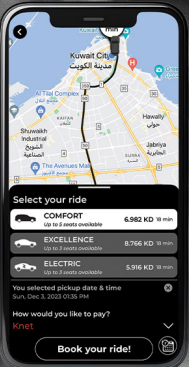



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Kuwait's Mohammad Al-Daihani qualifies for 2024 Paris Olympics



Bibi rejects Palestine statehood

Fighting rages across Gaza as death toll surges



GAZA: Health officials in Gaza Strip on Saturday reported a surging death toll in fighting with the Zionist entity, whose leader Benjamin Netanyahu rejected calls for "Palestinian sovereignty" after the war. As fighting raged across the besieged territory, a strike in Syria blamed on the Zionist entity and missiles fired at US-led coalition forces in Iraq raised further fears of a wider conflagration.

Gaza's health ministry reported at least 165 people killed over the previous 24 hours — more than double Friday's figure. An AFP correspondent reported gunfire, air strikes and tank shelling, especially in southern Gaza's Khan Yunis city. The Zionist entity is pressing its push southwards against Hamas, after the army in early January claimed the fighters' command structure in northern Gaza had been dismantled, leaving only isolated fighters.

But Hamas reported fierce combat in north Gaza as the Zionist military said troops backed by air and naval support were striking militant infrastructure throughout the Palestinian territory, including the north. The Zionist entity's relentless bombardment and ground offensive have killed at least 24,927 people in Gaza, mostly women and children.

The United States, which provides the Zionist entity with billions of dollars in military aid, has urged it to take more care to protect civilians, and the two

sides have disagreed over Gaza's future governance. Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and US President Joe Biden Friday discussed the post-war future of Gaza amid a dire humanitarian situation.


Biden said it was still possible Netanyahu could agree to some form of Palestinian state, after the two leaders spoke for the first time in nearly a month. "There are a number of types of two-state solutions. There's a number of countries that are members of the UN that... don't have their own militaries," Biden told reporters after an event at the White House. Asked what Netanyahu was open to, Biden replied: "I'll let you know."

But Netanyahu's office in a statement Saturday said he "reiterated his policy that after Hamas is destroyed (the Zionist entity) must retain security control over Gaza to ensure that Gaza will no longer pose a threat to (the Zionist entity), a requirement that contradicts the demand for Palestinian sovereignty".

A senior Hamas official on Saturday dismissed Biden's comments. "The illusion that Biden is preaching about a state of Palestine and its characteristics does not fool our people," Izzat Al-Rishq, member of Hamas's political bureau, said in a statement. "Biden is a full partner in the genocidal war and our people do not expect any good from him."

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Iran vows revenge as Zionist strike on Syria kills Guards



DAMASCUS: People and security forces gather in front of a building destroyed in a Zionist strike on Jan 20, 2024. — AFP

DAMASCUS: Iran on Saturday accused the Zionist entity of a strike in Damascus that killed five Revolutionary Guards members, and vowed to avenge the latest attack on the Islamic republic's personnel abroad. The Zionist entity has been accused of intensifying strikes targeting senior Iranian and allied figures in Syria and Lebanon — both backers of the Palestinian militant group Hamas — raising fears that the Gaza conflict could expand further throughout the region.

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) confirmed it lost five members in the strike that it blamed on the Zionist entity, its regional archfoe, updating an earlier toll from four. Hamas condemned what it called a "heinous crime". In Tehran, foreign ministry spokesperson Nasser Kanani also accused the Zionist entity of being behind the attack and said Iran "reserves the right to respond to organized terrorism" at the appropriate time and place.

Quoting an informed source, Iran's Mehr news agency said "the Revolutionary Guards"

Continued on Page 6

No amnesty seen as expat numbers rise

KUWAIT: Security sources have indicated that there will be no grace period granted to residency violators to correct their status in the near future. Previous experiences have shown that such measures are not effective, as violators tend to ignore the opportunity to rectify their status and choose to remain in Kuwait in violation, refusing to leave.

First Turkish astronaut arrives at ISS

WASHINGTON: An all-European crew including Turkey's first astronaut arrived at the International Space Station on Saturday on a voyage chartered by Axiom Space. Dubbed Axiom Mission 3 (Ax-3), it is the company's third launch to the space laboratory and the first where all three of the paid seats were bought by national agencies, rather than wealthy individuals.

The spacecraft docked at the ISS at

According to sources, the upcoming procedures for residency violators will include not only paying violation fees but also covering the costs of their deportation. To prevent illegal money transfers and evasion of fines, banks will be requested to freeze the accounts of violators. This will ensure that fines are withdrawn directly from the accounts, preventing individuals from claiming they lack the funds to pay.

Sources said decision to review the status correction for residency violators prior to 2020 is underway. If it is found to be ineffective, it will be officially canceled, and violators from before 2020 will be treated similarly to other violators.

1043 GMT and boarded within about two hours, according to NASA's live-stream of the event. The SpaceX Crew Dragon fixed to the top of a Falcon 9 rocket blasted off from NASA's Kennedy Space Center in the US state of Florida on Thursday. It arrived at the ISS, which flies around 420 km above the Earth, after a journey of about 36 hours, according to Axiom Space's website.

Turkish pilot and air force colonel Alper Gezeravci is joined by Walter Villadei, an Italian air force colonel who has previously flown to the edge of space on a Virgin Galactic space plane, and by Marcus Wandt from Sweden, who is representing the

Continued on Page 6

On Thursday, the interior ministry started allowing residency violators living illegally in the country prior to March 1, 2020 to regularize their status after paying the prescribed legal fines. Security sources had said residency departments have begun receiving violators, who should first consult with residency affairs investigators to obtain a "no objection certificate", then pay the fine amounting to KD 600 to complete the renewal of their residency permits.

Meanwhile, a recent official document from the statistics department has revealed that the number of Kuwaiti citizens has reached 1.5 million, while expatriates constitute

more than two-thirds of the population, accounting for 70 to 75 percent of the total population of the state. Population growth, whether among Kuwaitis or expatriates, is reported to be at a rate of 3.3 percent, according to the statistics.

The statistics further break down the expatriate population by nationality, with Indians reaching 1.12 million (31 percent of the population), Egyptians 671,000 (20.8 percent), Bangladeshis 281,000 (8.7 percent), Filipinos 214,000 (6.6 percent), Syrians 160,000 (4.9 percent), Saudis 128,000 (3.9 percent), Pakistanis 109,000 (3.4 percent), Sri Lankans 94,000 (2.9 percent) and Nepalese 70,000 (2.6 percent).

Japan's 'Moon Sniper' lands but power low

TOKYO: Japan on Saturday became the fifth nation to achieve a soft lunar landing, but said its "Moon Sniper" spacecraft was running out of power due to a solar battery problem. After a nail-biting 20-minute descent, space agency JAXA said its Smart Lander for Investigating Moon (SLIM) had touched down and communication had been established. But without the solar cells functioning, JAXA official Hitoshi Kuninaka said the craft — dubbed the "Moon Sniper" for its precision technology — would only have power for "several hours".


SLIM is one of several new lunar missions launched

by governments and private firms, 50 years after the first human Moon landing. Crash landings and communication failures are rife, and only four other countries have made it to the Moon: The United States, the Soviet Union, China and most recently India. As mission control prioritized gathering data while they could, Kuninaka suggested that the batteries might work again once the angle of the sun changed.

"It's possible that it is not facing in the originally planned direction," he told an early-hours news conference. "If the descent was not successful, it would have crashed at a very high speed. If that were the case, all functionality of the probe would be lost," he said. "But data is being sent to Earth."

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida called the landing "very welcome news" but said he was aware that

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This handout photo shows the transformable lunar surface robot "SORA-Q" installed on the lunar module for the SLIM mission at an undisclosed location. — AFP

Kuwait reiterates its call for immediate ceasefire in Gaza

Al-Bannai pledges Kuwait's continued support to NAM

KAMPALA: Kuwait reaffirmed the consistency between its stance and that of other Arab and Muslim nations regarding the urgency of immediate ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and reopening the border crossings to allow delivery of life-saving aid to residents there.

The State of Kuwait is firmly opposed to any attempt to evict the Palestinian people forcibly from their occupied territories, the country's Permanent Representative to the United Nations Tareq M Al-Bannai said in a speech to the 19th ministerial meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in Kampala, Uganda. He represents His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah at the 19th NAM Summit on Jan 19-20 and the third South Summit of Group 77 and China on Jan 21-11.

"The Palestinian people have been suffering from brutalities and atrocities at the hands of the Zionist occupation forces over the past 56 years. It is high time to break the cycle of brutal violence against them, Ambassador Al-Bannai, also Kuwait's chief delegate to the ministerial, said. "There is no way forward other than establishing full, durable and comprehensive peace based on the relevant UN resolutions and the 2002 Arab peace initiative to prepare the ground for the independent sovereign State of Palestine within the Jun 4, 1967, borders with East Jerusalem as its capital," he made clear.

On behalf of Kuwait, Ambassador Al-Bannai welcomed the genocide case brought by the Republic of South Africa to the International Court of Justice against the Zionist occupation entity for the ongoing atrocities in the Gaza Strip. He quoted late South African leader Nelson Mandela as saying "We know too well that our freedom is incomplete without the freedom of the Palestinians." He also praised the active role played by the NAM over the past six decades in lobbying for the Palestine question and standing against the flagrant violations being committed by the Zionist occupation authorities against



KAMPALA: Kuwait's Permanent Representative to the United Nations Tareq M Al-Bannai delivers speech at the 19th ministerial meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in Kampala. — KUNA

the Palestinian people on a daily basis. Since Bandung Conference in April 1955 (which eventually led to the creation of NAM), the movement has been able to overcome numerous challenges and continue the march towards realizing the common aspirations of its member countries, he noted.

Kuwait has been, and will continue to be, supportive of all efforts to promote development and prosperity in NAM countries and the world at large, Ambassador Al-Bannai pledged. Kuwait will maintain full support to the valiant struggle of the Palestinian people against the brutal aggression by the Zionist occupation forces, he said.

Reaffirming Kuwait's resolve to continue exposing the serious crimes of the Zionist occupation forces at all regional and international forums, he said, "We are duty-bound to stand by our brothers in Palestine who have been undergoing brutal Zionist entity war over 100+ days." Under the eyes of the in-



KAMPALA: Delegates pose for a group photo at the Non-Aligned Movement summit in Uganda.

ternational community, the Zionist war on Gaza has claimed more than 23,000 innocent lives, with half of the figure being women and children, in addition to 57,000 injuries and extensive damage to civilian infrastructure, he pointed out.

Ambassador Al-Bannai criticized the silence of the international community at the atrocities in the occupied Palestinian territories and the failure of the UN Security Council to shoulder its mandate to pro-

tect international peace and security.

He renewed Kuwait's call for overhauling the Security Council and other UN bodies, including the financial institutions, in a way that would make them able to respond to regional and international challenges. Al-Bannai thanked Azerbaijan for its successful presidency of NAM over the past four years, expressing best wishes for Uganda, the new presidency of the Movement (2024-2027). — KUNA

News in Brief

KFAED organizes educational expeditions to Tunisia, Vietnam

KUWAIT: A delegation of excellent Kuwaiti students departed on Friday to Tunisia and Vietnam kicking off the 13th edition of the initiative "Be among the Excellent." The initiative, due until the Jan 26 of this month, is organized by the fund for high school students, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education. Mona Al-Ayyaf, the media director at KFAED, said in a press release that the journey was planned by the fund to encourage students to excel in their studies. Saleh Al-Taqi, supervisor of the expedition, said the students would visit venture sites that had been launched with KFAED's contributions. For her part, Fatma Al-Tirkil, the supervisor of the journey to Vietnam, said the students would go to sites of development projects, in addition to tourist attractions and villages. KFAED launched the first such expedition in 2010. Up to 300 students had taken part in these travels, visiting more than 15 countries.

Al-Adwani hails teacher, student for winning award

KUWAIT: Minister of Education and Higher Education and Scientific Research Adel Al-Adwani has congratulated the teacher Sanaa Al-Barrak and the student Jenan Al-Sherif for winning Hamdan bin Rashed Al-Maktoum Award for Excellent Teaching at the Gulf level. The minister expressed in a statement on Friday his pride that the ministry of Education won the award in the categories, the excellent teacher and student, at the Gulf level, dedicating it to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah. The Kuwaiti ministry won the award on Thursday. Al-Barrak is a teacher at Safia bin Thabet school and Al-Sherif is a student at Tulaitalah high school for girls. Funded by the Hamdan bin Rashid Al-Maktoum Foundation for Distinguished Academic Performance, the prize is awarded every two years and aims to reward innovative practices that contribute to enhancing the quality of teaching and learning around the world. — KUNA

GCC chief praises Gulf participation in Davos Forum

GENEVA: Gulf Cooperation Council's Secretary-General Jassem Al-Budaiwi praised the participation of the GCC countries in the World Economic Forum's (WEF) annual meeting in Davos which concluded on Friday. "This participation is a clear example of how effective international cooperation is, at a time where collective efforts are increasingly needed to find solutions for dire global circumstances," a statement from the GCC Secretariat quoted Al-Budaiwi as saying. On the theme of WEF meeting "Building Trust," he said it signals the worrying regional and global escalations noting that significant discussions reflected the participants' commitment to building a resilient global community. He also expressed pride in his inaugural participation in the forum and emphasized that the Gulf countries' involvement extended beyond the public sector to include exceptional participation from the private sector, represented by the largest companies. — KUNA



A painting titled 'Once I Did Love'. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



An art piece portraying a group of women standing in solidarity.

Blink exhibition portrays women's dreams, memories

By Passant Hisham

KUWAIT: Embodying women's dreamy nights, and the recall of their deeply buried memories, Artist Leen Khalouf has poured personal experiences and narratives into emotionally captivating art pieces. "I drew inspiration from myself, and from women around me to paint these illustrations," she said.

The art pieces which portray women with their closed eyes, were showcased at the "Blink" art exhibition on Thursday at the Hub Café. Through the adornment of meticulously crafted details, Khalouf intended to deliver a profoundly emotional state of grief. "I wanted to reflect the most common emotions that women felt inside their homes, which they escaped from just by closing their eyes and traveling into another imaginary world that's beyond any boundaries," Khalouf noted.

In contrary to the melancholic facial features that were expressed through the paintings, Khalouf mostly relied on bright colors to reflect the better reality that women aimed to live, far from society's standards and limitations that have long imprisoned them in their negative emotions. According to Khalouf, the chance to unshackle the mind from its chains and let one's thoughts roam around can only be found during times of solitude, which explains why she mostly painted lonely women in the portraits.

The freedom found in solitude, the pain felt from one-sided love, and the strength derived from women empowerment are all different themes that Khalouf's



Artist Leen Khalouf



A visitor taking a photo of the artworks

paintings conveyed in a seamless manner, which the attendees agreed upon. "The artworks represent a harmonious interplay of elements, accurately conveying the experiences of these women through the well-made choice of colors and composition," visual artist Abdelrahman Al-Hmali said.

The paintings also evoked psychological feelings that could be triggered at first glance, as Ronald Grant, a psychology teacher, noted. "The emotions are very relatable, as we all have experienced waking up in the middle of the night and feeling deep sadness in the chest because of a dream or a night terror that brings with it a sorrowful memory."

Strongly mirroring the artist's personality and sensations, the artworks turned from just simple illustrations to vividly represent real situations that the attendees could relate to. Yousif Al-Qallaf, a visual and caricature artist, highlighted the most unique thing about the exhibition. "You can feel the soul of the artist spilled in the paintings, even in the women's illustrated features that are similar to hers," he said. In an attempt to follow the lead of the historical artists Matisse, Picasso, Cezanne and Modigliani, the artist found herself highly influenced by them in her pieces that embraced the modern art of expressionism.



A quote in a bookmark says, 'We travel far away, we see pictures and colors on the walls of memory, and every color has a story'.

Jahra Hospital's surgery dept wins int'l accreditation

KUWAIT: Head of Jahra Hospital Surgery Department Dr Mohammad Al-Jasmi said the hospital received the international accreditation as an outstanding center in obesity surgeries by American Surgeries Evaluation Establishment, which reflects the quality of health services given to patients in the hospital.

Al-Jasmi said in a statement that the surgery department at Jahra hospital succeeded in implementing the international accreditation standards and received it through after forming a committee to follow up and inspect surgeries before and after the procedure. It also took measures to deal with complications if developed, in addition to meeting conditions regarding hospital infrastructure with regard to bed capacity and the type of beds used, surgical tables, systems used in addition to seeking help of highly experienced doctors.

Al-Jasmi said the review committee for surgeries includes a group of consultants of various specialties besides consultants in psychology and other specialties to ensure patients safety before and after the procedure.

Local

Race held at Athletics Association to raise awareness about spina bifida

A tribute to Al-Wazzan who battled spina bifida since birth

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: A race was organized on Saturday aimed at raising awareness and challenging the prevailing narratives about spina bifida at the Kuwait Athletics Association in Kaifan. The race served as a tribute to Abdulrahman Al-Wazzan, who battled spina bifida, where children ages from 4 to 12 were invited to join in a race to promote inclusivity between all kids no matter what obstacles some face.

Speaking to Kuwait Times, Jude Hayat, who lost her beloved son Abdulrahman to spina bifida, is dedicated to raising awareness about the impact of the condition on families. "Spina bifida did not define Abdulrahman; it was a part of him since birth," she said. Hayat, along with her husband, felt a calling to organize the race and raise funds for wheelchairs and walkers for children of Gaza, as Abdulrahman had used them.

The event, organized close to his birthday, holds special significance to Hayat. She believes this event is a start and aims to make it an annual initiative, hoping for happiness, peace and love for the children of the world. "The event successfully sold 500 tickets for children, parents and guardians to participate in a race. This not only raises awareness about spina bifida, but also contributes to providing essential equipment for kids in Gaza. I was motivated by the memory of my son and aspire to continue this initiative annually to make a positive impact on other families facing similar challenges," she pointed out.

In honoring Abdulrahman's legacy, the community comes together, supporting a cause that transcends



Jude Hayat, the event organizer



Children run during the race. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

borders and disabilities. It's a poignant reminder that through collective efforts, people can bring about positive change and provide much-needed resources for those in need.

Parents flocked to the racetrack with their children, where hundreds of children collected their numbers and started to warm up. The race started from the youngest age category to the oldest. After the race, children had the opportunity to participate in competitions where they won prizes offered by

sponsors from Kitco, Kuwait Saudi Pharmaceutical Industries Company, Aqua Gulf, RUN, Bibi Hayat, LEND, Lily of the Valley and Work Shop.

All proceeds from the ticket sales were dedicated to the Kuwait Red Crescent Society to help the children of Gaza. This philanthropic effort showcased a beautiful cycle of support, from children participating in the race to those receiving assistance, embodying the spirit of compassion and solidarity across borders.



Children collecting their prizes.



Children seen warming up before the race.



Sponsor Kuwait Saudi Pharmaceutical Industries Company's booth.

Animal rights activist calls for mercy on animals after DGCA curbs

By Ghadeer Ghloum

KUWAIT: The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) recently released an official circular to all airlines regarding pet regulations at Kuwait International Airport. According to the circular, passengers are now restricted to bringing only one pet with them on-board, while any additional pets must be transported through the cargo terminal. This decision has caused significant discontent among many animal lovers. Kuwait Times spoke with Nathalie Veys, an animal rights activist, who expressed her firm opposition to the new circular, emphasizing the detrimental impact it has on both pet owners and animals.

Effects on pet owners

Veys elaborated that in countries like America, the average pet owner has 1.7 pets per household. However, in Kuwait, this number is closer to 3 pets per household. This is due to the exposure of pet owners to the suffering experienced by street animals, such as extreme heat, malnourishment, lack of veterinary care and abuse. As a result, pet owners feel compelled to adopt and care for more animals.

Veys also spoke about her own experience when she came to Kuwait in 2014 with one pet. Witnessing the suffering of street animals during her first summer pushed her to adopt more and more pets until she started the Adopt a Street Princess initiative,



Nathalie Veys with the dog she has rescued.

which aimed to rescue street animals and find them loving homes. By 2015, a shelter was established.

Key points in the new rule

Veys emphasized that it is crucial to understand the distinction between sending pets as cargo and as extra baggage with a passenger. "Sending pets as cargo requires longer processing times, as cargo companies require the items to be delivered well in advance of the flight. As a result, pets may spend unnecessary hours confined in travel boxes, amounting to 24-48 hours in some cases. Additionally, the involvement of numerous companies in cargo transportation leads to higher costs, including fees for loading, unloading, handling, inspection and storage. Furthermore,



Nathalie Veys pets a dog in a cage at the airport.

in comparison to international airports, Kuwait's cargo terminals lack necessary facilities for the handling and welfare of live animals," she explained.

Effects on rescue groups

According to Veys, rescue groups heavily rely on sending animals abroad to find new homes. This is because the local adoption capacity in Kuwait does not meet the demand for rescuing street animals. These groups work tirelessly to reduce the number of stray animals on the streets in a humane manner. However, they do not receive any support, including financial aid, from government departments in Kuwait.

The process of sending animals abroad already involves significant costs and extensive paperwork, but the new cargo rules further amplify these challenges. As a result, the rescue groups will be unable to send as many animals abroad, leading to an increase in the number of animals left on the streets and exacerbating the existing problem.

Recommendation

In light of the aforementioned consequences, Veys advised Kuwaiti authorities to collaborate more closely with



Nathalie Veys says on an average, Kuwait has three pets per household.

rescue groups to enhance their efforts, facilitate the process of sending animals abroad and find local solutions. By doing so, the government can contribute to the overall benefit of society.

The new DGCA rule has significant implications for both pet owners and rescue groups in Kuwait. The increased processing times, higher costs and lack of specialized facilities for live animals pose substantial challenges. By recognizing the importance of rescue groups' work and securing their support, Kuwait can make progress in addressing the issue of stray animals and ultimately benefit society as a whole.

IN MY VIEW

Will boycotts cause instability in luxury market in 2024?

By Dr Esraa Al-Shatti



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Many people around the world are in boycott mode, yet the luxury goods market in the GCC is expected to reach US\$6.97 million in 2024, growing at an annual rate of 3.54 percent, which prompts me to ask: Are people boycotting only outside the GCC?

With the unstable global situation, war in the Middle East, and a record number of countries holding elections in 2024, the luxury market worldwide is facing turbulence, especially in Europe and the US. Analysts say that consumers are more cautious about spending because they are concerned about the current political and economic situation. This is what luxury brands and retailers are bracing for over the next six to twelve months, as materialistic consumers worldwide continue to cut back on spending in what remains an uncertain macroeconomic climate.

With interest rates still high, questions swirling about the Gulf region and the appetite for luxury among high-net-worth individuals (HNWIs) and Chinese consumers, it is no wonder that analysts, brand leaders and industry figures are conservative in their outlook for 2024. Is this just a short period of difficult times due to the uncertain economic climate as analysts point out, or is it related to boycotts?

Barclays says it is taking a "cautious approach" and expects the luxury market to "fully materialize" in 2024, warning that some brands may face "negative growth" due to a significant drop in sales compared to the first half of 2023. I think these brands need to pay particular attention to this worrying situation.

HSBC gave its 2024 forecast the cheerful title "Goodbye Stellar Growth", noting that normalization could extend into 2025. The initial dramatic growth was linked to revenge buying after the COVID-19 lockdowns, and analysts believe that we are now returning to the normal pre-Covid situation. HSBC expects average growth of 8 percent in 2024 and 2025. In my view, some people are boycotting, while others are being selective in their buying behavior.

In their joint report, Altagamma and Bain & Co said they expect "softening personal luxury goods performance in 2024", with low-to-mid single-digit growth over 2023, based on "fragile consumer confidence, macroeconomic tensions in China, and sparse signs of recovery in the US", and that 2024 will be "a defining moment for brands, and the winners will separate themselves through resilience, relevance, and renewal — the basics of the new value-centered luxury equation".

I believe that Altagamma and Bain & Co should have included the Middle East, or at least the GCC, in their report, knowing that they represent a large part of the market, whether in the Gulf region or through outbound travel. In fact, the purchasing power of the Gulf region plays a significant role in the luxury market. Moreover, Mytheresa CEO Michael Kliger stated, "There are significant challenges for all participants in this market," suggesting that the current decline in luxury consumption is significantly worse than predicted due to the sector's extended boom years and the post-pandemic shopping frenzy.

He believes that a return to growth will depend on numerous factors, "We have one consumer segment that is not currently buying: the aspirational customer. To bring them back, we'll need a more optimistic economic outlook". I think Mr Kliger knows very well that the aspirational customer is Middle Eastern, because the boycotts have also affected that sector, even if only for a short period of time. Turnaround brands also face hurdles. These luxury brands, which have lost market share over the last three years, now need to increase investment to support new designer collections.

Kering, Burberry, Ferragamo, and Tod's are expected to underperform. Moncler and Swatch, both downgraded to "neutral", face significant challenges: Moncler has slower growth and deteriorating profit margins, Swatch faces the cyclical nature of the luxury watch market, excluding brands such as Rolex, AP and Patek Philippe, which are tied to supply.

LVMH received a positive rating. Despite the recent share price decline, the company's diversified brand portfolio and smart industry positioning make its current prices attractive. Bank of America sets its price estimate for LVMH at 32 percent above the current market value. Despite its overall cautious stance, Bank of America is optimistic on some companies, with Hermes, known for its resilience during economic downturns, its top pick for 2024.

In general, experts predict a lackluster year for the top brands, with organic growth forecasts ranging from 4 percent to 8 percent, and sales weighted toward the second half of 2024. A significant portion of the increase will come from Asia, while demand in the United States and Europe is expected to remain flat. The outlook for Chinese demand remains uncertain. I believe that investors and industry stakeholders need to be aware of these complex dynamics and identify the risks and opportunities in this volatile but potentially profitable market.

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KU processing applications of expat students

KUWAIT: The Kuwait University will begin processing the applications for admissions of foreign students for the second semester from Monday and wind up the process by Jan 22, 2024, said Dr Fadel Abbas, Acting Dean of Admission and Registration. Those granted admission at the University will complete the course at their own expenses. Admission includes graduates of the unified system, the religious institute and American schools, as well as graduates of English schools.

Dr Abbas said graduates of schools in Kuwait can submit applications for admission electronically. "Those students who have certificates from outside the country can submit their applications at the admission and registration hall in Sabah Al-Salem University City during working hours of these days," he pointed out.

He explained that candidates can apply online using the electronic system at the following address: <http://portal.ku.edu.kw/admission>. Dr Fadel Abbas Aziz added that in the event that an applicant cannot access the system to submit the application, an electronic link will appear before them transferring him/her to a page that provides instructions that must be followed.

He said that a student's admission to the university is conditional on the validity of these data, and he/she can also check out the progress of the process at the admission and registration hall and inquire during official working hours.

"Students must review their application to know the documents required," noting that the university has the right to cancel the admission of any student in the event that they do not provide the required documents. Dr Fadel Abbas concluded by inviting applicants to review the instructions provided by the university, stressing the need to comply with deadlines for submitting applications. He warned that no application will be accepted after the end of the announced period.

Photo of the day



KUWAIT: The Kuwait City skyline is silhouetted against an overcast skyline with clouds in the foreground on Saturday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Arab parliament praises Kuwait's strong, noble stance on Palestine

Kuwaiti diplomacy hailed as 'influential and supportive' of joint Arab action

CAIRO: Speaker of the Arab Parliament Adel Al-Asoumi on Saturday praised the positions of the State of Kuwait in support of Arab issues, especially the Palestinian brothers in the Gaza Strip, stressing that the Arab Parliament highly appreciates these efforts that come with the support of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. Al-Asoumi made the statement during the meetings of the four permanent committees of the Arab Parliament in preparation for the work of the second plenary session of the fourth session of the third legislative term of the Parliament.

Al-Asoumi said that His Highness the Amir is keen that Kuwait must be present in support of Arab issues, stressing that Kuwaiti diplomacy is "influential and supportive" of joint Arab action. He pointed out that the recent situation in the Arab region requires Arab solidarity and collective action to confront the great dangers to which the nation is exposed, indicating that the Arab Parliament is keen to have a clear working mechanism to advance a joint Arab action.

Al-Asoumi explained that this Arab mechanism also aims to coordinate with external parties to support Arab issues, especially those related to the brutal Zionist aggression against the Gaza Strip, noting

that the Arab Parliament is in permanent session to support the Palestinian brothers in the Strip.

The four permanent committees of the Arab Parliament held their meetings on Saturday, in preparation for the work of the second plenary session of the fourth session of the third legislative term of Parliament, which is scheduled to be held Sunday with the participation of a delegation from the Kuwaiti National Assembly.

Members of the Kuwait National Assembly and members of the Arab Parliament participated in the meetings of the four Arab Parliament committees, including a member of the Foreign, Political and National Security Affairs Committee, Representative Dr Muhammad Al-Huwaila, a member of the Economic and Financial Affairs Committee, Representative Khaled Al-Otaibi, and a member of the Legal, Legislative and Human Rights Affairs Committee, Representative Hamdan Al-Azmi.

The Foreign, Political and National Security Affairs Committee discussed political and security developments prior to the preparation of a com-



Speaker of the Arab Parliament Adel Al-Asoumi.

prehensive Arab vision on enhancing security and stability in the Arab world. The statement added that the legislative, legal and human rights affairs committee discussed the human rights situation report for the year 2023 and discussed ways to come up with an Arab parliamentary vision to address the negative repercussions of natural disasters in Arab world. — KUNA



CAIRO: Representative Dr Muhammad Al-Huwaila at the meeting of the Foreign, Political and National Security Committee in the Arab Parliament. — KUNA

Plan to print largest batch of textbooks

KUWAIT: The ministry of education engaged in discussions with the ministry of information on Thursday to outline a plan aimed at printing the largest batch of textbooks using the government printing press. The objective behind this initiative is to boost government revenues and adhere to the policy of spending rationalization.

Anwar Al-Hamdan, acting undersecretary of the ministry of education and acting assistant undersecretary for educational research and curricula, shared details after her meeting with Lafi Al-Subaie, undersecretary of the ministry of information for the press, publishing and printing sector. Hamdan highlighted that this collaboration is part of the effort to activate the media strategy, building on the success of the initial experiment in printing schoolbooks in 1975.

The meeting delved into the completion status

and accuracy of the textbooks for the 2023-2024 academic year, addressing challenges faced. Hamdan emphasized the development of a future plan in cooperation with the media to increase the number of printed textbooks to 70, aligning with the curriculum development department. It was stressed that the focus should be on expediting the printing of schoolbooks at the government printing press, ensuring approval, streamlining financial processes and verifying the readiness of the government printing press to accommodate the proposed plan.

An agreement was reached during the meeting to establish a working team comprising representatives from both ministries, including those from the financial department, supplies, warehouses and other relevant departments. The purpose of this team is to create a comprehensive timeline for printing schoolbooks with the government printing press for the 2024-2025 academic year.

Hamdan revealed that the two ministries are aiming to print approximately 20 schoolbooks before the end of the current fiscal year, specifically by March, leveraging the available time and budget to prepare for the upcoming academic year.



A meeting between the Acting Undersecretary of the Ministry of Education and the Acting Assistant Undersecretary for Educational Research and Curricula, Anwar Al-Hamdan, with the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Information for the Press, Publishing and Publications Sector, Lafi Al-Subaie.



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Niger’s ‘gateway to desert’ opens again for migrants

‘Strategic’ New Hampshire voters line up against Trump



This picture taken from a position in the Zionist entity along the border with Lebanon on Jan 20, 2024 shows smoke billowing over the Lebanese village of Odaisseh during Zionist bombardment. — AFP

In Lebanon, strange calls precede Zionist attacks

Lebanon’s communications networks, CCTV easy to hack, allowing Zionists to gather intelligence

BEIRUT: “Good morning, madame. This is the bank calling. Are you at home?” Since the Zionist entity launched its military attack on Gaza more than three months ago, residents of southern Lebanon have been receiving strange phone calls from Lebanese numbers and from people speaking in Lebanese accents.

The voices on the other end may claim to be conducting a survey, distributing aid, or calling from a public body. But the callers ask about families and their whereabouts, just before towns or homes come under Zionist attack, residents told AFP.

Lebanese security officials and the Iran-backed Shiite Hezbollah group, a Hamas ally, believe the strange calls are in fact from Zionists. Last week Umm Hussein, who is in her 70s and originally from the southern Lebanon village of Khiam, received a call from “the bank” asking her to come and collect some money at the nearby branch.

But according to her grandson Hassan Shukeir, Umm Hussein doesn’t even have a bank account. “They asked her if she was in Khiam, and the call ended when she said she was in Beirut,” Shukeir told AFP. Shortly after the call was terminated, a Zionist strike targeted the house next to hers in the village, the grandson said. Similar incidents have taken place in recent weeks across south Lebanon, from where Hezbollah has launched daily attacks on the Zionist entity in support of Hamas.

Network compromised

The Zionist entity has responded by bombarding border villages in Lebanon, resulting in the deaths of more than 190 people, at least 141 of whom have

been fighters from Hezbollah which has a heavy presence in the area. Hezbollah has told residents of villages in the south not to divulge any information to people calling from Lebanese numbers they do not recognize. “The enemy exploits such information to try to ensure the presence of our brother fighters in houses it intends to target,” Hezbollah said in a statement.

A security source told AFP that army intelligence and the police were investigating the calls which they believe originated in the Zionist entity, meaning Lebanon’s communications network has been compromised. The source, who requested anonymity because they were not authorized to talk to the media, said the entity has used this tactic before to target Hezbollah members holed up in homes.

In one case on Nov 22, a strike hit a house in the village of Beit Yahun, killing five Hezbollah members including the son of Mohammed Raad who heads the party’s bloc in parliament. Shortly before that attack, an unknown caller had asked the owner of the house whether she and her family were at home, the security source said.

A spokeswoman for the Zionist military told AFP she was “unable to answer that question”, when asked if the Zionist entity was behind the phone calls. According to Hezbollah, the entity has also hacked into security surveillance cameras at homes and businesses in border villages.

Scanning for Wi-Fi

In December, it said the Zionist entity was using this access to target Hezbollah fighters, and urged

Lebanese citizens to “disconnect the private cameras ... from the internet”. Hezbollah said the entity had hacked the cameras to gain visibility after the group’s cross-border attacks had “targeted most of the cameras” that the Zionist entity itself had installed near the border.

One resident, who asked to remain anonymous for security reasons, told AFP a local Hezbollah official called him recently and demanded he turn off and disconnect CCTV cameras installed around his house. He complied with the demand.

The security source said three men had been arrested recently on suspicion of working with Zionist-affiliated companies. One is accused of scanning for home Wi-Fi networks in Hezbollah’s southern Beirut stronghold.

Abed Kataya of digital rights group SMEX said civilian communications networks and CCTV cameras in Lebanon are easy to hack because the infrastructure lacks basic security measures. Private surveillance cameras, mostly Chinese imports, can be connected to the internet so owners can monitor them from afar using phone apps. But the connection is often “unencrypted, which makes it easy to hack”, Kataya said.

He said the Zionist entity has “a long history in espionage techniques”, especially in Lebanon, deploying spy balloons and observation towers along the border. On Jan 7, even the departures and arrivals screens at Beirut airport came under cyberattack, with media publishing footage showing anti-Hezbollah messages displayed instead and baggage conveyor belts that had ground to a halt. — AFP

UN: Nearly 20,000 babies born into Gaza war ‘hell’

GENEVA: The United Nations said Friday that thousands of babies had been born in conditions “beyond belief” in Gaza since the war there erupted more than three months ago. UNICEF spokeswoman Tess Ingram, back from a recent visit to the Gaza Strip, described mothers bleeding to death and one nurse who had performed emergency caesareans on six dead women.

Nearly 20,000 babies have been born into the nearly four-month war, according to UNICEF, the UN children’s agency. “That’s a baby born into this horrendous war every 10 minutes,” Ingram told reporters in Geneva via videolink from Oman. “Becoming a mother should be a time for celebration. In Gaza, it’s another child delivered into hell,” she said, emphasizing a need for urgent international action. “Seeing newborn babies suffer, while some mothers bleed to death, should keep us all awake at night,” she said.

The Zionist entity’s relentless ground and air military campaign in Gaza has killed more than 24,762 people, around 70 percent of them women, children and adolescents, according to figures from Gaza’s health ministry.

The entity claims the bombardment is aimed at destroying Hamas after the Palestinian resistance group attacked southern Zionist communities and military bases on Oct 7, 2023. Around 1,140 people, mostly civilians, died in the attack and subsequent Zionist military operation aimed at regaining control of communities targeted by Hamas. Ingram described “heartbreaking” meetings with women caught up in the chaos.

One woman, Mashael, was pregnant when her house was hit and her husband buried under the rubble for several days, and her baby stopped moving. “She says she is sure now, about a month later, that the baby is dead,” Ingram said. But, she added: “She is still waiting for medical care.” Mashael had told her it was best “a baby isn’t born into this nightmare”, she said.

Ingram also told the story of a nurse named Webda, who said she had performed emergency caesareans on six dead women in the past eight weeks. “Mothers face unimaginable challenges in accessing adequate medical care, nutrition and protection before, during and after giving birth,” Ingram said. “The situation of pregnant women and newborns in the Gaza Strip is beyond belief, and it demands intensified and immediate actions.” The infant mortality rate in Gaza at the moment is unknown, she said.

But she added: “It is safe to say that children are dying now because of the humanitarian crisis on the ground as well as from the bombs and bullets.” Ingram said the Emirati Hospital in Rafah was now catering to the vast majority of pregnant women in Gaza. “Struggling with overcrowded conditions and limited resources, staff are forced to discharge mothers within three hours of a caesarean,” she said. “These conditions put mothers at risk from miscarriages, stillbirths, preterm labor, maternal mortality and emotional trauma.” — AFP

Palestinians count cost of Zionist raid on West Bank

TULKARM, Palestine: Palestinians held funerals on Friday and assessed the damage of a days-long Zionist raid in the occupied West Bank, where violence has surged since war erupted in Gaza. Residents gathered beside seven bodies in a hospital in Tulkarm as the father of one of the dead wept in the corner, an AFP photographer said.

Zionist forces withdrew Friday after raiding the Tulkarm area for almost two days, during which the military said troops killed “at least eight terrorists”. Mourners threw flowers over those killed and masked gunmen fired in the air as the funeral procession made its way through Tulkarm refugee camp. Automatic rifles were later placed on the shrouded bodies, the AFP photographer said.

The Zionist entity has occupied the West Bank since 1967 and its troops regularly carry out incursions into Palestinian communities. The raids have escalated since the war between the Zionist entity launched a military attack on Gaza more than three months ago, increasingly lasting days and accompanied by air strikes. The Zionist military said they searched around 1,000 buildings around Tulkarm and interrogated hundreds of people, arresting dozens of them. The Palestinian Prisoners’ Club advocacy group reported Thursday that some of those detained were severely beaten by Zionist forces.

The army did not directly respond to AFP questions about the allegation. An army statement said troops seized weapons and destroyed “five explo-



TULKARM: Relatives mourn over the body of one of the Palestinians, who were killed during a days-long Zionist raid, during their funeral in a refugee camp in the occupied West Bank on Jan 19, 2024. — AFP

sives manufacturing laboratories”, while one soldier was seriously wounded in the raid.

AFP journalists saw widespread destruction in Tulkarm, including a damaged ambulance, a demolished house and other buildings with gaping holes in the walls. The camp had been flooded with mud and debris and diggers were needed to allow access.

Since the latest escalation in the Zionist occupation of Palestine began in October 2023, Zionist troops and settlers have killed more than 360 people in the West Bank, according to the Palestinian health ministry. Over the same period, Zionist forces have arrested more than 6,000 Palestinians, according to the Prisoners’ Club. — AFP

‘Strategic’ New Hampshire voters line up against Trump

‘Do we want more of the same or do we want to move forward?’

HOOKSETT, United States: New Hampshire voter Jan Dodge says she will vote for Nikki Haley in the state’s Republican primary — but supporting the former South Carolina governor is not the main motivation behind her choice. “I’m not actually a real supporter of Nikki Haley. But I don’t want Donald Trump to win New Hampshire. So, I’m voting for Nikki Haley. And that’s my story,” the 71-year-old retiree says, before bursting into laughter.

She is seated along with her friend Lisa Kester, a 59-year-old attorney, inside Robie’s Country Store in the cold New England state. “It’s a strategic vote,” Kester tells AFP. “It’s a vote against Donald Trump.”

Voters plotting ways to block the former US president from November’s ballot are lining up behind Haley as their best weapon against a second Trump term, and planning to cast their primary ballot for her on Tuesday. Dodge and Kester came to the iconic general store on the banks of the Merrimack river Thursday to listen to Haley speak.

With its red clapboard siding, Robie’s has been a regular stop on the New Hampshire campaign trail for decades. In 1975, Jimmy Carter stopped by, and was greet-

ed by the owner with “Jimmy who?” — a moment that helped cement Robie’s place in the pomp and circumstance of US presidential campaigns. Trump, says Dodge, was “horrible for four years.”

“And he would be even more horrible” should he take back the White House in his likely rematch with Democrat Joe Biden later this year, she adds. Dodge is a registered independent and ballot clerk. She found Trump’s “lies” about the 2020 vote, which he lost to Biden and for which he is now facing a criminal indictment for election interference, offensive.

Independents

Though difficult to quantify, the rejection of Trump was a recurrent theme among independents — allowed to vote in Republican or Democratic primaries in New Hampshire — and even among some Republican voters who spoke to AFP.

New Hampshire’s registered voters are famous for adhering to their state motto — “Live Free Or Die” — and remaining independent, a granite bloc that Haley has been chasing in her struggle to reel in Trump. She remains a long way behind the front-runner after his landslide victory in Iowa,

barely nipping at his heels in the polls.

“I think in New Hampshire, we’re trying to figure out how to vote so that Donald Trump isn’t the Republican candidate,” says 43-year-old social worker Emily McCarthy, who made the trip to Rochester on Thursday evening to see Haley speak.

She described herself as “very socially liberal, and more fiscally conservative,” adding that she is committed to human rights and “the right to do what you want with your body” — an allusion to conservative attacks on abortion rights.

What will she do in the event of another Biden-Trump match-up? She hesitates, says she doesn’t know yet, then blurts out: “I don’t think that Joe Biden is the strongest candidate, democratically, but I would rather have him be the president than Donald Trump.”

US Navy veteran Terry Morerod says he voted for Trump in both 2016 and 2020. “I’m not going to vote for Trump again,” the 61-year-old says. “We need some young blood.” At Robie’s, in among the cheeses, jars of maple syrup and the antique weapons decorating the walls, Haley repeats her campaign message to the listening crowd: “Do we want more of the same or do we



AMHERST, United States: A supporter of former UN ambassador and US 2024 Republican presidential hopeful Nikki Haley wears a sticker at Mary Ann’s Diner in Amherst, New Hampshire, on Jan 19, 2024. — AFP

want to move forward?” The “same,” she clarifies, does not just mean Biden, but also Trump.

Frank Tuoti, 70, was one of those who spoke to AFP who was backing Haley on her own merits. He said he would vote for anyone against Biden

— including Trump. But Trump, he said, is often his “own worst enemy.” “She’s a stabilizing force,” Tuoti said of Haley, pointing out that the United States is going through “a lot of upheaval.” “I think she’s a calming, stabilizing influence.” — AFP

Senator Tim Scott endorses Trump in blow to Nikki Haley

HOOKSETT, United States: A US senator who sought this year’s Republican presidential nomination endorsed Donald Trump on Friday in a boost to the former leader’s bid to secure his party’s backing to retake the White House.

Senator Tim Scott appeared on stage with the ex-president at a rally in New Hampshire, whose residents vote in the state’s primary on Tuesday. “I came to the very warm state of New Hampshire to endorse the next president of these United States, president Donald Trump!” said Scott, who was visiting the northern state during a bitter cold snap, to a chorus of cheers. “We need Donald Trump,” Scott said. “We need a president who unites our country.”

The South Carolina lawmaker was in the race for the nomination until Nov 12 when he withdrew, declining to endorse any other candidate. He had hoped to become the first Black Republican president but struggled to rise above the pack in the party’s crowded field.

Regularly polling in sixth place among Republican primary candidates, the 58-year-old drew only

around two to three percent of the vote, according to the RealClearPolitics average of major opinion polls. His backing should boost Trump’s so-far dominant effort to fend off challenges for the nomination from former UN ambassador Nikki Haley and Florida Governor Ron DeSantis.

The endorsement is likely a bitter pill for Haley, who is from Scott’s home state and served as its governor. CNN reported that Trump had been in discussions with Scott to secure his backing before South Carolina holds its primary election on February 24, but that the announcement was brought forward after Haley saw a bounce in support. “He’s a fantastic man,” the scandal-plagued Trump said of Scott. “Having his endorsement means a lot.”

“We have to unify. We have to go after these crazy people that we’re dealing with,” he added, before launching into fierce critiques of Haley. During his campaign, Scott frequently underlined his Christian faith and the conservative values he learned growing up in a poor, single-parent household.

He was one of five Republicans appearing in the third televised Republican debate last November, as challengers for the nomination sparred over Ukraine, China, abortion and the future of the party. Scott has expressed no interest in becoming a running mate to any of the remaining candidates, saying that being vice president “has never been on my to-do list for this campaign.” — AFP



CONCORD, United States: US Republican Senator from South Carolina Tim Scott speaks as Republican presidential hopeful and former US President Donald Trump listens during a campaign event in Concord, New Hampshire, on Jan 19, 2024. — AFP

Zionist President Herzog hit with criminal complaint

GENEVA: Zionist President Isaac Herzog has been targeted with a criminal complaint during a visit to Switzerland, Swiss prosecutors said Friday, amid allegations of crimes against humanity over the war in Gaza. The Federal Prosecutor’s Of-

fice (BA) confirmed that it had received a criminal complaint against the Zionist president, who was at the World Economic Forum’s annual meeting in Davos on Thursday to discuss the Gaza war.

“The criminal complaints will now be examined in accordance with the usual procedure,” BA said in a statement, adding that it was in contact with the foreign ministry “to examine the question of the immunity of the person concerned”.

It did not say what the specific complaints were, or who had filed them. But a statement allegedly issued by the people behind the complaint, entitled “Legal Action Against Crimes Against

Humanity” and obtained by AFP, said several unnamed individuals had filed charges with federal prosecutors and with cantonal authorities in Basel, Bern and Zurich.

The statement said the plaintiffs were seeking a criminal prosecution in parallel to a case brought before the UN’s International Court of Justice by South Africa, which accuses the Zionist entity of genocide in its offensive in Gaza.

Addressing the issue of immunity, the statement suggested that it could be lifted “in certain circumstances”, including in cases of alleged crimes against humanity, adding that “these

conditions are met in this case”.

Herzog told the Davos forum that the Zionist entity had launched its campaign in “self-defense” and again condemned the South Africa case as “outrageous”. “They (South Africa) basically support the atrocities and barbarism that we have seen on Oct 7,” he said, adding that the Zionist entity was concerned about the destruction in Gaza.

“We care. It is painful for us that our neighbors are suffering so much,” he said. “But how else can we defend ourselves if our enemies decided to entrench themselves in an infrastructure of terror of unbelievable size and scope?” he said. — AFP

Bibi rejects Palestine...

Continued from Page 1

The right of the Palestinian people to build their own state “must be recognized by all”, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told the Non-Aligned Movement summit in Uganda on Saturday. “The refusal to accept a two-state solution for (Zionists) and Palestinians, and the denial of the right to statehood for the Palestinian people, are unacceptable,” the UN leader insisted in Kampala. Such a stance “would indefinitely prolong a conflict that has become a major threat to global peace and security; exacerbate polarization; and embolden extremists everywhere,” Guterres warned. “The right of the Palestinian people to build their own state must be recognized by all.”

The UN’s UNRWA agency for Palestinian refugees says about 1.7 million people have been displaced in Gaza by the war. About one million are crowded into the Rafah area in the far south, near Egypt. UN agencies have warned better aid access — including through the Zionist entity’s Ashdod port — is needed urgently as famine and disease loom. After Friday’s Biden-Netanyahu call, the White House said the Zionist entity would allow flour shipments for Palestinians through Ashdod.

In Gaza, the UN humanitarian agency OCHA reported only 15 bakeries were operating across the narrow territory. Water availability for drinking and domestic use “is shrinking every day”, OCHA added. It also said that without immediate funding and an expanded response, 375,000 malnourished children and vulnerable mothers risk severe undernourishment.

Thousands of Gaza men have been detained by Zionist forces, often facing conditions that could amount to torture, said the UN’s human rights representative in the Palestinian territories, Ajith Singhay. The Zionist entity’s military said individuals suspected of involvement in “terrorist activities” were being treated in accordance with international law.

Violence has also surged in the occupied West Bank, where Zionist troops and settlers have killed more than 360 people since Oct 7, according to the Ramallah-based Palestinian health ministry. Deadly exchanges have occurred regularly between Zionist forces and Lebanon’s Iran-backed Hezbollah movement, whose deputy leader Naim Qassem has urged the Zionist entity not “to expand its aggression”.

In western Iraq, a military base used by US-led coalition forces came under a barrage of missiles, a US defense source and an Iraqi police official told AFP. Since mid-October, there have been dozens of attacks on US and coalition forces in Iraq and Syria, the majority of them claimed by Tehran-aligned groups that oppose US support for the Zionist entity. — AFP

pez-Alegria. “I think we probably spent a few more hours in Dragon than we felt like we needed to,” he said, smiling. “But it was all good.”

The new arrivals will spend about two weeks carrying out 30 experiments, learning more about the impact of microgravity on the human body, advancing industrial processes and more. Axiom Space was founded in 2016 by Michael Suffredini, a former ISS program manager for NASA, and entrepreneur Kam Ghaffarian. In addition to organizing private missions to the orbital outpost, the company is developing spacesuits for future NASA missions to the Moon. It is also building a commercial space station that it intends to initially attach to the ISS, then separate and orbit independently sometime before the ISS is retired. The exact costs of the Ax-3 have not been disclosed, but in 2018 when the company first announced the program, which involves chartering SpaceX hardware and paying NASA for services, it set a price tag of \$55 million per seat. — AFP

Iran vows revenge as Zionist strike...

Continued from Page 1

Syria intel chief” and his deputy were among those “martyred in the attack on Syria by (the Zionist entity)”. Mehr later quoted the IRGC as saying a fifth member wounded in the strike had died. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights war monitor said the Zionist strike on the Mazzeh neighborhood of the capital killed 10 people.

The Guards’ Sepah news agency blamed the attack on the “evil and criminal Zionist regime”, and named four of those killed as Hojatollah Omidvar, Ali Aghazadeh, Hossein Mohammadi and Saeed Karimi. The mid-morning strike, which sent a large plume of smoke skywards, was also reported by Syrian state media. Official news agency SANA said a residential building in Mazzeh had been targeted in what it called “a (Zionist) aggression”. The defense ministry said the strike killed “a number of civilians”. An AFP journalist said the building had been reduced to debris.

Japan’s ‘Moon Sniper’ lands but power...

Continued from Page 1

more “detailed analysis” on the solar cells was needed. NASA chief Bill Nelson tweeted his “congratulations (to Japan) on being the historic fifth country to land successfully on the Moon”. “We value our partnership in the cosmos and continued collaboration,” he added.

JAXA hopes to analyze data acquired during the landing, which will help determine whether the craft achieved the aim of landing within 100 m of its intended landing spot. SLIM was aiming for a crater where the Moon’s mantle, the usually deep inner layer beneath its crust, is believed to

be exposed on the surface. Two probes detached successfully, JAXA said — one with a transmitter and another designed to trundle around the lunar surface beaming images to Earth.

This shape-shifting mini-rover, slightly bigger than a tennis ball, was co-developed by the firm behind the Transformer toys. While the accuracy of the touchdown needs to be verified, Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics astronomer Jonathan McDowell said: “I think the mission is a big success.”

Several things could have caused the solar panel problem, he told AFP. “A wire came loose, a wire was connected the wrong way, or the lander is upside down and can’t see the sun for some reason,” McDowell speculated. The scientist added that “hopefully” JAXA had been able to download images from the landing, but said an experiment to study the composition of Moon rocks may be a lost cause. — AFP

International



AGADEZ: Migrants sit in the back of a pickup a few minutes before travelling to the Libyan border in Agadez on Jan 2, 2024. — AFP photos



Youssouf Sakho, an Ivorian citizen, sits at a housing unit for migrants in Agadez on Dec 30, 2023.

Niger's 'gateway to desert' opens again for migrants

NGOs hope decriminalizing trafficking would regulate sector, keep migrants safe

AGADEZ, Niger: Their faces wrapped up against the sun and sand, they pile into the back of waiting pickup trucks in northern Niger ahead of a grueling journey across the Sahara. Hawkers of protective turbans, cigarettes and water sachets do the rounds in the hope of one last sale before the vehicles pull out of the main bus station headed for Libya.

Known as the gateway to the desert, the historic town of Agadez is again bustling as a key transit hub for migration. Niger's military leaders who seized power in a July coup lost no time in repealing a law which criminalized the trafficking of migrants through the nation.

The November quashing of the 2015 legislation, which was unpopular and controversial for endangering the lives of migrants by pushing their transporters to illegal and unsafe roads, aims to make it easier for people to reach North Africa and eventually Europe. It was also designed to kickstart the economy in a region plagued by weapons and drug traffickers. "They're packed in like sardines," Aboubacar Halilou, one of those involved in the transportation, said. "But it's our job, people need to go."

Clandestine routes

Latecomers rush to pay their fare and show their travel documents to the police. Once everyone is checked, the trucks join up with a military convoy which once a week travels north — a guarantee of relative safety. "People applauded this repeal," Halilou said. "The couriers who were in prison have already been freed and are in the process of resuming work because it's a very lucrative activity."

But a wary distrust persists — most drivers shy away from reporters. Some transporters continue to use clandestine routes. They "have got used to circumventing" and "don't yet have confidence in the system", Mohamed Anacko, president of the Agadez regional authority said.

Beaten-up trucks with no registration plates fill the alleyways of the neighborhood from where the migrants set off. Clandestine convoys depart at night, avoiding the bus station and the administrative formalities. In this part of town, "loading is done in the open air, in the street", said Azizou Chehou, coordinator of the NGO Alarm Phone Sahara, which rescues migrants lost in the desert. "You don't know who the driver is, who are the passengers, where they originate or their

destination." NGOs hope the repeal will lead to the sector being regulated and help keep migrants safe.

Risks on route

Youssouf Sakho is waiting at one of the discreet holding houses used by the couriers before leaving. The Ivorian handed over his telephone and paid 300,000 CFA francs (just under \$500) to go to Libya. "You can't have 100-percent confidence in the transporter," he conceded. Some migrants turn up only to find the money they have already paid wasn't handed over to the driver. Once underway, they risk being left stranded in the desert at the first sign of bandits or security forces.

'Like any travel agency'

Clamping down on the clandestine sector is no easy task after nine years of under-the-radar people trafficking. The 15th-century Tuareg town of Agadez, an important crossroads of the caravan trade and a UNESCO World Heritage site, is in a region that has seen several rebellions and has a porous border. "Most of the people who work in migration are former rebels," Bachir Amma, head of a couriers' association, said.

Deprived of their income by the 2015 law, many turned to trafficking other things or armed theft. "For us, this isn't trafficking. The migrant pays for his ticket. We do roadmaps, we work like any travel agency," Amma said.

In passing the 2015 law, Niger became a strategic partner of the European Union as it struggled to stem a migrant flow towards conflict-wracked Libya. Brussels was the main financial backer for retraining projects for migration stakeholders in the Agadez region. But the EU suspended cooperation with Niger after the July 26 coup.

The new regime said the law had been adopted "under the influence of certain foreign powers". Its repeal was widely welcomed by Agadez residents. "The authorities have seen the international community turn its back ... Niger was a kind of valve for the migratory flows. "So, we had to reopen the valve," Agadez mayor Abdourahamane Touraroua said.

He said that since the law was scrapped, migrant departures from the town are "as much as three" times higher. The couriers meanwhile say business is still slow but will soon get back to where it once was. — AFP

Seoul police chief charged over Halloween crush

SEOUL: Seoul's chief of police has been charged with professional negligence over the deadly 2022 Halloween crush that killed nearly 160 people, prosecutors in the South Korean capital said. On Oct 29, 2022, tens of thousands of people — mostly in their 20s and 30s — had been out to enjoy post-pandemic holiday celebrations in Seoul's Itaewon nightlife district.

But the night turned deadly when people poured into a narrow, sloping alleyway between bars and clubs, the weight of their bodies and a lack of effective crowd control leaving more than 150 crushed to death.

Kim Kwang-ho, head of the Seoul Metropolitan Police Agency, was charged with professional negligence resulting in injury or death, Seoul's Western District Prosecutors' Office said in a statement released Friday.

As the chief of the SMPA, he "did not take necessary measures, such as deploying sufficient police forces and ensuring proper command and supervision" on the day of the crush, the statement said, although he was able to "foresee potential dangers arising" from overcrowding in the nightlife area.

Kim, the highest-ranking police official to face trial over the tragedy, was charged without detention. In January last year, Kim and 22 other officials from the police, rescue and district offices were forwarded to the prosecution by a special police investigation team for their alleged involvement in the government's mishandling of the crush.

Prosecutors subsequently charged the heads of the police station in Seoul's Yongsan district, which includes Itaewon, and the Yongsan Ward office, but had been undecided about charging Kim for over a year.

Friday's statement said Kim, "along with the chief of the Yongsan Police Station and the head of the Yongsan Ward office who are currently on trial, collectively caused the deaths of 158 individuals and injuries to 312 individuals as a result of professional negligence".

Families of the victims said they regretted the prosecution's lengthy decision-making process before charging Kim. "Chief Kim must immediately step down from his position and face trial," the families said in a statement. "President Yoon Suk Yeol must dismiss Kim immediately."

South Korea's rapid transformation from a war-torn country to Asia's fourth-largest economy and a global cultural powerhouse is a source of national pride. But a series of preventable disasters — such as the 2022 crush and the 2014 Sewol ferry sinking that killed 304 people — has shaken public confidence in authorities. — AFP



WETHERSFIELD, United Kingdom: Director of the UK operation of France's Medecins du Monde charity, Simon Tyler, poses for a photograph with a mobile clinic parked at an entrance to the former RAF base in Wethersfield, eastern England. — AFP

Medical charity aids 'desperate' migrants in UK

WETHERSFIELD: Outside an isolated former military base in the English countryside, a small medical team pitches up to assess and aid growing numbers of asylum seekers held there. The converted Royal Air Force base, northeast of London, is part of contentious efforts by the UK government to shift thousands of asylum seekers from costly hotels into other accommodation.

But critics say such places are ill suited to host vulnerable people who in many cases have been through traumatic experiences. "It's very hard inside," a visibly weakened Eritrean man in his 20s said in broken English as he arrived for an appointment with the medics at the razor-wired edge of the base this week.

The team from France's Medecins du Monde (Doctors of the World) charity has been operating the mobile clinic outside the Wethersfield barracks three days a week since early December, in partnership with fellow NGO Doctors Without Borders (MSF).

Consisting of a doctor and an assistant, and often including Medecins du Monde's UK director Simon Tyler, they can offer only limited care from the van loaded with basic medical equipment and supplies. Patients come in for a variety of ailments, in particular intestinal pain, he said. "But clearly the number one morbidity is mental health and psychological issues — it's the number one by a mile," he said.

'Inappropriate'

For Tyler, the base is exacerbating those problems and heightening the risk of suicides inside. "It's clearly inappropriate, especially considering the vulnerability of the people here," he said of the site, which is several kilometers from the nearest village and almost half an hour's drive from the closest town. "It feels like a detention center. They can leave, but they have absolutely nowhere to go. They feel desperate, and staying here exacerbates this. "Some are showing suicidal tendencies," Tyler added.

With a general election looming later this year and immigration a top concern among many voters, the Conservative government is trying to reduce the numbers arriving by regular and irregular methods. Around 30,000 people crossed the Channel to England on small boats last year, down by around a third on the nearly 46,000 the year before.

But it is still seen as a potent symbol of the Tories' perceived failure to control UK borders after its Brexit departure from the European Union. Once in the UK, many eventually gain asylum — around two-thirds of applications were approved last year — but that often requires years of waiting. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak wants to ease the backlog and deter more cross-Channel arrivals by transferring a small proportion permanently to Rwanda. The policy remains stalled amid legal challenges, however.

'Vulnerable'

Meanwhile, officials have been moving those awaiting a decision from hotels to bases like Wethersfield and other sites to drive down costs. Several hundred are being housed on a barge docked in southern England, which some have likened to a prison and where one asylum was found dead in a suspected suicide in December.

The first migrants arrived at Wethersfield, which can house up to 1,700 people, in July and its population has steadily risen to around 700, according to the interior ministry. Entry to the site, which is in interior minister James Cleverly's parliamentary constituency, is strictly monitored. All the residents are male and over the age of 18. Most hail from Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq and Eritrea.

Crossing the Channel was the last stage of long, perilous journeys. But when the men talk to the Medecins du Monde team, "you don't hear stories about the horrific journey they have taken, you hear stories about this place," Tyler told AFP. "Their biggest concern is being confined in a location like this, remote, feeling like somehow (they are) in prison."

He said the migrants recount fights occurring inside the barracks and difficulties sleeping. "Some vulnerable individuals are constantly feeling unsafe in this environment," he said. The team sees around 25 people each week, with some pre-booking appointment slots while others just try their luck by knocking on the door. — AFP

Content moderators' trauma 'work-related injury': Spanish court

MADRID: Psychological harm suffered by people moderating graphic online content should be considered a work-related injury, a Spanish judge has ruled in a case involving a subcontractor for Facebook parent company Meta.

Lawyers said it was the first time a court had recognized that sick leave taken by a content moderator was the result of his job monitoring disturbing content. Content moderators examine images, videos and comments posted by users to decide whether or not to remove them in line with a company's policy, in this case Meta.

The case, which was first reported by La Vanguardia newspaper, concerns an employee working for CCC Barcelona Digital Services, which monitors disturbing content on Facebook and Instagram. He was identified by the paper as a 26-year-old Brazilian who was still under ongoing psychiatric care.

The ruling, which was released this week and has been seen by AFP, said he monitored extreme content such as self-harm, torture, decapitations by extremist groups and suicide. Eight months into the job, he signed off sick with serious psychological side effects, it said, citing medical reports of issues including panic attacks, nightmares, sleep problems and an overwhelming fear of death.

'The unquestionable trigger'

Despite CCC arguing his psychological problems were down to "common illness", magistrate Jesus Fuentes found that "work-related issues were the sole, exclusive and unquestionable trigger". Spain's labor inspectorate had already published a damning report in 2022, imposing a fine and sanctions on CCC for its inaction "despite being aware of its workers' psychological problems due to their work".

The employee's lawyer, Francesc Feliu, who also represents around 20 other CCC staff, told AFP his legal firm had separately filed a criminal complaint "against CCC and Facebook Spain" over the serious infractions cited in the report and the psychological harm suffered. "The company is trying to avoid liability ... by saying the mental illness suffered by content moderators has no connection with their work so this ruling is extremely important because it rejects that argument," he told AFP.

"We are seeking a criminal conviction for company officials because they were aware of the risks to which the moderators are exposed yet the firm has not acted to minimize the potential risk." CCC, which has worked for Meta since 2018, was acquired by Canada's Telus International in 2020 and has 2,000 staff at its Barcelona operations. Telus told AFP it was "disappointed with the verdict" and would appeal.

"For these types of illnesses to be considered occupational accidents, they must exclusively result from the execution of that work, which we feel was firmly refuted," it said. Work-related mental health concerns accounted for "between one and two percent of total absences", it added. — AFP

SUNDAY, JANUARY 21, 2024

Business

In Davos, African countries want to tell a different story

African policy-makers seek to discuss free trade, investment and energy transition

DAVOS: From South Africa to Rwanda to Nigeria, African countries put on a show of force at the World Economic Forum this week, seeking to transform their image by grabbing private investment rather than development aid. This year in Davos there were no panels on development aid, and African policy-makers at the Swiss Alpine resort instead discussed free trade, investment and the energy transition.

With the fastest growing population of young people in the world, African officials and business-people believe the continent provides an unparalleled opportunity for investors.

“There is the story of all of these challenges and risk but there is also a formidable story of the amazing investment opportunities that the continent offers,” said Marie-Laure Akin-Olugbade, a senior executive at the African Development Bank. “We think that we need to tell the story,” she said, speaking during an event at the summit that gathers business and political elites. “Telling the story about what the continent offers is already a very good step in getting the private sector to crowd in,” Akin-Olugbade added.

Her enthusiasm was shared by others. “We are in a position to really take advantage of the digital revolution in the world,” Kashim Shettima, Nigeria’s vice president, said during a discussion about a project of the pan-African free trade area group. The African Continental Free Trade Area is made up of 47 countries with 1.4 billion people. “People are beginning to understand the importance of Africa’s place in history going forward over the next 10, 20 years,” said World Bank President Ajay Banga.

Beninese singer Angelique Kidjo said: “Things are changing. Things have been changing for the last decade in music, in art in general. And why won’t the business change?”

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) presented a new initiative called “Timbuktoo” during the forum, a plan to invest \$1 billion of public and private capital in innovative start-ups across the continent. “Africa is increasingly going to emerge as an investment destination,” UNDP administrator Achim Steiner told AFP.

Indian tycoon Adani bets big on vast solar and wind plant

MUMBAI: Deep in the desert, India’s most controversial billionaire is building the world’s largest renewable energy park as he races to future-proof his coal-linked fortune.

Gautam Adani’s ports-to-airports, media and energy empire—which critics say has benefited from his links with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi—made him for a brief time in 2022 the world’s second-richest man, with a \$154 billion fortune. A year ago his firms were hit by accusations of a “brazen stock manipulation and accounting fraud scheme” by US short-seller Hindenburg Research and their market value slumped by more than \$150 billion.

But they have since recovered much of their losses and the publicity-shy 61-year-old high school dropout is betting hefty sums on making billions more from the energy transition. India is the world’s third-biggest carbon emitter and Modi’s government has been at the forefront of attempts to push back against the “phase out” of coal at global summits. But the world’s most populous country and fastest-growing major economy needs ever more power, and Adani is building what he calls a “monumental” solar and wind project he boasts will be “visible even from space”.

As the wind whips up sand in the baking heat of the

Tata Steel axes jobs as industry forges ‘greener’ future

PORT TALBOT: Indian-owned Tata Steel is to cut up to 2,800 UK jobs, it announced on Friday, as the industry struggles to finance greener production of the metal.

Tata said it will shut its “two high-emission blast furnaces and coke ovens” in the Welsh town of Port Talbot this year, delivering a blow to a region already hit hard by deindustrialization. “Up to 2,800 employees are expected to be potentially affected” by restructuring at the company, including 2,500 roles over the next 18 months, the company outlined.

A company spokesman told AFP the “vast majority” of job losses would be in Port Talbot, the biggest steelworks in the UK, a country where Tata Steel employs about 8,000 staff. The European steel industry is confronting major upheaval. On Thursday, Italy proposed to place a heavily indebted giant steelworks, majority-owned by ArcelorMittal, under special administration in a bid to secure production and thousands of jobs.



DAVOS: (Left to right) Bloomberg Television’s Francine Lacqua, Singapore’s President Tharman Shanmugaratnam, Saudi Finance Minister Mohammed Al-Jadaan, ECB President Christine Lagarde, Co-chairman of Carlyle Group David Rubenstein, German Finance Minister Christian Lindner and WTO Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala attend a session on the closing day of the WEF in Davos on Jan 19, 2024. — AFP

Today’s value of young companies in Africa represents only 0.2 percent of young companies worldwide. Most of the capital injected into African start-ups comes from abroad, while 83 percent goes to businesses in just four countries: Egypt, Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa, according to the UN.

“So many ideas die an early death, simply because there is not the will to take a bet,” Steiner said. Rwandan President Paul Kagame said at the launch of the UNDP initiative that African “start-ups lack the funding to compete at a global level”.

Kagame announced Rwanda would provide \$3

million to the fund. Under the project, the money will be used to establish eight innovation centers in eight African countries including Ghana, Morocco and Senegal.

“One of the fundamental challenges to achieving development goals in Africa remains the ability to mobilize significant resources to finance,” Ghana’s President Nana Akufo-Addo said.

Since most African economies had minimal room to spend more, he said “private sector investments will play a significant role”. Norwegian International Development Minister Anne Beathe Tvinnerem said

of London and New York.

Adani will produce 17GW, with the rest generated by other companies. The project is slated to produce a third more power than China’s Three Gorges Dam, currently the world’s biggest power-generating facility.

‘Proud Indian’

The scheme is the showpiece of Adani Green Energy—in which France’s TotalEnergies bought a 19.7 percent stake for \$2.5 billion three years ago. In Mundra, site of India’s largest commercial port—run by another arm of the Adani empire—it is manufacturing key components for its aggressive solar and wind energy foray, including colossal wind turbine blades nearly 80 meters long. Solar panels are churned out on high-tech production lines nearby. “We are creating one of the globe’s most extensive and integrated renewable energy manufacturing ecosystems for solar and wind,” Adani wrote last month on X, formerly Twitter, where he describes himself as a “Proud Indian. Excited to be part of the India growth story!” New Delhi has called for ambitious clean energy projects to create 500 gigawatts of renewable capacity to meet half its energy needs by 2030.

Adani—who rejected Hindenburg’s charges as “maliciously mischievous”—has said he will invest an estimated \$100 billion into that energy transition. When fully operational, Adani’s renewable energy park will make up the equivalent of a quarter of India’s current capacity from wind and solar. But India also plans to sharply increase its coal-based power capacity and vows to become carbon neutral only by 2070, two decades later than many countries. — AFP



MUNDRA, India: This photograph taken on January 11, 2024, shows a general view of the Adani Group owned Mundra Port in Mundra. Deep in the desert, India’s most controversial billionaire is building the world’s largest renewable energy park as he races to future-proof his coal-linked fortune. — AFP

Rann of Kutch desert, thousands of laborers erect vast rows of solar panels, dig foundations for wind turbines and lay seemingly endless rolls of wires. Sagar Adani, Gautam’s nephew and executive director of Adani Green Energy, told AFP that the project’s teams are working “at an accelerated pace”. When complete in 2027, the \$2.3-billion Khavda Renewable Energy Park will cover 726 square kilometers (280 square miles) -- nearly the size of New York City. The park is aimed to have the capacity to generate 30 gigawatts of solar and wind energy—enough to power the homes of 18 million people, more than the combined populations



PORT TALBOT, United Kingdom: Raw materials to make iron sit in heaps at the Tata Steel Port Talbot integrated iron and steel works in south Wales. — AFP

The news of the Tata job cuts was greeted with alarm in the industrial town, where virtually all of the local economy revolves around the steelworks. “It’s more or less a wasteland now,” lamented Robert Jones, on one of the town’s main streets. “Things will get progressively worse for the town now,” he told AFP. Fifty-year-old Andrew, who declined to give his last name, worked in the blast furnaces for 30 years.

He told AFP the company should have kept one furnace open or the government should have bought it. “The young people are going to be more impacted because they have to re-train, find new jobs,” he said. Towards the end of last year, the UK government provided £500 million (\$634 million) to fund the production of “greener” steel at the Welsh plant, while saying that 3,000 jobs were still at risk. — AFP

“humanitarian situations out there are increasing, in volume, in scale, the needs are increasing” but the financial space to address them were “shrinking”.

Tvinnerem said there was a “perception” of risk, which could be absorbed by public money. Norway and the United States recently launched a program that will finance small and medium-sized businesses in Africa’s agricultural sector. The money will not go directly to companies, but in funds that will include money from private investors. “It can be done if we design the guarantee mechanism in the right way,” Tvinnerem said. — AFP

Jetblue, Spirit file appeal over blocked merger

NEW YORK: US carriers JetBlue and Spirit filed an appeal in federal court Friday seeking to reverse a judge’s decision to block their planned merger. The airlines “hereby appeal to the United States Court of Appeals for the First Circuit” against Tuesday’s ruling in Boston, according to a notice of appeal filed with the court.

The merger, if ultimately approved, would create the fifth-largest airline in the United States. US District Judge William Young rejected the plan earlier this week after the Justice Department last year sued to block the merger, noting the move would hurt consumers and violate antitrust law.

Lawyers for the airlines had argued that the tie-up stands to benefit customers “by bringing low fares and great service” to more markets, and would boost their ability to compete with dominant US carriers. But President Joe Biden and US Attorney General Merrick Garland instead called Young’s ruling a “victory” for American consumers. — AFP

‘Premature’ to expect rate cuts soon: Fed official

WASHINGTON: The US Federal Reserve’s fight against inflation is far from over and it is “premature” to expect rate cuts around the corner, a senior US central bank official said Friday. The Fed recently held its key lending rate at a 22-year high and penciled in up to three rate cuts this year, as inflation has continued to ease toward its long-term target of two percent.

As financial markets grew increasingly confident that rate cuts were coming as soon as March, Fed policymakers used recent public events to caution against starting the process of loosening monetary policy too soon, citing ongoing inflationary risks. Speaking to Fox Business on Friday, San Francisco Fed President Mary Daly—who is a voting member of the US central bank’s interest rate-setting committee this year—indicated that rate cuts were unlikely anytime soon.

“We are fully committed to restoring price stability and doing it of course as gently as we can, but we have a lot of work left to do,” she said. “We are not there yet, and it’s far too early to declare victory.” “While I think it’s appropriate for us to look forward and ask when would policy adjustments be necessary so we don’t put a stranglehold on the economy, it’s really premature to think that that’s around the corner,” she added. While Fed officials have seemed reluctant to support a March cut, some of them have clearly signaled they expect rate cuts to begin this year. — AFP



Mohammed Al-Kharafi (left) during the panel discussion.



Participants attend a panel discussion presented by Mohammed Al-Kharafi and organized by "Tamakan".

Al-Kharafi to young Kuwaitis: Strive for development, unleash your creativity

NBK COO highlights emerging trends in digital banking during Tamakan panel discussion

KUWAIT: As part of the ongoing panel discussions of "Tamakan" with the executives of National Bank of Kuwait (NBK), the program hosted Mohammed Al-Kharafi, COO – Head of Group Operations and Information Technology, who shared his extensive experience gained through a long career in the banking sector, and gave them advice on the best ways to develop their career.

This is the third the panel discussion of "Tamakan" program for training Kuwaiti fresh university graduates, organized by Creative Confidence for the fifth year in a row with NBK's strategic sponsorship. The discussion focused on key insights for a successful career in a dynamic landscape of the banking business, where the ambitious graduates gained insights into career success and the future of information technology in the banking sector.

A unique opportunity

Commencing his discussion with the youth, Al-Kharafi said: "Tamakan" program is a unique opportunity to enhance the skills required to navigate your way into the labor market. Over the past years, the program has achieved many excellent outcomes, so, every participant should make the most of this opportunity, considering it as the starting point for a successful and sustainable career."

"At NBK, we believe in the importance of supporting the youth, and therefore, we are always keen to attract and develop young national talents. This program has been designed for the youth who are ambitious and passionate about their career, by helping graduates choose their professional and academic path more clearly. Therefore, the program is an opportunity for fresh graduates to develop their knowledge and become an effective workforce," he added. Al-Kharafi called on the young people to take advantage of training opportunities, saying, "Make your ambitions sky-high, and strive to develop the necessary capabilities, experiences and skills that help realize these ambitions. Do not lose passion or let frustration creep into you just because of the obstacles you encounter at the beginning of your career. On the contrary, you should rather learn how to overcome these obstacles and learn from them until you reach your goal."

Successful career

Speaking of his early career, Al-Kharafi mentioned: "My passion and my first choice was to work in the banking sector; because it always propels me to learn, develop, acquire new skills and exposes me

to new experiences every day, and stay ahead of the latest technologies, which I utilize to improve and to develop the products and services provided to customers," he noted.

I joined NBK and started at Branches division, where I worked my way up to become branch manager. Afterwards, I held several positions until I currently reached the position of Head of Group Operations and Information Technology."

- We established the Innovation Lab to serve as an incubator to stimulate employees' creativity and innovation

- NBK provides employees with a unique work environment that promotes development

- The bank is a trailblazer in providing top-notch innovative digital banking solutions

- Group Operations & IT is the main driver of the bank's digital transformation strategy, always striving to advance its digital agenda

"The transition from working as a branch manager to joining Group Operations & IT was not easy, due to the difference in work nature, but my passion for learning, developing, facing challenges and overcoming obstacles was undoubtedly crucial to my career accomplishment," he continued.

Al-Kharafi highlighted the importance of discipline and adhering to high work ethics, having a continuous learning mindset, and adaptability to the ever-evolving labor market landscape.

He shared real-life tips on navigating the early stages of career, noting that focusing on problem solving

and critical thinking are key characteristics of a successful personality, as well as the ability to analyze complex situations and develop creative solutions is essential for success in any job role.

"Curiosity and passion for continuous learning is what we look for in new employees, because this desire is the main driver for building a successful career. New employees have a margin of risk at their early career, as well as the opportunity to benefit from the expertise of team members in each department," he added. Al-Kharafi called on the trainees to go the extra mile in continuous learning and developing skills, and to try to make the utmost benefit from all the top-notch training programs at the beginning of their career to raise their efficiency and skills with knowledge, which will help them make the right decisions in the future.

Continuous development

Al-Kharafi spoke about the development of banking, especially with technological advancement and mobile banking apps that revolutionized how banking transactions are made, and have grown to account now for the largest share of banking transactions. "NBK led the way in digital transformation, and Group Operations play a fundamental role in achieving NBK Group's goals by providing top-notch innovative digital banking solutions. We are also constantly working to advance the bank's digital agenda, as one of the trailblazers of digital innovation in Kuwait and across the entire region," he explained.

"We are always seeking to embrace innovation and apply it in all of the bank's operations and business models. We also provide a work environment promoting continuous development and flexibility, which enables us to keep pace with the ever-evolving customer requirements in light of the fast-paced technological advancement in the banking industry," he added.

Robotics for speed and accuracy

In the discussion, Al-Kharafi highlighted the emerging trends, innovations and intersection of banking and technology as well as the future of IT in banking and new technologies like Artificial Intelligence (AI), Robotic Process Automation (RPA) and leveraging new technologies to advance the bank's digital agenda. He gave an insight into the important role of RPA in banking operations, highlighting its potentials and impacts, and explaining how RPA improves efficiency, simplifies operations, and propels the industry to higher levels of innovation.

Al-Kharafi discussed how these technologies are

transforming the way banks operate, making them more efficient, secure and customer-centric. "With customers increasing reliance on smartphones for their banking transactions via the NBK Mobile Banking App, we continue to focus on robots to automate our operations using AI, which helps reduce service turn-around times while improving accuracy and customer experience," Al-Kharafi noted.

"Al-Kharafi Confirmed that In line with the instructions and directions of the Central Bank of Kuwait & The Cybersecurity Strategic Framework, Cybersecurity is the a key pillar of our digital transformation agenda. NBK adopts a proactive cybersecurity strategy to meet the dynamic development of cyber threats, in addition to its endeavors to improve internal operations and create a robust digital culture across the bank, including a comprehensive framework for data governance, privacy and security.

NBK Group Operations & IT organizes a program titled "Innovation Lab", which serves as provides an incubator to help stimulate employees' creativity to provide innovative solutions for challenges simulating their work nature in the bank. At the end of the program, the participant with the best idea is named and honored.

Golden tips

Al-Kharafi advised the young people to look for a work environment that provides them with continuous development and helps their progress to the highest positions. He noted that NBK regards supporting the youth as a fundamental part of its strategy, and always seeks to attract national talent and develop and upskill them through a series of training courses and professional academic programs, in preparation for taking on leadership positions in the future.

It is worth mentioning that the goal of "Tamakan" program is to develop the personal skills needed to become compelling candidates, in addition to encouraging the Kuwaiti youth to explore their potentials and unlock their creativity. The program adopts the Blended Learning methodology and focuses on many themes and workshops about creativity and innovation, design thinking, business model design, career exploration and innovative de-risking solutions.

NBK is a key contributor in different social initiatives aligning with Kuwait National Development Plan (KNDP), including youth empowerment and education development, reflecting its belief that the youth are Kuwait's most valuable resource and the main driver of national development.



DEARBORN: Ford Motor Co battery powered F-150 Lightning trucks under production at their Rouge Electric Vehicle Center in Dearborn, Michigan on September 20, 2022. -- AFP

Ford cuts output of e-pickup on lower demand

NEW YORK: US auto giant Ford said Friday that it is reducing production of its F-150 Lightning electric pickup, as it anticipates weaker demand for electric vehicles this year. The automaker plans to cut production at the Rouge Electric Vehicle Center to one shift from April 1, impacting about 1,400 workers, with some to transfer to other roles and others expected to take retirement packages.

"Ford expects continued growth in global EV sales in 2024, though less than anticipated," the company said in a statement. It is lowering production as it aims "to achieve the optimal balance of production, sales growth and profitability."

Sales of the F-150 Lightning jumped 55 percent

in 2023, with further growth forecast this year, according to Ford. But the company earlier lowered the listed price by almost \$10,000 for entry-level models. With expectations for slower EV growth in the coming years, the auto industry has been pulling back from earlier targets.

US consumers remain cautious about the vehicles, partly due to costs, as well as concerns about recharging on longer trips, with the slow pace of programs to expand national recharging facilities.

On Friday, the White house announced \$325 million in new investments this week, in part to help repair and replace EV chargers across the United States. Automotive research firm Edmunds predicts that the share of electric vehicles in the United States will represent eight percent of sales in 2024, up from 6.9 percent in 2023. On Friday, Ford also announced that it would add nearly 900 new jobs as part of a third crew at its Michigan Assembly Plant in Wayne, to boost production of its gasoline-powered Bronco sport-utility vehicles and Ranger pickups. In midday trading Friday, Ford shares were up by around 0.6 percent. -- AFP

US existing home sales fall to lowest level since 1995

WASHINGTON: US existing home sales fell in the final month of 2023, ending a tough year for real estate as full-year sales hit the lowest level since 1995, said industry data released Friday. For all of last year, sales of existing homes, which form the vast majority of the market, came in at 4.09 million, said the National Association of Realtors (NAR).

This was significantly below 2022's 5.03 million figure, as the interest-sensitive real estate sector struggled in the wake of rapid interest rate hikes by the Federal Reserve. The median sales price also reached a record high of \$389,800 in 2023, said the NAR. Between November and December, sales of all types of homes and condos dipped 1.0 percent, to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 3.78 million, the NAR said.

This marks the lowest sales activity in more than a decade. The aim of central bank interest rate hikes since early 2022 was to cool demand by raising borrowing costs, so as to tamp down stubborn inflation. But even as inflation cooled from a peak in recent years, Fed officials held rates at a 22-year high to ensure the battle is won. Meanwhile, a lack of inventory has bogged down the property market further, with homeowners reluctant to sell after having locked in lower mortgage rates.

NAR chief economist Lawrence Yun believes that "the latest month's sales look to be the bottom before inevitably turning higher in the new year." "Mortgage rates are meaningfully lower compared to just two months ago, and more inventory is expected to appear on the market in upcoming months," he said. The popular 30-year fixed-rate mortgage averaged 6.6 percent as of Thursday, below the 7.8 percent in late October, according to home loan finance company Freddie Mac.

There may be further reprieve ahead, with the Fed mulling the right time to cut rates and signaling three reductions this year. "Falling mortgage rates in late 2023 did little to boost housing activity as widespread supply limitations continue to thwart purchases," Nationwide senior economist Ben Ayers said. "The housing outlook for 2024 remains muddled with mortgage rates likely to be elevated while an expected economic

slowdown could dampen buyer demand," he warned.

In December, the median home price across housing types was \$382,600, up 4.4 percent from the year-ago period. While home prices tend to be higher in the summer months, "this is the highest December median home price ever," Yun said on Friday.

"Despite the weakness in home sales, the lack of supply is naturally firming up home prices," he added. Meanwhile, consumer sentiment in the United States jumped 13 percent in January to reach its highest level for almost two-and-a-half years, the University of Michigan said Friday. The index for consumer sentiment blew past expectations to reach 78.8 in January, according to initial estimates from the university, marking a steep rise from December, when the figure was 69.7. The data is likely to be seen as good news for President Joe Biden's 2024 reelection campaign, which has been struggling to convince American consumers that he has done a good job tackling inflation while continuing to support the US economy. But it is a tough message to sell, since good economic news in the current high interest rate environment is likely to reduce the chances of early interest rate cuts by the Federal Reserve. The Fed is determined to sustainably lower inflation by keeping rates at a higher level, meaning borrowing costs would remain elevated for both consumers and businesses.—AFP



SAN ANSELMO: A for sale sign is posted in front of a home on March 22, 2023 in San Anselmo, California. — AFP

Gulf Bank showcases leading environmental sustainability expertise at ‘Expo Doha 2023’

Expo held under the theme ‘Green Desert, Better Environment’

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank has declared its involvement in the International Horticulture Exhibition “Expo Doha 2023,” held in Qatar’s capital under the theme “Green Desert, Better Environment.” The exhibition will conclude on March 28, 2024, featuring participants from 80 countries, including various non-governmental organizations, international experts, private sector entities, universities, and laboratories. Projections indicate that the total number of visitors to the exhibition will reach three million.

The conference includes important events and workshops focused on developing worldwide solutions for issues such as desertification, climate change, sustainability challenges, and the progress of modern technologies to ensure resource sustainability.

In a specialized session scheduled for

January 23, 2024, Gulf Bank will present its significant expertise in environmental sustainability, emphasizing the contributions of Kuwait’s private sector to environmental conservation. It is worth mentioning that Kuwait will showcase a significant pavilion during the event. Ahmed Al-Amir, Gulf Bank’s Deputy General Manager of Corporate Communications, affirmed, “Gulf Bank actively participates in global and regional conferences and exhibitions focused on environmental sustainability, showcasing its leading practices in incorporating sustainability principles within and beyond the bank.”

He stressed that these participations offer an excellent opportunity for the exchange of ideas and collaborative efforts, leading to significant positive changes in the global environment. Al-Amir further



Ahmed Al-Amir: We are dedicated to actively contribute to the establishment of sustainable practices within the community

emphasized that the topics addressed at the Doha Horticulture Exhibition align with Gulf Bank’s strategic sustainability objectives. Al-Amir emphasized the significant efforts of Gulf Bank in promoting and accelerating the national sustainability agenda through carefully selected ini-

tiatives. These initiatives effectively play a role in fostering sustainable practices within the community, encompassing proactive and responsible measures in environmental, social, and governance (ESG) domains.

Gulf Bank’s vision is to be the leading

Kuwaiti Bank of the future. The Bank is constantly engaging and empowering its employees as part of an inclusive and diversified workplace in recognition of every employee’s role in delivering customer excellence and serving the community at large. With its extensive network of branches and innovative digital services, Gulf Bank is able to give its customers the choice of how and where to conduct their banking transactions, all while ensuring a simple and seamless banking experience. Gulf Bank is committed to maintaining robust developments in sustainability at environmental, social and governance levels through diverse sustainability initiatives, strategically selected to benefit the Bank both internally and externally. Gulf Bank supports Kuwait Vision 2035 “New Kuwait” and works with various parties to achieve it.

Economic outlook keeps investors wary on Nigeria

LAGOS: Record inflation, a sliding naira currency and weak financial structure are keeping investors wary of Nigeria, Africa’s largest economy, with some companies even stepping away despite economic reforms under recently-elected President Bola Ahmed Tinubu. Tinubu, who took office last May, has repeatedly called for patience to allow his reforms to take effect after ending a fuel subsidy and freeing up the naira currency—policies the government says will bring more foreign investment despite the short-term austerity they cause.

Tinubu’s moves have been praised by investors. But they have also led to a sharp fall in the naira’s value against the dollar, and access to foreign currency in Nigeria remains a major problem for foreign companies. For some companies the situation remains too uncertain. South African supermarket chain Shoprite last week said it was closing its store in Kano, Nigeria’s second largest city and capital of the Muslim north, “after careful evaluation of the financial situation of the store and the current business climate.”

It was the latest announcement from a foreign company about a reduction in presence in Nigeria despite the potential of a consumer market of more than 200 million people in Africa’s most populous nation. In December, the US multinational Procter & Gamble announced that it would halt production in Nigeria after three decades in the country. The manufacturer of Pampers, Ariel washing powder and Oral B toothpaste would now import and the company’s factory in the southwestern city of Ibadan would close down, and let go of its 1,800 direct and



LAGOS: A sliding naira currency, record inflation and weak financial structure are keeping investors wary of Nigeria.

indirect employees.

“When you think about places like Nigeria, when you think about places like Argentina, it’s very difficult for us as a US dollar-denominated company to create value,” Andre Schulten, P&G’s chief financial officer said at the Morgan Stanley Global Consumer & Retail Conference in New York in December. “It’s also difficult to operate because of the macroeconomic environment.”

In August, the British pharmaceutical giant GSK also announced it would end its operations in Nigeria, after more than 50 years working in the country.

“In common with many companies operating in Nigeria, the significant challenge in accessing foreign currency in recent years impacted our local operations and has affected our ability to maintain consistent supply of medicines and vaccines in the market,” a GSK spokesman told AFP.

GSK’s pharmaceutical products will now be distributed by a third-party company. In more muted ways, other international companies have begun a

restructuring of their activities in Nigeria, such as PZ Cussons, a British manufacturer of consumer goods including detergents, soaps, household appliances. In Nigeria since 1899, the company announced in September its plan to “delist from the Nigerian stock exchange” in order to “simplify” its activities in the country.

“We are focused on mitigating the challenges experienced in the region and we are making progress,” the company said. “It represents an investment in Nigeria and will allow us to simplify and strengthen our business here, putting in place a sustainable structure and platform to maximise long-term growth and value.” In its 2023 annual report, the company noted the fall in the value of the naira affecting its 2024 profits and significantly reduced the value of its liquidity.

For its part, the Dutch-British company Unilever announced in March “changes to its business model” to adapt to market conditions. It said it would abandon two segments—household products and skin products. Soon after taking office, Tinubu simultaneously initiated his two major reforms intended to restore public finances and attract foreign investment: the end of fuel subsidies that kept petrol prices artificially low and the liberalization of the naira.

These measures had immediate effects on the country’s economy, including a tripling of fuel prices and an explosion in inflation. Since May, the naira has lost 41 percent of its value against the dollar on the official currency market and 30 percent on the parallel market, and the price of food has increased by more than 31 percent, according to the World Bank.

Elected on the promise of a program called “Renewed Hope”, Tinubu has repeatedly called for “patience” from Nigerians as those reforms take root. The reforms were “essential” and were going in the “right direction”, according to a World Bank report published in December which stressed that it was time to put in place fiscal and monetary measures in the short and medium term in order to obtain results. — AFP



MUMBAI: Chairman and Managing Director of Reliance Industries, Indian billionaire businessman Mukesh Ambani with his wife and Founder Chairperson of the Reliance Foundation Nita Ambani arrive at the photocall area during the wedding reception ceremony of actor Amir Khan’s daughter, Ira Khan, in Mumbai on January 13, 2024. — AFP

India’s Reliance profit up 9.3% on consumer arms

NEW DELHI: Profits in India’s biggest conglomerate Reliance Industries rose 9.3 percent in the December quarter, company results showed Friday, with a small decline in its petrochemical business offset by consumer division growth.

Reliance is led by Asia’s richest man Mukesh Ambani and is India’s most valuable company by market capitalization. Despite an aggressive expansion into retail, telecoms and green energy, the firm still relies heavily on its traditional oil business to make money.

Net profit was 172.65 billion rupees (\$2.08 billion) on-year with operating revenue up 3.5 percent to 2.27 trillion rupees (\$27.3 billion). Reliance blamed the topline fall in its oil-to-chemical arm on a decline in benchmark oil prices. “Planned maintenance and inspection shutdown” also hit profitability, its earnings report said. The conglomerate’s refinery margins hit record levels in 2022-23 on buys of cheaper Russian crude—prices of which were hit by sanctions imposed following Moscow’s invasion of Ukraine—and exports of refined fuel to Europe.

The gap between Russian exports and other benchmarks has since narrowed with Brent crude prices 30 percent down from their 2022 peak. The company’s consumer divisions remained bright spots with telecom arm Jio posting a 12.8 percent rise in net profit to 52.08 billion rupees. Gross revenue from its retail business jumped 22.8 percent to 830 billion rupees. The festive season saw footfalls across its stores grow to 282 million for on-year growth of 40.3 percent. Reliance Industries shares ended flat in Mumbai ahead of the earnings announcement. — AFP

US tech jump; S&P 500 posts new record

NEW YORK: Wall Street stocks rallied Friday, with the tech sector logging major gains while the Dow and broad-based S&P 500 hit new highs.

But European markets, which are much less tech-heavy than their American counterparts, lagged as they ended the week lower on concerns about slow growth and high interest rates.

Global equities had rebounded Thursday as tech giants clawed back recent losses, overcoming concerns about central banks delaying rate cuts. Those gains continued into Friday, though at a less hectic pace. Still, it was enough for the S&P 500 to surpass its last record close in early 2022.

“The tech stocks are continuing to lead the market higher,” said Adam Sarhan of 50 Park Investments.

“You have explosive action in SMCI, in Nvidia, in Broadcom, in semiconductors in general, and that remains bullish for the market,” he said. SMCI shares rocketed 35.9 percent, Nvidia climbed 4.2 percent and Broadcom added 5.9 percent.

“The tech sector and communication services are still driving the US market, and Europe is missing out because of its lack of tech exposure,” said XTB research director Kathleen Brooks. New York’s gains were largely driven by a surge in tech giants including Alphabet, Meta and Nvidia after chip titan Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co unveiled a strong outlook for capital spending and revenue that boosted hopes for 2024. They also came as Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg posted on Instagram that the company is purchasing AI products including Nvidia chips which are key to AI projects. — AFP

Japan inflation slows to 2.3% as energy bills drop

TOKYO: Japanese consumer inflation slowed again in December due to lower electricity and gas bills, government data showed Friday, ahead of a Bank of Japan policy decision next week. Prices in the world’s third-largest economy, excluding volatile fresh food, rose 2.3 percent year-on-year in December, down from 2.5 percent the previous month. For the whole of 2023, consumer prices rose 3.1 percent year-on-year, the highest since 1982 according to the internal affairs ministry. The monthly figure was in line with market expectations and continued a broad trend of cooling inflation over the past year, down from 4.2 percent in January 2023.

Although inflation remains above the Bank of Japan’s longstanding two-percent target, the bank is widely expected to keep its monetary easing measures in place on Tuesday.

Unlike other major central banks that have raised interest rates, the BoJ has stuck to its ultra-loose policy, putting pressure on the yen. The BoJ stood pat last month and offered no guidance on its plans for the new year, sending the yen down against the dollar and boosting stocks.

Speculation had been swirling for weeks that the bank would shift away from negative interest rates and a tight grip on bond yields as prices ticked above two percent. BoJ governor Kazuo Ueda has repeatedly said that “a virtuous cycle of wages and prices” is necessary for the bank’s inflation target to be achieved sustainably. And following the deadly



TOKYO: A dog looks on as a customer browses through snacks on sale at a shopping street in Kichijoji district of Tokyo on January 19, 2024. — AFP

earthquake that slammed central Japan on January 1, the chances of a policy shift next month are now even lower, analysts say.

Unions are gearing up for annual Spring wage-hike negotiations, with the Japan Business Federation urging its members to offer higher salary increases than last year. “For Japan to move into a period of sustained inflation, it needs both wages and prices to increase,” said Nobuko Kobayashi, consulting firm

tract that management is trying to pressure us into accepting are obscene and unsustainable,” said Brian Contreras of the Los Angeles Times Guild.

“If management thinks our financial situation is untenable, they need to come to the bargaining table in good faith and work out a buyout plan with us,” Contreras told AFP at least 90 percent of guild members were participating in the walkout. The action came the day after managers at the troubled paper said widening losses meant substantial job losses were unavoidable.

“We need to reduce our operating budget going into this year and anticipate layoffs,” Times spokeswoman Hillary Manning said Thursday. “The hardest decisions to make are those that impact our employees, and we do not come to any such decisions lightly.” “We are continuing to review the revenue projections for this year and taking a very careful look at expenses and what our organization can support.”

No official number was put on the planned job cuts,

but reports said it could be at least 100 journalists—around a fifth of the newsroom. That would come on top of the 70 jobs that were lost last June. The Thursday’s announcement comes days after the abrupt departure of executive editor Kevin Merida, a respected industry figure who only joined the paper in 2021 with a brief to offer stability in a time of turmoil.

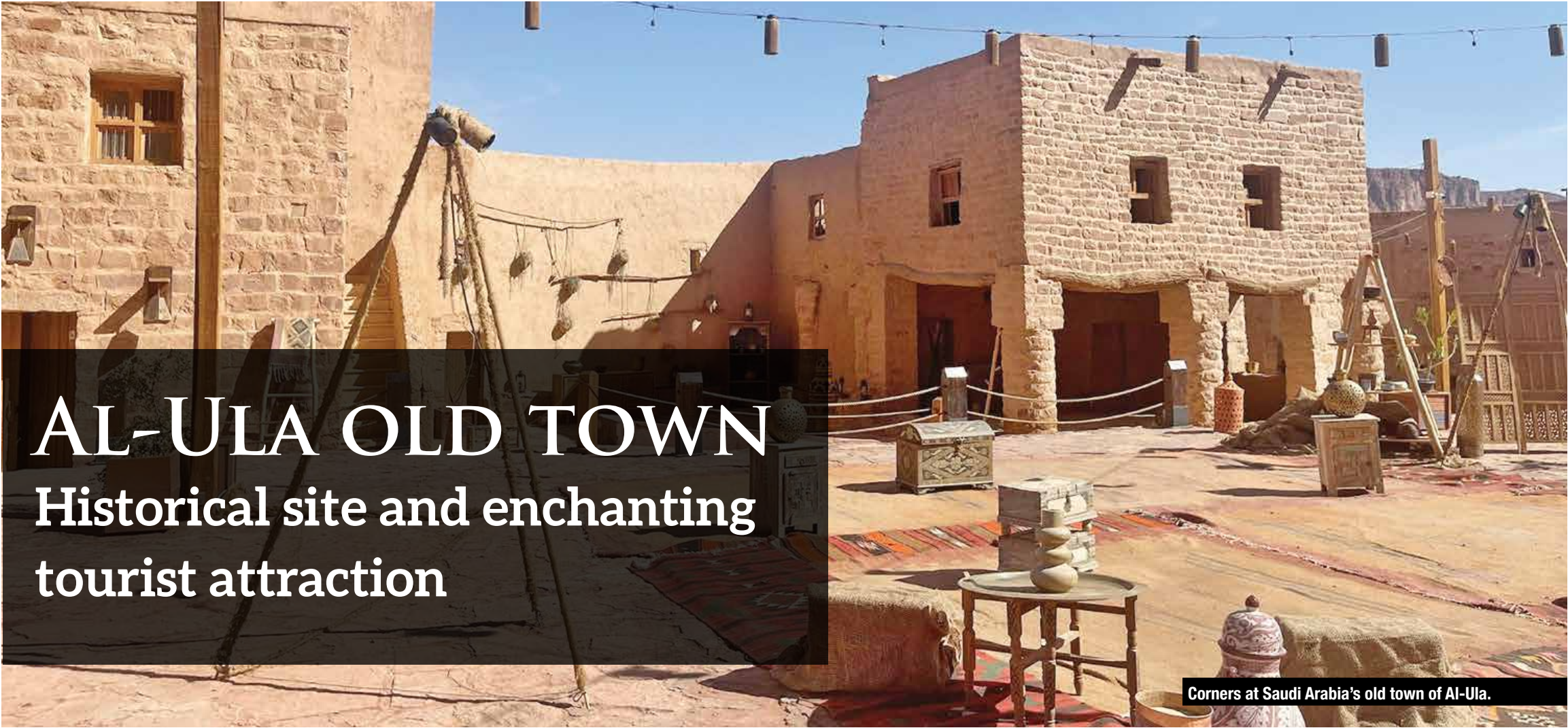
The paper, like much of legacy media, has struggled to adapt to the disruptions of the internet age, particularly the loss of advertising revenue and dwindling subscriber numbers. Billionaire owner Patrick Soon-Shiong, who bought the outlet six years ago, is understood to be subsidizing it to the tune of between \$30 and \$40 million a year. The Times was once a giant on the US media stage, with correspondents all over the country and around the world. But years of retrenchments have seen it shrink its once-mighty reach. Critics say while it still paints itself as a national paper with a West Coast perspective, it has a much more parochial feel nowadays. — AFP

LA Times staff walk out over job cut threats

LOS ANGELES: Unionized journalists at the Los Angeles Times walked off the job Friday for the first time in the paper’s 142-year history, after management said it planned significant job cuts to help plug a gaping financial hole.

Scores of employees gathered at a park in downtown Los Angeles to protest what they said were “obscene and unsustainable” contract changes being pushed on staff at the storied outlet in America’s second-biggest city. Others based in California state capital Sacramento and in Washington also downed pens, labor leaders said. “The changes to our con-

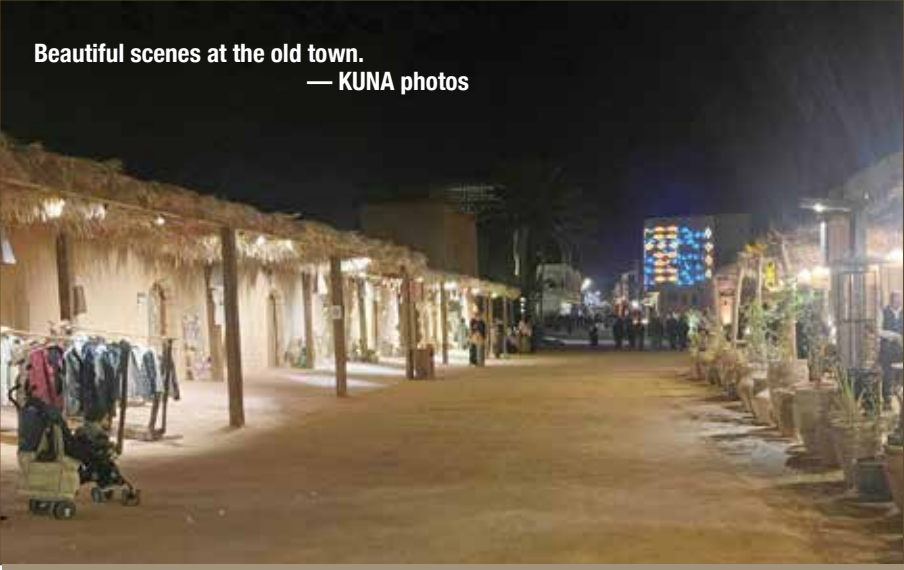
SUNDAY, JANUARY 21, 2024



AL-ULA OLD TOWN

Historical site and enchanting tourist attraction

Corners at Saudi Arabia's old town of Al-Ula.

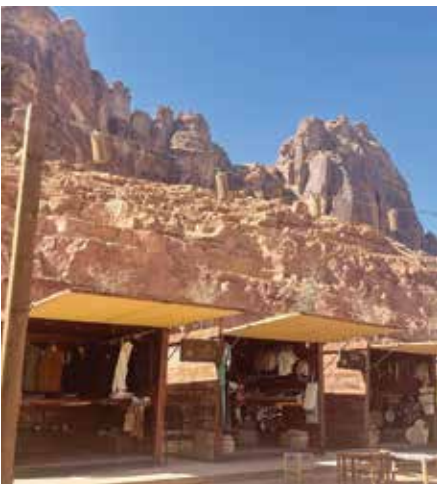


Beautiful scenes at the old town.
— KUNA photos

Saudi Arabia's old town of Al-Ula with its mud walls and narrow alleyways offers visitors an enchanting voyage through time and introduces tourists to Saudi heritage. The town's small shops, colloquially known as "Dikakeen", grant visitors the unique opportunity to purchase antiques or try out the traditional cuisine, as it also offers a variety of international restaurants. Al-Ula old town was recently awarded by the UN's World Tourism Organization for the great efforts exerted to safeguard its rich history. — KUNA



Old buildings



Ancient shop

Discarded Christmas trees, a gift to Stockholm's fish



Malin Kjellin is pictured as she loads old Christmas trees on a boat.



People from the Swedish Anglers Association, Sportfiskarna, throw old Christmas trees into the waters of Hammarby Sjostad.



Old Christmas trees are pictured after they were thrown into the waters of Hammarby Sjostad.

On a freezing January morning, dozens of discarded Christmas trees collected after the holidays are tossed into Stockholm's glacial waters, recycled to provide a welcoming habitat for marine life. The initiative, started by national sport fishing association Sportfiskarna in 2016 to help restore the endangered ecosystem, has been hailed by environmentalists. All the trees collected are from retailers who buy evergreens that have not been sprayed with pesticides.

Just days ago, the majestic Norway spruces held pride of place in cosy homes across Stockholm. Now, the tinsel and ornaments are being replaced by heavy rocks before the trees are thrown off a boat into the waters off the Hammarby Sjostad industrial zone. "Around here there's been a lot of construction, a lot of boats going in and out," Malin Kjellin, who heads the Sportfiskarna project, told AFP.

"There's not a lot of vegetation and these are really important habitats for fish to spawn that have disappeared," she says. "It's really hard to get (the habitat) back naturally. This is a way of substituting what has been lost." Since 2016, more than 1,000 trees collected after Christmas have been dropped in different spots. Kjellin pulled up one about to be tossed overboard. "If you look at it, there are plenty of places to hide in here. All these branches and needles. "These are really great places to lay the roe and also for juvenile fish to hide from bigger ones," she explained.

Fighting harmful algae
Underwater videos of the submerged trees shot in past years show gelatinous clusters of fish larvae nestled in the branches. "We have seen that it's really functioning," said an

by spills from human activities, where farming is the largest source."

"Since the 19th century, many of the coastal wetlands have been turned into farmland. "The wetlands close to the coast were very important habitats

choose it very carefully, you take it in and you live with it," said Camilla Hallstrom, a 63-year-old Stockholmer throwing her small spruce away at a collection point for the recycling project. "It's super to find environmentally



Old Christmas trees are pictured on a boat on its way to the waters of Hammarby Sjostad, before they are thrown into the water.

enthusiastic Yvonne Blomback of environmental group WWF. "These fish are very important for the ecosystem in the Baltic Sea. They are part of a food chain which helps to keep the algae under control," she said. "Over-fertilization that benefits algae is a problem in the whole of the Baltic Sea, caused

for the fish, so the fish have had huge problems to survive," Blomback said. January 13 marks the official end of Christmas celebrations in Scandinavia and is traditionally a day when many throw out their trees.

"Here in Sweden, you give the Christmas tree a personality, you

friendly solutions to reuse it!" The initiative has expanded to other Swedish regions. "Hopefully more people will do it. People can do it on their own," suggested Malin. —AFP



Malin Kjellin, project manager for the Swedish Anglers Association, Sportfiskarna, is pictured as she loads old Christmas trees on a boat. — AFP photos



Malin Kjellin is pictured as she loads old Christmas trees on a boat.



(From left) BAFTA chair, Sara Putt, British actors Naomi Ackie and Kingsley Ben-Adir and chair of the BAFTA film committee, Anna Higgs pose for a picture at the announcement of the British Academy Film Awards (BAFTA) nominations in central London.--AFP photos



Emma Baehr, Executive Director of Awards & Content.



BAFTA presenters Zainab Jiwa (left) and Ali Plumb (right) pose for a picture.

'Oppenheimer' tops nominations for BAFTAs

Oppenheimer" on Thursday led the shortlist of films vying for recognition at Britain's forthcoming BAFTA awards, earning an unrivalled 13 nominations, including a first ever for leading actor Cillian Murphy. Christopher Nolan's epic movie about the creation of the atomic bomb, which has grossed more than \$1 billion, has already cleaned up at the Golden Globes and Critics Choice Awards this month.

It is now the clear frontrunner for Oscars glory in March, some three weeks after the highlight of the annual British film calendar, the BAFTAs, on February 18. The blockbuster won BAFTA nom-

inations for best film, for Nolan (director and adapted screenplay), as well as for Murphy (leading actor), Emily Blunt (supporting actress) and Robert Downey Jr. (supporting actor).

"Poor Things", a surreal dark comedy, followed closely behind with 11 nods, including in the best film category and for Emma Stone's portrayal of a Victorian reanimated corpse with the brain of an infant. The American actress has already scooped Golden Globe and Critics Choice best actress awards for her no-holds-barred performance.

She will compete with Margot Robbie ("Barbie"), Carey Mulligan ("Maestro"), Sandra Huller ("Anatomy of a Fall"),

Fantasia Barrino ("The Colour Purple") and Vivian Oparah ("Rye Lane"). Other contenders for best film, aside from "Oppenheimer" and "Poor Things", include French courtroom drama "Anatomy of a Fall", 1970s-set prep school comedy "The Holdovers" and Martin Scorsese's "Killers of the Flower Moon".

'Barbenheimer'

Both Scorsese and his historical epic's leading man Leonardo DiCaprio missed out on BAFTA nods but the movie amassed nine nominations in total. The best director award will pit Nolan against Andrew Haigh ("All Of Us Strangers"), Justine Triet ("Anatomy of

a Fall), Alexander Payne ("The Holdovers"), Bradley Cooper ("Maestro") and Jonathan Glazer ("The Zone Of Interest").

Cooper also earned another individual nominations for his acclaimed bio-pic for original screenplay (shared with screenwriter Josh Singer) and best actor. He will battle Murphy, fellow Irishman Barry Keoghan ("Saltburn"), Colman Domingo ("Rustin"), Paul Giamatti for ("The Holdovers") and Teo Yoo ("Past Lives") for the gong.

The BAFTA shortlist was another disappointment for "Barbie"—the other half of last summer's "Barbenheimer" box office phenomenon—which only

managed five nominations.

Greta Gerwig's film, which turned nostalgia for the beloved doll into a sharp satire about misogyny and female empowerment, has so far failed to capture top prizes this awards season.

Reflecting on this year's shortlist, BAFTA chair Sara Putt said the 38 films with nominations reflected "an outstanding year for filmmaking". "They showcase ambitious, creative and hugely impressive voices from independent British debuts to global blockbusters," she added.—AFP



US video game designer, filmmaker and former video game programmer Jordan Mechner, poses during a photo session, in Paris on December 14, 2023.--AFP



'Prince of Persia' creator 'never imagined' game would be his magic carpet

For video game maker Jordan Mechner, "The Prince of Persia" has allowed him to achieve a childhood dream. "I had two dreams growing up: make video games and make movies," the acclaimed creator told AFP. "Thanks to 'Prince of Persia' I've achieved both." Thirteen years after the last installment of the pioneering game, Mechner's medieval hero is set to make a new appearance in "The Lost Crown", reviving a 30-year-old franchise that has sold more than 20 million copies.

French video game maker Ubisoft will release the new action-adventure Thursday inspired by the "One Thousand and One Nights" folktales. Much has changed between the game's genesis in Mechner's 1980s California "home studio" to the latest version developed in Ubisoft's studios in the French Mediterranean city of Montpellier.

It was one of the first games to use "motion capture", where movements are first filmed to make them more realistic once transferred to the screen. Back then, the 59-year-old American who has lived in Montpellier since 2015, used a VHS camera to film his little brother doing the full range of movements the

hero would need in the game. He then uploaded them image by image to a computer, using the rotoscoping technique borrowed from 20th century cartoon makers.

Mechner's amateur pianist father was also part of the family affair, composing the game's music. "It really was an artisanal production," he said. Upon its release in 1989, gamers were impressed by the advanced animation and fluid movements. And it established Mechner, who had already received attention in 1984 with "Karateka", a game he made entirely himself while still a student. He'd taught himself the basics of programming by reading magazines and experimenting on his Apple II computer which he was given as a teenager.

'Princess of Persia'

"Prince of Persia" became a cult saga with each new tech advance, above all going from 2D to 3D. It was acquired by Ubisoft in 2000 and was turned into a hit Disney movie in 2010. Mechner said he "never imagined" that the game's universe would last as long as it has.

He's now working on graphic novels, a popular art form in France. His "Re-

play: Memoires d'une famille" (Memoires of a Family), published by Delcourt, was released in April and recounts the story of his father and grandfather, Austrian Jewish refugees who made it to the United States just before World War II.

It will be released in English in March by Macmillan's First Second Books. It tells how his great uncle Joji managed to get an exit visa to move to France shortly after the Nazi takeover of Austria by showing off two watercolours painted by Adolf Hitler that he'd bought years earlier and stumbled on while cleaning out a cellar.

"After retiring, my grandfather spent three years writing a family memoir," he said. "I have to one day share these incredible family stories I grew up with." He also mixes in his personal life, such as an exchange with his two children after he told them in 2015 that he was moving to France. His son told him, "You should do something else besides working on 'Prince of Persia.'" To which his daughter added: "At least make 'Princess of Persia.'"—AFP

Rembrandt's hometown displays earliest known paintings

Rembrandt's earliest works, painted when the Dutch master was only 18 years old, will soon be on display together for the first time in his hometown of Leiden. Leiden's De Lakenhal museum, thought to be only a stone's throw from where Rembrandt's studio would have been, presented the collection of four paintings to media on Thursday.

The works are part of a series depicting the senses—"Spectacles Seller (allegory of sight)", "Three Musicians (allegory of hearing)", "Unconscious Patient (allegory of smell)", and "Stone Operation (allegory of touch)." Tantalizingly, a fifth Rembrandt in the series—"the allegory of taste"—has never been found.—AFP



A person looks at painting during the preview of the exhibition 'Rembrandt's four senses - his first paintings' in the De Lakenhal museum in Leiden.--AFP

Japan literary laureate unashamed about using ChatGPT

The winner of Japan's most prestigious literary award has acknowledged that about "five percent" of her futuristic novel was penned by ChatGPT, saying generative AI had helped unlock her potential. Since the 2022 launch of ChatGPT, an easy-to-use AI chatbot that can deliver an essay upon request within seconds, there have been growing worries about the impact on a range of sectors—books included.

Lauded by a judge for being "almost flawless" and "universally enjoyable", Rie Kudan's latest novel, "Tokyo-to Dojo-to" ("Sympathy Tower Tokyo"), bagged the biannual Akutagawa Prize on Wednesday. Set in a futuristic Tokyo, the book revolves around a high-rise prison tower and its architect's intolerance of criminals, with AI a recurring theme.

The 33-year-old author openly admitted that AI heavily influenced her writing process as well. "I made active use of generative AI like ChatGPT in writing this book," she told a ceremony following the winner's announcement. "I would say about five percent of the book quoted verbatim the sentences generated by AI."

Outside of her creative activity, Kudan said she frequently toys with AI, confiding her innermost thoughts that "I can never talk to anyone else about". ChatGPT's responses sometimes inspired dialogue in the novel, she added.

Going forward, she said she wants to keep "good relationships" with AI and "unleash my creativity" in co-existence with it. When contacted by AFP, the Society for the Promotion of Japanese Literature, the Akutagawa award's organiser, declined to comment.

On social media, opinions were divided on Kudan's unorthodox approach to writing, with sceptics calling it morally questionable and potentially undeserving of the prize. "So she wrote the book by deftly using AI ... Is that talented or not? I don't know," one wrote on X, formerly known as Twitter. But others celebrated her resourcefulness and the effort she put into experimenting with various prompts. "So this is how the Akutagawa laureate uses ChatGPT—not to slack off but to 'unleash creativity'," another social media user wrote.—AFP

Webb telescope discovers oldest black hole yet

The James Webb space telescope has discovered the oldest black hole ever detected, which was thriving so soon after the Big Bang that it challenges our understanding of how these celestial behemoths form, astronomers. The black hole was vigorously gobbling up its host galaxy just 430 million years after the birth of the universe during a period called the cosmic dawn, according to a study in the journal Nature. That makes it 200 million years older than any other massive black hole ever observed, study co-author and Cambridge University astronomer Jan Scholtz told AFP.

Yet it has a mass 1.6 million times greater than our Sun. Exactly how it had time to grow that big so quickly after the Big Bang 13.8 billion years ago will provide new information "for the next gener-

ation of theoretical models" aiming to explain what creates black holes, Scholtz said. Like all black holes, it is invisible and can only be detected by the vast explosions of light created when it gobbles up whatever matter is unlucky enough to be nearby.

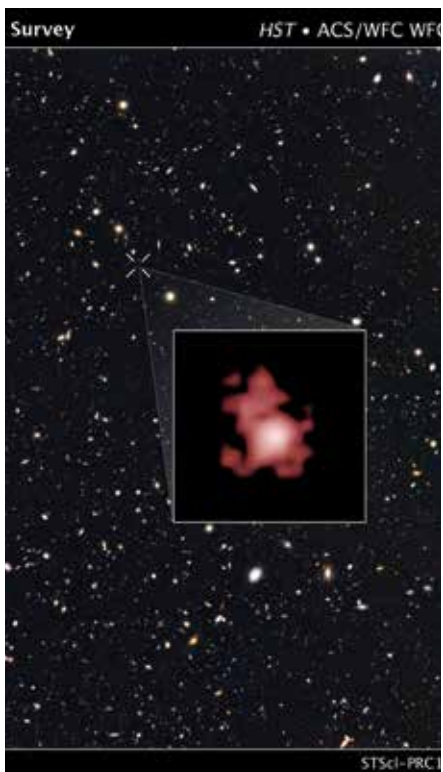
It was this light that allowed the Hubble space telescope in 2016 to spot its host galaxy GN-z11, which is in the direction of the Ursa Major constellation. At the time GN-z11 was the oldest—and therefore most distant—galaxy ever observed. However Hubble did not spot the black hole lurking at its centre.

In 2022, Webb usurped Hubble as the most powerful space telescope, unleashing a torrent of discoveries that have scientists rushing to keep up. Not only has it spotted the black hole at the heart of GN-z11, but it has also discov-

ered galaxies even further back in time and space, which are also bigger than had been thought possible.

The black hole was energetically eating up GN-z11 during the cosmic dawn, a period which came right after the universe's "dark ages," when stars and galaxies were first born. It normally takes the super massive black holes squatting at the centre of galaxies hundreds of millions—if not billions—of years to form. So how could this one have grown so quickly?

Study co-author Stephane Charlot, an astrophysicist at France's Institut d'Astrophysique de Paris, suggested that black holes in the early universe could have been formed in a different way than those closer by.—AFP





Models present creations by Walter Van Beirendonck for the Menswear Ready-to-wear Fall-Winter 2024/2025 collection as part of the Paris Fashion Week, in Paris. — AFP photos

THE ZANY BELGIAN DESIGNER KEEPING FASHION FUN

Always guaranteed to bring a touch of craziness and color to Paris Fashion Week, Belgian designer Walter Van Beirendonck could not help having a dig Wednesday at the megabrands dominating the industry. Even by the veteran designer's zany standards, his latest menswear show was a wildly imaginative collection, featuring jackets with tentacles, enormous hats, huge blue goat horns and a bright

green gas mask. Perhaps the most interesting detail was jackets with holes running right through from front to back. All of it was lapped up by Van Beirendonck's adoring fans—many of them extravagantly dressed in his past outfits—who see him as a blast of much-needed fun in the self-serious world of high fashion. The designer purposely went for an intimate setting this season to contrast

with the enormous shows put on by billion-dollar brands like Dior, Chanel and Louis Vuitton. "I don't want to do a big Far West movie," he told AFP backstage, in a dig at Louis Vuitton's ultra-expensive, cowboy-themed show the night before. "I feel it's really sometimes too much what they are doing. There's so much money being spent, they should spend it on better things," he said with a laugh. Van Beirendonck even eschewed the

usual pounding soundtrack of a fashion show, instead planting a hidden speaker on each model, playing the likes of Joy Division and David Bowie. He said that "more than ever" it was difficult to survive as an independent label, but it was gratifying to see young people discovering his work. Some of the new collection resurrected elements from his groundbreaking work in the 1990s, including prosthetics that added

strange new shapes to the models' faces, and his own. "Everything is completely new, it's not nostalgic. But it's a little bit like a reminder of what I did in the past, and which is now popping up everywhere," he said. "I have a really nice following of people that like what I'm doing—really young people are discovering my work from the 90s. It's a nice energy."—AFP



Models present creations by Bluemarle for the Menswear Ready-to-wear Fall-Winter 2024/2025 collection as part of the Paris Fashion Week, in Paris.--AFP photos

Sports

Iraq stun Japan to reach last 16

Struggling Iran also reach Asian Cup knockout rounds

DOHA: Iraq coach Jesus Casas said his team were “close to perfect” in stunning Asian Cup favorites Japan 2-1 on Friday to reach the knockout rounds, where they were joined by rivals Iran. Aymen Hussein scored two first-half headers in front of nearly 40,000 in Doha to consign four-time champions Japan to a first Asian Cup group-stage defeat in 26 matches. It also set Japan on a potential collision course with Son Heung-min’s South Korea in the last 16, assuming they still progress.

Casas said that the first big shock of the tournament was “only one win” but hailed it as “a great day for Iraqi people”. “I think the perfect match doesn’t exist,” said the Spaniard. “It’s impossible to have a perfect match, but we were close to perfect.” Hussein headed Iraq — ranked 63 in the world compared to Japan’s 17 — into the lead in the fifth minute and struck again in first-half injury time. Iraq endured a nervous finish after Liverpool’s Wataru Endo pulled one back in the third of eight minutes of injury time at the end of the game. “All the players were concentrating on this match and we were all ready for it,” said Hussein, who also scored in a 3-1 win over Indonesia. Iraq won the Asian Cup in 2007 and are dreaming of upsetting the odds all over again.

‘Painful memory’

Also Friday, Indonesia defeated Vietnam 1-0 thanks to a 42nd-minute penalty by Asnawi Mangkualam. It means Indonesia and Japan will battle it out on Wednesday for the second qualification spot from Group D.

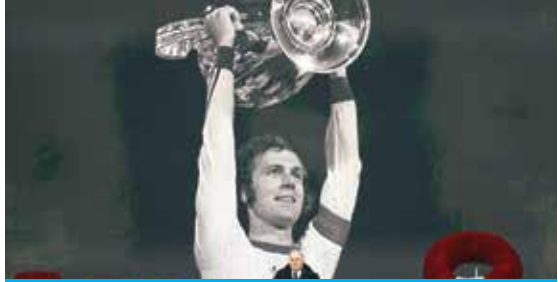


Sheikha Fajr Bader Al-Sabah

Germany pays emotional tribute to Beckenbauer

MUNICH: Germany said an emotional goodbye to Franz Beckenbauer on Friday, former teammate Uli Hoeness crediting the football legend with making Germans “proud” again. Beckenbauer died on Jan 7 in Austria and was laid to rest in a private ceremony in Munich five days later. Friday’s ceremony, which featured leading lights of German football and politics, was open to the public, giving fans a final chance to celebrate the man known as ‘Der Kaiser’ - The Emperor.

Completed for the 2006 World Cup, which Beck-



MUNICH: Honorary president of FC Bayern Munich Uli Hoeness delivers his speech during a farewell ceremony in tribute to late German football legend Franz Beckenbauer at the Allianz Arena on Jan 19, 2024. — AFP

Sarrazin revels in double Kitzbuehel downhill delight

KITZBUHEL, Austria: France’s Cyprien Sarrazin laid down a near-faultless run on Saturday to claim a second World Cup downhill victory in two days on the mythical Kitzbuehel course. Sarrazin’s fifth career victory came on the back of an electric descent of the 3.3km-long Streif course, widely regarded as the most exacting on the circuit, in 1min 52.96sec, pushing Swiss rival Marco Odermatt into second at 0.91sec.

Italy’s Dominik Paris, a four-time winner in Kitzbuehel with three downhill and one super-G, rounded out the podium, a further 0.53sec adrift, with just eight racers getting within two seconds of Sarrazin’s pace. As Sarrazin raced into the finish area, his eyes turned to the large electronic result board. With first place confirmed, the French racer ripped off his skis and jumped up on to the safety pads on the side of the piste, pumping his arms skywards and letting out an enormous roar.

Kitzbuehel is well known for the tens of thousands of knowledgeable fans who pack into the upmarket Tyrolean resort and Sarrazin’s show of emotion was greeted with a similarly gladiatorial response. “That really was ‘the’ run today,” said Sarrazin. “It was incredible, I enjoyed myself from top to bottom. I felt that there was speed. “I cross the line, I turn my head and I see that there is green for first place, so I scream.”

Sarrazin, who admitted to shedding a tear in bed after Friday’s victory, added: “Can we say I’m an artist? I don’t know but it’s just crazy, I really enjoyed it and showed everyone what I love doing. It was all good vibes. “For all those people who say it was one of the best runs they’ve seen, well that’s the best compliment they can pay me.”

although finishing third might also be enough. Hajime Moriyasu’s Japan beat Vietnam 4-2 in their opener and went into the Iraq game on the back of a 10-match winning streak in which they scored 43 goals.

Japan beat Spain and Germany to reach the last 16 of the 2022 Qatar World Cup. But they had no answer to the power and aggression of an Iraq side roared on by most of the crowd at Education City Stadium. Hussein headed home for the opening goal when the ball fell to him after Japan goalkeeper Zion Suzuki flapped at a cross. He notched his second just before half-time, holding off Hiroki Ito to nod home from close range. “The atmosphere was like an away game and conceding early hurt us,” said Moriyasu, but he refused to criticise the 21-year-old Suzuki, who was also shaky against Vietnam. “For him and for the team it will be a painful memory, but I want him to embrace the challenge,” said the coach.

Iran joined Iraq, Australia and hosts and holders Qatar in the last 16 but they made hard work of beating Hong Kong 1-0. On paper the fixture was among the biggest mismatches at the tournament, with Iran ranked 21st in the world to Hong Kong’s 150. Iran, hunting a record-equaling fourth continental crown, dominated possession in front of 36,412 at the Khalifa International Stadium. But Hong Kong — playing at their first Asian Cup in more than 55 years — had opportunities early on, especially when Brazil-born forward Everton Camargo blazed over from inside the box. —AFP

Third round of dressage league starts Sunday

KUWAIT: The third round of the dressage league is set to take place at the Kuwait Hunting and Equestrian Club, with the support of the Kuwait Equestrian Federation, on Sunday. Anticipating a significant turnout, the event will witness the arrival of new horses. The tournament features five levels, ranging from beginners to advanced.

Sheikha Fajr Bader Al-Sabah chairs the dressage committee of KEF, with committee members including Alaa Salem Al-Sultan, Abdullah Al-Awadhi, Naseeba Al-Maousherji, Dana Buresli and Abdullah Al-Amer. Sheikha Fajr highlighted that the league consists of eight rounds, with the third one commencing today.

enbauer ran as president of the organizing committee, Munich’s Allianz Arena was a fitting venue for the public goodbye. “The Allianz Arena, the most beautiful stadium in the world, would never have been built without Franz,” Hoeness said. Despite the subzero conditions, around 20,000 people gathered under blue skies in the Bavarian capital.

The ceremony opened with a rendition of Con Te Partiro performed by Munich tenor Jonas Kaufmann. He ended the event with Nessun Dorma, an aria from Puccini’s opera Turandot, which became the unofficial anthem of the 1990 World Cup. It was sung by the Three Tenors in Rome on the eve of the final which Germany, coached by Beckenbauer, won. Beckenbauer’s famous number five, made of red roses, laid on the green turf of the Allianz, alongside wreaths placed by the biggest clubs in the world including Liverpool and Barcelona.

‘I miss you deeply’

Born in 1945 in the suburbs of Munich, the peerless Beckenbauer became a national treasure in a Germany still grappling with the legacy of the Second World War. Winning national and European titles with Bayern Munich, Beckenbauer’s West Germany captured the 1972 Euros and the 1974 World Cup. As a coach, Beckenbauer guided the nation to their next World Cup in 1990, before playing a leading if controversial role in securing the 2006 tournament on home soil. The tournament, known in Germany as the ‘Summer Fairytale’, helped change the nation’s view of itself, six decades after the end of the war. Hoeness, who played alongside Beckenbauer at Bayern and at an international level, said bringing the World Cup to Germany was Der Kaiser’s “masterpiece”. —AFP

Streak of form

The result confirms the amazing streak of form Sarrazin is enjoying, moving him to within six points of Odermatt in the downhill standings. The Swiss racer remains well in control of the overall standings. The 29-year-old Frenchman won the super-G and finished second in both downhill in Wengen last week, having also won the Bormio downhill at the end of December.

Before this season, Sarrazin was a relative unknown, with one parallel giant slalom victory to his name, back in 2016, as well as a second place in a giant slalom in 2019, both in Alta Badia. His victory in the opening downhill in Kitzbuehel on Saturday saw him become the first French winner in the discipline here in 27 years, Luc Alphand having won in 1997. —AFP



KITZBUHEL: Winner France’s Cyprien Sarrazin celebrates on the podium of the Men’s Downhill event of FIS Alpine Skiing World Cup on Jan 20, 2024. - AFP



AL-RAYYAN, Qatar: Iraq’s defender Merchas Doski heads the ball past Japan’s midfielder Hidemasa Morita during the Qatar 2023 AFC Asian Cup Group D football match at the Education City Stadium on Jan 19, 2024. — AFP

Plans are underway to invite international referees to conduct training courses for riders and trainers. Sheikha Fajr mentioned that the technical director of the federation has been providing training for riders and coaches since the beginning of the season. The focus is on teaching them how to execute the dressage test accurately, ensuring the maximum points for each required move in the test.

Emphasizing that dressage relies on taming horses, which is fundamental to equestrianism, Sheikha Fajr explained that the sport is dedicated to teaching both the horse and the rider balancing, flexibility, and the ability to transition smoothly between speeds with minimal effort from the rider and complete obedience from the horse. Clear and precise communication with the horse is crucial.

Meanwhile, rider Abdullah Al-Amer encouraged show jumping riders to participate in dressage championships, emphasizing that dressage is the core of equestrianism. He noted the active participation of skilled riders in dressage championships.



Sports Illustrated mag lays off staff

NEW YORK: Staff at Sports Illustrated, the famed American sports magazine that became a fixture for athletes and fans, were laid off on Friday by publisher The Arena Group, according to the SI employees union. Arena group missed a licensing rights payment to brand owner Authentic Brands Group (ABG), which ended its deal with Arena, prompting layoff notices being sent.

“Earlier today, the workers of Sports Illustrated were notified that The Arena Group is planning to lay off a significant number, possibly all, of the Guild-represented workers at SI, a result of ABG revoking Arena’s license to publish SI,” the union said in a statement. “This is another difficult day in what has been a difficult four years for Sports Illustrated under Arena Group stewardship. “We are calling upon ABG to ensure the continued publication of SI and allow it to serve our audience in the way it has for nearly 70 years.”

Authentic, which bought Sports Illustrated publishing rights for \$110 million from Meredith in 2019, told AFP in a statement that SI will continue its activities but gave no further details. A notice sent to staffers by Arena said it would “be laying off staff that work on the SI brand”. “Some employees will be terminated immediately... and paid in lieu of the applicable notice period under the (union contract). Employees with a last working day of today will be contacted. Other employees will be expected to work through the end of the notice period.”

On Thursday, Arena announced it was terminating 100 employees after incurring substantial debt on its way to a more streamlined business model. It was uncertain what Authentic’s plans were for the SI brand. Sports Illustrated, which had suffered earlier rounds of layoffs, struggled with the transition to the digital age from the print area, where being featured on its cover was considered a milestone achievement for athletes.

SI’s Swimsuit Issue became famous for superstar models and athletes in swimwear, with photographs made in exotic locations all over the world. The first issue debuted in Aug 1954 showing a Major League Baseball image of Milwaukee Braves batter Eddie Matthews at home plate with a backdrop of the huge stands at County Stadium in Milwaukee.

SI was a hit for its color photographs and the long-form stories that accompanied the pictures — visual and written storytelling that became an industry standard. A myth grew about the SI cover jinx when teams would be featured on the front of the magazine only to suffer a major loss or injury soon after.

Among the athletes featured the most on SI covers are retired NBA legend Michael Jordan, former heavyweight boxing champion Muhammad Ali, NBA superstar LeBron James, 15-time major golf champion Tiger Woods and retired NBA star Magic Johnson. —AFP

Jokic, Murray star as Nuggets hand Celtics home loss

LOS ANGELES: Nikola Jokic and Jamal Murray combined for 69 points as the Denver Nuggets ended Boston’s unbeaten home start to the season with a thrilling 102-100 victory on Friday. A heavyweight showdown between the reigning NBA champions and a league-leading Celtics side lived up to the billing in a gripping battle at Boston’s TD Garden. Denver’s victory snapped Boston’s 20-game unbeaten run at home this season, the Nuggets laying down a psychological marker in what could well turn out to be a possible NBA Finals preview. Both two-time NBA Most Valuable Player Jokic and Murray were in scintillating form throughout. Jokic finished with 34 points, 12 rebounds and nine assists while Murray led the Nuggets scoring with 35 points from 15-of-21 shooting. “During the season you’ve got to find ways of motivating yourself and your team, and them not having a loss at home really motivated us,” Murray said afterwards.

“We just wanted to come here and bring the right energy regardless. It was good to get a dub (win) today,” added Murray, who also had eight rebounds and five assists. “They’ve got a great team, lot of guys I’m familiar with that I’ve been playing with or against my whole life — just a lot of fun when it gets competitive and physical like that. Just a really good win on the road.” Derrick White led Boston’s scoring with 24 points while Jayson Tatum added 22 and Kristaps Porzingis 21. For long periods of Friday’s titanic battle, it looked as if Boston would escape with their unbeaten home record intact in a game that saw the lead change hands 13 times. The Celtics built a hefty 12-point lead during the second quarter with Tatum scoring 10 points and Jaylen Brown adding seven.

But Denver always managed to claw their way back into the contest and edged ahead 99-98 with 3min 36sec remaining after Jokic’s driving hook shot. Tatum missed an opportunity to tie the game with an unsuccessful driving layup with 17 seconds left and the Nuggets held on for a gutsy victory.

Booker brilliance

Boston remain top of the Eastern Conference with 32 wins and 10 defeats, leading second-placed Milwaukee (28-13). Denver improved to 29-14 and are third in the Western Conference behind Minnesota (30-11) and Oklahoma City (28-13). In other games around the NBA on Friday, Devin Booker produced a superb 52-point display as the Phoenix Suns routed the New Orleans Pelicans 123-109 on the road.

Suns point guard Booker made six three-pointers while shooting 18 of 30 from the field in an impressive Phoenix win. Kevin Durant added 26 points for the Suns with Bradley Beal scoring 13. Zion Williamson scored 24 points for New Orleans who trailed almost for the entirety of the contest. Elsewhere Friday, hopes of a Los Angeles Lakers’ revival ground to a halt as the 17-time NBA champions were thumped 130-112 by the Brooklyn Nets. Impressive back-to-back wins over Oklahoma City and Dallas this week encouraged optimism that the struggling Lakers may have turned a corner. —AFP



BOSTON: Nikola Jokic of the Denver Nuggets looks for a way past Kristaps Porzingis and Jayson Tatum of the Boston Celtics during the second half at TD Garden on Jan 19, 2024. - AFP

Sports

Salah ruled out of two AFCON games as Senegal, Cape Verde reach last 16

Tanzania sack coach Amrouche after he is banned for Morocco comments

ABIDJAN: Record seven-time champions Egypt were dealt a major blow on Friday as captain Mohamed Salah was ruled out of two Africa Cup of Nations games with a hamstring injury, while holders Senegal and Cape Verde qualified for the last 16. The Egyptian Football Association confirmed in a statement that Liverpool star Salah would not be able to return for his country unless they reach the quarter-finals at the tournament.

The 31-year-old came off late in the first half of the Pharaohs' 2-2 draw with Ghana on Thursday. He will therefore sit out Monday's final group game against Cape Verde and any last-16 tie that would follow that. After drawing their opening two games, Egypt need to beat Cape Verde to be guaranteed of advancing in second place in Group B.

That would tee up a last-16 tie in San-Pedro on Jan 28, while they could also potentially qualify as one of the best third-placed teams. Salah will therefore only feature again at the competition if Egypt make it to a quarter-final on Feb 2 or 3. Senegal, who beat Salah's Egypt on penalties in the final of the last AFCON, clinched a spot in the next round with one group game to spare thanks to a 3-1 win over Cameroon in Yamoussoukro.

Ismaila Sarr of Marseille put the reigning champions ahead early on and later set up Habib Diallo to make it 2-0. Jean-Charles Castelletto pulled one back, but Senegal were not to be denied a convincing victory and talisman Sadio Mane put the outcome beyond doubt late on. Senegal have a maximum six points after two Group C matches, while Cameroon have only one and their hopes of advancing to the last 16 are in the balance. "I remember that in 2017 we lost to Cameroon in the quarterfinals, so during this match we did everything to win," said Marseille forward Sarr.

Inter breeze past Lazio into Italian Super Cup final

RIYADH: Inter Milan will face Napoli in the Italian Super Cup final after comfortably beating Lazio 3-0 in Friday's clash in Riyadh. Goals in each half from Marcus Thuram and Davide Frattesi and Hakan Calhanoglu's penalty four minutes after the break were enough for Serie A leaders Inter to get past Lazio at Al-Awwal Park. Simone Inzaghi's team, the current holders, will now face Napoli on Monday night at the same stadium after the Italian champions beat Fiorentina 3-0 on Thursday.

"It was a great performance, we had a lot of fun out there, like we haven't for a while," said Nicola Barella to Mediaset. "Everyone wanted the ball today, we had fun and that is important... it's taken a lot of work to reach this level of quality." Inzaghi now has a chance to win the Super Cup for a record-breaking fifth time in his career.

A win for Inter on Monday would also give them a third straight Super Cup victory, making them the second team to complete the hat-trick after local rivals AC Milan between 1992 and 1994. "We approached the game well, the boys played really well. We've got to the final which is what we wanted, now we need to recover in time for the match with Napoli which will be very difficult," said Inzaghi.

Inter have a tight title race with Juventus and the Champions League last-16 to contend with in the coming weeks but Inzaghi brought out the big

Bebe stunner

Later on in Group C Guinea, again missing star striker Serhou Guirassy, beat Gambia 1-0 at the same venue thanks to Aguibou Camara's second-half goal. The result leaves Guinea second in the section on four points, meaning they need just a draw against Senegal in their next match to guarantee qualification for the last 16, while a victory will see them progress as group winners. Cameroon and Gambia will meet each other next and can both hope to at least progress as one of the four best third-placed sides.

Earlier, Cape Verde became the first team to qualify for the last 16 thanks to a convincing 3-0 win over Mozambique in Abidjan. Former Manchester United forward Bebe set the Atlantic Ocean island nation on their way with a remarkable first-half free-kick from 40 metres at the Felix Houphouet-Boigny Stadium. Captain Ryan Mendes doubled their lead just after half-time and Kevin Pina wrapped up the win with a stunning strike midway through the second half.

Cape Verde's biggest ever AFCON victory leaves them on six points from two games and means they are now certain to top Group B, after they beat Ghana 2-1 in their opening game.

"I don't know how far we can go. Now we are into the last 16 and we just need to keep working as we have been," said Mendes. "We know it won't be easy but we believe in ourselves and in our work." Cape Verde already know they will stay in Abidjan for a last-16 tie against a third-placed team on Jan 29. Mozambique, appearing at their fifth Cup of Nations, have still never won a match in 14 attempts at the tournament.

Tanzania sack coach

Meanwhile, Tanzania fired coach Adel Amrouche after he was banned for eight matches and fined \$10,000 over comments about Morocco, a Confederation of African Football (CAF) official told AFP. His dismissal was confirmed by the Tanzanian Football Federation with Hemed Suleiman promoted from assistant coach to caretaker boss for the rest of their AFCON campaign. The Group F outsiders lost 3-0 to Morocco on Wednesday and still have to



RIYADH: Lazio's Spanish defender Mario Gila Fuentes is marked by Inter Milan's Turkish midfielder Hakan Calhanoglu during the Italian Super Cup semifinal match at Al-Awwal Park Stadium on Jan 19, 2024. — AFP

guns to shoot down Lazio. An uninterested-looking Lazio barely had a kick in a one-sided contest which showed why Inter are favorites to take the Scudetto from Napoli come May. Inter created a huge number of chances while Barella and Lautaro Martinez both had efforts hit the bar in a dominant display.

Lazio meanwhile will head back to Rome after having not created an opening in front of a largely tepid crowd in the Saudi Arabian capital. Napoli's win over Fiorentina was played out in front of a two-thirds empty ground and while Inter and Lazio had a bigger crowd there was limited enthusiasm from the stands. This season's Super Cup in the first to feature four teams, with the top two in last season's Serie A and the two Italian Cup finalists contesting the tournament. — AFP



Thierry Henry

pics football tournament which kicks off on July 24, two days before the opening ceremony. Each team is allowed three players over the age of limit of 23, and Henry, who played 123 times for France's senior team, hopes that the prospect of playing at an Olympics at home will attract players, but he said he also had not heard from other

over-age stars, such as Antoine Griezmann.

"No one has approached me. They ask each other," Henry said. "Let's be honest, it's the Olympics in France, so it's a big deal for everyone. If you talk to any player in France, they'd like to do the Olympics. But will they be able to?" I have a lot of possibilities and very few certainties," said Henry of his squad. "That's inherent in the youth category." — AFP



ABIDJAN: Egypt's forward Mohamed Salah runs with the ball during the Africa Cup of Nations (CAN) 2024 group B football match against Ghana at the Felix Houphouet-Boigny Stadium on Jan 18, 2024. — AFP

rouche after he was banned for eight matches and fined \$10,000 over comments about Morocco, a Confederation of African Football (CAF) official told AFP. His dismissal was confirmed by the Tanzanian Football Federation with Hemed Suleiman promoted from assistant coach to caretaker boss for the rest of their AFCON campaign. The Group F outsiders lost 3-0 to Morocco on Wednesday and still have to

Low-key debut for Suarez as Miami held by El Salvador

SAN SALVADOR: Luis Suarez made a subdued debut alongside former Barcelona team-mate Lionel Messi as Inter Miami kicked off their pre-season tour Friday with a 0-0 draw against El Salvador. Suarez, who signed for Major League Soccer's Miami last month from Brazilian club Gremio, started in attack alongside Argentine superstar Messi at the Estadio Cuscatlan in San Salvador.

But the 36-year-old Uruguayan forward struggled to find his footing in a low-key start to his career with the Florida franchise. Suarez, Messi and fellow former Barcelona players Sergio Busquets and Jordi Alba were all substituted at half-time with the match scoreless. Messi came closest to opening the scoring on 36 minutes, latching on to a clever touch from Busquets and rifling a volley towards goal only to be denied by El Salvador goalkeeper Mario Martinez, who also stopped the Argentine's follow-up effort.

Martinez was also alert four minutes later when Alba burst into the box only to see his shot parried away. El Salvador almost snatched victory in the 83rd minute, but Styven Vasquez's clever header cannoned off the bar. Friday's match launched a hectic series of pre-season friendlies for Miami as they prepare to kick off the new MLS season against Real Salt Lake on February 21.

Miami play FC Dallas in a friendly on Monday,

play Zambia and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Before Amrouche was axed, a CAF official said "(the organization) has suspended the coach for eight matches after comments he made about Moroccan officials in a TV interview". Algeria-born Amrouche alleged Moroccan officials within CAF decide who referees matches involving the senior men's national team, and at what time they kick off. — AFP

then head to Saudi Arabia for games against Al-Hilal on Jan 29. They face Al-Nassr on Feb 1 — a game that should see Messi line up against old rival Cristiano Ronaldo once more. Miami then travel to Asia to play friendlies against a Hong Kong select team on Feb 4 before taking on Japanese side Vissel Kobe three days later. The Herons return to the United States for a final pre-season game against Argentine squad Newell's Old Boys on Feb 15. — AFP



SAN SALVADOR: Inter Miami's Argentine forward Lionel Messi and El Salvador's midfielder Melvin Cartagena vie for the ball during a friendly at the Cuscatlan stadium on Jan 19, 2024. — AFP

Coach Henry dreams of Mbappe and gold for Olympic hosts

PARIS: Coach Thierry Henry hopes that Kylian Mbappe and other French World Cup stars might make themselves available for his team at the Paris Olympics. The 25-year old Mbappe, France's biggest star, will be a free agent in the summer and his choice of club has provoked intense speculation. The Paris Saint-Germain striker has long been linked with a move to Real Madrid.

"Kylian has a special place everywhere," Henry, France's under-21 and Olympic coach, told AFP in an interview on Friday. "But there's a difference between wanting something and being able to attain it. I don't know where he'll end up, but the club will have a say. I haven't contacted him about it yet."

Hosts France qualified automatically for the Olym-

Classifieds

Clinics & Hospitals

Clinics

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

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

Hospitals

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

Change of Name

I, Aliza Alekar, holder of Indian Passport No. W7995539 having permanent address, India, Maharashtra, India - 402309. Residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as under (Given name) Aliza Akhlaque and (Surname) Alekar (**#4595**) **19/1/2024**

Indian Passport no. Z 2815759 having permanent address at S/o. Mayandi Kayavayal Melasem Bon-mari Kallupatty post. Siva Gangai district. Deva Kottai, Tamilnadu pincode 630306 residing in Kuwait at present here by declare that henceforth my name will be read as under given name - Pichaimuthu and surname Mayandi. (**#4582**) **18/1/2024**

For labor-related inquiries and complaints: Call MSAL hotline 128

Sainz makes Dakar Rally history

‘El Matador’ delivers German outfit Audi first title



YANBU: Team Audi Sport's Spanish driver Carlos Sainz and his Spanish co-driver Lucas Cruzof celebrate their victory after crossing the finish line of stage 12 on Jan 19, 2024, at the end of the Dakar Rally 2024. — AFP

Kuwait's Al-Youha sets new record at Dortmund meet



DORTMUND: Kuwait's Yaqoub Al-Youha finished first in the men's 60m hurdles race at the Sparkassen Indoor Meeting Dortmund, registering a new tournament record of 7.58 seconds. He is participating in the tournament as part of his preparations for the Tehran Asian Indoor Championships.

YANBU, Saudi Arabia: Veteran Spanish driver Carlos Sainz won the gruelling Dakar Rally for a fourth time on Friday, becoming the oldest winner of the race at 61. The two-time world rally champion known as 'El Matador' had been all but guaranteed success when closest rival Sebastien Loeb was stranded in the desert for over an hour in Thursday's penultimate stage. On arriving, Sainz climbed out of his Audi car and jumped into the arms of his son, Ferrari Formula One driver Carlos Sainz Jr.

Sainz had led since the sixth stage and, aided by his fellow Audi drivers Sweden's Mattias Ekstrom and France's 'Mr Dakar', 14-time champion Stephane Peterhansel, controlled the race from then on. He finished more than an hour ahead of Belgian debutant Guillaume De Mevius (Toyota) with nine-time world rally champion Loeb (Prodrive) third, slipping a place from his two successive runners-up spots.

Sainz delivered German outfit Audi their first Dakar title. The Spaniard's fourth win takes him along-

side Ari Vatanen in the rally winners' roll of honor. He trails only the five victories of Qatar's Nasser Al Attiyah — whose defense of his title ended early this year — and Peterhansel and his eight car triumphs. This year was 58-year-old Peterhansel's final race.

Sainz said his boundless enthusiasm had kept him in the driving seat. "I think the energy comes from the passion I have," he said. "It's obviously, believing in yourself, believing that you can still drive and a lot of work behind the scenes as well. "To be here at my age and to stay at the level, you need to work a lot beforehand. "It doesn't just come like that. It shows that when you work hard, normally it pays off."

Sainz — whose previous wins came in 2010, 2018 and two years later — said he was unsure whether he would pursue a fifth title in 2025. "At the moment, I want to enjoy this victory and I will think about my future in the next weeks," he said.

De Mevius could barely believe he had battled his way to the podium. "It was a crazy race," the

29-year-old said. "We never expected to be on the podium. We always dreamed about it, but it was not the objective at the beginning of the race. "It's an amazing feeling to be here, it's an amazing feeling to be second." Earlier American Ricky Brabec had taken the honors in the motorbike category for a second time.

The 32-year-old Honda rider held an advantage of 10min 53sec, as the 12th stage brought the curtain down, over Botswana's Ross Branch on a Hero. Frenchman Adrien van Beveren, 33, claimed his first podium finish in the rally to fill third spot. Brabec had made history in 2020 when he became the first American to win the crown, but he was just as excited about doubling his tally. "I had chills down my spine as I crossed the finishing line," he said. "I still do not have words for how I feel, save it was a smooth ride, the team was unreal. I do not know how we put together such a perfect Dakar, I never fell once." — AFP

McIlroy back in Dubai hunt after magical 63

DUBAI: Rory McIlroy conjured up a magical third round 63 to reignite his quest for a fourth Dubai Desert Classic title on Saturday. After rounds of 71 and 70 the Northern Irishman appeared to be out of the running, going into the weekend trailing overnight leader Cameron Young by 10 shots. McIlroy knew he needed to produce something special to defend his title and he did just that with his brilliant bogey-free nine-under par effort to leave him in a share of second.

The world number two executed a grandstand finish, making an eagle putt from the fringe from nearly 45 feet. At almost the same time, Young made a double bogey on the par-3 seventh hole after hitting his tee shot into the water. That tied the two players on top at 12-under par. American Young would later make three

birdies on the back nine to finish on one-under par 71 and lead by two shots going into the final round.

McIlroy moved to 12-under par with the best round of the week so far, where he was joined by Poland's Adrian Meronk (70). Crowd favorite McIlroy, who secured his first professional win in Dubai in 2009 and played for the first time in the tournament as an amateur in 2006, matched his lowest round in the tournament in 13 appearances (first round in 2014).

"Because of the way the course is playing, I thought to myself, if I could shoot two rounds of 67s over the weekend, I would have a pretty good chance to at least contend," said the man of the day. "I've sort of nearly made up those 10 shots up in one day. So, I'm in a much better position than I thought I would be," said McIlroy, who could become the most successful player in the 35-year history of the Dubai Desert Classic with his fourth title win on Sunday.

"And obviously, that was a massive bonus at the last with the eagle. But yeah, I sort of expected if I played well today to still be four or five behind going into tomorrow, I'd have some chance. Looks like I'll be a little closer than that." McIlroy said he knew



DUBAI: Rory McIlroy of Northern Ireland plays a bunker shot on the 3rd hole during the second round of the Hero Dubai Desert Classic on the Majlis Course at the Emirates Golf Club on Jan 19, 2024. — AFP

he needed to play well on the tougher front nine of the Majlis course, and he did that with five birdies, three of them coming in succession from the seventh onwards. — AFP



KUWAIT: Mohammad Al-Dahani celebrates with his teammates.

Daihani qualifies for Paris Olympics

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait secured its second qualification spot for the Paris 2024 Olympics, thanks to shooter Mohammad Nayef Al-Daihani. He clinched third place in the men's individual skeet competition at the Asian Shotgun Championship, with Chinese Taipei's Lee Meng Yuan taking first place and India's Naruka Anant Jeet Singh securing second place. In the women's skeet, China's Gao Jinmei claimed first place and India's Raiza Dhilon secured second place, earning both shooters spots in the upcoming Paris Olympics. India's Maheswari Chauhan took the third spot. Sunday marks the final day of the Asian Shotgun Championship held at Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Olympic Shooting Complex, featuring participation from 26 countries. The concluding competition will be the skeet mixed doubles.

Top seed Swiatek dumped out as Alcaraz shines

MELBOURNE: World number one Iga Swiatek joined the rapid exit of top-10 women's seeds from the Australian Open on Saturday as Carlos Alcaraz sent a chilling warning to his rivals. Poland's Swiatek came into the third-round match against Czech teenager Linda Noskova on an 18-match unbeaten run, targeting a first title at Melbourne Park. But the tournament is turning into a graveyard for the stars and the 22-year-old four-time major winner lost her way after winning the first set, going down 3-6, 6-3, 6-4.

A crestfallen Swiatek said she felt the match was under control until she was broken in the second set. "I feel like I did really everything I could in pre-season to improve some stuff that I wanted to," she said. "Then I came here and I wasn't playing

kind of natural anymore." Noskova, playing in her first Australian Open, said she was "speechless". "I knew it was going to be an amazing match, but I didn't really think it would end up like this," said the 50th-ranked player, who faces Ukraine's Elina Svitolina next. Just three of the top 10 women's seeds remain in the draw at the end of the first week — defending champion and hot favorite Aryna Sabalenka, Coco Gauff and Barbora Krejickova.

A day after defending champion Novak Djokovic returned to top form, men's world number two Alcaraz laid down a marker in a lopsided contest against Chinese teenager Shang Juncheng lasting just 66 minutes. The 20-year-old, playing a tour-level match against a player younger than himself for the first time in his career, was leading 6-1, 6-1, 1-0 when his 18-year-old opponent had to retire. Shang entered the clash on Rod Laver Arena with his upper right thigh strapped and received treatment on the injury during the second set.

Dominant Alcaraz did not face a single break point to set up a last-16 meeting with Serbia's Miomir Kecmanovic, who saved two match points to



MELBOURNE: Poland's Iga Swiatek hits a return against Czech Republic's Linda Noskova during their women's singles match at the Australian Open on Jan 20, 2024. — AFP

beat last year's semi-finalist Tommy Paul 6-4, 3-6, 2-6, 7-6 (9/7), 6-0. The Spanish second seed is vying with Djokovic for the number one ranking and if they both reach the final it will double as a straight shootout for the top spot. — AFP