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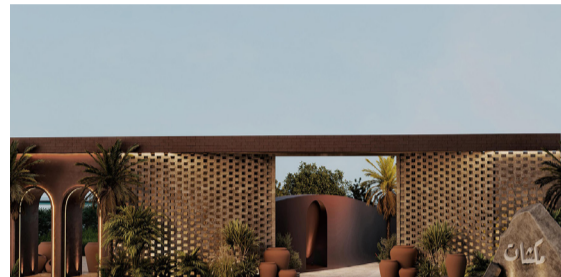
READY TO RIDE?

3 Mikshat 2 to support tourism and entertainment in Kuwait

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Kuwait urged to join genocide case against Zionist entity at ICJ

UN warns Gaza 'uninhabitable' amid Zionist massacres, bombardment



GAZA: A relative of 12-year-old Mohamed Awad, who was killed along with his immediate family in Zionist bombardment, mourns as he holds his body at the European hospital in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip on Jan 6, 2024. — AFP

KUWAIT/GAZA: A statement issued by 30 civil society entities in Kuwait on Saturday called on the ministry of foreign affairs to join South Africa's lawsuit against the Zionist entity at the International Court of Justice in The Hague. The statement emphasizes the need to hold the Zionist entity accountable for war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity committed in Gaza, according to international law and agreements.

The signatories expressed their concern over the international community's silence regarding the crimes committed by the Zionist occupation against the people of Gaza, including attacks on medical personnel, children, women, civilians, journalists and the elderly. They also expressed surprise at the silence of Arab and Islamic countries, which could contribute to the blockade and hinder the entry of food and medical aid to Gaza.

The statement urged the Kuwaiti government not to remain passive but to use its relations and capabilities in international forums to stop the aggression and hold the occupying entity accountable. It cited South Africa's recent move to file a lawsuit against the Zionist entity at the International Court of Justice, with

Turkey and Malaysia joining the case. The signatories include various civil society organizations, political groups, women's associations, student unions, NGOs and other groups advocating for solidarity with Palestine and condemning the actions of the Zionist entity. In The Hague application, South Africa says the Zionist entity has been acting "with the requisite specific intent... to destroy Palestinians in Gaza as part of the broader Palestinian national, racial and ethnic group".

Meanwhile, the Zionist entity bombed southern Gaza Saturday as the UN warned the besieged Palestinian territory has been rendered "uninhabitable" by three months of war. The fighting has sent tensions soaring across the region, and shows no signs of abating with the conflict entering its fourth month on Sunday.

Civilians in the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip have borne the brunt of the violence amid widespread displacement, destruction and a deepening humanitarian crisis. With swathes of the territory already reduced to rubble, UN humanitarian chief Martin Griffiths said Friday that "Gaza has simply become uninhabitable".

Continued on Page 6

NEWS IN BRIEF

US welcomes PM's appointment

KUWAIT: The US on Friday welcomed the appointment of Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah as Kuwait's new Prime Minister, hailing him as a longtime supporter of the strategic partnership between the two countries. "Sheikh Mohammad has a distinguished career of public service, including as Kuwait's Ambassador to the United States and as Foreign Minister. He has long been a champion of the strategic partnership between the United States and Kuwait," a State Department statement said. (See Page 2)

Brazil legend Zagallo dies at 92

SAO PAULO: The first person to win the FIFA World Cup as both a player and coach, Mario Zagallo died Friday at the age of 92. Years ahead of his time as a player, Zagallo quickly demonstrated his merit as a coach. A counter-intuitive type who believed in the number 13, Zagallo ventured abroad to Kuwait, winning the Gulf Cup in 1976 and reaching that year's Asian Cup final. — AFP (See Page 16)



Mario Zagallo

Neyadi named UAE youth minister

DUBAI: Sultan Al-Neyadi, the record holder for the longest space mission by an Arab astronaut, was named as the UAE's new minister of youth on Saturday. The appointment was made by UAE Vice President Mohammed bin Rashid as part of a Cabinet reshuffle.

Blinken tackles Gaza, NATO with Erdogan

ISTANBUL: Washington's top diplomat discussed the Zionist-Hamas war with Turkey's mercurial leader on Saturday before flying to Crete to address Greek concerns about the looming sale of US fighter jets to Ankara. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken's high-stakes meeting with one of Washington's most unruly NATO allies came on the first leg of a trip that includes visits to the Zionist entity and West Bank.

Blinken's fourth crisis tour of the three-month-old Gaza war comes with

fears mounting that the conflict could engulf swathes of the Middle East. Hamas chief Ismail Haniyeh called on Blinken to focus his visit on "ending the aggression" and said US support for the Zionist entity has enabled "unprecedented massacres and war crimes against our people in Gaza." Haniyeh, based in Qatar, added in a video message shared by his office that "the future and stability of our region are closely linked to our Palestinian cause".

The secretary general of the Palestine Liberation Organization executive committee, Hussein Al-Sheikh, said Gaza's future "is determined by the Palestinian people, not (the Zionist entity)." He was responding to Zionist Defense Minister Yoav Gallant's

Continued on Page 6



ISTANBUL: Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan meets US Secretary of State Antony Blinken at the Vahdettin private residence of the presidency on Jan 6, 2024. — AFP

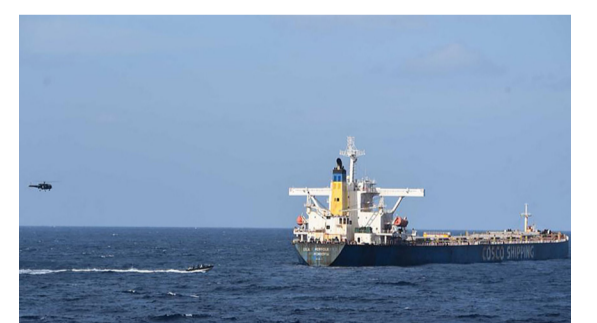
India navy rescues Arabian Sea crew after hijack bid

NEW DELHI: India's navy said Friday it had rescued 21 crewmembers from a vessel in the Arabian Sea after a hijacking distress call, the latest attack on commercial shipping in the region. Last month the force deployed several warships into the sea to "maintain a deterrent presence" after a string of recent shipping attacks, including a drone strike near India's coast which the United States has blamed on Iran.

It comes at a time when many vessels have been rerouted from the Red Sea due to drone and missile attacks carried out by Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels in solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza. A navy statement said Friday that all 21 crewmembers, including 15 Indian nationals, aboard the MV Lila Norfolk had been evacuated from the ship's citadel — a fortified section of commercial vessels used as a refuge during pirate attacks.

The 84,000-tonne bulk carrier had been boarded by five or six "unknown armed personnel" on Thursday evening but the attempted hijacking was "probably abandoned" after a forceful warning by Indian Navy, the statement said. It added that the warship INS Chennai, which had intercepted the vessel

Continued on Page 6



This handout photo released on Jan 6, 2024 shows an Indian Navy helicopter approaching the MV Lila Norfolk in response to a hijacking distress call by the vessel in the Arabian Sea on Jan 5, 2024. — AFP

Biden compares Trump to Nazis; tycoon hits back

BLUE BELL, Pennsylvania: US President Joe Biden launched his harshest attack yet on Donald Trump as he kickstarted his 2024 reelection campaign Friday, accusing the Republican of echoing Nazi Germany and posing a threat to democracy. The 81-year-old Democrat branded his likely challenger in November a "loser" and "sick" in a speech on the eve of the third anniversary of the deadly Jan 6 Capitol attack by pro-Trump supporters.

"He's willing to sacrifice our democracy, put himself in power," Biden told supporters, alternating between whispers and furious shouts as he laid into the man he beat in 2020. Not only had the twice-impeached former president instigated the Capitol attack, but the tycoon and his followers were still embracing "political violence" ahead of the 2024 vote, said Biden. "He calls those who oppose him vermin. He talks about the blood of Americans being poisoned, echoing the same exact language used in Nazi Germany," he added.

Biden chose a symbolic location for the speech near Valley Forge in Pennsylvania, the historic site where George Washington rallied American forces fighting their British colonial rulers nearly 250 years ago. He portrayed himself as a defender of America's institutions, warning that if Trump won a second term



Joe Biden



Donald Trump

in the White House then democracy itself was at risk. "Trump's assault on democracy isn't just part of his past. It's what he's promising for the future," said Biden.

Continued on Page 6



Local

US congratulates new Kuwait PM

Arab Parliament wishes Sheikh Dr Mohammad Al-Sabah success

WASHINGTON: The United States on Friday congratulated Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah on being appointed Prime Minister of Kuwait. In a statement, Spokesperson for the US Department of State Mathew Miller said, "The State Department welcomes the appointment of Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah as the new Prime Minister of Kuwait."

"Sheikh Mohammad has a distinguished career of public service, including as Kuwait's Ambassador to the United States and as Foreign Minister," Miller said. "He has long been a champion of the strategic partnership between the United States and Kuwait," Miller added. "We look forward to deepening our partnership with Kuwait and Prime Minister Al-Sa-

bah as we seek a more peaceful and stable Middle East region," he concluded.

Meanwhile, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan congratulated Sheikh Mohammad Al-Sabah on the same occasion. "I send my congratulations to Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah of Kuwait for his appointment as Prime Minister by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah," Sullivan said in a statement.

"The US-Kuwait relationship has been forged over decades to enhance peace and security in the Middle East. "Kuwait is a major non-NATO ally of the United States, and we look forward to continuing our work to deepen economic, cultural, political, security, and people-to-people ties," Sullivan added.

"Our historic partnership is essential to addressing shared challenges and building a more prosperous future for our people," he noted.

In another development, President Adel Al Asoomi has congratulated Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah on the Amiri Order appointing him as Prime Minister and assigning him to form a government. Al-Asoomi affirmed in a press release that Kuwait boasts many accomplished experts in various fields and wished the new prime minister success in leading Kuwait's government. His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah signed an Amiri Order Thursday appointing Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem as Prime Minister and assigning him to form a government. — KUNA



Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah

Kuwaiti premier receives congratulatory messages

EU Ambassador
Anne Koistinen

US Ambassador Anne Koistinen congratulates Sheikh Dr Mohammed Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah on his appointment as the Prime Minister of Kuwait. "We extend our sincere congratulations to Sheikh Dr Mohammed Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah on his appointment as the new Prime Minister of Kuwait. As the ambassador of the European Union to Kuwait, I look forward to working closely with the Prime Minister to further strengthen the strong ties between the European Union and Kuwait. I wish Sheikh Dr Mohammed success and for our bilateral relations and friendship to go from strength to strength."



EU Ambassador
Anne Koistinen

Turkish Ambassador
Tuba Nur Sonmez

On my behalf and on behalf of the Turkish Embassy and the Turkish community in Kuwait, I express my warmest congratulations to His Highness Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah for gaining the Amiri confidence and being appointed as Prime Minister. I am fully confident that our relations, which have gained steady growth at the 60th year old diplomatic relations, will grow stronger and stronger, and that the friendly relations between our two countries will continue to serve the common interest of our two peoples, and the humanity. I pray to God to guide his steps and grant him success in his duties for the good, and prosperity of Kuwait and its brotherly and friendly people."



Turkish Ambassador
Tuba Nur Sonmez

Kuwaiti perfumer tells stories through crafting scents

By Passant Hisham

KUWAIT: The aroma of sweet vanilla brings calming and peaceful emotions to Ghadeer's mind, as it reminds her of her mother's freshly baked goods. The earthy smell of rivers and the scent of grass, gives Eslam a comforting and grounding effect he used to feel in the rural neighborhood of his homeland, Palestine. Lavender, for Zainab, is a journey back in time, as it's closely related to her childhood, where lavender-scented soaps and air fresheners used to permeate throughout her home.

Omar Al-Qattan, a 23-year-old Kuwaiti perfumer, draws inspiration from such experiences to create scents that resonate with people's emotions and memories. "I once created a perfume that symbolizes the scent of vintage houses and nostalgic memories. One woman smelled it and literally cried as she told me it reminds me of my grandmother's old house," Qattan said.

Despite breaking his nose and partially losing his power of smell, Qattan managed to become the first and youngest Arab to win the best perfume award from Paris. He was introduced to his passion for creating perfumes at the age of 10 through a random experiment of spraying two perfumes together, which resulted in a completely different scent that left him dazzled and curious to go further. On that day, he found himself mixing every scent that came along his way, whether a body lotion, toothpaste or even laundry detergent, excited to see the results that each different combination would create.

With very limited sources of previous studies in fragrance oil mixing, Qattan went through a long journey of experimenting crafting perfumes for seven years. Then, to support his talent with knowledge, he enrolled in multiple perfumery courses in UK and Kuwait, where he was mentored by industry leading perfumers, business owners and instructors.

Qattan always wished to create his own perfume, but in the beginning, he found it very challenging to create a scent that could appeal to everyone. After multiple trials, errors and going through ups and downs, he was very close to losing interest in this craft and almost ceased valuing his talent. Until one day he broke his nose while playing football, which brought him to see things from a completely different perspective. "I realized that the sense of smell was a sacred blessing that I almost took for granted, which made me appreciate the skill that God has granted me," Qattan said.

From then on, he continued pursuing his passion, and at the same time majored in marketing during his college years, which helped in taking his talent to the next level. Through his studies, not only could he create pleasantly scented perfumes, but was also able to tell compelling stories through every scent. Blending his passion for crafting perfumes, the art of marketing, storytelling and the science of consumer behavior, Qattan received an award from the International Perfume Foundation in Paris, for creating the best perfume with the best background story and message.

Report emphasizes need for enhanced oversight, control

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Commerce and Industry has received a report from an impartial entity revealing shortcomings in its inspection teams and price control measures, leading to inadequate results in addressing soaring prices. The report identifies two main issues contributing to this situation. Firstly, the insufficient number of teams and team members, coupled with irregular campaigns, allows shop owners to evade scrutiny easily.

Furthermore, the inconsistent application of penalties and instances of closed shops re-opening without proper punishment contribute to the problem. Secondly, the current high

Over 30 million transactions and services on Sahel

KUWAIT: The spokesman for the unified government application for electronic services (Sahel) Youssef Kazem said on Saturday that the number of transactions and services completed through the application since its launch (from September 2021 to the end of 2023)



By only relying on plant-based pure essential oils, the story of Qattan's award-winning perfume was inspired by the calmness and beauty of nature, where he tried to capture in it the emotions triggered from being in a rainforest, surrounded by soft humidity and cold breeze, while breathing in the refreshing scent of grass. "A perfumer must have a good imagination that can be connected to reality, so that they can create scents that are relevant to people's experiences," Qattan said.

Qattan believes that what distinguishes one perfume from another is its distinctive identity that resembles each person's story in a unique way. He referred to a real-life example, where someone may always find himself choosing to wear the same perfume over and over, no matter how many times they have bought it before. "When standing in a store that has hundreds of perfumes, you find your eyes automatically falling on that one perfume that echoes your personality. You'll look at it and say, 'that's mine'," he noted.



Omar Al-Qattan

News in Brief

Cold weather predicted

KUWAIT: Meteorologist Fahad Al-Otaibi said the weather is expected to be very cold on Monday and Tuesday and advised livestock and camel owners, as well as farmers, to take precautions during the night and early morning. He said the Abdally station registered a temperature as low as 9 degrees Celsius a few days ago and will be less than that on Monday and Tuesday. He advised people to remain at home or in warm places to safeguard their health.

Fire kills baby

KUWAIT: An infant (four months old) lost his life in a Subbiya camp fire. According to a police source, a tent was engulfed by fire, causing the death of the baby. In another development, a man was killed during a traffic accident between a dump truck and a vehicle on Bnaider Road.

Kuwait applauds UAE

KUWAIT: Kuwait has applauded the UAE's mediation efforts in the Russia-Ukraine prisoner swap. Lauding the UAE's diplomatic efforts in sustaining world stability and peace, a Foreign Ministry statement also reaffirmed Kuwait's support for all similar initiatives. Furthermore, the ministry statement stressed Kuwait's position vis-à-vis the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, which calls for adhering to principles of international law and the UN Charter of respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of countries. Meanwhile, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres applauded the UAE's role in the prisoners-swap operation between Russia and Ukraine, which is the biggest since the beginning of the military operations in Ukraine. In a statement late Thursday, UN Secretary General's Spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said the UN hopes that this step will be followed by more prisoner exchange operations and efforts to de-escalate tension between the two sides. — KUNA

prices in the local market are disproportionate to the actual rise in import costs. For example, if import costs increase by KD 1, importers are raising prices by KD 4.

The report emphasizes the need for enhanced oversight by regulatory authorities and calls for a more precise role in addressing these issues. While acknowledging the influence of global crises on prices, the report highlights the importance of addressing both minor and major problems. It warns that prices could escalate beyond expectations if the ministry's efforts remain unchanged.

The report attributes the surge in prices to factors such as workers' wages and cargo insurance, but notes exaggeration in these claims. Additionally, some goods, despite being abundant in Kuwait and not imported, have seen unwarranted price hikes. The report stresses the crucial role of supervisory entities in controlling and protecting consumer rights, advocating for accurate data-driven pricing rather than arbitrary decisions by business owners.

reached more than 30 million. Kazim said in a press statement that the number of notifications sent to users of the application during the indicated period amounted to 100 million. He explained that there are 356 electronic services provided by 35 government entities through the application, which has reached 1.6 million users on various smart devices.

He added that the great support given by the Council of Ministers and the relentless pursuit to activate the government's work program and empower government agencies digitally have contributed to making important leaps and achievements on the path of digital transformation and broad devel-

Education Ministry prepares for exams

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Education confirmed on Saturday the completion of all the preparations and equipment required to receive the 12th-grade students in its scientific and literary section, who are scheduled to take exams at the end of the first school period.

The total number of students applying for the first semester exams in the scientific, literary, and religious education departments is 43,370. They include 27,540 in the scientific department and 15,006 in the literary department. The number of applicants for religious education is 824.

The Education Ministry will send daily awareness messages for the general technical guidance of various school subjects within the campaign and will continue until the end of the tests. These messages contain general tips, directions, and guidelines on effective study methods and learning resources for each subject before the exam day. — KUNA



opment. This has in turn, provided distinguished and accessible services to users. Kazim praised the great role played by government agencies in providing more services through Sahel, noting the continuous development in the procedures for executing transactions and the services provided through it. — KUNA

Local

Mikshat 2 to support tourism and entertainment in Kuwait



The entrance



House of poetry

KUWAIT: Abdulaziz Sari Al-Mutairi, acting undersecretary of the ministry of social affairs and chairman of the national cooperative projects committee, announced the launch of the kiosks project (Mikshat 2) on the North Island of Jaber Causeway, with a capacity of 3,500 visitors daily, operating from 3 pm to 11 pm.

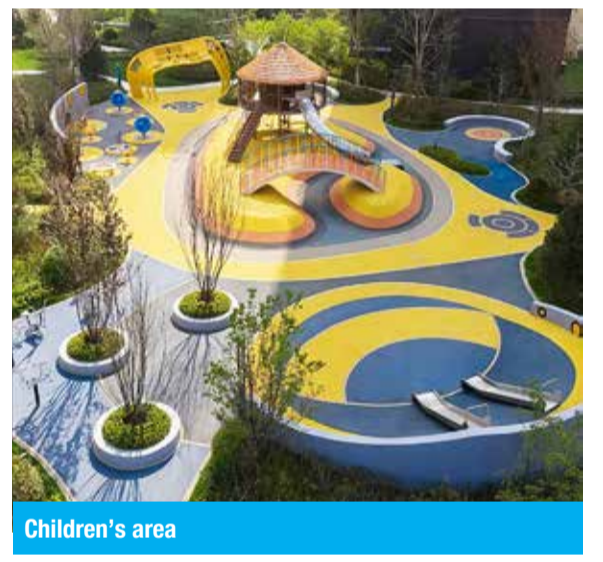
Mutairi told KUNA on Saturday that this initiative is in line with the guidance and support of Minister of Social Affairs Sheikh Feras Al-Sabah and approved by the Council of Ministers. It aligns with the minister's directives to bolster tourism and entertainment for both citizens and visitors. Mutairi emphasized the project aims to channel the funds of cooperative societies' shareholders towards supporting community cooperation and project financing.

In line with the minister's directives to foster partnerships with various entities, the project will involve collaboration with government entities, public benefit associations and volunteer teams. Designated spaces and slots will be provided for these entities to showcase their services and conduct awareness and educational workshops, with a primary focus on supporting families.

Mutairi highlighted that the project seeks to mirror Kuwaiti heritage while incorporating a cultural dimension that captures the essence of Kuwait's beauty across the past and present. The ministry is committed to aligning the designs to promote tourism and entertainment initiatives. The second edition of Mikshat will be a collaboration with social fund for popular cafes, featuring huts for visitors, shopping areas, restaurants, cafes, a cinema theater, children's games, a zoo and other surprises and activities. — KUNA



The theater arena



Children's area



The zoo



Is high cost of living a valid reason to stay unmarried?

By Abdulwahab Hilal

KUWAIT: The idea of marriage became less important among young people every year. As they claim high cost of living is the reason that averts them from getting married. However, young people may spend as the cost of marriage on something else, that as not important as marriage. Young people tend to spend on luxuries, like cars, travelling, clothes...etc.

Over time, the concept of marriage has changed for both genders. In the past each gender has a specific role in a marriage. Men have to be providers and women have to be homemakers. These days they don't seem to stick to their roles as they used to do in the past. Speaking to young people, Kuwait Times finds out that marriage was a controversial topic among youth.

Some men saw that there is a misunderstanding of the concept of providing, Engineer Ayman Ali, 62 years old, said "Men do not understand or correctly apply the concept of providing, and they are unwilling to bear all marriage expenses, as it places a financial burden on them, contradicting the idea of authority."

He explained that the interests of young men have shifted towards financial ambitions at the expense of building a family due to social media, which affects their future decisions due to their high aspirations that deviate building a family. There is also a change in marriage criteria, Ali said that girls are influenced by society and seek to obtain the same things that other girls around them have, without considering the needs or capabilities of their possible partners.

One of the reasons, according to Ali, the decrease in marriage rates which impact of these changes results in a significant decline in marriage rates, as many are hesitant to take this step. "The increase in divorce rates, made young people to avoid marriages and due to the rise in a man's expectations from his wife and his refusal to compromise, conflicts increase between spouses, leading to a higher divorce rate," he noted.

Also, receiving substantial financial assistance or parents bearing all marriage expenses makes young men not feel the burden of marriage, as they haven't struggled for it. For his part, Faisal, 29, pointed out that the cost of marriage has become higher and there is a change in the mindset of young people; where they want to stay young as they are growing up, adding "They want to live a carefree life and tend to postpone marriage until after thirty." For Talal, 37, avoiding marriage was due to misuse of social media has led men to fulfill their needs online, causing them to distance themselves from the idea of marriage.

He indicated, "People have started using social media even for discussing personal secrets and



household problems. Bachelors observe the problems of married couples, hearing about marriage issues despite not being married themselves. This has made the idea of marriage seem burdensome and disconnected from happiness." "The influence

of high divorce rates has led men to fear marriage due to the associated costs. With divorce rates being so high, they worry that divorce could hit their own homes, causing all the expenses of marriage to go to waste."

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P.O.Box 1301 Safat, 13014 Kuwait.

Email: info@kuwaittimes.com

Website: www.kuwaittimes.com

KUFPEC completes Norway assets' sale

KUWAIT: Kuwait Foreign Petroleum Exploration Company (KUFPEC) announced that the divestment of KUFPEC Norway AS (KNAS) assets has been completed after being approved by the Norwegian authorities. At the end of 2023, KUFPEC achieved another milestone through the successful exit of KUFPEC (China) Inc. from the People's Republic of China, according to a KUFPEC statement received by KUNA on Friday.

KUFPEC Chief Executive Officer Mohammad Salem Al-Haimer said, "KUFPEC works relentlessly to optimize its current portfolio and maximize the value of its assets through successful divestments and intensifying efforts to enhance projects' organic growth and exploration activities to meet the company's strategic objectives." "During our decade-long business journey in Norway, we achieved various monetary and technical achievements in terms of value addition and knowledge transfer to the Kuwaiti oil sector. "In China, we also achieved a successful exit, which was completed in one year. This achievement contributed to reducing the expected costs due to the exceptional efforts and efficiency of KUFPEC's teams," Al-Haimer noted.

"In both Norway and China, we have aimed to provide valuable contributions to the Norwegian and Chinese oil and gas sectors, and we thank the Norwegian and Chinese governments for these opportunities to have been part of their respective growth strategies," he added. KUFPEC is an international upstream company engaged in the exploration, development, and production of crude oil and natural gas outside the State of Kuwait and is a wholly owned subsidiary of Kuwait Petroleum Corporation. — KUNA



Photo of the day



KUWAIT: An aircraft is silhouetted against the rising waning crescent moon above Kuwait City early on January 6, 2024. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Is beauty really in the eye of the beholder?

By Dana Beidas

KUWAIT: When trying to define "beauty" in multiple attempts, the definitive conclusion is that it is everything and nothing at once. By saying "everything," it is the result of a universal system that could "make or break" one's life, determining whether a person is worthy of greatness, success and respect.

However, because this system is intentionally built to cause a constant feeling of insecurity and spread the sense of dissatisfaction within oneself throughout even the most conventionally "beautiful" people, that same system strives to produce solutions and remedies to "fix" the ugliness with the exchange of not only society's money but also take advantage of its never-ending search for temporary allure, which in turn makes it "made-up," there for, considered nothing.

Upon discussing this matter specifically with the people of Kuwait, the influence of Western media is undeniable. Mariam, 17, disclosed, "The world is

incapable of existing without the need to put on a caricature of what they desire to be perceived as; it's like an everlasting performance, and those aspirations mostly strive towards having "white" features."

She further explained that it all starts young, particularly for girls; in typical forms of media like TV shows, movies, and video games, it is demonstrated that when recognizing the role of privilege in beauty, research reveals that individuals could have better outcomes in life when seen as conventionally attractive.

The thin, blonde, light-colored-eyed, light-skinned characters are more popular, get more romantic interests, have more friends, and are generally treated better than their opposites not only in their respective cinematic universe but in the eyes of the Middle East as well, which has ultimately caused a wave of insecurity among the youth. Even now, with social media being in the lead, it could be much more damaging despite its false advantage of authenticity that many subconsciously think it has.

However, one question arises: Are the people who succumb to these societal pressures truly at fault? Mohammad, 22, expressed that while they do contribute to a harmful and exploitative complex, if they are not directly harassing anyone to conform to their specific ideology of beauty, then individuals who overtake extreme measures in search of confidence should not be shamed, as it is unfortunate to say that appearance is a notable factor regarding how well you will be treated by others.

Kuwaitis' lack of self-acceptance has resulted in the fear of aging, disordered eating, and the upsurge of potentially life-ruining plastic surgery and cosmetic practices. At the same time, studies have shown that the beauty industry and the entities that provide such services have only benefited rapidly and are currently at a historical high because if there were no benefits that come with physical attractiveness, these companies would not have existed either. Hawraa, 19, added, "We have been obsessing over faulty perfection that the erasure of authenticity is at stake. Lately, everybody looks, acts, and even talks the same."

On the other hand, Sara, 20, who has undergone a rhinoplasty, revealed, "No matter how much you



get done "under the needle," make-up and anti-aging products you use, lose weight by going on harsh restrictions, straighten and dye your hair to the point where it's completely damaged, you will always look at others in envy and never feel enough. This lesson needs to be spread more frequently."

"Our current way of viewing appearance directly contradicts what Islam has taught us about preserving beauty, which is the underlining message of wearing the Hijab, for example," Khalid, 25, disclosed. Simultaneously, many think a thin line exists between invasive beauty enhancements and self-expression. With recent propositions of restricting access to cosmetic procedures came outrage from the public, saying that this would threaten bodily autonomy and the freedom of choice. "It is seen as empowerment nowadays," he continued.

The most agreed-on aim for the future of Kuwait's beauty standards is not to disregard it entirely but to put less emphasis on its importance in society. Muna, 18, shares, "It is possible to acknowledge and criticize the existing beauty standard with its mentally sickening consequences while participating in some of those beauty practices. As women, if we completely shut ourselves out of it all, it will be impossible to live happily."

Arabs call on Washington to halt Zionist aggression

CAIRO: Secretary-General Ahmad Abul-Gheit of the Arab League has called on the US to shoulder its due responsibilities by pressing the Zionist occupation to stop the military aggression on Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. Abul-Gheit made the call while meeting with visiting US senators on the latest developments in the Palestinian territory, the Cairo-based bloc said in a press release. "Zionist practices are considered to be patterns of collective punishment that amount to war crimes and break international humanitarian law," he warned.

He underlined that it is essential to put the bi-state approach in place in an earnest and genuine manner in order to put an end to the long-lasting conflict. The Arab bloc's chief, further, asked the visiting US senators to seek to make their country put leverage on the Zionist occupation to halt the war machine in the Palestinian enclave.

Meanwhile, the Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union on Friday denounced recent comments by two Zionist ministers in which they had called for the forced displacement of the population of the Gaza Strip. "These racist statements reflect the identity of the colonizer, breach of Palestinian rights, and disrespect for international charters, norms, and conventions,"



A Pro-Palestinian supporter with a message reading 'Peace is the white man's word' written on her face take part in a demonstration in central London on January 6, 2024, calling for a ceasefire now in the war in Gaza. — AFP

the union said in a press release. It further decried the expulsion or displacement of civilians at times of war and conflict as a war crime.

The union, therefore, called on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and all international and humanitarian organizations to keep pressing the Zionist occupation to observe international legitimacy resolutions and international consensus and to provide protection for the defenseless Palestinian people. The occupation's insistence on pursuing "the law of the jungle" would only throw the entire region into further violence, it warned. — KUNA



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South Koreans evacuate border island as North fires artillery

Sudan paramilitary chief bids for legitimacy in Africa tour

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WASHINGTON: A woman waves a flag at a vigil for January 6th defendants outside the DC jail in Washington, DC on January 3, 2024. — AFP

Nightly vigil supports Capitol riot inmates

Nearly 1,300 people charged in relation to January 6 three years after violent attack

WASHINGTON: Bundled against the winter cold, a dozen people outside Washington's jail pray, sing and shout their support for inmates held over the violent attack on the US Capitol three years ago that sought to overturn Donald Trump's election defeat.

Family members and supporters — plus a few pet dogs — meet nearly every night at a spot they dub "Freedom Corner," just beyond the jail's barbed wire fence in a quiet residential neighborhood. The crowd share pizza and hot chocolate alongside jokes mocking the idea that any of their loved ones could really be a "big bad insurrectionist" or "domestic terrorist" over the January 6, 2021 assault.

Their defiant position, and many Americans' belief in Trump's false claim that he won the 2020 vote, point toward an incendiary 2024 election as the former president once again sets his sights on the White House.

Nicole Reffitt told AFP she keeps coming back to the vigil because "I feel it's important to show other Jan 6 families that you can be strong and you're gonna be OK." Her husband was the first person convicted

at trial for storming the seat of the US government as Congress certified President Joe Biden's win. Guy Reffitt, convicted on five counts including obstructing an official proceeding and entering a restricted building with a firearm, is now serving more than seven years at a prison in Oklahoma.

Prisoners phone in

Nearly 1,300 people have so far been charged in relation to January 6, with supporters estimating that about 40 are currently incarcerated at the jail in southeast Washington awaiting trial or sentencing. The group began congregating regularly in 2022, including Micki Witthoef, the mother of Ashli Babbitt, who was shot dead by a police officer during the 2021 attack.

Babbitt, a 35-year-old Air Force veteran, was among the first of hundreds of people to breach the Capitol building, as lawmakers and officials fled the angry mob. "After Ashli was killed ... I just wanted her to have a voice," Witthoef told AFP outside the jail. "I do believe she would support the men inside."

Witthoef, who was herself arrested for pushing a counter-protester near the facility in May—though the charges were dropped — said she is not for a "blanket pardon" for all defendants but believes many of them have been judged too harshly.

This week, several police cars monitored the scene as attendees set up phones to livestream the nightly ritual on YouTube, where they often attract thousands of viewers. After a short prayer and the Pledge of Allegiance, inmates from inside the jail, whom the group refer to as "political prisoners," began telephoning out.

Tamara Perryman, whose husband Brian Jackson is accused of assaulting a law enforcement officer on January 6, connected the calls to a large speaker. Several defendants phoned on Wednesday night ahead of the January 6 third anniversary. Most spent their allotted time asking about the weather, trading right-wing opinions on the day's news and asking for donations.

At 9:00 pm, a final call came with multiple inmates on the line to join in the US national anthem. As the evening ended, the group put their arms around each

other to sing the country song often known as "Proud to be an American," popular among conservatives. For Reffitt, that solidarity is why she has come to Washington — to be "boots on the ground" for January 6 defendants and their families. She accompanies them to court appearances and attends congressional hearings. Biden is putting the violent mob at the center of his reelection campaign, warning of Trump's threat to the "sacred cause" of US democracy.

As for her own voting plans, Reffitt said Trump "is a true Jan Sixer" but that it is "time for a more youthful direction" for the country. Perryman mused about the upcoming election over the phone with inmate Frank Rocco Giustino, who in February pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor charge for conduct at the Capitol on January 6.

Perryman said "Y'all are not really criminals," in contrast "to the rest of the population" at the jail. "It's a facade, it's a farce," Giustino agreed, before the jail's automated reminder that the call was about to be cut off. — AFP

Jerusalem's Armenians vow to keep up fight against settler project

JERUSALEM: Residents of Zionist-annexed east Jerusalem's historic Armenian quarter rapidly mobilized when bulldozers rolled in to start work on a luxury hotel, a project they fear threatens the ancient but dwindling community.

The real estate deal which gives an Australian-Zionist investor roughly 25 percent of the Old City's Armenian quarter has sparked anger and concern among its residents. "The youth arrived in large numbers and positioned themselves in front of the bulldozers," recalled resident Kegham Balian of the escalation last month. "The settlers underestimated our community," said the Armenian merchant. "We are waging a peaceful struggle, and we are not afraid."

Ever since the construction began, Armenians have set up camp, bringing tents, stoves, mattresses and even a TV to a weeks-long sit-in to guard the contested land. Inside a tent, wooden planks patch up the holes left by construction equipment.

On Thursday, "over 30 armed provocateurs" attacked members of the Armenian community including clergymen, the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem said in a statement. It accused the real estate developer, Danny Rothman, of being responsible for the "massive and coordinated physical attack" shortly after the patriarchate had taken to the court to annul the controversial land sale.

East Jerusalem and the Old City — divided into Muslim, Christian, Jewish and Armenian quarters — was seized by the Zionist entity in 1967 and annexed in a move not recognized by the international community. Land rights are a key point of tension in east Je-

rusalem and the occupied West Bank, where the Zionist entity has built and expanded settlements, considered illegal under international law.

Only around 2,000 Armenians remain in the Old City quarter after waves of immigration primarily to the United States and Europe since the 1960s. Like Palestinians in the rest of east Jerusalem, most Armenians do not hold Zionist citizenship but only residency.

'Without consent'

Panic first erupted among the minority community in April, after it was revealed that the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem and Father Baret Yeretzyan, in charge of real estate affairs, struck a deal in 2021 with a Tel Aviv-based company. The firm, which won a 99-year lease on the land, is Rothman's Xana Gardens Ltd, according to lawyer and Jerusalem specialist Daniel Seidemann. "The agreement was reached by the patriarchate without the knowledge and without the consent of the residents of the Armenian quarter or their institutions," Seidemann told AFP, an assertion echoed by community members. The contract included "11,500 square meters (2.8 acres) of land, including a parking lot, five residences, and the patriarchate's seminar hall," said Setrag Balian, co-founder of Save the ArQ, a movement by Armenian quarter residents.

Despite the Armenian Patriarchate saying it had subsequently "withdrawn from negotiations" after discovering "problems behind this transaction", many community members still feel betrayed. Yeretzyan, the priest behind the contract has been defrocked. — AFP

Bangladesh arrests opposition members over train fire

DHAKA: Bangladesh police on Saturday arrested seven opposition party members blamed for an alleged pre-election arson attack on a packed commuter train that killed four people and injured another eight. Friday night's blaze engulfed the intercity Benapole Express in central Dhaka, with hundreds scrambling to pull passengers from burning carriages. It was the latest in a series of fires to hit railway services since late last year, blamed by police on "deadly acts of sabotage" by the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) ahead of Sunday's national election.

Police said Nabiullah Nabi, a senior BNP official in Dhaka, and six other party activists were arrested in the capital early Saturday. "Nabi funded and masterminded the attack," Dhaka Metropolitan Police spokesman Faruk Hossain told AFP by phone.

The BNP and dozens of other opposition parties are boycotting Sunday's vote, which they say is a "sham" designed to entrench the rule of longtime Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. The party has vehemently rejected allegations of responsibility for the fires and demanded an international probe into the incidents.

"These are pre-planned acts of sabotage by government functionaries aimed at discrediting the non-violent movement of the BNP," party spokesman A.K.M Wahiduzzaman told AFP. "Tarique Rahman, our party chief, had expressed his fear that government was hatching these conspiracy to divert people's attention away from the sham election."

Police had earlier lowered the fire's



DHAKA: Bangladeshi fire fighters search through a burnt out carriage of the Benapole Express in Dhaka on January 5, 2024. — AFP

death toll from five to four. Samanta Lal Sen, a senior official of the Dhaka hospital treating victims of the blaze, said eight people had been critically injured. Bangladesh foreign minister A.K. Abdul Momen described the latest train fire as "an unforgivable crime against humanity". "The timing of this tragedy ... shows an absolute intention to hinder the festivity, safety and security of the democratic processes," he said.

Quamrul Ahsan, chief of the country's state-run railway authority told AFP that 32 passenger trains had been suspended over the weekend to "provide more safety to other passengers". Ahsan said there had

been at least four arson attacks targeting the trains ahead of the election. "These incidents are unprecedented," he said, adding that authorities had boosted security in some of the inter-city trains.

Hasina, 76, is assured of a fifth consecutive term in Sunday's vote, which observers have criticised as one-sided. Opposition parties held a series of protests last year demanding Hasina's resignation in favor of a neutral caretaker government to oversee the election and ensure its integrity. Violence in the run-up to Sunday's vote has killed at least 15 people, and the BNP has called a general strike over the weekend to protest the poll. — AFP

International

Sudan paramilitary chief bids for legitimacy in Africa tour

A meeting with Sudanese civilian politicians implies Daglo could emerge as political leader: Analysts

CAIRO: Sudan's paramilitary chief spent the first months of the country's war in the shadows. Now he has emerged to embrace civilian politicians and tour African capitals in a bid for international legitimacy, analysts say.

Mohamed Hamdan Daglo — commonly known as Hemeti — commands the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) which the United States accused of ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity in Sudan's Darfur region during its war with the army. The RSF has been fighting the Sudanese Armed Forces, led by Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, since April last year in the northeast African country where the US has also accused the army of war crimes.

Daglo had remained largely out of sight while Burhan emerged from a siege of military headquarters to make overseas trips and address the UN General Assembly as Sudan's de facto leader. But since late December Daglo has been on his first wartime trip abroad, meeting government leaders in Uganda, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, South Africa and Rwanda.

It is part of a strategy analysts see as likely linked to the United Arab Emirates. Daglo is "in the ascendancy," said veteran Sudan expert Alex de Waal. So is the war's death toll, estimated conservatively at more than 12,190.

Clement Deshayes, a Sudan specialist at Sorbonne University in Paris, said Daglo had been "welcomed with the attributes of a head of state" on his visits. The most important, said Deshayes, came in Addis Ababa where Daglo met with and embraced

Sudan's former prime minister Abdalla Hamdok, who was placed under house arrest after an October 2021 coup orchestrated by Burhan and Daglo, then allies.

Their putsch derailed Sudan's fragile transition to democracy. After a brief reinstatement, Hamdok resigned in January 2022 and fled for Abu Dhabi. He remains Sudan's foremost civilian politician and has reemerged as part of a new coalition known as Taqadam.

'Kiss the ring'

In embracing Taqadam, Daglo was making "the single most important move that he could to gain legitimacy," said Andreas Krieg, a security studies expert at King's College London. Although Burhan's administration continues to put out statements as the Sudanese government, the RSF controls the streets of the capital Khartoum, nearly all of the western Darfur region, and in December pressed deeper into Al-Jazira state, shattering one of the country's few remaining sanctuaries.

The United Nations says the violence is "imperiling regional stability," having unleashed the world's largest displacement crisis that has uprooted more than seven million people, including around 1.4 million who have crossed into neighboring countries.

Daglo, a former camel and sheep trader, rose to prominence under Sudan's former strongman Omar al-Bashir who unleashed Janjaweed militias after an ethnic minority rebellion began in Darfur in 2003. The militia campaign led to war crimes charges against Bashir and oth-

ers. When security personnel attacked pro-democracy demonstrators in Khartoum in June 2019 after Bashir's overthrow, it was the RSF, descendants of the Janjaweed, that witnesses said were at the forefront of the bloodshed, killing at least 128 people.

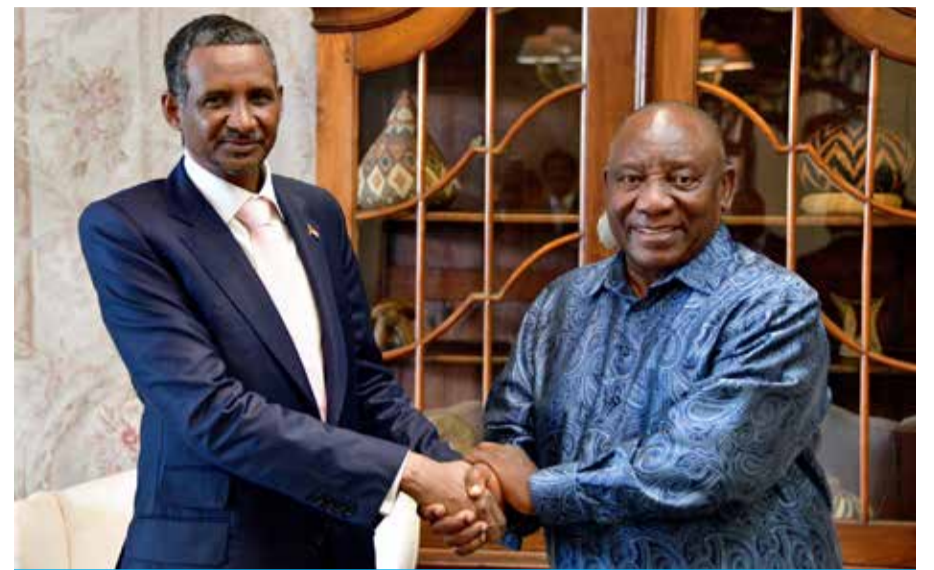
However, Daglo's embrace of a civilian partner offers the chance to gain international legitimacy, particular from the West, analysts told AFP. That, said Deshayes, was "despite the ethnic cleansing in Darfur (and) the systematic rape and looting in central Sudan and Darfur".

Kholood Khair, a Sudanese analyst, said rumors of a linkup between Hamdok and Daglo had been "rife even before the war" and were "kicked into overdrive" by the Addis meeting. In videos of the Addis event, Hamdok and his fellow politicians line up to shake hands with Daglo, who wears a sharp suit instead of military fatigues.

"The optics of the meeting were that Hemeti is in charge," Khair told AFP, with Hemeti "holding court and them coming to him, taking turns to say hello and kiss the ring." On social media, pro-democracy activists accused Hamdok of betraying civilians for political gain.

The army isolated

Hamdok has said he hopes for "an urgent meeting" with Burhan. However, Cameron Hudson, an Africa expert at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said the general was now "highly unlikely" to agree. Burhan reacted with fury to Daglo's tour, accusing the host nations of "partnering in the murder of



PRETORIA: This handout photograph by South Africa's Government Communication and Information System shows the leader of Sudan's paramilitary RSF Mohamed Daglo (left) on a visit to South African President Cyril Ramaphosa (right) at his official residence in Pretoria. — AFP

the Sudanese people". That "is precisely the intent," Hudson told AFP. "It will make the army look opposed to peace and paint Hemeti as the more reasonable and responsible party," he said.

Multiple analysts, including Krieg and Hudson, told AFP the strategy was probably not Daglo's alone and likely originated with the United Arab Emirates. The UAE, analysts say, already supplies the RSF with munitions via neighboring African countries — a charge the UAE has denied.

Krieg said the UAE was "engineering

a narrative whereby Hemeti comes out as a potential political leader", with "Taqadam as a legitimate civilian umbrella for the RSF as the security sector". The army has grown "more and more isolated," said Deshayes, with its military defeats pushing even close ally Egypt away and Daglo now able to "start (peace) negotiations from a place of strength". But at the same time, Burhan's alienation "will only confuse and complicate the situation and create more time and space for fighting to continue," said Hudson. — AFP

Senegal opposition leader's presidential bid faces setback

DAKAR: Senegal's Constitutional Council on Friday rejected jailed opposition leader Ousmane Sonko's candidacy for next month's presidential vote, his lawyer said, after a long-running judicial saga around the firebrand politician. The 49-year-old, who came third in the 2019 presidential election, has been at the center of a bitter stand-off with the state that has lasted more than two years and sparked often deadly unrest.

Sonko's lawyer, Cire Cleodor Ly, said the candidacy had been rejected on the grounds that the application was incomplete. "When we entered, (Council) President Badio Camara immediately notified us that (Sonko's) file was incomplete," he said.

More than 90 candidates have put their names forward to the Constitutional Council, which is due to announce the list of presidential contenders on January 20. President Macky Sall in July announced

that he would not seek a third term in the February 25 poll, handpicking his prime minister, Amadou Ba, as his coalition's presidential candidate.

Sonko filed his candidacy with the Constitutional Council in December despite the state's refusal to provide him the necessary documents to run. They argued that Sonko had been removed from the electoral register after being sentenced in June to two years' imprisonment for morally corrupting a young person. Sonko's lawyers had said they would file his candidacy anyway. The opposition figure has generated a passionate following among Senegal's disaffected youth, striking a chord with his pan-Africanist rhetoric and tough stance on former colonial power France.

'Electoral farce'

On Friday, Sonko's lawyer said the Constitutional Council president told him that "the files, the accompanying letters and the attached documents were received and checked by the commission, which concluded that one document was missing and that the candidacy file was incomplete".

Ly denounced the Council's decision as an "electoral farce" and suggested he would lodge "the appeals provided for by law" when he has information



ZIGUINCHOR: Ousmane Sonko (C), President of the opposition party Senegalese Patriots for Work, Ethics and Brotherhood, speaks to reporters in this file photo. — AFP

on the missing document. "The commission's composition was irregular because the law stipulates that this verification must be carried out in the presence of the candidate or the proxy," he said.

"There is a desire to move towards elections which from the outset lack transparency and which in any

case will not reflect the will of the nation". Ly told AFP that the Constitutional Council had not informed Sonko's legal team what document was missing.

Firebrand figurehead

A day earlier, the opposition figure's chances of running for president had been thrown into jeopardy after the Supreme Court upheld a six-month suspended sentence handed to him for defamation. The court's decision closed the case in which Sonko had also been handed a hefty fine for defamation and insults against Tourism Minister Mame Mbaye Niang.

Sonko's camp maintained he still had the right to run in the election since a judge in December ordered that he be reinstated on the electoral roll. His coalition nominated him as their presidential candidate last Sunday in a meeting that took place behind closed doors as authorities had banned a public gathering scheduled for the previous day.

On Friday, leaders from Sonko's coalition denounced the "complicity" of the Constitutional Council in the "plot" to eliminate him from the ballot. The firebrand figurehead has been jailed since the end of July on a string of other charges, including calling for insurrection, conspiracy with terrorist groups and endangering state security. — AFP

Kuwait urged to join genocide...

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AFP correspondents reported Zionist strikes early Saturday on the southern city of Rafah, where hundreds of thousands of people have sought shelter from the fighting. On the Zionist entity's northern border, Lebanon's Hezbollah group said it launched on Saturday its "initial response" to the killing of Hamas' deputy chief in Beirut, which a US defense official has told AFP was carried out by the Zionist entity.

The Iran-backed group said it had targeted the Zionist military's Meron air control base with 62 missiles, while the Zionist army reported "approximately 40 launches from Lebanon" early Saturday, and said it struck Hezbollah "military sites" in response. By the afternoon, warning sirens had sounded seven times in the Zionist entity, the military said. Contacted by AFP, a military spokesperson confirmed the mountaintop base had been targeted but did not say whether it was damaged.

The Hamas-allied Lebanese movement has been trading near-daily fire with Zionist forces since early October and said the barrage was a response to Tuesday's killing of Saleh Al-Aruri in a strike on Beirut's southern suburbs, a Hezbollah stronghold. While the two sides exchanged fire on Saturday, European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell, on a visit to Beirut, warned against a wider war. "It is imperative to avoid regional escalation in the Middle East. It is absolutely necessary to avoid Lebanon being dragged into a regional conflict," Borrell said. Before heading to Saudi

Arabia, Borrell called for a redoubling of peace efforts.

In the central Gaza town of Deir al-Balah, men clambered carefully around the concrete ruins and twisted rebar where Mohammad Al-Attar's house stood before Zionist rockets destroyed it. "There was no prior warning or anything," Attar said, his hands stained grey from the debris. "There's still the corpse of a little girl" underneath.

Palestinian man Abu Mohammed, 60, who fled to Rafah from the central Bureij refugee camp, told AFP that as the war nears its fourth month, Gaza's future appeared "dark and gloomy and very difficult". The Zionist entity has launched a relentless bombardment and ground invasion of Gaza that have killed at least 22,722 people, most of them women and children.

In a statement on Saturday, the Gaza health ministry said it had recorded more than 120 deaths over the past 24 hours. Victims of renewed Zionist bombardment were brought Saturday to the European hospital in the southern city of Khan Yunis, where relatives and mourners gathered. One of them, Mohamed Awad, wept over the body of a 12-year-old boy. He counted the deaths in his family. "My brother, his wife, his children, his relatives and the brothers of his wife — there are more than 20 martyrs," Awad, a journalist, told AFP.

Another Palestinian journalist, Akram El-Shafei, has died at the hospital from wounds sustained in Gaza City in November, making him "the 117th journalist... killed by the (Zionist) occupation during this crazy war", according to Asser Yassin of the Palestinian Media Forum. Yassin said the Zionist entity "directly targets journalists" but that it "only increases our determination to... convey the suffering and pain" to the world. Shafei's condition had initially improved, said relative Magda El-Shafei, but he "needed treatment" and there was "nothing" available. "He's gone," she told AFP. — Agencies

lot". "Today I make this sacred pledge to you that the defense, protection and preservation of American democracy will remain, as it has been, the central cause of my presidency."

Biden compares Trump to Nazis...

Continued from Page 1

Biden's full frontal attack on Trump came after criticism from some Democrats that the campaign has gotten off to a slow start. Biden lags behind Trump in some polls, and also has the worst approval rating of any modern president at this stage in his term of office. The president has failed to convince voters the economy is improving, while migration remains a headache and US support for Ukraine and the Zionist entity remains divisive among voters.

But perhaps Biden's biggest vulnerability is his age: As America's oldest-ever president, he has suffered a series of trips and verbal slips. Biden however warned that the biggest issue of all was Trump, saying that "your freedom is on the bal-

Blinken tackles Gaza, NATO...

Continued from Page 1

release on Thursday of a draft plan for Gaza's post-war governance that spoke of Palestinian "civil committees" taking gradual control, while the Zionist entity would "reserve its operational freedom of action" throughout the territory.

The State Department said Blinken "emphasized the need to prevent the conflict from spreading" during more than an hour of talks with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Blinken stressed the need to "work toward broader, lasting regional peace that ensures (the Zionist entity's) security and advances the establishment of a Palestinian state," the State Department said.

A Turkish diplomatic source said Foreign Minister Hakan Fiden pressed Blinken during a separate meeting for an "immediate ceasefire" that could ensure the smooth delivery of aid. Istanbul served as a base for Hamas political leaders until raids on the Zionist killed triggered a reprisal offensive in Gaza that has claimed more than 22,700 lives — most of them women and children. Turkey asked the Hamas chiefs to leave after some were captured on video celebrating the attack.

Erdogan has since turned into one of the Muslim world's harshest critics of Washington's support for the Zionist entity's destructive Gaza campaign. Erdogan has compared Zionist Prime Minister Ben-

jamin Netanyahu to Adolf Hitler and accused the United States of sponsoring the "genocide" of Palestinians. He has also rebuffed US pressure to cut off the suspected flow of funding through Turkey to Hamas and defended the group as legitimately elected "liberators" fighting for their land.

The US State Department on Friday announced \$10 million in rewards for information about five alleged Hamas foreign operatives — three of them believed to be based in Turkey — thought to be helping finance the Iran-backed group. Erdogan began to tone down his most strident comments after US President Joe Biden last month called the Turkish leader for the first time since the war broke out.

The call helped push along NATO member Turkey's glacial progress in accepting Sweden into the US-led defense organization in the wake of Russia's war on Ukraine. A key parliamentary committee approved Sweden's application in late December. Some analysts believe Biden's call also secured Blinken's meeting with Erdogan. The Turkish leader notably left the city during Blinken's last visit two months ago.

Blinken entered the talks hoping to win assurances that a ratification vote on Sweden's accession to NATO will be held soon by Turkey's full parliament. The State Department said Blinken and Erdogan discussed "completing Sweden's accession to NATO and strengthening trade and investment between the United States and Turkey". Erdogan has been able to use Turkey's veto power to impel Sweden into taking a tougher stance with Kurdish groups in Stockholm that Ankara views as "terrorists". — AFP

India navy rescues Arabian Sea crew...

Continued from Page 1

earlier Friday, was working to restore power and propulsion to allow the Liberian-flagged bulk carrier to continue to its next port of call.

The navy did not give a precise location of the vessel, which was last pinged by online marine traffic monitors off the coast of East Africa six days earlier. It also did not specify whether hijackers had gained control of the ship at any point but said earlier that an overhead patrol flight had confirmed the safety of the crew on Friday morning. Steve Kunzer, chief executive of the vessel's Dubai-based owners Lila Global, thanked the Indian navy for the rescue. "We

also want to thank the professionalism of our crew who reacted safely and responsibly under the circumstances," he said in a statement.

The Indian navy said it "remains committed to ensuring safety of merchant shipping in the region along with international partners and friendly foreign countries". Last month a drone attack hit the MV Chem Pluto tanker 370 km off the coast of India. Iran's foreign ministry rejected accusations of responsibility for that attack by Washington as "worthless".

It was the first time Washington had openly accused Iran of directly targeting ships since the start of the Zionist entity's war on Hamas, which is backed by Tehran. Yemeni rebel attacks have prompted major firms to reroute their cargo vessels around the southern tip of Africa, a much longer voyage with higher fuel costs. — AFP

International

South Koreans evacuate border island as North fires artillery shells

Pyongyang says escalation reminiscent of deadly 2010 incident had no effect on island



YEONPYEONG-RI, South Korea: A woman looks at wrecked homes hit by North Korea's 2010 shelling attack at a museum that displays materials related to the attack on Yeonpyeong island on January 6, 2024.



A general view shows the North Korean coastline with artillery bunkers as seen from a viewpoint on Yeonpyeong island. — AFP photos

SEOUL: North Korea's military fired over 60 artillery rounds near Yeonpyeong Island on Saturday, Seoul's military said, a day after both sides staged live-fire drills in the same area near their contested maritime border. "North Korean forces conducted artillery fire with over 60 rounds" northwest of Yeonpyeong Island on Saturday afternoon, Seoul's Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement.

On Friday, North Korea fired more than 200 rounds of artillery shells near Yeonpyeong and Baengnyeong, two sparsely populated islands situated just south of a defacto maritime border between the two sides. Residents of the two islands were ordered to evacuate to shelters and ferries were suspended during one of the most serious military escalations on the peninsula since Pyongyang fired shells at one of the islands in 2010.

Both Friday and Saturday, North Korea's shells landed in a buffer zone created under a 2018 tension-reducing deal, which fell apart in November after the North launched a spy satellite. Seoul's military said Saturday that "the repeated artillery fire within the prohibited hostile act zone by North Korea poses a threat to the peace on the Korean

Peninsula and escalates tensions".

"North Korea, following its claim of the complete nullification of the 'September 19 Military Agreement', continues to threaten our citizens with ongoing artillery fire within the prohibited hostile act zone," the JCS said, referring to the 2018 deal. "In response, our military will take appropriate measures," it said.

'No effect'

North Korea said Friday that its live-fire drills had not even had "an indirect effect" on the border islands. Yeonpyeong, which has around 2,000 residents, is about 115 kilometers (70 miles) west of Seoul. Baengnyeong, with a population of 4,900, is about 210 kilometers west of Seoul.

In November, Seoul partially suspended the 2018 military accord to protest Pyongyang's putting a spy satellite into orbit. North Korea then scrapped the deal completely. "It feels as if going back to the era of the Cold War, where the other side's actions are deemed violations and provocations, while one's own actions are seen as defensive and justified responses," Yang Moo-jin, pres-

ident of the University of North Korean Studies in Seoul, told AFP.

He urged Seoul to explore the possibility of working with China — North Korea's major ally, which has urged restraint from both sides — to reduce tensions on the peninsula. "The downside of the tit-for-tat strategy is the inability to take a moderate approach first, even when anticipating significant losses, due to pride," he said. "It is crucial for the leaders of North and South Korea to always remember that when verbal bombshells turn into actions, it will not only mean the end of their regimes but also the demise of our nation."

2010 incident

In 2010, in response to a South Korean live-fire drill near the sea border, North Korea bombed Yeonpyeong Island, killing four South Koreans — two soldiers and two civilians. That was the first attack on a civilian area since the 1950-53 Korean War. South Korea returned fire in an exchange that lasted more than an hour, as the two sides traded more than 200 shells, sparking brief fears of a full-fledged war. Relations between the two Koreas are

at one of their lowest points in decades, after the North's leader Kim Jong Un enshrined the country's status as a nuclear power into the constitution while test-firing several advanced inter-continental ballistic missiles.

At year-end policy meetings, Kim warned of a nuclear attack on the South and called for a build-up of the country's military arsenal, warning that conflict could "break out any time". On Friday, KCNA said Kim called for the ramping-up of missile launcher production "given the prevailing grave situation that requires the country to be more firmly prepared for a military showdown with the enemy".

His comments came after the White House accused North Korea of providing Russia with ballistic missiles and missile launchers that were used in recent attacks on Ukraine. Washington has called this an escalation of Pyongyang's support for Moscow.

The two Koreas remain technically at war because the 1950-53 conflict ended in an armistice, not a treaty, and most of the border between them is heavily fortified, with their contested maritime border never officially delineated. — AFP

Life on the frontline: Fear, camaraderie on South Korean island

YEONPYEONG, South Korea: When a North Korean artillery shell slammed into his house and burned it to the ground in 2010, Jung Chang-kwan thought that war had broken out again. That attack was a North Korean artillery barrage on Jung's home, the remote South Korean border island of Yeonpyeong, which killed four people in the first such incident since the 1950-53 Korean War.

And on Friday, that previous attack was on Jung's mind as he fled to a shelter with his family after North Korea fired artillery shells near his island, prompting a South Korean live-fire exercise in response. "There wasn't that much fear inside the shelter. Rather, all the residents came and it was just a chatting atmosphere because they had not seen each other in a long time," he said of the Friday evacuation.

In contrast, in 2010, Jung said his family was unable to salvage any of their belongings from their burning house and had no choice but to run. "The shells rained down, smoke billowed, and everything was engulfed in flames and destroyed, there was no time to think about anything else," he told AFP.

Having to flee again on Friday, 70-year-old Jung said it felt both strange and "reminiscent" of the 2010 incident. But "I wasn't too shocked," he said. "I've even experienced (my house) being directly hit by artillery fire before." On Saturday, North Korea fired another 60 artillery shells in the area, Seoul's military said, urging Pyongyang to immedi-



YEONPYEONG, South Korea: A general view shows a village on Yeonpyeong island, near the 'northern limit line' sea boundary with North Korea, on January 6, 2024. — AFP

ately cease "actions that increase tension" along the maritime border.

Shelters always open

Yeonpyeong is extremely close — less than two kilometers (1.5 miles) — to the de facto maritime border between the two Koreas known as the Northern Limit Line (NLL). Although it is controlled by Seoul and on the southern side of the de facto maritime border, the sparsely populated island is much closer to North Korea. It is only around 42 kilometers away from the North Korean city of Haeju, while being situated about 115 kilometers west of

the South Korean capital Seoul.

On a clear day in autumn months, the train station in Haeju, as well as the plumes of smoke rising from the city's factories, can be seen from a hilltop on Yeonpyeong. Yeonpyeong operates around 10 shelters across the island equipped with medical beds, children's books and gas masks, among other materials. "We always keep the shelter doors open," an official from the Yeonpyeong district office told AFP at one of the shelters where around 200 residents stayed on Friday. "Our aim is to ensure that people can seek refuge here whenever necessary." — AFP

Villages wait for help as Japanese quake toll tops 100

SHIROMARU, Japan: Twenty-five minutes after the New Year's Day earthquake, a tsunami several meters high barreled into Shiromaru, leaving a trail of destruction for the Japanese coastal community's mostly elderly residents. One person died but the roughly 100 inhabitants like Yukio Teraoka and his wife — well drilled in what to do in seismic hot-spot Japan — dashed out of their houses and fled to higher ground in time.

"We cannot live in our house anymore," Teraoka, 82, told AFP as he and his wife shoveled the heavy, sodden sand brought by the waves out of their wrecked home. "There is 30 kilograms (65 pounds) of rice stored in this," said his wife, in red rubber gloves, woolly hat and face mask, pointing to a hefty steel container the size of a refrigerator that rolled on the ground. "But it's all waste now after being soaked in sea water."

Elsewhere in the village, one of several that dot the small coves of the Noto peninsula hit by the 7.5-magnitude quake, a tangled mass of wooden, metal and plastic debris litters the streets. The detritus includes furniture, mattresses, shoes and, by one mangled metal fence, a forlorn and soggy Snoopy stuffed toy, even though like many villages in ageing Japan, Shiromaru has zero children of el-



SHIROMARU: People walk past debris on a road in Shiromaru, Ishikawa prefecture on January 5, 2024, nearly a week after a major 7.5 magnitude earthquake struck the region. — AFP

ementary school age. The death toll from the quake and its aftermath on Saturday reached 126, with 210 still unaccounted for. More than 30,000 people are in government shelters. Buffeted by the salty seaside wind, only a few people were cleaning up in Shiromaru on Friday four days on from the disaster, with little help from the overstretched authorities.

"I don't think we have received substantial supplies or food," Takushi Sakashita, 59, who lives near-

ly, told AFP. He said he has refrained from taking food rations at a nearby shelter so they would go to people more in need. "I myself try not to move around to save petrol, because fuel stations are not working and there is a serious lack of fuel," he said.

Shiromaru at least remains reachable along the main road. Many other communities are still cut off, with an estimated 1,000 landslides having made many roads impassable. Tens of thousands of people were without power or running water. — AFP

India's Sun probe reaches solar orbit after four months

NEW DELHI: India's solar observation mission on Saturday entered the Sun's orbit after a four-month journey, the latest success for the space exploration ambitions of the world's most populous nation. The Aditya-L1 mission was launched in September and is carrying an array of instruments to measure and observe the Sun's outermost layers.

India's science and technology minister Jitendra Singh said on social media that the probe had reached its final orbit "to discover the mysteries of Sun-Earth connection". The United States and the European Space Agency have sent numerous probes to the center of the solar system, beginning with NASA's Pioneer program in the 1960s. Japan and China have both launched their own solar observatory missions into Earth's orbit. But the latest mission by the Indian Space Research Organization is the first by any Asian nation to be placed in orbit around the Sun.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi hailed it as yet another "landmark" in the country's space program. "It is a testament to the relentless dedication of our scientists," he said on social media. "We will continue to pursue new frontiers of science for the benefit of humanity."

Aditya, named after a Hindu Sun deity, has travelled 1.5 million kilometers (932,000 miles) from the Earth — still only one percent of the distance between humanity's home planet and the star at the center of our solar system. It is now at a point where the gravitational forces of both celestial bodies cancel out, allowing it to remain in a stable halo orbit around the Sun.

The orbiter, which reportedly cost \$48 million, will study coronal mass ejections, a periodic phenomenon that sees huge discharges of plasma and magnetic energy from the Sun's atmosphere. These bursts are so powerful they can reach the Earth and potentially disrupt the operations of satellites.

The mission also aims to shed light on the dynamics of several other solar phenomena by imaging and measuring particles in the Sun's upper atmosphere. India has a comparatively low-budget space program, but one that has grown considerably in size and momentum since it first sent a probe to orbit the Moon in 2008.

In August last year, India became the first country to land an uncrewed craft near the largely unexplored lunar south pole, and just the fourth nation to land on the Moon. India became the first Asian nation to put a craft into orbit around Mars in 2014, and it is slated to launch a three-day crewed mission into Earth's orbit later this year. It also plans a joint mission with Japan to send another probe to the Moon by 2025 and an orbital mission to Venus within the next two years. — AFP

Business

SUNDAY, JANUARY 7, 2024

AI breathes new life into old trends

Gadget extravaganza CES kicks off in Las Vegas on Tuesday

SAN FRANCISCO: The annual tech industry fair known as the Consumer Electronics Show is regaining momentum after the pandemic, with artificial intelligence (AI) infusing everything from bicycles to baby bottles.

The gadget extravaganza referred to as CES formally kicks off Tuesday in Las Vegas, boasting more than 3,500 exhibitors and expecting some 130,000 visitors. CES exhibitor and attendee numbers have jumped each year since the COVID-19 pandemic caused it to be an online-only event in 2021.

"After COVID some people thought they were not going back," Creative Strategies analyst Carolina Milanese told AFP. "But, smaller companies that don't have the brand power to get attention they deserve at their own events are deciding to be part of the conversation at CES." While the show is increasingly a showcase for startups, big brands such as Amazon, Google, Intel, Netflix, Samsung, Sony and TikTok will also be there next week, according to the Consumer Technology Association organizing the event.

AI abounds

Analysts expect it to be the year of AI when it comes to product pitches at CES. "I do not suggest anyone create a game at CES to take a drink any time someone says AI, because you will be drunk before CES even starts," Techspontential analyst Avi Greengart quipped. Models on which AI is built have improved dramatically since last CES and the debut of OpenAI's ChatGPT, and they are being applied in meaningful ways for consumers, according to Greengart.

"There is little doubt that the tech ecosystem gathering in Las Vegas will focus on AI everywhere and on-device generative AI," said Forrester principal

analyst Thomas Husson. "The biggest theme will be about how AI can power new invisible and immersive consumer experiences."

Innovations on display at CES will include technology-packed glasses for the blind from Lumen that let wearers know where it is safe to walk, even avoiding puddles, according to the startup.

Meanwhile, Shift Robotics will let people try out its latest Moonwalkers shoes that let people walk at a running pace without breaking a sweat. AI will be featured in homes, sound systems, automobiles, televisions, baby bottles, beds and more, according to pitches sent out by exhibitors. "There is going to be a lot of AI and AI-washing similar to the green washing we saw a few years ago," Milanese said, noting that not all products will deliver.

Car tech galore

Eye-popping televisions from LG and others will be on display, along with automotive innovations as cars and the technology built into them are showcased. "CES has become an automotive show," analyst Greengart told AFP. "Cars have become rolling software platforms, or consumer electronics with wheels, and you can be sure there are going to be a lot of announcements."

Chip makers including Intel will spotlight their latest semiconductors designed to handle complex computing tasks. Nvidia plans a special address at CES on Monday focusing on consumer technologies and robotics. Nvidia chips are in hot demand by companies looking to power generative AI.

Greengart expects health to be among the big CES themes, with sensors built into mirrors, wearables and more to measure vital signs. L'Oreal chief executive Nicolas Hieronimus will be among the CES



At the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, AI will be featured in homes, sound systems, automobiles, televisions, baby bottles, beds and more. — AFP

keynote speakers for the first time, joining peers from Walmart, Qualcomm and Siemens on the show roster. Snap co-founder and chief Evan Spiegel will take part in a panel discussion on brand loyalty.

With the recent release of Meta's Quest 3 virtual reality headset and with Apple expected to hit the market early this year with its Vision Pro, a lot of small companies at CES are expected to show

off gear to compete in the "spatial computing" and mixed-reality market. Sustainability promises to be a more meaningful trend at CES than in the past as more companies adopt practices such as environmentally friendly packaging and using recycled materials in products and rechargeable batteries, according to analysts. "Some of the sustainability gains are starting to get real," Greengart said. — AFP

Global maritime trade sails into geopolitical storm

PARIS: International maritime trade has hit stormy waters as attacks by Yemen's Houthi rebels on ships in the Red Sea has reduced the availability of ships, causing freight rates to surge. Most large international shipping companies have decided to reroute trading to avoid the Red Sea and Suez Canal through which 12 percent of world trade usually passes.

The Houthis say the strikes are in solidarity with Palestinians in war-ravaged Gaza, which Israel has bombarded relentlessly for three months, in what it says is a campaign to destroy militant group Hamas. Danish shipping giant Maersk said Friday that it would divert all vessels around Africa instead of using the Red Sea and Suez Canal for the "foreseeable future" after Yemeni rebels attacked its merchant ships.

Vessels are circumnavigating Africa via the Cape of Good Hope, which extends the journey between Asia and Europe by 10 to 20 days on average, according to Arthur Barillas, general manager of Ovrsea, a freight organizer. Shipping companies have already announced significant price increases to cover the costs associated with the detour.

French shipping group CMA CGM has doubled the price of a 40-foot container between Asia and the Mediterranean to \$6,000. Italian-Swiss peer and sector leader MSC has hiked its prices to \$5,900 from \$2,900 for the same offering. The United States says there have been more than 20 Red Sea attacks by Houthi rebels since October 19.

The industry is suffering from a shortage of containers in Asia owing to longer journey times, causing a headache ahead of the Chinese New Year next



The container ship Maersk Line Manila is pictured at the ECT Delta terminal in Rotterdam's Harbour, in Rotterdam on August 1, 2022. — AFP

month. "There is a real influx (of goods) from Asia," said Barillas. In the runup to the Chinese New Year on February 10, "all the ships are full", causing freight rates to rise, he added.

Customers are rushing to have their goods shipped before the celebrations bring China, the world's biggest exporter, to a week-long standstill. A benchmark indicator for measuring the freight tariff rate of goods transported from China—the Shanghai Containerized Freight Index—has almost doubled in a few weeks. Such a sudden increase is reminiscent of what occurred during the COVID pandemic, when freight rates reached unprecedented heights on disruptions to supply chains. "Many people, they focus on the spot rate. And yes, it has doubled. And, of course, it asks about how desperate the situation is," Niels Rasmussen, chief shipping analyst at BIMCO, told AFP.

He added, however, that some shippers would have negotiated better deals. "If you look at the average rate for everything out of China through most of Europe and the Mediterranean, the increase is 15 percent to 20 percent," said Rasmussen. Attacks in the Red Sea are not the only ones disrupting international trade. The worst drought in decades to hit the Panama Canal has forced authorities to slow transits.

A potential further hazard could be the outcome of presidential elections in Taiwan due January 13, should it lead to another crisis with China, according to analysts. However, "even with the threat of some congestion and equipment shortages, carriers are much better-positioned to accommodate operationally for these diversions when compared to the disruptions seen during the pandemic", Israeli freight reservation and payment platform, Freightos, said in a weekly note to clients. — AFP



NEW YORK: Wall Street stocks edged higher Friday, despite strong US jobs numbers pouring cold water on hopes the Federal Reserve will cut interest rates.

Wall St up despite US jobs data dashing early rate cut hopes

NEW YORK: Wall Street stocks edged higher Friday, despite strong US jobs numbers pouring cold water on hopes the Federal Reserve will cut interest rates in the world's top economy in the next few months. The Fed signaled last month it sees itself beginning to cut interest rates in 2024, which helped stock markets finish the year on a strong note.

But minutes from its policy meeting, released this week, showed officials were in no hurry and expected to keep borrowing costs at a two-decade high for some time to ensure they have inflation under control. With a tight labor market and wage growth seen as a potential threat to the central bank's goal of bringing inflation down to its two percent target, investors were eyeing employment data for its implications on policy.

Friday's data showed US job growth surged in December to 216,000 jobs in the final month of 2023, confounding expectations of a slowdown from November. "The key takeaway from the report is that it wasn't weak, so the market is going to have to grapple with the notion that the Fed may not cut rates as many times in 2024 as the market had come to expect at the end of 2023," said market analyst Patrick O'Hare at Briefing.com.

But Wall Street stocks eked out gains on Friday, even as major indices posted their first weekly declines in weeks. "The US economy appears to have maintained its resilience into the end of 2023 with little sign of the recession that markets have become increasingly fearful of," said CMC Markets analyst Michael Hewson. Jack Ablin, chief investment officer at Cresset, said: "A strong labor market is good news, it really helps make the case for a soft landing."

This refers to a scenario where inflation comes down without a major downturn.

On Friday, data also showed that US service sector activity grew less than expected in the final month of 2023. European markets were off sharply after data showing eurozone inflation turning higher again last month also raised questions about the timing of European Central Bank interest rate cuts.

But they managed to claw back most losses, with Frankfurt's DAX index briefly poking into the green. Meanwhile, shares in French spirits makers tumbled after Chinese authorities launched an anti-dumping probe into brandy imported from the European Union. — AFP

US hiring beats expectations in December

WASHINGTON: US job growth surged unexpectedly in December, government data showed Friday, wrapping up a solid year for the labor market even as voters remain gloomy about the economy ahead of November's presidential election. The world's biggest economy added 216,000 jobs in the final month of 2023, said the Department of Labor, despite expectations of a slowdown from the prior month.

The unemployment rate was unchanged at 3.7 percent, holding at a historically low level and defying forecasts of an uptick. These robust figures come as higher interest rates bite, after the Federal Reserve lifted the benchmark lending rate rapidly and held it at a high level to ease demand and rein in inflation. They also add to optimism that the United States is achieving a so-called soft landing where inflation comes down without a significant downturn.

"This morning's report confirms that 2023 was a great year for Amer-

ican workers," said President Joe Biden. While strong job creation continued as inflation fell, Biden conceded: "I know that some prices are still too high for too many Americans, and I am doing everything in my power to lower everyday costs." Although the economy has defied recession predictions amid elevated rates, many Americans remain pessimistic as they grapple with higher costs—as Biden struggles to shift economic perceptions as he seeks reelection.

"What we're seeing now, I think we can describe as a soft landing. And my hope is that it will continue," Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen added in a CNN interview. "Factoring in downward revisions to the prior months' figures, the three-month average employment gain was 165,000, right in line with the 2019 average," said ZipRecruiter chief economist Julia Pollak. This suggests the labor market has returned to "pre-pandemic normal," she added. Wage growth was steady in December, rising 0.4 percent from November 2023, said the Labor Department.

From the year before, average hourly earnings rose 4.1 percent, slightly above November's reading. "This remains above the Fed's comfort zone of around 3.5 percent and will keep



LOS ANGELES: People arrive at a career fair where job seekers can meet with prospective employers during a City of Los Angeles career fair offering to fill vacancies in more than 30 classifications of jobs on November 2, 2023 in Los Angeles, California. — AFP

Fed policymakers on alert," said EY chief economist Gregory Daco. "Still, we anticipate that wage pressures will cool further." In 2023, although sectors like manufacturing and housing were hit harder by higher rates, a resilient labor market helped support consumption and the economy.

Last month, employment trended up in areas like government and health care. But transportation and warehousing lost jobs. Ryan Sweet of Oxford Economics warns that "the jury is

not going to be out on December employment for a couple more months," given the potential for revisions.

"But overall, I think the trend is that the labor market is still very strong," he told AFP. Friday's employment data is closely watched for its potential bearing on the Fed's thinking, as officials mull the path of interest rates. For now, "the timing of the first rate cut is still up in the air," Sweet noted. Some expect the central bank could start lowering rates as early as in March. — AFP

Business

Gulf Bank's digital services undergo a revolutionary transformation in 2023

Strategic initiatives cover e-services, branches, ATMs and call center



A group photo from the ceremony announcing the grand prize winner for the Al-Dana Millionaire account.



Gulf Bank's drive-thru interactive teller machine service.

KUWAIT: Mohammed Al-Qattan, the General Manager of Consumer Banking at Gulf Bank, affirmed that 2023 marked a substantial improvement in the bank's financial services, signifying a notable milestone in its ongoing digital transformation efforts. Al-Qattan emphasized the notable progress achieved, highlighting the success of the bank's strategic initiatives.

He went on to provide an overview of the key achievements in digital development witnessed by Gulf Bank in the past year, aligning with its 2025 strategy. This strategic vision aims to solidify the bank's position as a forward-looking financial institution in Kuwait, committed to delivering the most exceptional banking solutions and services to its customers.

The drive of digital transformation continued into 2023, covering electronic services, branch improvements, ATMs, as well as the call center. These initiatives were focused on enhancing the efficiency and accessibility of Gulf Bank's services, with the goal of achieving excellence in the banking sector. By leveraging cutting-edge technology, the bank aimed to surpass customer expectations. Below are some of the notable advancements from this ongoing transformation:

The best prepaid card program in Kuwait

Gulf Bank was honored with the best prepaid card program in Kuwait award for the year 2023, at the Mastercard MENA East Business Forum in Dubai. The event, attended by numerous leaders from the banking industry in the region, highlights the recognition of Gulf Bank's exceptional prepaid card offerings and its demonstrated capacity to innovate and excel in delivering outstanding products and services.

A completely enhanced mobile application

As a part of its rapid strides toward digital leadership, Gulf Bank has introduced a completely enhanced version of its mobile application. Boasting the simplest, fastest, and top-tier specifications in the banking sector, the app incorporates new technology that delivers an innovative banking experience, surpassing customer expectations.

Gulf Bank's mobile application stands out as one of the fastest, most efficient and user-friendly options in the banking sector. It encompasses a multitude of features and services accessible through a smart user interface, meticulously designed to cater to the unique needs of each customer, ensuring that their aspirations are promptly fulfilled.

Handling complaints through the mobile application

Gulf Bank was committed to receiving complaints through its "Complaints and Customer Protection" unit and the bank's mobile application. This commitment aligns with the guidelines set by the Central Bank of Kuwait and is a proactive measure to enhance customer protection in the banking sector. The goal is to foster a balanced relationship between banks and customers, adhering to the highest international standards in this field.



The value of the annual prize for the Al-Danah Millionaire draw has increased to KD 2 million.



Mohammad Al-Qattan:

- We have launched an enhanced version of the bank's mobile application, delivering unmatched advantages
- Our prepaid card program earned the prestigious Best Prepaid Card Program in Kuwait award
- The Al-Danah Millionaire annual grand prize has been increased to KD 2 million
- Pioneering as the first bank in Kuwait to offer a drive-thru ITM Service



Mohammad Al-Qattan signs the check for the winner of the semi-annual prize in the Al-Danah Millionaire draw.



Mohammad Al-Taqi receiving the award for the best prepaid card program in Kuwait.

Increasing the Al-Danah Millionaire Account grand prize to KD 2 million

Gulf Bank has increased the annual prize for the Al-Danah Millionaire Draw in 2023 from KD 1 million to KD 2 million, solidifying its position as the world's largest cash prize associated with a bank account.

The Al-Danah Millionaire Draw, marking its twenty-fifth consecutive year since its launch in 1998, now includes two grand draws annually. This comprises the annual grand draw of KD 2 million, a semi-annual draw of KD 1 million, two winners in two draws of KD 100,000 each, and 10 monthly draw winners receiving KD 1,000 each.

The first bank in Kuwait to offer drive-thru ITM services

In line with its 2025 strategy to position itself as a bank for the future, Gulf Bank has introduced the first drive-thru interactive teller machine (ITM) at its Sharq branch on Ahmed Al-Jaber Street. This initiative positions Gulf Bank as the first bank to offer this service to customers in Kuwait. Additionally, it provides a traditional ATM service, making it the first machine in Kuwait to deliver both services via drive-thru.

Advancement of branches

Concurrently with the evolution of its services, and ongoing efforts to enhance customer satisfaction, Gulf Bank has introduced a fresh identity for its branches. This identity places a strong emphasis on the self-service concept and is set to be progressively implemented across the existing branch network. The initiative kicks off with the Fanar branch, distinguished by contemporary decor and spacious interiors, fostering a comfortable environment for customers and an exceptional workspace for employees.

Introducing the Google Pay service

Gulf Bank has introduced the Google Pay service,

offering its customers advanced digital payment capabilities. This allows users to easily conduct contactless transactions using Android and OS devices, ensuring both convenience and security. All transactions made via Google Pay undergo authentication through facial recognition, device password, or fingerprint. The service is seamlessly compatible with all establishments accepting remote bank card payments through smart devices.

Outstanding features with Easy Pay

With the launch of the upgraded Easy Pay service, Gulf Bank now offers its credit cardholders the flexibility to divide significant local and international transactions into 12 monthly installments, all with 0 percent interest. This expansion provides customers with a wider range of options to manage their payments effectively. Simplifying installment payments, customers now have the flexibility to choose any duration between two and twelve months for their payments. The one-time fee for this service does not exceed KD 2, and it is entirely interest-free. Additionally, the bank has permitted the interest-free payment of children's tuition fees, over a 12-month period, aligning with the commencement of the new school year.

Offering sign language interpretation services

Demonstrating its dedication to embedding sustainability principles in society and adhering to the requirements of the Central Bank of Kuwait, Gulf Bank has implemented simultaneous sign language interpretation services in its branches, for individuals with special needs. This initiative is designed to elevate the customer experience, ensuring prompt and convenient completion of their transactions at all times.

Various events and activities during the year of savings

In its commitment to promoting social sustainabil-

ity and aligning with the requirements of the Central Bank of Kuwait, Gulf Bank has undertaken initiatives to spread financial literacy across society. Marking 2023 as the Year of Savings, the bank is actively encouraging and educating diverse segments of society about the importance of saving. This dedication is evident in the initiation of numerous activities and events designed to cultivate a savings-oriented culture. Furthermore, Gulf Bank has introduced a range of channels and products to support customers in embracing this approach.

Offers and discounts

In its ongoing commitment to reward its customers, Gulf Bank has introduced exclusive offers for all its credit cardholders. These special deals are applicable at various restaurants, cafes, and for online orders in Kuwait, through collaborations with several well-known entities.

The best and fastest points program

Gulf Bank offers its customers the best and fastest rewards program in Kuwait, which enables customers to redeem points for tickets on all airlines and make hotel reservations at more than 300,000 hotels worldwide. It is noteworthy that points accrued from international purchases exceed those obtained in Kuwait. The program ensures that customers can promptly achieve satisfying returns when utilizing their credit cards. Gulf Bank's vision is to be the leading Kuwaiti Bank of the future. The Bank is constantly engaging and empowering its employees as part of an inclusive and diversified workplace in recognition of every employee's role in delivering customer excellence and serving the community at large. With its extensive network of branches and innovative digital services, Gulf Bank is able to give its customers the choice of how and where to conduct their banking transactions, all while ensuring a simple and seamless banking experience.

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



Google Pay service



Gulf Bank's completely environmentally-friendly branch at Sabah Al-Ahmad.



Digital services section at Al-Fanar branch.



A completely enhanced smartphone application.

Business

Top NBK official shares experience during 'TAMAKAN' panel discussion

Al-Hamad: The ultimate return on investment in self-development

- The landscape for Kuwaiti youth is fiercely competitive, and opting for comfort is no longer viable for those aiming for success.
- Ascending to leadership positions necessitates continual development and acquisition of fresh skills every day.

- The work environment at NBK is optimal, offering opportunities on par with international organizations.
- Regular access to the latest reports and research is vital, with a focus on critically examining them.

KUWAIT: The inaugural session of the "TAMAKAN" training program was launched featuring executive management members from National Bank of Kuwait (NBK). The first panel discussion welcomed Faisal Al-Hamad, Chief Executive Officer - Global Wealth Management at National Bank of Kuwait. Al-Hamad shared his extensive experience spanning numerous years in the banking industry with the youth audience and engaged in an interactive session, responding to inquiries posed by program participants.

This panel discussion is part of the fifth edition of the "TAMAKAN" training program, designed to train young Kuwaiti graduates. Organized by "Creative Confidence" and sponsored by NBK, this program offers a unique chance for trainees to tap into the expertise of the bank's executive management through discussion sessions. These open dialogues connect participants with NBK leaders boasting decades of extensive experience in the banking industry, providing invaluable insights to help them forge sustainably successful career paths.

Al-Hamad initiated the discussion by reflecting on the beginning of his career path. He said, "A specialized academic background isn't a requisite to attain a particular position or ascend to the pinnacle of a career. What truly matters is commencing from any point, focusing on growth, creativity, innovation, swift learning, and leveraging experiences within your work milieu."

Professional debut

At the outset of his career, Al-Hamad shared, "Following getting my degree from a university in the United States, I spent four years in asset management there. Subsequently, I pursued a master's degree in business administration before transitioning to employment in Kuwait."

"Upon joining NBK Capital in 2007, the team comprised of just 25 members. However, the corporate culture ingrained within an organization of NBK's stature instilled in me a fervor for continuous growth and an unwavering commitment to learning. I've imbibed a culture that influences my work decisions, prompting me to derive value from every nugget of information or news I encounter," Al-Hamad continued.

Al-Hamad reassured TAMAKAN youth that channeling resources into honing skills and nurturing capabilities through learning and training represents the most lucrative investment, continuously expanding and accumulating gains with each passing day. He emphasized that regardless of one's career stage, there's an ever-expanding pool of knowledge to tap into. Al-Hamad highlighted training as a golden opportunity for recent graduates, urging them to seize this chance, particularly at the outset of their careers.

Work environment

Al-Hamad delved into the significance of the work environment in fostering employee development, stating, "For anyone aspiring to forge a successful and sustainable career, finding an optimal work setting that fos-



KUWAIT: The inaugural session of the "TAMAKAN" training program.

ters ongoing growth is paramount. The employee should harbor an innate passion for learning and maintain an inquisitive nature, constantly seeking to glean insights from those surrounding them."

Al-Hamad pointed out that NBK stands among the select few institutions embodying this attribute. He highlighted the bank's exceptional and distinctive work environment, akin to international standards. This distinction stems from NBK's commitment to continuous learning, offering top-tier training courses in collaboration with prestigious educational institutions. These efforts aim to holistically develop employees' skills, ensuring they carve out independent, promising, and sustainable careers.

He offered advice to the attending youth, urging them to avoid wasting time on matters beyond their control. Instead, he recommended that they channel their energy into enhancing their job performance. "Foster ambition and prioritize cultivating positive relationships with your colleagues. This approach ensures a tranquil and conducive work environment that nurtures creativity and innovation."

Al-Hamad also underscored the importance of consistently acquiring new skills daily as the sole pathway toward personal advancement and reaching envisioned positions. He emphasized that resting is not a viable option, particularly amidst intensifying competition—both at individual and institutional levels. Every entity aims to draw in the necessary competencies and talents, seeking to distinguish itself from competitors. Hence, continuous skill development becomes imperative in this landscape.

Analytical thinking

Al-Hamad emphasized the importance of staying abreast of the latest reports and studies while maintaining an analytical and critical perspective. He said, "I possess

an innate drive to seek new information daily, honing my analytical thinking through the demands of my profession. I don't merely receive news passively; rather, I habitually analyze its potential impact on our business sector and decision-making processes."

Job burnout

Addressing a participant's question on job burnout, Al-Hamad highlighted, "Each employee should seek motivations that drive ongoing professional growth. Losing the zest for learning might hinder an employee's ability to fulfill job demands and tasks, potentially leading to job burnout. This burnout can stem from the work environment or the place of work itself. Therefore, I consistently recommend seeking out the optimal work environment, which is precisely what NBK offers."

"Job burnout often arises from sustained work pressures, leading to diminished motivation, exhaustion, reduced enjoyment in tasks, and a loss of confidence in one's abilities. Hence, employees must continuously revitalize their engagement through various solutions. These may include taking vacations to alleviate work pressures, engaging in exercise, pursuing hobbies, or activities that bring joy, aiming to restore mental and physical vitality," Al-Hamad explained.

Practical challenges

The "TAMAKAN" training program panel discussion proved to be a significant opportunity for recent graduates. It allowed them to hear directly from the CEO of Global Wealth Management at NBK Group, gaining insights into the work environment and strategies for success in their careers. Al-Hamad's advice provided attendees with valuable insights to shape their future professional journeys. Al-Hamad highlighted the potential challenges awaiting new grad-



Faisal Al-Hamad speaks during 'TAMAKAN' panel discussion.

uates in their professional journeys and offered guidance on overcoming them. He emphasized the significance of seeking assistance from colleagues and mentors when encountering obstacles. Additionally, he emphasized the value of maintaining an open mind and a readiness to continuously learn as essential strategies for navigating these challenges successfully.

It is worth mentioning that "TAMAKAN" received "The Social Work Pioneer Project Award" from the GCC Council of Ministers of Social Affairs and Labor, recognizing it as an innovative training experience for Kuwaiti fresh graduates to achieve professional self-development in pursuit of emerging as active and efficient workforce.

Golden advice

Al-Hamad offered a series of advice to new graduates, emphasizing the importance of cultivating a strong work ethic and maintaining a professional demeanor in their careers. He also highlighted the significance of fostering positive relationships with colleagues, cultivating a constructive attitude, embracing adaptability in the face of change, and continuously seeking opportunities for learning and personal growth among other valuable tips for success in one's career.

- Invest in honing your skills and developing your capabilities: it's an investment with continually growing returns.
- Seek out an optimal work environment that fosters continuous development.
- Acquire new skills daily as the key pathway to progress.
- Concentrate on enhancing job performance, nurturing ambition, and fostering passion.
- Foster positive relationships with colleagues.
- Recognize that family understanding is pivotal for success in business.
- Rejuvenate mental and physical vitality through exercise or vacationing.



BEIJING: People try Tesla's electric vehicle Model 3 at its booth during the China International Supply Chain Expo (CISCE) in Beijing on December 1, 2023. — AFP

Tesla to recall 1.6 million cars in China

BEIJING: Tesla is recalling more than 1.6 million electric vehicles in China, the country's market regulator said Friday, marking another blow for the US firm days after it was surpassed in EV sales by China's BYD. The recall—sparked by the discovery of problems with assisted driving functions and door-locking systems—will be conducted through remote over-the-air (OTA) updates to the cars' software. China is a vital component in Tesla's global layout, both as a large consumer market and the host of a major manufacturing plant in Shanghai. "Starting from now, a total of 1,610,105 imported Model S, Model X, and Model 3, and domestic Model 3 and Model Y electric vehicles with production dates between August 26, 2014 and December 20, 2023 will be recalled," the State Administration for Market Regulation (SAMR) said in an online statement. "For vehicles within the scope of this recall, when the automatic assisted steering function is turned on, the driver may misuse the level two combined assisted driving function, increasing the risk of vehicle collision and posing a safety hazard," said the SAMR.

The recall also includes 7,538 imported Tesla models made between October 26, 2022 and November 16, 2023, which were found to have "a problem with the door unlock logic controls". In 2022, the firm recalled nearly 128,000 cars in China due to a rear motor inverter defect. And last month, Tesla initiated a recall of over two million vehicles in the United States and Canada due to risks associated with the autopilot software.

The latest recall in China comes just days after local competitor BYD surpassed Tesla to become the world's leading deliverer of electric vehicles, according to fourth-quarter sales data. Tesla's Shanghai production facility—its first "gigafactory" to be built abroad—delivered 947,000 vehicles in 2023, Chinese state-run news agency Xinhua reported earlier this week. China, the world's biggest polluter, has heavily encouraged sales of electric and hybrid vehicles through subsidies, aiming to have a majority of cars powered with clean energy by 2035. — AFP

India's Adani reclaims Asia's richest mantle

NEW DELHI: India's Gautam Adani once again became Asia's richest man on Friday, according to a Bloomberg index of the world's billionaires, a year after allegations of market manipulation hammered his conglomerate's stock prices. Adani Group saw more than \$150 billion wiped from its market value after a bombshell report by US investment research firm Hindenburg Research accusing it of "brazen" corporate fraud.

The family-run conglomerate's founder, the world's second-richest person ahead of Tesla founder Elon Musk, saw his personal fortune collapse by around \$80 billion. But both Adani and his business have since pared much of those losses as public scrutiny receded.

The Bloomberg Billionaires Index showed Adani's net worth gained around \$7.7 billion this week to reach \$97.6 billion, narrowly eclipsing fellow Indian tycoon Mukesh Ambani.

The two men are now respective-

ly the 12th and 13th richest people in the world, according to the measure. Shares in listed Adani Group companies jumped this week after India's top court dismissed a petition seeking to widen a probe into the Hindenburg allegations, saying that existing investigations by market regulators were sufficient.

"The honorable supreme court's judgment shows that: Truth has prevailed," Adani said on X, formerly known as Twitter, after the ruling. "I am grateful to those who stood by us. Our humble contribution to India's growth story will continue," he added.

Hindenburg, a short-seller investment house, not only tracks corporate wrongdoing but also makes money by betting on stocks falling. Adani has denied the allegations of fraud documented in its report, last year calling it a "deliberate attempt" to damage the image of his conglomerate for the benefit of short-sellers. Before the re-

figures, in part because working-from-home patterns had resulted in less commuting. The increase from 2022 -- when supply chains and deliveries were disrupted—came mainly from a 38.7 percent surge in large fleets of corporate vehicles. Vehicles purchased by private individuals stagnated at 818,000 units, which Hawes attributes to the rise in the cost of living and interest rates.

The number of new electric cars reached a record level last year of 315,000 units but their market share fell to 16.5 percent last year from 16.6 percent in 2022. Hawes said the UK's market share for electric cars was "probably in the bottom half in Europe", below nations such as France, Germany, Ireland and Portugal. He blamed a lack of incentives in Britain.

The SMMT wants the government to halve the VAT tax to ten percent on new electric car purchases for the next three years to try to boost sales. — AFP



MUMBAI: Chairperson of Indian conglomerate Adani Group, Gautam Adani, speaks at the World Congress of Accountants in Mumbai. — AFP

port, Adani Group's share prices had risen meteorically with its main listed unit shooting up more than 1,000 percent the five years to January 2023, funding a breakneck expansion of the conglomerate.

Its reach now spans a number of key sectors including coal mining, re-

newable energy, ports and airports. Adani is considered a close associate of Hindu-nationalist Prime Minister Narendra Modi, a fellow native of Gujarat state. Opposition parties and other critics say their relationship helped Adani to unfairly win business and avoid proper oversight. — AFP

Chinese finance giant Zhongzhi files for bankruptcy

BEIJING: Chinese asset management giant Zhongzhi Enterprise Group has filed for bankruptcy and was unable to pay its debts, a Beijing court said on Friday.

The development comes weeks after police opened an investigation into the group after the debt-ridden financial behemoth declared itself insolvent. According to a statement published by a Beijing court on WeChat, Zhongzhi applied for "bankruptcy liquidation because it cannot pay off its debts that are due, its assets are insufficient to pay off all debts, and it clearly lacks the ability to repay in full".

The Beijing No.1 Intermediate People's Court said it "found that the application meets the reasons for bankruptcy specified", and on January 5 "ruled to accept the bankruptcy liqui-

dation application".

In late November police in Beijing, where the group is headquartered, said they had opened an investigation into unspecified "alleged offences", adding that they had taken measures against several suspects. Zhongzhi, which is little known outside financial spheres, had earlier declared itself insolvent with its arrears estimated at nearly \$66 billion, according to a letter to investors cited by local media.

During China's real estate boom, many developers used Zhongzhi to finance their projects.

The company managed assets worth more than one trillion yuan (\$141 billion), according to investment bank Nomura. But the group has been caught up in China's property crisis, leaving it now unable to repay investors. Zhongzhi's bankruptcy raises fears of far-reaching consequences for China's financial system following the downward spiral of property developer Evergrande, whose troubles continue to take a toll on the country's real estate sector and the economy.—AFP

SUNDAY, JANUARY 7, 2024

Calling all guitar heroes: The Smashing Pumpkins are hiring

Could you be the next member of The Smashing Pumpkins? The influential alt rockers who achieved 1990s fame with hits including "Cherub Rock" and "Tonight, Tonight" are seeking an additional guitarist – and welcoming resumes. "The application process is open to anyone who might be interested," the band wrote on X Friday, inviting potential candidates to send their CVs and "related material."

Jeff Schroeder had played with the band's most recent iteration from 2007 until 2023, when he announced his departure. Originally formed in the late

1980s in Chicago, The Smashing Pumpkins gained acclaim for their brand of metal fused with dreamier pop sounds, catapulting to commercial success and becoming a Gen X touchstone band until their breakup in 2000.

Founding member, primary songwriter and front man Billy Corgan rebooted the band in 2006. Along with Corgan two of the original members, guitarist James Iha and drummer Jimmy Chamberlin, rejoined over the past decade. And now, with the departure of Schroeder, the rockers are looking to round out their sound with a fourth ahead of a European tour with Weezer set to launch June 7 in Birmingham, England. Later in the summer they – and you? – will join the Savors stadium tour with Green Day, Rancid and Linda Lindas, which is slated to begin July 29. — AFP



Billy Corgan and James Iha of The Smashing Pumpkins perform at Irving Plaza on Sept 22, 2022 in New York City. — AFP

'STARSKY & HUTCH' STAR DAVID SOUL DIES AGED 80



American actor David Soul, worldwide famous as detective Hutch, poses with Monaco policemen in Monte Carlo on Feb 15, 1985 during the TV-Video festival. — AFP

US-born actor and singer David Soul, a beloved 1970s icon for his role as Detective Kenneth "Hutch" Hutchinson in the classic TV series "Starsky & Hutch", has died aged 80, his family announced Friday. UK-based Soul, whose decades-spanning career included work as a director, producer and singer-songwriter, died Thursday "after a valiant battle for life in the loving company of family", his British wife Helen Snell said.

"He shared many extraordinary gifts in the world as actor, singer, storyteller, creative artist and dear friend," she added in a statement. "His smile, laughter and passion for life will be remembered by the many whose lives he has touched." One-time heartthrob Soul starred opposite Paul Michael Glaser's wisecracking tough guy Detective Dave Starsky in the wildly popular 1970s US series that was exported around the world.

The pair had cameos in a 2004 Hollywood remake of the hit show, starring Ben Stiller as Starsky and Owen Wilson as Hutch, which introduced the legendary characters to another younger generation. The original cop duo remained close over the years, with Soul describing Glaser as "my best friend, my brother" in a social media post last November.

Soul – who had been living in Britain since the 1990s – was also known for his roles in "Here Come The Brides", "Magnum Force" and "The Yellow Rose". At the height of his '70s acting fame, he also embarked on a music career, recording five albums, as well as later releasing a compilation album. The tracks "Don't Give Up On Us", released in 1976, and "Silver Lady" a year later, both topped the singles chart in Britain.

"Silver Lady" was used as the soundtrack to a commercial for Britain's National Express coach operator in 2014, with Soul – in his trademark aviator sunglasses – singing along at the wheel. "He was such a bright light and an inspiration for so many singers," US musician and fashion designer Nikki Lund said, in one of many tributes posted online.

'Found a home'

Soul became a dual US-UK citizen nearly two decades ago, after moving to London in the mid-1990s to fulfil a dream of taking on theatre roles. He credited later seeking a British passport with "a simple desire to belong", saying at the time that "after years and years of wandering the planet, I have finally found a home and a community that I can embrace."

In the UK, among Soul's starring roles was the lead in "Jerry Springer: The Opera", the controversial stage show about the US television talkshow host which led to a blasphemy case in the courts. He also took on numerous other acting jobs, including in the long-running British medical drama "Holby City", and was a fan of north London football club Arsenal.

The need to keep working may in part have stemmed from the early decision by both Soul and Glaser to sell their 7.5 percent share in "Starsky & Hutch" for \$100,000 each, just before the series' international syndication. Soul, who was also known for his social activism, particularly around animals, had six children from multiple marriages, and seven grandchildren.

The former BBC war reporter Martin Bell, who Soul helped in his successful 1997 UK parliamentary election campaign, spoke warmly of their friendship. "I like the fact that David seems unaffected by being famous," he told the Independent newspaper in 1999. "It can't have been easy when Starsky and Hutch finished, but he just got on with life and forged a career for himself as a singer and stage actor." — AFP

'Rue David Bowie': Paris to name street after rock icon

The city of Paris will on Monday name a street after rock music icon David Bowie, officials said, a first in honor of the singer eight years after his death. "Rue David Bowie" will be officially inaugurated in the capital's 13th district on the left bank of the city.

No former dignitary's name will need to be removed to make room for Bowie, as the street was created recently as part of a major makeover of the neighborhood which also includes modernist university library Bibliotheque Francois Mitterrand.

The thoroughfare – around 50 m long – was previously known to city planners as "VoieDZ/13", a working title that could have appealed to Bowie himself who wrote songs such as "TVC15" or "5:15". Bowie,

who died on Jan 10, 2016, of liver cancer would have been 77 on Monday.

Bowie counts as one of the most influential, as well as best-selling, musicians of the 20th century, mostly thanks to his unparalleled ability to reinvent himself artistically throughout his career that took off with hit single "Space Oddity" in 1969. His landmark songs and albums include "Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars" and "Aladdin Sane", and commercial smash hits "Let's Dance" and "China Girl" as well as gloomily experimental works such as "Low".

'Dancing in the Street!'

Paris played less of a prominent role in Bowie's life than London, Berlin and Los Angeles, but French avant-garde theatrical culture was an influence on his visual style. He also successfully covered French-language songs "Amsterdam" and "Ma Mort" (My Death) by Jacques Brel, who was not actually French but Belgian. A cryptic line in Bowie's "Aladdin Sane" song refers to "Paris or maybe hell".

He still has a cult following in France, where fan clubs such as "Bowie France" sell merchandise, orga-

nize concerts and Bowie conventions drawing thousands, and where cover band "Bowie Reloaded" fills even large venues with nostalgic fans.

Monday's unveiling of the plaque is scheduled for 4:15 pm (15:15 GMT), the mayor of Paris's 13th district, Jerome Coumet, said on X, former Twitter. An avowed Bowie fan, Coumet launched the idea for a Bowie street in early 2020, and won Paris city approval later that year, arguing that the star had "a strong link with the city of light". There is no record of a David Bowie-named street anywhere else.

In his X post, Coumet announced that "the 13th welcomes David Bowie! Dancing in the Street!", a reference to a hit song performed by Bowie and Rolling Stones frontman Mick Jagger. Monday's unveiling of the street name plaque will be followed by an evening of homage to Bowie at the district's city hall, featuring Bowie friend and biographer Jerome Soligny as well as Clifford Slapper, producer of a tribute album "Bowie Songs One". A Bowie exhibition, also at the mayor's office, is to run to the end of next week. — AFP

New-look Golden Globes prepares to toast 'Barbenheimer'



View during the 81st Annual Golden Globe Awards Press Preview and Red Carpet Rollout.



(From left) Barry Adelman, Ricky Kirshner, Glenn Weiss, Jo Koy and Helen Hoehne, President, Golden Globes, attend the 81st Annual Golden Globe Awards Press Preview and Red Carpet Rollout at The Beverly Hilton on Jan 4, 2024 in Beverly Hills, California. — AFP photos

Organizers of the newly reformed Golden Globes hope that a "Barbenheimer" love-in can help to revitalize Hollywood's famously fun-loving but scandal-dogged awards gala on Sunday. Kicking off prize-giving season from the usual swanky Beverly Hills ballroom at 5:00 pm (0100 GMT Monday), the Globes boast new owners and new voters – and have plenty of box-office gold to toast. The show is expected to celebrate "Barbie" and "Oppenheimer" – two movies that wowed critics and audiences alike when they were released simultaneously last summer, and have a whopping 17 nominations between them.

"They are so different than each other, yet they were both successful... We're thrilled that they're both very represented here," said this year's Globes producer Glenn Weiss. "It's been a big reset for the Globes," he told AFP. Greta Gerwig's "Barbie", which turned nostalgia for the beloved doll into a sharp satire about misogyny and female empowerment, leads the way with nine nods.

It is tipped to win the Globes for best comedy film and best screenplay, and boasts three of the six contenders for best song. As the year's highest grossing movie, it is also likely to claim a newly created award for box office achievement.

Christopher Nolan's "Oppenheimer" – the other half of last summer's viral cinematic phenomenon – tells the story of the inventor of the atomic bomb, and has eight nominations. The favorite to win awards for best drama film, best director and best score, "Oppenheimer" focuses on the rivalry between a brilliant scientist and a powerful politician, played by Cillian Murphy and Robert Downey Jr respectively. They are strong contenders for best lead drama actor and supporting actor.

'Party'

The Globes – which for decades have offered huge publicity and a timely boost to Oscars hopefuls – will be under scrutiny as they aim to bounce back from years of declining audiences. Allegations of corruption and racism led to an industry boycott in recent years. The show was taken off air entirely in 2022, and several A-listers skipped last year's edition. Since then, the rowdy, obscure group of Los Angeles-based foreign journalists that created the Globes

80 years ago has been disbanded, and a wider net of overseas critics was brought in to choose this year's winners.

Along with movie stars like Leonardo DiCaprio ("Killers of the Flower Moon"), nominees include big names from the world of music such as Billie Eilish and Dua Lipa – both for best song – and Taylor Swift for her recent concert movie. Despite the Globes' recent travails, Weiss hopes A-listers will be keen to finally celebrate together again, after an annus horribilis in which the industry was crippled by strikes.

Stars who were unable to promote their movies during the months-long Screen Actors Guild (SAG-AFTRA) walkout may use the occasion to make up for lost time on the Oscars campaign trail. "We want this to be a great opening season party that everybody feels that energy from. We all have lived through strikes together. We all are now out of that," said Weiss.

Just don't expect the Globes scandals and consequent reforms to be mentioned by organizers. "I kind of think that's been said," said Weiss. "Right now we're just making a party."

Cooper eyes double

If Murphy misses out on best actor in a drama, it will likely be to Bradley Cooper, who plays Leonard Bernstein in "Maestro". Cooper is also nominated for directing, and would be the first person ever bestowed acting and directing gongs for the same movie. Elsewhere, Indigenous actor Lily Gladstone is a firm favorite for lead drama actress her role in Martin Scorsese's "Killers of the Flower Moon", which has seven nominations overall.

"The Holdovers" could have two acting winners in Paul Giamatti and Da'Vine Joy Randolph, as a curmudgeonly history teacher and cook of a 1970s prep school, respectively. Emma Stone is the frontrunner for best comedy actress in surreal, sexy bildungsroman "Poor Things". On the television side, "Succession", "The Bear" and "Beef" are expected to dominate the categories for drama, comedy and limited series, respectively. Comedian Jo Koy hosts the 81st Golden Globes, which airs in the United States on CBS. — AFP

Elvis to get hologram treatment at new London show

A new immersive Elvis Presley show will open in central London later this year, bringing the king of rock 'n' roll back to life with the help of artificial intelligence (AI), organizers said. "Elvis Evolution", featuring a life-size digital Elvis performing on stage, is designed to be the first of a series of shows in cities including Las Vegas, Tokyo and Berlin.

British company Layered Reality put together the spectacle using AI, holographic projections, augmented reality, live theatre and multi-sensory effects to celebrate the singer's life and legacy. It promises previously unseen performances created through access to thousands of personal photos and home-video archive after striking a deal with Authentic Brands Group, which owns his estate.

Layered Reality chief executive Andrew McGuinness called the show "a next-generation tribute to the musical legend that is Elvis Presley". "Elvis maintains superstar status globally and people around the world no longer want to sit there and passively receive entertainment – they want to be a part of it," he added. The show, which is scheduled to open in November, will use music, technology and storytelling to chart Elvis's rise to fame and his cultural significance to the 1950s and 1960s.

Marc Rosen, head of entertainment at Authentic Brands Group, said it would give fans "a new, immersive way of experiencing Elvis Presley's life and legacy". Presley – one of the best-selling music artists of all time – died aged 42 at his Graceland mansion in Memphis, Tennessee in 1977. "Elvis Evolution" comes after the success of Swedish supergroup ABBA's "ABBA Voyage" digital avatar show, which opened at a purpose-built venue in east London in May 2022. Bloomberg reported in September last year that it has sold more than 1.5 million tickets, generating more than \$150 million. — AFP

Greece revives 2,300-year-old palace where Alexander the Great was crowned



This aerial photo shows the Aigai Palace after years of restoration work. — AFP photos

An ancient palace where Alexander the Great was crowned King of Macedonia will reopen to the public on Sunday after a 16-year 20-million-euro renovation aiming to restore its past glory. At a ceremony on Friday, Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis called the Palace of Aigai a "monument of global importance." The 4th century BC site spread over 15,000 square meters was one of the most important in classical Greece alongside the Parthenon in Athens.

Aigai was capital of the Macedonian kingdom, the dominant military power of the time, and archeologists say the palace was the kingdom's spiritual center. Built by Philip II, the father of Alexander the Great, the tombs of Philip and other Macedonian kings are nearby. After the assassination of his father, Alexander was

crowned at the palace in 336 BC before launching a military campaign that created an empire stretching into modern-day India.

The palace "has a cultural and national character, because it confirms the Greek identity of Macedonia throughout the centuries," Mitsotakis said. The site includes the royal palace and a colonnade that surrounded the palace and the agora, where ancient Macedonians debated important matters. It was in the courtyard, with an 8,000 capacity, that Alexander was proclaimed king.

The Romans destroyed the palace in 148 BC. Excavations to uncover the site started in 1865 and continued into the 20th century. The restoration project began in 2007 with help from the European Union. Situated near the modern-day Greek village of Vergina, the palace and the

nearby tombs are listed as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. Greece has boosted investment in its many antique sites which have become an important source of tourist revenue. For the past three decades, it has been demanding the

return of sculptures taken from the Parthenon that are in the British Museum, saying they were looted in the 19th century when Greece was under Ottoman rule. — AFP



Visitors look at an exhibition at Polycentric Museum of Aigai in Vergina.



This photograph taken at Polycentric Museum of Aigai shows the golden urn and the oak wreath of Philip II.



Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis attends the official inauguration of Aigai Palace after years of restoration work in Vergina on Jan 5, 2024.



Kenya says first 'visa-free' tourists arrive in country

Kenya said Friday it had welcomed the first batch of foreign tourists who arrived under a simplified entry system it hopes will encourage more visitors. The government's immigration services department said the "maiden visa-free arrivals" landed in Nairobi from Ethiopia's capital Addis Ababa and more were expected to touch down in coming days. Immigration and Citizen Services Principal Secretary Julius Bitok said visa requirements would be waived for all travelers to Kenya regardless of nationality.

Under the new system, travelers apply online

for an electronic travel authorization (ETA) and pay a \$30 "processing" fee. "Right now... all countries around the world including Africa, Asia, America, Australia, and all over the world, are able to come in visa-free," he said at the launch of the scheme at Nairobi's Jomo Kenyatta International Airport.

Last year President William Ruto announced that Kenya would become a "visa-free country" and existing requirements would be waived come January. Even so, as recently as last Tuesday the Kenyan Civil Aviation Authority warned the new ETA system was "in the process of development and implementation".

The number of tourist arrivals in 2022 rose to 1.54 million, still below pre-pandemic levels, according to tourism ministry figures. Kenya Tourism Board chair Francis Gichaba voiced hope in November that the figure could top two million in the latest financial year, surpassing the 2019 figure of 1.9 million. — AFP



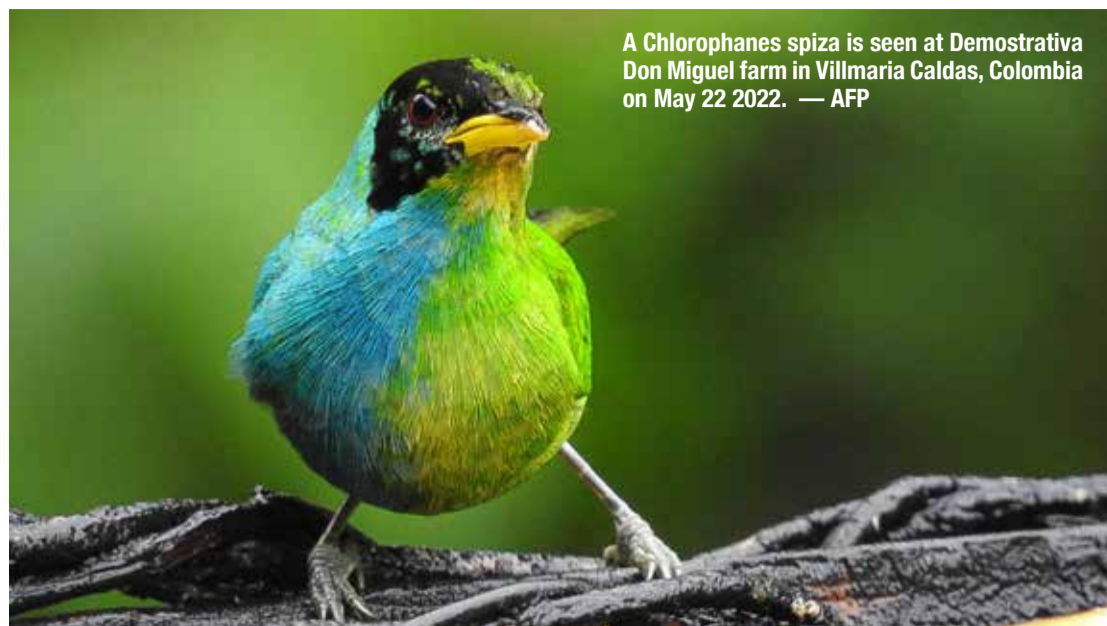
Lifestyle

In Colombia, rare bird flaunts male and female feathers

On the right side of its body, the bird flaunted the typical blue plumage and black head of the male Green Honeycreeper. On the left, it was a beautiful grass green. According to experts, the specimen spotted in Colombia was a rare example of "bilateral gynandromorphy" – a condition in which one side of an animal exhibits male characteristics and the other female. Amateur photographer John Murillo said he first spotted the unique bird through his camera lens when it landed on a feeder to enjoy a meal of bananas and grapes at a nature reserve in Villamaria in Colombia's west in late 2019. It was then observed by Murillo and experts for more than a year, but never captured.

In an article published last month in the Journal of Field Ornithology, Murillo and a group of bird scientists report the first recorded observation of gynandromorphy in a living Green Honeycreeper (*Chlorophanes spiza*). "In birds, the phenomenon is thought to arise as a result of an error during egg meiosis (a type of cell division), with subsequent double fertilization by separate sperm," they wrote. Whether the internal organs of the bird were also gynandromorphic and whether it was fertile, was "impossible to tell," the team added. Green Honeycreepers are small birds found in the tropics from southern Mexico to Brazil.

Murillo, 56, told AFP he felt very fortunate to have observed something "very different from anything we have seen." He also recounted the bird's "strange" behavior: "it was always alone" at the feeder. Murillo said the bird seemed more comfortable with humans than with individuals of its kind. "It is unique in the world, and so it will die," he said. — AFP



A *Chlorophanes spiza* is seen at Demonstrativa Don Miguel farm in Villamaria Caldas, Colombia on May 22 2022. — AFP

Creator blows final whistle on 'Captain Tsubasa' football comic

The Japanese creator of "Captain Tsubasa" said on Friday that he was blowing the final whistle on the beloved cartoon series after a run of 43 years. Yoichi Takahashi began writing the comic strip about 11-year-old football prodigy Tsubasa Ozora in 1981 and it grew into a global smash hit that inspired future superstars such as Lionel Messi and Andres Iniesta.

Known as "Holly e Benji" in Italy and "Super Campeones" in Spanish-speaking Latin America, it spawned animated films, video games and even statues in Takahashi's hometown in eastern Tokyo. But the 63-year-old announced in the latest edition of Captain Tsubasa Magazine that the series will end in April, citing his worsening health and changing conditions in the manga industry.

"It was not an easy decision and it might make those who enjoy reading Captain Tsubasa disappointed and sad, but I hope you understand my decision," he wrote in a letter to readers. Takahashi hopes the character will live on in some form and intends to draft ideas that can be used for future adaptations. More than 100 countries are believed to have tuned into the series and the stories have sold more than 70 million copies in book form in Japan, and more than 10 million overseas.

Takahashi also serves as managing director of a real-life football club who play in Japan's fifth tier. The club were renamed Nankatsu SC – after Captain Tsubasa's fictional school team – when Taka-



This photo taken on Jan 30, 2023 shows Japanese cartoonist and manga artist Yoichi Takahashi, best known for his work "Captain Tsubasa", displaying his autograph with a painting of the main character following an interview with AFP at his workplace in Tokyo. — AFP photos



Takahashi autographs a drawing of Captain Tsubasa.

hashi came on board. Takahashi became hooked on football after watching the 1978 World Cup on television. He created Captain Tsubasa with the intention of helping to popularize the sport in Japan, which did not have a professional league at the time. "I had no idea that people around the world would see it," Takahashi told AFP in an interview last year. — AFP



A train passenger plays piano next to stained glass artwork depicting the "Captain Tsubasa" anime cartoon at Urawa-Misono train station in Saitama on July 4, 2020.



Yoichi Takahashi

Same again? 1996 calendars reused for 2024

It is a radical form of recycling. Calendars from 1996 are being reused for 2024 as both are leap years that begin on a Monday. The quirk has sparked a flurry of interest on the internet, with 1990s nostalgia fans chasing down vintage calendars nearly 30 years old. As last year came to an end, people began posting about how the 1996 calendar works neatly in 2024, with one TikTok clip garnering over 1.5 million views.

Another viral post, this time on X (formerly Twitter), playfully reminds people to start reusing their carefully saved calendars featuring then-child star Jonathan Taylor Thomas – who is now aged 42. The US presidential election date on a 1996 calendar is correctly marked for 2024 as November 5, and there is also the Olympics in both years – though the dates don't match up.

Second-hand sites like Ebay are selling hundreds of 1996 calendars with themes ranging from Star Wars to Barbie and Pamela Anderson. Prices range from \$50 to \$200, with a Pocahontas calendar on sale for \$149.99. The calendars tap into a wave of 1990s throwback nostalgia embracing fashion trends, hairstyles and love of the "Friends" sitcom. The Time and Date website points out you could also reuse your dog-eared calendars from 1968 and 1940. — AFP

Strikes shut doors at world-famous French monuments

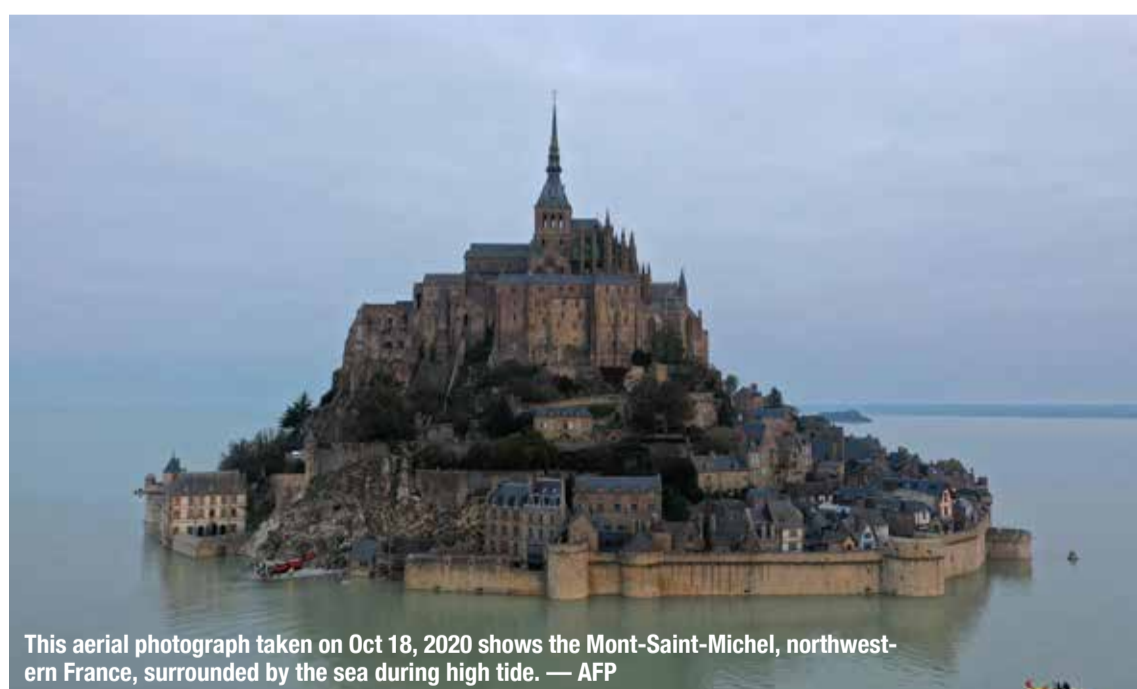
Tourists travelling to visit historic French landmarks the Eiffel Tower and Normandy's Mont Saint Michel have found their doors closed for part of the past two weeks, as striking workers complain of underinvestment and too many visitors. Investment in Mont Saint Michel, a fortified tidal island topped by an abbey, is "not at an appropriate level for this fantastic monument", one staff representative said. And an Eiffel Tower unionist last week warned that the cost of "major maintenance, renovation and conservation work" is being "underestimated" at the 125-year-old iron structure.

In Normandy, Herminia Amador Chacon of the CGT union said Mont Saint Michel workers "all have joint problems in the knees or the ankles" from staffing and guiding visitors around the site, which is accessible only by climbing 350 stairs. Others are posted out in the wet, rainy Channel weather for hours on end, with one reception worker calling the spot "marvellous but badly heated".

Only around 15 of the Mont Saint Michel's 55 workers have walked out since the open-ended strike began on December 26. But that has been enough to shut the gates of the abbey – one of France's most visited monuments, with around 1.5 million tourists per year – many days since.

Lise, 25, and Thomas, 24, had travelled the 70 km from Norman town Flers to visit on Wednesday, only to find a sign saying the abbey was only open between 1:00 pm and 5:00 pm. While "a little disappointed", the pair judged the staff could not "be on strike over nothing". Worker representatives at Mont Saint Michel are asking for more staff, extra pay for those with foreign language skills and compensation for the physically demanding parts of the job, as well as better facilities on site.

Abbey general secretary Arnaud Noblet said extra



This aerial photograph taken on Oct 18, 2020 shows the Mont-Saint-Michel, northwestern France, surrounded by the sea during high tide. — AFP

staff were already on hand during the busy summer season and a small number of new jobs were being created. He dismissed the idea that spending on the abbey was not in line with revenues. Pooling of resources among landmarks managed by the Centre for National Monuments (CMN) authority means "major monuments like the abbey keep the small ones alive", Noblet said.

Eiffel Tower 'heading for disaster'

In Paris, strikers among the Eiffel Tower's 360-strong workforce said they had walked out for one day on Dec 27 to protest against "unrealistic management" with "over-ambitious, impossible-to-achieve" business goals. "The Eiffel Tower is an old lady. It's 130 years old. Some of the lifts date back to 1899. There's a lot of work (to be done)," the workers said. They added that managers' projections of 7.4 million visitors per year were unrealistic – the tower hosted 5.9 million in 2022 – leaving a funding

gap that workers believe has management firm SETE "heading for disaster".

But SETE boss Jean-Francois Martins said the Eiffel Tower was "in good economic shape", even after the COVID-19 pandemic and inflation hit renovation costs. He said he believed workers fear jobs could be cut to make up for pandemic-era losses. Italian tourist Alessandro Monaco, 40, was disappointed. "We were quite stunned to see there was a strike. It's a real shame not to be able to visit today," he told AFP on the day of the stoppage last week.

Others were more sanguine. "The important thing is to see it, strike or no strike," said 40-year-old French visitor Marie-Christine Riviere. While the Eiffel Tower strike on Dec 27 lasted for just one day, "if the situation continues... the Eiffel Tower will be closed during the Olympic Games period" in July-August, worker representatives warned. — AFP

Sports

'Bit scared Nadal' suffers injury worry before Australian Open

Latest injury woe cast a shadow over Spanish superstar's plans

BRISBANE: Spanish superstar Rafael Nadal has admitted he was "a little bit more scared than usual" after a fresh injury headache clouded his build-up to the Australian Open. Nadal, a 22-time Grand Slam title winner, needed a medical time-out towards the end of his quarter-final loss at the Brisbane International, his first tournament for almost a year.

Nadal required treatment at 1-4 down in the third set of his match against Australian Jordan Thompson after feeling pain in his upper left thigh. Thompson won the match 5-7, 7-6 (8/6), 6-3 in a marathon of 3hr 25min. Nadal squandered three match points in the second set before his latest injury woe cast a shadow over his plans for the Australian Open which gets underway in Melbourne on January 14.

Nadal said he had played pain-free during his opening two rounds this week, but conceded he had been in pain towards the end of the quarter-final. He said that while the pain was in a similar place to last year's injury, the injury itself felt different. "It is a very similar place to what happened last year, but different, no?" the 37-year-old said. "I feel it's more muscle. Last year it was tendon. For sure it is not the same like last year at all because when it happened last year, I felt something drastic immediately. "Today I didn't feel anything. The only problem is because the place is the same, you are a little bit more scared than usual."

'Not 100 percent sure'

"I hope to have the chance to be practising next week and to play Melbourne," he added. "Honestly, I am not 100 percent sure of anything now." Nadal, who took most of 2023 off after suffering an injury at last year's Australian Open, underwent surgery on his left hip during his time away from the tour. The former world number one has also seen his ranking slip to 672 while rival Novak Djokovic has passed him in the Grand Slam title race with 24 to his name.

Nadal stressed he did not come into the Brisbane tournament expecting to win, and hinted that even the Australian Open was too soon for him. "In an ideal world, it is just the muscle supercharged after a few days of effort and a very tough match," Nadal said, adding that he had been very cautious when talking about his comeback. "That is why I'm talking all the time that my goal is to try to be competitive in a few months."

Later Friday, Nadal, the 2009 and 2022 Australian Open champion, said he would undergo tests on his injury in the coming days. "This is part of the process that I am going through. I had a small sensation, not a good one, in a similar place where I had the surgery, but it's too early to say anything," he wrote on Instagram. "Hopefully it's a charged muscle and in the next days I'll make some more tests. If it's only a charged muscle it's been a very positive week." He ended his message with "#brisbanetennis next Melbourne". — AFP



BRISBANE: Spain's Rafael Nadal receives medical treatment for his hip during the Brisbane International tennis tournament in Brisbane on January 5, 2024. — AFP



BRISBANE: Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus reacts during her women's singles match against compatriot Victoria Azarenka at the Brisbane International tennis tournament in Brisbane on January 6, 2024. — AFP

Sabalenka, Rybakina set up Open final rematch

BRISBANE: Top seed Aryna Sabalenka swept past Victoria Azarenka on Saturday into a Brisbane International final against world number four Elena Rybakina, setting up a replay of their 2023 Australian Open decider. Sabalenka saw off her fellow Belarusian 6-2, 6-4 while 2022 Wimbledon champion Rybakina cruised past Czech teenager Linda Noskova 6-3, 6-2. Sabalenka leads their head-to-head 5-2, including a three-set win in the Australian Open final last year that earned her a maiden Grand Slam title.

But their clashes are usually tight, with five of the seven meetings going to three sets. "I think we both serve really well," Sabalenka said of Rybakina. "We both play really super aggressive tennis. I think that's why all the matches are pretty tight. We both put each other under so much pressure." Russian-born Kazakh Rybakina put on a serving masterclass against Noskova, blasting eight aces, breaking her opponent once in the first set and twice in the second.

She has only lost 12 games on the way to the final and is yet to drop serve in a perfect build up to this year's Australian Open. "I didn't expect I would play that well this week," said the second seed, adding that she had been sick before arriving in Brisbane. "It's an amazing start to the year for me." World number two Sabalenka has also had an impressive tournament, not dropping a set. She broke Azarenka twice in racing through the first set in just 35 minutes. But two-time Australian Open champion Azarenka was better in the second and matched her younger rival until serving at 4-5 when she appeared to jar her knee.

She lost power in her serve and Sabalenka broke to take the match in 1hr 29min. Azarenka later denied there was a problem with her knee, saying she instead had an issue with her side throughout the match. "From the beginning of the match I wasn't able to do what I wanted with my serves," she said. "I definitely need a little rest and then I'll be getting ready for the Australian Open." In the men's draw, top seed Holger Rune will play either Grigor Dimitrov or Jordan Thompson after the Dane beat Russia's Roman Safiullin in the first semi-final.

Rune, the world number eight, was able to absorb the big-hitting of Safiullin, who hit 27 clean winners but also made 28 unforced errors. After Rune broke Safiullin's opening service game and won the first set, the Russian had the better of the second set but collapsed in the tiebreak. "It's been a great week so far," Rune said. "Playing some good matches against some great players. I'm excited for tomorrow and then Melbourne." — AFP

Dallas to host T20 World Cup opener, Barbados gets final

MIAMI: The opening game of cricket's Twenty20 World Cup will be held in Dallas with the final at the Kensington Oval in Barbados, organizers announced.

Australia sweep Pakistan series

SYDNEY: David Warner went out the way he began with a rumbustious innings to guide Australia to an eight-wicket victory and 3-0 Test series sweep over Pakistan in Sydney on Saturday. Playing in his 112th and final Test, Warner was dismissed for 57 – just 11 runs from finishing off the job—and left the Sydney Cricket Ground arena before an adoring home crowd. Marnus Labuschagne with his 19th Test half-century on 62 and Steve Smith on four were there at the end as the Australians eased to the 130-run target for the loss of just two wickets.

"We are in the entertainment business, happy to come out here and showcase what I try to do all the time," said the 37-year-old Warner, who made his Test debut in 2011 and will go down as one of the finest openers in cricket. "I started with Twenty20, tried to come here and emulate that, tried to play my shots and managed to get a win on the board." Asked how he wished to be remembered, Warner added: "Exciting, entertaining and, I hope, I put a smile on everyone's face the way I played." It was something of an anti-climax when Warner, known as "The Bull", was out—losing a review for lbw to spinner Sajid Khan.

Warner was congratulated by the Pakistan players, who had given him a guard of honour as he came out for his final innings, before he waved his bat acknowledging the cheering crowd as he left the SCG for the last time. It was a typically aggressive innings from Warner coming off 75 balls with seven fours, replete with crashing drives and audacious reverse sweeps. Warner scored 8,786 Test runs at an average of 44.59, with 26 centuries. But he will also be remembered for his central role in the "Sandpapergate" ball-tampering scandal of 2018 and was a polarizing figure.

Cummins hails resilience

The day was all about Warner, but this was Australia's 17th consecutive Test win against Pakistan, having secured the current series in Melbourne over Christmas. The hosts had an early setback when Warner's childhood friend and fellow opener Usman Khawaja

Asian Shotgun Championship set for kick off

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Asian Shotgun Championship 2024 will start Saturday at the Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Olympic Shooting Complex. 26 countries (represented by 500 shooters) will be participating in the event. The competition will continue until January 23, the President of Kuwait and Arab Shooting Federations, Secretary General of Asian Shooting Confederation Engineer Duaj Khalaf Al-Otaibi, said during a press conference on Saturday.

Al-Otaibi said competition will be in the Olympic skeet and trap for men, women, and juniors, as well as mixed doubles. He said this championship is highly important as it has eight quota places for the Paris 2024 Olympics. Kuwait will participate with 19 shooters in various competitions. Kuwaiti shooters are well prepared for the championship.

Engineer Al-Otaibi appreciated the major support from HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Secretary General of Kuwait

The expanded 20-team tournament is being jointly held by the United States and the West Indies and will get under way on June 1 at the Grand Prairie Cricket Stadium in Dallas, Texas, when the USA take on Canada, both teams making their first appearances at a T20 World Cup.

A total of 16 games will be held in the United States – the first time that a major international cricket tournament is held in the country. A new venue 30 miles east of downtown Manhattan will host the big clash between India and Pakistan on Sunday, June 9 – one of eight games to be held at the 34,000 stadium being built in



SYDNEY: Pakistan's wicketkeeper attempts to stump Australia's David Warner during his 112th and final Test on day four of the third cricket Test match between Australia and Pakistan at the Sydney Cricket Ground in Sydney on January 6, 2024. — AFP

was out in the second over, lbw to Sajid for a duck.

But it set centre stage for Warner as he sought to put pressure on the bowlers and fielders with his intimidating gung-ho approach. His 37th Test half-century came off just 56 balls. "I love the way the boys performed. It has been a great start to the (southern) summer for us," said Australia skipper Pat Cummins, who was named man of the series for his 19 wickets at an average of 12. "The boys found a way to get us back into the contest whenever we were on the back foot."

Pakistan go home on the end of yet another defeat in Australia, but there were some positives. Newcomer Aamer Jamal was announced as player of the match for his all-round performance of 82 in the first innings and 6-69 in Australia's first innings. "It's been so long to get here (his Test debut)," Jamal said. "I was over the moon, performing in front of this great (Australian) side wasn't easy, but I

stuck to my discipline and I loved every moment."

Hard lessons for Pakistan

Mohammad Rizwan and Jamal defied the Australian attack for almost the first hour of the fourth day, adding 41 runs to the overnight score before Nathan Lyon struck. Lyon switched to bowling around the wicket and Rizwan played across the line, edging a catch to Warner—who else—at leg slip for 28.

Jamal followed three balls later in Cummins' next over, top-edging a pull shot straight to Travis Head at deep backward square leg for 18. The end of the innings came three overs later when Lyon bowled Hasan Ali for five. Lyon finished with three for 36 and has 509 Test wickets. Pakistan have still won only four Tests in Australia dating back to 1956-7 and none since 1995. Captain Shan Masood said that his team "are learning things the hard way". Expensive dropped catches were a major issue for the tourists. — AFP



KUWAIT: Officials address the media during the press conference.

and Arab Shooting Federations, Tournament Director Obaid Al-Osaimi, said the Federation completed all organizational preparations for this

important event. He expressed hopes for Kuwaiti shooters as they prepare to book a place for the Paris 2024 Olympics.

Nassau County, Lauderhill in South Florida, the most established cricket venue in the USA, will host games featuring India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

While cricket is a niche sport in the United States it does enjoy significant support from the South Asian and Caribbean communities in the country. Cricket West Indies CEO Johnny Grave told AFP that the tournament marks a serious push by the International Cricket Council (ICC) to establish the game's foothold in the United States, particularly the new venue in the New York area. "I think it's a smart move by ICC to do what it needs to do. The whole point of

going to the US isn't just for tokenism and a gesture," he said. "It's got to be part of a proper and robust strategy to try and crack the US market. And I don't think there's a better way of doing it than the New York Tri-State area."

The selection of New York for the India v Pakistan game gives the event a chance to make a splash with a big crowd for one of the sport's biggest rivalries. "You can imagine that everyone in the Caribbean, anyone hosting the World Cup wants India, Pakistan to be one of their games. There's a lot of people that missed out on that," added Grave. — AFP

Sports

Porro's rocket fires Spurs into FA Cup fourth round

Ten-man Wolves rescue a 1-1 draw at Brentford

LONDON: Pedro Porro's sublime strike fired Tottenham to a hard-fought 1-0 win over stubborn Burnley in the FA Cup third round on Friday. Porro bagged his first goal this season with just 12 minutes left in north London to spare Tottenham the prospect of an unwanted trip to Turf Moor for a replay. Tottenham's progress to the fourth round made it five wins from their last six games in all competitions as they continue to bounce back from their autumn slump.

Coach Ange Postecoglou said this week that it is Tottenham's ambition to win a trophy like the FA Cup "every year". Without a major triumph since winning the 2008 League Cup, Tottenham fans would gladly take any silverware at present, no matter the competition. They won the last of their eight FA Cups in 1991 and Postecoglou would dearly love to mark his first season in charge by ending that long wait for a ninth.

"We were a little bit wasteful in the final third. The way the game was going we needed something special from someone and Pedro delivered. He's been outstanding all year," Postecoglou said. "Cup games are a unique beast and we're through to the next round so that's the main thing." The road to Wembley started for Tottenham without Son Heung-min, who is on Asian Cup duty with South Korea, and Pape Sarr, who has departed to play for Senegal at the Africa Cup of Nations.

Postecoglou's team were the dominant side even without Son and Sarr. Richarlison dragged his shot wide of the far post after slaloming through the Burnley defense in the early stages. Brennan Johnson's curler was pushed away by Burnley keeper Arijanet

Muric, who also saved well from Richarlison. Giovanni Lo Celso opened the second half with a long-range shot that was repelled by the over-worked Muric. Tottenham pushed hard in the closing stages, with Muric saving again from Johnson before the breakthrough finally arrived.

Muric had been in such good form that it was going to take something special to beat him and Porro duly delivered in the 78th minute. After winning back possession in the Burnley half, the Spanish defender took aim from the right-hand side of the area and unfurled a ferocious shot that bent into the far corner as Muric stood rooted to the spot. Burnley's exit leaves Vincent Kompany's second bottom side free to focus on their fight for Premier League survival.

Doyle rescues Wolves

Ten-man Wolves rescued a 1-1 draw at Brentford thanks to Tommy Doyle's stunning strike. Wolves midfielder Joao Gomes was sent off after just nine minutes for an ugly studs-up challenge on Christian Norgaard. Neal Maupay fired Brentford ahead when he rifled into the top corner after Wolves failed to clear a 41st minute free-kick. But Doyle equalized for the four-time FA Cup winners in the 64th minute with a blistering drive from the edge of the area. The draw ended Brentford's run of five successive defeats and Wolves' spell of three consecutive wins, which had included a 4-1 victory over the Bees in December.

Fulham ground out a 1-0 win against Championship strugglers Rotherham at Craven Cottage. The Cottagers have a League Cup semi-final first leg against Liverpool on Wednesday, so Marco Sil-



LONDON: Tottenham Hotspur's Argentinean midfielder #18 Giovanni Lo Celso (right) reacts as Burnley's Northern Irish midfielder #24 Josh Cullen (left) vies with Tottenham Hotspur's Italian defender #38 Destiny Udogie (center) during the English FA Cup third round football match on January 5, 2024. — AFP

va prioritized the trip to Anfield as he made eight changes from the New Year's Eve win over Arsenal. Silva's reserves were still strong enough to leave

Rotherham without an away victory since November 2022 as Bobby De Cordova-Reid bagged the winner from the edge of the area in the 24th minute. — AFP



Nigerian forward Victor Osimhen

Salah, Osimhen and African stars gear up for Cup of Nations

ABIDJAN: Sadio Mane's Senegal are aiming to retain their title and Mohamed Salah is chasing a first trophy with Egypt at this year's Africa Cup of Nations, which begins in Ivory Coast on January 13. A strong field also features 2022 World Cup semi-finalists Morocco and a Nigeria team spearheaded by African footballer of the year Victor Osimhen, as organizers hope the focus will remain solely on the football at this edition of the continental showpiece.

Ivory Coast is hosting the AFCON for the first time since 1984, when only eight teams participated with Roger Milla's Cameroon emerging as champions. This time there are 24 teams at a tournament initially scheduled to be played in June and July last year in order to avoid a clash with Europe's top leagues. However, fears over staging it during the rainy season eventually led the Confederation of African Football to push it back to the more traditional January and February slot.

Focus on security

The last AFCON, two years ago in Cameroon, was overshadowed by the tragedy at the Olembe Stadium in



Egypt's forward Mohamed Salah

Yaounde, when eight people died in a crush and stampede. Security is therefore at the forefront of organizers' thoughts this time, with 1.5 million fans expected to attend from outside the country. Matches will be staged in six stadiums across five cities, with two venues in the economic capital, Abidjan.

These include the 60,000-capacity Ebimpe Olympic Stadium, constructed especially for the competition. It will be the venue for the opening game between Ivory Coast and Guinea-Bissau, as well as the February 11 final. Games will also be played in the capital Yamoussoukro and neighboring Bouake, as well as in San Pedro on the coast and in Korhogo, in the north near the borders with Mali and Burkina Faso. Organizers will also hope the quality of the football is better this time than in 2022, when an average of fewer than two goals were scored per game.

Morocco will be expected to go far, with Africa's top-ranked nation still riding high from their run to the last four in Qatar just over a year ago. They have a squad full of players based at leading European sides, with Paris Saint-Germain right-back Achraf Hakimi the headline name, but Morocco have not won the AFCON since 1976. "With each competition that goes by we get further away from the date when we last won it, but that is not a reason for us to put extra pressure on ourselves," insisted coach Walid Regragui recently.

Can Senegal retain title?

Morocco are in Group F with DR Congo, Avram Grant's Zambia and Tanzania, who have never won a game at the

AFCON. Senegal are in a tougher-looking section with neighbors Gambia, the Guinea of Bundesliga hotshot Serhou Guirassy, and Cameroon. Mane and his team are aiming to become the first nation to retain the title since Egypt's run of three in a row between 2006 and 2010. "We have only ever won it once, so we are eager to go there and win, and keep winning," insisted Senegal coach Aliou Cisse. Winners in 2019, Algeria are aiming to make up for their woeful showing two years ago, when they exited in the group stage.

Egypt, led by Portuguese coach Rui Vitoria, boast the biggest star of all in Salah as they target a record-extending eighth AFCON title to banish the memory of defeats in the finals of 2017 and 2022. That is what Egyptians are dreaming of, although Salah's manager at Liverpool, Jurgen Klopp, is hoping for a different outcome given that his team are currently chasing the Premier League title. "From a personal point of view, I would be happy if they go out in the group stage but that's probably not possible. They can go on and win it," Klopp admitted.

Then there is the host nation, no longer the force they were when they last won the title in 2015 with Yaya Toure as captain, but looking to make the most of home advantage. Nigeria, with Bayer Leverkusen sensation Victor Boniface as well as Osimhen, have an almost unrivalled amount of depth in attack. South Africa, meanwhile, are back after missing the last edition, and have a team that leans heavily on the country's leading club side, Mamelodi Sundowns. The winners of the trophy will receive a record \$7 million in prize money, 40 percent more than what champions Senegal pocketed in 2022. — AFP

Brazil sack coach Diniz after World Cup struggles

BRASILIA: The Brazilian Football Confederation (CBF) sacked Fernando Diniz as coach of the men's national team Friday, a source there said, after a string of lackluster results for the "Selecao" in World Cup qualifying. Fans had hoped Diniz, 49, who also coaches Rio de Janeiro club Fluminense, would restore the thrilling "samba football" that made the five-time world champions famous. But since taking the job in July, he had struggled to deliver, with Brazil currently sixth place in South America's 2026 World Cup qualifiers, the last automatic qualifying spot from the continent.

The decision came a day after a Supreme Court judge ordered the reinstatement of the CBF's president, Ednaldo Rodrigues, who had been ousted by a lower-court ruling on December 7 that found irregularities in his 2022 election. FIFA and the South American Football Confederation (CONMEBOL) had refused to accept Rodrigues's ouster, warning the CBF it could be barred from international competitions if there was external interference in its affairs.

Rodrigues, the first black president in CBF history, had been leading negotiations to sign Real Madrid boss Carlo Ancelotti as coach. That bid fell apart on December 29 when Ancelotti extended his contract with the Spanish giants. Diniz presided over just two wins in his six months coaching Brazil, and had racked up a humiliating three straight losses in World Cup qualifiers, including at home to arch-rivals Argentina in November. Brazilian media reports suggested his successor could be Dorival Junior, current coach of Sao Paulo.

Split role

Diniz was named to the Brazil job for one year when he took over from Ramon Menezes, coach of the under-20 team, who had replaced longtime boss Tite (2016-2022) on an interim basis after the Selecao's underwhelming quarter-final exit from the 2022 World Cup against Croatia. A favorite with fans for the creative attacking play he has installed at 2023 Copa Libertadores champions Fluminense, Diniz largely failed to replicate the feat with the national team, triggering criticism that splitting his time between the club and national team was too much. His tenure started well enough, with a 5-1 drubbing of Bolivia, followed by a 1-0 win over Peru. — AFP



Brazil's coach Fernando Diniz

Late birdie lifts Scheffler to PGA Tour lead

LOS ANGELES: World number one Scottie Scheffler capped a nine-under par 64 with a birdie at 18 that lifted him to a one-shot lead Friday midway through the US PGA Tour Sentry tournament at Kapalua in Hawaii. Scheffler shook off an early bogey with an eagle and eight birdies on the par-73 Planta-

tion course, where his 16-under par total of 130 put him one in front of England's Tyrrell Hatton, South Korean Im Sung-jae and fellow American Brendon Todd. "I played really solid," said Scheffler, the 2022 Masters champion. "The few times I got into trouble I got out pretty quick and hit some nice pitches and a couple nice putts as well."

He putted from off the green at the 18th, where the 80-footer settled inches from the hole. "I thought it was going in," Scheffler said, but added "I was glad to tap it in." After a bogey at the second hole, Scheffler got on track with a birdie at the third before rolling in a 24-foot eagle putt at the par-five fifth. He added birdies at the sixth and ninth, then launched

a run of four straight birdies with a 14-footer at the 12th. At 13 he drained a seven-footer, at 14 he got up and down for birdie from a greenside bunker and at 15 he holed a six-footer.

Scheffler said he'd need more of the same to stay in front over the final two rounds of the elite season-opening event, which features winners from 2022 as well as the top 50 from last season's FedEx Cup championship. "Scores around this place are pretty low, but it's one of those places if you go out there and play well you're going to get rewarded," he said. "If you start not hitting it in the right spots, you can get in trouble. Just got to keep the pedal down out here." — AFP

Classifieds

Clinics & Hospitals

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khalidiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913

Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381

Ayoum Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

Hospitals

Sabah Hospital	24812000
Amiri Hospital	22450005
Maternity Hospita	24843100
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700
Chest Hospital	24849400
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010
Adan Hospital	23940620
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9

Change of Name

I, KANIKAIRAJ PAUL ROBERT, holder of Indian passport no. L6662628 having permanent address R No. 68 8 Azad Nagari Lalanigam Rd, Colaba, Mumbai, Maharashtra, pin code: 400005, India residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as given name MOHAMMAD YUSUF and surname SHAIKH. **(#4584) 5-1-2024**

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Grizzlies top slumping Lakers

Magic edge Nuggets; Warriors avoid another gut-wrenching defeat



LOS ANGELES: Cam Reddish #5 of the Los Angeles Lakers reacts as he is fouled by Ja Morant #12 of the Memphis Grizzlies during the first half at Crypto.com Arena on January 05, 2024. — AFP

LOS ANGELES: The Memphis Grizzlies surged past the floundering Los Angeles Lakers on Friday, drilling 23 three-pointers to hand LeBron James and company their fourth straight NBA defeat, 127-113. Marcus Smart made a season-high eight three-pointers on the way to 29 points and Jarren Jackson Jr connected on five from beyond the arc as he scored 31. The Grizzlies, who entered the contest as the worst-shooting team in the league, notched only their second victory in six games.

Desmond Bane scored 24 points and handed out 13 assists, Ja Morant scored 21 and Ziaire Williams added 10 of his 15 in the fourth quarter, when the Grizzlies out-scored the Lakers 33-19 to pull away. James scored 32 points and Anthony Davis added 31, but the Lakers suffered their 10th defeat in 13 games, unable to take advantage of 19 Grizzlies turnovers. James started strong, making four of four three-point attempts in the first quarter on the way to 14 points.

But he and the rest of the Lakers couldn't match the Grizzlies' energy in the second half. Lakers coach Darvin Ham, who found himself fielding questions about his job security before the contest,

said there was nothing for the Lakers to do but fight through it. "It's a disappointing loss, but we can't get discouraged," he said. "I'm disappointed that we've lost multiple games now in a row, but it's only going to make that fire bigger in my chest to try to figure this thing out."

"That was my message to the team after the game," Ham added. "We've got to fight. We're going to figure this thing out." Elsewhere, conference leaders Boston and Minnesota notched bounce-back victories while in Denver, Paolo Banchero recorded his first career triple-double and drilled the game-winning free-throws in the waning seconds of the Orlando Magic's 122-120 victory over the reigning champion Nuggets.

Banchero made four free throws in the last 34.6 seconds to seal the Magic's comeback from an 18-point third-quarter deficit, finishing with 32 points, 10 rebounds and 11 assists. Jamal Murray missed a chance to tie it at the buzzer for the Nuggets, who were coming off their own last-gasp, come-from-behind win over Golden State on Thursday courtesy of Nikola Jokic's buzzer-beating three-pointer. Jokic led Denver with 29 points. Mi-

chael Porter Jr. added 22, but the Nuggets looked weary on the second night of a back-to-back.

The Warriors, meanwhile, rebounded from their loss to Denver with a 113-109 victory over the lowly Detroit Pistons. Stephen Curry scored 14 of his 26 points in the fourth quarter to help Golden State avoid another gut-wrenching defeat. The Pistons, seeking just their fourth win this season, had kept it close and took a 103-102 lead on Bojan Bogdanovic's three-pointer with 1:41 to play. Curry answered with a pair of free throws and two three-pointers and the Warriors held on for the win.

Celtics silence Jazz

In Boston, the Eastern Conference leading Celtics used suffocating defense and 17 three-pointers to beat the Utah Jazz 126-97. Jayson Tatum scored 30 points, Kristaps Porzingis added 19 and Jrue Holiday chipped in 14 in the wire-to-wire victory over a Jazz team that had won nine of their previous 12 games. Boston, whose six-game winning streak was snapped in Oklahoma City on Tuesday, set the tone early, jumping to a 10-0 lead. After Porzingis drilled a three-pointer to make it 18-8 midway

through the first quarter the Jazz wouldn't get the deficit to single digits again.

"Tonight's game was about taking away their speed with our physicality and off-ball defense, and I thought we did that," Celtics coach Joe Mazzulla said after Boston stymied a Jazz team that put up 154 points in an overtime win over the Detroit Pistons on Wednesday. Western Conference leaders Minnesota snapped their first two-game skid of the season with a 122-95 victory over the Rockets in Houston. Minnesota's Anthony Edwards scored 24 points and Karl-Anthony Towns added 22 with eight rebounds and six assists.

Rudy Gobert added 13 points, 12 rebounds, two steals and two blocked shots for the Timberwolves, who led by as many as 33 points. The Indiana Pacers' high-octane offense was firing in a 150-116 rout of the Atlanta Hawks. Tyrese Haliburton handed out 18 of the Pacers' franchise-record 50 assists and also scored 10 points with eight rebounds before sitting out the fourth quarter along with the rest of the Pacers' starters. Myles Turner scored 27 points to lead the Pacers, who had eight players score in double figures. — AFP

Zagallo, an enduring giant of Brazilian football, dies at 92

SAO PAULO: The first person to win the FIFA World Cup as both a player and coach, Mario Zagallo was as instrumental a figure as any in Brazil's rise to prominence as a global football power. Zagallo, who died Friday at the age of 92, was the only surviving member of the Brazil team that lifted the 1958 World Cup trophy, the country's first title and one that eased the pain of a traumatic defeat by Uruguay at the Maracana eight years prior.

"I was at the Maracana for that fateful loss to Uruguay. I was a soldier and it was my job to keep people off the pitch," said Zagallo of a result that prompted national mourning. "I'll never forget the silence, the sadness and the disappointment of that defeat." His legendary teammate Pele died in December 2022. While that memory remained vivid, Zagallo would do his utmost to relieve the anguish by leaving his fingerprints on four of Brazil's five World Cup triumphs.

Emerging from the amateur ranks during the 1950s, Zagallo, a diminutive left winger, embodied Brazil's quest to blend attacking flair with defensive solidity, combining his own exquisite technique with admirable commitment. He won five Rio de Janeiro state championships with Flamengo and Botafogo. He only made his Brazil debut at the age of 26, shortly before the 1958 World Cup in Sweden, but became an integral member of the team, winning 37 caps.

Brazil's run of success

The tournament, which launched 17-year-old sensation Pele on the world stage, ended with Brazil beating the hosts 5-2 in the final. Zagallo scored his team's fourth and then set up Pele for the final goal. Four years later, Zagallo played every single minute as a Garrincha-inspired Brazil overcame an injury sustained by Pele in the group stage to retain their



Brazilian football legend Mario Zagallo

crown, coming from behind to beat Czechoslovakia 3-1 in Santiago. After retirement, Zagallo returned to the game as a manager, taking over former club Botafogo and leading them to two more state titles in a country under a military dictatorship.

Joao Saldanha had guided the national team to the 1970 World Cup in Mexico but was cast aside before the tournament in favor of Zagallo. Saldanha fell out with Pele and refused to bow to demands of then-president Emilio Garrastazu Medici on squad selection and, as a known Communist sympathizer, his fate was sealed. Zagallo, just 38 at the time, inherited an exceptionally gifted squad—including Pele, Carlos Alberto, Jairzinho and Rivelino—and oversaw six wins from six games as Brazil captured the title for a third time in four attempts.

Years ahead of his time as a player, Zagallo quickly demonstrated his merit as a coach. He later reflected on the fabled 1970 World Cup, dominated by a spectacular Brazilian display, as his "greatest memory as a manager". A counter-intuitive type who believed in the number 13, Zagallo's unabating hunger for success brought further domestic titles with Fluminense and Flamengo before he ventured abroad to Kuwait, winning the Gulf Cup in 1976 and reaching that year's Asian Cup final. — AFP

Pistorius released on parole 11 years after murdering girlfriend

JOHANNESBURG: South Africa's ex-Olympic runner Oscar Pistorius was released from jail on parole Friday and "is now at home", authorities said, almost 11 years after he shot dead his girlfriend Reeva Steenkamp in a crime that gripped the world. Having served more than half his sentence, the 37-year-old double-amputee was quietly whisked away from the Atteridgeville prison on the outskirts of the capital Pretoria, avoiding the hordes of media gathered outside. "He was admitted into the system of Community Corrections and is now at home," the department of correctional services said in a statement.

Pistorius has been restricted to staying within the Pretoria district of Waterkloof, where his uncle lives, although precise information on his whereabouts has not been confirmed. Known worldwide as "Blade Runner" for his carbon-fibre prosthetics, Pistorius will not be allowed to speak to the media as a condition of his parole. Prison authorities had previously warned the press that there would be no opportunity to photograph or speak to him and provided little detail about the plans for his release, citing "security" concerns.

Pistorius killed Steenkamp, a model and law graduate who was 29 years old at the time, in the early hours of Valentine's Day 2013, firing four times through the bathroom door of his ultra-secure Pretoria house. The shooting came a year after Pistorius made history by being the first double-amputee to race at Olympic level when he appeared at the London 2012 games. He was found guilty of murder and given a 13-year jail sentence in 2017 after a lengthy trial and several appeals. He had pleaded not guilty and denied killing Steenkamp in a rage, saying he mistook her for a burglar.

'Pain is still raw'

Shortly before his release, Steenkamp's mother June issued a statement saying that, while she accept-



Oscar Pistorius of South Africa

ed the decision of the justice system and conditions of his parole, "the pain is still raw and real". "There can never be justice if your loved one is never coming back, and no amount of time served will bring Reeva back," she said. "We, who remain behind, are the ones serving a life sentence." Steenkamp's father Barry died in September, aged 80, "of a broken heart", his widow has said. Offenders in South Africa are automatically eligible for parole consideration after serving half their sentence. Pistorius lost a first bid in March when the board found he had not completed the minimum detention period required to be let out. The Constitutional Court in October ruled that was a mistake, paving the way for a November hearing that approved his release.

Pistorius would have been required to undergo a pre-release program to prepare him for life outside prison, authorities said. "An elevated public profile linked to Pistorius does not make him different from other inmates nor warrant inconsistent treatment," the department of correctional services said. As part of his parole, until the end of his sentence in 2029, Pistorius must undergo therapy for anger and gender-based violence issues. He will also be banned from consuming alcohol and other substances, required to complete community service and also be home at certain hours of the day. The conditions "send out a clear message that gender-based violence is taken seriously" by the justice system, June Steenkamp said Friday. — AFP