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# Genocidal Zionists face justice

South Africa demands ICJ to force Zionist entity to halt Gaza atrocities



**THE HAGUE:** South Africa on Thursday accused the Zionist entity of breaching the UN Genocide Convention, arguing that even the Oct 7 Hamas attack could not justify such alleged actions, as it launched a landmark case at the top UN court. Pretoria has lodged an urgent appeal at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to force the Zionist entity to "immediately suspend" its military operations in Gaza.

"No armed attack on a state territory, no matter how serious... can provide justification for or defend breaches of the convention," said Pretoria's Justice Minister Ronald Lamola. "(The Zionist entity's) response to the October 7 attack has crossed this line and given rise to the breaches of the convention," he added.

The Zionist entity's relentless military campaign in Gaza has killed at least 23,469 people, mostly women and children. A world away from the death and destruction in Gaza, robed lawyers battled it out over technical legal arguments in the Peace Palace in The Hague. South Africa argues the Zionist entity is breaking its commitments under the UN Genocide Convention.

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**THE HAGUE:** (Left) Palestinian sympathizers take part in a demonstration during a hearing at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on a genocide complaint by South Africa against the Zionist entity on Jan 11, 2024. (Right) South African Minister of Justice Ronald Lamola and South African Ambassador to the Netherlands Vusumuzi Madonsela attend the hearing. — AFP photos

**NEWS IN BRIEF**

**Ban on sale of certain drugs**

**KUWAIT:** The ministry of health announced Wednesday a total ban on private pharmacies and hospitals distributing and selling of gabapentin and pregabalin drugs. Health Minister Ahmad Al-Awadhi imposed the ban in response to an unreasonable surge in prescriptions and sales of the two neurological drugs by private pharmacies and hospitals, the ministry clarified in a statement. It added that the new regulation restricts the prescription and distribution of all drugs containing gabapentin and pregabalin to government hospitals and pharmacies. — KUNA

**First woman to head Gavi**

**GENEVA:** Pakistan senator Sania Nishtar, a medical doctor, will soon take the reins of the Gavi vaccine alliance, the first woman to lead it, the organization said Thursday. Nishtar, a former health minister, will take over as Gavi's new chief executive officer on March 18, it said. The 60-year-old politician will replace David Marlow, who has been serving as interim CEO since long-time leader Seth Berkley left last August. Nishtar has had a range of roles within the Pakistani government, NGOs and the United Nations, during her 30-year career. — AFP



**Netflix pulls Indian drama**

**NEW DELHI:** A popular newly released Indian film was pulled from Netflix on Thursday after a backlash from Hindu activists for its depictions of meat-eating and inter-religious romance. "Annapoorani: The Goddess of Food" was taken down just weeks after its premiere in the latest instance of digital entertainment platforms in India censoring controversial projects. The film was the second-most watched Netflix feature in India the day before its removal. — AFP

## Skill test must for renewal of work permit

**KUWAIT:** The Public Authority of Manpower (PAM) has signed a memorandum of understanding with the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training to conduct mandatory practical and technical tests for skilled workers in Kuwait. These tests will be required for the issuance of work permits.

Informed sources said the initiative covers not only new recruits but also individuals whose work permits are up for renewal. Workers must pass these tests before iqama renewal; failure to do so will be considered a violation. The electronic link will enable the ministry of interior's residency affairs department to cancel the residence of those who evade the test.

The implementation of these tests is part of the smart recruitment professional system project, aligning with development plan projects. The phased launch of these tests will prioritize professions based on criteria

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**KUWAIT:** Officials from PAM and PAAET sign a memorandum of understanding on Jan 11, 2024.

## Blinken sees no escalation amid Gaza onslaught

**GAZA:** US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Thursday the Zionist-Hamas conflict was not "escalating" across the Middle East, while the Zionist entity pounded southern Gaza more than three months into the war. Wrapped up a whistlestop tour of the region, Blinken met in Cairo with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi, a key mediator in efforts to end the war. "I don't think the conflict is escalating" as regional stakeholders do not

want that, Blinken told reporters before take-off. "(The Zionist entity) doesn't, Lebanon doesn't. I actually don't think Hezbollah does," the top diplomat said of the powerful Lebanese group, a Hamas ally, which has exchanged regular fire with Zionist forces across the border since the start of the war.

In a visit to Beirut, US envoy Amos Hochstein said both Lebanon and the Zionist entity "prefer a diplomatic solution" to curb border tensions. Violence involving Hezbollah and other Iran-backed armed groups in Iraq, Syria and Yemen has spiked since early October, stoking fears of the conflict spiraling.

The UN Security Council on Wednesday adopted a resolution that demanded Yemen's

Continued on Page 6

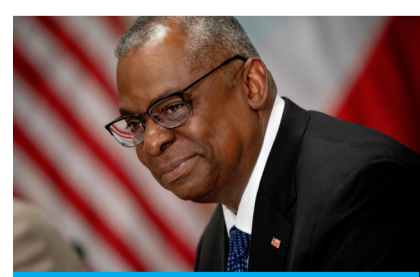


**GAZA:** Palestinian mourners react over the bodies of members of the Al-Orjani family after they were killed in Zionist bombardment on Jan 11, 2024 at Al Najjar hospital in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip. — AFP

## Biden under fire over vanishing defense chief

**WASHINGTON:** US President Joe Biden has played up his leadership credentials as he enters an election year but now finds himself on the defensive after his Pentagon chief kept his cancer diagnosis secret for a month in an extraordinary lapse. The 81-year-old Democrat has until now led a tightly disciplined White House with little of the merry-go-round of staff changes seen under Donald Trump, his predecessor and likely rival in a November rematch.

Yet Biden now faces uncomfortable questions about his credibility as commander-in-chief of the world's



top military, and mounting calls to sack Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, who twice went unannounced into hospital as Washington grapples with foreign crises in Gaza and Ukraine.

So far, Biden has resisted taking action over the 70-year-old Austin's vanishing act, but the White House has launched an urgent review of its chain-of-command procedures as it grapples to contain its worst cabinet crisis to date. The row also risks mak-

ing Biden — who has portrayed himself as a leader in contrast to a chaotic and undemocratic Trump in speeches this past week — look like he has lost control of his top team, at a time when Republicans are already painting him as too old to manage the job.

"The dereliction of duty here is so serious that it ought to require Austin's immediate resignation," conservative columnist Bret Stephens said in The New York Times. "What's astonishing here isn't that Austin neglected to inform his staff or the White House. It's the nonchalance with which the administration is treating the incident."

The White House has admitted the affair is "suboptimal", but amid repeated questions at daily briefings it insists that Biden still has confidence in Austin. Yet the timeline is damning, particularly regarding what the president knew about the whereabouts of

Continued on Page 6

## Iran seizes oil tanker off Oman in US dispute

**TEHRAN:** Iran's navy has seized a ship off Oman's coast to retaliate for the "theft" of its oil from the same tanker last year by the United States, state media said Thursday. The announcement came hours after a British-navy maritime security agency said armed men boarded the Greek-owned, Marshall Islands-flagged St Nikolas off Oman and changed course towards Bandar-e-Jask in Iran.

Four or five "unauthorized boarders are reported to be wearing military-style black uniforms with black masks", the United Kingdom Maritime

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## Local

# Will gold replace paper money?

## The rising importance of saving, investing in gold

By Passant Hisham

KUWAIT: The earliest history of human interaction with gold is long lost, but its association with rareness, wealth and purity remains to this day. "Ancient Egyptians used to believe gold was a divine metal that is immortal in its nature, because it never deteriorates, even over thousands of years," said Salah Al-Jemaz, a consumer behavior consultant with expertise in the gold and precious metals sector.



Salah Al-Jemaz

Even with worldwide agreement on the significance of this metal, not everyone is aware of the importance of saving and investing their money in it. Some prefer to invest their money in businesses or real estate or save in US dollar, oblivious to the fact that all of the above are prone to reaching point zero by time, while gold on the other hand grows continually, Jemaz noted.

Due to gold's volatile nature in the short term, some are driven away from it, as it requires a long time to generate a high return. However, Jemaz highlighted that the frequent fluctuation of gold prices is just one of its natural characteristics, which makes it a strong asset for portfolio diversification that's mainly suitable for long-term wealth preservation.

"It's a safe haven asset whose value grows in times of crisis," Jemaz said, highlighting how it re-



cently helped many people survive during the coronavirus pandemic, Russia's war on Ukraine, and the Zionist attack on Gaza. "It's the only real money that mankind trusts in these times," he affirmed.

Unlike people's misconceptions, gold is more powerful than the US dollar, whose value is only temporary. "The US dollar used to be one of the world's strongest currencies, but not anymore, just like 40 percent of strong currencies that completely disappeared by time," Jemaz said. He noted gold's exceptional power lies in being a universal currency, as it is exchanged as a commodity for international trade and other transactions around the world. Not only this, but gold jewelry is a popular source of adornment for women, which doubles up as a valuable financial resource for them.

Another key advantage of gold that Jemaz highlighted is that it's a popular type of investment for all people, with no need for having a special trading mindset or skills. All what one needs is to take enough precautions ahead of purchasing it, such as staying updated about the changing market prices and



KUWAIT: A customer looks at the gold ornaments on display at a gold shop in Kuwait in this file photo. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

buying it from trusted sources to avoid fraud.

"Literally everyone at any age or gender can invest their money in gold at any price or any weight," he said, referring to all gold types — coins, jewelry or bars. At the end, it all depends on the consumer's choice and goal of the investment, he noted.

When speaking of gold's importance, one shouldn't disregard silver's importance as well. "Silver is the male version of gold; they complement each other in some way," Jemaz said, explaining there's a positive correlation between them, as when gold prices rise, silver prices increase accordingly. Surprisingly, he mentioned silver is even more scarce than gold, and

in the coming years, the dramatic increase in its prices will alter people's perceptions about it.

The future will also unveil more surprises in currency exchange, as the world is heading toward the disappearance of cash currencies and the widespread use of digital currencies and cryptocurrencies instead, Jemaz noted. With these changes occurring, he believes there will be a significant role for gold, causing a shift in its use, as it will be the only tangible currency available for people to use. "The day is not too far off when we'll witness banks accepting gold as a replacement for money," Jemaz said.

## Kuwait Deputy FM chairs diplomatic, consular meeting



KUWAIT: The Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs chairs the meeting of the Council of Diplomatic and Consular Corps. — KUNA

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Deputy Foreign Minister Ambassador Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah chaired the meeting of Council of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps at the ministry's headquarters on Thursday. During the meeting, the foreign minister's assistants and the council's members discussed the topics on the agenda. —KUNA

## Dr Haroun from College of Architecture wins best research award

KUWAIT: A faculty member at the College of Architecture, Dr Yusef Al-Haroun, won the IASTE Berkeley Award for the best research at the nineteenth conference of the International Association for the Study of Heritage Environments (IASTE), which was hosted this year in Riyadh under the title "Heritage Dynamics".

The conference brought together more than 300 researchers from around the world who presented researches on three broad topics: "Theorizing Tradition as a Dynamic Project", "Dynamics of Spatial Social Practices and the Industry of Built Environments", and "Opening the Path." The conference was held between Jan 5 to Jan 10, 2024.

Organized annually by the University of California-Berkeley, one of the world's leading academic institutions, this competition provides an opportunity for



Dr Yusef Al-Haroun receives the IASTE Berkeley Award for the best research.

## Force Zionist entity to comply with UN resolutions: MP

TEHRAN: Kuwaiti MP Hamad Al-Mutar, undersecretary of the National Assembly's parliamentary caucus, on Wednesday called for activating the UN resolutions to put pressure on Zionist entity to comply with UN resolutions. During a speech delivered at the first meeting of the Asian Parliamentary Assembly's Palestine Committee (APA) held in Tehran, Al-Mutar stressed the necessity of providing protection to the Palestinian people and ensuring the delivery of humanitarian and relief aid to civilians in the occupied Palestinian territories as well as establishing a sovereign, independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital.

"We are committed to our principled and unwavering position towards the Palestinian issue," he said. He, at

researchers to share their work and discuss their findings, research methodologies and practical applications in relation to heritage in general and architectural and urban heritage in particular.

In turn, Dr Yusef Al-Haroun stated that the conference is a vital platform to highlight the importance of preserving heritage and enhancing the interaction between tradition and modernity, through the participation of a number of experts in the fields of architecture, urban planning, sociology, and history. It aims to promote the concepts of developing cities towards a sustainable and culturally diverse future, noting that his winning research was entitled "The Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Architectural Design, Identity and Culture Industry in Kuwait and the Gulf".

"The aim of this exploratory study is not only to find out how architects can use artificial intelligence as a design tool, but also how the results affect architectural cultural identity, form and style with significant implications for the future of design and participation in architectural heritage conversations and preservation, where interactive workshops were used as a way to understand landmarks in the cities of Kuwait, Riyadh and Doha," he added.

Dr Al-Haroun indicated that the results of the research revealed that artificial intelligence only understood global ideas and did not fully understand local concepts in architecture. "The perception about Islamic architecture is a general and vague one," as he described it as "digital bias" without understanding the diversity of cultures among Muslim peoples.

"Artificial intelligence is a powerful tool for architectural visualization, although the data indicates that when it comes to expressing culture, artificial intelligence still needs further development, as it constantly feeds on people's comments and opinions, which is the main means by which it grows," he stressed pointing to the importance of improving the platform's algorithms, which in turn will make it more accurate and closer to reality.

the same time, rejected double standards and positions towards what is happening to Palestinians, referring to Zionist entity's violations of human rights mainly in the Gaza Strip. The Kuwaiti lawmaker highlighted the martyrdom of more than 23,000 Palestinians and the injury of tens of thousands others in the war launched by the Zionist occupation forces as well as the destruction of infrastructure and hospitals. He called for taking immediate action to halt the current aggression on Gaza which violated all humanitarian norms and values as well as international laws. Al-Mutar further underlined the important role of regional and international parliaments in offering solutions to the Palestinian cause.

In this context, he pointed to the statement issued by the Kuwaiti National Assembly's foreign affairs committee last Monday calling on the governments to join the lawsuit filed by South Africa before the International Criminal Court (ICC) against the occupying Zionist entity. The meeting is featuring some lawmakers from 26 Asian and Muslim countries, including Kuwait whose delegation contains MPs Dawood Marafie and Shuaib Shaaban, in addition to Al-Mutar. — KUNA



Assistant Chief of Staff of the Administration and Manpower Authority, Major General Dr Khaled Al-Kandari, with the visiting delegation of the Ministry of Defense to the Republic of Pakistan. — KUNA photos



Major General Dr Khaled Al-Kandari leads consultations with the Pakistani delegation.

## Kuwaiti, Pakistani military delegations hold discussions

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti Ministry of Defense announced on Thursday that a Kuwaiti military delegation conducted a visit to Pakistan to discuss military

topics of common interests. The Kuwaiti delegation was headed by Assistant Chief of Staff for Human Resources, Major General Dr Khaled Al-Kandari. In a press release, the ministry said that the Kuwaiti delegation met with Pakistani Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Sahir Shamsahd Mirza and several other senior officials. The ministry said that during the meeting both sides discussed topics of common interests, especially in the military field. It added that the visit will conclude on Friday with the signing of several military MoUs between the two sides. — KUNA



CAIRO: The activities of the Humanitarian Appeal Conference to Support Gaza commenced in Cairo on Thursday with the participation of the State of Kuwait. — KUNA

## Kuwait participates in conference to support Gaza

CAIRO: The activities of the Humanitarian Appeal Conference to Support Gaza were launched in Cairo on Thursday with the participation of the State of Kuwait, with the aim of coordinating efforts related to responding to the repercussions of the war launched by Zionist occupation forces on the Gaza Strip. The Kuwaiti Red Crescent Society participated in the conference with a delegation headed by the Society's Secretary-General, Maha Al-Barjas, and included the Society's Advisor, Dr Musaed Al-Enezi, and the Director of Disaster and Emergency Management, Yusef Al-Maraj.

Egyptian Minister of Social Solidarity Nevin Al-Qabbaj said in her opening speech at the conference, "Humanitarian aid through the Rafah crossing alone is not enough, as we must consider the large numbers that have become homeless. It is our role

to work together to provide the basics of a decent life to the largest number of our brothers in the Gaza Strip". She stressed that the humanitarian situation in Gaza requires concerted efforts and joint action to alleviate the suffering of the population, calling on all national societies and humanitarian organizations to actively participate in providing urgent support and assistance to the Palestinians in Gaza.

She added, "We realize that the complex and difficult situation requires a comprehensive strategy," stressing full commitment to providing the necessary support and creating an appropriate environment for the work of national societies and humanitarian organizations. She stressed the importance of joint action in responding to the repercussions of the war on Gaza, noting that "this war witnessed a clear violation of all international conventions and the law of the International Humanitarian Commission."

Al-Qabbaj said that Egypt attaches great importance to solidarity and coordinated action to alleviate the suffering of the brothers in Gaza. She explained that her country's position will remain firm while unquestionably affirming the right of the Palestinian people to remain safe in their lands. —KUNA

# Kuwait signs five agreements with Saudi for smooth hajj pilgrimage

## Official affirms keenness to provide best care and services to Kuwaiti pilgrims

**JEDDAH:** Kuwait's Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs signed five agreements on Thursday to arrange hajj affairs for the Islamic year 1445, and provide their services along with the Saudi Ministry of Hajj and Umrah, through participating in the third edition of the Hajj and Umrah Services Conference and Exhibition in Jeddah.

The first and second agreements included determining the numbers of pilgrims, accommodation, setting up tents for Mina, Arafat and Muzdalifah, as well as providing food and the necessary supplies. The third and fourth agreements arranged receiving pilgrims and facilitating their travel procedure, providing transportation during hajj, while the fifth agreement included providing Zamzam water in the pilgrims' residence.

For his part, the Consul General of Kuwait in Jeddah and the permanent representative of Kuwait to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Mohammad Al-Mutairi affirmed to KUNA the undergoing preparations for arranging Kuwaiti pilgrims' affairs, and facilitate hajj travel procedures through having communications between a team from Kuwait Foreign Affairs Ministry and the concerned authorities in Saudi Arabia. Al-Mutairi affirmed the ministry's keenness to provide

the best care and services to Kuwaiti pilgrims, and expressed gratitude for Saudi Arabia's reception and hospitality while receiving Kuwait's participating delegation.

The Consul General expressed gratitude to Kuwait's leadership for providing care to Kuwaiti pilgrims, and thanked Saudi Arabia for its great efforts to best serve pilgrims from all over the world. Head of the Kuwaiti delegation, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Awqaf Dr Bader Al-Mutairi represented Kuwait in signing the agreements, while Deputy Minister of Hajj and Umrah Dr Abdulfattah Mashat represented the Saudi side.

The Kuwaiti delegation participating in the conference includes, in addition to Undersecretary Dr Bader Al-Mutairi, the Assistant Undersecretary of the Ministry of Endowments Mohammad Al-Aleem, Director of the Hajj and Umrah Affairs Department Sattam Al-Muzain, and the Superintendent of Hajj and Umrah Affairs Abdullah Al-Baejan.

The conference, which began on January 8 and concluded on Thursday, was organized by the Ministry of Hajj and Umrah in cooperation with the Pilgrims Service Program, and discussed initiatives, products, services, and investment in innovative technologies in the hajj and umrah sector. — KUNA



**MAKKAH:** Pilgrims gather around the Kaaba at the Grand Mosque on June 28, 2023 as they perform the farewell circumambulation or "tawaf", which is the focal point on the final day of the hajj. — AFP



Friends can have an impact on shaping thoughts and beliefs.

## Do we need to have friends?

By Ghadeer Ghloom

**KUWAIT:** "Friendship is considered one of the social needs of individuals." This is what Sociologist and Psychologist Dr Mona Al-Enezi highlighted during an interview with Kuwait Times about the unique connection that friendships hold to nourish our souls and its profound impact on our well-being.



Dr Mona Al-Enezi

### Human connections are based on social psychology

According to Dr Enezi, humans are inherently social beings who are influenced by the community and in turn, influence others. "Social psychology examines this influence and specifically focuses on how individuals are affected by the presence of others. It seeks to understand the degree of influence that individuals have in relationships. For instance, throughout our lives, we seek out role models and learn behaviors from them. This can be easily indi-

cated among children who copy behaviors of their parents, peers or others whom they stay with for a long time. Hence they play a significant role in shaping their personalities," she said.

Dr Enezi also highlighted that during adolescence, friends have a crucial impact on shaping thoughts and beliefs, which in some cases needs involvement and monitoring from an adult, especially parents. However, in adulthood, choosing friends is attributed to an individual's social intelligence.

### Friendships are fundamental

Dr Enezi shed light on Maslow's hierarchy of humans' needs, which supports the idea that making friends is an essential social need for individuals. It highlights the importance of friendships and their role in providing emotional support for individuals to achieve emotional well-being. Thus, friends often serve as an important support system in our lives for providing emotional support, understanding and encouragement during both good and challenging times.

They can help us navigate through difficulties, offer advice and provide a listening ear when we need to talk, which makes them an essential contributor to our overall well-being and happiness. Dr Enezi concluded that human relationships are considered one of the most unique aspects of life, requiring individuals to enhance their emotional and social skills in order to maintain genuine friendships and avoid disappointment or exploitation due to setting unrealistic expectations or engaging in an unhealthy connection.

## PAM: Kuwait keen on ensuring rights of foreign workers

**KUWAIT:** The Public Authority for Manpower stated that it is making persistent and continuous efforts to develop the process of bringing skilled workers to the country in a way that serves the development and economic interests of Kuwait and at the same time benefits the workers and the countries that export them.

Acting Director General of the Authority, Marzouq Al-Otaibi, said in a press statement on Thursday as he received the Ambassador of the People's Republic of Bangladesh to the country, Major General M D Ashiq Al-Zaman, and his accompanying delegation, that the labor market in Kuwait attracts workers with the specializations it needs that serve this market and meet its needs.

Al-Otaibi stressed the primary role of the Authority in providing legal protection and ensuring the existence of an appropriate work environment that guarantees the rights of all workers, including Bangladeshi workers, in various sectors.

He also stressed the keenness of both parties to joint cooperation with regard to Bangladeshi workers. He praised the strong and distinguished historical relations between the two friendly countries at the highest levels, pointing out the keenness to always maintain this good relationship.

Ambassador Ashiq Al-Zaman expressed his grat-



**KUWAIT:** Marzouq Al-Otaibi receives Major General Ashiq Al-Zaman and his accompanying delegation on Thursday.

itude and thanks to the State of Kuwait in general and to the Public Authority for Manpower in particular for the efforts it provides regarding the issues of Bangladeshi workers in Kuwait.

Al-Zaman stressed his country's constant endeavor to develop relations between the two countries in a way that serves the interests of all parties. It is noteworthy that during the meeting, cooperation mechanisms were discussed between the two sides in the field of recruiting and employing Bangladeshi workers in Kuwait. Some issues related to Bangladeshi workers were also discussed and efforts were made to solve the problems they face. —KUNA



**KUWAIT:** Marzouq Al-Otaibi with the Ambassador of the People's Republic of Bangladesh to Kuwait Major General Ashiq Al-Zaman and his accompanying delegation on Thursday. — KUNA photos



**KUWAIT:** A session of the second annual Kuwait Orthopedic Conference on Thursday. —KUNA photos

## Kuwait's second annual orthopedic conference begins

**KUWAIT:** The second annual Kuwait Orthopedic Conference was launched on Thursday to discuss the latest medical developments and challenges facing the practice of modern innovations and all specialties in the field of orthopedic surgery.

Conference President Dr Awaid Al-Mutairi told KUNA after the opening that the three-day conference, sponsored by the Minister of Health, Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi, hosts a number of international specialists and consultants in the field of orthope-

dic surgery to review and explain some delicate and rare operations and to answer the questions and inquiries of the attendees, including surgeons and students.

Al-Mutairi, a joint and orthopedic surgeon at Jaber Al-Ahmad Hospital, added that the conference's schedule includes dozens of lectures, workshops, and discussion panels covering all specialties in the field of orthopedic and joint surgery, which will be presented by specialists from several countries, including Saudi Arabia, Japan, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Egypt in addition to a broad participation from Kuwait.

He stated that the conference would focus on the introduction of robots into operating rooms and the challenges associated with it and would also provide an opportunity to bring the orthopedic surgeon community within Kuwait closer with their



Delegates attending the conference.

global counterparts to exchange expertise, experiences, and the latest findings of technology and science in the field.

He stated that Kuwait and its health sector, especially in the field of bones and joints, had made great strides in the past few years, with most hospitals forming special departments for joint surgery and treatment after a number of Kuwaiti doctors returned from their postgraduate studies from around the world. Al-Mutairi pointed out that the conference targets orthopedic and trauma surgeons, sports medicine doctors, and physical therapists, in addition to nurses, technicians, and medical students.

The conference will be accompanied by a medical exhibition for specialized international companies, during which they will display the latest medical devices, operating room equipment, and everything related to orthopedic and joint surgery. — KUNA

## Al-Rai fire controlled

**KUWAIT:** Fire brigades from Shuwaikh Industrial and Ardhiya centers controlled on Thursday a fire that erupted in a warehouse of wood and paints in the irrigation area. The teams managed to douse the blaze and brought it control. No major casualties were reported.



## 28 contracts to maintain ACs in MoE schools

**KUWAIT:** The Acting Assistant Undersecretary for Financial Affairs at the Ministry of Education, Matrouk Al-Mutairi, announced that the financial sector has completed the procedures for maintaining air conditioning for all schools of the Ministry of Education in its various educational regions and stages, in addition to the Ministry's general office by issuing two tenders.

Al-Mutairi explained in a statement to the ministry on Thursday that each tender includes 14 contracts with a total of 28 contracts for the next three years, noting "the first tender includes separate air conditioning units and drinking water coolers with a total value of approximately KD 9.4 million, where the winning companies were directed to deliver financial guarantees and sign contracts immediately."

In the same context, Al-Mutairi stated that the second tender is awaiting final approval by the State Audit Bureau to start completing the procedures for signing contracts with companies, as these contracts include the maintenance of the air conditioning and central ventilation system with a total value of approximately KD 8.3 million.

"The financial sector has been keen to launch these two tenders for more than a year and has been following up with the regulatory authorities until all the necessary approvals for these tenders were awarded so that work can commence immediately after signing these contracts," he added.

Al-Mutairi pointed out that these procedures ensure the provision of contracts for a period of three years to facilitate the maintenance of air conditioning in various schools of the educational zones, praising the concerted efforts of the concerned authorities inside and outside the ministry to follow them up and their keenness to conclude these procedures within a short period of time.

## Kuwait oil price up \$1.13 to \$80.09pb

**KUWAIT:** The price of Kuwaiti oil went up by \$1.13 to \$80.09 per barrel on Wednesday as against \$78.96 the day before, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said Thursday. In international markets, the prices of the Brent Crude and the West Texas Intermediate both fell by 79 cents and 87 cents, settling each at \$76.80 and \$71.73 per barrel respectively. — KUNA

### Photo of the day



**KUWAIT:** An aerial view of vehicles parked in a parking lot on Thursday in Salmiya. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

# MEW completes sewage station expansion in Umm Al-Haiman

## A milestone project in Kuwait's development plan

**KUWAIT:** Minister of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy, and the Acting Minister of Public Works Dr Jassem Al-Ostad affirmed on Wednesday that the expansion project of the sewage station in Umm Al-Haiman is one of the key projects in the country's development plan and a leading project in treating sewage water for utilization. Ostad stated during a tour that included the expansion project and the sewage pumping station in the Sabah Al-Ahmad that the project serves the governorates of Ahmadi and Mubarak Al-Kabeer, with a cost of approximately KD 1.5 billion and a capacity of 500,000 cubic meters.

He added the significance of the station lies in utilizing the treated water for agricultural and landscaping purposes, as well as for the needs of Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) in accordance with environmental considerations. Additionally, the project aims to harness the methane gas produced by the treatment stations to generate energy for the facility. Ostad explained that the project was carried out in collaboration with the Kuwait Authority for Partnership Projects, a German company and another Kuwaiti company specializing in this field. He noted that in the future, the project would be opened for public subscription.

Regarding the sewage crisis in Sabah Al-Ahmad, Ostad mentioned that, under the directives of the political leadership and with Kuwaiti determination, the sewage

pumping station was inaugurated on a trial basis to facilitate and alleviate the suffering of residents in the area. Following the station's operation, an environmental impact study will be conducted to assess the environmental effects of the sewage crisis in Sabah Al-Ahmad, forming a fact-finding committee to identify environmental damages and shortcomings in the country's infrastructure. A comprehensive study of the health situation of sewage and treated water will also be conducted to ensure the creation of a healthy environment in line with global health standards.

Ostad emphasized the importance of structural change in the sanitation engineering sector in the ministry, which currently lacks the necessary resources, resulting in the current crisis. He stated that the reasons for the delay in the sewage station for the city of South Mutlaa are currently being identified to avoid a recurrence of the scenario in Sabah Al-Ahmad.

Ahmed Al-Saleh, the Chief Specialist Engineer and Director of Umm Al-Haiman Projects, mentioned in a similar statement that sewage water for the Sabah Al-Ahmad area has been successfully connected to the station in coordination with the Public Authority for Housing Welfare, and the network is being cleaned. "Electricity has been supplied to the station today by



**KUWAIT:** Minister of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy, and the Acting Minister of Public Works Dr Jassem Al-Ostad visits the sewage station in Umm Al-Haiman on Thursday.

the Ministry of Electricity and Renewable Energy, and all equipment is being inspected in preparation for the station's operation in the coming hours," he added.

Saleh noted all obstacles to the project have been addressed with the guidance of Ostad and the cooperation of state entities, including the Ministry of Electricity and Water, KAPP, Ministry of Housing and the Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources. — KUNA



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Ambassador Nasser Al-Sabeeh with the participants.



Training session.



Ambassador Nasser Al-Sabeeh

## Saud Al-Sabah Center to offer 40 training programs on diplomacy

**KUWAIT:** The Assistant Foreign Minister for the Affairs of the Saud Al-Nasser Al-Sabah Diplomatic Institute, Ambassador Nasser Al-Sabeeh, affirmed on Thursday the Institute's keenness to raise the capabilities and skills of the employees of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other government agencies and bodies by providing nearly 40 training programs for them during the current year.

Ambassador Al-Sabeeh made this comment at the conclusion of the Emotional and Social Intelligence course which was held for employees of the Ministries of Education and Information.

The course is considered the first program of the Institute for the year 2024.

Ambassador Al-Sabeeh explained that the Saud Al-Nasser Diplomatic Institute exercises its role as part of the government organization in raising the capabilities of employees of all government agencies.

"The next phase will witness work on a remote training program (online), taking into account the trainees from the employees of the ministry of Foreign Affairs residing outside the country and other government agencies," he added. He pointed out that the various state institutions need to offer such training programs, and therefore "the digital library will be opened to trainees all the time without having any time constraints." He stressed that all programs of the Institute Saud Al-Sabah are held free of charge for government agencies and ministries according to a timetable determined by the Institute. — KUNA



China warns Taiwan voters to make the correct choice

## Frederik, from party prince to respected king of Denmark

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GAZA CITY: People walk in front of the Rashad Shawa Cultural Centre, built in the mid-1980s and named after its founder, the city's Palestinian mayor between 1971-1982, damaged in Zionist bombardment during the ongoing battles between Zionist entity and the Palestinian Hamas movement, in Gaza City's Rimal district. — AFP

# 'We lost hope': Ravaged Gaza nears 100 days of war

## Many families now shelter in makeshift tents against the cold winter

GAZA: Bombed-out neighbourhoods, mass graves dug in the sand, spreading hunger and disease—as the bloodiest ever Gaza war nears 100 days, besieged Palestinians have endured ever new horrors. More than three months of relentless Zionist bombardment since the October 7 Hamas attack have taken a gruelling toll on Gaza's 2.4 million people, most of whom have had to flee their homes.

"It has felt like 100 years," said Abdul Aziz Saadat, who is among the flood of displaced Palestinians whose number the UN puts at 1.9 million, and who now lives in the densely crowded southern Gaza city of Rafah. "Some are living in schools, some on the streets, on the floors, others are sleeping on benches," Saadat said in the city where many families now shelter in makeshift tents against the winter cold. "The war has not spared anyone."

Zionist entity has vowed to destroy Hamas, the Islamist group that rules Gaza, after its militants broke through a high-tech

security barrier and launched the worst ever attack Zionist entity. The bloody onslaught of October 7 left about 1,140 dead in Zionist entity, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally based on official figures, and saw 250 hostages dragged back into Gaza. Zionist entity's relentless military response has caused massive destruction in the Gaza Strip, even by the grim standards of its four previous wars, fuelling anger across the Middle East and beyond. At least 23,357 people have been killed in the fighting, the majority of them women and children, according to the Hamas health ministry—or almost one percent of the population.

### Like worst of Ukraine war

The war will reach the 100-day mark on Sunday, with no end in sight. Many thousands of strikes have rained down on the long-blockaded and densely populated Mediterranean coastal strip, cratering crowded urban areas and pancaking multi-storey residential buildings.

Much of northern Gaza has been reduced to a dusty wasteland and largely depopulated as Zionists troops and tanks have churned through it in a ground invasion from October 27 in which 186 soldiers have been killed. Gaza hospitals, schools, universities and places of worship have been hit, as Zionist entity has argued Hamas fighters are hiding among civilians and in a vast tunnel network below civilian infrastructure.

Entire neighbourhoods that once bustled with people, cars and donkey-drawn carts have been devastated in large-scale bombing starkly revealed in aerial photography. "It's just so widespread," said Jamon Van Den Hoek, an associate professor at Oregon State University who has been mapping the impact through satellite radar.

"It's really unprecedented in the speed of the damage." Between 45 and 56 percent of Gaza's buildings had been damaged or destroyed by January 5, according to research he has conducted with Corey

Scher at the City University of New York.

"The extent of damage that we've recovered or detected in Gaza only compares to the most severely hit areas in Ukraine," said Scher. The researchers said their figures may be higher than data from satellite imagery, as radar can pick up not just a bird's eye view but also damage to the sides of buildings.

A United Nations Satellite Center assessment, which covered just the first 50 days of the war, found around 18 percent of Gaza structures had already been destroyed or damaged. The war has also taken a toll on Gaza's ancient heritage, including centuries-old buildings in its historic centre, a web of narrow lanes which thrived with market traders and gold merchants before the war.

UNESCO said it was "gravely concerned" and stressed that "cultural property is civilian infrastructure, and as such must neither be targeted nor used for military purposes". — AFP



TALLINN: Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky (L) and Estonia's President Alar Karis address a press conference as they meet in Tallinn, Estonia on January 11, 2024. — AFP

## Zelensky says 'pauses' in conflict would help Russia

TALLINN: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky warned Thursday that any "pauses" in Ukraine's defence against the Russian invasion would only help Moscow to re-arm and allow it to "run us over".

He was speaking from Estonia, as Moscow and Kyiv accused each other of targeting civilians in their missile strikes in a sharp escalation of attacks, and as three Black Sea countries signed an agreement on clearing mines from its waters.

Zelensky was visiting the Estonian capital Tallinn on the second stage of a tour of staunch Baltic allies, part of efforts to bolster support for Kyiv with the war nearing its second anniversary. "Give the Russian Federation two to three years, then they will simply run us over," he said at a news conference with the Estonian President Alar Karis.

"We wouldn't take that risk... There will be no pauses in favour of Russia." A "long war" with Russia would not be good for Ukraine, Zelensky insisted. Karis called for "no limits on providing Ukraine with arms", also suggesting that Ukraine should be allowed to strike inside Russia with Western weapons.

"We must understand that in a war it's inevitable to attack the military objects of the aggressor, to slow the enemy's forces down and weaken them," he said. Earlier in January, Polish Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski called on Western allies to deliver long-range missiles to Ukraine to help Kyiv target Russian "launch sites and command centres".

In Tallinn, Zelensky restated Ukraine's credentials for NATO membership, arguing that its army would strengthen the bloc's eastern flank. NATO would gain "an army with military experience—not theory but practice", he said. — AFP

## US hopefuls flub chance to hit Trump in debate

DES MOINES: Nikki Haley and Ron DeSantis pitched Republicans Wednesday on their bids to be the 2024 presidential candidate in the final debate before nominating begins—but spurned repeated chances to make the case for abandoning front-runner Donald Trump. The head-to-head showdown in Iowa capital Des Moines came five days before the state's pivotal opening vote in the primary season, considered crucial for winnowing the field and giving those left standing a springboard for the rest of the race.

Trump has a commanding lead despite the multiple legal challenges he faces, but has skipped the televised debates, concluding he has nothing to gain by taking prime-time hits from lower-polling rivals.

With no other candidate qualifying and the contest's most vocal Trump critic, Chris Christie, dropping out hours earlier, the pair were expected to go after the ex-president more directly than in previous debates. But it quickly became clear that they were competing to be the absent former president's closest runner-up in Iowa rather than looking to eat into his lead as they ducked repeat opportunities to criticize him.

DeSantis, Florida's governor and a hardline conservative, set the tone early on by calling Haley a "mealy-mouthed politician who just tells you what she thinks you want to hear." "Donald Trump is running to pursue his issues. Nikki Haley is running to pursue her donors' issues. I'm running to pursue your issues and your family's issues and to turn this country around," he said, dusting off a favorite campaign line.

Haley, a former South Carolina governor, hit out at DeSantis's runaway campaign spending and repeatedly directed viewers to a website dedicated to enumerating all of her opponent's "lies." "Every time he lies... don't turn this into a drinking game because you will be over-served by the end of the night," she said. The pair spent much of the debate on alternating monologues rehearsing prepared opposition research, aggressively trading barbs on their records and policies running their states.

### Broken promises

DeSantis is seeking to regain ground lost to Haley and his path to the nomination depends on a strong showing in Iowa. Haley is looking to outperform expectations in the Midwestern state and ride into a one-on-one match-up with Trump in her preferred battleground of New Hampshire.

But much of the campaign has been overshadowed by the legal woes facing Trump, who has sought to use the precincts of courthouses across the country to dominate TV coverage and rally support. The tycoon's character came up early on but Haley stuck to the script, repeating a rote campaign remark that he was "the right president at the right time" but that "his way is not my way."

She briefly criticized Trump over his bogus claims that the 2020 election was stolen and for defending the 2021 assault on the US Capitol, but obfuscated when asked if she thought he viewed the Constitution differently from her. DeSantis was tougher on Trump and hit out at what he characterized as the front-runner's poor record on curbing public disorder, broken promises on border security and failure to attack Washington corruption.

But he quickly pivoted back each time to standard campaign lines attacking Haley. The Iraq veteran, who has promised to have drug smugglers shot dead at the southern border, focused on his opponent's record on



DES MOINES: Former US Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley (R) speaks as Florida Governor Ron DeSantis (L) looks on during the fifth Republican presidential primary debate at Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa. — AFP

controlling immigration, taxation, education and for being soft on abortion. Haley accused the more isolationist DeSantis of flip-flopping on aid to war-torn Ukraine, called him out repeatedly over his "demeaning" tone and attacked him over a feud with Disney that cost Florida 2,000 jobs.

Trump, who often arranges "counterprogramming" to draw attention away from the debates, was taking part in a Fox News town hall event elsewhere in Des Moines, his first live appearance on the network in two years.

He said DeSantis would be "working in a pizza shop or perhaps a law firm" without Trump's help with his career. He sought to assuage fears that he will abandon the rule of law if he is returned to the White House, assuring viewers he was "not going to be a dictator." "I'm going to manage like we did," he added. "We were so successful, that the country was coming together." — AFP

## International

# Frederik, from party prince to respected king of Denmark

## 'I will follow you, as you followed your father'

**COPENHAGEN:** A rebellious teen turned respected family man, Crown Prince Frederik becomes king of Denmark on Sunday, embodying the country's relaxed, liberal monarchy. Passionate about the environment, the 55-year-old has discreetly imposed himself in the shadow of his hugely popular mother, Queen Margrethe II, who announced her plans to abdicate in a televised New Year's Eve address after 52 years on the throne.

Enjoying the support of more than 80 percent of Danes according to a recent poll, the prince will become King Frederik X upon his mother's abdication on Sunday. "When the time comes, I will guide the ship," he said in a speech celebrating his chain-smoking mother's half-century on the throne in 2022.

"I will follow you, as you followed your father" in leading the thousand-year-old institution, Prince Frederik added. But this measured assurance is a far cry from his younger self. "He was not strictly speaking a rebel, but as a child and young man, he was very uncomfortable with the media attention and the knowledge that he was going to be king," said Gitte Redder, an expert on the Danish royal family. He only "gained confidence in his mid-20s," she told AFP.

### Lonely and tormented

A lonely and tormented teenager, Frederik resented his parents for neglecting him as they fulfilled their royal obligations. He sought solace in fast cars and fast living, and was considered a spoiled party prince in the early 1990s. But that view began to change after he graduated from Aarhus University in 1995, the first Danish royal to complete a university education.

His time at college included a stint at Harvard in

the United States, where he was enrolled under the pseudonym Frederik Henriksen. The fake surname was a nod to his father, French diplomat Henri de Monpezat who became Prince Consort Henrik when he married Margrethe.

But Frederik—who in addition to Danish speaks English, French and German—really began to mature into his role during his time training in the three branches of Denmark's military. The prince served in the navy's Frogmen Corps—where he was nicknamed "Pingo" (Penguin) -- one of only four of the 300 recruits to pass all of the tests in 1995. In 2000, he took part in a four-month, 3,500-kilometre (2,175-mile) ski expedition across Greenland.

### Complementing the queen

His daredevil side has landed him in hospital after sledging and scooter accidents, but his popularity has soared, boosted by the Royal Run, annual fun runs across Denmark that he began in 2018. "He is a sportsman, he attends concerts and football matches, which makes him even more accessible than his mother," royal expert Redder said.

"I don't want to lock myself in a fortress. I want to be myself, a human being," he once said, insisting he would stick to that even after taking the throne. He met his wife Mary Donaldson, an Australian lawyer, in a Sydney bar during the 2000 Olympic Games.

They have tried to give their four children as normal an upbringing as possible, sending them mainly to state schools. Their eldest, Prince Christian, who recently turned 18, was the first Danish royal to go to daycare.

The couple have gradually taken on many royal duties in recent years as the queen entered her eighties, "but very slowly and depending on the



**AARHUS:** In this file picture Crown Prince Frederik of Denmark holds Prince Christian of Denmark next to Crown Princess Mary of Denmark at Marselisborg Castle in Aarhus, Denmark. — AFP

queen's health", said historian Sebastian Olden-Jorgensen. The couple are "modern, woke, lovers of pop music, modern art and sports," he added. They "do not represent a potential revolution compared to the queen", but a careful transition adapting to the times, he said.

Among other things, Frederik has championed Denmark's drive to find solutions to the climate cri-

sis. He has said that he sees himself complementing his mother, a polymath who is an accomplished writer and artist. "You paint, I exercise. You dig for buried objects from the past, I buried my head in order not to be recognised during my time in the armed forces. You are a master of words. I am sometimes at a loss for them," he joked during the queen's jubilee celebrations. — AFP

## London mayor urges closer UK ties with EU

**LONDON:** London's mayor called Thursday for closer ties with Europe and a better debate about immigration as he branded Brexit a "key contributor" to Britain's cost-of-living crisis. Sadiq Khan, of the main opposition Labour party, said the UK should forge a "new settlement" with the European Union because Britain's 2020 departure from the bloc "isn't working".

His intervention comes in a general election year when the major political parties, in particular the ruling Conservatives, appear reluctant to talk about the repercussions of the 2016 EU referendum. "We've got to be frank, Brexit is simply not a peripheral concern that we can leave in the past," Khan was to say in a keynote speech, according to excerpts released by his office.

"It's a key contributor to the cost-of-living crisis right now and it's resulting in lost opportunities, lost business and lost income." He added Britain urgently needs "a closer relationship with the EU", arguing a "new settlement would not only turbocharge our economy and help to raise living standards, but help to unlock the growth and prosperity we need".

Khan, who will seek a third term in May, cited analysis commissioned by City Hall which found



**LONDON:** A handout photograph released by the UK Parliament shows Britain's Prime Minister Rishi Sunak (L), Britain's Chancellor of the Exchequer Jeremy Hunt and Britain's Work and Pensions Secretary Mel Stride reacting to a speaker during the first Prime Minister's Questions (PMQs) session of the year, at the House of Commons in London. — AFP

Britain's economy had lost out on £140 billion (\$178 billion) because of Brexit. London's economy is £30 billion smaller—about 7.5 percent—than its projected size if the UK had remained in the EU, the study concluded.

The analysis by Cambridge Econometrics estimated that Britain's economy would have missed out on more than £300 billion by 2035 if no action is taken, with the capital's economy missing £60 billion. The study also found that the average Londoner was nearly £3,400 worse off last year due to Brexit, with almost 300,000 fewer jobs present in the capital. — AFP

## Genocidal Zionists face justice...

### Continued from Page 1

Convention, a treaty signed in 1948 in the wake of the Holocaust. Top lawyer for South Africa Adila Hassim said the Zionist entity's bombing campaign aimed at the "destruction of Palestinian life" and had pushed Palestinians "to the brink of famine". "Genocides are never declared in advance, but this court has the benefit of the past 13 weeks of evidence that shows incontrovertibly a pattern of conduct and related intention that justifies a plausible claim of genocidal acts," she said.

As a fellow signatory to the treaty, South Africa can take the Zionist entity to the ICJ, which rules on disputes between countries and is often described as the "World Court". The ruling African National Congress (ANC) has long been a firm supporter of the Palestinian cause, often linking it to its own historic struggle against the white-minority government, which had cooperative relations with the Zionist entity.

South Africa has acknowledged the "particular weight of responsibility" of accusing the Zionist entity of genocide. It "unequivocally" condemned the Hamas attacks that sparked off the war in Gaza. Describing South Africa as the "legal arm" of Hamas,

the Zionist entity's foreign ministry spokesman Lior Haiat said Pretoria's case was "one of the greatest shows of hypocrisy in history". The United States is backing its ally the Zionist entity, with the State Department describing the charges as "unfounded".

As it is an urgent procedure, the ICJ could rule in a matter of weeks. Its rulings are final and cannot be appealed. However, countries do not always follow the court's verdicts — the ICJ has ordered Russia to stop its invasion of Ukraine, for example. But a court ruling against the Zionist entity would certainly increase political pressure on the country, with many speculating it could serve as a pretext for sanctions.

Cecily Rose, assistant professor of public international law at Leiden University, noted the court did not have to rule on the fundamentals of the case at this stage — that issue will likely take years. "Instead, the court would only be evaluating whether there is a risk of irreparable prejudice to rights held under the Genocide Convention, in particular the right of the Palestinians in Gaza to be protected from acts that threaten their existence as a group," Rose told AFP.

Dutch police kept rival demonstrations apart in The Hague. Hundreds of pro-Zionist protesters waving flags marched through the streets while a smaller group of pro-Palestinian supporters brandished placards saying: "End (Zionist) apartheid." Zohar Janovitch, 40, said Zionist leaders had "explicitly expressed their disregard for the lives of Palestinian civilians". — AFP

seizures of Iranian oil shipments. US sanctions target Iranian oil and petrochemical sales in a bid to reduce Iran's energy exports.

The Islamic republic has been under crippling US sanctions reimposed following Washington's 2018 withdrawal from a landmark nuclear deal. Ambrey, a British maritime risk company, said the group which boarded the St Nikolai covered the ship's cameras. A security officer "reported hearing unknown voices over the phone along with the master's voice", it added.

Communications have been lost with the vessel, which was carrying 19 crew — 18 Filipinos and one Greek — the tanker's Greece-based management company Empire Navigation told AFP in a statement. The vessel had been loaded with 145,000 tons of crude oil in Basra, Iraq and was destined for Aliaga in Turkey via the Suez Canal, Empire added. — AFP

## UK maternal deaths reaches highest level in 20 years

**LONDON:** The number of women in Britain dying during pregnancy or soon afterwards has reached its highest level in almost two decades, a new study reported Thursday. The figures from MBRRACE-UK, which monitors maternal deaths, stillbirths and infant deaths, and their causes, showed black women and those from deprived areas remained the most severely impacted.

MPs reported last year that although the UK has one of the lowest maternal mortality ratios in the world, it has "glaring and persistent disparities in outcomes for women depending on their ethnicity". It also comes after a series of scandals at maternity units within the state-funded National Health Service (NHS).

A damning 2022 report into one found failures at the Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital Trust in western England had contributed to the deaths of 201 babies and nine mothers over a 20-year period. The latest statistics prompted renewed calls for more investment and training in maternity services, despite health bosses in England claiming more money than ever is going into the sector.

Marian Knight, director of the National Perinatal Epidemiology Unit and MBRRACE-UK maternal re-

porting lead, said Britain's maternity systems were "under pressure" and the "increase in maternal mortality raises further concern".

"Ensuring pre-pregnancy health... as well as critical actions to work towards more inclusive and personalised care, need to be prioritised as a matter of urgency now more than ever," she added.

### 'Further action needed'

MBRRACE-UK found there were 13.41 deaths per 100,000 pregnancies reported from 2020 to 2022. Excluding deaths from Covid-19 -- the second most common cause—the maternal death rate for the period was 11.54 per 100,000. This is up from 8.79 per 100,000 in 2017-2019 and the highest since 2003-2005.

The main cause of death was thrombosis and thromboembolism, or blood clots in the veins. Heart disease and deaths related to poor mental health were also common. The maternal death rate among black women decreased slightly compared to 2019 to 2021, but this cohort remained three times more likely to die compared to white women.

Women from Asian backgrounds were twice as likely to die than white women, while women living in the most deprived areas were also twice as likely to die compared to those in the least deprived areas. A spokesman for NHS England said it recognised that "further action is needed to improve the experiences of women and their families".

He noted investment had increased to £186 million (\$237 million) annually to grow its "maternity workforce, strengthen leadership and improve culture". — AFP

## Skill test must for renewal of...

### Continued from Page 1

and conditions set by the memorandum. The goal is to enhance the technical workforce in Kuwait, contributing to the overall development of the labor market. The manpower authority highlighted the contracting sector as the initial focus

## Blinken sees no escalation amid...

### Continued from Page 1

Tehran-aligned Houthi rebels "immediately cease" attacks which have disrupted Red Sea shipping. The Hamas press office on Thursday reported 62 killed in Zionist strikes overnight, including around Gaza's main southern city of Khan Yunis.

In Gaza's southern city of Rafah, on the border with Egypt and overrun with displaced people fleeing violence further north, Palestinians mourned their dead and hoped the ICJ could render justice on their behalf.

## Biden under fire over vanishing...

### Continued from Page 1

the man who is directly below him in the military chain of command, and sixth in the presidential line of succession.

Career soldier Austin, who is known to closely guard his privacy, was diagnosed with prostate cancer in early December and had surgery under general anesthesia on Dec 22. He was then hospitalized on Jan 1 with complications from a urinary tract infection, and is still receiving treatment. Extraordinarily, the White House was not informed about the hospitalization until Jan 4. And it was not until Tuesday this week that Biden was finally told of the full story including the cancer diagnosis.

for these tests and work permit issuance. This sector's significance to Kuwaiti family needs necessitates protection against fraud and subpar implementation in building projects, particularly with the rise in housing and residential plot distributions to eligible Kuwaitis.

It is anticipated that these tests will streamline labor recruitment by ensuring specialization in respective fields and eliminating unqualified workers from the market. Additionally, the tests aim to prevent the issuance of work permits to individuals lacking eligibility for their chosen professions.

"(The Zionist entity) considers itself above the law," said Hisham Al-Kullah, holding a dead baby whose body was one of several to arrive at Rafah's Al-Najjar hospital. Another mourner, Mohammad Al-Arjan, expressed hope that "the court stops the war".

The United Nations estimates 1.9 million Gazans have been uprooted by the war. In Rafah, where many families now shelter in makeshift tents against the winter cold, displaced Palestinian Abdul Aziz Saadat said the war "has not spared anyone".

The war has triggered an acute humanitarian crisis, with a Zionist siege sparking shortages of food, water, fuel and medicine in Gaza, home to 2.4 million people. The UN humanitarian office said in a report that "access denials" and other constraints blocked most aid deliveries that had been planned this month. — AFP

The Pentagon insisted that Austin took part in calls from hospital, while key decisions were being made to contain fallout from the Zionist-Hamas war, which has sparked violence against US forces in Iraq and Syria as well as attacks on international shipping in the Red Sea. A Baghdad strike against a pro-Iran militia commander was approved before the hospitalization, it said.

That has not convinced Republicans who are now threatening Austin with impeachment, the latest Biden administration official they are targeting in a bid to hammer the Democrats ahead of November's election. The affair has drawn friendly fire too. Democrat Jack Reed, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said he was "concerned that vital chain of command and notification procedures were not followed". He called for "accountability and transparency" from the Pentagon and said the "lack of disclosure must never happen again." — AFP

## Iran seizes oil tanker off Oman...

### Continued from Page 1

Trade Operations (UKMTO) said. Iran's navy later confirmed it seized the ship named St Nicholas, which was previously called Suez Rajan. "The Navy of the Islamic Republic of Iran seized an American oil tanker in the waters of the Gulf of Oman in accordance with a court order," the official IRNA news agency said.

The seizure was in retaliation for "violation committed by the Suez Rajan ship... and the theft of Iranian oil by the United States," IRNA said. Iran has responded with tit-for-tat measures in the past after

## International

# China warns Taiwan voters

## Beijing says Washington must 'refrain from intervening in the elections'

TAIPEI: China warned Taiwan's voters Thursday to make the correct choice in the island's weekend elections, describing the presidential frontrunner as a "severe danger" who would threaten peace by following the "evil path" of independence.

Democratic Taiwan is two days from a pivotal election that is being watched from Beijing to Washington because the next president will determine the island's future relations with an increasingly assertive China in a flashpoint region. China views Taiwan as a renegade province and has never renounced the use of force to take it one day.

Vice President Lai Ching-te, the frontrunner candidate for the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), has portrayed himself as a defender of Taiwan's democracy but has drawn ire from China in the past over comments about independence—a red line for Beijing.

China's Taiwan Affairs Office said in a statement Thursday that if Lai "comes to power, he will further push for 'Taiwan independence' separatist activities (and create) turbulence in the Taiwan Strait".

"(He) would continue to follow the evil path of provoking 'independence' and... take Taiwan ever further away from peace and prosperity, and ever closer to war and decline," it said.

"We sincerely hope that most Taiwan compatriots will see the extreme harm of the DPP's 'Taiwan independence' line and the severe danger of Lai Ching-te in his instigation of cross-strait conflicts."

China's warning on Lai comes after Washington announced it plans to send an unofficial delegation to Taiwan after the election, a move that drew a sharp rebuke from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Beijing on Thursday.

Washington must "refrain from intervening in the



NEW TAIPEI CITY: Taiwan's presidential candidate Hou Yu-ih (L) of the main opposition Kuomintang (KMT) and his running mate Jaw Shaw-kong attend a press conference in Taipei. — AFP

elections... so as to avoid causing serious damage to US-China relations", said foreign affairs spokesperson Mao Ning, hitting back at Washington for its "brazen chattering about the elections".

Taiwanese Foreign Minister Joseph Wu criticised China's "repeated interference" in the election. "Taiwan's upcoming elections are in the international spotlight & (China's) repeated interference steals the focus. Frankly, Beijing should stop messing with other countries' elections & hold their own," Wu posted

on social media platform X on Thursday.

Lai, who had once called himself a "pragmatic worker for Taiwan's independence", has taken a softer line on the issue on the campaign trail.

He has chosen instead to echo current President Tsai Ing-wen's stance that Taiwan is "already independent" and therefore does not need to formally declare it. China cut off high-level communications with Tsai's government over her defence of the island's sovereignty.

Lai said on Tuesday that Taiwan cannot have "illusions about peace". "Accepting China's 'one-China' principle is not true peace," he said, referring to Beijing's doctrine that Taiwan is a part of China.

### 'Staunch ally'

Lai's opponent Hou Yu-ih of the Kuomintang (KMT) -- which has long encouraged closer cooperation with Beijing—has run on maintaining peace across the Taiwan Strait, saying that Lai would be a danger to China relations.

Hou rejected the DPP's allegation that he was "pro-China and a sell-out of Taiwan". "Taiwan is a democratic and free country," he told foreign media on Thursday, stressing that he did not have "unrealistic ideas" about China's intentions.

"No matter what China thinks... what the mainstream public opinion in Taiwan wants us to do is to maintain the status quo," Hou said, adding that the issue of "reunification" will not be on the table if he is elected. Chinese President Xi Jinping said in a recent address that unifying Taiwan with China is an "inevitability".

Beijing has stepped up military pressure on the island in recent years, sending warplanes and naval vessels on manoeuvres around Taiwan. Tsai has boosted defence spending during her two terms in office, buying more weapons from top ally the United States.

Hou said he will "not only increase our purchases... but also strengthen Taiwan-US military cooperation" if elected. "We are happy to see the United States playing a positive role in maintaining stability in Taiwan Strait," he said. "No matter what happens here, the United States will forever remain a staunch ally of ours." — AFP



DHAKA: Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina speaks as she is sworn in for a fifth term at the Presidential Palace in Dhaka. — AFP

## Hasina sworn in as Bangladesh PM for fifth term

DHAKA: Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was sworn in for a fifth term on Thursday after a landslide victory in an election boycotted by the opposition. Hasina's ruling Awami League party won nearly three-quarters of elected seats in parliament, with allied parties and friendly independent candidates making up nearly all the remainder.

The vote was criticised by the United States and the United Nations following a crackdown late last year that saw thousands of opposition party members arrested. "I will faithfully discharge the duties of Prime Minister according to the law," Hasina said in an oath-taking ceremony at the presidential palace. Around 15 ministers from the previous cabinet were dropped but most senior ministers retained their position, names circulated by the cabinet office showed. Career diplomat A.K. Abdul Momen was dropped as foreign minister after serving since 2019.—AFP

## Brunei's prince marries commoner

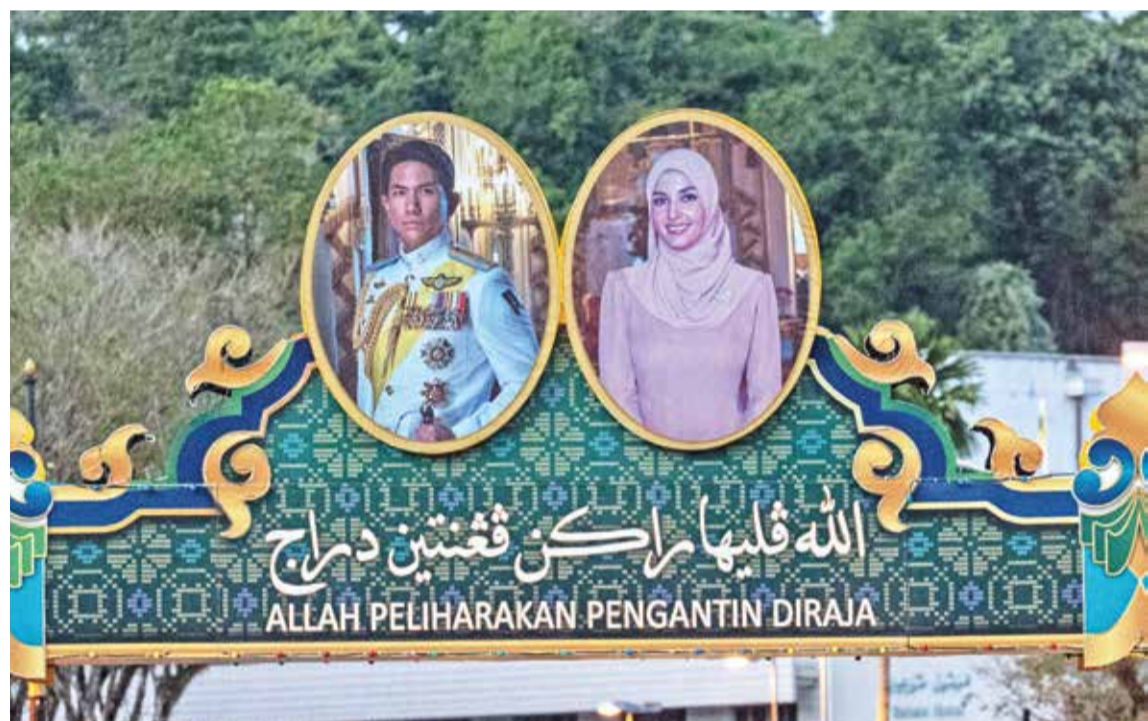
BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN: Brunei's polo-playing Prince Abdul Mateen, one of Asia's most eligible bachelors, married his commoner fiancée on Thursday as part of a lavish 10-day celebration in the oil-rich sultanate. An Islamic marriage ceremony for the 32-year-old prince and Yang Mulia Anisha Rosnah, 29, was held inside a gold-domed mosque in the capital Bandar Seri Begawan.

Mateen is the 10th child of Sultan Hassanal Bolkiyah—the world's longest reigning monarch and once the richest man on the planet—and is well down the succession pecking order. His bride—the granddaughter of one of his father's key advisers and a member of a prominent family in Brunei—reportedly has a fashion brand and co-owns a tourism business.

Mateen, wearing a traditional white outfit decorated with diamond-shaped motifs and a matching headpiece, was driven to the mosque in a luxury saloon. He sat on an elevated yellow cushion in front of an imam who presided over the male-only ceremony attended by the sultan and other relatives and guests.

After a 17-gun salute, Mateen approached his father and held his hand as the sultan recited a prayer for the royal couple. He then bowed, touching his father's hand with his forehead. As the motorcade left the mosque, Mateen waved to onlookers standing in the tropical heat. Celebrations for the royal wedding reach their climax on Sunday with a glittering ceremony in the 1,788-room palace and an elaborate procession. The guest list is expected to include international royalty and political leaders.

"It's like a fairytale," university student Syahida Wafa Mohamed Shah, 22, told AFP on Wednesday, near the Omar Ali Saifuddin Mosque, where the marriage was solemnised. Many Bruneians plan to



BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN: The portraits of groom Prince Abdul Mateen (L) and bride Anisha Rosnah (R) -- with a slogan in Bahasa Melayu that reads "God protect the royal couple"—are pictured on a billboard. — AFP

line the streets on Sunday to watch the royal newlyweds take part in a procession. "It's like something from a movie," said Nazatul Izzati Saifulrizal, 19.

### Extreme wealth

The pomp and pageantry of the royal extravaganza highlights the tiny country's extreme wealth, which is almost entirely derived from its enormous oil reserves. A sliver of land on the northern edge of Borneo island in Southeast Asia, Brunei was influenced by Buddhism and Hinduism before its

rulers converted to Islam in the 14th century. It fell under British rule in the 19th century and gained independence in 1984. An absolute monarchy with strict Islamic laws and a population of around 450,000 people, Brunei is one of the world's richest countries. Its annual GDP per capita is nearly \$36,000, according to the International Monetary Fund. However, analysts have warned that Brunei faces serious challenges to diversify its economy away from oil as crude prices remain volatile and its reserves dwindle. — AFP

## Strong quake rattles Afghanistan, no casualties reported

KABUL: A powerful earthquake hit northeastern Afghanistan on Thursday, shaking buildings from the capital Kabul to Islamabad in neighbouring Pakistan. There were no reports of casualties or serious damage as of several hours after the quake, according to authorities.

The epicentre of the 6.4 magnitude earthquake was in Jurm district in the Afghan province of Badakhshan in the remote Hindu Kush region, according to the US Geological Survey. "This afternoon, Badakhshan was jolted by a strong earthquake," Moezuddin Ahmadi, the provincial director of information and culture, told AFP over the phone.

"Based on initial information, we don't have any reports of casualties but we are checking in the

areas near the epicentre of the earthquake and we will share the final information once we have it." The quake struck at a depth of around 200 kilometres (125 miles), just before 2:00 pm (0930 GMT) and was felt in the capital Kabul, about 300 kilometres from Jurm.

Qari Inam, a resident of Sooch in Jurm district, said the earthquake "shook the village" and "walls of a number of houses were cracked". "Fortunately, we don't have any casualties, but we are checking the nearby areas," he told AFP.

Afghanistan is frequently hit by earthquakes, especially in the Hindu Kush mountain range, near the junction of the Eurasian and Indian tectonic plates. In October last year, around 1,000 people were killed when a series of quakes with magnitudes measuring between 4.2 and 6.3 jolted western Afghanistan.

Months later, thousands of people are still living in tents in the affected region as winter weather sets in, with 10,000 homes destroyed, according to the UN's refugee agency. Afghanistan's deadliest recent earthquake killed 5,000 in 1998 in the northeastern provinces of Takhar and Badakhshan. — AFP



PORT MORESBY: People run with merchandise as crowds leave shops with looted goods amid a state of unrest in Port Moresby. A festering pay dispute involving Papua New Guinea's security forces sparked angry protests in the capital. — AFP

## Papua New Guinea declares state of emergency

PORT MORESBY: Papua New Guinea's prime minister declared a 14-day state of emergency in the capital on Thursday, after 15 people were killed in riots as crowds looted and burned shops. Violence erupted in Port Moresby on Wednesday evening after a group of soldiers, police officers and prison guards launched protests over unexplained deductions to their pay.

Within hours the unrest had also spread to the city of Lae, about 300 kilometres (186 miles) to the north of the capital. "Today we call for a state of emergency for 14 days in our nation's capital," Prime Minister James Marape announced.

More than 1,000 troops were on standby "to contain any situations that may arise going forward", he said. At least 15 people were killed in the unrest in Port Moresby and Lae, said Police Commissioner David Manning.

Port Moresby's largest hospital treated 25 people with gunshot wounds, according to figures provided to AFP, as well as six people with "bush knife" lacerations. AFP TV footage showed looters in the capital dashing into stores through smashed glass windows, stuffing stolen goods into cardboard boxes, shopping trolleys and plastic buckets.

One man was seen lugging an entire chest freezer away on his shoulders. Buildings and cars were set alight, AFP TV footage showed, stirring up thick plumes of black smoke that hung over the worst-hit parts of the city. The US Embassy in Port Moresby said shots were fired near its compound as police tried to "disperse groups of looters".

A smaller crowd gathered earlier outside the prime minister's office in Port Moresby, tearing a security gate off its rails and torching a parked police car. Beijing has lodged a complaint with Papua New Guinea's government, following reports that rioters targeted Chinese-owned businesses.

Its foreign ministry said two Chinese nationals had been "lightly injured" in the violence. "We remind Chinese nationals in PNG to pay close attention to the changing security situation on the ground," ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said on Thursday. — AFP



KABUL: A general view shows residential buildings in the city of Kabul on January 11, 2024. A powerful 6.4-magnitude earthquake hit northeastern Afghanistan on January 11, shaking buildings from the capital Kabul to Islamabad in neighbouring Pakistan. — AFP

# Business

FRIDAY, JANUARY 12, 2024

## Global economy 'poised for a soft-landing', says IMF

### US inflation picks up on bumpy path to cool price gains

WASHINGTON: The global economy is "poised for a soft landing," an IMF spokesperson said Thursday, predicting that inflation around the world will continue to subside without causing a damaging recession. Last year proved to be "more resilient than we had expected," International Monetary Fund spokesperson Julie Kozack told a press briefing in Washington ahead of an upcoming update to the fund's economic forecasts. The Fund expects that resilience to continue into 2024.

"Our general view on the outlook is we are poised for a soft landing in the global economy," said Kozack. In October, the IMF predicted that global growth would reach 3.0 percent in 2023 -- a slight upgrade on forecasts earlier in the year--before ticking down slightly to 2.9 percent in 2024.

The IMF's growth projections are low by historical standards, underscoring the challenges faced by the global economy as it continues its recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, which wrought economic damage to many countries around the world. One of the challenges facing the Fund is the uneven pace of recovery from the pandemic, Kozack told reporters. "Low income countries in particular are at risk of falling further behind," she said.

"They are having the hardest time recovering from the series of shocks, including the pandemic, the food and oil price shock," she continued, adding that the IMF was focused on how to help the "most vulnerable members of our global community."

Meanwhile, consumer inflation in the United States rose more than anticipated in December, government data showed Thursday, with President Joe Biden conceding he must do more to tackle high prices. The Department of Labor's consumer price index (CPI), a key measure of inflation, rose 3.4 percent from a year ago, up from November. This underscores the bumpy road to lowering price increases as the presidential election looms in November.

Underlying pressures appear to be ebbing, as a "core" metric that strips out volatile food and energy

prices cooled to 3.9 percent in the last month of 2023 -- the lowest since May 2021.

But a rising inflation figure complicates the picture for Biden, who heads into his reelection campaign facing persistent negative perceptions about the economy. "The economy has created more than 14 million jobs since I took office, and wealth, wages, and employment are higher now than under my predecessor," said Biden in a statement Thursday. "But there is much more work to do to lower costs for American families and American workers." Analysts do not expect Federal Reserve officials to base their rate-setting off of one month's data, though accelerating inflation could add pressure on the central bank to hold interest rates at a high level.

The Fed rapidly lifted rates beginning in 2022 and have held them at a 22-year high, seeking to ease demand and sustainably rein in inflation. Despite the CPI uptick in December, inflation has come down significantly from the 9.1 percent peak in June 2022, while consumer spending and the jobs market remained resilient. This has fueled hopes of a so-called "soft landing" for the world's biggest economy, where inflation cools without a damaging recession.

From November to December, CPI rose 0.3 percent, up from the prior month. "The index for shelter continued to rise in December," the Labor Department said in its report. The energy index jumped 0.4 percent over the month on increases in electricity and gasoline, while the food index rose 0.2 percent, holding steady.

Describing the inflation battle as two steps forward and one step back, economist Robert Frick of the Navy Federal Credit Union said: "December was a clear step back." He noted that shelter prices accounted over half the increase, with little relief in sight "as rents prove sticky and homeownership costs rise." Consumers also "felt the most immediate pain in December from higher food and energy prices, and those are the two commodities Americans are most sensitive to," Frick said.



WILLIAMSTON: Casim Abbas, a mathematics professor at Michigan State University, shows the result of his morning's egg collection at his small egg farm at his home in Williamston, Michigan, on February 8, 2023. — AFP

As Biden seeks another term in office, he has focused on touting achievements such as the growing economy and low unemployment. But households are still feeling the squeeze of stubborn inflation and his economic agenda, dubbed "Bidenomics," has not appeared to resonate strongly despite largely encouraging data.

Looking ahead, all eyes are on the Fed, with economist Michael Pearce of Oxford Economics expecting the larger than expected inflation jump "will reverse some of the more aggressive rate cut bets this year." Although the Fed has signaled that it saw three rate reductions this year, markets are now moderating their

expectations of an early start to the reductions. But analysts maintain that the big picture has not changed.

"Core goods prices are flat or falling, rent gains are slowing but remain elevated, and core services inflation is still sticky," said Ian Shepherdson, chief economist at Pantheon Macroeconomics. He expects the Fed to wait for more data as it mulls the path of rates. "Fed officials will likely look through any uptick in headline CPI inflation, especially if it comes from the more volatile components," added economist Oren Klachkin of Nationwide. An uptick in core inflation "would get their attention, especially if it continues into January," he said. — AFP



LAS VEGAS: An Adam robot from Richtech Robotics makes coffee at the Las Vegas Convention Center during the Consumer Electronics Show January 10, 2024, in Las Vegas, Nevada. — AFP photos



LAS VEGAS, US: A vertical takeoff electronic aircraft from Supernal is seen outside the Las Vegas Convention Center during the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in Las Vegas, Nevada on January 10, 2024.

## Business trumps politics for Chinese companies at CES

LAS VEGAS: Xiaoyu Fan smiled as she looked around a bustling China Pavilion at the Consumer Electronics Show Wednesday as gadgets like bladeless fans were displayed and deals were being made. Hundreds of Chinese companies were at the annual CES gadget extravaganza, shrugging off US-China political trade tensions and focusing on taking care of business.

"I believe all the people in each country are very good, the civilization of each country is very nice, very friendly," said Fan, who was with the Zhejiang Crossbow Brand Electric Appliance Company from Wuyi, China. "We don't care about the governments; that's not our business" she added, a necklace around her neck spelling out the word "peace."

About 500 of the 3,500 or so exhibitors at CES are from China, more than last year but still not at pre-COVID numbers, according to the Consumer Technology Association that runs CES.

"The Chinese are back," association president

Gary Shapiro said in the lead-up to the Las Vegas show that ends on Friday. Chinese titans like TCL and Hisense dazzled CES goers with stunning televisions while less well-known companies showed off robots, drones, electronic bikes, charging cables and much more. TCL's partnership with the US National Football League was the main theme at a CES press event, complete with appearances by sports legends.

"They certainly seemed like a red-blooded American company that drinks beer and watches football," said Techspontaneous analyst Avi Greengart.

Chinese business leaders at CES included Apptronics chief executive Li Yi, whose company specializes in laser display technology used by major companies including car makers BMW and BYD. To Li, it seemed tension between the United States and China on the trade front was beginning to stabilize, and that the issue was more a battle over high technology than the type of consumer tech packing CES.

"For Chinese brands, being in the US is tough in today's climate," Li acknowledged to AFP. "But there is also an emerging opportunity; components technology companies are starting to see this as a chance to emerge." Chinese companies at CES played up innovation, wanting their country to be seen as a technology leader rather than just a place where things can be made cheaply.

"People typically think we are a manufacturing

powerhouse, and then people think we are copycats," Li said of attitudes towards Chinese entrepreneurs. "There are still probably people doing that, but more companies like us are trying to be innovative; we really don't want to reinvent the wheel and sell it at a lower price."

Futurum Group research director Olivier Blanchard saw advanced computer chips used for artificial intelligence as the heart of trade friction between the United States and China. That technology is a far cry from what is used in the cornucopia of AI-infused gadgets at CES from pet trackers to smart beds, baby bottles and electric bicycles. "The whole US versus China thing takes a very distant backseat to the dialogue that happens at CES," Blanchard said.

"Whether you're from China or from anywhere else, if you have a good product you're gonna find the market." Despite political tensions between the United States and China in regard to AI, national security and Taiwan, it would be unwise to decouple the two economies since they benefit so much from each other, according to Blanchard.

"I love the fact that they keep coming here every year, whether they're from China or anywhere else, and they keep trying," Blanchard said. "It's this weird churning layer of startups that are all competing to become the next big thing." — AFP

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by 16.5 percent, the negative effects of tightening monetary policies, lending criteria and the escalation of the geopolitical situation, the debt crisis and climate change.

He believed that despite the optimistic outlooks of the IMF regarding the Arab economy, this optimism depends on the scenarios of the war on Gaza and its impacts on the global oil prices and on the economic and political situations of the neighboring countries.

Based in Kuwait, the Arab Investment & Export Credit Guarantee Corporation (Dhaman) was established in 1974. It provides specialized insurance services against credit and political risks. — KUNA

## India's TCS, Infosys see revenue dips on client spending cuts

NEW DELHI: Indian IT giants TCS and Infosys both signaled weak revenue growth in quarterly results Thursday as a client spending slowdown deepened a seasonally weak time for the sector. Both companies, the second and fifth-biggest in India by market cap respectively, earn more than 80 percent of their revenue from Western markets, and each benefitted from a digital services boom during the COVID pandemic.

But both have since seen demand taper as customers cut back on tech spending due to higher inflation and an uncertain global economic outlook. Revenue from TCS operations was 605.8 billion rupees (\$7.29 billion) for the December quarter—a four percent on-year increase that represents its lowest revenue growth figure in two years.

Net profit rose nearly two percent on-year in the period to reach 110.6 billion rupees (\$1.3 billion) -- a figure dampened by a \$125 million legal settlement. The results were slightly above most analyst estimates, and the Mumbai-based firm's British business was up 8.1 percent to pare a three percent decline in North American market revenue. "Our strong performance in a seasonally weak quarter buffeted by macroeconomic headwinds demonstrates the strength of our business model," chief executive K Krithivasan said in a statement.

"We are seeing strong deal momentum across markets resulting in a solid order book providing visibility into our long-term growth." Employee attrition eased to 13.3 percent in the December quarter, down from 14.9 percent last quarter, which a top executive said was now within its "range of comfort". Shares in the firm closed 0.61 percent higher in Mumbai ahead of the results announcement.

### 'The higher end has come lower'

Infosys reported a decline in profit for the December quarter, and narrowed its revenue growth guidance to 1.5-2.0 percent in constant currency terms, from a previous estimate of 1.0-2.5 percent. "In effect, the higher end has come lower and the lower end has gone up a bit," chief executive Salil Parekh told reporters. "We see the outlook, in essence, is quite similar."

A big employer of India's engineering graduates, Infosys upset markets last quarter after it said it would halt campus hiring in an effort to cut costs. The Bengaluru-headquartered firm said net profit fell 7.29 percent year-on-year in the three months to December, to hit 61.06 billion rupees (\$735 million). The company's revenue moved up just 1.31 percent on-year to 388.21 billion rupees. "Typically, Q3 is a quarter with large furloughs and other end of year holidays," Parekh said. "That, we've seen continue." Shares in Infosys ended down 1.7 percent at the close of trading in Mumbai on Thursday. — AFP

## Arab GDP rose by 1.8% to \$3.5tn in 2023: Dhaman

KUWAIT: The Arab gross domestic product (GDP) grew by 1.8 percent to \$3.5 trillion in 2023, in conjunction with the growth of the global economy by three percent in the same year, said the Arab Investment & Export Credit Guarantee Cor-

poration (Dhaman). In a statement marking the publication of the corporation's quarterly bulletin on Thursday, Director General Abdullah Al-Sabeeh said that the overall outlooks of the Arab economy came positive for 2024, with an expected growth rate of 3.6 percent, buoyed by the potential growth of nine oil economies that account for 78 percent of the Arab GDP, which could make up for the downturn of other economies.

Al-Sabeeh attributed the decline in the performance of most Arab economic indicators in 2023 to several reasons, including the decrease of oil production by 5.2 percent and global crude oil prices



## Business

# China and Maldives upgrade ties with infrastructure deals

## Deals cover construction, healthcare and energy sources

BEIJING: China pledged Thursday to extend funding for infrastructure in the Maldives, after it upgraded ties with the strategic Indian Ocean archipelago. With Beijing and New Delhi tussling for influence, Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu was elected in September after pledging to cultivate "strong ties" with China and eject Indian troops.

Muizzu embarked this week on his first state visit to China—the Maldives' largest external creditor—and on Thursday, the two sides issued a joint communique detailing the "broad consensus" reached by their two leaders. China vowed to "continue to provide support within its capacity to the Maldives side in areas of priority concern", the statement published on state broadcaster CCTV said.

That included "infrastructure construction, medical care and healthcare, improvement of people's livelihoods, new energy sources, agriculture and marine environmental protection", it said.

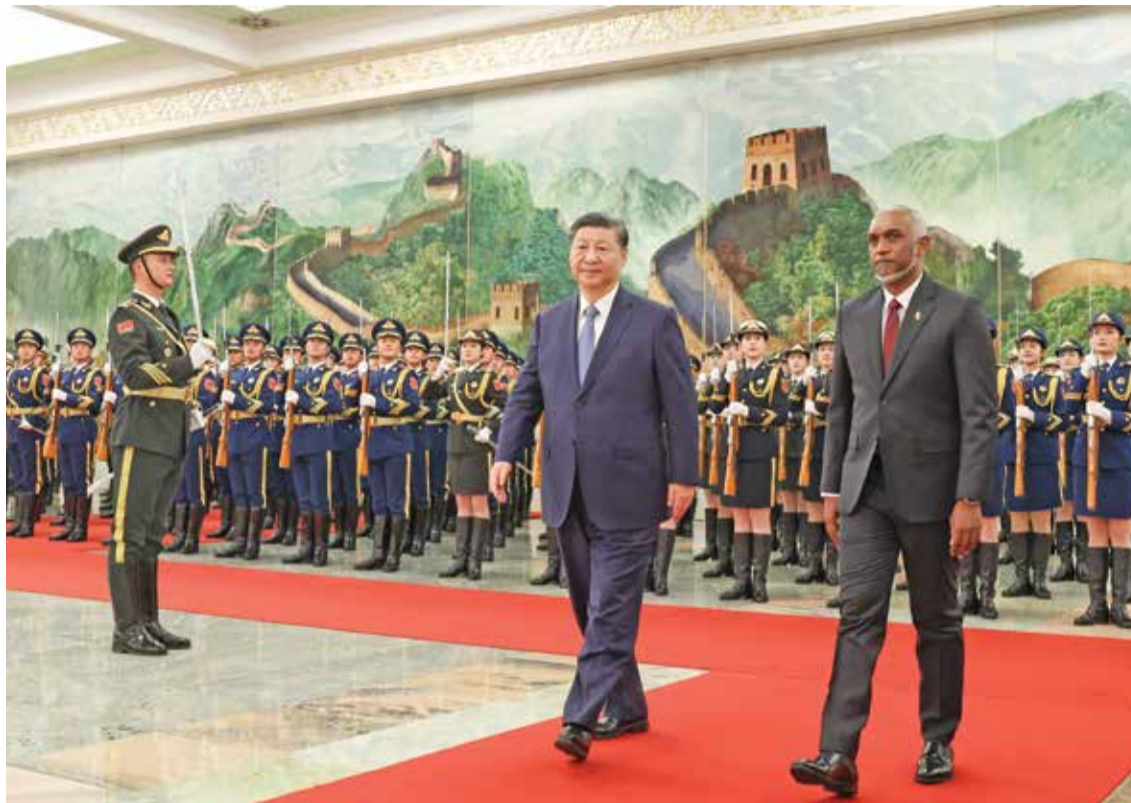
Muizzu, in turn, thanked China for its "selfless assistance" in providing the Maldives with development funds. The communique followed a meeting on Wednesday with President Xi Jinping at which Beijing announced the "elevation of bilateral ties".

"Under the new circumstances, China-Maldives relations face a historic opportunity to build on past achievements and forge ahead," Xi told Muizzu, according to China's state news agency Xinhua. Xi "stressed that China respects and supports the Maldives in exploring a development path suited to its national conditions", it said. Beijing "supports the Maldives firmly in safeguarding its national sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and national dignity", he said.

Muizzu thanked Xi for "China's significant role in the Maldives' economic success" and Beijing's role in the "infrastructure development of the Maldives", according to a readout from his office.

### Deals signed

Muizzu's party was an eager recipient of funds from the Belt and Road infrastructure program, a central pillar of Xi's bid to expand China's influence overseas. His mentor, former president Abdulla Yameen, borrowed heavily from Beijing for construction projects and spurned India. That left it owing 42 percent of its total external debts of more than \$3 billion to Beijing in 2021, according to the World Bank, citing the Maldives' finance ministry. Eleven percent of that debt was owed to China's Exim Bank, a key Belt and Road creditor. The Maldives signed



BEIJING: The photo taken on January 10, 2024 shows Maldives' President Mohamed Muizzu (right) and Chinese President Xi Jinping walking during a welcome ceremony at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing. — AFP

several fresh agreements with China on Wednesday, including ones on climate, agriculture and infrastructure, Muizzu's office said.

No details about the value of the agreements were shared by either side. The Maldives, primarily known as one of the most expensive holiday destinations in South Asia, with pristine white beaches and secluded resorts, has also become a geopolitical hotspot. Global east-west shipping lanes pass the nation's chain of 1,192 tiny coral islands, stretching around 800 kilometers (500 miles) across the equator. Muizzu was elected promising to remove a unit of Indian security personnel, deployed to operate three aircraft gifted to the Maldives to patrol its vast maritime territory.

He said last month he had secured their withdrawal but did not give a timeframe. Shekhar Sinha, a retired Indian navy admiral with the India Foundation think tank, told AFP that the partnership between

China and the Maldives "presents the most challenging security concern for India in the immediate future". "The comprehensive nature of the agreements has the potential of making Maldives a maritime satellite of China in the region," he added.

Muizzu has denied seeking to redraw the regional balance by bringing in Chinese forces to replace Indian troops. But tensions have flared with India as Muizzu's administration works to untangle a diplomatic row with New Delhi after three of its junior ministers reportedly called Modi a "clown" and a "terrorist" in since-deleted social media posts last week.

Bollywood actors and some of India's cricket greats have responded with calls for their compatriots to boycott their southern neighbor and instead book their next holidays closer to home. Tourism accounts for nearly a third of the Maldives' economy, with Indians making up the largest share of foreign arrivals. — AFP

## IMF approves \$1.2bn extended fund facility program for Jordan

AMMAN: The Executive Board of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has given the green light to Jordan's new \$1.2 billion Extended Fund Facility (EFF) program following expert-level negotiations in November of the previous year. The program will extend through 2028, reports PETRA.

In a statement on Thursday, Finance Minister Mohammad Al-Ississ underscored the strategic importance of the program for the country, noting that the collaborative effort involved various ministries and specialized institutions in its preparation. The program's goals encompass sustaining financial stability, elevating economic growth by enhancing national economic competitiveness, and supporting exports to alleviate unemployment by generating job opportunities. Furthermore, there is a focus on expanding social protection measures, according to the agency.

He stressed that the government has reaffirmed its commitment to combating tax evasion and avoidance, emphasizing the pursuit of tax fairness and increased general revenues without imposing additional tax burdens on citizens. He noted that the program does not entail any tax increases or the introduction of new ones. Jordan's Central Bank Governor Adel Al-Sharkas affirmed that the new EFF program will play a pivotal role in maintaining the reform momentum, strengthening the national economy's resilience, and increasing its flexibility in the face of economic shocks. He assured that the Central Bank remains steadfast in its commitment to upholding monetary and banking stability within the Kingdom. This includes adherence to the fixed exchange rate policy against the US dollar, a policy that has proven effective over the last three decades. Efforts are also directed towards advancing financial services digitization, expanding financial inclusion, and improving the insurance sector in alignment with global best practices. Furthermore, the Central Bank is dedicated to enhancing anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing systems. — Agencies

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## Business

# World added 50% more renewable energy but more needed, says IEA

## Winding down use of fossil fuels crucial to limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius

PARIS: The world added 50 percent more renewable energy capacity in 2023 over the previous year but more is needed in the battle against climate change, the International Energy Agency said on Thursday. The increase was the fastest growth rate in the past two decades and the 22nd year in a row that renewable capacity additions set a new record, the Paris-based IEA said.

The rise was driven by China, the planet's biggest emitter of greenhouse gases but also what the IEA called "the world's renewables powerhouse".

Massively scaling up the deployment of solar and wind power while winding down the use of fossil fuels is crucial to achieving the goal of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius from pre-industrial levels. But the world is not on pace to reach the goal of tripling renewable capacity by 2030, a target agreed by nearly 200 nations at the UN's COP28 climate summit in Dubai last month, the IEA said.

The COP28 agreement also called for "transitioning away" from fossil fuels, but without setting a timeline and short of a "phase-out" demanded by many nations but opposed by oil giant Saudi Arabia.

Global renewable capacity is expected to increase 2.5 times from 2022 levels by the end of the decade, the agency's annual report on the sector found. "It's not enough yet to reach the COP28 goal of tripling renewables, but we're moving closer—and governments have the tools needed to close the gap," IEA Executive Director Fatih Birol said. Birol said onshore wind and solar panels were less expensive now than fossil fuel plants in most countries.

"The most important challenge for the international community is rapidly scaling up financing and



IEA Executive Director Fatih Birol

deployment of renewables in most emerging and developing economies," he said. "Success in meeting the tripling goal will hinge on this," Birol added.

The agency, which advises developed countries on energy policy, said renewable capacity reached almost 510 gigawatts last year, with solar photovoltaics (PV) accounting for three-quarters of additions worldwide. China commissioned as much solar PV last year as the entire world did in 2022, while the country's wind power additions rose by 66 percent year-on-year. Increases in Europe, the United States and Brazil "also hit all-time highs", the energy watchdog said.

Prices for solar PV devices fell by 50 percent in 2023 compared to the previous year. The IEA said costs are expected to fall further as global manufacturing capacity is forecast to significantly exceed demand by the end of 2024. The wind industry, however, is facing "a more challenging environment due to a combination of ongoing



A field of solar panels in China, which the IEA dubs 'the world's renewables powerhouse'. — AFP

supply chain disruption, higher costs and long permitting timelines", the report said.

Dave Jones, global insights programme director at the Ember think tank, said the sector's 2023 growth "makes it clear that a tripling of renewables is entirely achievable".

"We are increasingly on track not only for a peaking of fossil fuel use this decade, but for sizable falls in fossil fuel use," Jones said. "2024 will be the year that renewables changed from a nuisance for the fos-

sil fuel industry, to an existential threat," he added.

Dean Cooper, global energy lead at conservation group WWF, said renewable energy generation was increasing "fast but not fast enough". "We will not avert climate catastrophe while fossil fuels continue to be burned," he said. "Those who want to see a liveable planet should increase pressure on their government to convert words into action by demanding they urgently transform their energy systems," he said. — AFP

## News in Brief

### Supermarket Tesco hikes profit forecast

LONDON: Britain's biggest retailer Tesco on Thursday posted record sales for the key Christmas trading period as inflation stayed high, causing it to upgrade its forecast for full-year earnings. Tesco said annual retail operating profit was expected to come in at around £2.75 billion (\$3.5 billion), up from its previous guidance for £2.6-2.7 billion. "We stepped up our investment in service over the key festive period, with more colleagues on the shop floor, helping to deliver market-leading availability and making this our best Christmas yet," chief executive Ken Murphy added in the trading statement. In the 19 weeks to January 6, comprising Tesco's third quarter and Christmas trading period, UK sales jumped 8.1 percent to £16.8 billion compared with one year earlier. "Tesco saw strength in fresh food sales and stated that its food inflation was less than its key competitors," noted Kathleen Brooks, analyst at XTB trading group. — AFP

### Bitcoin a dud in El Salvador

SAN SALVADOR, El Salvador: Hardly anyone used bitcoin last year in El Salvador, the first country anywhere to make the cryptocurrency a form of legal tender, said a poll released Wednesday. The government of President Nayib Bukele took this pioneering step in 2021, introducing bitcoin in circulation alongside the US dollar, which replaced the Salvadoran colon in 2001. The goal was to make remittances—cheaper to send and to get Salvadorans to open bank accounts, which 70 percent of the population lacked. However a poll by Central American University found that 85 percent of people questioned did not use bitcoin to pay for a good or service last year, and three percent have never ever used the currency. The poll was carried out from December 9 to 22 among 1,280 people and had a margin of error of 2.7 percent. A total of 77.8 percent of those questioned said that with bitcoin as legal tender their family financial situation has remained unchanged. — AFP

### Argentina, IMF in \$4.7bn disbursal deal

BUENOS AIRES: Argentina and the International Monetary Fund announced an agreement Wednesday to release \$4.7 billion dollars as part of a debt restructuring plan for the troubled South American giant. Latin America's third-biggest economy is on its knees after decades of debt and financial mismanagement, with inflation surpassing 160 percent year-on-year and 40 percent of Argentines living in poverty. The package is still subject to approval by the IMF board of directors. With this accord new president Javier Milei, who took power in December and inherited a deep social, economic and financial crisis, puts back on track a \$44 billion dollar bailout package with the IMF that dates back to 2018. The outgoing administration of Alberto Fernandez renegotiated the loan, but the recession that accompanied the COVID-19 pandemic and a severe drought this year made it difficult for Argentina to meet the targets agreed with the IMF. This new accord was agreed during a review of that loan package. "This is not a new agreement," economy minister Luis Caputo said as he announced the accord. — AFP

## NBK urges customers to verify safety of online shopping sites

KUWAIT: Reflecting its active role in promoting financial literacy and inclusion among the different segments of society, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) continues its participation in the "Let's Be Aware" banking awareness campaign introduced by the Central Bank of Kuwait, in cooperation with Kuwaiti banks and Kuwait Banking Association (KBA).

In this regard, NBK focuses on increasing online shopping awareness, and the need to be cautious when shopping on websites by securing their devices and bank/personal accounts, to avoid falling victim to hackers, as online fraud is usually done through suspicious websites, which use fake logos and trademarks.

Therefore, NBK advised customers to adhere to important security tips for online shopping including verifying the authenticity and safety of logged in shopping websites, checking for secure websites (https://), and logging out after finishing shopping. Furthermore, the bank also warned of

using public Wi-Fi for online shopping, as these networks are insecure and unprotected, which makes them easily prone to hacking, and stealing customers' personal and banking information. It also urged customers to avoid saving any banking or personal information on the browser used to log in to the online shopping store.

NBK urged customers to use third-party payment methods like "Samsung Pay, PayPal, Apple Pay," and to activate SMS notifications provided by banks to get notified of the debit transactions on their bank accounts, as well as using banks' smartphone apps to view transaction history and details including debited amount, transaction location, date, and name of the store in which it was made.

The bank also advised consumers to compare prices across platforms, and to beware of prices/offers that look too good to be true as this is a common trick used by scammers to steal consumers' information and accounts. NBK also reaffirmed that it will never ask customers for personal information via e-mail, SMS or phone calls, warning them of responding to such messages representing fraud attempts to obtain their banking information to steal their money or information.

NBK intensifies awareness by sharing educational content including video clips and text communications on all its social media platforms and

## UK to unveil 'biggest nuclear power expansion in 70 years'

LONDON: The UK government on Thursday announced plans for what it said was the country's "biggest expansion of nuclear power for 70 years" to bolster its energy independence and meet carbon emission targets. The Civil Nuclear Roadmap includes exploring the construction of a major new power station, £300 million (\$382 million) of investment to produce an advanced uranium fuel and "smarter regulation".

Taken together, the measures would quadruple UK nuclear power by 2050 to 24 gigawatts, enough to provide a quarter of the UK's electricity needs. "Nuclear is the perfect antidote to the energy challenges facing Britain—it's green, cheaper in the long-term and will ensure the UK's energy security," said Prime Minister Rishi Sunak.

"This is the right long-term decision and is the next step in our commitment to nuclear power, which puts us on course to achieve net zero by 2050 in a measured and sustainable way," he added. The government says it is committed to the 2050 net

zero target but has come under fire after announcing last summer it will issue "hundreds" of new oil and gas licenses in the North Sea. It is also grappling with a cost-of-living crisis partly caused by the spike in oil and gas prices following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Energy minister Claire Coutinho said the plans would mean the UK would "never again be held to ransom over energy by tyrants like Vladimir Putin". The government said the proposals represented "the biggest expansion of nuclear power for 70 years", adding it would "reduce electricity bills, support thousands of jobs and improve UK energy security".

The most eye-catching proposal is the possible construction of another power station as big as Sizewell in east England, construction on which is due to begin this year, and Hinkley in west England, which is currently under construction. Both power stations will be capable of powering six million homes each.

The UK currently has nine operational nuclear reactors on five sites but



A 245-tonne steel dome being lifted onto Hinkley Point C's first reactor building near Bridgwater in south-west England on Dec 15. — AFP

many are nearing the end of their operating lives. Six reactors on three sites have been shut down since 2021 and will be dismantled. However, operator EDF announced in March that it was extending the life of two British power plants—Heysham 1 and Hartlepool. The UK intends to build up to eight new reactors by 2050.

The government said on Sunday it will invest up to £300 million into producing the HALEU fuel required for

new high-tech reactors, and which currently is only commercially produced in Russia. "The UK will lead the way from its North West production hub to provide the world with this form of uranium fuel, with the first plant aiming to be operational early in the next decade," said the government.

Regulators will also be allowed to assess projects while designs are finalized in a loosening of rules aimed at speeding along construction plans. — AFP

## Stock markets gain, dollar down before US inflation data

LONDON: Major stock markets mostly rose and the dollar fell on Thursday before the release of US inflation data that could have a huge bearing on the Federal Reserve's timetable for cutting interest rates. The positive vibes across Asian and European trading floors followed gains Wednesday on Wall Street, where tech firms bounced after a relatively dull start to the year and dealers were gearing up for annual earnings from the world's biggest companies.

"Today sees the latest US inflation data take centre stage, with sentiment for US stocks expected to remain highly sensitive to any changes in the outlook for monetary policy going forward," said Joshua Mahony,

chief market analyst at Scope Markets. Wall Street won support Wednesday thanks to share-price gains for tech titans Amazon, Microsoft and Google-parent Alphabet, which have had a weak start to 2024. Tokyo led the way in Asia on Thursday, piling on 1.8 percent to finish above 35,000 points for the first time since early 1990 as a weak yen boosted exporters.

Bitcoin held at around \$46,600, having burst above \$47,700 earlier in the day on news that the US Securities and Exchange Commission had given the go-ahead for wider trading of the world's biggest cryptocurrency in the form of exchange-traded funds. The SEC approved the plans for 11 ETFs to list on leading exchanges including the New York Stock Exchange "on an accelerated basis", it said.

Analysts said the unit failed to take off after the news as the decision had largely been priced in over recent weeks. ETFs are traded on public markets, granting investors exposure to price movements in asset prices without taking direct ownership of the underlying assets. — AFP



TOKYO: Pedestrians walk below a signboard showing the closing numbers on the Tokyo Stock Exchange, along a street in Tokyo on January 11, 2024. — AFP

# Weekender

## What's the kerfuffle over a TRUFFLE?

By Faten Omar

The desert truffle season is here, and it is drawing crowds to the Al-Faqaa (Truffle) Market in Rai. The market showcases a variety of truffles, each distinct in shape, taste, size and price. As enthusiasts explore this culinary haven, the diverse offerings contribute to a sensory experience, highlighting the rich tapestry of flavors of regional truffles. The season's onset marks a time of culinary exploration and appreciation for these prized delicacies in Kuwait.

The truffle market experiences such high demand every year, that hundreds of merchants vie for the limited stalls available during the winter months. Bu Khalil, a truffle seller, spoke to Kuwait Times about the truffle season, which

ically falls on three main types — the esteemed white truffle, known as zubaidi, the red truffle, and the elusive black desert truffle (khula). The black variety is particularly challenging to find.

Regarding prices, Bu Khalil revealed that prices currently range between KD 10 and 30 per kilo. "The price of a medium-sized faqaa is KD 10, while a large one costs KD 20- 25. As for the zubaidi, a large one costs KD 30 and the small one KD 12," he explained. He confirmed the truffle varieties currently present in the Kuwaiti market are imported from Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Syria, noting the Iranian truffle season will begin on Feb 25, while other types will become available from Jan 27. Bu Khalil said the Kuwaiti Faqaa Market is considered the first-of-its-kind in the Gulf, as it specializes only in selling truffles.

Ahmed Al-Masry confirmed that other varieties of truffles from Arab countries will arrive next week. "The current prices of the truffles range between KD 20 and 50 per kilo of small and medium ones, while the biggest ones are sold for KD 70," he said. He stressed prices will soon be within everyone's reach, as the current high prices are due to a lack of truffles in the market.

Another seller, Ali Al-Jabali, said there are several varieties of truffles, the most expensive of which is the "zubaidi", whose price reaches hundreds of dinars depending on the size. There is also the "khalas" type, which is very desirable and



is sold by kilo or by box.

"Zubaidi, a distinguished white truffle renowned for its substantial size, good smell and delightful taste, maintains a consistently high price throughout the season. Even in exceptional cases where prices may see a slight decrease, the overall value of zubaidi remains elevated.

Many citizens opt to purchase significant quantities of this prized truffle, often choosing to store it for later use, attesting to its enduring popularity and appeal in Kuwaiti cuisine. Kuwaitis are addicted to truffles because they are rare and have such a distinct taste," Jabali told Kuwait Times.



A vendor arranges desert truffles for sale at the Truffle Market in Rai on Jan 8, 2024. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

began at the beginning of January and will continue until the end of May. "There is a high demand for buying truffles nowadays, and prices are still high due to the lack of truffles, but prices will drop by half after 10 days," he said.

With approximately 30 varieties of desert truffles, the culinary spotlight typ-



A vendor sits by his merchandise of desert truffles.



A vendor holds desert truffles for sale.



A customer inspects desert truffles.



A vendor presents desert truffles for sale at the Truffle Market.



A customer buys desert truffles from a vendor.



# Qesati

## Embracing the power of storytelling

By Passant Hisham

By fully immersing yourself in someone else's story, and at the same time being open to sharing a glimpse of your own narrative too, you can easily find a sense of belonging and togetherness around a group of strangers whom you just met. With this in mind, Fatemah Al-Habib started "Qesati", a community based in Kuwait providing a safe space for people to connect through the art of storytelling.

"Every person has an inspiring story to tell, if you really look into it; every person has something to teach you, only if you listen to them," Habib said. Qesati invites guest speakers from different backgrounds and fields of expertise, such as doctors, artists or athletes, to share their distinctive experiences. Every story highlights a key message the guest speakers aim to deliver through the reflection of their own journey, whether it's with finding their passion, learning to stay persistent, reaching self-acceptance, and more.

At the core of humans, there's always a need for this kind of communication, as the stories that we absorb can be powerful enough to shape our thought processes in much the same way a lived experience does. "As we get engrossed in our own lives, we tend to forget that our struggles are someone else's struggles too, and that we've never been alone," Habib noted.

She believes that it's always healthy to learn from others how they managed to deal with moments of hardships. This alone makes Qesati's sessions a lifechanging experience, bringing people to relate to one another despite their differences.

One of the people attending Qesati's sessions and events since the very beginning, Ahmed El-Sayed said: "Qesati has grown to be the activity I look forward to the most on my weekends in Kuwait. You get to hear interesting and often heartfelt stories of people from



Fatemah A-Habib, founder of Qesati.

all walks of life. You get to have deep conversations on topics of importance for everyone. You get to become friends with fellow attendees who share your hunger for knowledge and connection. Qesati has touched hundreds of lives over the years."

As Qesati embraces all the forms of storytelling that go beyond mere discussions and dialogues, it holds different events that gives people the chance to express themselves in their own unique way, for instance, by participating in art workshops, engaging in meditation sessions or showcasing their talents in music or poetry during open mic nights.

Habib acknowledged that the idea of storytelling goes back to the Stone Age. She noted it's an integral part of our daily lives, where we subconsciously practice it in every little detail — in the movies that we watch, the books that we read or the podcasts that we listen to. It even happens all the time with our friends, family or even strangers, where one basic question that is asked every day such as "How are you?" can trigger people to distill all the events of their day in one short story.

Stories have always been used to



People attend a Qesati session.



An attendee engages in a discussion with the guest speaker.

Another person who's attended some of Qesati's sessions, Zainab Dashti, shared her opinion about her personal experience. "It's unique in nature, as unlike normal talks or lectures, this is more intimate, where the audience is part of the conversation and can join in anytime. It creates an open environment that's engaging with dynamic discussions," she said.

educate, entertain and inspire, as well as having played a critical role in shaping us as communities and nations. Qesati is just one of the stories that we live every day, and Habib aims that with this community, she can influence as many people as possible to craft their own narrative in a way that can leave a real impact on the world.

# Brushing against boundaries

## The politics of art, expression and repression

By Abdulwahab Al-Tabatabaie

"Repression cannot exist without opposition," said Judie Mannaa, an up-and-coming voice in the Kuwaiti art community over coffee in Kuwait City, which has, in recent years, become a cradle of culture and the arts. Scarcely a 100 years ago, contemporary Kuwaiti art (and its artists) amounted to a niche but culturally and creatively rich minority that intended to capture the nation's, then, simple day-to-day and rural living through modest impressionist tableaux.

Fast forward a few decades, and today, the canvas has widened, giving way for a broad and vibrant art scene, whose artists bear the torch of their predecessors in raising a mirror to a society steeped in tradition and continued innovation. Recent contention and censorship, however, challenge these artists' ability to balance the legacy of

eras, which were bold and innovative in both respects: The impressionists, who domineered the years prior to the oil boom, intending to capture the traditional native sensibilities, and beginning from the '60s and '70s, the modernists, who pioneered artist culture with the advent of such artists as Khalifa Al-Qattan and Munira Al-Kazi.

These artists came to Kuwait from abroad with a knowledge of Western and neighboring cultures which were then applied to local art. Reuters called this era of the Kuwaiti art scene the "most avant garde in the Gulf". But this scramble for culture and the arts took a deep nosedive as it tackled rising sentiments of conservatism in the region and the Iraqi invasion, which caused a bottleneck in expression.

In the years since, the scene has experienced a renaissance headed by young artists eager to reinvent the wheel in the silent struggle against

that the Kuwaiti cultural atmosphere isn't the most accepting of all art. A lot of artists that I've met, both students and established visual artists with careers, feel as though they have to approach specific themes and statements with more subtlety and sensitivity than they'd have to elsewhere."

But this was not always the case. Many of the era-defining artists of Kuwait's golden age of art battled harsh traditional and religious convictions. It was only in the years leading up to the Iraqi invasion that a more conservative stance on expression took foothold, which was viewed by some as retaliation against the country's liberalism. The building of private infrastructure and services has taken precedence over the preservation of the country's rich creative culture.

These restrictions have had an inverse effect, however, providing artists a platform to communicate their themes in more subtle, dynamic ways, echoing these artists' opposition to the status quo. "Personally, I see it as a challenge which prompts me to explore more creative, subtle, and symbolic means of visual communication," Mannaa said. Her works, while not always overtly confrontational, offer a space for communication which defies the classic boundaries of tradition, namely, in her piece exhibited at a showcase earlier last year, Superimposed, which offers a dualistic narrative between those who subscribe to settler-colonialist and pro-Palestinian beliefs that highlights a prevailing statement of resistance against apartheid.

For artists like Mannaa, the growing limitations in freedom of expression have allowed them to craft nuanced dialogues between the seen and the unsaid. In her words, "those who oppose with minimal access to tools of self-expression must do so in a way which allows them to maneuver around the hypothetical yellow tape."

Nevertheless, not all artists view the Kuwaiti creative landscape through this lens of repression. For some, these boundaries are clearly established but flexible, serving as a framework to better cater to the public than restrict creative influence. Hashem Behbehani, a Kuwaiti comic artist and illustrator whose comics frequently address sensitive sociopolitical and bureaucratic issues in Kuwait, for instance, is an artist who feels safe and comfortable speaking on political matters in the country.

"Not at all, actually," Behbehani, 33,



Superimposed, Judie Mannaa (2023)

replied when asked if he felt repressed with respect to the art he and artists in Kuwait are able to produce, in an interview with Kuwait Times. "Regardless of all the negative things that come with being in Kuwait ... I think one of the biggest pros is that we do have a certain level of freedom of expression, and I do not feel fear when it comes to making art that's political in Kuwait. Because, so far, the rules have been clear as to what can and cannot be said," he pointed out.

Legal restrictions in freedom of expression in Kuwait are reserved for speaking poorly about HH the Amir and the explicit referencing of names and/or personal attacks on public figures, which have been easy for Behbehani to avoid until this point, despite his outspoken illustrations and bold opinions

on certain policies and bureaucracy in the country. Some artists are still able to succeed without violating cultural sensitivities. Regardless, he described the future as being unsure: "Can this change? Maybe. Especially with the laws that are being put forward by the ministry of communication."

While the art scene in Kuwait hosts a large number of conflicting views, as each artist must reconcile themselves with the cultural landscape differently, this diversity only makes for a more colorful social tapestry. Whether they fight against boundaries or embrace them, artists share the collective mission of honoring the hardships of the past with the promise of an infinite future.



"We must stop the corruption!," Hashem Behbehani (2022)

the past with the urgency of the present: How much longer can censorship intrude on art, before it becomes its subject?

In the heyday of Kuwait's contemporary culture, the country could be described as a modern refuge for regional artists. Historically, the art scene in Kuwait was defined by two distinct

sensitive topics. One of the boldest young pioneers of this cultural — or, rather countercultural — revival is Mannaa, a mixed media artist based in Kuwait. Mannaa, 16, described the issue: "As someone who's been both an observer and, as of late, an active participant in the Kuwait art scene, I've definitely seen the sentiment echoed



## Hook, line and sinker

# Kuwaitis' love for fishing

By Ghadeer Ghloom

**“When a person enters a world that is not their own, from land to water, they must face any problem with quick thinking and bravery and make decisions to save the situation – in this vast amount of water, in an environment that is not their natural habitat.”** With these words, Hasan Mohammad, a local fisherman, gave Kuwait Times a brief glimpse into the world of fishing and fishermen.

Mohammad explained to Kuwait Times that Kuwaitis' maritime love story is as old as the sea, and their association with the sea is a strong and essential bond. The sea represents the lungs, heart and arteries for Kuwaitis, as it is their source of livelihood and vital for individuals and society. Even after Kuwait was blessed with black gold (oil) and there was a change in income and livelihood sources, Kuwaitis did not forget their love for the sea. They remained loyal and devoted, passing this love onto the next generations.

According to Mohammad, the relationship with the sea has transformed into a hobby that requires investment, as it brings pleasure and enjoyment that can be felt and understood by those who practice it. Fishing provides endurance, patience, breadth of mind and willpower, as hours may pass in anticipation of the moment of catching a fish. It also enhances focus and mental clarity away from the noise of work and the city. This includes mental focus on a specific thing, relieving the mind from thinking about other matters, as the mind is occupied with one thing only, which gives it rest and strength in concentration. Furthermore, other the beneficial aspects of this hobby is quick thinking, decision-making and bravery.

### Language of fishing

Mohammad explained that fishing, known as “al hadaq” in the Kuwaiti dialect, is a hobby that has its own unique vocabulary in the language of fishermen. There are different types of fishermen: There is the beach fisherman, referred to as “seef”; there is the “dafar” fisherman, who enters the sea on foot until the waist, carrying a container or basket to hold fishing tools and the catch. There's also the boat fisherman, who uses a boat to reach open waters and faraway distances. Then there is the spearfishing diver and other meth-

ods that enthusiasts excel at. Each part of the boat also has a specific name or term. Similarly, each fishing tool and its method have their own terminology. In fact, this applies to everything related to this hobby.

For example, the front of the boat is called “Al sadr”, while the back of the boat is called “al tafer”. There's also the anchor that stabilizes the boat,

and its species require a specific size of fishing line and weight for catching. There is also a specific knotting technique used in the art of fishing for each particular fish. There is a method called “al rikka” which involves placing the lead weight “bild” at the beginning of the line, followed by the hook “meedar”. This method is usually used when the water is calm, according to fishermen,

leekh, al qarqoor, al mishbak and others. These methods are not preferred or encouraged as they harm the marine environment and fish spawning grounds. Such methods are known as destructive fishing.

Mohammad said that bait, known as “yeem” by Kuwaiti fishermen, is of various types, including shrimp, small fish, squid, sometimes chicken liver, and



Freshly-caught shoum.



Freshly-caught nuwaibi.



The fishing “kheit” comes in different sizes and thickness depending on the user's preference and targeted fish species.



Shrimp used as bait by Hasan Mohammad to catch fish.



The anchor used to stabilize the boat (al malmal).



“Al rikka”, a method that places the sinker (bild) at the beginning of the line (kheit), then comes the hook (meedar) with the bait (yeem) at the very end.

meaning when the sea current is in the high tide state.

On the other hand, there is the method of “al elaqa”, which is the opposite of the “al rikka” method. In this method, the weight (bild) is placed at the front of the line, followed by the hook. This method is usually used when the sea current is in the low tide state. There is also a state known as “al thabr”, which is the rotational state of the sea current to reach the islands. There are other fishing methods that have not been discussed here, such as using large fishing nets like al ghazl, al

others. Each type of fish bait is more likely to catch certain fish. For example, mullet fish, with the sides skinned and deboned, is mostly used in catching the subaiti fish. As for soft shrimp, it is often used in catching shoum and nuwaibi fish. Nuwaibi can be caught with squid as well. However, this does not mean that these types of bait are only used for these specific fish, but some fish seem to prefer certain types over others.

## What's on

• Event: **Painting in the garden**  
Place: Boulevard  
Date: January 12, 2024

• Event: **The Folio Club: Macbeth**  
Place: Kuwait Shakespeare Society  
Date: January 13, 2024

• Event: **Al-Mikshat**  
Place: North Island on Sheikh Jaber Causeway  
Date: January 12 to April 12, 2024

• Event: **Quantum Con**  
Place: Kuwait International Fairground, hall 6  
Date: January 25 to 27, 2024

• Event: **Mono-Printing Conversations**  
Place: Art Studio  
Date: January 12-13, 2024

• Event: **Tours in Sadu House**  
Place: Sadu House  
Date: From Saturday to Thursday  
Time: 6:30- 7 pm, 7:30- 8 pm

• Event: **Street King Roll Race**  
Place: Kuwait Motor Town  
Date: January 12, 2024

• Event: **TK Market**  
Place: Murouj  
Date: January 18 to 20, 2024

• Event: **Sports Square**  
Place: Mishref Park  
Date: January 12-13, 2024

• Event: **Creative Printmaking Conference**  
Place: Abdullah Al-Salem Cultural Center  
Date: January 6 to 27, 2024  
Time: 6 pm

• Event: **Horeca Kuwait**  
Place: Kuwait International Fairground, Hall 8  
Date: January 15- 17, 2024

• Event: **Mirzaamiyat**  
Place: The Arena - 360 Mall  
Date: January 24 to 27, 2024

## Sports

# Top seeds Rybakina and Paul crash out in Adelaide

## Kasatkina will play American second seed Jessica Pegula

ADELAIDE: Both top seeds at the ATP-WTA Adelaide International suffered quarter-final shocks on Thursday, with Elena Rybakina and Tommy Paul exiting in straight sets. World number three Rybakina, the 2022 Wimbledon champion and last year's Australian Open finalist, was stunned 6-3, 6-3 by Ekaterina Alexandrova, who led 4-0 in both sets.

American Paul crashed 6-1, 6-4 to Briton Jack Draper. Russian-born Kazakh Rybakina, who won the Brisbane International last weekend, fell two breaks behind in the opening set and did not win a game until 24 minutes into the match. She rallied in vain, losing the first set and trailing 5-0 in the second, putting up a late fight before slumping out to her 21st-ranked Russian opponent.

"I didn't have many expectations," Alexandrova said. "I tried to play every point. My serve (six aces) was a big help today." Alexandrova will now meet sixth seed Jelena Ostapenko, who survived a wobble in the first set but regained con-

centration to ease past Ukrainian Marta Kostyuk 7-5, 6-3.

"It was a tough match of course," Ostapenko said. "There have been times when I've needed to step into the point and put more pressure on the opponent. I need to go for my shots, even if I miss." One quarter-final was determined without a ball struck when Germany's Laura Siegemund pulled out of her match with Russia's Daria Kasatkina injured.

Kasatkina will play American second seed Jessica Pegula, who struggled to get past veteran qualifier Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova 6-7 (1/7), 7-5, 6-4. "She was hitting so hard, taking the ball early," world number five Pegula said. "I don't know how I stayed in it."

American Paul joined men's second seed Nicolas Jarry of Chile on the sidelines at the last event prior to the Australian Open. Jarry lost 6-4, 7-5 to Czech Jiri Lehecka. The 62nd-ranked Draper dominated the match against Paul from the start, running away with the first set and

battling in the second to set up a semi-final against Alexander Bublik.

Russia's Bublik ousted Italian fourth seed Lorenzo Musetti 6-3, 6-7 (4/7), 7-5. Third seed Sebastian Korda powered into the semi-finals for a second straight year, but needed five match points to set up a last four clash with seventh seed Lehecka.

The American, son of 1998 Australian Open winner Petr Korda, finished runner-up at Memorial Drive in 2023, losing to Novak Djokovic. He defeated Christopher O'Connell 6-4, 6-4 to keep his dream alive of going one better this year.

"I didn't play badly on the match points, but he really raised his level," said Korda, an Australian Open quarter-finalist last season. At the WTA Hobart International, Belgian top seed Elise Mertens stayed on track with a 7-5, 6-0 win over the Netherlands' Arantxa Rus. She will face Daria Saville for a place in the final after the Australian fought past China's Zhu Lin in three sets. — AFP



Elena Rybakina



Osami, Hammadi and Al-Fahad



Group photo of officials and participants.

## Shooting tourney begins today after final touches

By Abdellatif M. Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait Shooting Championship 2024 will be launched on Saturday at Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Olympic Shooting Complex, as the technical meeting will be held to put the final touches on the competitions procedures.

President of Asian Shooting Confederation Sheikh Salman Sabah Al-Salem Al-Humoud Al-Sabah said Asian shooting sport became a tough number at the international level due to shooters' many major achievements and having Asian countries hosting

most important tournaments.

He said that the presence of the President of the International Shooting Sport Federation (ISSF) Luciano Rossi in Kuwait to attend the Asian Championship reflects the major support he has for Asian and Kuwait shooting sport.

Meanwhile, President of Arab and Kuwait Shooting Sport Federations Eng. Duaij Al-Otaibi said the support from the ISSF and ASC confirms its importance as it is being held under their supervision and is qualifying for the Paris Olympics.

He said Kuwait's hosting of this continental sports event is evidence on the outstanding ability of KSSF personnel for organization, and he thanked the Public Authority for Sport and government entities for their support.

As part for the preparations for the tournament, the international course of shotgun referees in which the ISSF technical delegate Abdullah Ali Al-Mutawaa Al-Hammadi, from Qatar, and his deputy Mo-

hammad Al-Fahad, from Kuwait lectured concluded on Wednesday.

Al-Hammadi said "I thank Kuwait Shooting Sport Federation and Secretary General of Arab and KSSF Obaid Munahi Al-Osaimi for nominating the participants in the course that was highly successful through interaction from the start. The course was highly rich in topics and participants had to attend from 3:00 PM until 10:00 PM and ended with a 2 hour test for all".

He said the ASC look forward to organize such courses so all can benefit from them, as the current course included Trap, Skeet and Mixed doubles.

Meanwhile, head of the referees committee of the Asian Championship Mohammad Al-Fahad said the number of referees in this tournament is 18 from Kuwait and the same number from other countries, adding that KSSF worked for more than a year on preparing referees to reach the outstanding level they have now, through regular workshops.

## Nepal suspends ex-captain after rape conviction

KATHMANDU: Nepal's cricket body on Thursday suspended former captain and star player Sandeep Lamichhane, a day after he was sentenced to eight years in prison for rape. Lamichhane, 23, was once the poster boy for cricket in Nepal and the leg-spinner's on-field success had boosted the sport's profile in the Himalayan republic.

In 2022, he was accused of raping a young woman in a Kathmandu hotel but was freed on bail and returned to the squad to compete in international tournaments. "We inform you that Sandeep Lamichhane has been suspended from any kind of domestic and international cricket activities as he has been convicted and sentenced." Cricket Association of Nepal president Chatur Bahadur Chand said in a statement.

Lamichhane is not in custody and was not in court for Wednesday's sentencing. His lawyer, Saroj Ghimire, told AFP he "will appeal the decision" in a higher court. The rape survivor had said she was a minor at the time of the crime, but in a previous ruling the court said she was 18.

Lamichhane was convicted of rape in December after a repeatedly delayed trial that had left him free to continue his sporting career. When authorities issued an arrest warrant in September 2022, Lamichhane initially failed to return from Jamaica, where he was playing in the Caribbean Premier League.

He was dismissed as national captain and arrested, but Nepal lifted his playing ban after he was freed on bail. This allowed him to remain on the national team, including for the World Cup qualifiers and the 2023 Asia Cup. Cricket does not enjoy the same adulation in mountainous Nepal as it does elsewhere in South Asia.

But the sport has been growing in popularity, with Nepal given one-day international status by the world gov-



KATHMANDU: Kathmandu District Court official Chandra Prasad Panthi (C) speaks during a press conference in Kathmandu, announcing the court's decision to sentence Nepal's former star cricket captain Sandeep Lamichhane to eight years in prison for rape. — AFP

erning body in 2018. Lamichhane was a major part of this rise as the most sought-after Nepali cricketer in lucrative T20 franchise leagues around

the world. His big break came when he was snapped up for the Indian Premier League, the world's richest cricket tournament, in 2018. — AFP

## La Rochelle hoping Alldritt can reverse Champions Cup woes

PARIS: Two-time defending champions La Rochelle will be hoping that the return of Gregory Alldritt to Champions Cup duty this weekend can reverse the French club's fortunes with a victory over Leicester. The emblematic No 8 has played in two Top 14 games since making his comeback from a two-month post-World Cup break.

His presence helped La Rochelle to an impressive 29-8 victory over Top 14 rivals and five-time European champions Toulouse and a 29-20 win over Pau in festive league action. Ronan O'Gara's team are, however, without a win in Pool 4 in the Champions Cup. They went down 16-9 in their opener at home to Leinster and were then pipped by a point away to the Stormers, both played during Alldritt's absence. That has left them with a crunch match when they host Leicester on Sunday.

And O'Gara will be happy to fully integrate Alldritt after a break that saw him return to the family home in the southern Gers region and also attend the wedding of his older brother Scott, in Scotland, the land of their father. "They did me a lot of good," Alldritt told AFP in an interview of his holidays.

"These are things that are important to me and that I don't necessarily manage to do in normal times." Golf, padel and jogging by the sea were order of the day, "things that I'm not used to doing".

### Regenerate better

Alldritt said his body had benefitted from the break. "I could have played rugby in November or December, but I had this desire (to take a break) because the season is long, there are still five months left," he said. "Physically, I felt that I needed to recover... If I had to do it again, I would. It's work on the future: to come back even stronger afterwards. The goal was to regenerate better to come back better." A change in fortunes in the Champions Cup, Alldritt said, was now on the cards.

"The whole team are disappointed not to have won at least one of those two matches," he said. "We are still in the race. We have to continue to prog-



Ronan O'Gara

ress and perform in line with the last two weeks. "We have to win this weekend (against Leicester) and send our fans home happy again."

Looking ahead, Alldritt expressed his hopes of being able to rebound from what he called an "emotional" 2023. "There were incredible emotions, first with a second Champions Cup title for La Rochelle, and then a World Cup in France, even if it was a defeat in the quarter-finals," he said. — AFP

## Celtics hold off Timberwolves

LOS ANGELES: Jayson Tatum drained a go-ahead layup then drilled a dagger three-pointer as the Boston Celtics beat the Minnesota Timberwolves 127-120 in overtime Wednesday in a battle of the NBA's best teams.

A duel between the league's worst produced its own thrills as San Antonio's superstar rookie Victor Wembanyama notched his first career triple-double to lead the Spurs to a 130-108 victory over the Detroit Pistons.

Tatum scored 26 of his 45 points in the fourth quarter and overtime and the Celtics improved to 18-0 at home. "You live for those moments, you want to do whatever you can to help your team win," Tatum said. "In the back of my mind I didn't want to lose at home yet."

Jaylen Brown added 35 points and 11 rebounds for the Celtics. Jrue Holiday scored 12, drilling a three-pointer that put the Celtics up 111-109 with 25.9 seconds left in regulation. Minnesota's Anthony Edwards drained two free throws to tie it and Tatum missed a desperation shot at the buzzer.

Edwards finished with 29 points and Karl-Anthony Towns added 25 with 13 rebounds for Western Conference leaders Minnesota, whose 26-11 record is second only to East-leading Boston's 29-8. Minnesota cut a 10-point deficit to one at halftime and took the lead on Towns's three-pointer to open the third quarter. They led 106-97 with 3:35 left in regulation.

In Detroit, French prodigy Wembanyama scored 16 points with 12 rebounds and 10 assists, notching his first triple-double in just 21 minutes on the floor. He connected on just six of his 16 shots from the field but made four of five free throws and showed off his sophisticated playmaking skills as he surpassed his previous season high of seven assists.

"He's a very good passer," Spurs coach Gregg Popovich said of the player who has already displayed outstanding scoring, rebounding and shot-blocking skills in his first season. "He was a good passer before he got here."

Six days past his 20th birthday, Wembanyama became the fifth-youngest NBA player to post a triple-double—reaching double digits in three key statistical categories. "It's beautiful when we play like that as a team and get it all together," said Wembanyama, who said his 10 assists were the product of cohesive offense by the team against a Detroit defense focused on him.

"My teammates did the right cuts and made the right shots," he said. Wembanyama, who played without a turnover, completed his triple-double with his 10th assist, a smooth dish to Doug McDermott who knocked down a three-pointer that made it 109-86 early in the fourth quarter.

"I'm glad I didn't know," McDermott said. "I heard the crowd erupt. I assumed it was something Victor did and not something I did."

### Pelicans rout Warriors

In San Francisco, home fans booed the Golden State Warriors as they slumped to a second straight blowout loss, falling 141-105 to the New Orleans Pelicans. Jonas Valanciunas scored 21 points and Zion Williamson added 19 as eight Pelicans players scored in double figures.

New Orleans made 13 of their 19 three-pointers in the first half on the way to a 73-60 lead at the break and pushed the advantage to as many as 41 in the second half. "I think we deserved it, for sure," Warriors coach Steve Kerr said of the jeers. "I think we're just lacking confidence right now. You get to a stage where you kind of lose your belief."

The in-form Utah Jazz notched a ninth win in 11 games, dominating the defending champion Denver Nuggets 124-111 in Salt Lake City. In Charlotte, Sacramento center Domantas Sabonis notched his league-leading 33rd double-double with 24 points and 10 rebounds and also added seven assists in the Kings' 123-98 rout of the Hornets. — AFP

Sports

# World Cup stars Morocco seek end to 48-year African trophy drought

**'To win the African Cup you have to be extremely strong'**

**ABIDJAN:** Morocco coach Walid Regragui was just five months and 20 days old when the country won the Africa Cup of Nations for the only time in 1976. In the second and last tournament decided by a mini-league, Morocco snatched a late 1-1 draw with Guinea to finish first in Ethiopia.

As Moroccans celebrated conquering Africa then, few could have imagined that 48 years later the Atlas Lions would still be seeking a second title, given the country is a continental football powerhouse. The closest they have come to a second triumph was in 2004 when Regragui was the right-back in a team beaten 2-1 by hosts Tunisia in the final.

But while the Cup of Nations has been an endless tale of disappointments, Morocco soared to dizzy heights at the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, becoming the first African and Arab semi-finalists. Given little chance of surviving a group including Belgium and Croatia, they not only did so but eliminated Spain and Portugal before falling to France in the semi-finals.

"What we did at the World Cup was unbelievable. We put Africa on the world map," said the 48-year-old born in a southern Paris suburb. After the stunning World Cup showing, the pressure on Morocco to achieve further glory has intensified with some pundits labelling them "red-hot favourites" to win the 2024 Cup of Nations. They will face two former champions, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Zambia, and outsiders Tanzania in Group F in the Ivory Coast, where the tournament kicks off on Saturday.

## Farrell named British and Irish Lions coach for tour to Australia

**LONDON:** Ireland boss Andy Farrell was named as coach of the British and Irish Lions for the 2025 tour of Australia on Thursday. Farrell will work solely with the Lions from December this year until the conclusion of the tour, meaning he would miss Ireland's Six Nations campaign in 2025.

The 48-year-old former England dual-code international recently signed an extension to his contract as Ireland coach till the conclusion of the next World Cup in 2027. Under Farrell's stewardship, Ireland won a Six Nations Grand Slam last year, the triple crown in 2022 and secured a first ever series win in New Zealand.

Ireland also rose to number one in the world rankings before last year's World Cup. However, they again failed to make it beyond the quarter-finals of the showpiece event following an agonising loss to the All Blacks.

Farrell succeeds Warren Gatland, who has led the Lions on their last three tours to the southern hemisphere dating back to 2013. He was a mem-

**'Curse of African Cup'**  
Assuming they qualify for the knockout stage, four more hurdles must be cleared if Morocco are to end what Regragui calls "the curse of the African Cup". In their last seven Cup of Nations appearances, the Atlas Lions have never got past the quarter-finals, and suffered a stunning last-16 loss to minnows Benin in 2019.

Regragui is not buying the "red-hot favourites" line, telling reporters that "there are at least 10 teams that can win the Cup of Nations. We are not the favourites. There are better teams than us on the continent. Since the World Cup in Qatar many countries have progressed."

"Teams like Algeria, Egypt, the Ivory Coast and Nigeria, none of whom qualified for the World Cup, are among the favourites. Any team can beat any other at the Cup of Nations. There is no such thing as an easy group. To win the African Cup you have to be extremely strong."

DR Congo, a force in the distant past when they qualified for a World Cup and were African champions twice, are back under French coach Sebastien Desabre after missing out in 2022. Potentially the biggest threat to Morocco in the group, the Leopards boast an outstanding defender in Chancel Mbemba and a Premier League forward in Yoane Wissa from Brentford.

"I am hoping we can at least reach the quarter-finals, while Morocco must be favourites to lift the trophy," says Desabre. Since a penalty shootout victory over hotly fancied Ivory Coast in the 2012 final, Zambia have slumped and

Wales wing added.

Lions chief executive Ben Calveley said: "Andy is without question one of the best coaches in the world and knows what it takes to win a series in Australia given his involvement in the series win in 2013. His achievements with Ireland in recent years have been exceptional and his coaching experience at Test-match level with Ireland, England and the Lions make him an outstanding candidate for this role."

Expectations will be high on Farrell to deliver a series win down under with Australian rugby in crisis. Eddie Jones quit as the Wallabies coach after just two wins from nine Tests last year that included a group stage exit from the World Cup after defeats to Wales and Fiji.

But Farrell, the father of England's Owen Farrell, could come up against his former boss Joe Schmidt with the Kiwi linked with taking charge of Australia. Farrell served as defence coach to Schmidt with Ireland before succeeding him in 2019. — AFP

ber of Gatland's coaching team for the 2013 series win in Australia and tied series against New Zealand in 2017.

"It is a tremendous honour and a privilege to be named head coach of the British and Irish Lions," said Farrell. "I know how special Lions Tours are having been involved in the 2013 and 2017 Tours, so I am delighted to get the chance to lead the team in 2025."

"There is a wealth of talent across Britain and Ireland, and I am looking forward to building a team that can deliver the ultimate goal of success in Australia." The Lions are comprised of leading players from England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales. They traditionally tour one of Australia, New Zealand and South Africa every four years.

**Farrell 'one of the best'**  
Lions chairman Ieuan Evans, who played for the combined side during their victorious 1987 tour of Australia, welcomed Farrell's appointment by saying: "Andy Farrell's appointment marks a fantastic chapter for the Lions as we build towards the 2025 tour in Australia."

"We know the challenge we face in Australia won't be easy and to have someone of his stature with the Lions puts us in a great position to replicate the success we enjoyed in 2013," the former

him back in black and yellow soon," said Dortmund sporting director Sebastian Kehl. "He knows this city, the stadium, our fans and our club. Even though he hasn't played any competitive games in the past few months, we are sure that he will quickly settle back in with us, get into top form and use his qualities to help us achieve our goals for the season." German media reports the deal will cost Dortmund roughly four million euros and that Sancho has agreed to take a significant cut to his reported £300,000-a-week wages.

**Homecoming**  
After joining from the Manchester City academy aged just 17, Sancho scored 50 goals and provided 64 assists in 137 appearances during his first spell at Dortmund, helping them to win the 2021 German Cup and 2019 German Super Cup.

"When I came into the dressing room today, it felt like 'coming home'. I know the club inside out, I've always been very close with the fans here, and I there was no break in contact with those in charge," said Sancho.

"I can't wait to see my teammates again, go out on the pitch, play football with a smile on my face, assist goals, score goals and help achieve Champions League qualification." Dortmund are betting on Sancho re-discovering his form of old to help turn their season around. — AFP



**ABIDJAN:** Ghana national football team players exit the Felix Houphouet-Boigny International Airport in Abidjan on January 10, 2024 ahead of the 2024 Africa Cup of Nations (CAN). — AFP

failed to qualify for the last three editions. "To be part of the group that has taken Zambia back where it belongs is a great achievement," says Leicester City forward Patson Daka, who netted five

times in qualifiers. Tanzania share with fellow qualifiers Guinea-Bissau, Mauritania, Mozambique and Namibia the goal of winning at the tournament for the first time. — AFP

Wales wing added.

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But Farrell, the father of England's Owen Farrell, could come up against his former boss Joe Schmidt with the Kiwi linked with taking charge of Australia. Farrell served as defence coach to Schmidt with Ireland before succeeding him in 2019. — AFP



**Andy Farrell**

## Latest graft scandal overshadows China's Asian Cup campaign

**DOHA:** China launch their Asian Cup campaign on Saturday in the throes of a domestic anti-corruption drive that has triggered the downfall of numerous leading football figures including former coach Li Tie. The ex-Everton midfielder permanently took over as China boss in January 2020, spearheading President Xi Jinping's ambitions for the country to become a footballing superpower.

But four years on, that unlikely goal looks further away than ever and the 46-year-old Li is facing years in prison. Days ahead of the Asian Cup in Qatar, Li appeared on national evening television and said he paid hundreds of thousands of dollars in bribes to secure the top job and was involved in match-fixing.

His confession on Tuesday was part of an anti-graft documentary aired on state broadcaster CCTV. China's Asian Cup squad were required to watch, state media said. CCTV regularly airs confessions by criminal suspects, including former officials, before they have appeared in court. "I'm very sorry. I should have kept my head to the ground and followed the right path," Li, dressed in dark clothes and sitting sombre-faced in a bare room, said in the footage.

"There were certain things that at the time were common practices in (Chinese) football," added Li, who was fired in December 2021 after yet another World Cup qualifying campaign turned sour. At least 10 senior leaders and executives of the Chinese Football Association (CFA) have also been brought down, including former president Chen Xuyuan, who also appeared in the programme.

Like in other sectors of Chinese society, the ruling Communist Party has launched periodic campaigns against graft in football. There was a similar crackdown 15 years ago.

Football fan Xi has previously said he wanted China to host and one day even win the World Cup. But they have still only reached the World Cup once, in 2002, when they went out in the group stage after losing all three games without scoring a goal.

China are currently ranked 79th in the FIFA rankings, sandwiched between El Salvador and Guinea. With no new stars emerging and still reliant on 32-year-old forward Wu Lei, expectations of going far at the Asian Cup under their Serbian coach Aleksandar Jankovic are low. — AFP

## Sancho escapes Man Utd exile to rejoin Dortmund

**BERLIN:** Jadon Sancho rejoined Borussia Dortmund on loan for the rest of the season on Thursday, less than three years since Manchester United paid £73 million (\$93 million, 85 million euros) for the England winger. Sancho had been frozen out at United for most of the season after becoming involved in a public spat with manager Erik ten Hag. The 23-year-old posted on social media in September that he had been made a "scapegoat" at the club for poor performances after being left out of the matchday squad for a 3-1 defeat at Arsenal.

Sancho has not played a minute for the Red Devils since and been forced to train away from the first team. Even prior to the breakdown of his relationship with the former Ajax boss, Sancho never lived up to his price tag at Old Trafford.

He scored just 12 times in 82 appearances and struggled to hold down a regular first-team place under both Ole Gunnar Solskjaer and Ten Hag. But he will hope a return to the club where he made his name as one of Europe's rising stars can rejuvenate his career.

"Jadon is an absolute difference maker and I'm looking forward to seeing



**Eric Dier**

## Tuchel confirms Dier set to sign with Bayern

**BERLIN:** Bayern Munich coach Thomas Tuchel on Thursday confirmed the imminent signing of England defender Eric Dier from Tottenham, telling reporters "he is in Munich". "We're trying to sign him, finalise the deal and get another alternative for our squad," Tuchel told reporters on Thursday.

Dier arrived in Munich on Thursday ahead of a medical check and told Sky Germany: "Bayern is a wonderful club". Dier, whose contract with Tottenham was set to expire in the summer, arrives for a reported fee of four million euros (\$4.38 million). Often deployed as a centre-back,

the versatile Dier can also play as a defensive midfielder or as right-back. The 29-year-old spent a decade at Tottenham and will be reunited with former Spurs teammate Harry Kane in the Bavarian capital.

Tuchel has been looking for additional support in defence, particularly with Kim Min-Jae set to miss several games as he represents South Korea at the Asian Cup. Tuchel said he saw Dier as a "specialist in the position of central defender" and told reporters "first and foremost, this will free up Leon Goretzka for midfield". — AFP

# Classifieds

### Clinics & Hospitals

#### Clinics

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

Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

### Change of Name

**I, Azra Ali**, holder of Indian passport No. B6045689, permanent address 15/212 Doodh Bungalow civil lines, Kanpur Nagar, Pin: 208001, Uttar Praesh, India. residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as under Given name: Azra Ali old passport No. T0709151 as name Safia Ali  
(#4587) 10/1/2024

**I, Shaikh Ahmed Shaikh Umar**, holder of Indian passport number M1863962 having permanent address at house no. 6-56, Moosa Nagar, Allipur Zahirabad district Sangareddy. Pin 502318, Telangana. Residing in Kuwait at present hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as (Given name) Ahmed and (surname) Shaik  
(#4586) 10/1/2024

**I, Hashim**, holder of Indian passport No. M6102991 having permanent address Mohammedipura, Temba, Sagwara, Dungarpur, Rajasthan, India, Pincode: 314025 residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as under: (Given name) Hashim and (surname) Sagir  
(#4585) 10/1/2024

## Liverpool fight back to take League Cup semi-final lead over Fulham

'If you've got that mentality, a lot of beautiful things can happen'



LIVERPOOL: Fulham's Portuguese midfielder #26 Joao Palhinha (2R) and Fulham's Brazilian midfielder #18 Andreas Pereira (R) jump in the wall to block a freekick by Liverpool's Argentinian midfielder #10 Alexis Mac Allister during the English League Cup semi-final first leg football match between Liverpool and Fulham at Anfield in Liverpool. — AFP

**LIVERPOOL:** Liverpool produced another comeback after conceding first to take a 2-1 lead over Fulham into the second leg of their League Cup semi-final on Wednesday. Willian fired the visitors in front in their first ever League Cup semi-final at Anfield.

But two goals in three second-half minutes from Curtis Jones and Cody Gakpo gave the Reds a slender advantage ahead of the second leg at Craven Cottage on January 24. Jurgen Klopp's men have now fallen behind in 14 games this season, but have won seven of those matches and lost just three.

"It's the mentality in the group, in the club, in the city. Everybody is like this," said Gakpo. "Just keep going no matter what happens. We showed it again today. If you've got that mentality, a lot of beautiful things can happen." Liverpool were without Mohamed Salah due to his participation at the Africa Cup of Nations, while Trent Alexander-Arnold was among a number of injury absentees and it showed in a sluggish first half.

Fulham could not have wished for a better start when Willian opened the scoring on 19 minutes. Virgil

van Dijk was twice at fault as his weak header was pounced on by Andreas Pereira. Willian then got the break of the ball inside the penalty area before firing through Van Dijk's legs beyond Caoimhin Kelleher. Fulham were left to curse their fortune after the break, but the visitors were architects of their own downfall for not taking the chance to extend their lead.

### Fulham's missed chance

Klopp left his midfield wide open as he threw on Gakpo and Darwin Nunez to form a front four alongside Luis Diaz and Diogo Jota. But before the home side turned the game around, Fulham had multiple opportunities to pick them off on the counter-attack.

Bobby De Cordova-Reid wasted the best of them when he forced Kelleher into a comfortable save with Pereira and Raul Jimenez begging for a cross. "Second half we had really good moments, we should have scored another goal at least," said Fulham manager Marco Silva.

"Even so the game is at half-time. We are losing 2-1 but we will go for it for sure. "At home, with our fans behind us, it is going to be a great night

for Fulham FC." Liverpool were struggling to make their numbers in attacking areas count until Jones' long-range effort deflected off the unfortunate Tosin Adarabioyo and beyond the helpless Bernd Leno.

Moments later the record nine-time League Cup winners led. The substitutes combined as Nunez's low cross was turned home by Gakpo at the near post. But Leno then won his personal duel with Nunez three times in the final 20 minutes to keep Fulham in the tie.

The German goalkeeper was stretched by a towering header and blast from a tight angle by the Uruguayan. Leno's best stop, though, came five minutes from time when the former Arsenal 'keeper spread himself to block from a narrow angle.

"It was not our best game we ever played but it is not about that at the moment," said Klopp. "If we want to go to the final we need a really good game at Fulham and we need a result." Liverpool remain the strong favourites to reach the Wembley final against either Middlesbrough or Chelsea next month. However, Fulham do have hope with home advantage to come in the second leg. — AFP

## Real Madrid edge Atletico to reach Super Cup final

**RIYADH:** Real Madrid defeated Atletico Madrid 5-3 after extra-time in a pulsating battle in Saudi Arabia to reach the Spanish Super Cup final on Wednesday. Mario Hermoso and Antonio Rudiger exchanged early headed goals before Ferland Mendy sent Madrid ahead at the Al-Awwal Park stadium in Riyadh.

Antoine Griezmann levelled with a milestone goal for Atletico to become their all-time leading scorer and Kepa Arrizabalaga's own goal sent the Rojiblancos ahead, but Dani Carvajal smashed Madrid level and forced extra-time.

With the game heading towards penalties, Stefan Savic's own goal under pressure from Joselu nudged Madrid ahead and substitute Brahim Diaz wrapped up the win on the counter-attack with Atletico goalkeeper Jan Oblak stranded out of position.

In Sunday's final Madrid will face either Barcelona or Osasuna, who meet Thursday in the other semi-final. "Atletico played very well and so did

we, it was a spectacular game," Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti told Movistar. "We won because we had more energy in the final stages ... (the substitutes) all delivered."

Diego Simeone's Atletico are the only team to beat Madrid this season, in September, and they started strongly with Samuel Lino testing Arrizabalaga shortly before they took the lead. Hermoso headed in the opener after six minutes from Griezmann's corner as Rodrygo failed to challenge him in the air. Rudiger levelled for Madrid in similar fashion as he escaped Savic and nodded Luka Modric's corner home. Madrid, unbeaten in 20 matches, were in the ascendancy and full-back Mendy capitalised with a deft flicked finish from Carvajal's low cross.

### Milestone man

Griezmann headed into Arrizabalaga's hands before pulling Atletico level in a gripping first half, turning away from Modric before driving home from the edge of the box. The goal took him

ahead of the late Luis Aragonés as Atletico's all-time top scorer on 174 goals. Rodrygo almost put Madrid ahead again before the break after leading Atletico's defence on a merry dance but Oblak parried his effort and grabbed the loose ball before it could spin over the line.

Saudi spectators, despite mainly supporting Real Madrid, jeered Los Blancos midfielder Toni Kroos, on as

a second half substitute, after he criticised players moving to the country from European football last summer in search of riches.

Oblak made a fine save to thwart Carvajal before Atletico took the lead with 12 minutes remaining. Arrizabalaga collided with Alvaro Morata as he tried to catch a cross and the ball bounced into Madrid's goal off the on-loan Chelsea stopper. — AFP



RIYADH: Real Madrid's Brazilian forward #11 Rodrygo attempts a shot as he is marked by Atletico Madrid's Spanish midfielder #14 Marcos Llorente during the Spanish Super Cup semi-final football match between Real Madrid and Atletico Madrid at the Al-Awwal Park Stadium in Riyadh. — AFP



KUWAIT: Kuwaiti swimmers pose with their medals.

## Kuwaiti swimmers claim 4 medals at aquatics tourney

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait swimmers secured four medals: One gold, one silver and two bronze, Wednesday on the first day of the Arab Age Group Championships, held at Aspire Dome in Doha.

Faisal Abualhassan, a member of the board of directors of the Kuwaiti Aquatics Federation and the head of delegation for the event, told KUNA that Kuwaiti swimmer Hassan Al-Suaileek clinched the gold medal of the 50m boys butterfly race in the 13-14 age group. Swimmer Hamad Al-Gheith claimed the silver medal in the 200m freestyle race in the same age group and his compatriot Saud Al-Enezi won the bronze medal in the 50m butterfly race, Abualhassan said. Moreover, a Kuwaiti team, including the trio plus swimmer Hasan Rajab, grabbed the bronze medal of the 200m freestyle relay race of the same age group. Abualhassan pointed out. He affirmed that Kuwait's champions will dedicate exceptional efforts to achieve more victories in the upcoming days of the tournament.

The Arab Aquatics Age Group Championships bring together more than 300 young talents from 17 Arab countries to compete across three aquatic sports including swimming, water polo and open water swimming over six days. — KUNA