the best comprehensive services for both citizens and expats, the ministry said in a statement. This facility will receive complaints and reports from investigation offices and the preventive and criminal department at the ministry, it added. — KUNA

Qatar cuts sentences of Indians

NEW DELHI: India's foreign ministry said Thursday that Qatar had reduced the sentence of eight ex-navy personnel, arrested reportedly for spying for the Zionist entity and put on death row. Indian media have reported that the eight Indian nationals — among them former high-ranking and decorated officers, including captains who once commanded warships — were arrested in Doha in Aug 2022. On Thursday, the foreign ministry said the "sentences have been reduced". India's ambassador and family members were in court for the appeal hearing. New Delhi said, adding that the government will "continue to take up the matter with the Qatari authorities". — AFP

Rome objects to settler envoy

ROME: Italy has objected to the Zionist entity's intention to nominate the mayor of one of the main West Bank settlements as ambassador to Rome, a diplomatic source said Thursday. In July, the Zionist foreign ministry put forward the name of Benny Kashriel, mayor of Ma'ale Adumim, near Jerusalem, to succeed Alon Bar, a career diplomat due to retire in the summer of 2024. But a diplomatic source told AFP, confirming press reports, that Italian authorities had sent a number of messages indicating that they considered the appointment inappropriate. — AFP

JN.1 detected in Kuwait but no cause for alarm

KUWAIT: Cases of the JN.1 COVID-19 variant have been detected in Kuwait, but the discovery is "predictable and not worrisome", the official spokesperson of the Ministry of Health Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said on Thursday. Dr Sanad, also director of the health communication center, addressed on Thursday new messages to the public: starting with the

announcement regarding discoveries of JN.1 cases as a result of tests by genetic examination teams tasked with following up on the outbreak of COVID variants and other viruses in the country.

However, Dr Sanad assured the public that the detection of such variants is predictable and not worrisome. "And there are no extraordinary preventive measures at present," Dr Sanad said, also noting that this period of the year regularly brings with it seasonal viruses that cause breathing illnesses. He advised people who feel infected to keep a distance from others and seek medical consultation, particularly when the symptoms persist or increase in intensity. Dr Sanad added the ministry provides vaccinations for

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Gazans facing 'grave peril' as scores martyred

GAZA: Zionist forces on Thursday heavily bombed the besieged Gaza Strip as the center of fierce combat against Hamas moves steadily south, where hundreds of thousands of displaced Palestinians are sheltering. The war has devastated much of northern Gaza as air and artillery strikes and house-to-house fighting have become heaviest in the southern city of Khan Yunis.

Ashraf Al-Qudra, spokesman for the health ministry in Gaza, reported more than 200 deaths "including entire families" over the past 24 hours in strikes across the territory. An AFP correspondent reported heavy artillery strikes overnight particularly on Khan Yunis. The Zionist army has deployed an additional brigade to Khan Yunis, the hometown of Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar, said military spokesman Daniel Hagari.

More than 80 percent of Gaza's 2.4 million people have been driven from their homes, the UN says, and many now live in cramped shelters or makeshift

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GAZA: Palestinians mourn relatives killed in a Zionist strike at Nasser hospital in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip on Dec 28, 2023. — AFP

Zionist forces killing, looting in West Bank

RAMALLAH: Zionist forces killed a Palestinian man during an overnight raid on Ramallah, seat of the Palestinian Authority in the occupied West Bank, the territory's health ministry said Thursday. The military said its forces had targeted money exchange shops in Ramallah and other parts of the West Bank. An AFP journalist saw Palestinians hurl Molotov cocktails at the forces in Ramallah. The Palestinian Red Crescent Society said its medics treat-

ed eight people for gunshot wounds. The Zionist entity has occupied the West Bank since the 1967 Arab-Zionist war and regularly carries out raids there, though they are far less common in the territory's institutional heart Ramallah. The Red Crescent said medics also treated people wounded by Zionist forces across the West Bank, in the governorates of Hebron, Jericho, Jenin and Nablus.

Zionist Defense Minister Yoav Gallant's office said "millions of shekels destined for Hamas and Islamic Jihad" had been seized during the raids. According to the ministry's statement, Gallant said multiple such shops "will be declared terrorist organizations due to their activity of transferring funds for terrorist purposes".

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RAMALLAH: Mourners carry the body of Hazem Qatawi, who was killed during an overnight raid by Zionist forces, during his funeral on Dec 28, 2023. — AFP



In my view

Mental Health Literacy: Tool for patient empowerment



By Dr Aziz Al-Khayyat

Health literacy is defined by the Center for Disease Control in the USA as, "the degree to which individuals have the ability to find, understand, and use information and services to inform health-related decisions and actions for themselves and others" (Santana et al). It is no secret that in Kuwait we have poor health literacy in our population. A study on diabetic patients in Kuwait found that 44 percent of diabetic patients in Kuwait have poor health literacy (Hussein et al).

Anecdotally, I can attest to the countless patients I have seen with misunderstandings about their health and conspiracies regarding healthcare as a whole. I often wonder if there is a single person out there on a WhatsApp group chat who is intentionally spreading misinformation. But alas that is too simple of an explanation for our current state. The issue with poor health literacy is that it does not just manifest as arguments with doctors or relatives over health decisions; rather it takes the form of poor health outcomes.

Poor health literacy

The research has shown patients with poor health literacy are more likely to attend emergency rooms, are hospitalized more, and are less likely to take their medicines properly (Berkman et al). The issue of health literacy gets even more complicated when it relates to mental rather than physical health. I do not believe many would disagree when I say that stigma against mental health in Kuwait is a pressing issue. And for those who would disagree, research done by Scull et al. supports the existence of mental health stigma in Kuwait (Scull et al).

Combine stigma with poor health literacy and what we get are people that are less likely to seek treatment and stick to their treatment plan. This is not to say that great strides have not been made in recent years. For example, many polyclinics now can manage common mental health issues like mild depression. However, much of the public discourse surrounding mental health focuses on diagnosis. But from my experience working in mental health both at Amiri hospital and the Kuwait Center for Mental Health is that the public still has a poor understanding of treating mental health issues.

When someone gets a chest infection due to bacteria, the solution to their health issue is intuitive: if we get rid of the bacteria, we get rid of the health problem. The patient is then happy to take their antibiotics for a week and then feels back to normal. In the world of psychiatry, the issue is a bit more complex. Nothing illustrates this more than a question I am asked, on average, three times a week: is my condition genetic? My answer: partially.

The usual follow up is: is this because of the stressors in my life. My answer, once again: partially. The truth about mental health is that it is a complicated interplay between environmental, genetic, psychological, and personal factors. In this way, mental health can be compared to a cake- you need all the ingredients to make a cake, not just the eggs. With something so complicated, it is no wonder that we have yet to find a single pill to be a cure-all for psychiatry.

Bio-psycho-social model

So where does this leave health service users? More often than not, it leaves them confused when they don't see a complete improvement the day after taking their medicines. It leaves them dubious of the doctor who is prescribing their treatments. Better health literacy about how doctors decide on treatment may be the solution. Specifically, the model that doctors use in every consultation they perform: the bio-psycho-social model.

The bio-psycho-social model is an approach in medicine which views patient health holistically. It holds that health is the result of biological, psychological, and social factors and that treatment of any condition requires addressing all these elements. This model is of particular significance in the realm of mental health. Let's take depression for example. Biologically, we know that there are certain brain chemicals, specifically serotonin, which are not balanced in episodes of depression.

Psychologically, we know that maladaptive thought patterns and beliefs serve as triggers and fuel to said episodes. Socially, we know that poor social support and circumstances like poverty are linked with depression. Using this model, we can appreciate how managing depression would therefore include a combination of medications (bio), talk therapies (psycho), and seeking social support where needed (social).

The research supports this approach: for example, antidepressants and talk therapies like cognitive behavioral therapy have shown similar efficacy in managing depression, but the treatment choice which has shown longer lasting remission is a combination of both. The problem that myself and other doctors working in mental health face is we often can only address the "bio" part of the model through the use of medication.

Patient's psychological

Realistically, even with consultations lasting up to an hour, a single meeting with a psychiatrist cannot address all of a patient's psychological and social needs. This is in addition to the fact that it is not within our expertise to do so despite our best efforts/intentions. For example, although I may provide some psychological and emotional support during my consultations with patients, I cannot provide a structured therapy program like a clinical psychologist can.

This is where referrals to programs like group or individual therapy are critical, and it is the responsibility of doctors to provide them. Beyond this, sadly, the responsibility rests on the patient. So how can we address the psychological and social aspects of mental health treatment? I believe that a big part of the answer lies in empowering people to address the parts of their treatment that doctors cannot.

The key to this empowerment lies in improved health literacy relating to our community's understanding of the bio-psycho-social model. If we shift our mindset, as a community, that treating mental health is as simple as taking a pill, we may see people start to address the parts of the model that doctors cannot.

For example, we may see a greater willingness to engage with talk therapies without fear of stigma or shame. The best part of this shift is that these health and social support systems are already in place in Kuwait. Seeing a psychologist is as simple as asking for a referral. The bottom line is that people want to feel better and live normally with their mental health struggles, but only seeing their health through a single lens is unlikely to yield the results they hope for.

Arab Parliament thanks Kuwait for its position on Palestinian issues

Arabs call for immediate ceasefire, boycott of pro-Zionist companies

CAIRO: President of the Arab Parliament (AP), Adel Al-Asoumi, has expressed thanks to Kuwait's political leadership, topped by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, for its patriotic stances towards Palestinian people. Speaking to KUNA in a statement during an AP meeting on Palestine, Al-Asoumi said Kuwait's positions in support of the Palestinian cause and the steadfastness of Palestinians in their occupied territories have been noticed and witnessed throughout history.

He referred to Kuwait's air bridge of humanitarian and relief aid to help Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip that have been subject to the occupation forces' aggression since October 7. He indicated that a preparatory meeting was held for the AP plenary session due on Thursday that discusses the situation in Palestine and Palestinians' sufferings. Al-Asoumi underlined that the AP continues to support the Palestinian cause via parliamentary diplomacy, urging all agencies that could put pressure on the occupying Zionist entity to halt its aggression and violations against Gaza and the citizens of the West Bank and Jerusalem.

Boycott-pro-Zionist companies

Meanwhile, President of the Arab Parliament Adel Al-Asoumi called for an active boycott of companies that expressed support for the Zionist occupation's heinous military campaign against the Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. During the Palestine committee meeting of the Arab Parliament, Al-Asoumi said that the Zionist war machine was committing daily massacres against the

Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip and elsewhere, indicating that this was horrifically happening under the sight and hearing of the world.

He reiterated that the Arab countries maintained the option of boycotting as a weapon against companies and international entities pleased with the Zionist crimes against the Palestinian people. On Thursday's Arab Parliament session in support of Palestine and the Gaza Strip, Al-Asoumi affirmed that attendees would be exploring all venues that would help highlight the Palestinian just cause and prevent further bloodshed against the innocent.

He stressed that the Arab Parliament stood with the Palestinians aspiration for a future independent state with east Jerusalem as its capital, saying all efforts would be poured towards achieving that goal. A number of Arab lawmakers, including Kuwait National Assembly MPs Ahmad Lari and Hamdan Al-Azmi, attended the Palestine committee meeting.

Immediate ceasefire

The Arab League called on Thursday for an immediate ceasefire and halt of Zionist occupation aggression against the Gaza Strip, which would open the doorway for the safe delivery of necessary relief aid to the war-torn region. In a speech to the Arab Parliament special session on supporting Palestine and the Gaza Strip, the league's Assistant Secretary for Palestinian Affairs and Occupied Arab lands, Ambassador Saeed Abu-Ali, said, "All those who opposed an immediate ceasefire in the Gaza Strip are partners in the heinous crimes and have blood on their hands."

The misery connected with the Palestinian cause could only be solved through ending occupation and establishing an independent state of Palestine within the June 1967 borders and east Jerusalem as the capital of the country, indicated Abu-Ali, stressing that any military solution to the situation would be detrimental to the Palestinian people and their rights to dignity and freedom.

Abu-Ali followed by saying that the Zionist government, for years, had been committing acts of horror against the Palestinian people, killing them, abusing them, and destroying their lives and honor. The separation of the issue of the Gaza Strip from what was occurring in the West Bank is another attempt to de-legitimize the Palestinian cause, but this would not take place, affirmed the Arab League official.

The two-state solution would only come via a true international determination to bring it into reality, indicated the official, who affirmed that the majority of the world was in support of the step, save for a few countries that stand against justice and truth. The Zionist war machine is committing an act of genocide that must be stopped at all costs, and the world must implement international resolutions to halt these crimes, he added.

He went on to say that 2.5 percent of the Gaza population were either massacred, wounded, or missing, revealing that 60 percent of the total infrastructure in the Strip was completely destroyed. Abu-Ali called for implementing UNSC Resolution 2720, allowing for the increased delivery of crucial humanitarian relief aid into Gaza before matters slide into uncharted territories. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Visitors explore the Mirzaam Exhibition, the largest platform for decoration and interior design in Kuwait. The number of visitors at the exhibition exceeded 400,000.



Mirzaam concludes 4th edition with a remarkable success

KUWAIT: Mirzaam Exhibition, the largest platform for decoration and interior design in Kuwait, concluded its fourth edition with remarkable success on December 16, 2023, despite coinciding with the announcement of the death of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. The value of the invoices exchanged with the raffle coupons won by visitors reached KD500,000, while the value of donations to the Save Palestine campaign through the Kuwait Red Crescent exceeded 14,000 dinars.

The number of visitors at the exhibition exceeded 400,000. The management of the Mirzaam exhibition announced the winners of the competition for the most beautiful pavilion for the companies participating in Mirzaam. "Wooden House" won the beauty category; "Sabara" won the sustainability category; and Pro Painters won the innovation category.

Ramadayiat Mirzaam

In the same context, the organization and founder of Mirzaam Exhibition, Farah Al-Humaidhi, revealed the start of preparations for the second edition of the Mirzaamiyat Exhibition—Ramadan, the largest exhibition for preparing and beautifying the home for Ramadan at the Arena—Mall 360 (from January 24 to 27, 2024). The event will host more than 130 participants from Kuwaiti companies and regional and international brands as they provide products and services to celebrate the holy month.



Farah Al-Humaidhi

Mirzaamiyat Ramadan is one of the miniature and specialized versions of the largest Mirzaam exhibition, which focuses on preparations for the month of Ramadan with all its innovative decorations that keep pace with the joy of receiving the holy month and harmonizing its atmosphere for breakfast. They also provided suhoor and ghabga, as well as innovative ideas for the gifts.

The exhibition will dazzle its visitors in its second edition in both form and content. The results of the first version of the Ramadan Mirzaamiyat were carefully evaluated to benefit from them in the development of the subsequent version, which is also followed by the largest Mirzaam exhibition since the launch of its first edition in 2019.

Al-Humaidhi stressed that the great development that characterized the subsequent editions of Mirzaam in the second and third editions, up to the current fourth edition, reflects its promotion of the principle of sustainability, which is in line with achieving the vision of New Kuwait 2035, adding that the Mirzaam Exhibition, since its inception, has been aimed at build-



ing an effective national commercial platform for cooperation, commercial communication, the exchange of experiences, and the development of community culture.

Moreover, the advancement of public taste in various fields of decoration and interior design will enable participants to display their products, ideas, and the latest developments in furniture and decorations. Al-Humaidhi concluded by thanking the sponsors and participants, appreciating their efforts that crystallized at the successful conclusion of the fourth edition of Mirzaam. She thanked the platinum sponsors (for the fourth consecutive year) of Zain,

the leading telecommunications service in the Middle East.

Zain Smart Home

Waleed Al-Khashti, Chief Corporate Relations Officer at Zain Kuwait, expressed his happiness with Zain's return as a platinum sponsor of the "Mirzaam" exhibition for the fourth time in a row, pointing out the great turnout of visitors at the exhibition grounds in Mishref. The "Zain Smart Home" contained different rooms and sections that simulate real homes. It enables everyone to experience Zain's smart solutions closely and choose what suits their home construction plans.



KUWAIT: Mourners gather at the cemetery to bury a Kuwaiti who died in Iraq, Iraqi authorities found the bodies of a Kuwaiti citizen and a Saudi citizen residing in Kuwait who had gone missing in the Iraqi Governorate of Al-Anbar on Monday. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Kuwait Times, Kuwait News staff look forward to 2024 with hope



As we usher in the New Year, Kuwait Times and Kuwait News staff express their wishes, prayers and resolutions for 2024. They may be wishful, whimsy or Ahwacky, but we can all hope for a better future.

Abdellatif Sharaa: Peace... a word that has become a dream. I wish for sanity to be restored to humanity and let people live their lives! May Allah Almighty help us all.

Abdullah Boftain: I hope the coming year will be a peaceful and promising one for our brothers and sisters in Gaza and across Palestine, with an end to the human tragedies and catastrophes they are suffering now. At the professional level, I would like to keep the pioneering institutions of Kuwait Times and Kuwait News always on top, with more content, more interactions with the community — both expats and Kuwaitis, focusing and highlighting talents and interacting with CSR initiatives. Also, to add fresh blood to the team and use our platform for the benefit of the society and the greater good. On a personal level, I aim to climb more mountains, run more marathons and visit more countries.

Abdul Malik: Have a healthier diet.

Abdul Raheem Abdeen: Three wishes for the New Year: May God protect Kuwait, a home of safety and security. Human rights should be equal without any discrimination — resolutions of the United Nations and the Security Council should be binding on all countries to maintain international peace and security, and not according to whims. That the world will live in peace without wars or conflicts.

Ahmad Jabr: The Palestinian people's struggle has taught us valuable lessons, among which is to appreciate all the things which God has given us. I seek in the New Year to continue spreading awareness about Palestine in hopes of educating more people around the world about our cause. My wish for the New Year is for Palestine to be free.

Ahmed Abdel Moneim: Praise be to God! I wish it will be a blessed year. God willing, it will be the best year to evolve and achieve significant growth and success in my career.

Ali Edassery: I hope for the best year yet. May everyone achieve all what they want with ever-present happiness.

Alsayed Al-Ashri: I wish this year will be full of happiness, goodness, wellness and peace of mind. I hope God will protect my family and loved ones from all harm and bring peace and security to Kuwait, Egypt and all Arab and Islamic countries.

Alwathaq Bellah: I wish that the war in Palestine ceases. My children succeed in their endeavors. Allah willing.

Antonio Coelho: My New Year's resolution for 2024 is for peace in war-torn countries. And for all communities to live together in peace and harmony and to respect all. May the world be a better place for all. God bless the new Amir!

Ashraf Baraka: My New Year resolution is to seek professional development. I strive to build a foundation that ensures success and fulfillment for both my career and the well-being of my family. I want to be able to make my children's dreams come true.

Balaraman Elumalai: Learn at least one new thing every day.

Barrak Al-Hindi: One of my wishes for the year 2024 is that God will grant security to my country, Kuwait, and to all the free people of the world, and that God will grant victory to our brothers in Palestine against the Zionist aggressors with a near victory, God willing, and that God will grant us health, wellness and joys. I also wish for more prosperity and elevation for Kuwait Times.

Bhasker Reddy: Spend more time with loved ones.

Billal Mia: Start saving more money.

Chidi Emmanuel: Setting a New Year's resolution is a great way to kick off the year with purpose and determination. I intend to set a goal that will align with my aspirations and areas for improvement. Here are some of my resolutions: Getting fit and healthier: I intend to go through regular exercise and eat healthy and organic food; Learn something new: Whether it is a new language, a musical instrument, a hobby, or a subject of interest, I hope to expand my knowledge and skills;

Travel more: Exploring new places, experiencing new cultures and broadening my horizons through travel will be fulfilling; Career development: I am setting professional goals, such as acquiring new skills.

Dhoha Al-Essa: This year I want to read more — a goal of two books a month.

Faten Omar: Seeing my beloved ones in good health and extreme happiness. Be able to travel the world and dive into multiple cultures. Be the reason to help all humans and animals. Lastly, I wish people can be considerate and kind to each other.

Ghadeer Ghloom: As we're about to step into a brand new year, my heart overflows with gratitude for the opportunity to be a part of Kuwait Times! I wish for this cherished newspaper to experience great success and limitless growth in all endeavors. I am looking forward to 2024 for I have a lot of love to share with my loved ones, friends and the remarkable team I work with. May 2024 bring forth joy and an unwaver-

Allah that my son and daughters achieve what they aspire to and are in good health and wellness.

Ismail Al-Ruwaini: May peace prevail in the world. I wish success to my daughter who is in high school, and I wish God gives my loved ones health and wellness.

Jana Alnaqeb: To stop checking my messages on my phone while I am driving.

Jino Arickel: I am excited about the upcoming year and my strong desire is to send my children for higher studies. My daughter is about to finish her bachelor's degree, while my son is preparing to complete his 12th grade.

Kannapiran Ponnuswami: Make more money, try to lose weight.

Khaled Al-Abdulhadi: For a happy New Year full of excitement and prosperity. To a year of blissful moti-

to build it again. Free Palestine!

Narayan Das: I hope my family is well, my daughter succeeds in her nursing school and my son does well in his education.

Nebal Snan: In 2024, I'll continue to stretch myself beyond my comfort zone to grow both as a journalist and a person. I hope to find innovative ways to tell stories from our diverse communities and bring forward their needs. I pray for wisdom, courage and kindness to push through the challenges before me and find balance in my personal and professional lives.

Passant Hisham: This year I only wish for a fresh start, with more inspiring stories to learn from, more places to explore and more interesting people to meet. I wish that through every experience, I will be able to unlock new gates of self-awareness and get one step closer to the person who I aspire to become.

Rachelle De Leon: My resolution for this year is to spend quality family time, take a break more often, exercise regularly and stick to a budget to save money.

Raed Mohammad: For Allah to keep the bounty of security and safety on my second country Kuwait. More development and prosperity in Kuwait. For Allah to grant security and development to Islamic countries.

Robin Jacob: I'm hoping that if everything goes well, I'll be able to kick off a soccer turf in my hometown this coming year. Excited for a fresh start filled with peace, prosperity, and love for all my close friends, colleagues, and family.

Roshan Rodrigues: A new year is filled with possibilities, so dream big and believe in yourself this year.

Saboosh Mia: Spend more time with family.

Safa Mahmoud: Many and varied wishes in my heart for all of us to be happy, full of health and safe in the New Year.

Sahar Moussa: Hope to work on myself, learn more skills and improve professionally. Also, I hope for world peace and that Palestine would be free from the river to the sea.

Sajeev K Peter: I'm looking forward to traveling more in 2024, and hopefully, making progress on my long-pending book project!

Shakir Reshamwala: I aim to take Kuwait Times to greater heights. I pray for health, wellness and success for my family. I hope to achieve all my personal and professional goals. Also, I plan to write, travel and exercise more. May peace and security prevail in the world.

Shehzad Shabbir: Dream big, work smartly, then succeed.

Sivasdas Ramachampat: New year, new me, same dreams, fresh start.

Sreenu: My New Year resolution is to improve the quality of my life by improving my lifestyle choices and be more connected with my family.

Syed Muneer: I wish that me and my family will have good health and a prosperous New Year.

Venkut Subia: I wish to reunite with my family.

Vijay Bahadur: To lead a healthy lifestyle.

Wael Mansour: I wish for a better year for the Islamic world.

Yeasin Hussain: Learn a new skill.

Zainab Dashti: Read for 30 minutes every day.

Zakir Mansoori: Hopefully, 2024 will be better than last year. The war will end in Palestine and peace will return, global warming will reduce, and no more coronavirus. And we will have a better world than before.



ing spirit of unity and peace around the world.

Hamad Al-Marei: In the coming year, I wish for a ceasefire and peace. I want the Palestinian war to be a memory of how good can win over evil. I wish for success and happiness for all my loved ones. I extend these hopes to colleagues and friends, praying for abundant health, wellness and goodness in their lives. I wish as well for the safety of our beloved Kuwait.

Hassan Al-Kilani: My resolution is for peace for the world. I hope to become a director, in addition to committing to the gym, eating healthy food and reading for half an hour every day.

Hawrah Al-Yakoob: My New Year's resolution is as follows: Create feasible goals that I can actually adhere to and follow through.

Hussain Assad: I hope Manchester United win the English Premier League.

Islam Al-Sharaa: I hope Allah grants me success in my work and that I will be healthy and well. I hope I can go for umrah with my wife. I wish from

vation, and a year of diligent dedication.

Mary Shaker: Given the many pressures and burdens of life, all I hope for the New Year is that God may grant us His protection, that my family may be well and that beloved Kuwait may remain in all goodness, peace and prosperity.

Md Ali Pevumkattil: Make time for family, sleep early, be positive, exercise more.

Md Sabry: Don't work hard, work smart.

Mohamed Hasen: I want my family and myself to be happy.

Mohan Mallela: Spend more time with my family; start a new daily routine to make myself productive, healthy and fit; keep track of my expenses; pay more attention to investments rather than just savings; engage in welfare activities which are helpful to society.

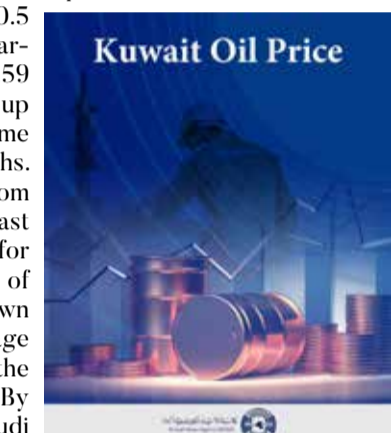
Mustansar Shabbir: Quit smoking, get fitter and healthier, spend more time with family and perform hajj with my family.

Nael Abu Ateyah: Ceasefire in Gaza and to be able

Kuwait's oil exports to Japan down 3.6%

TOKYO: Kuwait's crude oil exports to Japan in November fell 3.6 percent from a year earlier to 7.00 million barrels, or 233,000 barrels per day (bpd), marking the second consecutive month of decline, government data showed Thursday. As Japan's third-biggest oil provider, Kuwait supplied 9.0 percent of its total crude imports, compared with 9.4 percent in the same month of last year, the Japanese Natural Resources and Energy Agency said in a preliminary report.

Japan's overall imports of crude oil in November edged up 0.5 percent year-on-year to 2.59 million bpd, up for the first time in five months. Shipments from the Middle East accounted for 94.6 percent of the total, down 0.8 percentage points from the year before. By country, Saudi Arabia remained in the top spot, with imports from the kingdom jumping 18.1 percent from the year before to 1.11 million bpd, followed by the United Arab Emirates with 974,000 bpd, down 9.0 percent. Qatar ranked fourth with 121,000 bpd and the US fifth with 79,000 bpd, respectively. Japan is the world's third-biggest oil consumer after China and the US.



Crude oil up \$1.62

In another development, the price of Kuwaiti crude oil went up by \$1.62 during Wednesday trading to reach \$83.07 per barrel, compared with \$81.45 pb the day before, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said Thursday. In the global markets, Brent crude dropped by \$1.42 to reach \$79.65 pb, and West Texas intermediate lost \$1.46 to reach \$74.11 pb.— KUNA

KUNA's Media Development Center organizes program on photography



Participants pose for a group photo after the training program 'Principles of Photography'. — KUNA

KUWAIT: Kuwait News Agency Center for Development of Media Skills concluded on Thursday a training program titled Principles of Photography, which started on Sunday and was attended by a number of employees from the agency and the Kuwait Anti-Corruption Authority (Nazaha). Mustafa Al-Bader, Head of the Design and Photography Department at the news agency, stressed in remarks to KUNA the importance of media and public relations

workers learning about the principles of photography and the difference between cameras and lenses to help them perform their tasks.

Al-Bader explained that the program touched on the types of cameras and lenses and their uses and functions, noting that the program participants did some practical training as well as a field photography trip to integrate the program's theo-

retical and practical learning.

The training program also explained some photography theories, applications on the camera, focus systems, and how to use lighting in photography. The center, founded in 1995, is considered to be one of the most important media training centers at the national level, providing hundreds of training programs in various media fields and aiming to develop media capabilities and personal capabilities and improve

GCC-South Korean accord will enhance trade cooperation

RIYADH: GCC Secretary Jasem Al-Budaiwi said on Thursday that the freshly crafted free trade agreement between the Gulf Cooperation Council and the Republic of South Korea would boost commercial exchanges between the two sides. The GCC said in a statement that Al-Budaiwi signed a joint statement with South Korean Trade Minister Ahn Duk Geun to conclude negotiations and reach a free trade agreement between the GCC and Seoul.

This agreement will contribute to an increasing volume of bilateral trade and commercial exchange

in goods and services and enhance economic diversification between the GCC member states and South Korea, he said. According to the statement, Al-Budaiwi said that the signing came after over five rounds of negotiations and reflected the real common desire to strengthen the strategic partnership and economic cooperation between the two sides.

According to Al-Budaiwi, who was cited in the statement, the free trade agreements are a result of the GCC leaders' directives to advance common trade and investment interests and strengthen the Cooperation Council's economic ties with other nations and international blocs. He stated that the agreement included trade in goods and services, government procurement, digital trade, cooperation in the fields of small and medium enterprises, customs procedures, intellectual property, and other topics of common interest.— KUNA



GCC Secretary Jasem Al-Budaiwi with South Korean Trade Minister Ahn Duk Geun.



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Kuwait Red Crescent Society opens Late Shaha Abdulrazeq center in Hadramout. — KUNA photos

KSR partners UNICEF, IsDB for Afghanistan development

JEDDAH: Kuwait Society for Relief (KSR) signed on Wednesday two partnership deals with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Afghanistan Humanitarian Trust Fund (AHTF), an affiliate of the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), to implement two sustainable development projects. The deal with UNICEF aims to implement a water project that benefits rural communities in remote areas, KSR Treasurer Jamal Al-Nouri told KUNA.

The project, which will cost four million dollars and be completed in 12 months, will provide safe wa-

ter for nearly 64,000 people in Faryab, Helmand, and Farah provinces, he said. KSR will contribute one million dollars to the project, as Al-Nouri pointed out. The second agreement aims to launch eight primary health facilities that will provide healthcare for women in vulnerable communities in the provinces of Nuristan, Ghazni, and Zabul.

The project will cost up to four million dollars, of which KSR will contribute one million dollars. Upon completion in 24 months, it will benefit 141,000 females, or nearly eight percent of females in the targeted areas, he added. On his part, Kuwait Consul General in Jeddah and Permanent Representative to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation Mohammad Al-Mutairi said his country offered \$500,000 in emergency assistance to the AHTF. The financial assistance was channeled under a ministerial decree adopted by the Kuwaiti cabinet in August, said Al-Mutairi, who attended the signing ceremony in Jeddah.— KUNA



Delegation from Kuwait Red Crescent Society visits Yemen to open development projects.



Late Shaha Abdulrazeq center offers services in Hadramout.



Sudan civilians rush for arms as paramilitaries advance

'Alone': Afghan women fault West for the lack of support

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DEIR EL-BALAH, Palestinian Territories: Iman Al-Masri feeds one of her quadruplets - with the fourth still being treated in hospital - as they take shelter at a school in Deir Al-Balah in the central Gaza Strip on December 27, 2023. — AFP

Gaza mother gives birth to quadruplets

Displaced young woman flees home on foot with her three other children

DEIR EL-BALAH, Palestinian Territories: Iman Al-Masry is simply exhausted after giving birth to quadruplets in a hospital in southern Gaza, miles away from her home in the north of the war-torn Palestinian territory. Days into the Zionist entity war in Gaza, the young woman fled the family home in Beit Hanun on foot with her three other children seeking safety.

They walked five kilometers (three miles) to the Jabalia refugee camp, looking for a means of transport that would take them to Deir Al-Balah further south. Iman was six months pregnant and "the distance was too long", she told AFP. "It affected my pregnancy," added the 28-year-old mother, who gave birth by C-section on December 18 to daughters Tia and Lynn and sons Yasser and Mohammed.

But Iman was quickly asked to leave the hospital with the newborns—minus Mohammed who was too fragile to go with them—to make room for other patients of the war. Now, with Tia, Lynn and Yasser, they live in a cramped schoolroom turned shelter in Deir Al-Balah along with around 50 other members of their extended family.

"Mohammed weighs only one kilogram (2.2 pounds). He cannot survive," she said of the child she left behind at a hospital in the Nuseirat refugee camp. Lying on a foam mattress in a schoolroom turned shelter for her and her extended family, Iman recounts her journey from hell.

"When I left home, I had only some summer clothes for the children. I thought the war would last a week or two and that afterwards we would

go back home," she said. More than 11 weeks later, her hope of ever going back are shattered. The Gaza Strip, home to 2.4 million people, lies in ruins from the north to the south. According to UN estimates, the fighting has displaced 1.9 million Palestinians internally. The Zionist entity campaign has killed at least 21,110 people, according to the latest toll issued by Gaza's health ministry, about two thirds of them women and children.

Like other mothers, Iman had hoped to follow tradition and celebrate the birth of her babies by "dousing them with rose water", she said. But 10 days on "we have not even been able to bathe them", she said, because of the difficulty of finding clear water in the devastated territory, where there is a dire shortage of basic food stuff, including milk, medicine

and hygienic supplies such as diapers.

"Normally I would change babies' diapers every two hours. But the situation is difficult and I must be thrifty," she said, adding that the newborns get only a fresh diaper in the morning and another in the evening. Her husband Ammar Al-Masry, 33, said he is devastated because he cannot provide for his family. "I feel helpless," he said, surrounded by his six children in the foul-smelling schoolroom.

"I fear for my children. I don't know how to protect them," he said, adding that he spends most of his days outdoors searching for food.

"Tia (who has jaundice) must be breastfed and my wife needs nutritious food that contains protein. The children need milk and diapers. But I cannot get any of that." — AFP

Iran mourns Guards' commander killed in Zionist strike

TEHRAN: Thousands massed Thursday in the Iranian capital for the funeral of senior Revolutionary Guards commander Razi Moussavi, three days after he was killed in what Tehran says was a Zionist entity strike. The crowd in Tehran's central Imam Hossein square chanted "Death to Zionist entity" and "Death to America".

Many waved yellow flags imprinted with the message "I am your opponent"—a reference to Zionist entity—in both Persian and Hebrew. Zionist entity has long fought a shadow war of assassinations and sabotage against arch foe Iran and its allies, but Moussavi's killing in Syria came at a time of sharply heightened regional tensions over the Zionist entity war on Gaza since early October.

Some of the mourners in Tehran carried pictures of Moussavi together with the revered Qasem Soleimani, a former commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps's foreign operations arm who was killed in a 2020 US drone strike in Baghdad. Iran next week will mark the fourth anniversary of the death of Soleimani, who had run the IRGC's Quds Force for more than a decade. Iranian state media says a Zionist entity missile strike on Monday near the Syrian capital Damascus killed Moussavi, a Quds Force general and the most senior Guards commander killed since Soleimani.



TEHRAN: Mourners attend the funeral of Razi Moussavi, a senior commander in the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) who was killed on December 25 in a Zionist strike in Syria, in Tehran, on December 28, 2023.—AFP

The Zionist entity army, which has launched hundreds of strikes on Iran-linked targets in war-torn Syria in recent years, said only that it does not comment on foreign media reports. Syria on Thursday said Moussavi's "martyrdom" on its territory was part of Zionist entity's "aggressive policies", official news agency SANA reported. In letters sent by the Syrian foreign ministry, Damascus called on the United Nations to act against Zionist entity actions which might "ignite the region", SANA said.

Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei earlier on Thursday met with Moussavi's family and

led a prayer over the slain general's body before it was taken to the central square.

The head of the Guards, Hossein Salami, hailed Moussavi as "one of the most experienced and effective IRGC commanders in the Axis of Resistance"—Tehran-aligned armed groups in the Middle East. IRGC spokesman Ramezan Sharif warned on Wednesday that "our response to Moussavi's assassination will be a combination of direct action as well as (from) others led by the Axis of Resistance". "I say that the revenge for Hajj Qasem is a separate operation," the Guards chief said. — AFP

tance have been crucial in helping the pro-Western country battle against a far larger attacking Russian force.

However, right-wing Republicans have led a push to halt the effort, refusing to authorize new budget outlays if the Democrats don't first agree to sweeping, tough new measures against illegal migration over the US southern border. The final tranche of aid is worth up to \$250 million and includes "air-defense munitions, other air-defense system components, additional ammunition for high mobility artillery rocket systems, 155mm and 105mm artillery ammunition, anti-armor munitions, and over 15 million rounds of ammunition," the State Department said.

The statement underlined the US-led coalition helping Ukraine, noting that "more than 50 countries" are involved. "It is imperative that Congress act swiftly, as soon as possible, to advance our national security interests by helping Ukraine defend itself and secure its future," it said. — AFP

US releases final package of military aid for Ukraine

WASHINGTON: The US government on Wednesday announced what it said was the last remaining package of weapons available for Ukraine under existing authorization, with Congress now needing to decide whether to keep supporting Kyiv's battle against Russian invasion. "The year's final package" includes air-defense and artillery munitions, the State Department said in a statement. It added that Congress, where Republicans are split on supporting Ukraine, should "act swiftly" to renew the flow.

President Joe Biden has made backing Ukraine a priority and US weapons and financial assis-



UNDISCLOSED LOCATION, Ukraine: A Ukrainian serviceman holds a MANPADS (Man-Portable Air-Defense Systems) "Stinger" anti-aircraft weapon as they scan for possible air targets, onboard a Maritime Guard of the State Border Service of Ukraine boat. — AFP

Haley rebuked over Civil War comments

WASHINGTON: US presidential hopeful Nikki Haley faced a firestorm of criticism Thursday after failing to mention slavery as a cause of the American Civil War when asked what led to the conflict at a campaign event. Less than three weeks before voting begins in the race for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination, it was the first major stumble for a candidate whose campaign has seen her propelled from an unlikely outsider to front-runner Donald Trump's biggest threat.

The former UN ambassador told a town hall crowd Wednesday in Berlin, New Hampshire that the cause of the bloody 1861-65 war was "basically how the government was going to run" and "freedoms and what people could and couldn't do". She added that "it always comes down to the role of government and what the rights of the people are".

Apparently caught off guard, she turned the debate back at the questioner, who responded that he was not the one running for president, and that it was "astonishing" that slavery had not come up in her answer. Scholars agree that slavery was the main driver of the Civil War, and Haley's obfuscation prompted swift rebuttals. "It was about slavery," President Joe Biden said, responding on social media to video footage of the town hall. Haley, 51, attempted to clear up her comments in a local radio interview Thursday in New Hampshire, affirming that "of course the Civil War was about slavery, that's the easy part". She accused the town hall questioner — who refused to identify himself to reporters — of being a "Democratic plant" sent to damage her campaign and boost Trump, who is considered a weaker prospect against Biden in the general election.

Trump commands a lead of more than 20 points in polling for New Hampshire's Jan 23 primary, but Haley has been gaining ground — overtaking Florida Governor Ron DeSantis as the former president's biggest threat. DeSantis spokesman Andrew Romeo called Haley's clarification "embarrassing". "If she can't handle a question as basic as the cause of the Civil War, what does she think is going to happen to her in a general election. The Democrats would eat her lunch," he posted on X, formerly Twitter.

The Florida governor, who is a distant second behind Trump in nationwide primary polling, has sparked controversy in his own state over the teaching of race, a delicate issue that divides Americans. And Trump himself has been berated on both sides of the political divide and accused of echoing Adolf Hitler for remarks about undocumented migrants "poisoning the blood" of the nation. — AFP

International

Sudan civilians rush for arms as paramilitaries advance

The 8-month conflict transforming into full-blown civil war

AL-JAZIRA STATE, Sudan: The rapid advance of Sudanese paramilitaries has intensified calls on civilians to carry arms, raising the specter of the eight-month conflict between rival generals transforming into full-blown civil war. The paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) have seized most of Sudan's southern Al-Jazira state including its capital Wad Madani and begun pushing further south into Sennar state in their war against the army.

Amid growing claims of abuses by RSF fighters, groups of civilians have called for "armed popular resistance" across the Sudanese states of White Nile, River Nile, Gedaref, North, Kassala and Red Sea. The RSF meanwhile has ordered inhabitants of areas brought under its control to provide the paramilitary force with volunteers who would be armed to "protect their territory". The fighting since April 15 pits army chief Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan against his former deputy, RSF commander Mohamed Hamdan Daglo. The violence has killed more than 12,000 people, according to a conservative estimate by the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project.

The UN says at least 7.1 million people have been displaced, including 1.5 million who fled across the border into neighboring countries. Last week at a thousands-strong rally in the northern city of Shendi, River Nile state governor Mohammed Badawi said: "We are going to train young people on weapons, so that they can defend their lands and their honor, and protect the families from the rebellion" of the RSF.

In the coastal city of Suakin, south of Port Sudan, a Beja tribal leader, Mohammed Al-Amin Turk, an-

nounced on Monday: "We are ready to take up arms (against the RSF) for the victory."

In a village in Al-Jazira state's west, one resident—requesting anonymity for safety concerns—told AFP that the paramilitaries have already handed out weapons. "The RSF are arming a number of young men in each village, giving them Kalashnikovs and one or more cars, depending on the size of the village," he said. The proliferation of arms has spurred fears that the conflict might spill over beyond the ranks of the army and the RSF. According to the Small Arms Survey project, 6.6 percent of Sudan's 48 million people have weapons. The risks are particularly grave in the vast western region of Darfur, already scarred by bloody violence in the 2000s that killed about 300,000 people.

Darfur as well as Kordofan in the south and the capital Khartoum have borne much of the brunt of the current war. The United Nations in May warned that armed civilians, tribal fighters and rebel groups had already taken up arms in Darfur. The calls now to arm more civilians "are disastrous", a Sudanese security official told AFP, requesting anonymity. "They add fuel to the fire, in a country already suffering from the proliferation of weapons."

To Sherif Mohammed Othman, a leader of Sudan's main civilian alliance the Forces for Freedom and Change, "we must call on both parties to put an end to the conflict, instead of encouraging citizens to join the popular resistance or the ranks of the army."

Meanwhile, the leader of Sudan's paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) arrived Thursday in



Displaced people fleeing from Al-Jazira state arrive in Gedaref in the east of war-torn Sudan. — AFP

Ethiopia on the second stop of his first trip abroad since war erupted with Sudan's army in April. Mohamed Hamdan Daglo's visits to Ethiopia and Uganda come as regional diplomats scramble to broker a meeting between the RSF commander and his rival,

Sudanese army chief Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan. The warring generals have not met face-to-face since the outbreak of fighting between their forces that has killed over 12,000 people by some conservative estimates, and forced million to flee. — AFP

Liberia tanker inferno death toll tops 40

MONROVIA, Liberia: More than 40 people have been killed and dozens badly burned when a petrol tanker exploded in central Liberia, the country's chief medical officer said Thursday. Witnesses said people clambered onto the lorry to try collect petrol leaking from its tank after it crashed and tipped into a ditch along a road in Totota, about 130 kilometres (80 miles) from the capital Monrovia on Tuesday.

Local Aaron Massaquoi told AFP that "some of them had iron hitting the tanker for it to burst for them to get gas. "People were all around the truck and the driver of the truck told them that they could take the gas that was spilling," Massaquoi said. "He told them not to climb on top of the tanker and that

they should stop hitting the tanker... but some people were even using screwdrivers to put holes on the tank." The grisly task of establishing the death toll has been made more difficult because the victims were so badly burned, said Liberia's chief medical officer Francis Katch. He told AFP that his teams were "going door-to-door to establish the number of missing people".

Liberia is the tenth poorest country in the world, with more than half its five million people living in often dire poverty. President George Weah, the former AC Milan striker who is due to step down as head of state on January 22, sent his "profoundest sympathy" to the families of victims.

"So far more than 40 deaths have been recorded," the presidency said in a statement. "It is reported that some locals in the area attempted to scoop the contents of the trapped tanker when the explosion happened," it added. Police initially thought around 15 people had died with another 30 hurt, but the death toll has shot up since. "There were lots



MONROVIA: A petrol tanker goes up in flames in central Liberia.

of people that got burned," said Prince B Mulbah, deputy inspector general for the Liberia national police. Another police officer, Malvin Sackor, said some locals were collecting the leaking petrol when the tanker exploded. Chief medical officer Katch said dozens had been badly burned.

Among the "patients most badly hurt are children and a pregnant wom-

an", local health chief Cynthia Blapooch told the newspaper Front Page Africa. "Dozens of injured people from the incident have been transported to various hospitals," the presidential statement confirmed. "The President has said health authorities have got his full backing to beef up manpower and equipment where necessary in their frantic attempt to save lives." — AFP

French father who killed wife, children 'heard voices'

BOBIGNY, France: A 33-year-old French man who admitted to killing his wife and their four children claimed he "heard voices" telling him to "cause harm", a prosecutor said on Thursday. French police on Tuesday arrested a man with a history of psychiatric illness on suspicion of murdering his Haitian-born wife and their children aged nine months and four, seven and 10 years old.

Their bodies had been found on Monday, Christmas Day, at home in Meaux east of Paris. The man, a plumber, has been receiving treatment since 2017 for depres-

sion and psychotic behavior. Meaux public prosecutor Jean-Baptiste Bladier, citing the results of Wednesday's autopsy, said the children's 35-year-old mother and her 10- and seven-year-old daughters had received "around 10 stab wounds each" which had been "administered with great violence". The four-year-old and nine-month-old boys "died of asphyxia following drowning", he added. The suspect was to appear before an investigating judge on Thursday. The prosecutor has requested that he be remanded in custody.

The suspect said that he had "not been able to identify a trigger for his act", said the prosecutor. He has "felt nothing" and "felt empty" after murdering his family, the prosecutor added.

According to Bladier, the suspect "indicated that he had been taking his daily medication" since 2019, but had not taken it on December 24. Police discovered the bodies at a ground-floor apartment in a working-class

district of Meaux at around 9:00 pm on Monday.

Neighbours told police they had heard cries downstairs during the night of December 24 to 25, adding they had seen traces of blood. An inquiry has been opened into the murder of minors under 15 years old, and murder by a partner. The man had been held in 2019 after stabbing his partner in the shoulder blade when she was pregnant with their third child and then trying to kill himself. She had refused to press charges. The man was arrested near his father's home in the neighbouring town of Sevran.

"He loved his children, he loved his wife," the suspect's father, who had alerted police to his son's presence after refusing to open the door, told broadcaster RMC.

"Maybe what he did there was unconscious, that he didn't know what he was doing", he said. "I don't understand it yet". The suspect's sister was more outspoken, saying she had helped raise him. — AFP

JN.1 detected in Kuwait but no...

Continued from Page 1

influenza and pneumonia or the latest type of the jab at 42 centers throughout Kuwait. He advised people, particularly those aged 60 and above, and those suffering from chronic diseases to be immunized. He also recommended that personnel at health facilities use masks during worktime.

The ministry of health hosted 93 specialized doctors from around the world as part of its visiting doctors program in the past three months. In a statement on Thursday, Dr Sanad said the ministry

receives a number of consultants specialized in different medical fields every month. He added the goal of the program, besides treating patients, is sharing experience as well as discussing the recent developments in the medical world through seminars and workshops.

Meanwhile, Dr Sanad warned against the increasing number of accidents related to cars, motorcycles and buggies during the camping season. There have been 700 cases of such accidents reported since the beginning of December, mostly of youth of both genders suffering head injuries, broken bones, dislocated joints, internal bleeding and death, he noted. Dr Sanad called on parents to make their children aware about the dangers of reckless driving and encourage them to abide by traffic laws to protect their lives and the lives of others. — KUNA

Gazans facing 'grave peril' as...

Continued from Page 1

tents in the far south, in and around the city of Rafah near Egypt. UN World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus called for "urgent steps to alleviate the grave peril" facing Gaza's people, including "terrible injuries, acute hunger and... severe risk of disease".

French President Emmanuel Macron in a call with Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu voiced his "deepest concern at the very heavy civilian toll" and stressed "the need to work towards a lasting ceasefire", Macron's office said. The Zionist entity's relentless aerial bombardment and ground invasion with troops and tanks have killed at least 21,320 people, mostly women and children, according to Gaza's health ministry. The Zionist army says 167 of its soldiers have been killed inside Gaza.

A Zionist siege imposed since Oct 7 — following

years of crippling blockade — has deprived Gazans of food, water, fuel and medicine. The severe shortages have only been sporadically eased by humanitarian aid convoys entering primarily via Egypt. "We are tired of everything," said Ekhlash Shnenou who fled her Gaza City home. "Enough with the war, enough with the pain, enough with the hunger."

One of the many people displaced, 28-year-old Iman Al-Masry, recently gave birth to quadruplets in a hospital in southern Gaza after fleeing her family's home in the devastated north. The arduous journey "affected my pregnancy", she said, recounting that she gave birth by C-section on Dec 18 to two girls and two boys, one of whom was too fragile to leave hospital. "They are very slim," she said of the three other infants, speaking in a schoolroom turned shelter in Deir Al-Balah. "It's cold and windy and there's no bathtub... I just use wipes."

The Palestinian Red Crescent society reported fresh shelling Thursday near Al-Amal hospital in Khan Yunis, killing at least 10 people. It died in a statement the "intensification" of Zionist strikes in the area of the facility, already hit earlier this week, where about 14,000 Palestinians are sheltering. — AFP

Zionist forces killing, looting...

Continued from Page 1

In Ramallah, the AFP journalist saw a damaged exchange shop with smashed glass across the floor. Official Palestinian news agency Wafa reported Zionist forces "stormed a number of money exchange shops, seized their contents and detained a number of their owners". Surging violence has seen 522 Palestinians killed in the West Bank this year by Zionist security forces and settlers, according to a health ministry toll, 314 of them since the outbreak of the Zionist-Hamas war on Oct 7.

The United Nations on Thursday said the human rights situation in the occupied West Bank was rapidly deteriorating and urged the Zionist entity to "end unlawful killings" against the Palestinian population. A report released Thursday demanded an immediate end to the use of military weapons and means during law enforcement operations, an end to arbitrary detention and ill-treatment of Palestinians, and the lifting of discriminatory movement restrictions.

"The use of military tactics and weapons in law enforcement contexts, the use of unnecessary or disproportionate force, and the enforcement of broad, arbitrary and discriminatory movement restrictions that affect Palestinians are extremely troubling," UN rights chief Volker Turk said in a statement. "The intensity of the violence and repression is something that has not been seen in years."

The report, which looked at the human rights situation in the occupied West Bank and annexed East Jerusalem in detail from Oct 7 to Nov 20, documented a "sharp increase" in air strikes as well as incursions into refugee camps and other densely-populated areas, resulting in "deaths, injuries and extensive damage" to civilian infrastructure.

In the weeks following Oct 7, the report document-



RAMALLAH: Palestinian man inspects the damage to a money exchange shop after a raid by the Zionist army on Dec 28, 2023. — AFP

ed a "sharp rise in settler attacks" including "shootings, burning of homes and vehicles, and uprooting of trees". Turk asked the Zionist entity to end "settler violence against the Palestinian population, to investigate all incidents of violence by settlers and (Zionist) security forces, to ensure effective protection of Palestinian communities against any form of forcible transfer, and to ensure the ability of herding communities displaced due to repeated attacks by armed settlers to return to their lands".

The UN Human Rights Office said it had verified the deaths of 300 Palestinians from Oct 7 to Dec 27 in the occupied West Bank and annexed East Jerusalem. The deaths included 79 children. Of the 300 deaths, "(Zionist) security forces killed at least 291 Palestinians, settlers killed eight, and one Palestinian was killed either by (Zionist) security forces or settlers".

The rights office said that prior to Oct 7, 200 Palestinians had already been killed in the area in 2023, which it said was the highest number in a 10-month-period since the UN began keeping records in 2005. Turk urged the Zionist entity to grant his office access to the Zionist entity, adding that it was ready to report in a similar manner on the Oct 7 attacks. — AFP

International

'Alone': Afghan women fault West for the lack of support

Women rights activists remain at the mercy of Taliban rulers

PARIS: Afghan activist Rita Safi has harsh words for western governments she said have failed to deliver on promises to help women from Taliban-ruled Afghanistan.

Safi herself has made it to France where she is seeking asylum, but her sister Frozan was not so lucky. She died in a hail of bullets back home because she, too, was a defender of women's rights.

Speaking in a shelter outside Paris, the 29-year-old Rita Safi said her sister would still be alive had the promised help been forthcoming. "They were saying that they would support us, but these were just words," she said. "They left us alone. This is the reason why I lost my sister."

Safi had hoped for more support from Western powers after the Afghan capital Kabul fell to the Islamist group in 2021. But a large majority of Afghans did not make their evacuation lists following the takeover, leaving them at the mercy of their new rulers.

Safi's older sister Frozan was a prominent human rights defender in the northern Afghan city of Mazar-i-Sharif. Her body was found in October 2021, just over two months after the Taliban takeover. She was 29. "She was killed so brutally by the Taliban," she said, showing AFP an image of her coffin draped in a red cloth on her phone. "She was shot with seven bullets. Her face was totally destroyed." The Afghan authorities said that four women died that day and that they had arrested two people in connection with the killings.

After speaking to the media about the killings Safia said that she, too, received death threats. Safi managed to escape to Pakistan in December 2021. She only had a two-month visa but hoped a Western nation would soon give her refuge. Instead she was forced to spend two years in the Pakistani capital, living in constant fear of deportation. During this time, the Taliban authorities continued to ex-

clude Afghan women and girls from ever more spheres of public life, including high school and university, as well as parks, fairs or gyms.

It was not until a French journalist highlighted Safi's plight in an article and vouched for her request for a French visa that things started to look up. She was among around a dozen Afghan women to land in Paris on December 8. All have sought asylum and will likely be given it.

Rights groups have said many Afghans have been left in limbo in Pakistan, at risk of deportation. Some 600,000 people have fled across the border to Pakistan since the Taliban returned to power in 2021. But since October, some 345,000 Afghans have returned home, including after being deported.

"There are so many women like Rita in Pakistan who have had relatives killed or abducted in Afghanistan, who have been threatened," said French journalist Margaux Benn, who is member of a collective trying to help these Afghan women. "But they haven't met a Westerner who wanted to help them, so their cases stay at the bottom of the pile."

Tcherina Jerolon, from Amnesty International, said the visa application was so "long and complex" that Afghan women had basically been "abandoned to their own fate".

Since 2021, France says it has handed over 15,000 visa to Afghans, "mostly women, rights defenders, journalists and magistrates". But Delphine Rouilleault, the head of the France Terre d'Asile ("France Land of Asylum") association, said that hardly anyone had landed in France over the past year.

"No one has arrived from Afghanistan, and only very few Afghan women have landed from Pakistan," she said. The French foreign ministry did not reply to a request for comment.

Afghanistan is home to some 40 million people. Since the Taliban takeover, the



KANDAHAR, Afghanistan: Afghan burqa-clad women sit next to winter and other goods aid distributed by a UMMAH charity in Kandahar on December 28, 2023. — AFP

United Kingdom has given refuge to 21,500 Afghans, most through a massive airlift operation in late August 2021.

The United States has taken in 90,000, most also in 2021. Some 30,000 have travelled to Germany, where authorities have said they are "very worried" by deportations from Pakistan. Sweden and Denmark have said they would automatically give Afghan women visas despite tough immigration policies, but it is unclear how many have benefited. Neveen Hashim, a 32-year-old Afghan women's rights activist who landed in France in

September, said it was not enough. Afghan women in Pakistan are often single and more vulnerable to abuse, she said. And "if they are deported back to Afghanistan, they will definitely be facing death, or detention, or jail," she added.

The West spoke about "civilization, democracy and human rights", she said, but "they left us at the mercy of a regime who... closed every door in our face." "The international community is hypocritical," she said. Her sister Rafah, who is in Pakistan, is hoping for the French authorities to grant her a visa. — AFP

Tributes flood in for 'visionary' ex-EU chief Delors

PARIS: Tributes from across Europe poured in for Jacques Delors, a former EU Commission chief who played an instrumental role in European integration, following his death on Wednesday at 98.

European Council President Charles Michel said Delors "led the transformation of the European Economic Community towards a true Union. A great Frenchman and a great European, he went down in history as one of the builders of our Europe," Michel posted on social media.

Current European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen said Delors had "shaped entire generations of Europeans, including mine" and was "a visionary who made our Europe stronger". European Central Bank chief Christine Lagarde highlighted Delors's role for the single European market and "the path he laid out towards our single currency, the euro." "Europe, she said, "has lost a true statesman".

French President Emmanuel Macron called his fellow countryman a "tireless creator of our Europe".

Posting on X, formerly Twitter, Ma-

cron said "his commitment, his ideals and his rectitude will always inspire us".

Delors was "a statesman with a French destiny", Macron added. Olivier Faure, head of the French Socialist party where Delors was a towering figure, said "a giant has left us". Delors, who served as finance minister under Socialist president Francois Mitterrand, sought to "overcome tragedy by building a durable peace" after World War II ravaged Europe, Faure added.

"Modern Europe today loses its founding father," said Enrico Letta, a former Italian prime minister who currently heads the Jacques Delors Institute created by the ex-EU commission chief. Writing on X, Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani praised "a personality who showed, on the basis of Christian values, the path of strengthening Europe".

Belgium's Prime Minister Alexander De Croo also hailed the EU's "founding father", whose "project for a stronger and more secure union remains hugely relevant for the Europe of tomorrow". Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said that Delors "always believed in a



BRUSSELS: Late President of the European Commission Jacques Delors combs his hair prior to being interviewed by the French TV channel France 2 in the EU "Breydel" building, in Brussels, on November 14, 1994. — AFP

united, open and prosperous Europe".

"He worked to make what many thought impossible a reality," Sanchez wrote on X.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz hailed Delors as a "visionary" and an "architect of the EU as we know it". Delors fought for European unity "like few others", Scholz added, urging Europeans to continue his work for the continent's benefit.

Portuguese Prime Minister Anto-

nio Costa said he hoped Delors' legacy would inspire European leaders to strengthen the EU. "At a moment when the European Union is once again facing unprecedented challenges, the heritage of Delors should spur a renewed engagement," he wrote on X.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken described Delors as a "visionary statesman". "Delors transformed Europe through tireless service to the idea of a Europe whole and free." — AFP

Bangladesh jails former air force chief in crackdown

DHAKA: A Bangladesh court sentenced a former air force chief and an ex-minister to prison Thursday in the latest conviction of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's political opponents ahead of elections next month. Altaf Hossain Chowdhury headed the air force until 1995 and later joined the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), the main opposition to Hasina's ruling Awami League.

He and former BNP water minister Hafizuddin Ahmed were among eight people jailed and sentenced at a Dhaka court for inciting violent protests in 2011 that saw BNP supporters set fire to cars.

"They were sentenced to jail for 21 months each," chief prosecutor Abdullah Abu told AFP.

The opposition has rejected the case as "baseless, false and fabricated", accusing the courts of following government instructions to imprison Hasina's opponents ahead of the January 7 poll.

India targeting journalists with spyware: Amnesty

NEW DELHI: India's government has again targeted high-profile journalists with Pegasus spyware, Amnesty International and The Washington Post said in a joint investigation published on Thursday. Created by Zionist entity firm NSO Group, Pegasus can be used to

access a phone's messages and emails, peruse photos, eavesdrop on calls, track locations and even film the owner with the camera. Watchdogs have documented widespread use of the spyware—which is normally only sold to governments or security agencies—against journalists and activists in dozens of countries, including India. Amnesty said journalists Siddharth Varadarajan of The Wire and Anand Mangnole of The Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) had been targeted with the spyware on their iPhones.

"Increasingly, journalists in India face the threat of unlawful surveillance simply for doing their jobs," said Doncha O Cearbhaill, head of Amnesty International's Security Lab. That threat compounds an already hostile climate

for reporters also facing "imprisonment under draconian laws, smear campaigns, harassment, and intimidation", he added. India's government did not immediately respond to the report, which said the most recent identified case of spyware use occurred in October.

In 2021, New Delhi was accused of using Pegasus to surveil journalists, opposition politicians and activists, with leaked documents showing the spyware had been used against more than 1,000 Indian phone numbers. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's main political rival, Rahul Gandhi, was among those targeted. The government denied conducting "illegal surveillance" but refused to cooperate with a Supreme Court probe into the allegations, the findings of which have not been made public. — AFP



Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina addresses a rally during an election campaign in Sylhet on December 20, 2023, ahead of the general elections. — AFP

But her opponents say she has ruled with an iron fist and her security forces have been accused of rampant human rights abuses.

Two years ago, Washington sanctioned the elite Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) police unit and several of its top officers over allegations of rampant human rights abuses. The RAB has been accused of extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances—charges denied by Hasina's government. — AFP

News in Brief

Russia reopens embassy in Burkina Faso

OUAGADOUGOU, Burkina Faso: Russia on Thursday reopened its embassy in Burkina Faso after a gap of nearly 32 years, the West African nation's government and a Russian diplomat said. The mission was closed in 1992. The Russian Ambassador to Ivory Coast, Alexei Saltykov, said Russian President Vladimir Putin would name the new envoy. The Burkina Faso foreign ministry confirmed in a statement that "Russia formally reopened its embassy this Thursday in Ouagadougou." Saltykov said he would head the mission in Burkina Faso until the new ambassador is named and described Burkina Faso as "an old partner with whom we have solid and friendly ties." Burkina Faso last year experienced two military coups—both triggered in part by discontent at failures to stem a raging jihadist insurgency. — AFP

Nicaragua revamps security apparatus

MANAGUA: Nicaragua has revamped its Ministry of Interior, with President Daniel Ortega pledging a stronger security apparatus that recalls the powerful and feared department that operated during the revolutionary government. Under the restructuring Ortega announced on Wednesday, the ministry's portfolio will now include the police, the prison system, firefighters and immigration offices. "It is a step that gives us enormous strength and we once again have the two great instruments with which we defeated the counterrevolution: the army and the Ministry of the Interior," Ortega said. — AFP

Russia, NASA to continue joint ISS flights

MOSCOW: Russian and US space agencies have agreed to keep working together to deliver crews to the International Space Station (ISS) until at least 2025, Russian corporation Roscosmos said Thursday. The space sector—including its so-called cross-flights that involve sending crews from different nationalities on one spacecraft—is a rare area of cooperation remaining between Moscow and Washington since Russia sent troops to Ukraine. "An agreement was reached to continue cross-flights until 2025 inclusive," Roscosmos said in a press release. The decision was taken "to maintain the reliability of the ISS as a whole," it added. — AFP

China: Taiwan 'hyping up' interference claims

BEIJING: China's defense ministry on Thursday accused Taiwan's leadership of "hyping up" claims that Beijing is interfering in the self-ruled island's upcoming presidential election. "The DPP authorities have been hyping up that China's mainland is interfering in its elections," ministry spokesperson Wu Qian told a press conference, using the initials of Taiwan's ruling Democratic Progressive Party. He accused Taipei of trying to "stoke confrontation and manipulate the election". One of the main themes in the lead-up to Taiwan's closely watched January 13 vote is how the presidential candidates will handle relations with China. — AFP

Business

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 29, 2023

2024 to mark beginning of a new world with technological change

UBS Year Ahead 2024 report outlines what investors should expect in New Year



TOKYO: Pedestrians walk near the Ameya-Yokocho in Ueno, one of the busiest open-air markets in Tokyo, ahead of the New Year holiday on December 28, 2023. — AFP

GENEVA: With uncertainties set to persist in both the economic and geopolitical spheres, investors should focus on quality, get in balance, and stay disciplined yet agile. Looking at the decade ahead, there are opportunities to capture growth in leaders from disruption, including generative AI, and in private markets, according to a report by UBS's Chief Investment Office.

In the Year Ahead 2024, UBS Global Wealth Management's (GWM) Chief Investment Office (CIO) outlines what investors should expect as they enter what it set out to be, "a new world". According to the report, this new world – defined by economic uncertainty and geopolitical instability, but also profound technological change – leads to three key conclusions for the year ahead.

First, the strength of the US economy in 2023 is likely to give way to slower, though still positive, growth in 2024, while European growth should remain subdued, and China enters a "new normal" of lower, but potentially higher quality growth. Second, central banks are expected to start their rate-cutting cycles next year. And finally, politics will have an outsized role in 2024, with the upcoming US elections, and ongoing geopolitical tensions and wars.

Manage liquidity: With interest rates expected to fall in 2024, investors should consider limiting overall cash balances and take opportunities to optimize yields, using fixed term deposits, bond ladders, and structured solutions.

Chinese smartphone giant Xiaomi unveils first electric car

BEIJING: Chinese consumer electronics giant Xiaomi unveiled its first electric car model on Thursday, with its boss declaring ambitions of becoming a global automotive powerhouse despite fierce competition at home. Beijing-based Xiaomi, which is the world's fourth-largest smartphone manufacturer, is also a leading provider of tablets, smartwatches, headphones and electric scooters.

The company announced in 2021 its intended foray into electric vehicles, joining a trend that has seen several major Chinese tech companies pivot towards the highly competitive sector.

Xiaomi boss Lei Jun took to the stage in Beijing

Stock markets mixed as trading year nears end

LONDON: Stock markets diverged on the penultimate trading day of 2023 Thursday as investors cautiously look ahead to next year when the US Federal Reserve is expected to cut interest rates.

Wall Street advanced at the open but European stock markets were mixed in afternoon deals. Asian equities mostly closed higher, with Tokyo bucking the trend as it fell. Equities have trended higher since late October as the market has embraced moderating inflation and a strong labor market in the belief the US economy can avoid recession. Data Thursday from the Department of Labor showed a slight increase in unemployment claims. However, the level

Buy quality: Quality bonds should deliver both yield and capital appreciation, while stocks with stable balance sheets and sustainable profit margins are likely best positioned to generate earnings despite weaker economic growth.

Trade the range in currencies and commodities. With the USD expected to remain well supported around current levels, and oil prices to trade in a \$90–100/bbl band, yield generation strategies, or strategies that enable investors to systematically buy currencies below current levels offer opportunity.

Hedge market risks: Geopolitical uncertainty means investors need to prepare for volatility ahead. In addition to diversification, investors can further insulate portfolios against specific risks through capital preservation strategies, using alternatives, or with positions in oil and gold. Mark Haefele, Chief Investment Officer at UBS GWM, says: "We see 2024 mark the beginning of a new world. And while it can be easy to feel a sense of trepidation when faced with new challenges, years of adversity reinforce three things in terms of investing – the value of global diversification, the virtue of patience, and, most important, the resilience of humankind."

Equities will likely deliver negative returns and bonds positive returns. A sharp slowdown in growth – possibly resulting from the cumulative effect of interest rate hikes enacted so far – results in a moderate or severe recession. Grim investor sentiment and sharply lower earnings expectations feed into equity

price declines. Bonds fare well as interest rate expectations plummet and investors seek safe havens.

The expectation is for equities to deliver positive and bonds flat returns. Strong economic growth buoys corporate earnings growth, investor sentiment, and ultimately equity prices. By contrast, resilient growth and persistently above-target inflation keep bond yields elevated or push them even higher, leading to flat bond returns.

The "Five Ds" to watch in the decade ahead

The economic aftermath of the pandemic has been wide-ranging and often unexpected. The unusual economic mix of consistently high inflation and interest rate levels not seen in more than 15 years, yet defiantly low unemployment and robust growth, begs the question of whether the "new world" also brings with it a new macroeconomic regime. The answer to that question will be defined by developments in the "Five Ds": deglobalization, demographics, digitalization, decarbonization and debt.

According to the report, investment opportunities to capture value and growth in the decade ahead include:

- Picking leaders from disruption. Some of the highest returns in equity markets over the decade ahead are expected to come among those companies that can harness new technologies to grow markets, dislodge incumbents, or slash costs. Successfully identifying these "leaders from disruption"



Traders work on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange.

remains low by historic standards. About 15 minutes into trading, the Dow Jones Industrial Average was up 0.1 percent at 37,698.02. The index closed at a record on Wednesday.

Global stock markets have mostly been on the front foot since the Fed's most recent meeting, when

price declines. Bonds fare well as interest rate expectations plummet and investors seek safe havens.

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BEIJING: Xiaomi boss Lei Jun took to the stage in Beijing Thursday to unveil the SU7, a sedan that is scheduled to enter the market in 2025.

line channels. The firm was placed on a blacklist by the United States in 2021 due to alleged links to the Chinese military. — AFP

it signaled its rate-hike cycle could be nearing an end as inflation slows. "Indices have been powered higher, partly by optimism about a soft landing for the US and there is still a risk of the economy slowing more sharply as the full effect of higher borrowing costs filter through," noted Susannah Streeter, head of money and markets at Hargreaves Lansdown.

While US inflation has slowed, it remains above the Fed's long-term target of around two percent, and analysts warned that consumer spending had still not bounced back to healthy levels. US retail sales over the key holiday shopping season were up 3.1 percent year-on-year, according to the Mastercard SpendingPulse survey, but that was markedly down from the previous year's 7.6-percent jump. "This is a reflection of a more cautious consumer and less discounting from retailers due to better inventory management," said asset manager Louis Navellier in a note. "While inflation is falling, the runup from last year's high rate has still squeezed budgets against a modest wage growth closer to four percent." — AFP

is critical to boosting long-term portfolio potential.

- Capturing growth with private markets. Private market managers should be well positioned to provide capital, through equity and debt investments, to support key growth areas including the transition to net-zero; healthcare and infrastructure; as well as AI and digitalization. The asset class therefore offers attractive opportunities for investors to gain differentiated exposure to long-term opportunities in exchange for lower liquidity.

Drivers could include high rates of investment linked to digitalization (AI), decarbonization, and defense. In this scenario, the expectation is for strong earnings growth and good performance from equities, but more muted initial performance from bonds as investors price interest rates staying higher for longer. Potential drivers of this scenario include a prominent role for AI or a swing back toward globalization. This scenario would likely be favorable for both equities and bonds. The expectation is for good earnings growth to support equities, and lower interest rate expectations to support bonds. Potential drivers include aging populations or the promise of AI and renewable energy not meeting expectations. This scenario would likely be initially positive for bonds as financial repression is used to manage rising debt burdens. Equity multiples could be supported by central bank stimulus, but companies could also struggle to deliver earnings growth.

Fitch: Ethiopia in 'restricted default' after missed payment

WASHINGTON: Fitch announced Wednesday that it downgraded Ethiopia's credit rating to "restricted default" after the African country missed a \$33 million coupon payment. The credit agency also cut the rating of Ethiopia's \$1 billion Eurobond to "default" for the same reason, it said in a commentary.

But Fitch said the country's local-currency debt rating remained at CCC- because the government "has continued to service" the debt. The Ethiopian government is currently in talks with creditors to restructure debt held in Eurobonds. The country has already reached an agreement with other creditors, including China, to secure \$1.5 billion in debt relief.

After missing the payment on December 11, the Ethiopian Finance Ministry emphasized an intention to ensure "consistency and fairness" towards creditors. "Ethiopia's decision to withhold the December coupon payment on its Eurobond, despite the affordable amount at stake, stemmed from the intention to treat all external creditors equitably," the ministry said on December 15.

"A failure to do so could indeed jeopardize ongoing discussions with other external lenders on the same matter." The government is holding talks on an aid package with the International Monetary Fund, but must reach an agreement on debt restructuring with a majority of creditors.

The finances of Africa's second most populous country have been hit by the two-year conflict in the northern region of Tigray that ended with a peace deal in November last year. Ethiopia has said it needs around \$20 billion to rebuild northern Ethiopia after the war that claimed the lives of around half a million people, according to US estimates. The landlocked country has about \$28 billion of external debt and is also grappling with sky-high inflation and a shortage of foreign currency reserves. — AFP

US economy resilient, growth likely to slow in 2024: UBS

European growth to remain sluggish; Chinese economy to grow by 4.4%

WASHINGTON: US economic growth was more resilient than expected in 2023, with the support of excess consumer savings. In 2024, we think growth is likely to slow. High interest rates are likely to curb the propensity to spend: Items often purchased by borrowing, like houses and cars, are the least affordable they have been in years. Households are having to grapple with the end of childcare subsidies, the trimming of Medicaid rolls, and the resumption of student loan payments. And we think savings rates are likely to rise as confidence ebbs.

No significant contraction. While we expect a slowdown, we do not expect a significant contraction in activity. It would be historically unusual for the US economy to avoid a recession after a period of rate hikes. We expect the strength of the US economy in 2023 to give way to slower, though still positive, growth in 2024 as consumers face mounting headwinds. We expect European growth to remain subdued, and China to enter a "new normal" of lower, but potentially higher-quality, growth.

First, job security among the key spending group of middle-income households is likely to remain high. Second, we expect solid investment spending related to artificial intelligence, semiconductors, infrastructure, and green energy. Third, strong household and business balance sheets should mean a degree of resilience against negative shocks.

Real consumer incomes should rise because of falling inflation and a resilient labor market, and we expect those to translate into higher consumer spending. Households have already accumulated precautionary savings and reduced debt.

We expect European growth to remain sluggish overall. Monetary policy will likely stay restrictive through next year, even after the three rates cuts we expect. Bank lending will likely be constrained by pressure on bank profitability, less generous support from the European Central Bank (ECB), and concern over remuneration of reserves. Subdued external demand and high energy costs are likely to weigh on exporters and manufacturers.

We expect the Chinese economy to grow by 4.4 percent in 2024, below an estimated 5.2 percent in 2023, weighed down by muted consumption, slow external demand, and challenges in the property sector. Over the longer term, a shrinking labor force, structural limits to trade-driven growth, and a fragile geopolitical balance mean the era of over 6 percent annual growth for China is likely behind us. Still a growth engine. A new normal for the Chinese economy is no reason to write it off, however. Beijing recently announced a CNY 1 trillion bond issuance program that could lift next year's GDP growth by 0.4–0.8 percentage points, and this could foreshadow more policy action in 2024. Longer term, we expect consumer spending, leadership in the carbon transition, and industrial supply chain upgrades to provide durable and quality growth drivers.

The conditions that allowed this included future inflation expectations being well anchored, a tight labor market, and sizable household savings—three features that are present in today's environment. The recession in 2020 was triggered by the coronavirus pandemic. Our base case remains that the US will achieve a "softish" landing in 2024, thanks to robust labor de-



GLENDAL, US: People gather in the Americana at Brand shopping center on the day after Christmas on December 26, 2023 in Glendale, California. — AFP

mand, solid investment spending, and strong consumer and business balance sheets. We think slower growth will lead to lower interest rate expectations, and lower yields, in 2024, making high-quality bonds an attractive investment

opportunity. We expect equity markets to rise broadly, but particularly like quality companies, including those in the technology sector, with the potential to grow earnings against a backdrop of less robust economic activity. — UBS report

High interest rates the new normal

GENEVA: In our view, government bond markets are overpricing the risk that high interest rates will represent the new nor-

mal, and we expect yields to fall in 2024.

Inflation made progress toward central bank targets in 2023, and in 2024 we believe that journey will continue. In our base case, we expect US and Eurozone core consumer price inflation to end 2024 in the 2–2.5 percent range. Key drivers include falling homeowner-related inflation, weaker consumer demand, and slower wage growth.

We believe that the combination of

lower growth and lower inflation should lead to interest rate cuts in 2024. Although inflation will likely remain above the 2 percent targets through most, or all, of the year ahead, we believe policymakers will be sufficiently confident by midyear that inflation is falling sustainably toward Key questions for 2024 17 target. Our base case is for the ECB and Bank of England each to cut rates by 75bps in 2024, while we expect the

Fed and Swiss National Bank to ease by 50bps next year.

Markets are implying that the Fed will not cut rates below 4.2 percent over the next five years. While it is possible that interest rates could stay higher for longer than we expect, we consider it highly unlikely that the Fed will not need to cut rates below 4 percent, or otherwise intervene in markets, within the next half-decade. Over that time frame, at least one recess-

sion, period of low inflation, or financial turbulence should be considered likely. Political decisions to engage in large and unfunded fiscal spending create risks to this view. Expect bond yields to fall. We expect slower economic growth in 2024 to lower interest rate expectations, both over the short and longer term.

Commensurate to this, we expect the 10-year US Treasury yield to fall to 3.5 percent by the end of next year. — UBS

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Business

Developing countries are grappling with shrinking growth prospects: World Bank

Mounting debt crisis making it harder for countries to confront challenges

WASHINGTON: The world is facing myriad global challenges—including climate change, pandemics, and conflict. At the same time, many developing countries are dealing with shrinking growth prospects, weakening investment, and surging debt. These trends are reversing hard-won development gains and threatening progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals: nearly 700 million people are living in extreme poverty, and almost half the world's population live on less than \$6.85 a day. These challenges are having particularly negative impacts on women and girls, poor and vulnerable people, and other marginalized communities.

As we address these challenges, global public goods are an important part of the solution. These are goods that benefit everyone and can be used over and over again without running out—biodiversity, clean air, the prevention of communicable diseases, international trade, the international financial architecture, and open data are some examples.

The World Bank Group is working to strengthen the delivery of these goods through our financing, knowledge, and partnerships. From 2020 through 2022, our financing for global public goods—including climate action, pandemic preparedness, and support for countries affected by fragility—exceeded \$100 billion.

The largest multilateral financier of climate action in developing countries, the World Bank's total climate finance amounted to a record-high of \$29.4 billion, or 40 percent of total IBRD and IDA finance, in fiscal 2023. About half of the Bank's climate finance supports adaptation to address mounting climate impacts on the poorest and most vulnerable people. Since June 2022, we have produced more than 20 Country Climate and Development Reports—core diagnostics that integrate climate change and development considerations for countries, helping them prioritize the most effective ways to reduce emissions and boost adaptation.

Collectively, the low-carbon development strategies from these reports can reduce emissions by 70 percent, without harming growth. As of July 1, 2023, all new Bank financing operations—including projects and other assistance—that go to our Board will be expected to demonstrate how they meet our commitment to the Paris Agreement goals.

The COVID-19 pandemic made clear the importance of preventing, preparing for, and responding to pandemics, especially in developing countries. Since the onset of the pandemic, the World Bank has provided \$14.2 billion to over 100 countries to support their health responses. We also help countries finance and build stronger, more resilient health systems, including more than \$30 billion to strengthen primary care and public health. We invest in regional programs, such as the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, to better detect diseases, expand laboratory capacities, and pool resources. Through the Pandemic Fund, which is housed at the World Bank, we finance projects that address critical gaps and strengthen pandemic prevention, preparedness, and response in developing countries.

Nearly half the world's extreme poor live in countries affected by fragility, conflict, and violence, and the spillover effects place all countries at risk. The World Bank supports conflict-sensitive, green, and inclusive growth in these contexts, with a strong focus on preventing conflict. Through our partnerships, including with UN agencies and other humanitarian organizations, we engage in the most challenging situations. Since IDA16, average annual IDA financing for fragile and conflict-affected countries has increased more than fivefold; and the share of IBRD's portfolio in these countries nearly doubled from fiscal years 2016 to 2021. To address forced displacement, we help countries support refugees, internally displaced people, and host communities through concessional financing, social protection programs, and economic development.

Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the World Bank Group has leveraged our broad range of financing instruments to rapidly disburse funds while also mobilizing financing and support from donor partners. We have mobilized more than \$37.5 billion in emergency financing for Ukraine by providing platforms for generous support from donors and international partners to supplement our own resources. This financing helps the government meet urgent budget needs, support essential public services, and address critical recovery and repair needs. By the end of fiscal 2023, we had disbursed nearly \$23 billion. This support has reached 13 mil-



NUWARA ELIYA, Sri Lanka: Women farmers carry sacks of leaves at a tea estate in Nuwara Eliya on December 27, 2023. — AFP

lion Ukrainians, helping provide wages for essential employees, pensions for the elderly, and social programs for the vulnerable.

A mounting debt crisis is making it harder for countries to confront these challenges. Total debt in developing countries is at the highest level in 50 years—about 60 percent of the poorest countries are at extreme risk of debt distress, if not already facing it, and the danger is spreading to many middle-income countries. This trend has been further exacerbated by rising interest rates, depreciating currencies, and slowing global growth.

The World Bank supports comprehensive, long-term solutions for countries dealing with unsustainable debt levels. This includes our support for the G20's Common Framework, targeted relief for

countries in debt distress, and measures to enhance accountability and debt transparency. We also co-chair the Global Sovereign Debt Roundtable with the IMF and the G20 Presidency of India to address barriers to debt restructuring.

As these and other challenges evolve, the World Bank Group is finding ways to better support countries, strengthen our response to crises, and reverse the precipitous decline in economic growth, poverty reduction, and human development. We are working closely with governments, civil society, the private sector, and other stakeholders to hone our vision and enhance our mission to better aid a rapidly changing world. Ultimately, we expect to promote even more sustainable, inclusive, and resilient growth as we embark on a new era in development. — The World Bank report

UK lifts Brexit obstacles for French students

LONDON: Britain on Thursday lifted some costly obstacles placed on school trips post Brexit—but only for students from France as campaigners called for all EU countries to benefit. The U-turn follows talks earlier this year over the issue between Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and French President Emmanuel Macron.

French and EU nationals at schools in France who cross the Channel for a language-learning holiday will now need to carry only a simple identity card, as was the case before the UK formally departed the European Union in 2021. While non-EU nationals attending French schools will still need a passport to enter the UK on a language-learning holiday, London has scrapped the need for them to have a visa costing £115 (\$147). British Educational Travel Association, which has seen demand for school trips tumble since Brexit, described Thursday's changes as "a positive step ahead", while urging the UK government to expand them for the entire European Union.

BETA is pushing also for a new scheme that would allow groups of EU nationals and residents aged under 18 to travel to the UK for up to six weeks for educational visits. In France, the director of an organization offering school trips warmly welcomed the partial lifting of restrictions that have been made ahead of the new year, claiming it would trigger a resurgence in visits. — AFP

Argentines protest Milei's sweeping economic reforms

BUENOS AIRES: Thousands of Argentines took to the streets of Buenos Aires on Wednesday, clashing with police as they protested a decree of sweeping economic reform and deregulation published by President Javier Milei.

Marching at the behest of labor unions, the protesters demanded the courts intervene to invalidate the mega-decree they say would carve away at worker and consumer protections.

Congress is sitting in an extraordinary session this week, at the request of ultra-libertarian Milei—in office since December 10 -- to consider the plan. He sent a package of bills to give effect to his decree to parliament on Wednesday. The decree would change or scrap more than 350 economic regulations in a country accustomed to heavy government intervention in the market.

Among others, it abolishes a price ceiling on rent, eliminates some worker protections and scraps laws shielding consumers from abusive price increases at a time annual inflation exceeds 160 percent and the poverty level has surpassed 40 percent. A number of civic groups on Saturday filed a court motion to have the decree declared unconstitutional. On Wednesday, protesters waved Argentine flags and placards reading: "The homeland is not for sale."

"We do not question the legitimacy of President Milei, but we want him to respect the division of powers. Workers need to defend their rights when there is an unconstitutionality," construction union leader Gerardo Martinez told reporters at the march.

After the protest ended, small, scattered groups continued to confront police. Local media said seven people were arrested. Milei's "chainsaw plan" to cut state spending has triggered a series of street pro-



BUENOS AIRES: Riot police clash with protesters after a demonstration called by Argentina's Labor Union (CGT) against President Javier Milei's emergency decree in Buenos Aires on December 27, 2023. — AFP

tests against the government. Other aspects of the decree include an end to automatic pension increases, restrictions on the right to strike, easing away from price caps for private health services, and the privatization of some public companies.

It also terminates some 7,000 civil service contracts. Unless both houses of Congress scrap the plan in its entirety, the decree will enter into force on Friday.

Milei's far-right party, Freedom Advances, has 40 seats in the 257-member lower house of parliament and seven senators out of 72. "The decree is destructive of all labor rights," said 45-year-old

teacher Martin Lucero, who took part in the protest. "The Argentine people chose Milei as president of the nation, not as emperor," he added. The 53-year-old self-described "anarcho-capitalist" has targeted spending cuts equivalent to five percent of gross domestic product.

Shortly after taking office, his administration devalued Argentina's peso by more than 50 percent, and announced huge cuts in generous state subsidies of fuel and transport from January.

Milei has also announced a halt to all new public construction projects and a year-long suspension of state advertising. — AFP

S Korean company's pro-parent and office-free policies

SEOUL: Early starts to workdays and late finishes are routine in South Korea, a country notorious for its hard-driving corporate culture, but Erin Lim knew she wanted to do things differently at her business.

The 38-year-old entrepreneur pioneered office-free work to help working mums like her in 2017 -- well before work-from-home flexibility became a happy side effect of the pandemic, including for many parents. After the birth of her first son, Lim, who describes herself as an "overwhelmingly picky customer", could not find a baby carrier she liked.

So, with her six-month-old son in tow, she headed to Seoul's main fabric market. Soon, she had a prototype of the baby wrap she wanted and, despite having no manufacturing or entrepreneurial experience, launched a business making and selling the carriers out of her front room.

"I'm a person who doesn't take anything for granted. So, for example, when I started the company, I asked myself: why would I need an office?" Now, Lim's company has 55 staff members -- 92 percent women,

the majority working parents—and they all still work almost exclusively from home, offering flexible hours and keeping in-person meetings to the bare minimum.

"The reason: I wanted to watch my children grow up," Lim told AFP, adding that family life should take priority over a rigid, inflexible work schedule. The daily school drop-off "is a really essential time—to walk with them to school", she said. So her company, Konny, enshrined the right to a school drop-off into its policies. "I didn't want to have a company culture that didn't understand that," she added.

At first, Lim and her husband—the company's second employee—stored their inventory in a spare room and did everything themselves. But as orders flooded in, Lim soon became overwhelmed by customer questions. She hired a customer service agent—a highly skilled executive who had previously left her decade-long job at a major South Korean gaming company over childcare issues.

"There is a Korean phrase: the graveyard of many women's careers is the winter hol-



SEOUL, South Korea: This picture taken on November 29, 2023 shows Erin Lim (left), CEO of baby products company Konny, posing with her husband Kim Dong-hyun (right) during an interview at her home in Seoul. — AFP photos

iday for their kid's first year at elementary school," said Lim, referring to the first major school break, when many families run into childcare challenges. South Korea has some of the lowest rates of female workforce participation among OECD countries, but the data -- 55 percent for women versus 73.5 percent for men—disguises what activists say is an even worse reality of underemployment for working mothers.

Many mothers are forced out of hard-won, high-paying jobs after having children due to childcare issues, experts say, with the official "economic participation rate" for women in their 40s far lower than for men -- 67.5 percent compared to 92.1 percent. Unlike companies in many countries, most major South Korean firms quickly required workers to return to the office after the pandemic, with minimal

work-from-home options. "An average Korean company requires an employee to go to work early in the morning and finish work late at night with occasional after-work dinner. That is not sustainable," Lim said. South Korea has some of the world's lowest birth rates, and despite hundreds of millions of dollars of government incentives, many women choose not to become mothers. — AFP

Lifestyle

Shakira's Colombian home city unveils statue in her honor



View of a statue of Colombian singer Shakira at the Malecon in Barranquilla, Colombia, on Dec 26, 2023. — AFP

Colombian superstar Shakira's Caribbean home city of Barranquilla unveiled a 6.5-meter hip-swaying statue in her honor on Tuesday. The towering bronze and aluminum creation depicts the singer in a bikini top, bare middle and a long, flowing skirt, her hands clasped over her head and one hip jutting out in one of her characteristic dance moves.

"Hips that do not lie, a unique talent, a voice that moves masses," reads the inscription at the base of the sculpture unveiled on the banks of the Magdalena River at a ceremony attended by Shakira's parents William Mebarak and Nidia Ripoll. "Hips don't lie" is the title of one of 46-year-old Shakira's award-winning songs.

On the platform X, the singer thanked sculptor Yino Marquez and his art student collaborators for "this example of the enormous artistic talent of the people of my country". Shakira Isabel Mebarak Ripoll, an icon of Latina girl power, has sold some 80 million albums worldwide and won three Grammy awards. She has recently been in the news for completely different reasons, investigated over unpaid taxes in Spain and paying millions of euros in settlements.

In 2021, Shakira was named in the "Pandora Papers" leaks, which revealed the wealth and tax avoidance strategies of the global elite. She has since released a new hit song with Argentine DJ Bizarrap that has been viewed more than 666 million times on YouTube and won 2023 song of the year at the Latin Grammy Awards. — AFP

'Aquaman,' 'Color Purple' notch notable weekends at North American box office

"Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom," starring Jason Momoa as a sea-dwelling superhero, splashed to the top of the three-day Christmas weekend box office despite muted ticket sales for the DC Extended Universe offering, industry watchers reported. The film took in \$38.3 million in its debut weekend in the United States and Canada for the Friday-through-Monday period, according to Exhibitor Relations.

The DC comics sequel follows the king of Atlantis as he splits his time between the depths of the sea and the surface world, combining forces with his half-brother and former enemy as turmoil and climate change threatens the underwater realm. Warner Bros' fantasy musical "Wonka," starring Timothee Chalamet as a younger version of Roald Dahl's famous chocolatier Willy Wonka — a character first played by Gene Wilder and then Johnny Depp — placed second for \$28.4 million.

The new musical version of "The Color Purple," which only debuted on Christmas Monday, meanwhile landed in third with \$18.2 million in sales — the biggest Christmas Day opening since "Sherlock



Holmes" in 2009. The new reimagining is based on the Pulitzer-Prize winning novel by Alice Walker that then became a beloved movie before landing on Broadway as a musical. It follows the struggles and triumphs of a young black woman in rural Georgia in the early 20th century.

The movie rounds out Warner Bros' standing in the top three spots and stars Taraji P Henson, Fantasia Barrino-Taylor, Danielle Brooks, H.E.R. and Colman Domingo, among others. In fourth was animated comedy "Migration" about a family of mallard ducks out on an adventure as they fly from New England to Jamaica, which earned \$17.5 million in its debut weekend.

And romcom "Anyone But You" debuted in fifth with \$8.1 million. Rounding out the top 10 this holiday weekend were: "The Iron Claw" (\$6.8 million), "Salaar Part 1 - Ceasefire" (\$6.7 million), "The Boys in the Boat" (\$5.7 million) (Monday/Christmas Day debut), "Hunger Games: The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes" (\$4.1 million) and "Dunki" (\$3.7 million). — AFP



Tom Smothers of US duo The Smothers Brothers dies at 86

Tom Smothers of the groundbreaking singing comedy duo The Smothers Brothers, whose combination of folk music, jokes and biting political commentary earned American admirers and detractors alike over a six-decade career, has died at 86, his family said Wednesday.



Tom Smothers

A statement posted by the National Comedy Center — which hailed Tom Smothers as a "true champion" of free speech — said he died on Tuesday following a recent battle with cancer.

"Tom was not only the loving older brother that everyone would want in their life,

he was a one-of-a-kind creative partner," Dick Smothers said in the statement. "I am forever grateful to have spent a lifetime together with him, on and off stage, for over 60 years." Tom and Dick Smothers began performing on stage in the late 1950s.

Success grew quickly, and they appeared on major prime-time comedy and variety shows, delivering a funny, often provocative shtick that resonated with viewers. They went on to host their own one-hour variety show on CBS television, The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour, which debuted in 1967 and helped pave the way for other comedy and sketch shows such as Saturday Night Live years later.

But their forthright wit and scathing critiques of parts of American culture and the government during the politically explosive Sixties ran afoul of network executives, and their show was cancelled in 1969. "It was kind of original," Tom Smothers once said of the format he perfected with his brother. "When we started singing folk songs I'd make up introductions to the songs and people would laugh. And pretty soon my brother would say something like 'That's wrong' or 'That's the dumbest thing I've ever heard,'" Tom said in a 2000 interview with the Television Academy Foundation.

It took about a year for the brothers to hone their formula of music, sibling rivalry and argument, he said, adding: "It became a working conversation of disagreement." The Smothers Brothers often touched on US politics, social upheaval and war, and their show — whose writers included the likes of Steve Martin and Rob Reiner — became legendary in a rapidly changing industry. "It was huge, and it was spectacularly subversive in a splendid way," comedian Lewis Black told All Arts TV in 2019. — AFP

Japan department store chain red-faced after Christmas cake fiasco

In prim and proper Japan, all it took to prompt a prestigious department store chain into an earnest, public apology in the aftermath of Christmas were complaints over mangled \$40 cakes. "Cake collapse" has dominated headlines for days in Japan after irate consumers took to social media over the weekend to post pictures of crumbled Christmas cakes delivered to their doorsteps.

Sold online by major chain Takashimaya, the strawberry-topped cakes — meant to be immaculately decorated — arrived to some customers miserably flattened and fragmented, images on social media showed. Out of the nearly 3,000 frozen cakes sold, more than 800 were confirmed to have been marred as of Tuesday night, Takashimaya said in a statement on Wednesday.

"We would like to apologize deeply for the deformation in our frozen Christmas cakes that betrayed the expectations of many of our customers," Takashimaya senior official Kazuhisa Yokoyama told a nationally televised news conference. The firm said customers may be reimbursed for the cakes, priced at 5,400 yen a piece, depending on delivery conditions.

The debacle left Takashimaya officials organiz-

ing an exhaustive probe into its production and delivery partners. Takashimaya though "couldn't identify a cause", Yokoyama told reporters, claiming temperature management was not the issue. Still, "we, as the seller, are responsible for delivering our products to the hands of our customers, including from production to distribution", Takashimaya said in the statement. "The entire responsibility rests on us."

Many consumers expressed disappointment online over the destroyed cakes. One user of social media platform X posted two days before Christmas about their dismay, alongside photos of a mushed confection. "I ordered a Christmas cake online for the first time, but when it arrived, it was completely messed up. I thought I could trust Takashimaya, but is this something that often happens with a cake delivery? I don't know," they posted.

Another shared an image of a more intact cake, but voiced similar dissatisfaction. "Takashimaya's cake was delivered to me like this. I'm sad," the X user wrote. But others tried their best to keep their Christmas spirits up. One X user described the creativity with which their friend had let a three-year-old son decorate the cake "as he likes" to cover up the mess. With chocolate spread all over, "the result was funnier than when it had arrived... it's now full of children's dreams", said the X post, which garnered more than 16 million views. — AFP

Eiffel Tower closed as staff go on strike

The Eiffel Tower, one of the world's top tourist attractions, was closed Wednesday after staff went on strike, the landmark's operator said. The one-day stoppage on the 100th anniversary of the death of engineer Gustave Eiffel, who built the tower, was to protest against "the current way it is managed", the hard-left CGT union said in a statement. The tower's operator SETE was "headed for disaster", it said.

The CGT said management was running the Eiffel Tower according to a business model that was "too ambitious and unsustainable" and that it said was based on an inflated estimate of future visitor numbers, while underestimating construction costs. SETE apologized to visitors, advising anyone with electronic tickets for Wednesday "to check their email" for more information on their booking.

The Eiffel Tower — Paris' most famous landmark — attracts nearly seven million visitors a year, around three-quarters of them foreigners, according to its website. During the COVID pandemic numbers dropped sharply due to closures and travel restrictions, but recovered to 5.9 million in 2022. The CGT said the tower's management was basing its future budget on 7.4 million annual visitors, although "this level has never been reached".

Stephane Dieu, a CGT union rep at the Eiffel Tower, told AFP that the monument was not sufficiently funded to pay for "very large maintenance work" that was needed. "The Eiffel Tower is old, it's an old lady of 130 years," he said. "We have lifts here that were built in 1899." Unless a financial deal could be made with the city of Paris, "we will run out of cash in 2025, despite our visitor numbers". Some visitors who had hoped to go up the 1,083-foot structure expressed their frustration when they were



A couple prepares to pose for a photograph in front of the Eiffel Tower, closed after staff went on strike on the 100th anniversary of the death of engineer Gustave Eiffel who built the tower, in Paris on Dec 27, 2023. — AFP

turned away. "We came here this morning to visit this magnificent Eiffel Tower," said Alessandro Monaco, 40, an Italian tourist. "We were gobsmacked to see that there was a strike, that was a bit tough. It's a real pity," he said. But Marie-Christine Riviere, a French health insurance consultant, said she was not too disappointed at being unable to climb up. "The important thing is to see the Eiffel Tower, strike or no strike," she told AFP.

Arrests for Venezuelan rapper's killing 8 years after 'suicide' ruling

Venezuelan authorities said a singer named the best Spanish-language rapper by Rolling Stone did not commit suicide eight years ago but was in fact killed. Singer Tyrone Gonzalez or Canserbero, as he was better known, died in 2015 at the age of 26 in a fall from the 10th floor of an apartment building in Maracay in Venezuela's north. Investigators at the time ruled he had committed suicide after killing his friend Carlos Molnar in a fight.

On Tuesday, Attorney General Tarek William Saab showed reporters the video confessions of two individuals — siblings Natalia and Guillermo Amestica — now suspected of killing Canserbero. The case was reopened in November and the singer's body exhumed for fresh investigations. In one of the videos, Natalia Amestica says she had drugged Canserbero and Molnar — who was her husband — then stabbed them. Her brother then helped cover up the crime, staging a fight and throwing Canserbero's body from a window, according to the taped confession.

Saab said a dispute about money had led to the crime. In total, six people have been detained over the murder, said Saab. Several others are on the run. The attorney general's office has issued arrest warrants for several police officers who were at the scene, accusing them of taking money from the siblings to cover up the crime. War-

rants were also issued for a forensic pathologist and two investigators with the prosecutor's office who were involved in the investigation.

"Canserbero can rest in peace," said Saab, who compared the crime to the murder of American rapper Tupac Shakur in the United States in 1996 at the age of 25. Last month, a former gang member who had long boasted of his involvement in that crime pleaded not guilty in a US court. He has been charged over the killing despite not being the man wielding the weapon used in the crime. — AFP



Venezuela's Attorney General Tarek William Saab speaks during a press conference at the headquarters of the Public Prosecutor's Office in Caracas on Dec 26, 2023. — AFP

New York's Tenement Museum embraces black migrant history

Manhattan's Tenement Museum already preserves the history of some immigrants who shaped New York City — from destitute Irish fleeing the great famine to Jewish survivors of the Holocaust — now it is also making room for the lives of African-American migrants. Beginning next week, visitors to the museum can tour a two-room apartment that is a recreation of one once inhabited by Joseph and Rachel Moore, a black couple who lived in the area during the US Civil War in the late 19th century.

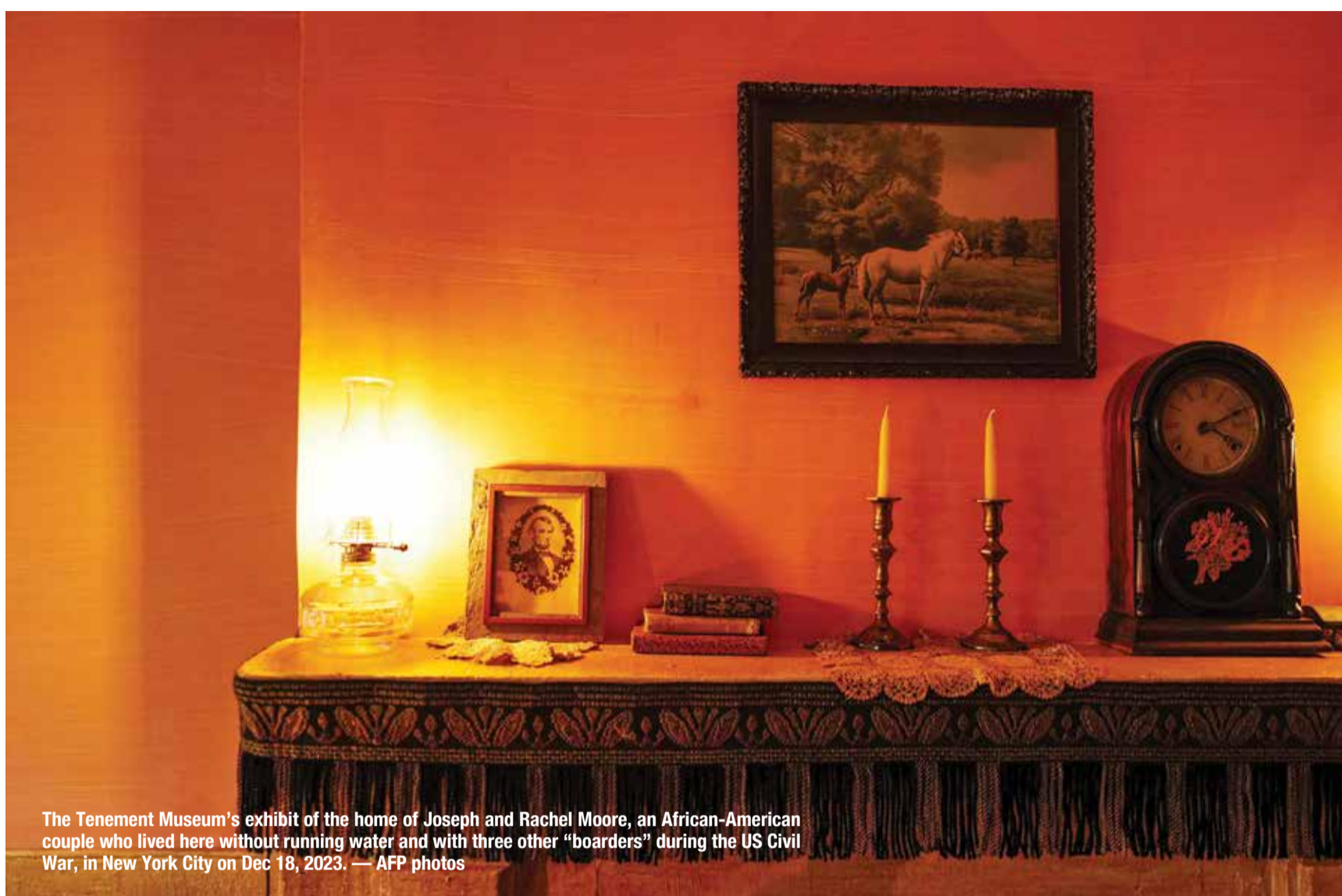
The Moores squeezed into the unit along with three other boarders. There is no running water. Laundry hangs in the kitchen. On a mantelpiece sits a portrait of Abraham Lincoln, the president who abolished slavery in 1865, as the war between the US north and south drew to an end. Joseph worked as a waiter or coachman depending on the season, Rachel was a servant and washerwoman for wealthy families.

The couple "moved to the city when they were both pretty young, in their 20s. And they lived in Manhattan through one of the most tumultuous decades of the country's history, during the Civil War... when Black Americans were gaining some new freedoms for the first time," explains Kathryn Lloyd, vice president of programs and interpretation at the museum.

Accused of 'rewriting' history

The Tenement Museum draws some 200,000 visitors a year who immerse themselves in the history of the millions of migrants who settled in New York in the 19th and 20th centuries. Many lived in large, old buildings divided into small, often-crowded apartments, which became known as tenements. The immigrants' stories echo today in the city, which struggled last year to absorb more than 100,000 migrants from Latin America.

The museum occupies two actual brick tenement buildings at 97 and 103 Orchard Street on Manhat-



The Tenement Museum's exhibit of the home of Joseph and Rachel Moore, an African-American couple who lived here without running water and with three other "boarders" during the US Civil War, in New York City on Dec 18, 2023. — AFP photos



tan's Lower East Side. The dwellings of some of the former residents have been recreated, including of the Schneiders, German beer saloon owners in the latter 1800s, and the Baldizzis, Italians who survived the Great Depression here. The Moores actually lived in a similar building in Soho, a district a 20-minute walk away that had a large African-American community.

In the city registry, Joseph Moore appears as "col'd," for "colored," signifying that he was black, right next to another Joseph Moore, also a waiter but Irish, fleeing famine in his native country and whose story is also revealed at the museum. When its permanent exhibition was expanded to include the black experience, the museum was accused of "a literal rewriting of history" in an article published in the New York Post, because the Moore family had not lived on Orchard Street.

A broader view of US identity

But after a tour, Vanessa Willoughby, 28, a Harlem resident who works in finance, said she was pleased that the museum had expanded the narrative "to include a black family in their story telling about working class New Yorkers living in the late 1800s". The museum is working to expand the history of immigration beyond that of white Europeans to include Asians and Latin Americans, and now black American migrants. For Lloyd, the museum's vice president,

telling the Moore story was crucial to understanding migration within the United States and how the stories add to what "we learn about American identity."

Rachel Moore, who was "the first generation in her family to be born free" rather than enslaved, arrived in New York in 1847. Joseph arrived 10 years later from neighboring New Jersey, where slavery had not been abolished, unlike New York. Yet the shadow of slavery loomed for him as he risked being kidnapped and taken to the South into enslavement.

In July 1863, the New York City draft riots broke out, which were revolts against enlistment in the army during the Civil War that turned into racist pogroms against New York's African Americans. The violence claimed at least 120 lives and forced 20 percent of African Americans to leave the city. The museum lost track of Rachel Moore from 1870 onward, and traced Joseph back to New Jersey, where he returned to live years later. His apartment is described in a newspaper article of the time, which also noted that it contained a portrait of Abraham Lincoln. — AFP





Ivorian chef Charlie Koffi buys ingredients for the preparation of a gouagouassou sauce at the Adjame market in Abidjan on Dec 4, 2023. — AFP photos

Ivory Coast chefs cook up new twist on African food

In the kitchen of his Abidjan restaurant, Ivory Coast chef Charlie Koffi prepares his country's staggering tropical bounty with the techniques of fine French cuisine. And he's far from alone. A growing number of his fellow chefs in the West African nation are retouching local specialties with cooking skills picked up elsewhere. One of Koffi's signature dishes is an adaptation of gouagouassou sauce, a local specialty.

In his version, a rabbit is stewed with African eggplants, spicy oil, powdered akpi seeds and local fefe pepper. "It is one of the dishes I really loved as a child," Koffi told AFP. "As a chef, it was almost an obligation to come back to it." Koffi was trained in France before opening his Abidjan restaurant, Villa Alfira, in 2017 to showcase his country's cuisine.

In the well-lit main dining room overlooking a pond where fish on the menu swim, Eric Guei tucked into a gouagouassou casserole. "I find taste and audacity in this dish," the happy customer said. "It mixes Western know-how with local flavors." Guei enjoyed the copious but beautifully presented meal with his friend Yasmine Doumbia. "Gouagouassou is a very traditional Ivory Coast dish, and to see it in a restaurant like this is a real pleasure," she said. Villa Alfira is a change from the "maquis", typical animated local eateries where braised chickens and fish are eaten by hand, along with traditional sauces, manioc polenta and fried plantains.

Grilled okra and cassava chips

A few kilometers away, a chef at the upscale restaurant La Maison Palmier is working on her new creation: A taster dish inspired by placali, a typical Ivorian dish made with sticky gumbo sauce, bits of meat and dried fish, accompanied by fermented manioc paste. Hermence Kadio, who trained locally, has her own much lighter take on the classic. She grilled the gumbo (okra), while the cassava is puffed up and turned into chips.

Every week the restaurant's French head chef Mathieu Gasnier offers amuse-bouche — small bite-sized appetizers — like these to "re-awaken the memories of people who grew up with these dishes." About half his clientele is Ivorian, he said. "Even if our restaurant's cuisine is intended to be international since we are in a five-star hotel, I think it would be wrong not to take advantage of all these beautiful products that surround us," he said.

Grains such as fonio and sorghum grow in the Ivory Coast's hot dry northern savannas, said Koffi, while the forested south produces local varieties of spinach and typical tropical products such as bananas and yams.



A view of the banana foutou with peanut sauce.



A view of the rabbit gouagouassou sauce.



A view of the puffed cassava chips, placali with grilled okra.

Healthier and tastier

N'Cho Yapi, who founded the group Chefs: Creators of Emotions, said Ivorian cooks began going back to their culinary roots just after the turn of the century. Before that, chefs at fancy restaurants "had the habit of offering Western dishes with imported products," he said. "But the cost of living kept going up," so they turned to less-expensive products "they had just under their noses". And local specialties are appearing more and more on the menus of the luxury restaurants that have mushroomed across Abidjan in recent years, Yapi added.

Valerie Rollainth, an Ivorian chef trained in France at the famous Institut Paul Bocuse, insisted that typically hearty Ivorian cuisine is no longer suited to the capital's increasingly sedentary lifestyle. "There are too few vegetables, a shocking quantity of oil, and the dishes are cooked too long" and lose their nutrients, she said.

At the nutritional workshops she organizes, she urges people to eat local products in new ways, such as raw okra, which "is very good against diabetes". "Some diseases are linked to eating habits," she said. "In the Ivory Coast, not everyone has access to health care, but everyone has access to healthy food." — AFP



Koffi prepares gouagouassou sauce with rabbit accompanied by rice in his restaurant at Villa Alfira in Abidjan.



Chef Hermence Kadio prepares puffed cassava chips and grilled okra placali at the Maison Palmier restaurant in Abidjan.



French chef Mathieu Gasnier serves a banana foutou appetizer with a rich sauce and puffed cassava chips accompanied by grilled okra placali at a restaurant in Abidjan.

Sports

Marsh's 96 leads Australia fightback after Pakistan blitz

Cummins takes five as Pakistan all out for 264

MELBOURNE: Mitchell Marsh hit a counter-attacking 96 in a fighting rescue mission with a dogged Steve Smith Thursday to help Australia build a 241-run lead and regain control of the second Test against Pakistan.

The hosts were reeling at 16-4 after dismissing Pakistan for 264 in reply to their first innings 318 in Melbourne. But Marsh and Smith put their heads down to compile what could be a match-saving 153-run partnership.

At stumps on day three, the hosts were 187-6 with Smith out for 50, off 176 balls, in the last over of the day, leaving Alex Carey unbeaten on 16. Shaheen Shah Afridi and Mir Hamza both took three wickets. It could have been a different story but Abdullah Shafique spilled a regulation catch in the slips when Marsh was on 20.

Marsh eventually fell four runs short of a deserved century, but it took a superb one-handed diving catch at slip from Agha Salman to remove him. "Obviously that one hurts at the end," Marsh said of Smith's dismissal. "But from 16-4, if you'd told us we'd have a 240-run lead at the end of the day, we'd take that."

"It's evenly poised," he added. "As we saw, I think there's still enough in the wicket so add a few more runs tomorrow and we'll give it our all." After Cummins took 5-48 and Nathan Lyon 4-73 to dismiss Pakistan, Australia needed to negotiate a tricky 15 minutes of the morning session.

But Usman Khawaja was out for a duck second ball, caught behind by Mohammad Rizwan off bowling spearhead Afridi. The same combination struck

again when Marnus Labuschagne edged down the legside on five as the hosts slumped to 6-2 at lunch.

When they returned, David Warner let rip with a drive to the boundary off Afridi, but he didn't last, dragging a Mir Hamza ball onto his stumps on six. He received a standing ovation as he walked off for the last time as a batsman at the Melbourne Cricket Ground, with the third Test in Sydney set to be the last of his long career.

Things got worse for the hosts when Travis Head was bowled by Hamza's inswinging yorker next delivery to leave Australia in disarray at 16-4. But Marsh saw off the hat-trick ball and along with Smith dug in to take the sting out of the attack.

Cummins takes five

When Aamer Jamal came on, Marsh slammed three boundaries in four balls to further relieve the pressure before the missed chance by Shafique. Smith played a crucial supporting role, taking 101 balls for his first boundary before reaching a gritty 40th Test half-century.

"This was a big, big opportunity," Pakistan great Waqar Younis said on commentary duties of the Shafique miss. "This might be the difference between winning and losing this game."

Pakistan had begun the day on 194-6, after an electric spell from Cummins in the final session on Wednesday saw a collapse from 124-1, and the Australia skipper was again in the thick of the action. Rizwan made a confident start, adding 13 to his overnight 29.

But he was no match for a canny Cummins, who



MELBOURNE: Pakistan bowler Shaheen Shah Afridi (L) celebrates dismissing Australian batsman Marnus Labuschagne as fellow batsman David Warner (R) looks on during the third day of the second cricket Test match between Australia and Pakistan at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) in Melbourne on December 28, 2023. — AFP

tempted him into a drive that flew straight to Warner who had just been moved to cover from slip. It broke a 45-run partnership with Jamal who began to play his shots. New partner Afridi crunched four boundaries before he was undone by Lyon's spin,

trapped lbw for 21. Jamal was in good touch, finding the ropes three times in six balls at one point in his 33 not out. Cummins grabbed his fifth wicket by bowling Hasan Ali for two before Lyon had Hamza stumped for the same score. — AFP

Kuwait win gold, silver medals at Gulf golf tourney

MUSCAT: The players of the Kuwait golf national team won Wednesday the gold and silver medals of two different categories in the Oman-hosted Gulf Golf Championship. Secretary General of the Kuwait Golf Club and head of the Kuwaiti delegation to the tournament Mazen Al Ansari told KUNA that Kuwait golfer Salem Al-Abkal won the gold medal of the U-16 category. In the U-16 double category, Al-Abkal and his compatriot Bader Al-Ansari won the silver medal, he said.

Al-Otaibi noted that Al-Abkal won the gold medal of the same competition for the third time in a row. The competition, organized by the Omani Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, commenced on Monday and concluded today. Players from five Arab-Gulf countries: Kuwait, Oman, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, participated in the three-day event. — KUNA



The 103-strong racing fleet had been battered by thunderstorms and heavy swells since setting off from Sydney Harbour on Tuesday. By Thursday morning the field had been whittled down to 92 vessels, with rough conditions forcing a number of damaged boats to retire.

'Rough as anything'

LawConnect has been the runner-up in the three previous editions of the race, while the heavily favoured Andoo Comanche was last year's victor. Beck said it was a major feat to triumph over the better-resourced Comanche boat, which bills itself as the "world's fastest supermaxi".

"The boat, I jokingly call it a shitbox. But compared to Comanche it honestly is a shitbox," Beck said. "You look up close and it's rough as anything. Comanche is a beautiful boat, it's better in every way." LawConnect's unlikely victory was even more remarkable given a violent wind gust ripped one of its sails early in the contest. "It was totally ruined. That was during one of those squalls on the first night," said Beck.

It fought a running duel with Comanche after Hong Kong-owned supermaxi SHK Scallywag, which had been in a three-way battle for the lead, was forced to bow out of the race on Tuesday evening. Law Connect crossed with a winning time of one day, 19 hours, three minutes and 58 seconds.

First held in 1945, this year marked the 25th an-



HOBART: This handout image received from Salty Dingo on December 28, 2023 shows Christian Beck (L), skipper and owner of the yacht LawConnect, reacting after receiving the John H Illingworth Challenge Cup trophy for line honours from Arthur Lane (R), the Commodore of the Cruising Yacht Club of Australia, during an official presentation for the annual Sydney to Hobart yacht race in Hobart. — AFP

niversary of a violent storm that tore into the 1998 race fleet, with wild winds whipping up mountainous seas in which six people died, five boats sank and 55 sailors were rescued. — AFP

LawConnect swoops late to win thrilling Sydney-Hobart race

SYDNEY: Australian supermaxi LawConnect took line honours in the punishing Sydney-Hobart ocean race on Thursday, pipping rival Andoo Comanche in one of the tightest-ever finishes to the blue water classic. The two 100-foot supermaxis jostled for position as they charged down Australia's east coast overnight, and were separated by around two nautical miles as they turned into the final stretch on Tasmania's River Derwent.

Having trailed for much of the morning, LawConnect outwitted Andoo Comanche with the finish line in sight after almost two full days of "cat-and-mouse" sailing. With 51 seconds separating the two yachts, race organisers said it was the second closest finish in the prestigious race's 78-year history only beaten by the 1982 edition which was decided by seven seconds.

"It's a dream come true. I never thought it was possible actually," LawConnect skipper Christian Beck told reporters in Hobart. "They took the lead pretty close to the line. We thought there was no way we could get it back."

Nadal back for one last hurrah

SYDNEY: More than two decades after bursting on the scene, the sun is setting on Rafael Nadal's storied career with the Spanish gladiator hoping his creaking body can hold up long enough to see out the season.

The 37-year-old returns to the courts in Brisbane this week, almost a year since he last played professionally before an injury curse that has long plagued him returned with a vengeance. It has been a recurring theme of a record-breaking career which has brought 22 Grand Slam titles and global respect, a painful by-product of his all-action, brutal-hitting style that has led to struggles with serious knee, wrist and foot problems.

His most recent setback, at the 2023 Australian Open, resulted in two rounds of hip surgery and fears that he would never grace the courts again. But Nadal didn't want it to end like that, and he has battled back for what he admits is likely his last season, to say goodbye to the fans, "enjoy myself again", but also be competitive.

"I don't know at what level (I can play at), I don't know what to expect, I have no idea, but I don't care right now," Nadal said this month, looking ahead to 2024. "I'm just happy to be back and with great ex-



BRISBANE: Spain's Rafael Nadal attends a training session ahead of the Brisbane International tennis tournament in Brisbane on December 28, 2023. — AFP

citement to make the effort that is necessary to have fun, and I believe that I will be competitive."

His coach Carlos Moya gave an insight into how hard it had been to get to this point, admitting there were times when he thought Nadal's career was over. "When you go through a process like this operation ... at the end of the day, going under the knife is really a last resort to try and make a comeback and retire on court," Moya told the ATP Tour website last week.

"Aware of those risks, he gave it a go because it was the only option for him if he wanted to come back.

"It has not been a bed of roses, far from it. It's been a winding, tortuous road, with many curves." The fact that Nadal is still driven to hit balls is indicative of a player who, while quiet and modest off court, has been relentless in his pursuit of tennis glory.

That drive, and all the on-court idiosyncrasies he is famous for, has garnered 92 titles since turning professional in 2001, including 22 Slams. He dominated the French Open, where he won 14 of his majors, his first arriving just days after his 19th birthday in 2005, his last in 2022 making him the event's oldest champion.

On the famous crushed brick of Roland Garros, he has lost just three times in 115 matches. He is a four-time champion at the US Open, won Wimbledon in 2008 and 2010, and is a two-time winner at the Australian Open—with 13 years spanning his first triumph at Melbourne Park in 2009 and his second in 2022.

Whether Nadal—whose athleticism, power, mental strength and brilliant forehand made him one of the greatest ever—makes it through 2024 will depend on how he manages himself. But Moya admitted it was hard to rein in his natural competitiveness.

"As much as we try to get that into his head and make him see it, when he steps on a tennis court, he's a competitive animal," he said. "A large part of my work and that of the team has been to stop him. Stop him in terms of the load of training, stop him in terms of hours of work, intensity." — AFP

India may miss Davis Cup match hosted by rival Pakistan

NEW DELHI: India may be forced to forfeit a Davis Cup play-off hosted by rival Pakistan, with the local tennis association saying Thursday the team was waiting on New Delhi's approval to travel. The nuclear-armed neighbours have fought several wars since winning independence from British rule in 1947, and sporting contests between the two have long been the victim of their enduring animosity.

The All India Tennis Association (AITA) asked the sports ministry for approval to travel to Pakistan after a request to shift the fixture to a third country was rejected by the International Tennis Federation tribunal.

"The proposal is still pending with the ministry and we are awaiting a decision," AITA secretary-general Anil Dhupar told AFP. Pakistan Tennis Federation president Salim Saifullah Khan said 18 members of the Indian squad had requested visas for the World Group 1 clash scheduled for February 3-4.

"We have all the arrangements put in place. They will be given the best security and accommodation," he told AFP. "Let politics be kept away from sports and better sense prevail." New Delhi last hosted the Pakistani tennis team in 2006 and the Indian Davis Cup team last travelled to Islamabad in 1964, according to news outlet India Today.

Local media reports said a 2019 match was moved to Kazakhstan, with the AITA citing political tensions as the reason for the request. Sports matches between India and Pakistan are rare owing to decades of hostility between the two nations.

They share one of the world's great sporting rivalries in cricket, by far the most popular sport in both countries. But their teams have not played a bilateral series in more than a decade, and typically only face each other in larger tournaments. India refused to travel to Pakistan for the 50-over Asia Cup in September, a move that forced its neighbour to partially relinquish hosting duties to Sri Lanka. Pakistan travelled to India the following month for the Cricket World Cup after its request to stage some matches in a third country was rejected. — AFP

S Africa skittle India to claim innings win

CENTURION: Fast bowler Nandre Burger took 4-33 as South Africa bowled out India for just 131 in their second innings to win the 1st Test by an innings and 32 runs in Centurion on Thursday. Virat Kohli was the only batsman to test the home attack on the third day, top-scoring with 76 before being the last man out.

South Africa had earlier taken a first innings lead of 163 as Dean Elgar (185) and Marco Jansen (84 not out) extended their first innings to 408. India were 62 for three at tea, still 101 runs in arrears, with Indian captain Rohit Sharma (0), fellow opener Yashasvi Jaiswal (5) and Shubman Gill (26) all back in the pavilion. The collapse began in earnest after the resumption as Burger, who had already removed Jaiswal with a sharp lifter, had first innings centurion KL Rahul, Ravi Ashwin and Mohammed Siraj all caught behind the wicket.

Jansen showed his all-round value to the team by taking 3-36. Kagiso Rabada, who took five wickets in the first innings, picked up 2-32 and completed the victory by taking a sensational catch to remove Kohli whose 76 included 12 fours and a six. The India innings lasted just 34.1 overs and leaves them looking for answers ahead of the second Test in Cape Town next week. The loss means India will have to wait a while longer if they are to win a Test series in South Africa. They are the only regular Test-playing country where India have yet to win a series. — AFP

Sports

Chelsea snatch late winner against Crystal Palace

Defeat leaves Palace dangling three points above the relegation zone

LONDON: Noni Madueke snatched a 2-1 win for Chelsea in the Premier League on Wednesday, scoring a late winner from the penalty spot against Crystal Palace to offer the Blues some cheer towards the end of a terrible 2023.

Mauricio Pochettino's side, bogged down in mid-table, took an early lead through Mykhailo Mudryk but Michael Olise pegged the hosts back at Stamford Bridge. Madueke won and converted an 89th-minute penalty to claim victory for stuttering Chelsea after three losses in their previous four top-flight matches.

Chelsea owner Todd Boehly has spent lavishly across the past three transfer windows but the Blues have suffered 19 league defeats in the calendar year. Defeat leaves Palace dangling three points above the relegation zone and coach Roy Hodgson under pressure.

Chelsea dominated the first half and created several openings despite missing suspended attacking pair Raheem Sterling and Cole Palmer, both booked in an error-strewn defeat by Wolves on Christmas Eve.

Pochettino handed left-back Ian Maatsen his first top-flight start on the right of the attack and the 21-year-old came close early on, nudging past Dean Henderson but Tyrick Mitchell cleared the ball away as it rolled towards goal.

Mudryk broke the deadlock in the 13th minute after Christopher Nkunku played in Malo Gusto, zipping outside him on the left. Gusto squared for

Mudryk to slot home for his third league goal of the season. The Ukraine winger could have added his fourth soon afterwards when Nicholas Jackson teed him up with a brilliant backheel, but Henderson rushed out to save well.

Jackson set up Nkunku, making his first start for the club, but the French forward air-kicked under pressure from Chris Richards. The hosts were rampant but Palace snatched an equaliser just before the break through Olise after another Chelsea defensive error.

The Blues defence inexcusably left the winger unmarked and he took Jordan Ayew's cross on his chest superbly before smashing home at the near post. Chelsea's initial spark faded and the visitors set up camp in their half, aiming to end a seven-game winless streak.

Playmaker Eberechi Eze whipped a free-kick wide in front of Palace's baying fans and Chelsea goalkeeper Djordje Petrovic thwarted Jean-Philippe Mateta. Jackson blew a golden opportunity by firing wide after Conor Gallagher slipped him in, and when he did find the net minutes later the goal was ruled out by VAR for offside.

Chelsea fans were infuriated but their rage turned to cheers when they were awarded a penalty after another video review following Eze's foul on Madueke. The 21-year-old winger calmly stroked the ball home and Chelsea held on through Palace pressure in stoppage time to claim a tense victory. — AFP



LONDON: Crystal Palace's French midfielder #07 Michael Olise (L) shoots the ball but misses to score during the English Premier League football match between Chelsea and Crystal Palace at Stamford Bridge in London. — AFP

Romero adds to Tottenham's injury woes

LONDON: Tottenham Hotspur boss Ange Postecoglou revealed Wednesday he'd been dealt another injury setback when confirming Cristian Romero will miss the next four to five weeks with a hamstring strain.

The 25-year-old Argentina centre-back's absence is all the more galling for Spurs as Romero only returned from a three-match suspension at the beginning of December. Romero suffered the injury during last weekend's

2-1 victory against Everton with Postecoglou, speaking ahead of Thursday's match at Brighton, saying: "Not so great with Romero."

"He had a scan the other day and has got a hamstring strain. We are looking at probably four or five weeks for him. "Disappointing to lose him, for sure. We obviously missed him with the suspension and now we've just got him back and he steadied things up."

"Now he will be missing again for quite a chunk of time." Romero's fellow central defender Micky van de Ven remains sidelined with a hamstring injury of his own sustained during a 4-1 loss to Chelsea in November. Van de Ven suggested last week he could be back training in a fortnight, with a cautious Postecoglou hinting the January 14 trip to Manchester United as a

comeback date for the player.

"He is getting closer," Postecoglou said. "We will see him some time in January. I don't think Burnley but Man United on the 14th potentially. "I don't look at comeback dates until I see them training with us and he hasn't been part of the group."

"He is not due to be part of the group this week so we'll see how he is going at the end of this week. Once they start training with the group, that's when we start thinking about if they are available. "He is at the tail end of it, for sure and at some point, middle of January he could be available but how we use him after such a long absence will be depending on where he is at."

Spurs could leapfrog Aston Villa into third place in the Premier League with victory at Brighton. Postecoglou

was linked with the Brighton job when Graham Potter left to join Chelsea last September before the Seagulls appointed Roberto De Zerbi.

But the Spurs boss said there was never a realistic prospect of him leaving Scottish champions Celtic mid-season. "No-one knew about me a year ago mate," Postecoglou joked. "No, look I didn't have discussions with Brighton at the time and to be honest there wasn't really the possibility that I would leave Celtic mid-season."

"I had only been there a year-and-a-half and even though there was nothing real and people weren't really saying to me that clubs wanted to talk to me, I kind of knew in my mind that if I was going to do it, it would have to be after the second year because I was never going to leave within the year." — AFP

Dodgers introduce Japanese pitching ace Yamamoto

LOS ANGELES: The Los Angeles Dodgers introduced prized Japanese pitcher Yoshinobu Yamamoto on Wednesday hours after confirming they had inked him to a 12-year deal worth a reported \$325 million. Yamamoto's arrival comes two weeks after the Dodgers inked two-way superstar Shohei Ohtani—a free agent after winning a second American League Most Valuable Player award with the Los Angeles Angels—to a historic 10-year, \$700 million deal.

Like Ohtani, Yamamoto said he picked the Dodgers because he wants to play for a Major League Baseball winner. "It was very important to me to go to a team that wants to win, not only now but in the future as well," he said at an introductory press conference at Dodger Stadium. "The Dodgers provided that opportunity the most."

The Dodgers beat out a bevy of other suitors to land the 25-year-old Yamamoto, with New York's Yankees and Mets, the San Francisco Giants and Boston Red Sox among the Major League Baseball teams that pursued him.

Yamamoto made his first remarks as a Dodger in English after taking the podium with his new number 18 Dodgers jersey buttoned on over his business suit and tie. "Good afternoon," he said. "My name is Yoshinobu Yamamoto of the LA Dodgers."

"I am beyond ecstatic to become a member of this historic franchise, and cannot express how much it means to me to be able to call Los Angeles my new home." Yamamoto arrives after a dominant career in Japan, where he went 70-29 with a 1.82 earned run average in 172 Nippon Professional Baseball games over eight seasons. He struck out 922, walked 206 and gave up just 36 home runs in 172 innings. Yamamoto teamed with Ohtani in Japan's victorious World Baseball Classic MVP and was named Japan's Pacific League MVP for the third straight year in November. — AFP



LOS ANGELES: New Los Angeles Dodger, Japanese pitcher Yoshinobu Yamamoto, next to interpreter Mako Albee, smiles during his introductory press conference at Dodger Stadium in Los Angeles. — AFP

Son leads S Korea squad 'ready' to win Asian Cup

SEOUL: Tottenham Hotspur's Son Heung-min was named in South Korea's Asian Cup squad on Thursday and coach Jurgen Klinsmann said it was "about time" they ended their 64-year continental drought.

Wolves forward Hwang Hee-chan, who scored his 10th Premier League goal of the season against Brentford on Wednesday, was also among Klinsmann's 26-man selection for the tournament, which kicks off in Qatar on January 12. Son will captain a squad that includes Bayern Munich defender Kim Min-jae and 22-year-old Paris Saint-Germain attacking midfielder Lee Kang-in.

South Korea have not won the Asian Cup since 1960 and Klinsmann said: "It's all about timing now and I think we are ready for this big, big competition. "It's 64 years -- 64 years is a long time for Korea. It's about time that we get this done." South Korea have been drawn in Group E and will face Malaysia, Jordan and Bahrain in the first round.

They lost 1-0 to eventual champions Qatar in the quarter-finals of the 2019 Asian Cup in the United Arab Emirates. Klinsmann, a World Cup winner with Germany in 1990, will have one of the strongest squads in the tournament in Qatar and he said he could "see it in their eyes that they are hungry for it."

"I have a good feeling because they're doing well at their clubs," he said. "They're healthy, they're fit, they're ambitious and they're very hungry. This is the foundation for playing a good tournament." Son will be appearing at his fourth Asian Cup and was part of the South Korea team that lost to hosts Australia in the 2015 final.

Hwang scored twice in Wolves' 4-1 win over Brentford to move one goal behind Son, who has 11, in the Premier League scoring charts.



SEOUL: South Korea's national football team head coach Jurgen Klinsmann (R) speaks during a press conference to announce the South Korean squad for the Asian Cup in Seoul on December 28, 2023. — AFP

'One of the favourites'

Lee is also making a splash after moving to Paris from Mallorca in the summer, and Klinsmann described him as "a flower that starts to bloom". "We have a lot of different pieces in that roster and that makes us one of the favourites for the Asian Cup," said Klinsmann.

"We have to fine tune these elements over the next couple of weeks and then go into the tournament with confidence." Klinsmann was unable to select Hwang Ui-jo, who has been suspended by South Korea because of a police investigation into allegations he illegally filmed an ex-girlfriend.

The Norwich City forward is accused of filming a sexual encounter with the former partner on his phone without consent. He denies the allegation. "It's very difficult for us coaches to deal with that because it's not in our power," said Klinsmann.

South Korea squad:

Goalkeepers: Kim Seung-gyu (Al Shabab/KSA), Jo Hyeon-woo (Ulsan), Song Bum-keun (Shonan Bellmare/JPN).

Defenders: Kim Young-gwon (Ulsan), Kim Min-jae (Bayern Munich/GER), Jung Seung-hyun (Ulsan), Kim Ju-sung (FC Seoul), Kim Ji-soo (Brentford/ENG), Seoul Young-woo (Ulsan), Kim Tae-hwan (Ulsan), Lee Ki-je (Suwon), Kim Jin-su (Jeonbuk).

Midfielders: Park Yong-woo (Al Ain/UAE), Hwang In-beom (Red Star Belgrade/SRB), Hong Hyun-seok (Gent/BEL), Lee Soon-min (Gwangju), Lee Jae-sung (Mainz/GER), Lee Kang-in (Paris Saint-Germain/FRA), Son Heung-min (Tottenham/ENG), Jeong Woo-yeong (Stuttgart/GER), Hwang Hee-chan (Wolves/ENG), Moon Seon-min (Jeonbuk), Park Jin-seob (Jeonbuk), Yang Hyun-jun (Celtic/SCO).

Strikers: Cho Gue-sung (Midtjylland/DEN), Oh Hyeon-gyu (Celtic/SCO). — AFP

Classifieds

Change of Name

I, Ayman Tariq Muhammad Ali, S/D/O Tariq Muhammad Ali resident of Mangaf, Block 4, Street 25, Building 61, floor 4, flat 10, Kuwait do hereby solemnly affirm and declare as under. (1) That I was registered with FBISE at SSC Annual Level under registration no 1477121007 and passed the SSC Annual/Supplementary examination 2014 under Roll No : 137126 (2) That I have decided to change partially my name from Ayman Tariq to Ayman Tariq Muhammad Ali & my father's name from Muhammad Tariq Ali to Tariq Muhammad Ali which is

written as Ayman Tariq & Muhammad Tariq Ali in Board's documents/record respectively and make my name consistent as per my passport and Kuwait birth certificate. Hence, the same may be changed. (3) The Statement given above is true & correct to the best of my knowledge belief and noting material has been concealed or withheld.

I, Ziad Tariq Muhammad Ali S/D/O Tariq Muhammad Ali resident of Mangaf, Block 4, Street 25, Building 61, floor 4, flat 10, Kuwait do hereby solemnly af-

firm and declare as under. (1) That I was registered with FBISE at SSC Annual Level under registration no 1277121069 and passed the SSC Annual/Supplementary examination 2012 under Roll No : 598254 (2) That I have decided to change partially my given name from Ziad to Ziad Tariq Muhammad Ali which is written as Ziad & in Board's documents/record respectively and make my name consistent as per my passport and Kuwait birth certificate. Hence, the same may be changed. (3) The Statement given above is true & correct to the best of

my knowledge belief and noting material has been concealed or withheld. (#4580) 29-12-2023

I, PATHAN MUBBATSHER KHAN ABDUL RAHIM-KHAN Holder of Indian Passport No. W7999298 Having Permanent Address Darugala Mohalla, Nr Motasutharwada Lunawada, Mahisagar, Pin: 389230, Gujarat, India Residing In Kuwait At Present, Hereby Declare That Henceforth My Name Will Be Read As Under: Given Name MOBSIRKHAH ABDULRAHIMKHAN And Surname PATHAN. (#4579) 27-12-2023

2023 a notable year for Kuwait Special Olympics

Recognition by HH the Amir is the most precious honor for Special Olympics



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received athletes at the Bayan Palace and (right) Kuwaiti athletes are seen at the Special Olympics — KUNA photos

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: The year 2023 witnessed many activities which the Special Olympics organized and participated in, specially that this year that came as life in sports activities were restored following Corona pandemic, most notable was the participation in the Summer International Games, held in Berlin, Germany with the participation of 7,000 players, representing 190 countries, where Kuwait won 7 gold medals, 10 silver, 4 bronze, that in addition to 2 fourth place, 3 fifth place, 3 sixth place, 2 seventh place and 1 eighth place.

The Berlin achievement received high level appreciation by Kuwait leadership by the reception of HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah (then the Crown Prince) at Bayan Palace of the Special Olympics athletes in the presence of Al-Sheikha Sheikha Al-Abdullah, Chairman of Tomooh Sports Jassim Al-Nouri, founder of Tomooh Club, National Director of Kuwait Special Olympics Rihab Buresli and Tomooh members of the board, as they presented to HH the Amir the winning athletes in Berlin.

The year 2023 was a year that witnessed major activities in implementing the sports, health programs and initiatives of the Special Olympics at the local, regional and international levels.

The year started with the athletics games for the mentally challenged athletes, sponsored by the Public Authority for Sport with the participation of 67

players from 14 clubs, schools and institutions, and competitions were according to international rules as the GMS system was used for the first time in managing competitions and players classifications.

The Special Olympics organized the 6th Kuwait local Bowling tournament within the sports inclusion of the disabled with 40 players of both genders participating. It also organized Kuwait 3rd Bocce Tournament with 100 players participating.

Special Olympics, in cooperation with Tomooh Sports Club for mental disabilities organized the awareness health sport program "Your health is your step" during the holy month of Ramadan. The program was about counting the number of steps the athlete makes during the competition through the use of (Mi Band 5) watch, that in addition to measuring the muscle, and fat mass as well as the weight and height of each competitor before the start of the program. The daily walk included 10 thousand steps in one hour, then physical fitness exercises for half an hour.

Activities included a sports health day with the American Army in Arafjan camp that included sports activities as part of the Special Olympics preparations for the world games.

Sports activities of 2023 were concluded by organizing the first walking and running race for the mentally challenged on the occasion of The Disabled World Day of December 3 each year under the sponsorship of Zain company. "Initiatives of strengthening the rights and empowering the disabled"

As part of the societal mission to protect the rights of the disabled and to go along world development in empowering them the initiatives program organized, in cooperation with Kuwait society for the Disabled Guardians, several training workshops with the participation of institutions, schools and societies concerned with the disabled affairs as well as several activists, guardians and coaches from Kuwait Tomooh Club most notable was the workshop of the mechanism of monitoring the implementation of the International treaty for the disabled rights, and how to write reports for the UN committee concerned with the disabled rights at Kuwait National Library, as well as the simplified reading workshop at Nisf Essa Al-Asfour in Qadisiya area.

National Director of Kuwait Special Olympics Rihab Buresli was pleased with the success of Kuwait Special Olympics in organizing those various activities, which reflect the distinguished level and solid base the Kuwait Special Olympics is now enjoying.

She said Special Olympics will continue its hard work to take the sport and health care of the mentally challenged to new levels, and thanked Tomooh Sports Club, the official representative of Kuwait Special Olympics.

She also thanked the Regional Special Olympics and its President Eng. Ayman Abdulwahab, Public Authority for Sport and all ministries and state entities that contributed to the success of Kuwait Special Olympics activities.

Cavaliers rally to stun Mavs, Durant fuels Suns win

LOS ANGELES: Cleveland's Caris LeVert made the go-ahead three-pointer with 2:03 to play as the Cavaliers rallied from a 20-point deficit to beat the Dallas Mavericks 113-110 on Wednesday. Elsewhere, two-time NBA champion Kevin Durant delivered his 18th career triple-double to lead the Phoenix Suns to a much-needed win over the Houston Rockets, and the Philadelphia 76ers downed the Orlando Magic despite the absence of reigning NBA Most Valuable Player Joel Embiid.

In Dallas, the Mavericks looked on their way to following up their Christmas victory over Phoenix, as they led by as many as 20 on the way to a 15-point halftime lead. Luka Doncic scored 39 points for Dallas and Seth Curry added 19 off the bench. But they went stone cold for five minutes in the fourth quarter as the Cavs unleashed a 15-0 scoring run to take a 111-105 lead with 1:13 to play.

LeVert scored 29 points off the bench for Cleveland. Jarrett Allen scored 24 points and grabbed 23 rebounds, and Isaac Okoro added 22 points for the Cavs, who were again without ailing star Donovan Mitchell or the injured Darius Garland and Evan Mobley. A step-back three-pointer from Doncic pulled the Mavs within three points with 17.4 seconds remaining.

But on their final possession, Doncic was caught near midcourt and passed to Curry, whose last-gasp three-pointer was blocked by Max Strus. "Guts, plain and simple," Cavaliers coach J.B. Bickerstaff said of what carried his team to victory. "It was the ability to dig down and go somewhere when things weren't going your way. "We were struggling defensively in the first half, but collectively we went out and just found a way. You don't do that without heart, courage and fortitude." In Houston, Durant scored 27 points with 10 rebounds and matched his career high with 16 assists to propel the Suns to a 129-113 victory over the Rockets.

The Suns snapped a frustrating three-game losing streak, building a 104-84 lead through three quarters and holding on for their first road win in a month. Eric Gordon, returning to Houston, where he played seven seasons for the Rockets, matched Durant's 27 points while hitting seven of his 11 three-point attempts.

The Suns outrebounded the Rockets 43-32 and made 14 three-pointers. They connected on 57.3% of their shots from the field against the second-stingiest defense in the league.

In Brooklyn, Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 32 points, grabbed 10 rebounds and handed out eight assists for Milwaukee, who beat the short-handed Nets 144-122. Khris Middleton added 27 points and 10 assists for the Bucks, who outscored the Nets 44-30 in the fourth to cruise home.

Brooklyn had kept it close through the third quarter, despite missing starters Spencer Dinwiddie, Nic Claxton and Cameron Johnson along with stand out reserve Dorian Finney-Smith for rest and injury management. Mikal Bridges, Cam Thomas and Royce O'Neal didn't play after the first quarter, but the Nets still managed to grab a 79-78 lead with 5:21 left in the third. — AFP

Man City battle to beat Everton on return to EPL

LONDON: Manchester City came from behind to beat Everton 3-1 on their return from the Club World Cup on Wednesday, moving five points behind Premier League leaders Liverpool. Pep Guardiola's men, chasing an unprecedented fourth consecutive English top-flight title, were in trouble when trailing 1-0 at Goodison Park, courtesy of a first-half strike from former City player Jack Harrison.

But Phil Foden fizzed a shot past Jordan Pickford in the 53rd minute and Julian Alvarez put the visitors ahead from the penalty spot. Bernardo Silva capped a brilliant second-half performance for the champions, taking advantage of an error from Pickford in the closing minutes.

Elsewhere, Chelsea's Noni Madueke scored a late winner from the penalty spot in a 2-1 win against Crystal Palace to lift spirits at Stamford Bridge after a miserable 2023 while Wolves hammered fast-sinking Brentford 4-1. City, who had won just one of their previous six league games, are now back in fourth spot with a game in hand over Jurgen Klopp's Liverpool, who have 42 points.

Last season's runners-up, Arsenal, two points behind Liverpool, are in action against West Ham on Thursday. "I remind them (of their abilities) every day," Guardiola told Amazon Prime. "We have standards to keep. That makes us have more responsibility so the standards cannot go down."

He added: "They showed again how special they are. We know after six games with just one win the people were asking, which is normal because it is all about results, but we are close."

City sparkle

City came into the match against Everton on a high after winning the Club World Cup last week in Saudi Arabia—their fifth trophy during an extraordinary 2023. But they have not had their own way in the Premier League in recent weeks. City forced



LIVERPOOL: Everton's English midfielder #37 James Garner (R) heads the ball during the English Premier League football match between Everton and Manchester City at Goodison Park in Liverpool, north west England. — AFP

Sean Dyche's Everton onto the back foot early but could not make their domination of possession count and it was the battling home team who engineered a breakthrough when City failed to clear.

Rodri gave the ball away in his own box and Dwight McNeil picked up the free ball, producing a fine cross for Harrison to steer home. Harrison almost doubled the lead minutes later, forcing a fine fingertip save at full stretch from Ederson in the City goal.

Everton held onto their lead until the break but City, still without the injured Erling Haaland, came out full of intent in the second period. They got the reward they deserved when Foden found himself in space on the edge of the area and hit a rocket into the bottom corner, giving England's Pickford no chance.

Referee John Brooks awarded a penalty shortly after the hour mark, penalising Amadou Onana for handball, and Alvarez blasted it down the middle. Silva sealed all three points when Pickford was closed down by Alvarez and the ball was deflected into his path, with the Portugal international curling into an open net.

A second straight defeat for Everton—docked 10 points last month for breaches of financial rules—leaves them just one place above the relegation zone. Chelsea substitute Madueke won and converted an 89th-minute penalty to claim victory for stuttering Chelsea after three losses in their previous four top-flight matches. Mauricio Pochettino's side appeared likely to face another frustrating evening after Michael Olise had cancelled out Mykhailo Mudryk's early goal with a brilliant finish on the stroke of half-time. "The Premier League is really tough and we need to be consistent," Pochettino told the BBC.

"The first half of the season has been really up and down and it's been tough and difficult. But we're positive and we need to show that we can compete." South Korean international Hwang Hee-chan scored twice as mid-table Wolves came away from Brentford with a 4-1 win, taking his Premier League tally to 10 goals for the season. But it was a fourth straight defeat for Brentford, who are now just four points above the drop zone. — AFP