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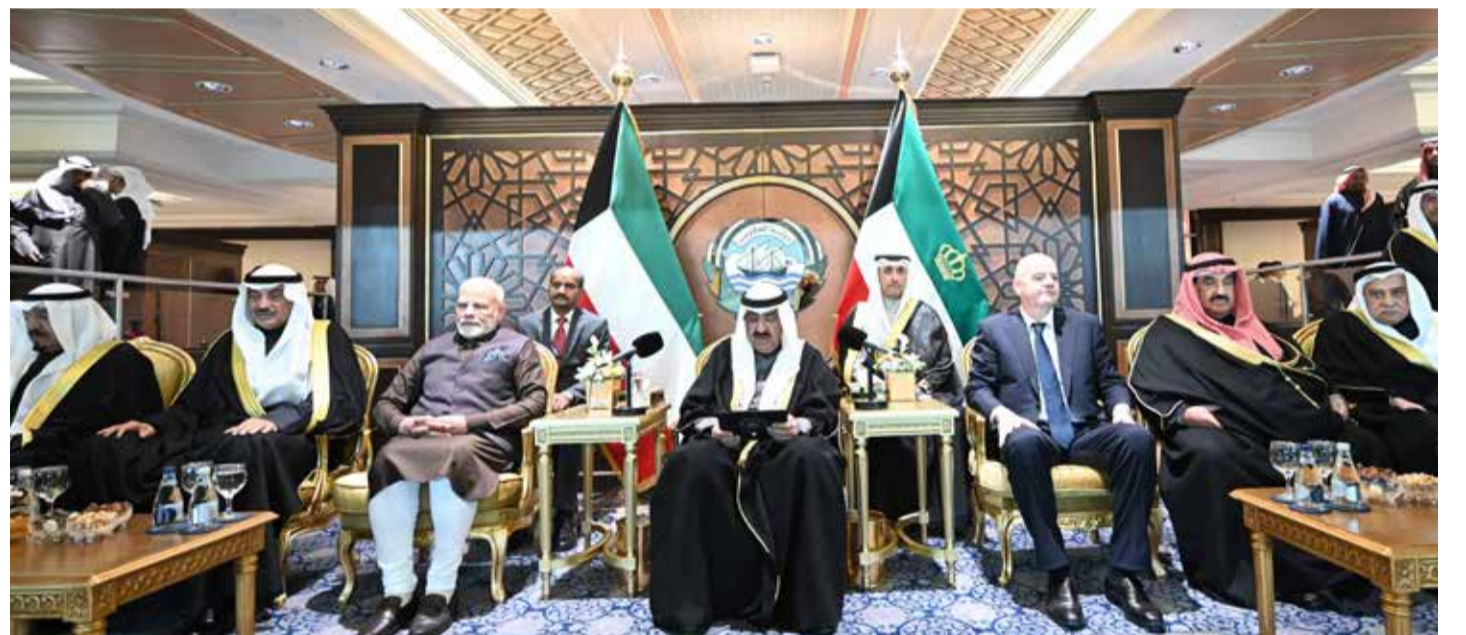

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Amir launches Khaleeji Zain 26

Indian PM Modi and FIFA President Infantino guests of honor at ceremony



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah attends the inauguration ceremony of Khaleeji Zain 26, along with HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, FIFA President Gianni Infantino, HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah, HH Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah and senior sheikhs at Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium on Dec 21, 2024. — Amiri Diwan photos

KUWAIT: Under the sponsorship of HH the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the inauguration ceremony of the Arabian Gulf Cup tournament (Khaleeji Zain 26) was held at Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium on Saturday. HH the Amir arrived at the stadium to a warm welcome by dignitaries. The ceremony was attended by HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, visiting Indian Prime Minister Na-

rendra Modi, FIFA President Gianni Infantino, senior sheikhs, HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah and senior officials from Kuwait and the Gulf.

SEE PAGE 16

The ceremony started with the national anthem, followed by a brief statement by HH the Amir, who welcomed all attendees "who

have gathered on the territory of the State of Kuwait, the territory of amity and peace... such a gathering depicts the fraternal sports spirit bonding our Gulf peoples". "In the name of His Almighty Allah, we inaugurate the 26th session of the Arabian Football Gulf Cup," he said. The spectacular opening ceremony showcased artistic performances reflecting both the Gulf heritage of the past and the vision for the future — KUNA

Zionists kill 7 children from 1 Gaza family

GAZA: Gaza's civil defense rescue agency reported that a Zionist air strike killed 10 members of a family on Friday in the northern part of the territory, including seven children. Violence in the Gaza Strip continues to rock the coastal territory more than 14 months into the Zionist-Hamas war, even as international mediators work to negotiate a ceasefire between the Zionist entity and Hamas fighters.

"There are 10 martyrs ... all targeted by an air strike on their home in Jabalia al-Nazla, southwest of Jabalia. All of the martyrs are from the same family, including seven children, the oldest aged six," civil defense agency spokesman Mahmud Bassal told AFP. Bassal said the strike injured 15 other people. The Zionist entity in early October began a major military operation in Gaza's north, which it said aimed to prevent Hamas from regrouping there. Hamas and two other Palestinian groups said on Saturday that a Gaza ceasefire deal with Zionist entity is "closer than ever", provided Zionist entity does not impose new conditions. Last week, indirect negotiations between Zionist entity and Hamas mediated by Qatar, Egypt and the United States were held in Doha, rekindling hope of an agreement.

"The possibility of reaching an agreement (for a ceasefire and prisoner exchange deal) is closer than ever, provided the enemy stops imposing new conditions," Hamas, Islamic Jihad and the leftist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine said in a rare joint statement issued after talks in Cairo on Friday. — Agencies

Modi on landmark visit to Kuwait, hails Indian expats' contributions

By Shakir Reshamwala

KUWAIT: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi arrived on a two-day official visit to Kuwait on Saturday, the first in 43 years by an Indian premier to the country. Modi and an accompanying delegation were received at Kuwait International Airport by First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense and Interior Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Al-Sabah, Foreign Minister Abdullah Al-Yahya and senior officials. Shortly after his arrival, Modi met prominent members of the Indian community in Kuwait, including 101-year-old Mangal Sain Handa. He then met Indian workers at a labor camp, before heading to

SEE PAGE 2

an indoor stadium for a community event titled 'Hala Modi'. Addressing the capacity crowd of expats from across India and all walks of life, he praised Indian workers from diverse fields, noting their contribution to remittances sent back home. He added the Kuwaiti leadership appreciates Indian workers for their skill and honesty.

"It takes four hours to reach Kuwait from India, but it took an Indian prime minister four decades," Modi said in a nod to the historic nature of his visit. He emphasized the long-standing relationship between India and Kuwait. "Our nations are bound not only by diplomacy, but also by hearts. Our past and future are intertwined," he said.

Modi recalled the words of HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah when they met recently in New York: "When you need anything, you go to India." He reflected on the COVID pandemic era, when Kuwait provided liquid oxygen to India, while India supplied vaccines and healthcare support to Kuwait. He also praised Ku-



KUWAIT: (Left) HH the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the opening ceremony of Khaleeji Zain 26 at Sheikh Jaber International Stadium on Dec 21, 2024. (Right) Modi shakes hands with Mangal Sain Handa, a 101-year-old Indian resident of Kuwait.

wait for its response during the deadly Mangaf fire incident in June.

Kuwait-India ties go back to the pre-oil era, when Kuwaiti merchants and sailors were present in many Indian cities. Modi revealed India's dominance in the jewelry sector was influenced by pearls from Kuwait, noting the Indian rupee was in circulation in Kuwait till its independence, with words like paisa and anna used in everyday parlance.

Modi highlighted the economic cooperation between India and Kuwait, with an emphasis on innovation, steel, technology and manpower. He said India can assist Kuwait in achieving its New Kuwait vision

with its smart cities, green technology, startups and skilled youth. "India, as the world's most youthful nation, can help fulfill global skills needs," he said. The Indian premier mentioned advancements in technology, digital payments and space ventures, saying every Indian should be proud of these achievements.

At the end of his speech, which was punctuated by applause, Modi thanked the leadership of Kuwait for welcoming him, revealing to the cheering crowd that he has been invited as a guest of honor by HH the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for the opening ceremony of the Khaleeji Zain 26 (Arabian Gulf Cup) on Saturday evening.



Local



KUWAIT: Kuwait's Deputy Prime Minister, Defense Minister, and Interior Minister Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Saud Al-Sabah (right) welcomes India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi (left) upon his arrival. — KUNA photos



Ambassador of India to Kuwait Dr Adarsh Swaika (center) greets Prime Minister Narendra Modi (right) upon his arrival in Kuwait.



India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi disembarks from his plane upon his arrival in Kuwait for an official visit on December 21, 2024.

Trade, commerce key pillars of strong Kuwait-India ties: Modi

PM Modi highlights synergy between India's development plans, Kuwait Vision 2035



Prime Minister Modi is seen during his visit to an Indian labor camp in Kuwait.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi greets the crowd at Hala Modi, a community event held to welcome the India Prime Minister.



Prime Minister Modi greets members of the Indian community during an official two-day visit to Kuwait, on December 21, 2024.

KUWAIT: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Saturday that trade and commerce have been important pillars of bilateral relationship between Kuwait and India, with two-way trade increasing. "Trade and commerce have been important pillars of our bilateral relationship. Our bilateral trade has been on an upswing. Our energy partnership adds a unique value to our bilateral trade," the Indian prime minister said in an interview with KUNA.

The Indian prime minister arrived in Kuwait on Saturday in the first visit by an Indian prime minister to Kuwait in over four decades. "We are happy to see 'Made in India' products, particularly in automobile, electrical and mechanical machinery, and telecom segments making new inroads in Kuwait. India today is manufacturing world-class products at the most affordable cost. Diversification to non-oil trade is key to

achieving greater bilateral trade," he said. He added there is considerable potential to expand bilateral cooperation in the pharmaceutical, health, technology, digital, innovation and textile sectors, urging business chambers, entrepreneurs and innovators must engage and interact with each other more. On his visit to Kuwait, he said: "I am delighted to visit Kuwait. I thank His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for his gracious invitation. This visit holds special significance. It marks the first visit by an Indian Prime Minister to Kuwait in over four decades."

"I thank His Highness for inviting me to attend the inauguration of the Arabian Gulf Cup. This is an honor for me. I extend my best wishes for successful hosting of the tournament," he said. The Indian prime minister went on saying that India and Kuwait share a deep and historic bond and the relationship between both countries has always been one of warmth and friendship and that the crosscurrents of history and exchanges through ideas and commerce have brought people close and together.

Cultural connect

"We have traded with each other since times immemorial. The discoveries in Failaka Island speak of our shared past. The Indian rupee was a legal tender in Kuwait for over a century till 1961. This shows how closely our economies were integrated," Modi said. He noted that India has been a historic trading partner of Kuwait and continues to be so in contemporary times and that people-to-people linkages over centuries have fostered a special bond of friendship between the two countries. "Overall, the bilateral ties are progressing well and if I could say, scaling new heights. I eagerly look forward to my talks with His Highness the Amir to elevate our ties in various areas including defense, trade, investment, and energy," he said.

"The strong roots of our historical ties must be matched by the fruits of our 21st century partnership — dynamic, robust and multifaceted. There is a lot we have achieved together, but possibilities are limitless for our partnership. I am sure this visit will give new wings to it," Modi stressed.

The Indian prime minister noted that Indians are the largest expatriate community of over a million in Kuwait and India is among the top trading partners of Kuwait and many Indian companies are executing infrastructure projects and offer services in multiple domains in Kuwait. He said that Kuwait Investment Authority has made substantial investments in India and there is a growing interest in investing in India now, adding that bilaterally and multilaterally, there has been a good understanding of each other's interests. Modi boasted that his country is currently amongst the fastest-growing large economies in the world, as in less than a decade it has moved from being the 11th largest to the 5th largest economy in the world, and is poised to become the 3rd largest economy soon.

Investment opportunities

Modi believed that this growth creates immense opportunities for investment across a variety of sectors and that the pace of infrastructure development in India is extraordinary, be it expressways, railways, airports, ports, energy grids or digital connectivity." Over the last decade, we have doubled our airports from 70 in 2014 to over 150 in 2024. In the next five years, 31 Indian cities will be serviced by metro transport systems. The number of education and skill development institutions has also doubled since 2014, reflecting a strong focus on human capital development. This is supported by a favorable demography and a highly skilled workforce," he said. "Digital economy and services are increasing productivity, ushering efficiency and creating new consumer demand. Almost 50 percent of all global digital payments are happening in India. Technology is changing the face of the Indian economy, from drones to green hydrogen," he added.

"Our political stability, policy predictability and reform-oriented business approach has made India

a magnet for global investment, manufacturing, and supply chain. The Indian growth story is attracting global manufacturers — from semiconductors, aircraft, drones to e-vehicles - to set up shop in the country," he said.

Synergetic transformation

On his government's vision to transform India into a developed country by 2047, he said: "Our vision and that of 140 crore Indians, is to see India as a developed country by 2047, when we will be celebrating 100 years of our independence. We are striving to accelerate growth in all sectors to improve the living standards of our people. We are building an India where the physical and social infrastructure is world class, and all citizens have an opportunity to excel."

"We are committed to leapfrog in our development cycle to uplift every Indian into a higher development trajectory. The results are there for all to see. In the last ten years, we have pulled 250 million people out of poverty. We are also ensuring that all our regulations and laws are as per global standards so that investors feel at home," he said.

Modi continued saying: "Similarly, I am told that Kuwait Vision 2035 focuses on transformation of the country by making the country an economic and connectivity hub. I also understand that many infrastructure projects from airport terminal to seaport to rail link, electricity transmission, renewable energy projects, and special economic zones are in the pipeline." However, he said there is a lot of synergy in both sides' visions which align on many fronts as the tremendous pace of economic activity in both countries open large opportunities for the two governments and companies to cooperate and collaborate.

He pointed out that Kuwait and India have a much wider partnership in many areas, apart from the traditional energy sector partnership, including education, skill, technology, and defense cooperation. "A number of Indian companies are already engaged in execution of infrastructure projects in various sectors in Kuwait. Similarly, we are seeing investments from Kuwaiti companies in India. It is a mutually beneficial partnership in a true sense," he said.

Responding to a question about how India's soft power can influence its global outreach, he said India's civilizational ethos and heritage form the foundation of its soft power. He added that its soft power has grown significantly alongside its expanding global presence, particularly over the last decade. "In Kuwait and the Gulf, Indian movies stand out as a prime example of this cultural connection. We have seen that people in Kuwait have a special liking for Indian cinema. I am told that there are three weekly shows on Kuwait Television on Indian movies and actors," he said.

"Similarly, we share several attributes in our cuisine and culinary traditions. Centuries of people-to-people contact have also resulted in linguistic similarities and shared vocabulary. India's diversity and emphasis on peace, tolerance and coexistence resonate with the values of Kuwait's multicultural society. Recently, a Kuwaiti scholar translated Ramayana and Mahabharata in Arabic," Modi stressed. The Indian prime minister boasted that the Indian community acts as a living bridge between the two countries, fostering a deep appreciation for Indian philosophy, music and performing arts. He expressed pleasure to learn that a weekly Hindi language program has been started by Kuwait national radio titled 'Namaste Kuwait' this year.

Earlier, Modi and his accompanying delegation were received at Kuwait International Airport by First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Al-Sabah, His Highness the Prime Minister's Diwan Chief Abdulaziz Al-Dakheel, Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya, Advisor at His Highness the Prime Minister's Diwan and Chief of the Accompanying Mission of Honor Sheikh Dr Basel Humoud Al-Sabah, Assistant Foreign Minister for Asian Affairs Ambassador Sameeh Hayat and Kuwaiti Ambassador in India Meshal Al-Shemali. — KUNA

In my view

Welcome Modi



By Dr Hala Al-Mekaimi

Not only is the Indian Prime Minister's visit to Kuwait significant because it comes after a 43-year gap, but its timing is also crucial. It occurs against the backdrop of rapid development in the Gulf region, which has the potential to influence global dynamics.

As the leader of the strong GCC bloc and a key player in the current global landscape, Kuwait stands to gain greatly from this visit. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit is expected to bring renewed hope to the region and present an opportunity for peace.

The visit is likely to mark a new chapter in bilateral relations, as both countries share a common agenda for international peace and stability. Both leaders are expected to discuss recent developments and explore ways to reduce regional tensions.

Since taking office in 2014, Prime Minister Modi has actively worked to reshape India's foreign policy. A key shift has been positioning the Gulf region as an integral part of India's extended neighborhood. Kuwait is the last of the GCC countries that Modi is visiting, having already visited the other five.

Under Modi's leadership, the Gulf has evolved into a strategic partner for India, with both foreign and security policies now prioritizing the region. Indian External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar has emphasized that India is focusing more on the Gulf, with which it shares deep historical ties, rather than looking further afield.

This shift reflects the growing depth of India-Gulf relations, which now encompass not just energy, trade, and expatriate concerns, but also political, defense, security, investment, and regional cooperation. India's priorities include boosting economic growth through increased investment, addressing security issues, and expanding its regional influence.

Modi's diplomatic strategy has evolved to add a personal touch to his visits. For example, his motor drive with the UAE ruler in 2015 highlighted his more personal approach to diplomacy, moving beyond traditional formalities.

India has a vested interest in the stability of the GCC, both due to the presence of over 9 million Indian expatriates and because the GCC is India's largest trading partner. During the early phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, Modi personally directed the dispatch of medical teams and supplies to Kuwait, and Kuwait reciprocated by sending vital medical aid to India during the second wave. These personal gestures go beyond traditional diplomacy. Modi's visit to Kuwait is particularly important as it will set the stage for a new agenda between India, Kuwait, and the broader GCC, reinforcing the long-standing relationship and redefining India's extended neighborhood.

Note: Dr Hala Al-Mekaimi is a Professor of Political Science at the College of Social Sciences in Kuwait University. She is also a Workshop Director at Gulf Research Meeting organized by the Gulf Research Centre Cambridge.



Yusuff Ali MA

Lulu Group's chair hails Modi's visit to Kuwait as historic

KUWAIT: In a statement reflecting the deep-rooted ties between India and Kuwait, Yusuff Ali MA, Chairman of Lulu Group International, hailed the ongoing visit of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi as a historic milestone in the bilateral relationship between the two nations. "This is indeed a very historic day in the Indo-Kuwait bilateral relationship which spans decades," said the chairman, acknowledging the long-standing ties that have grown over the years. He noted that Kuwait has been home to millions of Indians, with over one million Indians currently residing in the country, contributing to its economy and society. "For years now, Indians in Kuwait have lived peacefully, earning their livelihood with utmost respect and dignity in this culturally and economically advanced country," he added.

He also commended the leadership of His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for guiding Kuwait to become one of the most prosperous and wealthiest economies in the world. He emphasized that under the Amir's visionary leadership, Kuwait offers a very high standard of living for its residents. With the arrival of Prime Minister Modi for his first-ever official visit to Kuwait, he expressed optimism that this visit would further strengthen the socio-economic and trade relations between India and Kuwait. "I am very positive that it will further boost the long-standing socio-economic and trade ties between both countries and bring in a new era of peace and prosperity," he said, highlighting the potential for deepening collaboration across various sectors.

AHLAN WA SAHLAN

Honourable
Prime Minister of India

Shri. Narendra Modi

The Indian Community in Kuwait
extends Heartfelt
Greetings and a Warm Welcome
to our esteemed leader,
whose vision continues
to inspire billions

— — — — —
Your visit marks
a significant milestone
in strengthening
the deep-rooted bonds of friendship,
trade and culture between
India and Kuwait.



With gratitude and pride

**INDIAN COMMUNITY
IN KUWAIT**

Long Live India-Kuwait Friendship



News in Brief

MoI detects 4,122 traffic violations using AI cameras

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Interior has announced that 4,122 traffic violations were recorded between December 12 and 15, using advanced artificial intelligence-powered surveillance cameras. The violations included offenses such as failure to wear seat belts and using handheld mobile phones while driving. In a statement, the ministry called on all road users to adhere to traffic rules and emphasized the ongoing efforts to intensify monitoring and awareness campaigns to ensure public safety. The ministry urged motorists to take responsibility by following traffic regulations, aiming to create a safer environment on the roads. — KUNA

Statistical center projects 3.7% GDP growth for GCC

MUSCAT: The Statistical Centre for the Cooperation Council for the Arab Countries of the Gulf (GCC-Stat) has projected a 3.7 percent GDP growth for GCC countries in 2024, with further growth expected in the following years — 4.5 percent in 2025 and 3.5 percent in 2026. The growth forecast is driven by increased oil production, as OPEC+ gradually lifts production quotas and new gas fields come online. Non-oil sectors are also anticipated to grow, with a 4.5 percent rise expected in 2024, continuing at 3.3 percent in 2025 and 4.1 percent in 2026. Key drivers include private sector expansion in tourism, transportation, retail, and storage. The ongoing infrastructure projects across the region are expected to boost growth further and foster private sector development. GCC economic diversification strategies are expected to spur growth in sectors such as renewable energy, technology, innovation, and manufacturing from 2024 to 2026. — KUNA

Poland's new diplomat highlights strengthening ties with Kuwait

Kuwaiti investors invited to explore opportunities in Poland's agri-food sector

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: The Embassy of the Republic of Poland in Kuwait hosted a media gathering to introduce Michal Cholewa, the newly appointed Head of Mission, and to recap the embassy's key initiatives in 2024. In his address, Head of Mission highlighted the historical and contemporary strength of Poland-Kuwait relations, which span over six decades, stating: "It's a great privilege to be posted here in Kuwait, a welcoming country with which Poland shares a deep bond." He noted that Polish forces' participation in the liberation of Kuwait is a testament to the countries' shared history and emphasized the need to focus on future collaboration, noting that his country aims to intensify dialogue, boost trade volumes, and strengthen people-to-people connections.

Regarding trade relations, he affirmed that it is a key focus, highlighting Poland's participation in the International Agro Food Expo Kuwait this December, which marks the first time the embassy had taken part in this event. He described the expo as a gateway to the Gulf region, with the agri-food sector playing a pivotal role. "The embassy facilitated the participation of several Polish companies in productive B2B matchmaking sessions. As one of Europe's largest food producers and a food-secure nation, Poland demonstrated its commitment to supporting Kuwait's



Michal Cholewa, Head of Mission at the Polish Embassy in Kuwait.

strategy of diversifying reliable sources of agri-food imports. This collaboration underscored Poland's role as a stable and trusted business partner offering high-quality products," he added. "Trade turnover between Poland and Kuwait reached approximately \$430 million last year, and we are eager to see this number grow," Cholewa said. He also acknowledged Kuwait's existing investments in Poland and stressed the embassy's efforts to expand these further.

The Head of Mission encouraged Kuwaiti investors to explore opportunities in Poland's agri-food sector, adding: "Poland is a secure country with highly skilled professionals and high-quality products. Our food security aligns with Kuwait's strategy to diversify its import sources and enhance reserve capacity. Together,

a vision promoted by the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Kuwait's efforts to diversify its energy mix have focused primarily on solar energy, with the Shagaya Renewable Energy Park being a key project. Located in the western part of the country, the park is designed to harness both solar and wind energy. While parts of the park are already operational, the full project is expected to be completed by 2030.

Despite these efforts, Kuwait remains largely dependent on oil and gas for its energy needs. The transition toward renewable energy is ongoing, and the country is working to integrate more sustainable energy sources into its overall energy strategy.

RENAC's CEO highlighted the importance of the academy's collaboration with Kuwait, noting that the program provides trainees with both technical knowledge and insights into the economic aspects of renewable energy.

Representing the graduates, trainee Hajar Al-Hamlan explained that participation in the program is part of Kuwait's broader strategy, led by the

Ministry of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy, to achieve a target of 15 percent of the country's energy needs from renewable sources. Al-Hamlan also noted that the program supports the ministry's goal of generating 30 percent of the country's electricity from renewables by 2030.

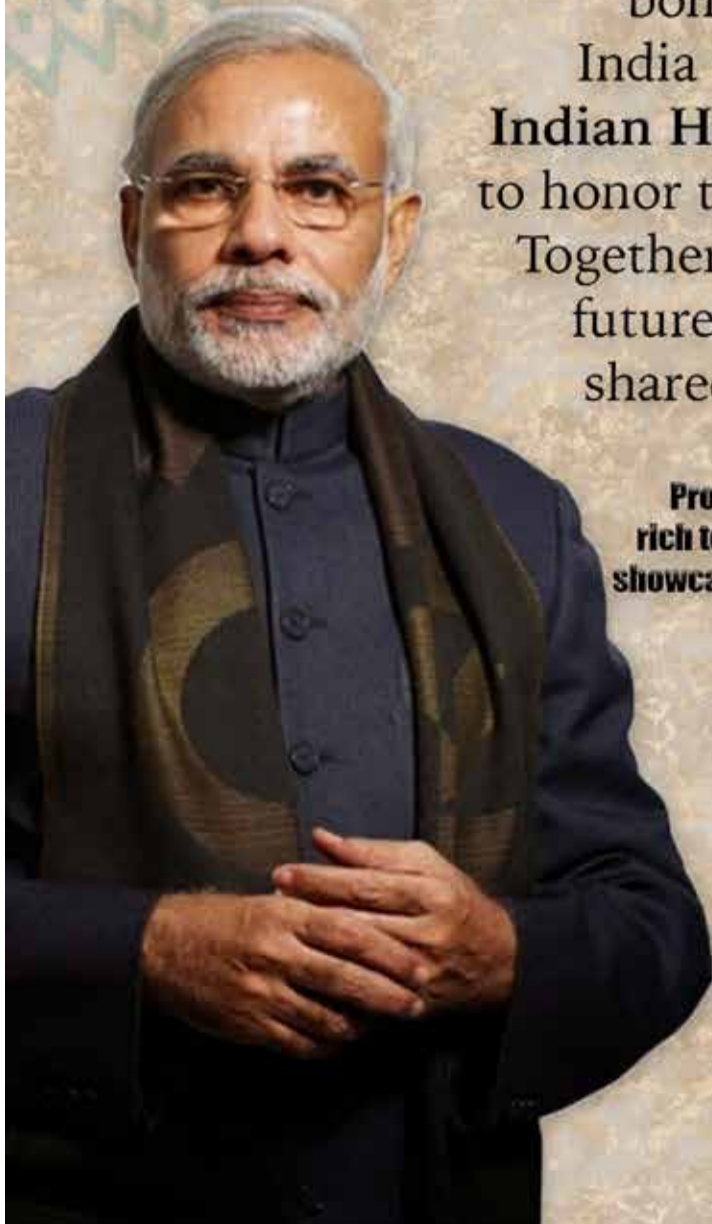
Alongside increasing renewable energy, Kuwait has also been promoting energy efficiency programs, aiming to reduce energy consumption and the country's reliance on fossil fuels for power generation. This includes initiatives in residential, industrial, and commercial sectors to cut down on waste and improve energy use. Despite these efforts, oil and natural gas still account for more than 90 percent of Kuwait's energy consumption, including for electricity generation, water desalination, and other industrial uses. The scale and pace of the transition toward renewables are slow due to factors such as the abundance of cheap fossil fuels, the cost of transitioning to renewable energy infrastructure, and the technological challenges involved in scaling renewable projects to meet national demand. — Agencies

Trainees complete solar program amid struggles to diversify energy sources

BERLIN: A new group of Kuwaiti trainees has completed a specialized program in photovoltaic (solar) systems at The Renewables Academy AG (RENAC) in Berlin. The graduation ceremony, attended by Kuwaiti Ambassador to Germany Reem Al-Khaled and RENAC CEO Berthold Breid, marks another step in the 16-year collaboration between Kuwait's Ministry of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy and RENAC.

Ambassador Al-Khaled noted that the participation of 10 employees from the Ministry of Electricity in the program highlights Kuwait's ongoing efforts to diversify its energy sources and work toward renewable energy solutions. She emphasized that such initiatives help build the capacity of local professionals and support Kuwait's goals for energy sustainability,

التراث
الهندي
Indian
heritage
Welcomes
HONORABLE PRIME MINISTER
**SHRI
NARENDRA MODI**
Celebrating the enduring
bond between
India and Kuwait,
Indian Heritage is proud
to honor this historic visit.
Together, we embrace a
future of unity and
shared prosperity.
Indian Heritage –
Proudly celebrating India's
rich textiles and craftsmanship,
showcasing tradition and honoring
the spirit of India



KUWAIT: Healthcare professionals who were part of the medical team participating in the surgery in Kuwait pose for a group photo. — KUNA

Kuwaiti doctor performs region's first remote robotic prostatectomy

KUWAIT: Sabah Al-Ahmad Urology Centre has successfully conducted the first remote robotic radical prostatectomy surgery in the Middle East, using the MicroPort Medbot Toumai surgical robotic system to treat a Kuwaiti patient diagnosed with prostate cancer. This makes Kuwait one of the first countries globally to perform such a procedure using technology from MicroPort, a multinational medical technology developer and manufacturer that is primarily headquartered in Shanghai, China. Dr Saad Al-Dosari, the center's director who performed the surgery remotely from China, said in a phone interview with Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) that the procedure adds a remarkable achievement to Kuwait's healthcare sector. It represents a significant medical milestone in the Middle East at a time when the healthcare system continues to advance in robotic surgeries.

Al-Dosari highlighted the unique aspect of the surgery, noting that the patient was approximately 7,000 kilometers away, and the operation was conducted as if the surgical team were physically present in Kuwait. He explained that robotic surgeries had been introduced at the center in 2014, but this remote surgery, known as Telesurgery, is a first for both the Arabian Gulf and the broader Middle East.

He emphasized that patient safety is the top priority. A full medical team, including surgeons, anesthesiolo-

gists, and nurses, was present in the operating room in Kuwait to intervene if necessary. Despite the distance, the surgery was performed with high precision as though the surgical team was right next to the patient.

Al-Dosari also noted the significance of remote robotic surgeries in enabling the exchange of expertise, performing complex surgeries in collaboration with global centers, and training national medical staff in robotic surgery techniques from any location.



Dr Saad Al-Dosari, Director of Sabah Al-Ahmad Urology Centre, performs the Middle East's first robotic radical prostatectomy surgery remotely from China.

He attributed the achievement to the guidance of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, emphasizing that this development positions Kuwait among countries leading in adopting the latest advancements in surgical technology. Al-Dosari expressed his sincere gratitude to Minister of Health Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi for his unwavering support of such cutting-edge technologies, which represent a major leap forward in healthcare technology. — KUNA



Healthcare professionals oversee the surgery in the operation room at the Sabah Al-Ahmad Urology Centre.

HEARTY WELCOME TO KUWAIT



SHRI. NARENDRA MODI Honourable Prime Minister of India

We wholeheartedly welcome Honourable Prime Minister **Shri. Narendra Modi**, who is leading India towards greater prosperity and a \$5 Trillion economy with his dynamic vision. May this visit further strengthen the historic relationship between India & Kuwait.

Long live Indo-Kuwait friendship



Regional Headquarters: Farwaniya, Kuwait.

Operations in 25 countries
GCC · Africa · USA · Europe · Australia · Far East · India

International

Russia, Ukraine trade deadly strikes

Kursk strike kills 5 after Moscow claims Kyiv attack

KYIV: Russia and Ukraine on Friday accused each other of launching deadly missile strikes, with Moscow saying at least five were killed by a missile strike on its Kursk border region after a dawn attack on Ukraine's capital killed one man.

Ukraine struck the small town of Rylsk in Russia's Kursk region, killing five and wounding 12, said the governor, Alexander Khinshtein. An earlier toll from the governor said six people were killed. Khinshtein accused Kyiv of firing US-supplied HIMARS rocket systems on civilian targets, saying the strike damaged buildings including a school and the dormitory of a pilot training college.

Videos on social media showed cars on fire, debris strewn on roads and buildings with windows blown out. The border region is partly occupied by Ukrainian forces. Russian foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova told TASS state news agency Moscow would raise the attack at a UN Security Council meeting Friday.

Russia last year accused Ukraine of using cluster munitions to attack the town of around 15,000 residents located around 20 miles (30 km) from the border. The attack came hours after Russian missiles hit central Kyiv early Friday, killing at least one person and damaging embassies.

Moscow claimed the dawn attack as retaliation for a strike using Western missiles on a chemical plant earlier in the week. Ukraine's air force said Russia launched five Iskander missiles on Kyiv, all of which it managed to shoot down, but falling debris damaged several districts.

'Explosions after explosions'

Russian aerial attacks regularly target the capital but rarely cause significant damage as Kyiv is well protected by air defence, nearly three years into Russia's invasion. "There were explosions after explosions in a row," said 45-year-old Ksenia, who was staying at a hotel near the site of the wreckage.

The strikes killed a 53-year-old man and wounded

13 people, most suffering from shrapnel injuries, city officials said. They also damaged a building housing the embassies of Argentina, Palestine, North Macedonia, Portugal and Montenegro, and Albania's diplomatic mission, the Ukrainian foreign ministry said.

'Barbaric attacks'

"Another heinous Russian attack against Kyiv," European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen posted on X. "Putin's disregard for international law reaches new heights." In the absence of the Russian ambassador in Lisbon, the charge d'affaires of the Russian Federation has been summoned to be presented with a formal protest, the Portuguese government said.

"These are barbaric attacks on diplomatic institutions, this is crossing all possible red lines and international rules," foreign ministry spokesman Georgiy Tykhy was quoted as saying by Ukrainian agency Interfax. The Kyiv National Linguistics University said on its Instagram account that its building had also been hit.

Victoria, a 35-year-old doctor, had come out to look at the charred cars and buildings with blown-out windows at the site of an attack. "Russians should burn in hell," she said. Air Force spokesman Yuriy Ignat said Ukraine Patriot air-defence systems had been deployed to shoot down the missiles.

More strikes

Moscow claimed responsibility for the overnight attack on Ukraine, carried out a day after Russian leader Vladimir Putin threatened to strike Kyiv. "You know that such strikes on Russian territory have been carried out, and you know that the president has said that every time there will be a response," said Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov.

The Russian defence ministry announced "a combined strike with long-range precision weapons" in response to Ukraine's earlier attack. The ministry said it had targeted an office of the SBU security service and a defence industry site. "All



KYIV: People clean up broken glass at the site of a missile attack in Kyiv, amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Russian missiles targeted the Ukrainian capital Kyiv at sunrise, killing five and cutting heating to hundreds of residential buildings in cold temperatures. — AFP

the targets have been struck," it added.

'Dumbass'

Putin, at a press conference Thursday, had suggested a "high-tech duel" over Kyiv to test his claims that Russia's new hypersonic ballistic missile, dubbed Oreshnik, is impervious to air defences. "Let them set some target to be hit, let's say in Kyiv," he said.

"They will concentrate there all their air defences. And we will launch an Oreshnik strike there and see what happens." Zelensky hit back, saying: "People are dying and he thinks it's 'interesting'... Dumbass."

Russian attacks also killed two people in Ukraine's southern city of Kherson Friday. "Today Kherson woke up from numerous strikes of the Russian army.

The occupants have created hell in the city," governor Oleksandr Prokudin said.

Prokudin also said shelling had cut power to 60,000 homes in the region, under daily strikes since Ukraine liberated the city in November 2022. Russian forces have been pushed back to the other side of the Dnipro river, but the city of Kherson is within range of Russian artillery.

A Russian sabotage group tried but failed to cross the Dnipro during the shelling, spokesman for the Southern Defence Forces Vladyslav Voloshyn told state-run Suspilne media. Russian troops are on the offensive again, especially in the eastern Donbas region, where this week they captured two small villages near the city of Pokrovsk. — AFP

Chinese ship linked to severed Baltic Sea cables sets sail

STOCKHOLM: A Chinese ship linked to the recent severing of two undersea cables and anchored off Denmark's coast since November 19, departed Saturday, Sweden's coast guard said. Sections of two telecom cables were cut on November 17 and 18 in Swedish territorial waters of the Baltic Sea.

Suspicious have been directed at a Chinese ship—the Yi Peng 3 -- which according to ship tracking sites had sailed over the cables around the time they were cut. The Yi Peng 3 had been anchored in the international waters of the Kattegat strait between Sweden and Denmark.

Ship tracking site Vesselfinder showed the Yi-Peng 3 steaming north out of the strait on Saturday and Sweden's coast guard confirmed that the vessel had lifted anchor. "She has reported that she is heading for Egypt and Port Said," Hanna Buhler, duty officer at the Swedish Coast Guard told AFP, adding that they would continue to monitor the ship.

On Thursday, authorities from Sweden, Ger-

many and Finland were invited aboard for an investigation led by China. A Danish representative also accompanied the group as Denmark had served a "facilitating role" by hosting meetings between the countries at the Danish foreign ministry earlier in the week, Danish Foreign Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen had said.

'Observer role'

"It is our expectation that once the inspection is completed by this group of people from the four countries, the ship will be able to sail to its destination," Rasmussen said. Swedish police on Thursday confirmed that they were going onboard the ship as observers. "Representatives of the Chinese authorities are conducting investigations aboard the vessel and have invited the Swedish authorities to take part in an observer role," police said adding it would not be taking any "investigative measures".

The Swedish Accident Investigation Authority (SHK) also took part in the visit, but noted that as the ship was "anchored in international waters", where "Swedish authorities are not able to exercise jurisdiction over a foreign vessel".

John Ahlberk, director of SHK, told AFP on Thursday that they were hoping to gather "as much information as possible". "There have been claims that the cable breakage has to do with anchors from the ship. So it is in-

teresting for us to hear what the crew has to say about it," he said.

Ahlberk noted that it was not clear to what extent they would be able to speak to the crew or conduct their own investigations since the investigation was led by Chinese authorities aboard a Chinese ship. European officials have said they suspect sabotage linked to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The Kremlin has rejected the comments as "absurd" and "laughable".

Sweden in late November requested China's cooperation in the investigation, but Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson stressed that there was no "accusation" of any sort. Early on November 17, the Arlon cable running from the Swedish island of Gotland to Lithuania was damaged.

The next day, the C-Lion 1 submarine cable connecting Helsinki and the German port of Rostock was cut south of Sweden's Oland island, around 700 kilometers (435 miles) from Helsinki. Tensions have mounted around the Baltic Sea since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

In September 2022, a series of underwater blasts ruptured the Nord Stream pipelines that carried Russian gas to Europe, the cause of which has yet to be determined. In October 2023, an undersea gas pipeline between Finland and Estonia was shut down after it was damaged by the anchor of a Chinese cargo ship. — AFP



Two submarine cables damaged in the Baltic Sea

The "Arlon" telecommunications cable has been damaged since Sunday morning, the "C-Lion1" cable was broken Monday, according to operators.

Source: TeleGeography

AFP

Yemen rebels hit Tel Aviv in missile attack

TEL AVIV: A missile fired from Yemen by Iran-backed Houthi rebels struck Tel Aviv before dawn on Saturday, wounding 16 people in the second such attack in days. The Zionist military said it failed to intercept the missile, forcing many residents to leave their homes in the early hours. The Houthis claimed responsibility for the attack, saying it used a ballistic missile directed at "a military target of the (Zionist) enemy".

The rebels have repeatedly launched missiles against the Zionist entity in solidarity with the Palestinians since the war in Gaza began more than a year ago. In response, the Zionist entity has struck multiple targets in rebel-held areas of Yemen, including ports and energy facilities. The Zionist emergency medical service, Magen David Adom (MDA), said 16 people were slightly injured.

"I was at home and heard a loud explosion. I immediately went to the scene and saw significant blast damage to nearby buildings," medic Yosef Kourdi was quoted as saying in a statement released by MDA. "MDA teams provided medical care to 16 individuals who were mildly injured by glass shards from shattered windows in nearby buildings due to the impact of the strike," the statement said.

Ido Barnea, an IT manager whose apartment was damaged, told AFP a missile alert had sounded just before 4:00 am. "Then there was a big ball of fire in the sky," he said. "I didn't even manage to get up and get dressed to go out." An AFP photographer reported that many residents in the vicinity of the strike had to leave their homes, carrying only the essentials. AFP images showed a large crater where the missile hit, and debris in the bedroom of a nearby house that was damaged.

Police swiftly cordoned off the neighborhood. Noa Mosseri, whose apartment was also damaged, told AFP she too heard the missile alert. "We were very lucky be-



TEL AVIV: Zionist emergency responders inspect a crater at the site where a projectile fired from Yemen landed on Dec 21, 2024. — AFP

cause we didn't have time to get to a safe place. Within seconds there was a boom. We managed to get out and so we were not hurt," she said.

In their statement on Saturday, the Houthi rebels pledged to continue their attacks against the Zionist entity "until the aggression stops and the siege on the Gaza Strip is lifted". The strike came just two days after the rebels fired a missile. The military said that missile had been intercepted but only partially. In response, the Zionist entity struck several Houthi targets in Yemen, including in Sanaa — the first such strike on the rebel-held capital. Rebel leader Abdul Malik Al-Houthi said nine civilians were killed in the strikes.

Hours after the Houthi attack on Saturday, the Zionist military said it had intercepted a drone over the Zionist entity's south, which had approached from the east. It did not specify the origin of the drone, but similar attacks have been claimed by the Islamic Resistance in Iraq group since

the Gaza war broke out. Soon after retaliating for Thursday's attack by the Houthis, Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu warned the rebels of severe repercussions if there was any repetition.

"After Hamas, Hezbollah and the Assad regime in Syria, the Houthis are almost the last remaining arm of Iran's axis of evil," Netanyahu said. "The Houthis are learning and will learn the hard way, that those who strike (the Zionist entity) will pay a very heavy price for it." On Dec 9, a drone claimed by the Houthis exploded on the top floor of a residential building in the central city of Yavne, causing no casualties.

And in July, a Houthi drone attack on Tel Aviv killed a Zionist, prompting retaliatory strikes on the rebel-held port of Hodeida. The Houthis have also repeatedly targeted merchant vessels in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden that they say are Zionist-linked, prompting retaliatory strikes on Houthi targets by the United States and Britain. — AFP

US drops bounty for Syrian leader after meeting

DAMASCUS: Washington is scrapping a long-standing reward for the arrest of Syria's new leader, a senior US diplomat said Friday, following "positive messages" from a first meeting that included a promise to fight terrorism. Barbara Leaf, Washington's top diplomat for the Middle East, made the comments after her meeting with Ahmed Al-Sharaa in Damascus — the first formal mission to Syria's capital by United States diplomats since the early days of Syria's civil war.

The lightning offensive that toppled president Bashar Al-Assad on Dec 8 was led by the Islamist Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), which is rooted in Al-Qaeda's Syria branch but has sought to moderate its image in recent years. Leaf's meeting with HTS chief Sharaa came despite Washington's six-year-old designation of his group as a terrorist organization. "Based on our discussion, I told him we would not be pursuing the Rewards for Justice reward offer," Leaf told reporters. After their talks, "it's a little incoherent, then, to have a bounty on the guy's head," she said, welcoming the messages from him. "We will be looking for progress on these principles and actions, not just words," she said.

After the meeting, a statement from Syria's new leaders said they wanted to contribute to regional peace. "The Syrian people stand at an equal distance from all countries and parties in the region... Syria rejects any polarization," the statement said. Leaf said she told Sharaa of the "critical need to ensure terrorist groups cannot pose a threat inside of Syria or externally, including to the US and our partners in the region." "Ahmed Al-Sharaa committed to this," she said. The US delegation also included Roger Carstens, the US pointman on hostages. He said he worked on Friday with the new Syrian leadership to search a location where American journalist Austin Tice could have been held, and "we'll be working with the interim authorities" to examine other locations. Tice was kidnapped in Syria in Aug 2012.

On a regional tour prior to the Aqaba talks, Secretary of State Antony Blinken had stressed the need to prevent a resurgence of Islamic State group (IS) militants. The US

military said on Friday its forces had killed an IS leader and another operative in Deir Ezzor province, part of escalated US military action against the group since Assad's overthrow. The US embassy said Leaf also met with Syria's White Helmet rescuers, civil society leaders, activists and others "to hear directly from them about their vision for the future of their country". Below a photograph of Leaf and others with a memorial wreath, the embassy said she had also commemorated the tens of thousands of people murdered, tortured, disappeared or detained under Assad. "The US commitment to hold accountable those responsible for these atrocities is unwavering," the embassy said on X.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who backed Assad's opponents, has stressed reconciliation and restoration of Syria's territorial integrity and unity. Turkey has been putting pressure on Kurdish-led forces in Syria, and Erdogan said Friday it was time to destroy "terrorist" groups operating in the country, specifically IS and Kurdish fighters. "Daesh, the PKK and their affiliates — which threaten the survival of Syria — must be eradicated," he told journalists following a summit in Cairo, referring to IS and the Kurdistan Workers Party, respectively.

The autonomous administration in northeastern Syria is protected by the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces, mostly made up of the People's Protection Units (YPG). Turkey accuses the YPG of being a branch of the PKK, which both Washington and Ankara consider a terrorist group. Kurdish leaders in Syria have welcomed Assad's ouster and raised the three-star independence-era rebel flag, but many in the region fear continued attacks by Turkey and allied fighters. Leaf said Washington was urging a ceasefire between Turkish-backed forces and the SDF around the Kurdish-held Syrian border town of Kobane, also known as Ain al-Arab. On a visit to Ankara on Friday, German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock warned of the dangers of any "escalation" of the fighting, saying: "Security, especially for Kurds, is essential for a free and secure future for Syria." — AFP

International

Deadly attack on German Xmas market

'Islamophobic' suspect arrested, who railed against Islam and Germany

MAGDEBURG, Germany: The Saudi suspect in Germany's deadly car-ramming attack on a Christmas market held strongly anti-Islam views and was angry with Germany's migrant policy, official said Saturday. Chancellor Olaf Scholz condemned the "terrible, insane" attack that killed five people and shocked the nation, days before Christmas and eight years after a jihadist drove a truck into a Christmas market in Berlin.

Police were puzzling over the motive of Taleb Al-Abdulmohsen, the top suspect after an SUV ploughed at high speed through a dense crowd Friday, also injuring 205 people in the eastern city of Magdeburg. The mass carnage sparked sorrow and revulsion, with a nine-year-old child among the dead and casualties being treated in 15 regional hospitals.

Germany has been hit by multiple deadly jihadist attacks, but evidence gathered by investigators and his past online posts painted a different picture of Abdulmohsen, a 50-year-old doctor of psychiatry. A self-described "Saudi atheist" who as an activist who helped women flee the oil-rich kingdom, he has railed against Islam but also against what he saw as Germany's permissive attitude towards refugees from other mainly Muslim countries.

Interior Minister Nancy Fraser said he held "Islamophobic" views, and a prosecutor said that "the background to the crime... could have been disgruntlement with the way Saudi Arabian refugees are treated in Germany". Taha Al-Hajji of a Berlin-based organization told AFP Abdulmohsen was "a psychologically disturbed person with an exaggerated sense of self-importance".

Call for unity

Abdulmohsen in his online posts spoke about his troubles with and suspicions of German authorities. Last August, he posted on social media: "Is there a path to justice in Germany without blowing up a German embassy or randomly slaughtering German

citizens? ... If anyone knows it, please let me know." Die Welt daily reported, citing security sources, that German state and federal police had carried out a "risk assessment" on him last year but concluded that he posed "no specific danger".

A somber Scholz, dressed in black, visited the attack site Saturday together with national and regional politicians laying flowers outside the main church in Magdeburg. Mourning and bereaved residents have left candles, flowers, cards and children's toys at the Johanneskirche church, where a memorial service was planned at 7:00 pm (1800 GMT).

Scholz pledged the state would respond "with the full force of the law" to the attack but also called for unity as Germany has been rocked by a heated debate on immigration and security ahead of elections in February. The center-left chancellor said it was important "that we stick together, that we link arms, that it is not hatred that determines our coexistence but the fact that we are a community that seeks a common future." He said he was grateful for expressions of "solidarity... from many, many countries around the world. It is good to hear that we as Germans are not alone in the face of this terrible catastrophe."

'Sad and shocked'

Surveillance video footage of the attack showed a black BMW racing straight through the crowd, scattering bodies amid the festive stalls that were selling traditional handicrafts, snacks and mulled wine. On Saturday, debris and discarded medical materials blew across the cordoned-off site, where stalls now stand empty around a giant Christmas tree, the event canceled for the year out of respect for the victims.

The leader of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), Alice Weidel, which has focused on jihadist attacks in its campaign against immigrants, wrote on X: "When will this madness stop?" "What happened today affects a lot of people. It affects us a lot," Fael



MAGDEBURG, Germany: German Chancellor Olaf Scholz speaks to the press during a visit to the site of a car-ramming attack on a Christmas market on Dec 21, 2024. — AFP

Kelion, a 27-year-old Cameroonian living in the city, told AFP. "I think that since (the suspect) is a foreigner, the population will be unhappy, less welcoming."

Michael Raarig, 67 and an engineer, said that "I am sad, I am shocked. I never would have believed this could happen, here in an east German provincial town." He added that he believed the attack "will play into the hands of the AfD" which has had its strongest support in the formerly communist eastern Germany.

Security was stepped up Saturday at Christmas markets elsewhere in Germany with more police seen in Hamburg, Leipzig and other cities. German footballers were holding a minute's silence and wearing black armbands in weekend matches in tribute to the victims. The regional Evangelical church announced that at 7:03 p.m. (1803 GMT) "the time of yesterday's attack on the Christmas market, the bells of all churches in Magdeburg and many places of worship in the surrounding area will ring." — AFP

Suspect denies hospital rape, murder of doctor

KOLKATA: An Indian man on trial for raping and murdering a 31-year-old doctor has pleaded not guilty, his lawyer said Saturday, a crime that appalled the nation and triggered wide-scale protests. The discovery of the doctor's bloodied body at a government hospital in the eastern city of Kolkata on August 9 sparked nationwide anger at the chronic issue of violence against women.

Sanjoy Roy, 33, the lone accused in the case, pleaded not guilty before the judge in a closed court on Friday in Kolkata, his lawyer Sourav Bandyopadhyay told AFP. "I am not guilty, your honor, I have been framed," Roy told the court, Bandyopadhyay said, repeating his client's words.

Roy, a civic volunteer in the hospital, was arrested the day after the murder and has been held in custody since. He would potentially face the death penalty if convicted. The court began hearings on November 11, listening to evidence from some 50 witnesses, but it was on Friday that Roy took the stand.

"Judge Anirban Das questioned him with more than 100 questions during the six-hour-long in camera deposition, that continued until late in the evening", Bandyopadhyay said. Roy had earlier proclaimed his innocence to the public while screaming from a prison van outside the court before a hearing in November.

Doctors in Kolkata went on strike for weeks in response to the brutal attack. Tens of thousands of ordinary Indians joined in the protests, which focused anger on the lack of measures for female doctors to work without fear.

India's Supreme Court has ordered a national task force to examine how to bolster security for health-care workers, saying the brutality of the killing had "shocked the conscience of the nation". The gruesome nature of the attack drew comparisons with the 2012 gang rape and murder of a young woman on a Delhi bus, which also sparked weeks of nationwide protests. The trial continues. The next hearing is set for January 2, 2025. — AFP

Pakistan courts convict 25 of pro-Khan unrest

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan military courts have convicted and sentenced 25 people for involvement in pro-Imran Khan unrest last year, the armed forces said Saturday, with the majority handed decade-long prison terms.

Ex-prime minister Khan was arrested in May last year after being ousted from office and mounting an unprecedented campaign of defiance against the nation's powerful military leaders. His detention over graft allegations sparked nationwide unrest, some targeting armed forces installations, and prompting rare prosecutions of civilians in military courts.

Amnesty International called the move "an intimidation tactic, designed to crack down on dissent" and said it was "contrary to international law". Military courts are largely opaque, but after months of confidentiality the military public relations wing named 25 people who have been prosecuted.

All of the convicted are men and 14 have been sentenced to a decade of "rigorous imprisonment", the military said with the remaining 11 set to

serve lesser prison terms. "All sentences announced by the military courts are disproportionate and excessive," said a spokesman for Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party. "These sentences are rejected." The verdicts were announced just three weeks after the capital Islamabad was gripped by fresh unrest, as tens of thousands of Khan supporters flooded in to demand his release. The government said at least five security personnel were killed whilst PTI allege at least 10 of their own were shot dead by security forces before crowds retreated.

'Political terrorism'

A military statement did not make clear what crime each person had been convicted of or when, listing only the location of their offence. The shortest sentence meted out was two years. During the May 2023 unrest Pakistan "witnessed tragic incidents of politically provoked violence and arson at multiple places," the military statement said.

"These blatant acts of violence not only shocked the nation but also underscored necessity of checking this unacceptable attempt of political terrorism." Former cricket star Khan served as prime minister from 2018 to 2022, when he was ousted by parliament in a no-confidence vote.

He blamed the then-head of the powerful military establishment for his



TEOFILO OTONI: Handout picture shows a truck on top of a car on the site of a crash in Teofilo Otoni, Minas Gerais state, Brazil on December 21, 2024. An accident involving a car, a truck and a bus, killed 32 people. — AFP

At least 32 die in truck, bus accident in southeast Brazil

SAO PAULO: At least 32 people were killed in a bus crash in southeastern Brazil on Saturday, officials said, adding that the death toll could still rise. The accident in Minas Gerais state involving a bus that was traveling from Sao Paulo left "between 32 and 35" people dead, a spokeswoman for the local fire department told AFP by phone.

"It was not yet possible to specify the exact number due to the state of the bodies," she added. Officials gave conflicting accounts of the events. Firefighters initially said the bus had blown a tire

near the town of Lajinha, causing the driver to lose control of the vehicle and hit a truck. Another vehicle also hit the bus from behind, officials said, but its occupants survived.

However, firefighters later cited witnesses as saying that a granite block had collapsed on the bus in an apparent landslide, which may have caused the vehicle to collide with the truck and catch fire. Thirteen people survived and sought medical help.

"After hours of work, firefighters managed to extinguish the flames and have removed 22 charred bodies of victims who were trapped" inside, the fire department said in a statement earlier Saturday, as authorities warned that the number could rise.

In a video released Saturday morning, Lieutenant Alonso Vieira Junior, with the Minas Gerais fire department, said a crane would be needed to clear the wreckage, and that "there are still more victims to be removed." — AFP



PESHAWAR: A supporter of jailed former prime minister Imran Khan holds his poster during a gathering by the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party to observe Martyrs' Day to honor those who allegedly died during last month's protest, in Peshawar. — AFP

downfall. Pakistan's generals are considered the country's political king-makers and have directly ruled the nation for decades at a time.

Khan's May 2023 detention lasted a matter of days but he was re-arrested three months later and has remained imprisoned since, facing a parole of court cases he claims are politically motivated. Meanwhile PTI was targeted by a sweeping crackdown fol-

lowing the unrest, with thousands of grassroots supporters and senior officials arrested. The 72-year-old was barred from running in February elections, which were marred by rigging allegations. PTI defied the crackdown to win more seats than any other party, but a coalition of parties considered more pliable to military influence formed a government and shut them out of power. — AFP

How Assad inner circle fled Syria after his fall

CAIRO: A lightning rebel offensive early this month caught Syria's ruling clan off guard. President Bashar Al-Assad fled to Russia on Dec 8, leaving behind many of his collaborators, some of whom sought refuge in neighboring countries. According to two sources, the ousted president, who fled to Moscow via the Russian military airfield in Hmeimim on Syria's coast, was accompanied by only a handful of confidants.

Among them were his closest ally, the secretary-general of presidential affairs Mansour Azzam, as well as his economic adviser Yassar Ibrahim, who oversees the financial empire of Assad and his wife, Asma. "He left with his secretary and his treasurer," an insider who requested anonymity said, mockingly.

Bashar's brother, Maher Al-Assad, commander of the elite Fourth Division tasked with defending Damascus, did not know about his sibling's plans. Leaving his men stranded, Maher took a separate route, fleeing by helicopter to Iraq before traveling to Russia, according to a Syrian military source. An Iraqi security source told AFP that Maher arrived in Iraq by plane on Dec 7 and stayed there for five days.

Maher's wife, Manal Al-Jadaan and his son briefly entered Lebanon before departing through Beirut airport, said Lebanese Interior Minister Bassam Mawlawi, without disclosing their final destination. Another Assad government heavyweight, Ali Mamlouk, the former chief of Syria's security apparatus, fled to Russia via Iraq, said a Syrian military source. His son passed through Lebanon before leaving for another destination, according to a Lebanese security source.

'Wanted'

The Iraqi Interior Ministry denied on Monday the presence of either Maher Al-Assad or Mamlouk in Iraq. Both are wanted men. Maher — and Bashar Al-Assad — are wanted by France for alleged complicity in war crimes over chemical attacks in Syria in August 2013. The French courts have already sentenced Mamlouk and Jamil Hassan, former head of Syria's Air Force Intelligence, in absentia to life imprisonment for complicity in crimes against humanity and war crimes.

On Friday, the Lebanese authorities received an Interpol alert relaying a US request to arrest Hassan and hand him over to the US authorities, should he enter the country. The United States accuses Hassan of "war crimes", including overseeing barrel bomb attacks on Syrian people that killed thousands of civilians. A Lebanese judicial source told AFP that they had no confirmation of Hassan's presence in Lebanon, but assured that he would be detained if found.

Last-minute escapes
Other prominent figures also made hasty escapes. Bouthaina Shaaban, Maher translator for Hafez Al-Assad — Bashar's father who founded the brutal system of government his son inherited — fled to Lebanon on the night of Dec 7-8. Shaaban, Bashar Al-Assad's long-time political adviser, then travelled to Abu Dhabi, according to a friend in Beirut. Kifah Mujahid, head of the Baath Brigades — the military wing of Syria's former ruling party — escaped to Lebanon by boat, a party source told AFP.

Other officials took refuge in their hometowns in Alawite regions, some of them told AFP. Assad hailed from Syria's Alawite minority. Not all escape attempts were successful. Ihab Makhoul, Bashar Al-Assad's cousin and a prominent businessman, was killed on Dec 7 while trying to flee Damascus. His twin brother, Iyad, was injured in the same incident, said a military official from the former government. Their elder sibling, Rami Makhoul, once considered Syria's richest man and a symbol of the regime's corruption, managed to survive. Rami, who fell out of favor with the Assad regime years ago, is believed to be in the United Arab Emirates. — AFP

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 22, 2024

Burgan Bank receives CBK's approval to acquire 100% stake in Bahrain's UGB

Transaction expected to be completed by Q1 2025

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank announced that it has obtained the final approval from the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) to acquire 100 percent stake in United Gulf Bank (UGB), a licensed conventional wholesale bank headquartered in Bahrain. The execution of this transaction remains subject to closing formalities that are expected to be completed by the first quarter of 2025 (Q1'25).

The purchase price of this transaction has been settled at \$190 million, which roughly translates to 1.0x of UGB's current shareholders' equity or book value. This acquisition is expected to have an impact of 60 to 70 basis points on Burgan Bank's regulatory capital ratios, predominantly due to the consolidation of UGB's assets. The final impact would be determined at the closing of shares' transfer. It is worth mentioning that UGB has a 60 percent stake in Kamco Investment Company (Kamco Invest).

Tony Daher, Group Chief Executive Officer

at Burgan Bank, said: "The 100 percent acquisition of UGB aligns with the Bank's new asset reallocation strategy and efforts to build new and diversified revenue streams. This transaction would benefit Burgan by providing access to KAMCO Invest's platform to further drive its non-interest income. Additionally, it will help expand the Bank's footprint across the GCC region while contributing to bolstering potential revenues and synergies through UGB's banking license."

Daher emphasized that the Bank's ongoing



Tony Daher, Group CEO at Burgan Bank

efforts to achieve sustainable growth and implement expansion plans are guided mainly by its vision to become the most modern and progressive bank in Kuwait. This vision is driven by a focus on key strategic pillars, including asset reallocation, embracing digital transformation, investing in human capital development, and adhering to environmental, social, and governance (ESG) standards in order to deliver an outstanding banking experience that lives up to customers' aspirations and meets their needs.

It serves to note that in June 2024, Burgan Bank announced that it had received CBK's initial approval to engage with Bahrain's regulatory authorities regarding the acquisition of a 100 percent stake in UGB. Shortly thereafter, the Bank secured a no-objection from the Central Bank of Bahrain in August 2024, followed by final approval from CBK. The transaction is expected to be finalized during the first three months of 2025.

US Congress passes bill to avert shutdown

WASHINGTON: The US Congress averted a Christmastime government shutdown early Saturday after weeks of tense negotiations that went down to the wire, passing a bill to fund federal agencies through mid-March. With the midnight deadline already expired by minutes, senators dropped normal procedure to fast-track the package to a vote, halting government shutdown preparations and saving Christmas for more than 800,000 workers at risk of being sent home without pay.

"It's good news that the bipartisan approach in the end prevailed... It's a good outcome for America and the American people," Democratic Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said in a speech on the Senate floor. The Democrats run the Senate, so there was never much doubt that the funding package would get a rubber stamp after the party was crucial in helping the Republican majority in the House pass the bill earlier in the day.

But with senators often dragging their feet over complex legislation, there were fears that the funding fight might spill into next week. That would have meant non-essential operations winding up, with up to 875,000 workers furloughed and as many as 1.4 million more required to work without pay.

Congress's setting of government budgets is always a fraught task, with both chambers closely divided between Republicans and Democrats. President-elect Donald Trump and tech billionaire Elon Musk, his incoming "efficiency czar," created much of the drama this time around by pressuring Republicans in an 11th hour intervention to renege on a funding bill they had painstakingly agreed with Democrats.

Two subsequent efforts to find compromise fell short, leaving Republican House Speaker Mike Johnson at the last chance saloon as he spent much of Friday huddling with aides to find a way to keep government agencies running. If the funding bill had



The US Capitol is seen in Washington, DC, on December 20, 2024. — AFP

failed, non-essential government functions would have been put on ice. Employees in key services like law enforcement would have continued working but would only have been paid once government functions were back up. Many parks, monuments and national sites would have closed at a time when millions of visitors are expected.

Lawmakers avoided all that holiday-season pain by funding the government until March 14 in a package that includes \$110 billion in disaster aid and financial relief for farmers. It is essentially the same as a bill that failed miserably in a vote Thursday—except without a two-year suspension of the country's self-imposed borrowing limit demanded by Trump. The influence of Musk, the world's richest man, over the Republicans—and his apparent sway with Trump—has become a focus for Democratic attack, with questions raised over how an unelected citizen can wield so much power.

There is growing anger even among Republicans over Musk's interference after he trashed the original funding agreement in a blizzard of posts—many of them wildly inaccurate—on his social media platform X. "Last time I checked, Elon Musk doesn't have a vote in Congress," Georgia House Republican Rich McCormick told CNN. "Now, he has influence, and he'll put pressure on us to do whatever he thinks the right thing is for him. But I have 760,000 people that voted for me to do the right thing for them."

Trump had been clear that he was willing to see a shutdown if he did not get his way, and the passage of funding legislation without his priorities included demonstrated that even his great influence over Republicans in Congress has limits. But Johnson put a positive sheen on events, telling reporters after the House passed the funding package that January, when Trump returns to office, would mark a "sea change" in Washington. — AFP

Fed caution on rate cuts could cause friction with Trump

WASHINGTON: Donald Trump's imminent return to the White House and uncertainty about his policy proposals has begun weighing on the US Federal Reserve, raising concerns of a reckoning between the central bank and the president-elect. Fed chair Jerome Powell acknowledged on Wednesday that Trump's economic platform, which includes the threat of major tariff hikes, the extension of tax cuts, and mass deportations, had been a consideration when members of the rate-setting committee met to consider the number of interest rate cuts they expect next year.

"Some did identify policy uncertainty as one of the reasons for their writing down more uncertainty around inflation," Powell said after the Fed announced it was cutting rates by a quarter point and signaled just two cuts in 2025. "We don't know what'll be tarified from what countries, for how long, and what size," he said. "We don't know whether there will be retaliatory tariffs, we don't know what the transmission of any of that will be into consumer prices."

Previously, Powell had refused to comment on how the Fed was thinking about the potential impact of the next administration's economic policies. Trump has continued to insist that, "properly used," tariffs would be positive for the US economy.

"Our country right now loses to everybody," he told reporters at his Florida residence earlier this week. "Tariffs will make our country rich." Given the uncertainty over Trump's plans, the decision by many policymakers to pencil so few cuts may have signaled a willingness to keep rates higher if the new administration puts forward policies that are inflationary. Steven Englander, head of G10 FX Research at Stan-



NEW YORK: A picture of Donald Trump is displayed as traders work on the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) floor in New York City. — AFP

dard Chartered bank, told AFP.

"There are reasons not to be that pessimistic, and yet they chose to be that pessimistic," he said. "So it's hard to sort of avoid the signal that maybe they wanted to send a message." The US central bank has a dual mandate from Congress to act independently to tackle inflation and unemployment. But it must still consider how the economy could be affected by government policies. "We're going to have to learn what policy actions Congress, or the administration, will choose to do, and then obviously study those, analyze those, and fold those in," New York Fed President John Williams told CNBC on Friday.

"I have incorporated some thinking about where fiscal policy may be, immigration and other policies, because those are important drivers to thinking about the economic outlook," added Williams, who has a vote on the Fed's rate-setting committee.

Trump has had a long and often fraught relationship with Powell, whom he originally nominated to lead the independent US central bank in 2018, frequently criticizing him during his first term for not cutting interest rates quickly enough. The Republican president-elect has also said he has "better instincts" on the economy than many Fed governors, and argued that the US president should have "at least" a say in setting interest rates—something he cannot currently do.

Powell's current term as Fed chair ends in May 2026, and Trump said earlier this year he would "let him serve it out, especially if I thought he was doing the right thing." "We haven't explicitly written about any sort of disagreement between the White House and the Fed," Bank of America senior US economist Aditya Bhavt told AFP. "But you could easily end up in a world where they want different things." — AFP

Trump threatens tariffs if EU doesn't buy more oil, gas

WASHINGTON: US President-elect Donald Trump on Friday threatened the European Union with tariffs if the bloc does not reduce its "tremendous" trade gap with Washington through oil and gas purchases. "I told the European Union that they must make up their tremendous deficit with the United States by the large scale purchase of our oil and gas," Trump said in a post on his Truth Social platform in the early hours of Friday. "Otherwise, it is TARIFFS all the way!!!"

According to US figures, goods imports from the EU were \$553.3 billion in 2022, while its exports to the bloc were \$350.8 billion. This puts the US goods trade deficit with the EU at \$202.5 billion that year.

EU chief Ursula von der Leyen had already suggested to Trump in November that the United States could supply more liquefied natural gas to the bloc to replace Russian energy. Replying to questions on Trump's threat on Friday, an EU spokesman said the 27-nation bloc was open to talks, noting that the US also enjoyed "a substantial trade in services surplus vis-a-vis the EU". "We are ready to discuss with President-elect Trump how we can further strengthen an already strong relationship, including by discussing our common interests in the energy sector," EU spokesman Olof Gill told a press briefing.

Trump, who takes office in January, has made sweeping threats of slapping tariffs on US trading partners—including Canada, Mexico and China—which could send reverberations across the global economy. Accusing Canada and Mexico of allowing the United States to be flooded with illicit drugs and undocumented migrants, he had threatened a 25-percent import tariff, while vowing at least 10 percent against China, Washington's Asia-Pacific rival.

Earlier this month, the European Union concluded a massive trade deal with four South American countries—Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay—which aims to create a 700-million-customer free-trade area. Von der Leyen had said the agreement would build trade bridges as "strong winds are blowing in the opposite direction, towards isolation and fragmentation"—comments largely seen as a nod to Trump's threats to hike tariffs. — AFP

Google counters bid by US to force sale of Chrome

SAN FRANCISCO: Google late Friday countered a US call to sell its Chrome browser, suggesting a judge address antitrust concerns by barring the firm from making favorable treatment of its software a condition of licensing. Google filed a 12-page proposed order banning the internet giant from requiring favorable distribution or treatment of its software on mobile devices as a condition of licensing popular apps like Chrome, Play or Gemini.

In contrast, the US government in November asked a judge to order the dismantling of Google by selling its widely used Chrome browser in a major antitrust crackdown on the company.

The US Department of Justice urged a shake-up of Google's business that includes banning deals for Google to be the default search engine on smartphones and preventing it from exploiting its Android mobile operating system. Determining how to address Google's wrongs is the next stage of the landmark antitrust trial that saw the company in August ruled a monopoly by US District Court Judge Amit Mehta. Google has proposed that Mehta bar it from using the licensing desirability of its applications to compel mobile device makers to pre-install its search software or make it the default offering, a court filing showed. "Nothing in this Final Judgment shall otherwise prohibit Google from providing consideration to a mobile device manufacturer or wireless carrier with respect to any Google product or service in exchange for such entity's distribution, placement on any access point, promotion, or licensing of that Google product or service," the proposed order stipulates. Calling for the breakup of Google marks a profound change by the US government's regulators, which have largely left tech giants alone since failing to break up Microsoft two decades ago.

Regardless of Judge Mehta's eventual decision, Google is expected to appeal the ruling, prolonging the process for years and potentially leaving the final say to the US Supreme Court. The case could also be upheld by the arrival of President-elect Donald Trump to the White House in January. His administration will likely replace the current team in charge of the Justice Department's antitrust division. — AFP



Bader Al-Ali and Visa representative Ghadir Sarab during the signing of the Gulf Points Program cooperation agreement.



Najla Aleisa gives a presentation on the points program.

Gulf Bank launches Kuwait's fastest and most comprehensive rewards program

Program offers broader redemption choices for travel, shopping, cashback and points transfer

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank has officially launched its enhanced Gulf Points Program, setting a new benchmark for loyalty rewards in Kuwait. Renowned as Kuwait's fastest and most rewarding loyalty program, the enhanced Gulf Points now offers customers unparalleled benefits, including cashback, seamless airline and hotel bookings, and a cutting-edge digital shopping store - the first of its kind in the banking sector.

The announcement was made during a press conference attended by Bader Al-Ali, Acting General Manager of Consumer Banking at Gulf Bank, Najla Aleisa, Chief Marketing Officer at Gulf Bank, and Visa representative Ghadir Sarab.

Revamped program features

Bader Al-Ali shared his excitement about the program, stating: "The enhanced Gulf Points program is designed to transform everyday banking into extraordinary experiences. It reflects Gulf Bank's commitment to providing innovative solutions tailored to customer preferences."

Key features

- **Earn Points:** Customers earn points on every transaction made using Gulf Bank credit cards.
- **Instantly redeem for cashback:** Gulf Points can be redeemed for cash, transferred directly to the customer's credit card.
- **Share Rewards:** Gulf Points can be gifted to family and friends.
- **Travel Benefits:** Redeem points for flights, hotel stays, and car rentals globally.
- **Online Store:** A pioneering online store, integrated into Gulf Bank's app, enables customers to shop directly using Gulf Points.



Bader Al-Ali and Najla Aleisa during the press conference.

Bader Al-Ali
Acting General Manager of Consumer Banking at Gulf Bank
"Our goal is to elevate the customer experience by providing greater flexibility to tailor rewards to individual needs and preferences".

Najla Aleisa
Chief Marketing Officer at Gulf Bank
"The all-new Gulf Points program allows customers to earn points on daily purchases, inspiring a culture of saving and encouraging forward-thinking financial behavior".



egrated with digital wallets, reinforcing its role as a market leader. Adding that Gulf Points exemplifies Gulf Bank's focus on innovation and delivering beyond expectations."

Boosting economic growth

The program's launch aligns with Kuwait's increasing credit card usage, which grew by 12.6 percent in 2024, reaching KD 3.4 billion in the first nine months alone. Growth sectors such as tourism and travel have been key contributors to this trend. The contest will encourage customers to explore the program's full potential and maximize their benefits.

Stay tuned for more details about this initiative aimed at boosting customer engagement and credit card adoption.

The enhanced Gulf Points program reaffirms Gulf Bank's position as a pioneer in delivering innovative banking experiences, catering to customer needs while supporting Kuwait's growing economy. Download the Gulf Bank app today to explore the enhanced Gulf Points Program.

Al-Ali emphasized: "These features are designed to meet the evolving needs of our customers, reflecting Gulf Bank's dedication to delivering innovative services rooted in customer feedback."

Driving a culture of saving

Najla Aleisa highlighted the program's broader impact: "The enhanced Gulf Points program encourages the use of credit cards over debit cards, empowering customers to accumulate Gulf Points on

daily purchases while fostering a culture of saving and innovative financial behavior."

She further noted: Credit card usage in Kuwait accounts for only 10 percent of total consumer spending, compared to 27 percent in Saudi Arabia and 87 percent in the UAE, signaling substantial room for growth. Gulf Bank's leadership in digital innovation is underscored by its highest-rated banking app on Apple's App Store and Google Play. Gulf Bank's credit cards are among the most widely in-



A group photo of bank officials and employees with the Visa representative.

Ex-IMF chief Rato gets four-year jail term in Spain

MADRID: A Madrid court sentenced ex-IMF chief and Spanish economy minister Rodrigo Rato to more than four years in prison for tax crimes, money laundering and corruption, it said Friday. The sentence comes after the disgraced former heavyweight of Spain's conservative Popular Party was jailed for four and a half years in 2018 for misusing funds while working at lender Bankia.



Rodrigo Rato

Prosecutors had alleged that Rato defrauded the Spanish tax office and lined his own pockets to the tune of 8.5 million euros between 2005 and 2015. Judges found Rato guilty of "three offences against the Treasury, one offence of money laundering and one offence of corruption between individuals", the court said in a statement. Rato was sentenced to four years, nine months and one day in jail and fined more than two million euros (\$2.1 million).

The court added that the "undue delays" in the proceedings, which lasted more than nine years, reduced the sentence. Rato told conservative daily newspaper ABC he would appeal the ruling, which he described as "unfair and lacking in any legal basis".

He spent eight years variously serving as an economy minister and a deputy prime minister in the conservative government of Jose Maria Aznar before going on to lead the International Monetary Fund from 2004 to 2007. Rato later headed Spanish lender Bankia, where he misused company credit cards for personal expenses between 2010 and 2012, which earned him the 2018 jail sentence.

He was moved to a semi-open prison regime in late 2020, a decision that came just after he was acquitted in another case of fraud and falsifying the books during the 2011 flotation of Bankia.

The Bankia scandal came to light at the height of a severe economic crisis that left many people struggling financially. It sparked outrage in Spain, which worsened when the government then spent 22 billion euros on a bailout for the failing lender that quickly won notoriety as a symbol of financial excess. A second defendant, Domingo Plasas, was sentenced to 18 months in prison for money laundering and collaborating in two of Rato's tax offences.

Another defendant, Alberto Portuondo, got three months and one day for colluding with Rato in a corruption scheme whereby they received kickbacks in return for securing Bankia contracts. The court cleared the 13 other defendants in the trial. Two of Rato's successors at the IMF have also faced legal woes. France's Dominique Strauss-Kahn, who succeeded Rato in 2007, was tried in 2015 on pimping charges in a lurid sex scandal and acquitted. And in 2016 a French court found current European Central Bank chief Christine Lagarde, who took over from Strauss-Kahn, guilty of "negligence" for her role in a massive state payout to tycoon Bernard Tapie when she was finance minister. She was not sentenced. — AFP

Volkswagen unveils major job cuts in cost-saving drive

HANOVER: Crisis-hit auto giant Volkswagen said Friday it planned to axe 35,000 jobs by 2030 in Germany after reaching an agreement with unions on a drastic cost-cutting plan. The deal, struck at the end of marathon negotiations with labor representatives, will save Europe's largest carmaker around four billion euros (\$4.2 billion) a year, the German group said.

But the powerful IG Metall union hailed the agreement, which came just in time for Christmas and put an end to rolling strikes, saying it had averted forced redundancies and plant closures.

Volkswagen had originally said it was considering completely shuttering production sites in Germany, which would have been an unprecedented move in the 87-year history of the carmaker. The situation at the eponymous mass-market Volkswagen brand, which employs around 120,000 people in Germany, was "serious" and demanded urgent action, management argued. VW has struggled with the transition to electric vehicles as it battles rising competition in China from local manufacturers, such as BYD and Geely. The 10-brand group—which also owns Audi, Porsche and Skoda—has said it also has to contend with falling demand and elevated labor and production costs in Europe.

"There will be no plant closures," negotiator Thorsten Groeger from the IG Metall union told a press conference. The agreement however foresaw cuts to production across Volkswagen's 10 German factories and corresponding job losses. Volkswagen's smallest factory in Dresden, which employs around 300 people, would stop vehicle production at the end of 2025 and be converted to another use, the group said. At a plant

in Osnabrueck, where some 2,300 people work, production would continue until mid-2027 before "other uses" for the site were found. The number of production lines at Volkswagen's headquarters in the central German city of Wolfsburg would meanwhile be reduced from four to two, the group said.



Negotiator of the IG Metall metalworker's union Thorsten Groeger and chairwoman of the General and Group Works Council of the Volkswagen Group Daniela Cavallo hold a joint press conference in Hanover. — AFP

In the process, 4,000 jobs would be lost at the flagship factory by 2030 and the production of the popular Golf car relocated to a factory in Mexico.

And in eastern Zwickau, a key site for the production of electric vehicles, the number of lines would be cut to one. "We had three priorities in the negotiations: reducing excess capacity at the German sites, reducing labor costs and reducing development costs to a competitive level," VW brand CEO Thomas Schaefer said at a press conference in Berlin. In all three cases, the group had been able to find "viable solutions", Schaefer said. All in all, the carmaker would reduce its capacity in Germany "by over 700,000" units, he said. "These are tough decisions, but also important decisions for the future". Of the planned four billion euros in savings, 1.5 billion would come from lower labor costs and a progressive reduction in the group's headcount, Volkswagen said. — AFP

Preparing for life in retirement

Strategies for a secure financial future

KUWAIT: Effective retirement planning is vital for ensuring financial security. A key component is understanding asset allocation, which helps align investments with changing risk tolerance and financial goals. Good asset allocation involves diversifying investments across various asset classes, such as stocks, bonds, and alternatives, to balance risk and potential returns.

As individuals approach retirement, their risk tolerance typically changes due to a decreased ability to recover from market downturns and a greater focus on capital preservation. Regular reviews of asset allocation support achieving retirement objectives while managing risks. Periodically reassessing investments and making adjustments based on market conditions and personal circumstances allows retirees to better position themselves for a comfortable and sustainable retirement. This proactive approach can create growth opportunities, even in retirement, promoting overall financial stability.

The role of time

The earlier individuals start saving, the more their savings can benefit from compounded interest. Starting savings at a young age allows investments to grow exponentially over time, because compound interest generates returns on previously earned interest. This is particularly advantageous for younger investors, who can better weather market volatility. Since they have a longer time horizon before needing to access their funds, they can handle the market volatility by taking advantage of gains during good times and reducing the effects of bad times. Additionally, starting early instills a habit of saving and investing that can lead to greater financial stability in the long run.

Investment strategies by demographics

As investors move through various stages of life, their investment strategies and risk tolerance shift. Therefore, it's important to periodically rebalance their portfolio to ensure it aligns with their retirement objectives.

- **Younger investors (30 years and below):** Typically, they adopt an aggressive risk profile, focusing on equities and growth-oriented assets to capitalize on long-term growth potential.

- **Middle-Aged Investors (30 to 50 Years):** This group stabilize their risk tolerance and may adjust investment strategies based on life milestones, such as purchasing homes or funding children's education.

- **Pre-retirees (50 years and older):** Approaching retirement, investors generally shift to more conservative strategies, prioritizing capital preservation and income-generating investments.

SIP and dollar cost averaging

SIP is an effective retirement planning method that involves investing a fixed amount of money at regular intervals, regardless of market changes. Investing fixed amounts regularly, a strategy known as dollar-cost averaging, helps mitigate market volatility. Committing a consistent amount at set intervals allows investors to smooth out their purchasing process, acquiring more shares when prices are low and fewer when prices are high. This method also promotes disciplined saving, making it a routine aspect of budgeting. Over time, the impact of compounding can enhance wealth accumulation, making this approach effective for individuals across all age groups. Whether for young adults, middle-aged individuals, or seniors,



this strategy fosters long-term financial stability and growth.

The importance of financial advisors

Financial advisors help tailor strategies to align with individual goals and risk tolerances, particularly for high-net-worth individuals (HNWIs), who often require more complex asset allocation strategies. They take into account various factors, such as market conditions, tax implications, and future income needs, to create a comprehensive financial plan. Regular portfolio rebalancing is crucial to ensure alignment with retirement objectives. This process involves adjusting the investment mix periodically to maintain the desired risk level and capitalize on market opportunities. Advisors aim to enhance returns while also helping to mitigate risks associated with significant market fluctuations. Additionally, ongoing communication between advisors and clients ensures that strategies remain relevant as life circumstances change.

Key considerations for retirement planning

- **Plan for unanticipated expenses including critical illness coverage:** retirees often face substantial and unexpected costs, particularly those related to

healthcare. An emergency financial buffer is essential for a resilient retirement plan.

- **Start saving early:** Begin saving for retirement as early as possible to take advantage of compounding interest. Maximizing contributions during your working years is crucial for long-term financial success.

- **Diversify income sources and rebalance regularly:** A balanced investment strategy lead to better retirement outcomes. Periodic adjustments based on market conditions are necessary to align with your financial objectives and risk tolerance.

- **Plan for a long life:** With potential retirement lasting up to 35 years in retirement, it is important to ensure your investments continue growing to keep pace with inflation and preserve purchasing power. Consider maintaining exposure to growth-oriented assets.

Key takeaways

- **Customized strategies:** Retirement planning must be tailored to individual needs, goals, and risk tolerance.

- **Importance of asset allocation:** Regularly adjusting asset allocation is essential to align investments with changing financial objectives.

- **Leverage time for growth:** Early savings take advantage of compound interest, particularly benefiting younger investors.

- **Disciplined investing:** Methods like dollar cost averaging help mitigate market volatility and promote consistent contributions.

- **Value of financial advisors:** Advisors provide crucial guidance in developing personalized retirement strategies, especially for high-net-worth individuals.



Season to play game and save big at LuLu Hypermarket

KUWAIT: A world of wonder and joy awaits kids and adults alike at LuLu Hypermarket's Toy Fest 2024, the ultimate holiday treat. From December 18 to January 4, children and families are invited to explore a magical wonderland filled with toys, games, and exciting surprises that will light up every little one's holiday season.

The Toy Fest kicked off at LuLu Hypermarket Egaila outlet on 19th December with an exciting inauguration by renowned gamer Ahmadalrakda, in the presence of top management of LuLu Kuwait. The event drew enthusiastic crowds as families flocked to witness the beginning of this kid-friendly festival. Toy Fest 2024 features jaw-dropping deals, including discounts of up to 60 percent on top-branded toys, and attractive offers on gaming accessories making it the perfect opportunity to stock up on gifts and games for the little ones. Shoppers can also explore the Toy Expo, a showcase of the latest and most popular toys, along with live spot games, where children can participate, win freebies, and enjoy a lineup of fun-filled end-of-year surprises that will make their holiday season ever more magical.



Japan inflation jumps to 2.7% in November

TOKYO: Japanese inflation accelerated in November, with prices rising 2.7 percent on-year partly because of higher energy costs, government data showed Friday. The core Consumer Price Index (CPI), which excludes volatile fresh food prices, topped market expectations and was up from 2.3 percent in October. The reading remained above the Bank of Japan's two percent inflation target, set more than a decade ago as part of efforts to boost the stagnant economy.

The two percent target has been surpassed every month since April 2022, although central bank policymakers have sometimes questioned the role of temporary factors such as the war in Ukraine.

Analysts had forecast a core CPI reading of 2.6 percent for November. "Core core CPI", which excludes both fresh food and energy prices, stood at 2.4 percent. Rice prices continued to soar, with the data showing an on-year increase of around 64 percent after this year's harvests were hit by hot weather and water shortages.

"Rising prices for food, including rice, and the

scaling back of measures against extreme summer heat, such as subsidies for electricity and fuel bills" contributed to the jump in inflation, deputy chief cabinet secretary Fumitoshi Sato told reporters. Japan's summer this year was the joint hottest on record—equaling 2023 -- as extreme heatwaves fueled by climate change engulfed many parts of the globe.

The Bank of Japan on Thursday left its borrowing costs unchanged and warned of uncertainty over the US economy under president-elect Donald Trump. That caused the yen to fall against the dollar, extending a retreat that began Wednesday when the Federal Reserve forecast it would make fewer interest rate cuts. On Friday morning, one dollar bought 157.61 yen, compared with about 153.60 on Wednesday.

"Despite the pause, the BoJ appears determined to tighten policy further," said Stefan Angrick of Moody's Analytics. "The central bank's monetary policy statement maintains a fairly hawkish tone, arguing that the economy is recovering and will keep growing above its potential rate—a view that feels at odds with the data," he said. Weak demand has been a drag on growth for Japan, and it's likely that data will show the economy shrinking in 2024, Angrick said, adding that the bank faced a tricky situation. "The domestic economy isn't strong enough for significant rate hikes, but maintaining the status quo risks further yen depreciation and higher inflation," he said. "We anticipate two more rate hikes in 2025."—AFP

Fed's favored inflation gauge edges higher

WASHINGTON: The Federal Reserve's preferred inflation measure rose for a second straight month in November, according to government data published Friday, although the increase came in a touch below expectations. The personal consumption expenditures (PCE) price index rose 2.4 percent in the 12 months to November, up from 2.3 percent in October, the Commerce Department said in a statement.

"What we're seeing is encouraging news," New York Fed President John Williams told CNBC on Friday, adding that it had been "a bit of a bumpy kind of a journey" on inflation. Goods prices fell 0.4 percent over the last 12 months, while services jumped 3.8 percent, the Commerce Department said. Food prices rose 1.4 percent over this period, while energy prices dropped by 4.0 percent, underscoring some of the volatility seen in prices.

However, headline prices rose just 0.1 percent from October, pointing to a slight slowdown in what is sure to be welcome news for the US central bank. Both the annual and monthly inflation figures came in slightly below the median forecasts from econo-

mists surveyed by Dow Jones Newswires and The Wall Street Journal. "We can break for the holidays with the comfort that the economy's growth engine is humming along," Nationwide financial markets economist Oren Klachkin wrote in a note to clients.

On Wednesday, the Fed cut interest rates by a quarter point to between 4.25 and 4.5 percent, and signaled a slower pace of cuts ahead, triggering a sharp sell-off in the financial markets. The sole holdout voting against a cut, Cleveland Fed President Beth Hammack, said Friday that her decision had been "a close call." "I prefer to hold policy steady until we see further evidence that inflation is resuming its path to our two percent objective," she said in a statement.

The independent US central bank is responsible for tackling inflation and unemployment, largely by hiking or lowering interest rates to affect demand.

This indirectly impacts the cost of borrowing for consumers and businesses, affecting everything from mortgages to car loans. While headline inflation has come down slightly, it remains stuck above the Fed's long-term target of two percent.

At the same time, economic growth is still resilient, and the labor market has shown some signs of weakness while remaining relatively robust. "The Fed would like to continue lowering interest rates, but it feels it can't do so amid what increasingly looks like an elevated inflation and resilient growth environment," said Klachkin of Nationwide. — AFP

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 22, 2024



Portuguese chef Julio Fernandes' dish "Bacalhau a Minhota" is pictured at the specialized in traditional cod-based recipes restaurant, D'Bacalhau.



Customers enjoy a meal at the specialized in traditional cod-based recipes restaurant, D'Bacalhau.



Cod is stored for salt curing at Ribeirvalves cod processing plant.



A waiter serves beverage to accompany the Portuguese chef Ricardo Simoes' dish for the Christmas menu which consists of a piece of confit cod served with açorda.



Portuguese chef Ricardo Simoes' dish for the Christmas menu, a piece of confit cod served with açorda.



The original characters are replaced by codfish heads in a version of the famous painting "American Gothic" by artist Grant Wood, displayed at the "Codfish History and Interpretation Centre" at Comercio Square in Lisbon.



Cod is stored for salt curing at Ribeirvalves cod processing plant --which produces nearly 30,000 tons per year-- in Moita.



Portuguese chef Julio Fernandes' dish "Bacalhau a Gomes de Sa" is pictured at the specialized in traditional cod-based recipes restaurant.



An employee prepares the codfish to be sliced in fillets at Ribeirvalves cod processing plant.

Salt cod has long been a national staple in Portugal, where it is said there are as many recipes for this humble fish as there are days in the year. And at Christmas the dried and salted fish is central to meals at family gatherings in Portugal, the world's biggest consumer of "bacalhau" as it is called here, just as turkey is at Thanksgiving in the United States.

The most traditional way to prepare salt cod is to bake it in the oven and serve it with boiled potatoes. But it can also be grilled, turned into fritters or even used to replace meat in a lasagna. "When I'm asked to come up with a menu for Christmas, I am bound to suggest a salt cod recipe," said chef Ricardo Simoes of the Federico restaurant located at a luxury hotel in central Lisbon.

"We have an incredible culture" around the preserved fish, the 42-year-old added, saying he "likes to play" with traditional recipes to give them a touch of sophistication. This year he has designed a cod confit matched with prawns and drizzled with coriander juice.

Portugal consumed nearly 55,000 tons of salt cod last year, an average of around six kilos (13 pounds) per inhabitant, according to the Cod Industry Association (AIB). Roughly one-third of cod sales happen around Christmas, according to the group. As the holiday season approaches, supermarkets across the country of around 10 million people prominently display hundreds of salt-encrusted cod piled high.

'Meat of the poor'

The central role of cod in the country's cuisine is surprising since the fish, which thrives in deep icy waters such as those around the North Atlantic, has never existed in Portuguese seas.

Introduced to the country in the 16th century, salt cod represented a nutritious and non-perishable food source for Portuguese sailors on their long sea expeditions to the Americas and Asia.

At first this fish was a food exclusive to the aristocracy but it gradually became popular as well among lower classes as supply increased, bringing down prices. Salt cod started being regarded as "the meat of the poor". It is also referred to as "o fiel amigo" or "the faithful friend".

Consumption boomed in the 20th century during the decades-long dictatorship of Antonio de Oliveira Salazar, which subsidized cod fishing expeditions off Canada's eastern coast and Greenland, the director of a Lisbon museum dedicated to the history of cod, Claudia Gomes, told AFP.

Today salt cod dishes are often sought out by tourists who visit the country. "Coming to Portugal and not tasting salt cod is like going to Brazil without visiting Rio de Janeiro," said Jessica

Cod is king in Portugal at Christmas



A piece of confit cod is pictured at Federico restaurant during the preparation of a dish of their Christmas menu.

Baptista, a 33-year-old Brazilian tourist, as she left the D'Bacalhau restaurant in Lisbon. Specialising in traditional cod recipes, the eatery cooks "a minimum of eight tonnes of cod every month," said its owner Julio Fernandes, 68.

Youth losing interest

Portugal accounts for almost 20 percent of the world's consumption of this fish, which is caught mainly in Iceland and Norway. The sector employs more than 2,500 people in Portugal, with sales worth 500 million euros (\$519 million) last year, according to AIB figures.

Producers predict a fall in consumption this year due to a rise in price which jumped nearly 15 percent to hit nearly 14 euros a kilo in 2024. They also find younger generations are losing interest, in part due to the time it takes to prepare salted cod. The fish must be soaked in several changes of cold water before cooking. "Reaching out to young people is our big challenge," said Vera Xavier, head of production at the Ribeirvalves cod processing plant near Lisbon. —AFP



Portuguese chef Julio Fernandes cooks one of his traditional cod-based recipes.



An employee operates a forklift to store codfish for salt curing at Ribeirvalves cod processing plant.

Swedish hip hop star shot dead in car park

Swedish police said Friday a man had been shot dead in a car park in the city of Norrkoping, with media identifying the victim as the rapper Gaboro, who reportedly had links to criminal gangs. A video purporting to show the killing quickly spread on social networks.

In the video, seemingly filmed with a camera worn by the shooter, a person carrying a handgun can be seen firing

multiple shots in a car park. Police said they were aware of the video and that it was part of their investigation. They said a man in his 20s, who had been found injured at the scene on Thursday morning, was later pronounced dead in hospital.

Multiple media outlets reported that the man was the rapper Gaboro, whose songs have been streamed millions of times on Swedish music streaming gi-

ant Spotify. Sweden has seen a rise in gang shootings and bombings linked to score-settling between rival groups, with police struggling to control the illicit drug market.

Several high-profile artists have previously been victims of the violence. In June, 26-year-old rapper C.Gambino -- whose real name is Karar Ramadan and is not to be confused with American rapper Childish Gambino -- was killed

in a shooting, having been named the country's hip hop artist of the year the month before.

Another award-winning Swedish rapper, Einar, was shot and killed in Stockholm in a gang conflict in October 2021. Last year 53 people died in 363 shootings, often in public and sometimes claiming the lives of innocent victims and passers-by. —AFP



Amazigh women weave a carpet during the seventh edition of the annual Ouauzguit Carpet Festival, in the town of Tazenakht in Morocco's Ouarzazat province.--AFP photos



An Amazigh woman displays carpets that she wove.



Two Amazigh women card wool.



An Amazigh woman displays carpets that she wove.

MOROCCO'S WOMEN RUG WEAVERS BATTLE TO SAVE AGE-OLD CRAFT

In southern Morocco, women are the guardians of the age-old craft of carpet weaving, an intricate art form that often leaves them with meagre earnings. Women like Ijja Benchri, who creates carpets on a wooden weaving loom outside her small home in the village of Taznakht, follows traditions going back many generations. "I started when I was 11 or 12, imitating the women I saw weaving," said Benchri, 60. "Little by little, I learnt,

are then categorized into various styles, depending on their region of origin and their designs. Some of Morocco's finest rugs are crafted from high-quality sheep wool in Jbel Sirwa just south of the Atlas Mountains, and dyed using natural pigments from plants like henna, pomegranate peels, or indigo.

Though industrial dyes have replaced natural ones for most weavers because they are cheaper and can be produced more quickly. "This tradition has been handed down for centuries, from mothers to daughters," said Safia Imnoutres, who leads a local women's weaving cooperative. She was one of the women showcasing their creations at a recent festival in Taznakht dedicated to safeguarding the heritage.

"The intermediaries decide the price, and we have no choice but to accept it because this is our livelihood." These diminishing returns, she added, have con-

some weavers to sell their work directly to buyers, cutting out middlemen. The center also tries to open new avenues for these women to sell their products inde-



An Amazigh woman displays carpets that she wove.

and it became my life's work."

Known for their bold geometric patterns and vibrant colors, the handwoven rugs are a fixture in local markets and a favorite among tourists. In 2022, traditional carpets accounted for nearly 22 percent of the kingdom's artisan exports, according to government data. The mountain villages around Taznakht are famous for their Ait Ouauzguite carpets, named after a native Amazigh tribe, one among a grouping of several communities indigenous to North Africa long referred to as Berbers.

The carpets are woven by the women on small traditional looms, either at home or in specialized workshops. They

'Comes from within'

Creating a single carpet can take two to four weeks depending on its size, said Benchri, speaking in Tamazight, the community's language recognized as an official language alongside Arabic in Morocco. "I choose the colors as I go, according to my feelings," she added. Imnoutres also described the process as "instinctive", guided by emotion rather than a predetermined design.

"Weaving is an expression of the women's feelings, when they are joyful, when they are melancholic," she added. "It's an art that comes from within." But beyond its artistic value, weaving is a vital source of income. Every Thursday, many travel to a weekly market to sell their rugs, often to middlemen who set the prices.

On average, a large rug sells for just 250 Moroccan dirhams (around \$24), with its final price later raking astronomical profits. In cities like Marrakech, some 250 kilometers (160 miles) north of Taznakht, they are sold in bazaars for up to ten times the original price. Other rugs are listed at up to \$6,000 on online platforms.

"We earn very little," said Benchri.



An Amazigh woman rolls wool on a loom.



An Amazigh woman weaves a carpet inside her home.



A man from Douar Mouddat in the Tazenakht region, walks amid drying carpets.

tributed to making the craft less attractive for younger women and jeopardizing the handcraft tradition. Additionally, the influx of cheaper, machine-made rugs has deepened competition.

To address these challenges, a new exhibition space in Taznakht allows

pendently through courses in digital marketing. "If this heritage isn't made financially viable, we risk losing it," Imnoutres warned. —AFP



A man from Douar Mouddat in the Tazenakht region, washes carpets.



Amazigh women process wool as others weave a carpet.



An Amazigh woman spins wool.

Lifestyle



Models pose while presenting a collection by Namibian designer McBright Kavari in Windhoek.--AFP photos



Namibian designer McBright Kavari (right) adjusts an otjikaiva hat (a distinctive, horizontal, horned headdress that symbolizes respect for the cows that have been so important to the Herero people) on a model inside his workshop in Windhoek.



Namibian designer McBright Kavari (left) works alongside his colleague Kasukona inside his workshop in Windhoek.

Floor-length and horns: Namibia's Herero dress endures

From his humble Windhoek workshop, Namibia's leading fashion designer is keeping alive the love for the Herero people's traditional dress with horned headgear, a full-length skirt and a link to German colonizers accused of genocide. McBright Kavari's sewing room is piled high with seemingly ordinary fabric that he transforms with labor and skill into elegant and voluminous dresses called ohorokova. Kavari's designs may introduce modern twists, but they maintain the distinctive and conservative character of a garment believed to have its roots in the arrival of German missionaries in this arid southwestern African land in the early 19th century.

"Myself being a Herero, I felt like that to keep the dress alive, I have to think outside the box and modify it and make it lovable for the youth and the young generation," he told AFP. Kavari always includes one or two ohorokova outfits in his collections. His creations have walked runways in China, Ethiopia, Ghana and even Germany, the former colonial power that historians say committed the first genocide of the 20th century against the Herero and Nama, another of Namibia's ethnic groups. "I want to show it (the ohorokova) to the world to tell more people about our Herero people," he said. "Once it's on stage, it wows everybody. Everybody wants to know more about it. It's very



Namibian designer McBright Kavari works inside his workshop in Windhoek.

attached to history as well."

The German occupiers are believed to have killed at least 60,000 Herero between 1904 and 1908, about 80 percent of the population at the time, in outright massacres or by locking them into concentration camps. About 10,000 Nama people also died. It is not certain how Herero women came to adopt the ohorokova, replacing the long, hide aprons that they wore before, but the dress has endured despite the passage of time and its links to German

colonization.

"We don't know if it was a choice to adopt that dress, or if it happened by force," said Maria Caley, fashion lecturer at the University of Namibia. But it carried through the traditional values of the Herero people, such as that a woman should cover her body and not even show her knees, Caley said. And the Herero version of the dress is "completely different" to that of the first missionaries, having been adapted and appropriated to represent the Herero

people, she said.

Horned headdress

Perhaps the most striking piece of the outfit is the headdress, called otjikaiva, which resembles the horns of a cow, reflecting the Herero roots as cattle herders. "The headdress used to be very plump and chunky, not so wide from the head," Caley said. "But now it has become very thin and very, very stylized." This is only one of Kavari's innovations. Some of his designs have added several layered petticoats to the floor-length skirts, or abandoned the sleeves.

He caused an outcry with a design in 2013 that featured a snake in the headdress of a creation for the country's Miss Universe contender. "The journey hasn't been that easy," said the designer. "People are not easy when it comes to change." "Non-negotiables" are the length of the skirt and conservative neckline, said one of his top customers, Yamillah Vetarapi Katjirua, who owns about 50 creations from flesh-colored to aquamarine and lapis lazuli.

"He has been able to maintain the integrity of the dress but still make it modern so that young people don't disassociate from it," she said. "For me he has struck that balance very well between modernizing and respect." That so many people have an opinion on the dress shows that this aspect of the Her-



Namibian designer McBright Kavari poses for a portrait inside his workshop in Windhoek.

ero culture is still "very much alive," said Caley. The Herero are a relatively small group: only around 179,000 remain, less than six percent of Namibia's population, according to the 2023 census.

"I feel they fell in love with the dress, they are more in love with the dress," Kavari said. "Every young Herero lady is owning one or two dresses in their closet." By taking his designs from one of the world's most sparsely populated countries to international catwalks, Kavari said he wants "to keep the people aware that there is a tribe in Namibia, the Herero-speaking people".—AFP



People navigate small boats on the Lekkersluis canal in Amsterdam on October 23, 2024, as the city launches its 750th anniversary celebrations.--AFP

Anger as Amsterdam allows 'ugly' solar panels on historic canal houses

Amsterdam's world-famous canal-side houses will soon be allowed to have visible solar panels on their roofs, much to the dismay of local heritage groups, who say they will be an eyesore. The Dutch capital's tall, thin historic houses dating from the 16th to the 18th centuries are poorly insulated and energy hungry. Solar panels are already allowed on roofs of protected buildings, so long as they cannot be seen from the street. But now the local council wants to relax the rules further in a bid to make the mansions more sustainable.

Starting in 2025, the Amsterdam council is allowing panels to be "visibly installed on all roofs of monuments and buildings located in protected areas". But heritage activist Karel Loeff is up in arms at the change. "Of course sustainability is very important," he told AFP in the Grachtengordel canal district, a UNESCO World Heritage site.

"But these solar panels are really ugly and they should not be allowed on roofs visible from the canal," the 55-year-old said. "It would clearly blight the view of what you can see now, a beautiful original 18th-century gable."

'Chaos'

With around one-third of its land below sea level, the Netherlands is particularly vulnerable to global warming, but is also one of Europe's biggest per capita emitters of CO2 emissions. The country's goal of reducing CO2 emissions by

55 percent by 2030 compared to 1990 levels seems out of reach, according to official estimates. The new coalition government, led by the far right, is expected to unveil its proposals early next year.

"We must contribute to sustainability in all areas," said Alexander Scholtes, Amsterdam's Green Party deputy mayor. This also applies to the city's 10,000 listed buildings, he told AFP. It won't be the Wild West, he insisted, with rules about the color of the panels and how they are placed. High energy bills means many homeowners want to make their homes more sustainable, Scholtes added.

"We can achieve responsible sustainability with fewer rules and faster procedures, and still take into account this cultural heritage," he argued. But Loeff is not convinced, predicting "chaos". He said he was not against solar panels on homes, but only outside the historic centre.

Another heritage group, the Friends of Amsterdam City Center, said "installing solar panels in plain sight seriously damages the protected urban landscape." The capital is not the only Dutch city relaxing solar panel rules. Rotterdam, Utrecht and others are following suit. The changes come as the Netherlands Cultural Heritage Agency is pushing to make monuments more sustainable. Authorities want protected buildings to reduce CO2 emissions by 40 percent by 2030 and 60 percent by 2040.—AFP

Ringo and McCartney reunite for trip down memory lane

Beatles drummer Ringo Starr was a surprise guest at the final gig of former band-mate Paul McCartney's London tour, with the pair reuniting to play some of the Fab Four's greatest hits.

"I've had a great night tonight, it's been a great show," the 84-year-old drummer said late Thursday as he took the stage at London's O2 Arena on the final evening of McCartney's "Got Back" tour. They then ran through timeless hits including "Helter Skelter" and "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band."

"I'm off now, I've had a great night and I love you all," Starr told the packed crowd as he left the stage. Starr and McCartney have reunited several times since the Beatles break-up, including on McCartney's 2018-19 "FRESHEN UP" tour. Rolling Stones guitarist Ronnie Wood

also joined McCartney for the song "Get Back", with the former Beatle playing his original Hofner bass for the first time in 50 years.

McCartney, 82, played the instrument throughout the Beatlemania decade and it was used to record hits including "Love Me Do", "She Loves You", and "Twist and Shout". The instrument was thought to have been lost during recording sessions in 1969, but an investigation last year discovered that it was actually stolen in 1972. The investigators tracked down its whereabouts and reunited McCartney with the guitar in February. The 82-year-old opened Thursday's show with "A Hard Day's Night", before rattling through almost 40 hits from pop music's best-loved back catalogue.—AFP



In this handout image provided by The Rolling Stones, Mick Jagger, Charlie Watts, Katy Perry, Keith Richards and Ronnie Wood pose backstage at the MGM Grand Garden Arena on May 11, 2013 in Las Vegas, Nevada.—AFP

Blistering barnacles! Tintin-linked tomb gets historic listing

A 17th-century English tomb linked to the beloved Tintin comics has been granted official protection as a "remarkable" historic place by heritage chiefs. In sleepy Leigh-on-Sea, Essex, far from the snowy mountains of Tibet where the intrepid young reporter Tintin roamed, lies the tomb of Mary Haddock, mother of Admiral Richard Haddock. The admiral is believed to have inspired the character of the ill-tempered Captain Haddock in Belgian author Herge's "Adventures of Tintin".

Known for his inventive expletives like "blue blistering barnacles!", the com-

ic captain was a seafarer like Richard Haddock. Mary Haddock's tomb is "notable as a single monument dedicated to a named woman in a period of gender inequality", according to Historic England, which announced "17 remarkable and unusual historic buildings and places" listed this year on Wednesday. Other quirky additions include a brutalist concrete Baptist church in Bristol, southwest England, which has a Tesco supermarket on its ground floor and is known locally as the "church above the shops".

Historic England classed the 1960s building as a "striking example of post-war church architecture". A former bungalow-style maternity ward and an early 20th-century fingerpost -- a crossroads signal with pointing fingers at the ends of the direction arms -- were also listed as Grade II sites this year.—AFP



Berlin film fest to give honorary award to Tilda Swinton

Berlin's international film festival will next year present Scottish actress Tilda Swinton with a lifetime achievement award, organizers said Friday.

The decision to give Swinton the Honorary Golden Bear prize was taken in recognition of her "breathhtaking" range and status as "one of our modern filmmaking idols", Berlinale director Tricia Tuttle said in a statement.

"To cinema she brings so much humanity, compassion, intelligence, humor and style, and she expands our ideas of the world through her work," Tuttle said. The award will be presented at the festival's opening ceremony in the German capital on February 13.

The Berlinale, running February 13-23, ranks along with Cannes and Venice among Europe's top film festivals. The 2025 edition of the festival will open with the premiere of "Das Licht" ("The Light") by German director Tom Tykwer. Swinton said in the statement from the Berlinale that "to be honored in this way by this particular festival is deeply touching for me".

She recalled that the Berlinale was "the first film festival I ever went to, in 1986 with Derek Jarman and the first film I made, his Caravaggio". "It was my portal into the world in which I have made my life's work -- the world of international filmmaking -- and I have never forgotten the debt I owe it," she said. Born in London in 1960, Swinton's early career was marked by appearances in European arthouse movies, appearing in several works directed by the late British filmmaker Derek Jarman.—AFP

Sports

Heavyweight foes Usyk, Fury set for rematch

Newly bearded Fury, aching for revenge, veers between moody silence and venomous threats

RIYADH: Oleksandr Usyk and Tyson Fury reprise their heavyweight "fight of the century" on Saturday with multiple titles and both fighters' place in history on the line. Usyk edged a split decision at Riyadh's Kingdom Arena in May, handing Fury his sole defeat and becoming the first undisputed champion of the four-belt era.

The unbeaten Ukrainian has exuded his trademark calm before the rematch while the newly bearded Fury, aching for revenge, has veered between moody silence and venomous threats. Usyk, 37, and his 36-year-old rival were locked in an incredible 11-minute face-off on Thursday that ended with the sweating Fury cursing and hurling insults.

Much like their absorbing duel seven months ago, the first heavyweight unification bout in 25 years, Saturday's return to the 22,000-seat venue is difficult to call. Usyk, formerly an outstanding amateur and an Olympic champion, is 22-0 including 14 knock-outs and was undisputed cruiserweight champion before uniting the heavyweight belts within six fights.

The intelligent, mobile southpaw throws his array of shots with unerring accuracy, while supreme fitness makes him notoriously dangerous in the closing rounds. Although the scoring was tight in May, he had Fury in serious trouble in the ninth when the buckling Briton took a standing eight count before being saved by the bell.

"Gypsy King" Fury, however, is a natural boxer with the instinctive ring smarts of a man who hails from generations of bare-knuckle champions. The 6ft 9ins (206cm) Lancastrian comes in at 281 pounds (127.4kg) fully clothed, the heaviest of his career, indicating intent to dominate a man who is six inches shorter and 55 pounds lighter. Fury also boasts a strong record in rematches, after prevailing convincingly in his trilogies against Derek Chisora and Derek Chisora.

'You can't write him off'

"It's a hard one to say because if I'm a betting man, I would pick Oleksandr Usyk," Dillian Whyte,



RIYADH: Ukraine's Oleksandr Usyk (C-L) and Britain's Tyson Fury (C-R) stand on stage during the official weigh-in on the eve of their undisputed heavyweight world championship rematch in Riyadh. — AFP

who lost to Fury at London's Wembley in April 2022, told Sky Sports. "But I know from history and seeing Fury fight and knowing his resolve, and being in camp with him and fought him and seen that he has always bounced back.

"It's hard to go against him because you can't just write him off. You think he's finished, he's not going to come back, and then he just comes back and produces the goods." One question that hangs over Fury (34-1-1) is his conditioning after a personal life that has touched the depths of alcoholism, substance abuse and depression.

Crimea's Usyk, meanwhile, is a model professional

and comes fired by patriotic fervor as Ukraine approaches three years since the Russian invasion. By beating Fury, "The Cat" joined the likes of Muhammad Ali, Joe Louis and Mike Tyson as undisputed heavyweight champion, and the first since Lennox Lewis in 1999. If Fury, the bookies' slight underdog, brings Usyk's reign to an end, he would become only the sixth three-time heavyweight champion, a bracket that includes Hall-of-Famers Ali, Lewis and Vitali Klitschko, the last man to achieve the feat in 2008 and now mayor of Kiev.

Only the WBA, WBO and WBC belts are now on the line after Usyk, focused on the lucrative rematch,

relinquished his IBF title rather than face challenger Daniel Dubois. Reports put the prize purse at an increased \$190 million with Usyk, as defending champion, expected to receive the bigger share—a reversal of fortunes from May.

The fight sits high in the portfolio of Saudi Arabia's oil-funded push into sports, which has drawn accusations of "sportswashing" its dubious human rights record. After Formula One, the LIV Golf tour, Newcastle United and a swathe of ageing football stars, the conservative kingdom's strategy confirmed its crowning moment this month when it was awarded football's 2034 World Cup. — AFP

Vonn finishes 14th on World Cup return

ST. MORITZ: US ski legend Lindsey Vonn made an impressive return to competitive action almost six years after her last race finishing 14th in the women's World Cup super-G in St Moritz on Saturday. The 40-year-old American, who last raced at this level at the world championships in Are in 2019, was 31st to start and clocked 1 minute 16.36 seconds, 1.18sec behind the winner Cornelia Huetter.

The Austrian winner was 0.18sec ahead of Swiss skier Lara Gut-Behrami with the Italian Sofia Goggia completing the podium. Huetter moves second in the

overall standings, 37 points behind Camille Rast of Switzerland.

She is third in the discipline standings 10 points behind joint leaders Goggia, who won the opening super-G of the season at Beaver Creek last week, and Gut-Behrami. All eyes, however, were on Vonn who has come back to the sport hoping to qualify for the 2026 Winter Olympics. Vonn left the sport in 2019 after a series of major injuries but she has been free of pain since a right knee replacement in April, when part of the bone was cut off and replaced by two titanium pieces.

She was the most decorated women's skier with 82 World Cup victories when she retired. Her mark has since been eclipsed by fellow American Mikaela Shiffrin's 99. Vonn, the 2010 Olympic downhill champion, also won 20 World Cup titles, including four overall crystal globes, eight world championship medals and secured 137 World Cup podiums.

Sediqullah Atal, fresh from a maiden ODI century on Thursday, top-scored with 52 as Afghanistan cruised to 131 for two in just 26.5 overs and completed a white-ball double after a Twenty20 series win.

It was the seventh ODI series triumph for Afghanistan over Zimbabwe with one drawn. "It is wonderful to see youngsters like Allah coming into the team and making such a big impact," Shahidi told reporters. "Allah is doing very well for the team and, hopefully, he can maintain this momentum and bowl well going forward."

Wreaking havoc with his off-break deliveries, Ghazanfar continued a memorable year in which he was part of the Kolkata Knight Riders squad that won the Indian Premier League. Star leg spinner Rashid Khan also tormented the hosts, taking three for 38 as the fragility of the Zimbabwe batters was exposed again. They were all out for 54 two days ago.

Williams, whose 61-ball knock included three sixes and six fours, was among only three Zimbabweans



Lindsey Vonn

She will have a chance to go even better when she takes part in another super-G at St Moritz on Sunday. — AFP

to reach double figures. The top Zimbabwe scorer departed when his reverse sweep shot off Khan was caught by 39-year-old Mohammed Nabi at first slip.

Atal and Abdul Malik put on 84 for the first wicket before both fell in the space of 10 balls, leaving Shahidi (20 not out) to seal victory with 139 balls to spare. A brilliant catch at deep extra cover by Brian Bennett spelt the end for Atal. Earlier, Malik got an inside edge to a Richard Ngarava delivery, which uprooted his leg stump. The teams now move to southern city Bulawayo for a two-Test series, with the first starting on December 26.

Brief scores

Zimbabwe 127 in 30.1 overs (S.Williams 60; Allah Ghazanfar 5-33, Rashid Khan 3-38) v Afghanistan 131-2 in 26.5 overs (Sediqullah Atal 52, Abdul Malik 29, Hashmatullah Shahidi 20 not out)

Result: Afghanistan win by eight wickets

Series: Afghanistan win 2-0. — AFP

Ghazanfar takes 5 as Afghanistan win ODI series

HARARE: Teenage spinner Allah Ghazanfar took five for 33 as Afghanistan overwhelmed Zimbabwe by eight wickets on Saturday for a 2-0 one-day international series win. The 18-year-old followed up a six-wicket haul against Bangladesh last month with a man-of-the-match show in Harare as the tourists crushed the hosts for the second time in three days.

The opening ODI in the three-match series was washed out on Tuesday. Zimbabwe were put in to bat by Afghanistan captain Hashmatullah Shahidi and, with the exception of veteran Sean Williams, who made 60 from 61 balls, flopped to be all out of 127.

Tiger in family golf event but has 'long way' before PGA return

MIAMI: Tiger Woods will play alongside his 15-year-old son Charlie in this week's PNC Championship, but the 15-time major winner said Friday his PGA Tour return remains distant. The 36-hole parent-child tournament at Ritz-Carlton Golf Club in Orlando will be the first quasi-competitive event for Woods since he underwent back surgery in September.

Back trouble and leg injuries from a 2021 car crash have limited Woods' ability to play in the regular tournaments he once dominated. "My leg is what it is. It's still here," said Woods, who turns 49 on December 30. "But this year I struggled a lot with my back and it's a lot better, but I still have a long way to go."

Woods was 60th at the Masters and missed the cut in the year's other three majors, struggling to recover form between rounds. In his only other start this year, Woods withdrew after one round at the Genesis Invitational, the February event he hosts at Riviera. "The recovery has gotten to be the hardest part," Woods said. "But over the course of rounds, weeks, months, it gets harder." Even getting his surgically repaired body ready to compete is difficult.

"Preparing for competitive play is different. That takes months, weeks,"

Woods said. "But it starts with each and every day. You just do the little things correctly and they add up." "It's frustrating. It's hard. I have an amazing team, amazing support. But I have to do the little things on a daily basis and away from everybody. It's hard."

Woods has been impressed with top-ranked Scottie Scheffler, who won nine times this year including a second Masters and Paris Olympic gold. It's a domination unseen since Woods in his heyday. "How he has handled the pressure and the expectations for he and his family, I think he's doing an unbelievable job," Woods said. "He's just coming into his own. This is the fun part of watching him develop. This is going to be the start of an unbelievable year."

Woods said a commonality in their success styles is avoiding errors. "It's not making that many mistakes," Woods said. "Over the course of big events, lots of play at an elite level, not making mistakes adds up."

Charlie beats Tiger for nine

Woods, who shares the record of 82 PGA Tour wins with Sam Snead, has a new rival to challenge him in Charlie Woods, who recently defeated his dad over nine holes. "He beat me for



ORLANDO: Tiger Woods of the United States and son Charlie Woods pose for a photo during the pro-am prior to the PNC Championship at Ritz-Carlton Golf Club on December 20, 2024 in Orlando, Florida. — AFP

nine holes. He has yet to beat me for 18 holes," Woods said. "That day is coming. I'm just prolonging it as long as I possibly can. "We have so much fun out there. It'll be a fun atmosphere tomorrow and we're just going to have a blast." This week marks the fifth time the Woods duo has played in the event, with a runner-up finish in 2001 their best showing. They were fifth last year.

Woods hopes playing this week can be a step back to competing once more. "I'm not competitive right now, but I just

want to be able to have the experience again," Woods said. "This has always been one of the bigger highlights of the year for us as a family."

"We want to win, but it's about the bond. It's about having the family. It's about us having a father-son moment together." His next competition is planned for January's launch of TGL, the six-team tech-golf league developed by Woods and Rory McIlroy. It features a specially built arena with video screens and rotating greens. — AFP

Russian skaters allowed to compete as neutrals in 2026

LAUSANNE: Russians will be able to qualify for the ice-skating competition at the 2026 Winter Olympics as neutral athletes, the sport's governing body said on Friday.

The International Skating Union (ISU) announced "a pathway to allow a limited number of individual neutral athletes (AIN) to participate under strict conditions in designated Olympic qualifying events for the 2025/26 season".

The decision applies to figure skating and speed skating disciplines, the ISU said. "Recognizing that competing in the Olympic Winter Games is the pinnacle of any skater's career, the ISU has carefully examined the feasibility of implementing the IOC's recommendations on creating a pathway to facilitate the participation of athletes affiliated with ISU Members in Russia and Belarus in the Olympic Winter Games Milano Cortina 2026," the ISU said.

Just 15 Russian athletes were permitted to take part in the Paris Olympics this summer, competing as neutrals. The athletes had to qualify for the Games and pass a double check, first by the international sports federations and then by the International Olympic Committee (IOC), to prove they did not actively support the war in Ukraine or have any links with their countries' armies.

The ISU said it "noted the peaceful participation of AINs at the Olympic Summer Games in Paris 2024 and with this perspective in mind, reaffirms its commitment to fostering safe, peaceful, and fair competitions at Milano Cortina 2026". — AFP

McSweeney 'devastated' by Test axing

MELBOURNE: Dumped opener Nathan McSweeney said he was "devastated" Saturday after being cast out of Australia's team after just three Tests against India but vowed to come back a better player. The 25-year-old won the race to replace the retired David Warner at the top of the order alongside Usman Khawaja but failed to seize the opportunity. With a high score of just 39, McSweeney was axed from the hosts' 15-man squad for the final two Tests of the series.

"Devastated. I get the dream come true and then didn't quite work out the way I wanted," he told Australia's Channel Seven. "It's all part of it and I'll get my head down and get back in the nets and work really hard, and hopefully be ready to go for my next opportunity. "It's the game we are in. If you don't take your opportunity, and you are not performing as well as you want to, your position's never safe." Teen sensation Sam Konstas was called up for the first time and is favourite to replace McSweeney when the five-Test series, which is locked at 1-1, resumes on Boxing Day in Melbourne.

Middle-order batsmen Josh Inglis and allrounder Beau Webster are also in the squad as other options. Should 19-year-old Konstas play, he would become Australia's youngest Test debutant since current skipper Pat Cummins took the field against South Africa at Johannesburg in 2011. Chief selector George Bailey acknowledged it was a "really hard decision" to dump McSweeney but said Australia needed to "throw something different" at India's pace bowlers led by Jasprit Bumrah. — AFP

Sports

Villa beat Man City to deepen Guardiola's pain

City have now lost six Premier League games

BIRMINGHAM: Aston Villa beat crisis-hit Manchester City 2-1 on Saturday to heap more misery on floundering manager Pep Guardiola, who has now suffered nine defeats in his past 12 matches.

Jhon Duran finished off a fine team move to give the home side an early lead and Morgan Rogers doubled Villa's advantage in the 65th minute. Phil Foden scored his first Premier League goal of the season in stoppage time to pull one back but it proved to be too little too late. Guardiola, in the worst run of his glittering career, said Friday that "sooner or later" things will turn around but City's fear factor has vanished and they have just one win in their past 12 games in all competitions.

City have now lost six Premier League games in the current campaign, twice as many as they suffered during the whole of last season, when they were crowned champions for a fourth straight season. They have dropped to sixth in the Premier League, nine points behind leaders Liverpool having played two games more, while Villa leapfrogged them into fifth.

Guardiola said he trusted his players despite their shocking form. "It depends on us," he told the BBC. "The solution is bring the players back. We have just one central defender fit, that is difficult." "We have to think positive and I have incredible trust in the guys," he added. "Some of them have incredible pride and desire to do it. We have to find a way, step by step, sooner or later to find a way back."

Guardiola made six changes to the team side that lost last week's Manchester derby, bringing in goalkeeper Stefan Ortega and reshaping his defence with Rico Lewis, John Stones and Manuel Akanji. Mateo Kovacic and Jack Grealish also returned.

But the defending champions started the match in chaotic fashion and could have been behind with just 15 seconds on the clock. Untidy work from Josko Gvardiol allowed John McGinn to steal the ball and he fed Duran, whose shot from outside the box was pushed behind by Ortega. Villa were millimeters away from taking the lead from the resulting corner, with Ortega, in for injured first-choice goalkeeper Ederson, producing a superb save to deny Pau Torres. City then settled and their possession numbers topped 75 percent but they created little.



LONDON: Manchester City's Norwegian striker #09 Erling Haaland (C) vies with Aston Villa's Spanish defender #14 Pau Torres (L) and Aston Villa's English defender #04 Ezri Konsa (R) during the English Premier League football match between Aston Villa and Manchester City at Villa Park in Birmingham. -- AFP

Duran strikes again

Instead it was Villa who took the lead in the 16th minute through Duran after a superb team move. Youri Tielemans delivered a wonderful defence-splitting pass to Rogers, who burst through City's backline with ease before squaring for Duran and the Colombian international finished crisply for his seventh Premier League goal of the season.

Foden tested Villa goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez in the 35th minute after an incisive move involving Lewis. And Gvardiol squandered a glorious chance moments before half-time, heading a Grealish cross over the bar. Guardiola brought on Kyle Walker for Stones at the break but Villa again took control, this time enjoying much more of the ball. Minutes into the

second half Matty Cash lashed an attempt into the side netting after a speedy attack before Duran had a strike ruled out for offside.

Rogers, formerly of Manchester City, hit the foot of the post just before the hour mark after an intricate team move down the left. But Emery's men doubled their lead 20 minutes into the second half, with Rogers finishing unerringly from a McGinn pass.

City created little as they searched for a way back into the game until Foden pounced for a late consolation goal. Emery told TNT Sports that Villa were "feeling strong". "We played the first half very well," he said. "In the second half we kept possession more and getting in the box to score the second goal, we imposed and dominated more." -- AFP

Bayern Munich rout Leipzig on sombre night

BERLIN: Bayern Munich swept RB Leipzig aside 5-1 on Friday to extend their lead at the top of the Bundesliga on a sombre night in Germany following a deadly car attack at a Christmas market in the eastern city of Magdeburg. Bayern are now seven points clear of second-placed Bayer Leverkusen, who have the chance to close the gap back to four points when they host Freiburg in Saturday's late game. However, there was little mood for celebration after at least two people were killed and more than 60 injured when a vehicle barreled through a crowd of revelers in Magdeburg at high speed, leaving a trail of bloody carnage.

"It's almost impossible to talk about football, the people of Magdeburg are in our thoughts tonight," said Bayern coach Vincent Kompany in a press conference reduced to a short statement. "We won tonight, but I wish victories for peace next year." The small ceremony that the Munich club traditionally offers its supporters before Christmas was cut short, reduced to a rendition of "Stille Nacht" ("Silent Night"), due to the events in Magdeburg. A minute's silence was also observed in the Allianz Arena.

On the pitch, Jamal Musiala scored after just 30 seconds for Bayern. Musiala steered the ball in from close range from Michael Olise's cross after a sublime flick by Harry Kane, returning from an injury lay-off, had opened the door for Olise. But Bayern's lead lasted barely a minute. Lois Openda's stepover left Kim Min-jae in his wake and the Belgian sent a perfect low cross for Benjamin Sesko to score with a first-time finish. Both teams took a breather after an intense opening, but it wasn't long before Bayern were back in front. Konrad Laimer exchanged passes with the dangerous Olise, and the Austrian volleyed expertly past Peter Gulacsi in the Leipzig goal. Bayern added a third courtesy of a Joshua Kimmich piledriver in the 36th minute. The midfielder, captaining the side in the absence of the injured Manuel Neuer, found some space 25 yards out and let fly with an unstoppable drive.

Leipzig, who have won twice their last three visits to the Allianz Arena, steadied the ship a little after the break but Bayern were in no mood to compromise and continued to produce some of their best football of the season.

They extended their lead in the 75th minute through Leroy Sane, who just managed to stay on side as he collected Alphonso Davies' through pass, rolling the ball into the bottom corner. Bayern were hungry for more though. Kimmich, a thorn in Leipzig's side all night, found space on the right and whipped a cross in for Davies, who connected to score a rare headed goal and bring up Bayern's fifth of the night. Kane joined Kompany in offering his sympathy to the victims of the Magdeburg attack. "Sometimes, there is a bigger picture than football. All the team and FC Bayern presents its condolences to anyone who is affected by this," said the England star. -- AFP



MUNICH: Bayern Munich's German forward #10 Leroy Sane (C) scores the 4-1 past Leipzig's Hungarian goalkeeper #01 Peter Gulacsi (R) during the German first division Bundesliga football match between FC Bayern Munich and RB Leipzig in Munich, southern Germany, on December 20, 2024. -- AFP

Gatland remains as Wales boss

LONDON: Warren Gatland will remain as Wales coach for the 2025 Six Nations despite a dire run of results, officials announced Friday. But the veteran New Zealander has been warned by the Welsh Rugby Union he must start delivering results in what is his second spell in charge of Wales.

November international reverses against Fiji, Australia and world champions South Africa extended Wales' losing streak to a national record 12 matches. Wales have not experienced a Test victory since a pool win over Georgia at the Rugby World Cup in October 2023, with a 45-12 drubbing by the Springboks in Cardiff meaning they finished a calendar year without a win for the first time since 1937. WRU chief executive Abi Tierney said in a statement she had considered "wholesale immediate change" as part of her review, before deciding challenging Gatland to "change Wales' fortunes on the pitch was the best approach at this time".

Former Wales wing Nigel Walker, however, has resigned as WRU executive director of rugby in response to the team's decline. "I've had a number of very honest conversations with Warren and I will make no secret of the fact that his position was on the line as we undertook our review," Tierney said.

"Further than that, like any head coach in any sport, he knows the security of his position is directly related to the performances of the team and that this is a situation that will continue to intensify. "There is a tough challenge ahead but Warren is more than up for that challenge. We also believe he is equal to it."

Gatland may be contracted until the 2027 World Cup but his position is set to be reviewed again after the Six Nations, with Wales having a tough start to the tournament away to France in Paris on January 31. "I've been pretty honest in terms of welcoming scrutiny and challenge, as well as that I understand the pressures of international rugby with performances and results," Gatland said. "I'm pleased to have the support of Abi and the board to take the squad into the Six Nations. "This group of players has a huge amount of potential and we will be working incredibly hard together to turn around our fortunes on the pitch. "We know, more than ever, we will be judged on competitiveness, on success and on winning during the 2025 campaign," the 61-year-old added. --AFP



CLEVELAND: Donovan Mitchell #45 of the Cleveland Cavaliers shoots over Bobby Portis #9 of the Milwaukee Bucks during the second quarter at Rocket Mortgage Fieldhouse on December 20, 2024 in Cleveland, Ohio. -- AFP

Cavaliers cruise past Bucks, Embiid shines in Sixers win

LOS ANGELES: The Cleveland Cavaliers delivered a reality check to newly crowned NBA Cup champions Milwaukee on Friday, dominating the Bucks 124-101 to push their league-best record to 24-4. Donovan Mitchell scored 27 points and Darius Garland added 16 for the Cavs, who led by as many as 36 points as the Bucks struggled in the absence of injured guard Damian Lillard. Giannis Antetokounmpo, who led the Bucks to victory in the NBA Cup final against the Oklahoma City Thunder on Tuesday, scored 33 points with 14 rebounds and three steals. Khris Middleton, back from illness, scored 14 points off the bench for Milwaukee, but starting guards Andre Jackson Jr and AJ Green were a combined 0-for-9 from the field, neither contributing a point.

The Cavaliers, winners of seven of their last eight, improved to 15-1 at home and got good news with the season debut of Max Strus—who had been sidelined with hip and ankle injuries. Strus scored nine points in 19:07 minutes off the bench for Cleveland and drilled

three of their 20 three-pointers. "We did it on both ends of the floor," Mitchell said. "We set the tone, offensively, defensively. Knowing they had a long trip back (we were) trying to get going early, push the pace, and we did it for 48 minutes."

Bucks coach Doc Rivers, who had called it "weird" to pick up regular-season action after playing the semi-finals and final of the in-season tournament in Las Vegas, said the game was not a good gauge of where the Bucks are. "We were flat, tired, whatever you want to call it," Rivers said. "There's no read on tonight's game... give them all the credit."

In Philadelphia, the 76ers' star center Joel Embiid wore a protective mask as he returned after missing one game because of a sinus fracture to score 34 points in a 108-98 victory over the Charlotte Hornets. Embiid, who had been expected to sit out at least through Saturday after taking an inadvertent blow to the face last week, added five rebounds, nine assists, two steals and two blocked shots.

Tyrese Maxey scored 23 points and Kelly Oubre Jr. added 22 for Philadelphia, who notched their fourth win in five games as they try to climb into the race for a play-in berth. Embiid has been largely absent from the Sixers' stuttering season. The 2023 NBA Most Valuable Player was appearing in just his seventh game of the campaign after his troublesome left knee delayed his season debut. --AFP

Classifieds

Clinics & Hospitals

Clinics

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

Industrial Shuwaikh

Qadsiya	24814764
Dasmah	22515088
Bneid Al-Gar	22532265
Shaab	22531908
Qibla	22518752
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22459381
Mirqab	22451082
Sharq	22456536
Salmiya	22465401
	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, **Hasan**, holder of passport no. T8209964, do hereby change my name to Hasan (given name) Tapiya (surname) for all purposes. I will henceforth be known in the name Hasan Tapiya and I also undertake to carry out this name change in my all documents.

22/12/2024

I, **MUSTAFA**, holder of Indian Passport No. P0359918 having permanent address: 11, Bohra Bakhal Ward No.12, Rajgarh Dist. Dhar 454116 Madhya Pradesh, India, residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as (given name) MUSTAFA and (surname) BOHRA.

#6612, 20/12/2024

Automated enquiry about the Civil ID card is 1889988

Khaleeji Zain 26 dazzles with artistic show reflecting Gulf past and future

Amir receives Indian PM Narendra Modi and FIFA President Gianni Infantino



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets FIFA President Gianni Infantino as HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and Minister of Information Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi look on at Jaber International Stadium during the opening ceremony of Khaleeji Zain 26.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi as HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah looks on.



Scenes from the opening ceremony.



KUWAIT: The Arabian Gulf Cup Football Championship (Khaleeji Zain 26) competitions commenced on Saturday evening at Jaber International Stadium. The event featured a spectacular opening ceremony that showcased artistic performances reflecting both the Gulf heritage of the past and the vision for the future. The ceremony began with an inspiring speech by the tournament sponsor, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, followed by the national anthem of Kuwait.

Throughout the opening ceremony, the lives of the people of Kuwait and other Gulf countries were depicted, focusing on their historical relationship with the sea, which served as a source of livelihood for previous generations. Desert life, symbolized by the camel, was also highlighted in a captivating presentation that embraced the tournament's slogan: "The Future is Gulf." The event showcased stunning artistic displays that represented the ancient heri-

tage of the Arab Gulf countries, infused with modern artistic elements that conveyed a unified Gulf vision for a bright future. Notably, Gulf boats were featured, symbolizing the region's present and future. The ceremony merged traditional Gulf folk arts with modern technology, engagingly presenting a common Gulf identity.

Kuwaiti artist Bashar Al-Shatti and Saudi artist Ayed performed a beautiful artistic operetta set against vibrant backgrounds featuring the championship cup, coffee pot, and incense burner. The event conveyed powerful messages through visual displays that illustrated the unity of the Gulf's destiny and the shared vision connecting the region's peoples under one banner. It concluded with a stunning fireworks display that captivated the audience.

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Saturday received, at Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium, FIFA President

Gianni Infantino. Attending the audience were His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, GCC countries' ministers of sports and youth and heads of sports unions partaking and attending the Arabian Gulf Cup tournament (Khaleeji Zain 26).

Earlier, the First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Interior Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Al-Sabah on Saturday toured Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium inspecting the final preparations for launch of the Arabian Gulf Cup tournament, Khaleeji 26. The Ministry of Interior said in a statement that the tour included examination of the mobile central operation room to check coordination mechanisms among the field teams.

Sheikh Fahad, who also checked the gates, affirmed in a statement necessity of boosting cooperation among all the parties involved in organizing

the tournament, urged the personnel to abide by the set plans and maintain a team work spirit. He lauded efforts by the security personnel and the organizers, affirming that the interior ministry provided all available human and technical resources to ensure the sport event safety.

Amid an atmosphere of high patriotism and enthusiasm, Jaber Al-Ahmad International Sport Stadium witnessed inflow of thousands of football fans, watching the inauguration of the Arabian Gulf Cup tournament (Khaleeji Zain 26), which followed shortly with a match between Kuwait and Oman.

Amid the flattering Kuwait flags and the fans' chants echoing across the vast modern stadium, the football enthusiasts queued in long lines en route to the seats. Kuwaitis, individuals and families, came in clad in the national team blue t-shirt cheering the national team ahead of its first encounter in the Gulf championship. — KUNA

Kuwait, Oman draw in Khaleeji Zain 26 opener

KUWAIT: Kuwait football team drew with its Omani counterpart with a score of (1-1) in the opening match of the Arabian Gulf Cup Football Championship (Khaleeji Zain 26), which was held on Saturday evening at (Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium) within the competitions of the first group of the tournament.

The first half of the match witnessed parity between the two teams with a scarcity of opportunities and available spaces, but the Kuwaiti team was active in the middle of the game to enable its captain, Yusuf Nasser, to score the first goal of the tournament in the 34th minute of the match after a perfect header after receiving a beautiful cross from his colleague Mishari Ghannam.

Blue star Mohammed Daham missed an opportunity to increase the Kuwaiti team's lead in the 41st minute, and the Omani team scored the equalizer one minute later through its striker Issam Al-Subhi after investing in a cross to put it easily into the goal. Omani strikers missed a golden opportunity at the end of this half after they shot the ball against the post twice. The Omani red imposed a relative advantage in the second half to waste more than one opportunity, most notably a cross that passed from more than one Omani player, and the Kuwaiti team had some attacks, but they were not translated into goals, so that each team obtained one point at the beginning of their journey.

In the second round of the tournament, the Kuwaiti team will meet its UAE counterpart next Tuesday at Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium, while the Omani team will play with its Qatari rival on the same day at Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah Stadium at Sulaibikhat Club. — KUNA



Kuwaiti and Omani players vie for the ball during their opening match.



People wave national flags in the stands.

