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Kuwait nationality law amended

Interior minister to meet editors-in-chief, heads of NGOs to explain amendments

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Key amendments to the Nationality Law of 1959 were published on Monday in the official gazette Kuwait Al-Yaum in an Amiri decree, which means they are effective. The amendments almost entirely abolish the right of foreign women to get Kuwaiti citizenship after getting married to Kuwaiti men. Under the previous law, such women had the right to apply for citizenship after five years of marriage, provided they have children. In the past several months, the government has revoked the citizenship of more than 10,000 naturalized wives of Kuwaitis.

The amendments also allow revoking the citizenship of Kuwaitis who obtained it through forgery or cheating. All relatives who had obtained citizenship through that person will also lose it. The amendments allow revoking the citizenship of any naturalized Kuwaiti convicted in a final verdict of crimes related to honor or state security crimes or for abusing the Al-



mighty, prophets and HH the Amir. The amendments allow revoking the citizenship of naturalized Kuwaitis if they were dismissed from government jobs over honesty or honor reasons within 10 years of obtaining the citizenship. The amendments also allow authorities to revoke citizen-

ship for national interests and the state's external security, and also for carrying out anti-state activities. The state can use modern technology in granting citizenship or revoking it, the amendments state.

The amendments treat children of Kuwaiti women married to foreigners as Kuwaitis if they maintain their stay in the country and their fathers are held by the enemy, die or divorce their mothers. As per the decree, a foreign male obtaining Kuwaiti citizenship does not entitle his foreign wife to the citizenship. However, their underage children would be treated as Kuwaitis, and they can choose their preferred nationality one year after reaching the legal age.

The amendments also abolished allowing authorities to naturalize foreigners including stateless people or bedoons who or their ancestors lived in the country since 1965 and before, and maintained their stay in Kuwait. In the explanatory note, the government says it has become very difficult to trace this category of people.

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Greenland and Panama reject Trump threats



PHOENIX: US President-elect Donald Trump speaks during Turning Point's annual AmericaFest 2024 on Dec 22, 2024. — AFP

PANAMA CITY/COPENHAGEN: Panama's President Jose Raul Mulino on Sunday dismissed recent threats made by US President-elect Donald Trump to retake control of the Panama Canal over complaints of "unfair" treatment of American ships. "Every square meter of the Panama Canal and its adjacent areas belongs to Panama and will continue belonging to Panama," Mulino said in a video posted to X.

Meanwhile, Greenland on Monday stressed that it was not for sale, after Trump again suggested he wanted the United States to take control of the strategic island that holds major mineral and oil reserves. Greenland's Prime Minister Mute Egede quickly sought to quash any chance of a deal. "Greenland is ours. We are not for sale and will never be for sale. We must not lose our long struggle for freedom," Mute Egede said in a statement.

Mulino's public comments, though never mentioning Trump by name, come a day after the president-elect complained about the canal on his Truth Social platform. "Our Navy and Commerce have been treated in a very unfair and injudicious way. The fees being charged by Panama are ridiculous," he said.

Trump also complained of China's growing influence around the canal, a worrying trend for American interests as US businesses depend on the channel to move goods between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. "It was solely for Panama to manage, not China, or anyone else," Trump said. "We would and will NEVER let it fall into the wrong hands!"

"Has anyone ever heard of the Panama Canal?" Trump said at AmericaFest, an annual event organized by Turning Point, an allied conservative group. "Because we're being ripped off at the Panama Canal like we're being ripped off everywhere else." After the event, he posted an image on Truth Social of an American flag flying over a narrow body of water, with the comment: "Welcome to the United States Canal!"

The Panama Canal, which was completed by the United States in 1914, was returned to the Central American country under a 1977 deal signed by Democratic president Jimmy Carter. Panama took full control in 1999. Trump said that if Panama could not ensure "the secure, efficient and reliable operation" of the channel, "then we will demand that the Panama Canal be returned to us, in full, and without question." Mulino rejected Trump's claims in his video message, though he also said he hopes to have "a good and respectful relationship" with the incoming administration.

Continued on Page 6

Zionists kill 58 in Gaza as Bibi warns Houthis

GAZA: The health ministry in Gaza said on Monday that 58 people had been killed in the Palestinian territory in the past 24 hours, taking the overall war death toll to 45,317. The ministry also said in a statement that at least 107,713 people have been wounded in more than 14 months of war by the Zionist entity.

Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told lawmakers on Monday that "some progress" had been made in negotiations to secure the release of captives held in Gaza. His comments in

parliament come two days after three Palestinian groups said in a rare joint statement that a deal for a ceasefire in Gaza war and to exchange prisoners was "closer than ever".

In recent days, indirect negotiations between the Zionist entity and Hamas mediated by Qatar, Egypt and the United States were held in Doha, rekindling hope of an agreement, more than 14 months into the Gaza war. "Everything we are doing cannot be disclosed. We are taking actions to bring them back. I wish to say cautiously that there has been some progress, and we will not stop acting until we bring them all home," Netanyahu said in parliament.

On Saturday, Hamas, Islamic Jihad and the leftist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine said in a joint

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GAZA: Palestinians mourn by the bodies of victims killed in Zionist bombardment outside the morgue of Nasser Medical Complex in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip on Dec 23, 2024. — AFP

Jordanian, Qatari envoys hold talks with Syrian leader

DAMASCUS: Syria's new leader Ahmed Al-Sharaa held talks Monday with senior Arab diplomats expressing support for the Syrian people and discussing future cooperation, in the latest high-profile visits since Bashar Al-Assad's overthrow. Sharaa, whose Islamist group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) spearheaded the offensive that toppled Assad on Dec 8, has welcomed envoys from the Middle East and beyond in recent days, including Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan on Sunday.

Visiting Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi expressed his country's support for Syria's reconstruction in a meeting with Sharaa on Monday, in the first trip to Syria by a senior Jordanian official since Assad was toppled. Images



DAMASCUS: Syrian leader Ahmed Al-Sharaa meets Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi (left) and Qatari Minister of State Mohammed Al-Khulaifi (right) on Dec 23, 2024. — AFP



released by the foreign ministry showed the pair shaking hands, while Jordan's official Al-Mamlaka TV reported that Safadi had discussed avenues of cooperation, including in the areas of trade, border management, aid and electricity connections, along with security.

Safadi expressed support for "a government that

represents all spectrums in Syria", as well as for "the drafting of a new constitution", according to Al-Mamlaka. "We agree to support the Syrian people in rebuilding their state," he was quoted as saying, adding that "the Arab countries agree to support Syria at this stage without any external interference".

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Extremely rare baby mammoth found in Siberia

MOSCOW: Russian scientists on Monday showed off the remarkably well preserved remains of a baby mammoth found in the permafrost-covered region of Yakutia. The 50,000-year-old female mammoth has been nicknamed "Yana" after the river in whose basin it was discovered this summer. Experts say "Yana" is the best preserved mammoth carcass in the world and is one of only seven whole

remains ever found. Studies will now be carried out to work out her exact age at death, estimated at "one year old or a bit more". The carcass was shown at the Federal University of the North East in the regional capital of Yakutsk, the institution said in a statement. "We were all surprised by the exceptional preservation of the mammoth," rector Anatoly Nikolayev said.

Researcher Maxim Cheprasov said it was a "unique discovery". The remains weigh 180 kg and are 120 cm tall and 200 cm long. The carcass was dug up near the Batagaika research station where the remains of other prehistoric animals — a horse, a bison and a lemming — have also been found. — AFP



YAKUTSK, Russia: This handout picture shows the carcass of a baby mammoth during its presentation on Dec 23, 2024. — AFP



Local

Syrians in Kuwait weigh promise of change against pain of loss

Uncertainty clouds relief following fall of Bashar Al-Assad



PARIS: A woman reacts as people hold Syrian independence-era flags during a rally in support of the Syrian people and in celebration of the December 8, 2024, fall of Syrian president Bashar Al-Assad in Paris, on December 14, 2024. — AFP photos



IDLIB: People gather with independence-era Syrian flags during celebrations of the ouster of president Bashar Al-Assad in the northwestern city of Idlib on December 22, 2024.

By Passant Hisham

KUWAIT: After years of fleeing a life, they described as "hell" under a regime they deemed "dictatorial" in every sense, Syrians in Kuwait shared mixed emotions about the future following the fall of Bashar Al-Assad's government. While initial relief was clear, it has since been overshadowed by uncertainty and sorrow over the atrocities that have come to light.

"At first, I was happy, but despite the joy and newfound freedom, I am concerned," said 58-year-old Tarek, who is from Daraa, and has worked in Kuwait for three decades to support his family back home. He pointed to the Zionist entity's exploitation of the chaotic situation and incursions into their land, with its forces moving into parts of southern Syria to capture the buffer zone. "There

is a sense of vulnerability because there is no strong leadership giving orders to defend our country. It feels like a game played by global powers." This sense of fragility contrasts with the optimism expressed by 38-year-old Hassan Kilani from Hama, who last visited Syria in 2009. "The situation can't get worse than what we've endured. The previous period was the worst thing a nation or individual could experience," he stated.

Echoing his sentiments, 60-year-old Ahmed Sourour from Damascus reflected on the profound suffering endured under the regime, recounting how his tears flowed as the extent of people's suffering was recently brought to light through media channels. In particular, he referred to the harrowing images of prisoners who emerged malnourished, sleep-deprived, and brutally tortured.

"Entire families were executed in their homes, children included, not to mention the countless incidents of rape. There isn't a single positive memory to recall from this regime," he said.

Memories of loss resonate deeply with Kilani, who recounted the disappearance of his uncle in 2014 after being arrested without justification. "Nothing can replace what we lost," he said. Still, he clings to hope, especially with recent news of some prisoners, long presumed dead, being released. His ambitions to return to his country have grown stronger since Al-Assad's fall. Positive signs shared by relatives in Syria, such as the restoration of electricity and water, have fueled his aspirations for Syria's future.

Adding to this optimism, Sourour pointed to plans for a 400 percent public sector salary increase, though he

tempered his expectations. "We don't seek a luxurious lifestyle; we want a life of dignity," he said. Before the fall of the regime, Tarek said that most of the country was living below the poverty line, with some resorting to burning tree branches to stay warm or to cook. "Salaries in Syria before were equivalent to just five Kuwaiti dinars, barely enough for food, drink, and housing," Sourour said. "No one, not a single person, could manage on that."

Despite the widespread joy, skepticism lingers. Abdelsalam Moustafa, 60, from Halab, who hasn't visited home in eight years, acknowledged some of the government's "positive gestures," such as suspending mandatory military service and providing essential supplies. However, he questioned their long-term commitment: "Will they stick to their promises forever?"

For Tarek, the focus remains on security and basic needs rather than political ideology. "I want my children to go to school safely. I don't care what the new rulers' religion is, as long as we live in peace," he said. Meanwhile, Moustafa emphasized the importance of rebuilding a strong army to protect Syria's borders. "The old regime was oppressive, but it safeguarded our borders. Now, we are in the unknown," he noted, echoing Tarek's concerns about foreign interference.

Kilani, on the other hand, prioritized freedom to criticize the shortcomings of the government, a right that Syrians didn't have under Al-Assad. "We want freedom of speech. We don't want the glorification of leaders or their statues dominating every corner. Enough of that nonsense," he declared, appealing to the new government for a break from the past.

Over 95,000 ETAs issued to Kuwaitis in 2024: UK Embassy

KUWAIT: The United Kingdom's Electronic Travel Authorization (ETA) scheme has seen a significant uptake, with over 95,000 ETAs issued to Kuwaiti nationals since its launch in early 2024, the UK Embassy in Kuwait announced on Monday.

Since February, Kuwaiti citizens have been exempted from the pre-entry visa requirement for travel to the UK. The ETA allows Kuwaiti nationals—and citizens of other GCC countries—to visit the UK as often as they wish within a two-year period. The UK continues to be a popular destination for travelers from the Gulf region, with an estimated 800,000 visitors from Gulf countries recorded in 2022.

"While collaboration in fields such as trade and investment, and defense and security, has long underpinned our special ties, what truly binds us together are the extraordinary links between our people," UK Ambassador to Kuwait Belinda Lewis said.

The months between July and September saw an increase in the number of ETAs issued, with 47,142 approvals granted in just three months. In total, 95,381 ETAs have been issued since the scheme's rollout in February. Ambassador Lewis noted that the initiative has "made taking short trips to the UK easier and more flexible than ever before." This year holds special significance for both nations as they celebrate 125 years of official diplomatic relations. The milestone has been marked with various cultural events and high-level diplomatic exchanges, further strengthening the enduring partnership between the UK and Kuwait.



Belinda Lewis

stc, MEW promote awareness on water, energy consumption

KUWAIT: Kuwait Telecommunications Company – stc, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers, enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, announced its collaboration with the Ministry of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy (MEW), which consists of launching an awareness-based social media posts highlighting the importance of conserving water and electricity. The initiative comes as part of stc's ongoing commitment to sustainability and its role in supporting national initiatives that create a positive lasting impact on the community.

The initiative aims to educate the public through informative posts published on social media platforms highlighting efficient practices for reducing energy consumption. The collaboration will focus on the importance of resource conservation by limiting energy usage and water consumption to promote efficiency, emphasizing the shared responsibility within the community to achieve long-term sustainability. Having organized a number of awareness and sustainability campaigns, stc aims to drive engagement and spread a wide impact through this collaboration alongside MEW.

Commenting on the collaboration, Danah Al-Jasem, General Manager of Corporate Communications at stc, said: "As a pioneer and leader in digital communications, we believe that it is our duty to support national initiatives and spread key messages, through our digital channels, that aim to promote and instill a sustainable mindset that will serve the generations to come. Conserving electricity and water requires collective efforts, and through this campaign, we aim to raise awareness and encourage individuals and organizations to adopt efficient re-



KUWAIT: Ahmed Al-Jafira, Elaf Al-Oraifi, Ahmad Al-Nuwaibit and Mariam Al-Kandari pose for a photo.

source management practices. Our collaboration strongly aligns with the key objectives defined under our 2024 Sustainability Program."

Al-Jasem added: "At stc, our sustainability and comprehensive corporate social responsibility frameworks are at the core of our corporate strategy, with a strong emphasis on impacting the communities we serve in a positive and effective way. Having said that, we are dedicated to implementing sustainable programs & initiatives that can impact both internally within the organization and externally while creating long-term value for society. Our collaborations with entities within the public and private sectors aim to further broaden our reach and contribute to driving positive change for the community as a whole."

Ahmed Al-Jafira, Director of the Public Relations and Citizen Service Department at MEW, said: "Conserving electricity and water extends beyond being an economic necessity, but a national duty that contributes to protecting our natural resources and the environment for future generations. We are witnessing today unnecessary consumption rates of such resources that are impacting the community, and we believe that raising awareness on such issues is essential and critical. Our collaboration with stc aims to provide citizens and residents with tips on how to reduce consumption, while sharing valuable information related to effective sustainable practices. Through cooperation and commitment, we can implement these practices and secure the needs of tomorrow."

Pakistani, Kuwaiti officials discuss military affairs

KUWAIT: The Deputy Chief of General Staff of the Kuwaiti Army, Major General Pilot Sabah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, met with Lieutenant General Sahir Mirza, Pakistan's Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee, on Monday to discuss key issues of mutual interest, focusing on military cooperation and development between the two nations.

The meeting, held during Lt General Mirza's official visit to Kuwait, was followed by an official reception. According to a statement from the Kuwaiti General Staff, Lt General Mirza also visited the Mubarak Al Abdullah Joint Command and Staff College, where he received a comprehensive briefing on the college's role in preparing military leaders and its academic and training programs aimed at enhancing leadership and operational skills.

Additionally, Sheikh Dr Abdullah Al-Sabah, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Defense, met with Lt General Mirza to further discuss areas of collaboration and strengthening ties between Kuwait and Pakistan. The meeting, which took place on Monday, was attended by Sheikh Dr Shamayel Ahmed Khaled Al-Sabah, Assistant Undersecretary for External Equipment, along with other senior officials from the Ministry of Defense. — KUNA



Sheikh Dr Abdullah Al-Sabah, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Defense, meets with Pakistan's Lieutenant General Sahir Mirza during his visit to Kuwait on Monday December 23, 2024.



KUWAIT: Major General Pilot Sabah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah stands next to Lieutenant General Sahir Mirza during their meeting. — KUNA photos

Local

Deputy Prime Minister visits key security facilities in Saudi Arabia

Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef praises achievements of Kuwaiti, Saudi law enforcement



RIYADH: Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef and Saudi officials tour key security facilities accompanied by officials during an official visit to Saudi Arabia on Monday, December 23, 2024. — KUNA photos



A security officer gestures as officials listen to his speech during the tour.

RIYADH: Kuwait's First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense, and Minister of Interior, Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef and Saudi Minister of Interior, Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef, visited several key security facilities in Saudi Arabia on Monday, as part of his official visit to the Kingdom. According to a statement from Kuwait's Ministry of Interior, Sheikh Fahad's visit on the second day of his official trip to Riyadh included a tour of the Saudi National Center for Security Operations (911), where he was welcomed by Saudi Minister of Interior Prince Abdulaziz bin Saud bin Nayef bin Abdulaziz. The Deputy Prime Minister was briefed on the center's role in providing security services to citizens and residents, as well as the advanced technologies used to receive reports and direct the relevant authorities to handle them.

Sheikh Fahad's tour also included a visit to the Saudi National Cybersecurity Authority, where he was greeted by Saudi Minister of State and Chairman of the Cybersecurity Authority, Dr. Musaed Al-Aiban. He was accompanied by Kuwait's Acting Head of the National Cybersecurity Center, Dima Al-Sumait. During the visit, Sheikh Fahad was informed about the authority's role in enhancing and protecting cybersecurity in the Kingdom, as well as its support for security agencies on cybersecurity-related matters.

The minister also visited the King Fahd Security College where he watched a documentary film about the college. He learned about the college's educational and security programs, which focus on research and studies related to security.



A Saudi security official gestures as Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef and Saudi Minister of Interior Prince Abdulaziz bin Saud bin Nayef bin Abdulaziz look on.

Sheikh Fahad also visited the Saudi Reform and Rehabilitation Center, where he was welcomed by Deputy Head of State Security, Abdullah Al-Owais. The visit included an overview of the center's programs for intellectual and psychological rehabilitation, aimed at enhancing intellectual security and reintegrating individuals into society.

The Deputy Prime Minister's tour concluded with a visit to the General Directorate of Border Guard, where he was received by the Director General,

Major General Shaya Al-Wadani. He was briefed on the Border Guard's mission to protect the Kingdom's land and maritime borders.

In his statement, Sheikh Fahad praised the technological and human progress he observed at the visited facilities, highlighting their role in enhancing security and stability in Saudi Arabia according to the best global law enforcement standards. He expressed his gratitude to Saudi Interior Ministry personnel for their outstanding efforts and dedication,

wishing the Kingdom's leadership, government, and people continued prosperity and success.

The Deputy Prime Minister also commended the achievements of law enforcement agencies in both Kuwait and Saudi Arabia in combating crime, underscoring the coordination and collaboration between the two countries' security forces. Sheikh Fahad was accompanied on the tour by Kuwait's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Sheikh Sabah Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, and a security delegation. — KUNA



Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef and officials watch a demonstration during their tour of key security facilities.



KUWAIT: Khaled Al-Mughames, Chairman of the Kuwait Red Crescent Society and Ambassador of Palestine to Kuwait Rami Tahboub pose for a photo during their meeting.

Kuwait Red Crescent Society reaffirms full support for Gaza

KUWAIT: Ambassador Khaled Al-Mughames, Chairman of the Kuwait Red Crescent Society, reaffirmed the organization's commitment to providing all forms of support to alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people, particularly those injured in the brutal Zionist assault on the Gaza Strip.

In a press statement following his meeting with the Ambassador of Palestine to Kuwait Rami Tahboub, Al-Mughames emphasized that Kuwait's government and people have been steadfast in supporting the Palestinian people since the beginning of the conflict. He highlighted the efforts of official institutions and charitable organizations in Kuwait in providing medical and humanitarian aid to help the Palestinians overcome the current crisis.

Al-Mughames and Ambassador Tahboub reviewed the recent activities of the Kuwait Red Crescent in Palestine, particularly in the Gaza Strip, as well as the aid programs being provided to the Palestinian people. Al-Mughames assured that the Kuwait Red Crescent would continue to provide support to the Palestinian people without hesitation.

Ambassador Rami Tahboub praised the humanitarian role played by the Kuwait Red Crescent, emphasizing its continuous support for the Palestinian people over the years. He stressed the importance of the organization's efforts, noting that it is often the first to deliver humanitarian relief to those in need, particularly providing various forms of assistance to the Palestinian people. Tahboub also acknowledged the Red Crescent's efforts in delivering humanitarian aid to Gaza, underscoring that these supplies are part of an ongoing series of contributions from the Kuwait Red Crescent to the Palestinian people. He reviewed the latest developments concerning the situation of Palestinians in Gaza, especially the provision of medical and food aid to displaced Palestinians in the shelters they currently inhabit.

Tahboub stated that Kuwait will remain supportive of all humanitarian efforts in line with its foreign policy, which is committed to providing humanitarian aid to all nations in need. He also highlighted the generosity of the Kuwaiti people, known for their commitment to good deeds, charity, and giving.

Kuwait Oil Company celebrates 90 years of leadership, innovation

KUWAIT: Dec 23, 2024 marked the 90th anniversary of the establishment of Kuwait Oil Company (KOC), a national institution that has achieved leadership in oil and gas exploration and production. KOC has persevered through challenging times, including the Second World War, the 1990 Iraqi invasion and the COVID-19 pandemic. Over nine decades, KOC has dedicated its efforts to enhancing Kuwait's petroleum reserves and increasing production, thereby bolstering the national economy and contributing to development.

The company has focused on developing the skills of its workforce and the wider society, prioritizing environmental conservation and sustainable development. It has consistently supported Kuwait's leadership and development processes, with dedicated personnel whose efforts have made the company a model of productivity and excellence.

KOC was established on Dec 23, 1934, through a partnership between the Iranian-English Petroleum Company, now known as British Petroleum (BP), and the American Oil Company, now Chevron. In 1936, the company drilled its first well in Bahra, and in 1938, it discovered oil in the Burgan Al-Kabeer field, which remains the second-largest oil field globally. By the end of 1938, eight wells had been drilled.

World War II interrupted the company's operations, but work resumed after the war in 1945. On June 30, 1946, KOC exported its first shipment of crude oil. The

company developed Ahmadi town and expanded its operations, starting production in Magwa between 1951 and 1953. In Dec 1955, it discovered a new field in Rawdatain, north of Kuwait.

In 1956, KOC launched an exhibition showcasing its history and operations. On April 27, 1950, it inaugurated Ahmadi Hospital to provide medical services to its employees and their families. By 1974, the company transferred 60 percent of its concessions to Kuwait, with the remaining 40 percent divided equally between BP and the Gulf Company. In March 1975, KOC was fully nationalized. Later, in Nov 1976, the cornerstone for the gas project at Ahmadi refinery was laid. The year 1977 saw the drilling of a deep well at Burgan field, reaching a depth of 20,000 feet.

The Iraqi invasion on Aug 2, 1990 severely disrupted the company's operations. However, KOC personnel made extraordinary efforts to safeguard Kuwait's oil wealth. After liberation, the company quickly responded to the environmental disaster caused by retreating Iraqi forces, who set 727 oil wells on fire. Despite the enormous challenge, the fires were extinguished within 240 days. On July 27, 1991, KOC exported its first post-war crude oil shipment and resumed drilling at Magwa on September 14, 1991. On Nov 6, 1991, the late Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah extinguished the last burning well, Burgan 18.

Since its inception, KOC has established seven natural reserves and oases to promote environmental conservation and sustainability. In 2005, it launched the first marine colony as part of its environmental efforts. In Oct 2012, it opened the Kuwait Center for Integrated Smart Fields, marking a significant step into the digital realm. The company has worked extensively to reduce associated gas flaring, cutting it from 17 percent to just 0.5 percent.

Kuwait, Oman boost trade ties at joint forum

KUWAIT: Minister of Commerce and Industry Khalifa Al-Ajeel and his Omani counterpart, Qais Al-Yousef, emphasized the importance of strengthening economic and trade relations between the two countries, particularly in areas that promote sustainable development. In his speech at the launch of the Kuwaiti-Omani Economic Forum and Exhibition in Kuwait on Monday, Minister Al-Ajeel stated: "We are keen to ensure that the efforts of the ministry and government entities align with the noble desire to enhance cooperation and trade exchange within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)."

Following the opening of the forum, an agreement was signed between Omani company "Mawane" and Kuwait's "Public Services Company" to enhance cooperation in several fields, strengthening economic ties and expanding the scope of collaboration between the private sectors of both nations. During the forum, the ministers also inaugurated an accompa-

nying exhibition featuring 70 small and medium-sized enterprises, with 50 Omani companies showcasing sectors such as food, handicrafts, and technology.

The forum includes three main discussion sessions focusing on topics such as manufacturing industries, supply chain integration, real estate development, luxury hotels, and food security. Additionally, bilateral meetings between businesspeople and companies from both countries are being organized to establish strategic partnerships and achieve integration in line with the goals of Oman Vision 2040 and Kuwait Vision 2035.

Al-Ajeel highlighted the directives from the leadership to unify policies, facilitate trade and investment flows, support local industries, and promote innovation and entrepreneurship across GCC countries. He further remarked that the forum was a manifestation of these directives, aiming to achieve prosperity and advancement for the Gulf region. He also reflected on the long-standing and rooted relations between Kuwait and Oman, particularly during the prosperous maritime trade period. "Oman has been a key stop for Kuwaiti ships heading to the Indian subcontinent and beyond, marking the beginning of a historical trade relationship that continues today," he said.

The minister recalled the strong ties



KUWAIT: Minister of Commerce and Industry Khalifa Al-Ajeel and his Omani counterpart, Qais Al-Yousef, cut a ribbon along with officials to inaugurate the Kuwaiti-Omani Economic Forum and Exhibition. — KUNA

between the two nations, especially during the 1990 Gulf War, when Oman opened its doors and hearts to Kuwaitis, providing refuge and solidarity. Al-Ajeel also noted that with the establishment of the GCC in 1981 and the signing of the unified economic agreement, the economic ties between Kuwait and Oman have been formalized and continue to grow.

In his address, Oman's Minister of

Commerce and Industry referred to Kuwait as a "strategic partner" and expressed the commitment to further strengthen economic relations under the guidance of both countries' leadership. He emphasized the importance of cooperation in priority sectors that will create job opportunities and enhance sustainable development for both nations. — KUNA



In my view

Homeland first



By Dr. Khalid Al-Saleh

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A poet once said: "My homeland, even if I am oppressed within it, is dear to me, And my people, even if they are ungenerous to me, are still kind."

This verse encapsulates the highest form of loyalty to one's homeland. The homeland is not merely a person, a tribe, or a political faction. It is a vessel that carries all our emotions, memories, hopes, family, security, and peace. These qualities cannot be found together anywhere else but in the homeland. For this reason, the homeland is above defamation and immune to any attempts to harm it.

It is beyond me how some individuals who either because they disagree with the direction of their country, have not achieved their personal dreams, or have suffered from unfair treatment, become disillusioned with or hostile toward their homeland. I cannot understand why some, rather than working to address their grievances, choose to stab their own homeland with metaphorical knives. Worse still, some even ally with forces that seek to tear it down. This is not an act of patriotism; it is self-destructive. A true patriot does not seek to harm their nation but works to heal and protect it.

Of course, I fully support standing against oppression, as seen in Syria, where people fought for their country's future. However, the method of resistance should never involve conspiring against the nation itself or trying to dismantle it. Such actions do not serve the country's interests; they only contribute to its destruction. This is not the path of patriotism—it is the betrayal of the homeland.

Today, Kuwait is witnessing a troubling wave of voices, many of whom appear unclear in their intentions. These individuals, quick to criticize the country on media and social platforms, target the nation's achievements and defame its leaders. This approach does not serve the cause of justice; rather, it deepens the suffering and risks turning one's own country into an enemy. These voices may even be exploited by those who wish to bring the country down, used as pawns in a game that seeks to fulfill private political agendas—agendas that harm the national interest.

The verse I mentioned earlier offers the clearest guidance for those who feel wronged: they must seek justice, using every resource available, including the legal system. However, the pursuit of personal justice should never come at the expense of the nation's stability. Restoring individual rights is crucial, but it should not mean the destruction of the homeland.

Let us never forget that Kuwait is the cradle that nurtures its children from birth. It provides warmth and shelter as they grow, guiding them from the loving arms of their mothers into the embrace of their homeland. And in the end, it is Kuwait that gives them rest, with their coffins lying peacefully beneath the soil of the land they called home. Kuwait remains a source of strength and pride for its people. May God protect Kuwait, its leaders, and its good people, and may He grant the country lasting peace and security.

Commerce ministry tightens policies for real estate ads

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Minister of Commerce and Industry Khalifa Al-Ajeel has issued a ministerial decision regarding commercial advertisements and marketing for real estate, as part of efforts to regulate the real estate market in Kuwait. According to a statement issued by the Ministry of Commerce on Sunday, the new decision limits real estate advertisements to companies and institutions that are licensed to conduct real estate brokerage activities in Kuwait or internationally, as long as their license is valid. Additionally, media platforms are restricted to merely publishing these advertisements.

The decision defines real estate advertisements as any promotion related to the sale, purchase, leasing, renting, transfer, or any type of transaction linked to a specific property. Such advertisements can be published in newspapers, magazines, on the internet, through social media platforms, in public spaces, on roads, in exhibitions, or through any other advertising method.

The new regulations specify that companies and institutions involved in advertising must adhere to several requirements. These include avoiding the use of misleading language or phrases that suggest non-existent specifications or benefits, ensuring there are no legal barriers to transferring the property's ownership,

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: An aerial view of the iconic Kuwait Towers, surrounding recreational facilities, and part of the new waterfront project is seen in this photo.

— Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Kuwait enforces stricter regulations on freezing government scholarships

Frozen scholarships among top setbacks affecting students abroad

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Higher Education in Kuwait is enforcing new strict guidelines for students wishing to freeze their government-funded scholarships abroad. This move follows a 2023 report by Kuwait's Audit Bureau, which identified the freezing of scholarships as one of the primary causes of students being expelled from their approved scholarship programs. The report, which examined data from the 2019-2020 academic year, highlighted this issue as a significant factor in scholarship disruptions.

As part of ongoing efforts to address challenges faced by students abroad, the ministry has ramped up its review of scholarship policies. Dr. Adel Al-Adwani, the former Minister of Education and Higher Education, has entrusted a specialized committee with the task of conducting a comprehensive review of scholarship regulations. This initiative is part of a broader strategy to align Kuwait's scholarship programs with national educational goals, ensuring they benefit both students and the country's long-term development. This review is particularly crucial given the substantial annual cost of the scholarships, which is estimated to be around KD 600 million, Economist Mohammed Al-Baghli wrote in Al-Jarida.

New guidelines

Under the new regulations, students are no longer permitted to freeze their scholarships before they have been dispatched abroad. However, students may request a deferral for up to one academic year if they are unable to obtain a travel visa, if they face health issues (provided they submit an official medical report), or for other reasons that are deemed acceptable by the Ministry of Higher Education. The ministry has also clarified that students can only freeze their scholarships after receiving a recommendation from the Cultural Office and obtaining official approval from the ministry. If a student faces unexpected circumstances that require them to leave their study



KUWAIT: Students accepted in Kuwait's government-funded university scholarship program attend an orientation session in this file photo. — KUNA

destination, they must submit a formal request to the Cultural Office at the beginning of the academic year or semester to suspend their scholarship.

In situations where a student is unable to secure admission to a recommended university for reasons beyond their control, their scholarship can be frozen for a maximum of one year for universities operating on an annual system, or for two semesters for those with a semester-based system. Furthermore, if a university refuses to allow a student to repeat a failed academic year and the Cultural Office is unable to find an alternative university, the scholarship will be frozen until the student is admitted to a recommended institution. If a student fails their exams and the university only permits them to sit for final exams, the scholarship will be frozen until two months before the exams, after which it will be reinstated.

The ministry also emphasized that scholarships will be frozen if a student accumulates three consecutive warnings, or four separate warnings, and has only one academic year remaining before graduation. Similarly, if a student exhausts all opportunities to continue their scholarship due to repeated failures in the annual system but still has one academic year left, the scholarship will be suspended until they gain admission to a recommended university. Finally, if a student's GPA falls below the required level and they are suspended from their university, their scholarship will be frozen until they receive acceptance from an approved institution.

These new guidelines are part of a broader effort by the Ministry to enhance oversight and ensure that Kuwait's scholarship programs effectively support students in their academic journeys. — Agencies



KUWAIT: This aerial photo shows Kuwait City and surrounding residential areas.

verifying the accuracy of all official documents related to the property, and obtaining written approval from the property owner before publishing any advertisement. Additionally, the necessary mechanisms to obtain this approval will be defined in a way that safeguards the interests of all parties involved in the real estate market.

The decision further states that no property may be advertised—regardless of type—without ob-

taining a property identification letter from Kuwait's Municipality. This letter must remain valid throughout the advertisement's duration. Licensed companies are prohibited from advertising properties without a valid property identification letter, although this requirement does not apply to international properties. The decision also prohibits the concealment of any significant flaws that may affect the value of the property or the buyer's decision. Advertisers are required to

provide all available information to potential buyers.

Property owners may advertise directly (for sale, purchase, lease, rental, or transfer) but must adhere to all the regulations outlined in the decision and clearly indicate that they are the property owner.

Properties outside Kuwait

For properties located outside Kuwait, the decision emphasizes that licensed companies or institutions must obtain prior approval from the property owner to market the property. This approval must be granted via a power of attorney, authorization, or official letter notarized by the Kuwaiti Embassy in the country where the project is located. The same rules for advertising within Kuwait apply to properties abroad.

Furthermore, the decision mandates that all licensed companies or institutions involved in real estate advertising must uphold the highest standards of transparency and accuracy in their advertisements. These include clearly stating the advertiser's license details, including the company's commercial license number. The advertisement must also provide an accurate description of the property and the price. No misleading terms or phrases should precede or follow the price, such as "negotiable" or "price to be reviewed."

If images of the property are included in the advertisement, they must be genuine and accurately represent the property being advertised. It is prohibited to use images copied from websites or other electronic platforms. In cases where the advertisement concerns a property under development, only illustrative drawings of the project should be used, not images of other properties. If the property is for rent, the advertisement must clearly state the actual income from the property and whether this income is gross or net. — KUNA



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People and rescuers inspect the carcass of a bus hit by Zionist strike which led to casualties, in the Mawasi area west of Khan Yunis city in the southern Gaza Strip on December 23, 2024. -- AFP

Only 12 trucks delivered food, water in North Gaza since October: Oxfam

HRW report details deliberate efforts by Zionist entity to deprive Gazans of water

UNITED NATIONS: Just 12 trucks distributed food and water in northern Gaza in two-and-a-half months, aid group Oxfam said on Sunday, raising the alarm over the worsening humanitarian situation in the besieged Palestinian territory. The Zionist entity authorities rejected the report, saying it was "deliberately and inaccurately" ignoring their humanitarian efforts.

"Of the meager 34 trucks of food and water given permission to enter the North Gaza Governorate over the last 2.5 months, deliberate delays and systematic obstructions by the Zionist entity military meant that just twelve managed to distribute aid to starving Palestinian civilians," Oxfam said in a statement, in a count that included deliveries through Saturday. "For three of these, once the food and water had been delivered to the school where people were sheltering, it was then

cleared and shelled within hours," Oxfam added.

Zionist entity, which has tightly controlled aid entering the Hamas-ruled territory since the outbreak of the war, often blames what it says is the inability of relief organizations to handle and distribute large quantities of aid. COGAT, the Zionist entity defense ministry body coordinating Palestinian civilian affairs, slammed the Oxfam report. "The Oxfam report deliberately and inaccurately ignores the extensive humanitarian efforts made by Zionist entity in the northern Gaza Strip," COGAT told AFP. "Since October, over 2,100 aid trucks have entered the northern Gaza Strip," it said, insisting that specific shipments "including food, water, and medical supplies" had been dispatched to northern Gaza areas of Beit Hanoun, Beit Lahia and Jabalia. In a report focused on water, New York-based Human Rights

Watch on Thursday detailed what it called deliberate efforts by Zionist entity authorities "of a systematic nature" to deprive Gazans of water, which had "likely caused thousands of deaths... and will likely continue to cause deaths." Zionist entity's offensive has killed at least 45,317 people in Gaza, also mostly civilians, according to figures from the Hamas-run territory's health ministry that the United Nations considers reliable.

Oxfam said that it and other international aid groups had been "continually prevented from delivering life-saving aid" in northern Gaza since October 6 this year, when Zionist entity intensified its bombardment of the area. "Thousands of people are estimated to still be cut off, but with humanitarian access blocked it's impossible to know exact numbers," Oxfam said.

"At the beginning of December, humanitarian orga-

nizations operating in Gaza were receiving calls from vulnerable people trapped in homes and shelters that had completely run out of food and water." Oxfam highlighted one instance of an aid delivery in November being disrupted by Zionist entity authorities. "A convoy of 11 trucks last month was initially held up at the holding point by the Zionist entity military at Jabalia, where some food was taken by starving civilians," it said.

"After the green light to proceed to the destination was received, the trucks were then stopped further on at a military checkpoint. Soldiers forced the drivers to offload the aid in a militarized zone, which desperate civilians had no access to." The UN General Assembly overwhelmingly approved a resolution on Thursday asking the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to assess Zionist entity's obligations to assist Palestinians. -- AFP



Veronica Macamo, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation smiles at the end of the announcement of the results of the 2024 presidential elections in Maputo on December 23, 2025. -- AFP

Mozambique's top court confirms ruling party win

MAPUTO: Mozambique's top court on Monday confirmed the ruling party Frelimo's victory in an October election, which has sparked massive protests by opposition groups who say the vote was rigged. The Constitutional Council has the final say over the electoral process and its ruling is likely to spark further protests in Mozambique, a Southern African country of close to 35 million people that Frelimo has governed since 1975. Western observers have also said the election was not free and fair, and the post-election period has seen the biggest protests against Frelimo in Mozambique's history.

At least 130 people have been killed in clashes with police, according to the civil society monitoring group Plataforma Decide. Provisional results in late October from the electoral commission, which has not commented on allegations of fraud, gave Frelimo's Daniel Chapo the presidency by a landslide while the party retained its majority in parliament.

The Constitutional Council on Monday proclaimed Chapo president-elect and confirmed Frelimo's majority. Frelimo has consistently been accused by opponents and election observers of rigging votes since it first allowed elections in 1994, although it has repeatedly denied those accusations.—Reuters

Probe finds Trump ally paid for underage sex

WASHINGTON: A former US lawmaker who was Donald Trump's first pick to run the Justice Department paid for sex numerous times, including with an underage girl, according to a congressional report due for release later Monday. Matt Gaetz also used illegal drugs, including from his Capitol Hill office, according to the 37-page document obtained by CBS News and CNN, the culmination of a long-running probe by the House Ethics Committee.

"The committee determined there is substantial evidence that Representative Gaetz violated House rules and other standards of conduct prohibiting prostitution, statutory rape, illicit drug use, impermissible gifts, special favors or privileges, and obstruction of Congress," panel investigators wrote, according to reports.

Gaetz has repeatedly denied wrongdoing—pointing to the Justice Department's decision not to bring charges against him in 2023 after a criminal probe—and is suing the committee to block its release. Congressional investigators found that the 42-year-old broke multiple Florida laws on sexual misconduct, although they cleared him of federal sex trafficking violations. The panel voted secretly to release its report after initially deciding against doing so. Investigators listed payments by Gaetz totaling more than \$90,000 to 12 women "likely in connection with sexual activity and/or drug use" between 2017 and 2020. They focused on a 2018 trip to the Bahamas during which

Iranian singer freed on bail without hijab

TEHRAN: An Iranian court on Monday freed on bail a female singer who performed in an online concert two weeks ago without adhering to the strict Islamic dress code, local media reported.

"Singer Parastoo Ahmadi went to the 38th District



Matt Gaetz, the former US lawmaker who was Donald Trump's first pick to run the Justice Department paid for sex numerous times, including with an underage girl, according to a congressional report on December 23, 2024. -- AFP

Gaetz is alleged to have had sex with four women and took the party drug ecstasy.

The ex-congressman is an incendiary figure with few friends on Capitol Hill, but was a staunch Trump loyalist and a favorite of the president-elect's ardent supporters. He resigned from Congress in November after Trump nominated him for US attorney general.

"The allegations had been openly discussed for years and Gaetz withdrew from consideration when it became clear he lacked sufficient backing from Republicans to win Senate confirmation. Gaetz was not immediately available for comment but denied having sex with a minor or paying women for sex in a statement last week. "In my single days, I often sent funds to women I dated—even some I never dated but who asked. I dated several of these women for years," Gaetz said.—AFP

Court of Tehran's Moral Security Monday with her lawyers. Her charges were explained to her, and she was released on bail" of about \$38,500, Ham Miham daily reported. The paper added that "charges were also explained to the musicians of the virtual concert," and they were freed on bail of about \$25,500 each.

The concert, performed on December 11 with no audience present, was shot inside Iran with Ahmadi and her four-man backing band on keyboard, percussion and guitars, playing outside on a stage in the grounds of a traditional caravanserai complex. The singer was not wearing a headscarf and was bare-shouldered in a long, flowing black dress. She

Nine killed as bus, fuel truck collide in Iran

TEHRAN: At least nine people were killed on Monday when a bus collided with a fuel truck in Iran's southeast, state media reported, the second mass casualty road accident within days.

Mohammad Mehdi Sajjadi, head of the Red Crescent Society in Sistan-Baluchestan province, told the official IRNA news agency that "nine people lost their lives and 13 others were injured in the accident in which a bus collided with a fuel truck near Zahedan". On Saturday, 10 people were killed when a bus plunged into a ravine in Iran's western Lorestan province. Iran has a poor road safety record, with more than 20,000 deaths in accidents recorded between March 2023 and March 2024, according to figures from the judiciary's Forensic Medicine Organisation cited by local media.

In August, 28 Pakistani Muslim pilgrims en route to Iraq were killed when their bus crashed in central Iran. Impoverished Sistan-Baluchestan, which borders Pakistan and Afghanistan, saw one of Iran's deadliest accidents in 2004, when a gasoline tanker collided with a bus, sparking a massive fire that killed more than 70 people.—AFP

streamed the concert on her YouTube channel.

Afterwards, the judiciary's Mizan Online news website said a "legal case" was filed against the singer and the production staff for performing "music without observing legal and religious standards".

Under rules imposed after the 1979 Islamic revolution, women must cover their hair and neck and wear loose-fitting clothes in public. They are also not allowed to sing solo in public. However, increasing numbers of women are appearing without hijab, especially since protests erupted following Mahsa Amini's death in custody in September 2022. She had been arrested for allegedly violating the dress code.—AFP

International

Canada's Trudeau faces increasing pressure from his own MPs to quit

Opposition parties push for election amid US tariff threat

OTTAWA: Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, whose party looks set to lose power early next year, is under increasing pressure from his own legislators to step down and let someone else take over.

The ruling Liberals face obliteration in the next election after more than nine years in office amid voter fatigue as well as anger over high prices and a housing crisis. The Canadian Broadcasting Corp said more than 50 Liberal members of parliament from Ontario — the most populous of the 10 provinces and the party's main stronghold — held a call on Saturday and agreed Trudeau had to step down.

"There is no alternative but to have the leadership change now," Liberal legislator Chandra Arya, traditionally a Trudeau loyalist, told the CBC on Sunday. As of last Friday, only 18 legislators had publicly demanded that Trudeau quit. Last week, Trudeau suffered two major blows — then finance minister Chrystia Freeland quit amid a policy dispute over spending and all the opposition parties then said they would unite to bring down the minority Liberal government.

If he quit and the party had time to choose a new permanent leader, the contenders would potentially include Freeland, Foreign Minister Melanie Joly, Innovation Minister Francois-Philippe Champagne, and

former central bank governor Mark Carney. Trudeau though shows no intention of leaving soon. The Globe and Mail, citing a Liberal source, said he would spend Christmas with family before taking a skiing vacation in the Pacific province of British Columbia.

A Liberal source told Reuters last week that Trudeau would mull his future over the Christmas and New Year. Opposition parties say that given Trudeau's days are clearly numbered, and the incoming US administration is promising to impose a crippling 25 percent tariff on all Canadian imports, the country needs an election now to produce a stable government. Polls show the Liberals would be crushed by the official opposition right-of-center Conservatives in an election. The Liberal Party released an advert over the weekend saying that if the Conservatives won, they would slash public spending. The spot did not mention Trudeau once. Trudeau's options include staying on until a near-certain defeat in a no-confidence motion, probably in March, stepping down next month to allow the party to name an interim leader, or ending the current session of parliament to buy the Liberals some time to choose a new leader and prepare for the next election, though that risked alienating voters. — Reuters



Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau leaves Parliament Hill after attending a cabinet meeting in Ottawa, Canada. — AFP

Report: 3,100 Native Americans died in US boarding schools

WASHINGTON: The number of Native Americans who died in US boarding schools is at least triple the official government figure, the Washington Post reported Sunday. From 1819 until the 1970s, the United States ran hundreds of Indian boarding schools across the country to involuntarily assimilate Native children into European settler culture, including forced conversion to Christianity. An investigation by the Post documented 3,104 Indigenous students who died at the schools between 1828 and 1970, three times the number found in a recent government assessment of the institutions' toll.

President Joe Biden made headlines in October when he offered a historic apology for one of the United States' "most horrific chapters": Native American children being ripped from their families and placed in often abusive boarding schools.

The Post found that in many cases, children who died were buried "in cemeteries at or near the schools they attended, underscoring how, in many

cases, children's bodies were never sent home to their families or tribes." Poor record-keeping and the passage of time have made it difficult to determine exactly how many children died at the schools, where conditions were akin to "prison camps," one expert told the newspaper.

Some cemeteries are marked, while others "are hidden, neglected or have been paved over," said the Post, adding that its conclusions were based on "hundreds of thousands" of government documents.

Children died of disease, malnutrition and accident, sometimes under suspicious circumstances, according to the Post. Biden's speech came after a government report documented the deaths of nearly 1,000 children at such schools, though the real number was always thought to be higher.

The Biden administration has invested significantly in Native American communities, with executive actions expanding tribal autonomy, designating monuments to protect sacred ancestral sites, directing agencies to prioritize the problem of gender-based violence, and more. Native Americans remain, on average, poorer than the rest of the country at large, a fact that advocates attribute to centuries of marginalization. In Canada, where more than 4,000 students at residential schools are believed to have died or gone missing, a government commission blasted the schools as a form of "cultural genocide." — AFP

Biden commutes sentences for 37 death row inmates

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden on Monday commuted the death sentences of 37 of 40 federal inmates, taking action ahead of the return of Donald Trump who oversaw a sweeping number of lethal injections during his first term. With less than a month left in office, Biden had faced growing calls from death penalty opponents to commute the sentences of those on death row to life in prison without parole, which the 37 will now serve. The move leaves only a handful of high-profile killers who acted out of hate or terrorism facing the federal death penalty—for which there has been a moratorium under Biden.

"These commutations are consistent with the moratorium my Administration has imposed on federal executions, in cases other than terrorism and hate-motivated mass murder," Biden said in a statement.

"I am commuting the sentences of 37 of the 40 individuals on federal death row to life sentences without the possibility of parole," he said. The three inmates who will remain on federal death row include Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, who helped carry out the 2013 Boston Marathon

bombing, and Dylann Roof, an avowed white supremacist who in 2015 shot and killed nine Black churchgoers in Charleston, South Carolina. Robert Bowers, who killed 11 Jewish worshippers during a 2018 mass shooting at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, will also remain on death row. Those commuted included nine people convicted of murdering fellow prisoners, four for murders committed during bank robberies and one who killed a prison guard. "Make no mistake: I condemn these murderers, grieve for the victims of their despicable acts, and ache for all the families who have suffered unimaginable and irreparable loss," Biden said. "But guided by my conscience and my experience...I am more convinced than ever that we must stop the use of the death penalty at the federal level," he added.

Biden campaigned for the White House as an opponent of the death penalty, and the Justice Department issued a moratorium on its use at the federal level after he became president. During his reelection campaign, Trump spoke frequently of expanding the use of capital punishment to include migrants who kill American citizens and drug and human traffickers. There had been no federal inmates put to death in the United States since 2003 until Trump resumed federal executions in July 2020. He oversaw 13 by lethal injection during his final six months in power, more than any US leader in 120 years. The last federal execution—which was carried out by lethal injection at a prison in Terre Haute, Indiana—took place on January 16, 2021, four days before Trump left office. — AFP

Amiri decree amends nationality law...

Continued from Page 1

First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense and Interior and Chairman of the Supreme Nationality Committee Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Al-Sabah will hold a meeting on Wednesday with editors-in-chief of daily newspapers and heads of public welfare societies at 10:30 am at Seif Palace. The interior ministry said in a statement on Monday that the meeting aims to clarify the most prominent features of the new Kuwaiti nationality law amendments and discuss the files of dual nationals and those who acquired nationality based on fraud, false statements or incorrect certificates according to article 21, and the files of article 8 (wives of Kuwaitis).

Meanwhile, the new residency law which contains tough penalties and high fines of up to five years in jail and KD 10,000 in fines is likely to be implement-

ed in March, a top interior ministry official was quoted as saying. The new residency law was issued by an Amiri decree earlier this month, but it does not become effective until the interior ministry completes the bylaws necessary to apply the law.

The new law considers trading in visas or selling residency for money as a felony instead of a misdemeanor in the previous law, director of the residency affairs detectives department Brig Mishaal Al-Shanafa told a local newspaper. The penalty for this crime has been toughened to up to five years in jail and a fine that could reach KD 10,000, said Shanafa, adding that the penalty will be added for each case.

Expat workers who pay money to obtain residency are also penalized under the new law, he said. Previously, the penalty was deportation, but under the new law, they will be fined and jailed and then deported, he said. He said that during the first eight months of this year, the department has sent 26,000 expats to the deportation department. Shanafa said the new law stipulates that expat visitors can stay for three months and violators are liable for a one-year jail term and a fine between KD 1,000 and KD 2,000.

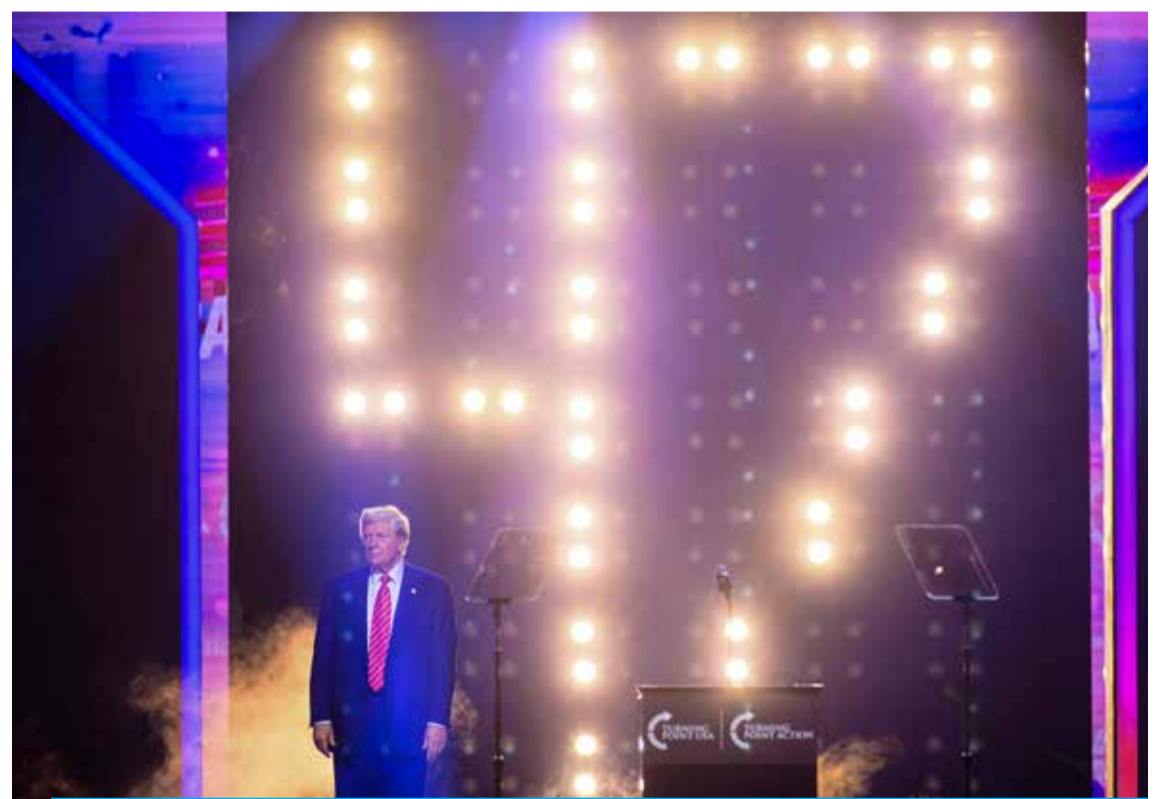
who tries to harm us will be struck with full force. We will continue to crush the forces of evil with strength and ingenuity, even if it takes time," Netanyahu said.

Zionist warplanes retaliated against ports and energy infrastructure, which the military said contributed to Houthi rebel operations, after a rebel missile hit the Zionist entity last week. The Houthis said the Zionist strikes killed nine people. Netanyahu also stated that he wanted to sign new peace accords with Arab countries, similar to the "Abraham Accords" negotiated in 2020 by the United States, which saw Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and Morocco establish formal ties with the Zionist entity.

"Moderate Arab countries view (the Zionist entity) as a regional power and a potential ally. I intend to seize this opportunity to the fullest," he said. "Together with our American friends, I plan to expand the Abraham Accords... and thus change even more dramatically the face of the Middle East." — Agencies

Qatar Airways plane to land at the Syrian airport" since Assad's ouster, foreign ministry spokesman Majed Al-Ansari wrote on X. A Qatari official told AFP that "a technical aviation team" accompanied the delegation "to assess the readiness of Damascus airport to resume operations". "Qatar has offered to provide technical support for the resumption of commercial and cargo flights, as well as ensure the airport's maintenance during the transitional phase," the official added.

A source close to the Saudi government told AFP on Monday that a delegation from the kingdom had also met with Sharaa in Damascus a day earlier to discuss the "Syria situation and Captagon", an illegal amphetamine-like stimulant. The drug has flooded the region in recent years, and was Syria's largest export under Assad, turning the country into one of the world's biggest narco states. Jordan in recent years has cracked down on the smuggling of weapons and drugs, including Captagon, along its 375-km border with Syria. — AFP



PHOENIX: US President-elect Donald Trump arrives to speak during Turning Point's annual AmericaFest 2024 on Dec 22, 2024. — AFP

Greenland and Panama reject...

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"The canal has no direct or indirect control from China, nor the European Union, nor the United States or any other power," Mulino said. "As a Panamanian, I reject any manifestation that misrepresents this reality." Later on Sunday, Trump responded to Mulino's dismissal, writing on Truth Social: "We'll see about that!" China does not control or administer the canal, but a subsidiary of Hong Kong-based CK Hutchison Holdings has long managed two ports located on the canal's Caribbean and Pacific entrances.

Trump offered to buy the vast Danish territory of Greenland during his first term in office — receiving an abrupt refusal — and he revived his push over the weekend when naming his ambassador to Copenhagen for his incoming administration. Greenland, the world's largest island, is an autonomous Danish territory with its own parliament, about 55,000 inhabitants, and a small pro-independence movement. It relies on Denmark to fund more than half of its public budget.

Trump on Sunday posted that "for purposes of National Security and Freedom throughout the World, the United States of America feels that the ownership and control of Greenland is an absolute necessity." As president, he canceled a state trip to Denmark in 2019 after the country said Green-

land was not for sale. Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen at the time labelled Trump's offer as "absurd", leading him to term her dismissal of the idea as "nasty". Frederiksen remains in her role of Danish prime minister. Under President Joe Biden, the United States said it did not want a purchase but instead sought to strengthen ties.

The Danish government must state in clear terms that control over Greenland is not up for discussion or negotiation, member of parliament Rasmus Jarlov of the opposition Conservative Party said on social media platform X. "To the extent that US activities aim to take control of Danish territory, it must be prohibited and countered. Then they can't be there at all," said Jarlov, who heads parliament's defense committee.

The island, whose capital Nuuk is closer to New York than the Danish capital Copenhagen, boasts mineral, oil and natural gas wealth. But development has been slow, leaving its economy reliant on fishing and annual subsidies from Denmark. With its Pituffik air base, Greenland is strategically important for the US military and its ballistic missile early-warning system, since the shortest route from Europe to North America runs via the island.

Since 2009 Greenland has held the right to declare independence from Denmark. The island of some 56,000 inhabitants, which relies on significant budget transfers from Copenhagen each year, has so far refrained from doing so. This is not the first time Trump has openly considered territorial expansion. In recent weeks, he has repeatedly mused about turning Canada into a US state, though it is unclear how serious he is about the matter. — Agencies

Zionists kill 58 in Gaza as Bibi...

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statement that progress had been made to reach a ceasefire deal. "The possibility of reaching an agreement (for a ceasefire and prisoner exchange deal) is closer than ever, provided the enemy stops imposing new conditions," the three groups said after they held talks in Cairo a day earlier.

In his address to lawmakers, Netanyahu also warned the Houthi rebels of Yemen, who last week fired two missiles at the Zionist entity, including one that injured 16 people in the commercial hub of Tel Aviv on Saturday. "I have instructed our forces to destroy the infrastructure of Houthis because anyone

Jordanian, Qatari envoys hold talks...

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Also in Damascus on Monday was Qatar's minister of state at the foreign ministry, Mohammed Al-Khulaifi, leading the "first high-level Qatari delegation" to Damascus "after 13 years of diplomatic rupture", his ministry said. "This visit reaffirms the strong fraternal ties" between Qatar and Syria, and underscored Doha's "unwavering commitment to supporting and assisting the Syrian people in their quest for progress, while preserving Syria's sovereignty", the foreign ministry statement added.

Syrian state news agency SANA published images of the meeting between Sharaa and the Qatari delegation. Khulaifi arrived in Damascus aboard "the first

International

Bangladesh tells India it wants Hasina back for 'judicial process'

Dhaka launches \$5bn graft probe into ex-PM's family

DHAKA: Bangladesh has told neighbor India that it wants former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who fled to New Delhi in August, back in the country for "judicial process", the acting head of the country's foreign ministry said on Monday.

Ties between the South Asian neighbors, who have strong trade and cultural links, have become fraught since Hasina was ousted following violent protests against her rule and she took refuge across the border. Dhaka's request to New Delhi on Monday came two weeks after India's foreign secretary visited Bangladesh and the two countries said they hoped to clear the cloud and pursue constructive relations. "We sent a note verbale to the Indian government saying that the Bangladesh government wants her (Hasina) back here for judicial process," Touhid Hossain told reporters, referring to diplomatic correspondence between the two countries. Hossain did not elaborate on the judicial process.

India's foreign ministry and Hasina's son, Sajeeb Wazed, did not immediately respond to requests seeking comment. The head of Bangladesh's interim government, Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus, has demanded that India send Hasina back so that Bangla-

desh can try her for what it says are crimes against protestors and her opponents, and crimes she is accused of committing during her tenure over the past 15 years.

Yunus has also been upset with Hasina for criticizing his administration from New Delhi. Hasina faces numerous charges, including crimes against humanity, genocide, and murder, among others. She denies the charges.

Indian Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri visited Dhaka this month and reiterated India's commitment to pursuing a constructive relationship with Dhaka. New Delhi has said that Hasina came to India at a short notice for "safety reasons" and continues to remain here, without elaborating.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh has launched a probe into the alleged \$5 billion embezzlement connected to a Russian-backed nuclear power plant by ousted leader Hasina and her family, the anti-corruption commission said Monday. Along with Hasina, the now-former prime minister who fled to India after being toppled by a revolution in August, those subject to the inquiry include her son, Sajeeb Wazed Joy, and niece, Tulip Siddiq, a British lawmaker and government minister.

The allegations were raised by a writ seeking an investigation filed in the high court by Hasina's political opponent, Bobby Hajjaj, chairman of the Nationalist Democratic Movement party.

"We seek justice through our court", Hajjaj told AFP on Monday. Key allegations are connected to the funding of the \$12.65 billion Rooppur nuclear plant, the South Asian country's first, which is bankrolled by Moscow with a 90 percent loan. A statement Monday from the commission said it had launched an inquiry into allegations that Hasina and family members had "embezzled \$5 billion" from the Rooppur plant via "various offshore bank accounts in Malaysia".

It said its investigations were examining "questionable procurement practices related to the overpriced construction" of the plant. "The claims of kickbacks, mismanagement, money laundering, and potential abuse of power raise significant concerns about the integrity of the project and the use of public funds", the commission said. Graft allegations also include theft from a government building scheme for the homeless. Hasina, 77, fled by helicopter on August 5 into exile in India, infuriating many



Former Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in this file photo.

Bangladeshis determined that she face trial for alleged "mass murder".

It was not possible to contact Hasina for comment. Siddiq has "denied any involvement in the claims" accusing her of in-

volvement in embezzlement, according to a statement from the British prime minister's office. Joy, who is understood to be based in the United States, was also unavailable for comment. — Agencies

News in Brief

Sea mine found off Turkey

ISTANBUL: A sea mine was discovered floating off Turkey's Black Sea coast northeast of Istanbul, state news agency Anadolu reported, saying the explosive device would be destroyed on Monday. The device was found on Sunday off the coast of Agva, some 50 kilometers (30 miles) east of the point where the Bosphorus Strait enters the Black Sea. Since Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, the warring sides have both deployed mines to protect their coastlines but they have often been displaced by storms. — AFP

Man who set woman on fire held

NEW YORK: New York City police arrested a man suspected of setting fire to a woman on the subway in Brooklyn who died from the incident, authorities said, calling it "one of the most depraved crimes" a person could commit. The man "calmly walked up to the victim" on the F train in Brooklyn and set her ablaze on Sunday morning, New York City Police Commissioner Jessica Tisch told a press conference. "The suspect used what we believe to be a lighter to ignite the victim's clothing, which became fully engulfed in a matter of seconds," she said, adding that police rushed to the scene and the fire was put out with an extinguisher. — AFP

Malaysia's 1MDB sues Amicorp

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia's 1MDB said on Monday it was suing corporate services provider Amicorp Group and its CEO Toine Knipping for more than \$1 billion for allegedly facilitating more than \$7 billion in fraudulent transactions over a five-year period. The scandal-racked sovereign wealth fund claimed Amicorp, which is headquartered in Hong Kong, had used shell companies and sham transactions. Its legal action filed in the British Virgin Islands was part of efforts to recover stolen assets, 1MDB said. — AFP

Ex-US Marine pilot to be extradited

SYDNEY: Australia's attorney general has decided an ex-US Marine pilot accused of illegally training China's military will be extradited from Australia to the United States, with the pilot's family slamming the news as "inhumane". Daniel Edmund Duggan was arrested in Australia in October 2022 at the request of the US government, which accuses him of breaking arms control laws. It alleges he illegally trained Chinese military pilots between 2010 and 2012, after he left the Marines. Duggan has denied the charges. — AFP

7 dead in Mexico plane crash

MEXICO CITY: At least seven people died when a light aircraft crashed Sunday in a heavily forested area of Jalisco in western Mexico, local authorities reported. The aircraft, a Cessna 207, was flying from La Parota in the neighboring state of Michoacan. Jalisco Civil Protection said via its social media that the crash site was in an area that was difficult to access. — AFP

Journalists arrested in Turkey

ISTANBUL: Turkish authorities arrested nine people, including seven journalists, for taking part in banned demonstration in support of two Turkish-Kurdish journalists killed by a Turkish drone in northern Syria, media and rights groups said Sunday. Nazim Dastan, 32, and Cihan Bilgin, 29, who worked for Kurdish media, were killed Thursday near the Tishrin dam, about 100 kilometers (60 miles) east of Aleppo, when their car exploded, the Dicle Firat Turkish journalists' association said. — AFP

Dalai Lama seeks to allay health concerns amid succession talk

DHARAMSHALA, India: When the Dalai Lama went to New York in June for knee surgery, his followers worried about his overall health and the future of Tibetan Buddhists without him. He told Reuters last week there was nothing much to worry about.

"According to my dream, I may live 110 years," said the 89-year-old spiritual head of Tibetan Buddhists when asked about his health and how he was feeling. The Nobel laureate has been disarming questioners with the same reply for years.

The knee too is improving, he said at his Himalayan residence in Dharamshala town in northern India after blessing more than 300 visitors from India and overseas at a regular audience. "Not much serious problem," he said after walking gingerly with the help of aides, although for longer



Military personnel stand next an ASCOD 2 Sabrah light tank on static display during a ceremony held to mark the 89th founding anniversary of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) at Camp Aguinaldo in Manila. — AFP

Philippines says to acquire US Typhon missile system

MANILA: The Philippines said Monday it planned to acquire the US Typhon missile system as part of a push to secure its maritime interests, sparking warnings from China of a regional "arms race".

The US Army deployed the mid-range missile system in the northern Philippines earlier this year for annual joint military exercises with its longtime ally, and decided to leave it there despite criticism by Beijing that it was destabilizing to Asia. Philippine Army chief Lieutenant-General Roy Galido told a news conference on Monday that the missile system would be "acquired because we see its feasibility and its functionality in our concept of archipelagic defense implementation".

"I'm happy to report to our fellow countrymen that your army is developing this capability for the interest of protecting our sovereignty," he said, adding the total cost of the acquisition would depend on "economics". The presence of the US missile launcher had angered Beijing, whose navy and coast guard forces have engaged in escalating confrontations in recent months with the Philippines over disputed reefs and waters in the South China Sea.

Beijing claims almost the entire South China Sea despite an international ruling that its assertion has no legal basis. Manila and Washington, longstanding treaty allies, have deepened their defense cooperation since Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos took office in 2022 and began pushing back on Beijing's claims to the South China Sea. And on Monday, China swiftly condemned the decision to acquire the system as a "provocative and dangerous move" and warned it risked triggering an "arms race". "It is an extremely irresponsible choice for the history of its own people and the people of Southeast Asia, as well as for regional security," foreign ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said Monday.

"The region needs peace and prosperity, not missiles and confrontation," she added, urging Manila to "correct its wrong practices as soon as possible". As a rule, it takes at least two or more years for the Philippine military to acquire a new weapons system from the planning stage, Galido said Monday, adding it was not yet budgeted for 2025. It took five years for Manila to take delivery of the BrahMos cruise missile last year, he added. — AFP



NEW YORK: Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama arrives at his hotel in New York on June 23, 2024, as he prepares to undergo knee surgery. — AFP

distances he is taken around in a golf cart. He spoke to Reuters only for a few minutes at the end of the audience.

The 14th Dalai Lama fled to India along with thousands of Tibetans in early 1959 after a failed uprising against Chinese rule. Beijing insists it will

choose his successor, but the Dalai Lama has said it was possible his incarnation could be found in India and warned that any other successor named by China would not be respected. Tibetan Buddhists believe that learned monastics are reincarnated after death as newborns. The Dalai Lama's prediction of living for another two decades is reassuring for his followers, but more clarity on his succession - including if and where he will be reincarnated - could come from him when he turns 90 in July, said Dolma Tsering Teykhang, the deputy speaker of the Tibetan parliament-in-exile, also based in Dharamshala.

"We are just lay people, we can't fathom his wisdom, so we are waiting for his clear guidance," Teykhang told Reuters in her parliament office about 2 km (1.5 miles) from the Dalai Lama's residence.

Teykhang said that although even thinking of the current Dalai Lama's demise brings tears to her eyes, there is a system in place for the Tibetan-government-in-exile to continue its political work while officers of the Dalai Lama's Gaden Phodrang Foundation would be responsible for searching and recognizing the next Dalai Lama. — Reuters

Here's the fact: Harm Reduction Science and Technology

Throughout history, humans have been consistently creative and inventive. We've found ways to solve problems to make life easier and more enjoyable. While this is typically positive, we also learn that creative inventions can also lead to unforeseen problems. Innovation never stops, and with the help of science, technology, and human creativity it allows us to create solutions.

Think about electric cars. The world has become increasingly aware of the harmful effect the combustion engine has on the environment. For years, car companies have been experimenting and developing new technologies to enable fully electric engines. Thanks to years of research and development, electric cars are now a common sight to see on roads. Increasingly, we're finding ways to power our lives which do less harm to the environment than traditional methods of power generation. We still need to drive cars, but we had to develop a more sustainable way to do it. Energy-saving lightbulb which utilized lead was developed and were much more energy efficient than traditional filament bulbs. So, people still had access to electric light, but with reduced environmental impact.

This is an example of an idea known as harm-reduction. Rather than abandoning the technology because of the harm it causes, harm reduction accepts that innovation needs reviewing and improving, and that there are often better ways to do the same things, which keep the desired effects

while minimizing the unintended negatives.

Harm reduction also applies to tobacco. It's obviously best that nobody smokes and that those who do smoke, quit. Nevertheless, huge numbers of people aren't doing so. Science and technology have provided a better alternative to continued smoking. Devices such as e-cigarettes and tobacco heating systems are designed to deliver nicotine, but without the burning that takes place while smoking cigarettes.

How does this reduce harm?

It is the smoke produced from burning that contains the high levels of harmful and potentially harmful chemicals associated with smoking related disease. By eliminating combustion, and therefore smoke, scientifically substantiated alternatives can significantly reduce the average levels of harmful chemicals compared to cigarettes. This does not make them risk-free and they provide nicotine which is addictive. However, they offer the potential to be much better alternatives for adults who would otherwise continue to smoke.

Harm reduction techniques are all around us in countless ways, and the drive to do better has served us well in the past. There's no reason we shouldn't keep trying to find better alternatives and embrace technologies that do less harm.

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TUESDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2024

Biden launches fresh US trade probe into legacy Chinese chips

Investigation targets mature chips powering autos, appliances

WASHINGTON: The Biden administration on Monday announced a last-minute trade investigation into Chinese-made "legacy" semiconductors that could heap more US tariffs on chips from China that power everyday goods from autos to washing machines to telecoms gear. The "Section 301" probe, launched just four weeks before President-elect Donald Trump takes office on Jan 20, will be handed over to his administration in January for completion, Biden administration officials said.

The effort could offer Trump a ready avenue to begin imposing some of the hefty, 60 percent tariffs that he has threatened on Chinese imports. Departing President Joe Biden has already imposed a 50 percent US tariff on Chinese semiconductors that starts on Jan 1. His administration has tightened export curbs on advanced AI and memory chips and chipmaking equipment to China and also recently increased tariffs to 50 percent on Chinese solar wafers and polysilicon.

The US Trade Representative's office, which will conduct the new probe, said it is aimed at protecting American and other market-driven chip producers from China's massive state-driven buildup of domestic chip supply. US Trade Representative Katherine Tai said that the trade agency has found evidence that Beijing is targeting the semiconductor industry for global domination, similar to its buildup in steel, aluminum, solar panels, electric vehicles and critical minerals.

"This is enabling its companies to rapidly expand capacity and to offer artificially lower priced chips that threaten to significantly harm and potentially eliminate their market-oriented competition," she told reporters on a conference call. Legacy chips use older, mature manufacturing processes and are found in a

wide range of mass market applications. They do not include advanced chips for use in artificial intelligence applications or sophisticated microprocessors.

The Biden administration will begin accepting public comments on the probe on Jan 6, and has planned a public hearing for March 11-12, according to a Federal Register notice on the probe. It is unclear whether Trump's choice to lead USTR, Jamieson Greer, a trade lawyer and former USTR chief during Trump's first administration, will be confirmed by the US Senate by then. The probe is being conducted under Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974, the same unfair trade practices statute that Trump invoked to impose tariffs of up to 25 percent on some \$370 billion worth of Chinese imports in 2018 and 2019, triggering a nearly three-year trade war with Beijing. If Trump takes up the probe, it needs to be completed within a year from initiation.

A Biden administration official said in addition to examining the impact of the imported chips themselves, the probe would also look at their incorporation into downstream components and end-use goods for critical industries including defense, automotive products and medical devices. It also will target China's production of silicon carbide substrates and wafers for semiconductor fabrication.

US Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo said her department's research shows two-thirds of US products using chips had Chinese legacy chips in them, and half of US companies did not know the origin of their chips including some in the defense industry, findings that were "fairly alarming."

After the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the supply of semiconductors and temporarily halted production of autos and medical equipment, the US has sought to build its own semiconductor supply chain



An image of an electronic wafer is displayed at the Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC) Museum of Innovation in Hsinchu on November 21, 2024. --- AFP

with \$52.7 billion in new subsidies for chip production, research and workforce development.

But Raimondo said China's plans to build more than 60 percent of the world's new legacy chip capacity over the next decade were discouraging investment elsewhere and constituted unfair competition.

"It undercuts our companies and makes the US dependent on China for the chips that we use every

day in so many things," she told reporters. Despite a bitter presidential campaign, one of the few areas of continuity between Biden's and Trump's administrations will be tariffs on China. Biden kept in place all of the duties on Chinese imports imposed by Trump and added to them, including 100 percent duties on Chinese-made electric vehicles in an effort to keep them out of the US market. — Reuters

UAB: 7 Kuwaiti banks among top 100 banks

BEIRUT: The general secretariat of the Union of Arab Banks announced on Monday the entry of seven Kuwaiti banks into the list of the 100 strongest Arab banks for 2023. The capital of these banks amounted to about \$35.6 billion and their assets amounted to about \$336.6 billion, Wissam Fattouh, secretary general of the Union, said in a statement.

Fattouh explained that the data containing the 100 strongest Arab banks in terms of capital showed that the total core capital of these banks amounted to about \$451.9 billion, while their assets amounted to about \$4.2 trillion. The National Bank of Kuwait ranked first



Wissam Fattouh

locally and ninth in the list in terms of capital, followed by Kuwait Finance House in second place locally and tenth in the Arab world, then Burgan Bank in third place locally and 38th in the Arab world. Gulf Bank ranked fourth locally and 42nd in the Arab world, followed by Commercial Bank of Kuwait, fifth locally and 49th in the Arab world, Ahli United Bank, sixth locally and 51st in the Arab world, and Kuwait International

Bank, seventh locally and 61st in the Arab world.

In terms of assets, Kuwait Finance House ranked first locally and eighth in the Arab world, followed by the National Bank of Kuwait in second place locally and ninth in the Arab world, Burgan Bank in third place

locally and 41st in the Arab world, and Gulf Bank in fourth place locally and 42nd in the Arab world. Ahli United Bank ranked fifth locally and 44th in the Arab world, followed by Commercial Bank of Kuwait in sixth place locally and 57th in the Arab world, and Kuwait International Bank in seventh place locally and 64th in the Arab world. The United Arab Emirates recorded the largest number of Arab banks in the list of the 100 strongest banks by entering 18 Emirati banks, followed by Egypt (12 banks), Saudi Arabia (11 banks), Bahrain and Jordan (nine banks each), Qatar and Morocco (eight banks each), Kuwait and Oman (seven banks each), Tunisia (six banks), Lebanon and Algeria (two banks each), and Palestine (one bank).

The Secretary General of the Union of Arab Banks stated that 21 Islamic banks entered the list of the 100 strongest Arab banks by core capital for 2022, including four banks from Qatar and Saudi Arabia, three banks from Kuwait, the UAE and Bahrain, two banks from Egypt, and one bank each from Jordan and Oman.—KUNA



Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer attending a Parliamentary Liaison Committee hearing in London. — AFP

UK economy records zero growth in Q3

LONDON: Britain's economy failed to grow during the first three months of Prime Minister Keir Starmer's new government, official figures showed on Monday, adding to signs of a slowdown that has cast a shadow over his time in office so far. The Office for National Statistics lowered its estimate for the change in gross domestic product output to 0.0 percent in the July-to-September period from a previous estimate of 0.1 percent growth. The ONS also cut its estimate for growth in the second quarter to 0.4 percent from a previous 0.5 percent. Starmer and his finance minister Rachel Reeves took power in early July, warning of the poor state of the economy before announcing tax increases for businesses in a budget on Oct 30 that has alarmed many employers. Analysts, many of whom said the grim tone of the new government risked slowing the economy, said the numbers suggested zero growth over the entire second half of the year. The Bank of England last week forecast that the economy would not grow in the fourth quarter. But it kept borrowing costs on hold because of the risks still posed by inflation.

Paul Dales, chief UK economist at consultancy Capital Economics, said the GDP downgrade was caused in part by weaker demand for exports while consumer spending and business investment at home held up. "Our hunch is that 2025 will be a better year for the economy than 2024," Dales said.

Philip Shaw, chief economist at Investec, said the economy was only just on course to avoid a recession - defined as two consecutive quarters of economic contraction - but the data raised the likelihood of the BoE cutting interest rates in early 2025. A separate survey from Lloyds Bank showed confidence among businesses fell to its lowest level of 2024 in December. Data from the Confederation of British Industry - based on previously released surveys - showed companies expected activity to fall and prices to rise in early 2025.

Alpesh Paleja, a CBI economist, said the figures "suggest that the economy is headed for the worst of all worlds - firms expect to reduce both output and hiring, and price growth expectations are getting firmer." The government's hike in social security contributions for employers was exacerbating weak demand, Paleja said. Reeves said Monday's GDP data showed she faced a huge challenge "after 15 years of neglect" but that her budget would create sustainable long-term growth. The Conservatives' spokesman on the economy said Reeves had to rethink tax increases urgently before they come into effect in April.—Reuters

Volkswagen boss hails cost-cutting deal but shares fall

FRANKFURT: Volkswagen's chief executive welcomed a deal to slash jobs and reduce production capacity in Germany without the need to close factories, but the car giant's shares fell heavily on Monday. "The agreement is good news for Volkswagen," CEO Oliver Blume said in an interview with the Frankfurter Allgemeine daily. "We are reducing overcapacity at our German plants. This will enable us to continue manufacturing vehicles in Germany at competitive costs." After weeks of tough talks and strikes, Europe's biggest carmaker announced Friday an agreement that will see 35,000 jobs cut in Germany by 2030, as part of a package to save four billion euros (\$4.2 billion) a year. But unions hailed the deal as VW pulled back from a threat to close plants at home for the first time and has agreed not push through any compulsory redundancies.

Even without shuttering factories, Blume said the agreement would lead to a reduction in production capacity of around 730,000 vehicles a year. This was "equivalent to the production volume of two to three large plants", he said. Volkswagen has been hit hard by rising costs at home, a stuttering switch to electric cars and growing competition in key market China from domestic rivals, particularly in EVs. The job cuts will fall on the flagship VW brand, at the center of the carmaker's crisis, with management long complaining that its manufacturing costs are too high and its profits too low.

The 10-brand automaker's other brands range from Seat and Skoda to Porsche and Audi. But investors did not seem impressed with the deal, sending Volkswagen's shares down more than three percent in afternoon trade in Frankfurt, making it the heaviest faller among firms listed on the blue-chip DAX index. The crisis at Volkswagen began in September when the auto titan dropped the bombshell that it was considering closing factories in Germany for the first time in its 87-year history, and making heavy job cuts. Two mass strikes followed, with union IG Metall threatening to launch the biggest wave of industrial action seen in Germany for decades unless VW walked back its most extreme plans.—AFP



NEW YORK: Luigi Mangione appears for his arraignment at Manhattan Criminal Court on December 23, 2024 in New York City. — AFP

Accused killer of US insurance CEO pleads not guilty

NEW YORK: The man accused of gunning down a health insurance executive in a brazen hit in New York that sparked fierce debate about the industry pleaded not guilty Monday to state charges including "terrorist" murder. Luigi Mangione wore a white shirt, burgundy sweatshirt and was shackled during his appearance in a Manhattan court where he was flanked by police officers. Monday's hearing came after Mangione, 26, appeared in a New York court last week to face federal charges also including murder following his dramatic extradition by plane and helicopter from Pennsylvania, where he was arrested at a McDonald's restaurant.

The suspect is charged in both state and federal court in the December 4 shooting of UnitedHealthcare chief executive Brian Thompson. Thompson's murder brought to the surface deep public frustration with the expensive and opaque US medical insurance system, with many social media users painting Mangione as a hero. People demonstrating against the industry gathered outside court Monday brandishing banners reading "free Luigi" and "innocent until proven guilty." If convicted in the state case, Mangione could face life

imprisonment with no parole. In the federal case, he could technically face the death penalty.

Mangione's attorney Karen Friedman Agnifilo has previously sought clarity on how simultaneous federal and state charges would work, calling the situation "highly unusual." Agnifilo raised concerns on Monday that Mangione could not receive a fair trial, and questioned why New York mayor Eric Adams had been present when Mangione was brought off a police helicopter at a Manhattan helipad last week. Agnifilo told local media Monday that officials "are treating him like he is like some sort of political fodder."

She said the sight of Mangione flanked by rifle-wielding tactical officers during the final stage of his extradition that was widely broadcast was "utterly political." Mangione was arrested in Altoona, Pennsylvania, on December 9 following a tip from staff at a McDonald's restaurant, after a days-long manhunt. He had traveled to New York by bus from Atlanta about 10 days before the crime, the Department of Justice said. After checking into a Manhattan hostel with false identification, he allegedly performed reconnaissance near the victim's hotel and the conference venue where the shooting took place. Early on December 4, Mangione allegedly tracked Thompson, walked up behind him and fired several gunshots from a pistol with a silencer, prosecutors allege. Afterward, he fled on a bicycle. Police say a "life-changing, life-altering" back injury may have motivated Mangione, although there was no indication he was ever a client of UnitedHealthcare.—AFP

Business

NBK introduces 'AFAQ' - GCC's unified payment system on mobile banking

System to enhance customers' banking experience by providing top-notch digital services

KUWAIT: In line with its commitment to enhancing customer banking experience and providing them with top-notch innovative digital services that cater to their needs and allow quick and easy transactions, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) has announced introducing AFAQ - GCC's unified payment system on Mobile Banking, allowing financial transfers in local GCC currencies.

'AFAQ' is a regional payments system provided by the Gulf Payments Company to execute financial transactions in GCC local currencies in a real-time basis, with low fees, and within a safe, secure, and stable ecosystem through ensuring the privacy and continuity of communication by linking the 'AFAQ' system and the national central banks through a highly secure private network.

'AFAQ' provides elevated levels of protection and data security in the payments system through the provision and management of digital certificates and the provision of the Public Key Infrastructure (PKI) service. This service allows for the secure issuing and managing of digital certificates to ensure the confidentiality and integrity of the data transmitted through 'AFAQ' payments.

On this occasion, Abdullah Al-Mutawaa, Head



Abdullah Al-Mutawaa

- We strive to keep pace with customers' evolving needs, growing expectations
- The system facilitates fast processing of financial transfers in local GCC currencies
- Transfers are made to the currency of the receiving country, provided the beneficiary bank is on the list of GCC banks participating in the service

of Funds Transfer & Wealth Management Operations at National Bank of Kuwait said, "'AFAQ' implements operating rules and regulations in accordance with professional practices and advanced international standards, which aligns with NBK's continuous endeavors to keep pace with customers' evolving needs and growing expectations and preferences, as part of its constant dedication to providing top-notch and highly advanced products and services."

"The 'AFAQ' service is available through NBK Mobile Banking App at a competitive exchange

rate, allowing transferring from the customer's Kuwaiti Dinar account to another GCC currency (the currency of the receiving country), provided the beneficiary bank is on the list of GCC banks participating in the service, and currencies included are KWD, AED, BHD, SAR, OMR," he mentioned.

"NBK is one of the first banks to introduce cutting-edge technologies in fast payments and transfers in Kuwait through its digital channels, which include NBK Mobile and Online Banking as well as NBK Corporate Online Banking, thus helping increase the volume of cross-border transactions."

It is worth mentioning that NBK strengthened its footprint across key regional markets by offering innovative banking services that cater to the needs of customers regardless of their geographical location, which helped solidify the bank's position as a highly trusted brand.

Through the NBK Mobile Banking App, NBK is dedicated to offering customers a secure and seamless platform for managing their finances with utmost convenience. This advanced app enables users to perform a wide array of banking transactions, including opening new accounts, reviewing account and credit card transactions, and monitoring NBK Miles and NBK Rewards Program points. Additionally, customers can effortlessly pay credit card dues and various electronic bills, locate NBK Branches, ATMs, and CDMs across Kuwait, across Kuwait, submitting requests for account statements, updating personal information, as well as toll-free numbers for customers when abroad to reach the bank for any help or inquiry. The NBK Mobile Banking App is available for download on the App Store, Google Play, and Huawei AppGallery.

Weyay Bank launches 'AFAQ' for instant bank transfers

KUWAIT: In a new step to enhance its financial services and expand its regional scope, Weyay Bank announces the launch of the "AFAQ" service, which is a qualitative leap in the field of bank transfers between the Gulf Cooperation Council countries. "AFAQ", by linking the payment systems of the Gulf countries, enables financial transfers in the local currencies of these countries to be made faster and at lower cost compared to the traditional methods usually used in transfers.

"AFAQ" is a regional payment system provided by the Gulf Payments Company that aims to facilitate financial transfers in the local currencies of the Gulf countries instantly and at low rates with a high level of privacy and information security. Customers can make transfers to any of the Gulf banks that are "AFAQ" participants effectively without having to worry about currency fluctuations or delays in transfers. The launch of this service in the Weyay app reflects its ongoing commitment to providing innovative banking solutions that meet the needs of customers, especially in the Gulf region, and enhances its position as a pioneering digital bank in providing digital banking services that are characterized by saving time, effort, and flexibility.

Amal Al-Duwaisan, Head of Weyay Bank, men-

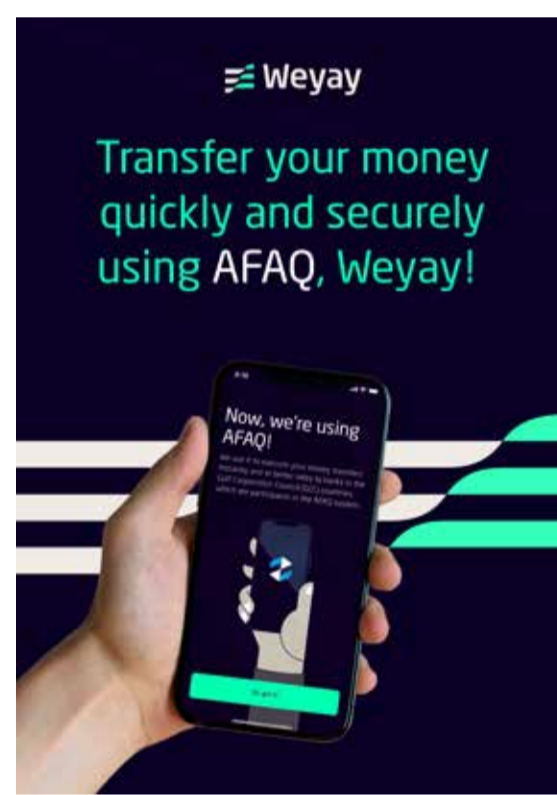
tioned, "We always strive to provide banking solutions in the field of digital innovation in line with our customers' needs, which in turn emphasizes on Weyay's position as the first digital bank in Kuwait." She also added, "We are proud to be a participant of the 'AFAQ' system, which contributes to enhancing economic co-operation and the monetary integration strategy between the GCC countries as well as to providing an instant transfer service to our customers at competitive prices while ensuring the highest standards of security."

"AFAQ" is set to transform how users engage with digital payments. Weyay Bank, through the new "AFAQ" service, not only does meet the evolving needs of its customers, but it also shapes the future of cross-border payments within the GCC. All information about the digital services and features provided by Weyay Bank can be found on its website www.weyaybank.com or in the Weyay app that can be downloaded from the App Store or Google Play Store.

Weyay is the first digital bank in Kuwait, providing an innovative and convenient banking experience to its customers through an advanced digital platform. With the introduction of "AFAQ",



Amal Al-Duwaisan



Weyay Bank continues its commitment to providing banking solutions that keep pace with the evolution of the digital age and contributes to facilitating the lives of its customers by providing fast and efficient services.

Slovak PM Fico in Russia to discuss gas deliveries

MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin held surprise talks with Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico at the Kremlin on Sunday to discuss the future of Russian gas deliveries.

The two leaders also discussed the conflict in Ukraine, just hours after Putin had warned of harsh reprisals against Kyiv over a drone attack. Slovakia, which heavily relies on Russian gas, has raised concerns about the prospect of losing supplies as a contract allowing its transit through Ukraine expires by year-end. Ukraine has made it clear it will not renew a transit contract that expires on December 31. Fico is one of the few European leaders Putin has stayed friendly with since the 2022 eruption of hostilities with Ukraine. The visit by Fico, whose country is a NATO and European Union member, had not been previously announced.

Russian TV journalist Pavel Zarubin, a Kremlin insider, posted a short video showing the two leaders smiling and shaking hands. Later Sunday, Kremlin spokesman Dmitri Peskov only confirmed that the meeting had ended, adding that the two leaders would not make a joint statement.

But Fico, in a statement posted on his Facebook account after the talks, said Sunday's meeting was "in response to" Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky opposing any "transit of gas through Ukraine to our territory". Fico said Putin had confirmed Russia's "readiness... to continue to supply gas to the West and to Slovakia, which is practically impossible after 1 January 2025", but did not elaborate. Both leaders exchanged views on the conflict in Ukraine, and "the possibility of an early peaceful end" to it.

Fico blamed Kyiv for being "in favor of sanctions" against Russia's nuclear program. He said that was "harming Slovakia financially and threatening the production of electricity in nuclear power plants" in the country. Fico ended military aid to Ukraine when he became prime minister again in October 2023. Like Hungarian counterpart Viktor Orban, he has called for peace talks. — AFP

Luxury Western goods line Russian stores, 3 years into sanctions

MOSCOW: Despite a barrage of Western sanctions and swathes of brands quitting Russia after the Kremlin launched its Ukraine offensive, Moscow's most well-off shoppers are still spoiled for choice when it comes to luxury Western goods. In the Russian capital's exclusive shopping quarters, department stores and high-end Russian outlets are doing a roaring trade in Western sports cars, gold jewelry and designer clothes.

The picture is a far cry from the West's claims that its sanctions would collapse the Russian economy and cut it off from the outside world. "I don't see any particular changes," said Natalia, a 51-year-old dentist strolling through the plush GUM shopping mall, facing the Kremlin on Moscow's Red Square.

"Maybe there were three stores—Chanel, Dior, Hermes—that I know have left. All the rest are the same as before. I see even Brunello Cucinelli is here," she said, referring to the Italian fashion house. Many in Moscow—including Russian President Vladimir Putin—have reveled in what they call the "failure" of sanctions to isolate Russia from the global economy.

"They wanted to isolate us? Please! We are so isolated here it's even funny," scoffed 61-year-old pensioner Sergei, leaving an upmarket store. The United States, European Union and Britain have explicitly banned the export of "luxury goods" to Russia as part of their sanctions packages.

Several brands and groups also voluntarily quit the market at the start of the offensive—including Chanel, Hermes, LVMH and Kering—amid a wave of corporate exits from Russia. But almost three years later, their logos still adorn products on the shelves of Russian stores in Moscow, a bustling megalopolis of some 13 million inhabitants that

Swiss business gets Christmas bonus from EU trade deal

ZURICH: Swiss business welcomed a new deal to overhaul the country's relationship with the European Union, bringing Christmas cheer to an economy that is set to be one of Europe's most resilient in a challenging 2025. Corporate lobbies, economists and firms say the agreement unveiled on Friday stabilizes relations with the bloc - which accounts for over half of Swiss exports - even if it still faces a difficult ratification process involving a likely referendum.

"Market access is crucial: European trade is a cornerstone of the Swiss economy," said Samad Sarferaz at the KOF Economic Institute at ETH, a university in Zurich.



MOSCOW: A woman uses her mobile phone in front of a German Karl Lagerfeld shop at the GUM department store in Moscow on November 18, 2024. — AFP

was a profitable market for them before the conflict.

Sanctioned goods of all kinds are easily exported to Russia through willing middlemen in places like the Caucasus and Central Asia. Even if they aren't selling directly to Russian shoppers anymore, many of the Western luxury brands have kept hold of their premises in central Moscow, apparently in the hope of reopening sometime in the future. "Their announced departure is pure hypocrisy," said one French businessman selling luxury goods in the Russian capital.

"Even though their stores are officially closed,

"The benefits will not be seen immediately, but will be there in the long run." Switzerland's economy was already tipped to outperform its neighbors. UBS sees it growing in 2025 by 1.3 percent compared to 0.6 percent for Germany, 0.9 percent for France and 0.9 percent for the euro zone. Without a deal, Switzerland would face potentially massive disruptions to trade and EU market access, said Sarferaz. The EU accord will harmonize standards, allow access to research programs and facilitate movement of people - with some protections to allay Swiss fears over mass migration.

It will help Switzerland's pharmaceuticals sector, which generates over 50 percent of Swiss goods exports, get access to the best workers and research, said Georg Daerending, spokesman for industry association Interpharma. Pharma giant Roche ROG.S said it created planning and legal certainty. If Switzerland's mutual recognition agreement (MRA) with the EU for the sector is ultimately not updated, pharmaceu-

tical products face higher costs, the firm said. Rudolf Minsch, chief economist of business lobby EconomieSuisse, said the commitment to stability was a welcome tonic in a world riven by wars and trade tensions. That was especially true given the weakness of Germany - Switzerland's top trade partner - and the Swiss franc's appreciation, which makes exports dearer. "It used to be the case that when Germany got a cold, Switzerland got pneumonia," Minsch said. "No longer."

The strong franc has forced companies to be more efficient and specialize further. Switzerland has also sealed free trade deals with over 30 countries including India and China. Low inflation, low interest rates and robust domestic demand backed by real wage growth have made the economy resilient, said Claude Maurer, chief economist at BAK Economics, a think tank. Still, foreign demand is a worry, and the EU deal is unlikely to provide a quick fix for problems in neighboring Germany, where the key carmaking industry is struggling. — Reuters

Japan watchdog accuses Google of antitrust violation

TOKYO: Japanese authorities will hand Google a cease-and-desist order over an alleged antitrust violation in the first such move against a US tech titan, a government source said Monday.

The Japan Fair Trade Commission (JFTC) accuses Google of breaking the law by imposing "transactions with binding conditions" on Android smartphone manufacturers in Japan. Specifically, it says Google made sure that its online app store Google Play needed to be installed as part of a package with its web-browser search app Chrome. Google Play is so widely used that without it, "Android devices are basically unsellable", the source told AFP.

The JFTC also believes Google dangled financial incentives to pressure these smartphone makers into excluding rival search apps, said the source, who declined to be identified because the information is not yet public. Such behavior constitutes "unfair trading practices" banned by the antitrust law, the source said, adding that a cease-and-desist letter would be sent to Google pending a hearing.

Such administrative action is a "fairly strong" measure taken by the JFTC, the source said, and the first against the GAFAM—an abbreviation for US tech behemoths Google, Amazon, Facebook, Apple and Microsoft. Google Japan was not immediately available for comment when contacted by AFP.

The move mirrors similar crackdowns on Google in the United States and Europe. The US government asked a judge in November to order the dismantling of Google by selling its widely used Chrome browser in a major antitrust crackdown on the company. Meanwhile the European Commission, the EU's executive, recommended last year that Google should sell parts of its business and could face a fine of up to 10 percent of its global revenue if it fails to comply. — AFP

Honda, Nissan to launch merger talks

Ex-CEO Ghosn says Nissan in 'panic mode' on Honda merger

TOKYO: Japanese auto giant Honda and its struggling rival Nissan agreed Monday to launch talks on a merger seen as a bid to catch up with Chinese rivals and Tesla on electric vehicles.

Their collaboration would create the world's third largest automaker, expanding development of EVs and self-driving tech. But Honda's CEO insisted that it was not a bailout for Nissan, who last month announced thousands of job cuts and reported a 93 percent plunge in first-half net profit.

"This is not a rescue," Toshihiro Mibe told reporters, stressing that one condition for the merger would be for Nissan to complete its so-called "turn-around" plan. Lackluster consumer spending and stiff competition in several markets is making life hard for many automakers. Business has been especially tough for foreign brands in China, where electric vehicle manufacturers such as BYD are leading the way as demand grows for less polluting vehicles.

The two firms along with Mitsubishi Motors said they had signed a memorandum of understanding to start discussions on integrating their business under a new holding company. Citing "dramatic changes in the environment surrounding both companies and the automotive industry", a joint statement said the companies planned to list the holding company on the Tokyo Stock Exchange in August 2026.

It comes after reports said Taiwanese electronics behemoth Foxconn had unsuccessfully approached Nissan to acquire a majority share. It then asked Renault to sell its 35 percent stake in Nissan—a pursuit now said to have been put on hold. China overtook Japan as the biggest vehicle exporter last year, helped by government support for EVs.

Honda and Nissan—Japan's number two and three automakers after Toyota—already agreed in March to explore a strategic partnership on software and components for EVs among other technologies.

This partnership was joined by Mitsubishi Motors in August. The companies want to seal their merger deal in June next year, but it is unlikely to be a marriage of equals.

Honda will nominate the president of the new holding company, whose board will be mostly made up of Honda executives, their statement said. Nissan is a majority shareholder of Mitsubishi Motors, which "aims to reach its conclusion by the end of January 2025 on the participation or involvement in the business integration between Nissan and Honda," it added.

Honda and Nissan's partnership could include a manufacturing tie-up where they build vehicles at each other's plants, local media said. Nissan chief Makoto Uchida praised Honda's agility and ability to adapt as the industry shifts, praising the company as "a partner who can share the sense of crisis about the future".

"As the business environment for automakers changes in the future, I believe we will not be able to get there unless we have the courage to change ourselves," Uchida said.

Nissan has weathered a turbulent decade, including the 2018 arrest of former boss Carlos Ghosn, who later jumped bail and fled Japan concealed in a music equipment box. Ghosn told reporters in Tokyo on Monday via video link from Lebanon, where he is at large, that turning to its arch-rival Honda showed that Nissan was in "panic mode".

Meanwhile, former Nissan chief Carlos Ghosn on Monday said the struggling Japanese automaker was in "panic mode" as it prepares to start talks on a merger with industry arch-rival Honda.

Ghosn was arrested in Japan in 2018 on suspicion of financial misconduct, but fled the country concealed in a music equipment box the following year while on bail. "Frankly, I wonder how this is going to work," the 70-year-old French, Lebanese and Bra-



TOKYO: (L to R) Makoto Uchida, President and CEO of Nissan motor corporation, Toshihiro Mibe, President and Representative Executive Officer of Honda, and Takao Kato, President and CEO of Mitsubishi Motors stand for a photo call after a joint press conference in Tokyo on December 23, 2024. — AFP

zilian national, now at large in Lebanon, told reporters in Tokyo via video link. Debt-laden Nissan last month announced thousands of job cuts and reported a 93 percent plunge in first-half net profit. Ghosn said he was not sure that Nissan had "the talent... to face the challenges that they are facing".

"That's one of the reasons for which they are surrendering in a certain way, in a panic mode, by

saying, 'please help us'. And they're turning to an arch-rival of Nissan." Honda and Nissan—Japan's number two and three automakers after Toyota—are aiming to finalize a merger deal in June 2025 and actually join forces in 2026, local media said. Mitsubishi Motors, which could join the new holding company early next year, will also take part in Monday's announcement. — AFP

Lagarde: ECB very close to reaching its inflation goal

FRANKFURT: European Central Bank (ECB) President Christine Lagarde said the euro zone was getting "very close" to reaching the central bank's medium-term inflation goal, according to an interview published by the Financial Times on Monday. Earlier in December, Lagarde had said the central bank would cut interest rates further if inflation continued to ease towards its 2 percent target, as curbing growth was no longer necessary. "We're getting very close to that stage when we can declare that we have sustainably brought inflation to our medium-term 2 percent," Lagarde told the FT, urging continued vigilance on services inflation.

"You know, inflation, the latest reading we have

is 2.2 percent," she added. "But services is still 3.9 percent and not budging much. It's been hovering around 4 percent. Slightly declining now."

Lagarde said she opposed retaliation by Europe to tariff threats made by incoming US President Donald Trump. "I said that retaliation was a bad approach because I think that overall trade restrictions followed by retaliation and this tit-for-tat, conflictual way of dealing with trade is just bad for the global economy at large," she added. Like Lagarde, Irish central bank chief Gabriel Makhlof too warned that some elements of services inflation in the euro zone were a bit concerning, the paper said.

Uncertainty clouded the outlook for 2025, however, as Trump's actions were all but impossible to read, Makhlof, a member of the ECB's governing council, said separately.

Makhlof would still want gradual interest rate cuts, rather than big leaps, unless the facts and evidence changed, he said. "I have not seen, and I, at the moment, do not see, the need for a sudden big leap," he said, referring to calls for the central bank to start



FRANKFURT: European Central Bank (ECB) President Christine Lagarde says the eurozone was getting "very close" to reaching the central bank's medium-term inflation goal. — AFP

cutting rates by 50 basis points. "We wouldn't want to complicate our price stability objective by making these sort of insurance cuts." — Reuters



A worker checking on parts in a guitar factory in Zaozhuang, eastern China's Shandong province. — AFP

China consumption rises as caution spurs rentals

BEIJING: China's domestic demand is gathering pace as cautious consumers increasingly choose to rent items from cameras to handbags rather than buying them, the official People's Daily said, though government data tell a different story. The rise of the "rent, not buy" model has injected new impetus into the world's second-largest economy, the paper said in an upbeat commentary on Monday, flagging a trend that provides businesses with a "new perspective".

As China's domestic demand weakened this year, reluctance to spend has fed a boom in rentals, with internet platforms letting consumers hire a drone, for example, at 1 yuan (14 cents) a day, versus a typical cost of more than 5,000 yuan (\$685). For 35 yuan, one can get a "99 percent new" Louis Vuitton handbag, a listing on a popular app showed.

New forms of demand are giving rise to new consumption formats with "huge" potential, the paper said. State media typically talk up China's consumption outlook even when government data flag a more sobering trend. Retail sales of consumer goods grew just 3.5 percent in the period from January to November compared with a year earlier, statistics show, as a low-base effect that helped boost 2023's post-pandemic retail sales by 7.2 percent faded.

The bleak retail landscape stretches beyond small towns and cities to the capital, Beijing, which reported a fall of 2.8 percent in retail sales from January to November, far below the national figure. — Reuters

US crypto industry eyes day-one Trump executive orders

WASHINGTON: The cryptocurrency industry is pushing President-elect Donald Trump's team to kick start his promised crypto policy overhaul when he takes office next month with executive orders that would help push tokens mainstream, according to industry officials.

Trump plans to issue a flurry of executive orders and directives on everything from immigration to energy on his first day in office on Jan 20, Reuters reported this month. On the campaign trail, Trump courted crypto cash with promises to be a "crypto president," and the industry wants him to make good on that pledge with executive orders creating a bitcoin stockpile, ensuring the industry can access banking services, and creating a crypto council, the people said.

They are pushing for those executive orders within Trump's first 100 days in office, and expect at least one could come on Jan 20, said two other people with knowledge of the matter.

"Given the tenor of the campaign, it would be imperative for executive orders to really set out what the actual priorities will be on day one and provide some kind of roadmap," said Rebecca Rettig, chief legal and policy officer at crypto company Polygon Labs. Worried about crime and volatility, President Joe Biden's regulators cracked down on crypto companies, but Trump has pledged to reverse course. His crypto policy team is already taking shape, with the announcement this month of crypto-friendly Securi-

ties and Exchange Commission chair Paul Atkins and White House crypto czar David Sacks.

"There has been an effort in the Washington bureaucratic swamp to stifle innovation... but President Trump will deliver on his promise to encourage American leadership in crypto," Trump transition team spokesperson Brian Hughes said in a statement. Bitcoin, the world's largest cryptocurrency, hit new records above \$107,000 this month after Trump reiterated his plan, first unveiled in a speech in July, for a strategic bitcoin reserve. Bitcoin has since fallen back below \$100,000. Analysts are divided on whether Trump could use executive powers to create the reserve, potentially via the Treasury Department, or whether an act of Congress would be necessary. One industry group, the Bitcoin Policy Institute, has gone as far as to draft a text of a potential executive order Trump could use to establish such a stockpile. That draft would designate bitcoin as a strategic reserve asset and require the Treasury Secretary to spend \$21 billion over a year to amass a national bitcoin stockpile, according to the draft seen by Reuters.

Zack Shapiro, the Bitcoin Policy Institute's head of policy, said the United States should get ahead of geopolitical rivals in monetizing bitcoin, "rather than have the price run up without the United States having any reserves." He declined to say if the group had shared the draft with Trump's team.

Trump also said in July that he would not let banks "choke" crypto firms out of the traditional financial system, and some executives expect he will also try to address that issue with an executive order. Crypto companies have long complained that banks won't work with them due to regulatory scrutiny, although regulators say banks are free to lend to crypto firms that follow the law.

While an executive order directing bank reg-



This illustration photograph shows a Bitcoin cryptocurrency coin picture displayed on a smartphone beside a screen showing a trading chart in Brussels. — AFP

ulators to go easy on crypto would send a signal to agency officials and provide them with political cover, it's unlikely to have legal force since federal bank regulators are independent, some executives warned. "(They) are not going to change policy on the ground on day one," said Jonah Krane, partner at financial firm Klaros Group. "But they will tell you what direction this administration wants to head." Trump has also said he'll create a crypto industry council and his team is discussing how to structure and staff it. Previous administrations have stood up specialized councils via executive orders, executives noted. More broadly, Trump could also try to address crypto complaints that existing regulations are not fit for the industry with an executive order articulating core principles for crypto regulation, similar to an order Trump issued in 2017 directing regulators to review banking rules. "I wouldn't be surprised if you get something like an executive order early on that directs the agencies to re-examine their rules in this space," Krane added. — Reuters

Global markets rise as US inflation eases rate fears

LONDON: Global stock markets mostly edged higher on Monday as traders welcomed below-forecast US inflation data that raised hopes about the health of the world's biggest economy. A holiday-thinned week got off to a healthy start after last week's sell-off sparked by the US central bank signaling fewer interest rate cuts than had been expected for 2025.

Asian markets followed a strong lead from Wall Street, which rebounded on Friday on the inflation data, with Tokyo and Hong Kong in the green. Shanghai was the sole decliner. European markets struggled for direction, with London edging up and Paris and Frankfurt remaining flat.

Sharp losses last week were pared back after US inflation data for November came in lower than expected, providing some optimism that policymakers were winning the battle against prices and would have room to keep cutting rates. Still, there remains some trepidation among investors as Donald Trump prepares to return to the White House, pledging to cut taxes, slash regulations and impose tariffs on imports, which some economists warn could reignite inflation.

"The initial response to the US election was positive as investors focused on the obvious tailwinds to profitability: lower corporate tax rates and less regulation," said Ronald Temple, chief market strategist at Lazard. "However, I expect much more dispersion within the equity market when the reality of a much-less-friendly trade environment sets in."

Investors were also cheered by news that US lawmakers had reached a deal to avert a Christmashime government shutdown following marathon talks on Friday. In the UK, the government was dealt a fresh blow after official data showed that the economy stagnated in the third quarter, revised down from initial estimates of 0.1 percent growth. "The economy stood still between July and September, and that was before the budget cast another chill, and caused output to shrink in October," said Susannah Streeter, head of money and markets at Hargreaves. Official data out of Spain on Monday showed that the Spanish economy grew 0.8 percent in the third quarter as domestic consumption and exports increased, comfortably outstripping the European Union average.

In company news, shares in crisis-hit German auto giant Volkswagen lost around two percent on the back of news Friday that it plans to axe 35,000 jobs by 2030 in a drastic cost-cutting plan.

Shares in Japanese auto giant Honda rose over three percent after it announced Monday an agreement to launch merger talks with struggling compatriot Nissan that could create the world's third largest automaker. — AFP



NEW YORK: US stocks edged lower in early trading Friday, as traders looked to lock in gains at the end of a positive week for major Wall Street indices. — AFP

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2024



Afghan bread, the humble centerpiece of every meal

Every day before dawn, Jamil Ghafari gets to work on the floor of a cramped Kabul bakery with five other men churning out thousands of traditional flatbreads -- the staple of every Afghan meal. The common bread Ghafari has made for 27 years is fluffy with a satisfying crunchy edge, where each piece has been slapped onto the wall of an earthen oven sunk into the floor. Afghans rely on bread, he told AFP. So he and his colleagues, each in charge of one part of the five-step process, take pride in their work.

said bakery worker Shafiq. "Here bread consumption might go up, but it will never go down."

He said his shop sells around 3,500 a day, as he handed pieces folded into plastic bags out the window from his perch encircled by bread on display. Men, women and children, rich and poor, rain or shine, stop by multiple times daily at their closest bakery for fresh bread to accompany their meals. "In Afghanistan, without bread, eating a meal with others is incomplete," said Mohammad Masi, 28, while picking up

with our own hands," 51-year-old Nabizada said, scooping up rice, beans and salad between pieces of bread. "Since I was born I have never gone a day without bread, thank God," he said. "Even if we had nothing else, we always had a piece of bread."

Breakfast, lunch and dinner

For many in Afghanistan -- one of the poorest countries in the world where 12.4 million people live in acute food insecurity, according to the World Food Program -- bread makes up the largest part of meals. Afghan bread is one of the few foods that everyone can afford, with prices as low as 10 Afghanis (0.14 US cents) to 50 Afghanis. "Here, poor people often only have bread to eat... with tea or water," said schoolteacher Azeem. "Afghanistan has been impacted by wars, its people are poor, and their economic situation is not good. So when they earn some money, they buy a bit of bread for their families." Women in blue burkas huddle with children outside the brightly lit bakery windows, hoping someone will buy an extra piece for them.

For Wahida, 30, when her family sank into deep poverty two years ago, she turned to making bread to survive and feed her children. She produces it at one of the women-run, home-based bakeries dotted around the outskirts of Kabul and often found in rural areas. "Bread is important, it's beloved and eaten the most," she said. "Us rural people, we like homemade, and those who don't want to bake buy from bakeries," she added, wetting the back of a stretched piece of dough before reaching deep into the wood- and straw-fired oven to set it baking again. Homemade or from the bakery, the only thing that matters for Kabul dentist Mohammad Masi is that bread with "breakfast, lunch and dinner is a must". "If I don't eat bread, I feel like I haven't eaten anything at all." —AFP

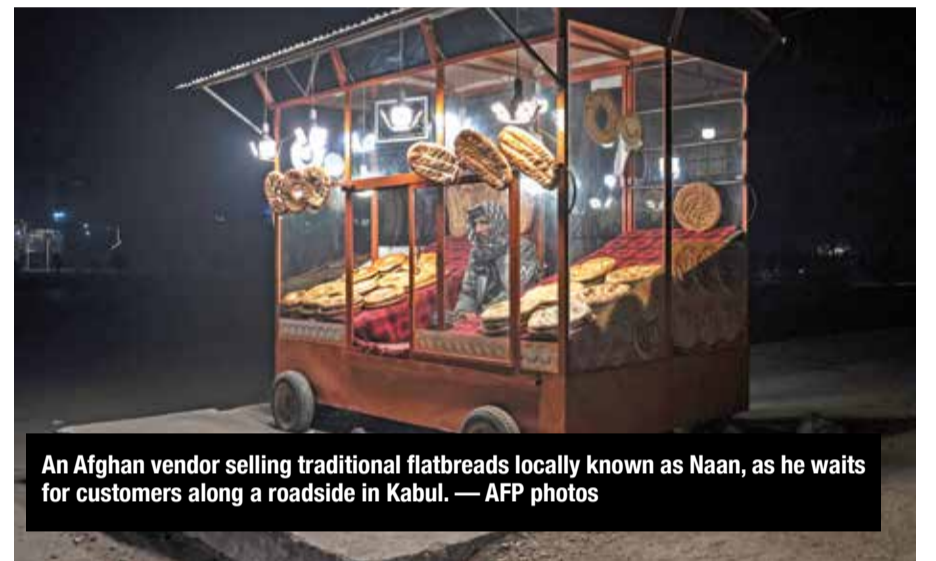


Afghan baker Jamil Ghafari (left) preparing traditional flatbreads locally known as Naan, at a bakery in Kabul.

"We always try to provide good bread for people, our customers must be satisfied," he said in the north of the Afghan capital. Piles of bread -- some round, some stretched into canoe-like shapes, some sprinkled with sesame seeds or sugar -- overlap like roof tiles lining the slanting display windows of bakeries in the Afghan capital. Their bright lights pour out over streets on seemingly every corner. "Afghanistan has a long tradition of relying on bread,"

several rounds on his way home on his bike on a recent chilly night. "Bread is one of Afghanistan's most beloved and famous foods," he said.

Thick halves of homemade hardy loaves dotted the colorful cloth spread on the floor of Beg Murad Nabizada's home in eastern Kabul, where he shares evening meals with his family of four. Most days it is the only time they can eat together. "We prefer to make our bread at home because it's baked



An Afghan vendor selling traditional flatbreads locally known as Naan, as he waits for customers along a roadside in Kabul. — AFP photos



Afghan burqa-clad women (center) buying traditional flatbreads locally known as Naan, from a roadside bakery in Kabul.



Afghan vendors selling traditional flatbreads locally known as Naan, at a roadside market in Kabul.



An Afghan burqa-clad woman (right) buying traditional flatbreads locally known as Naan, at a roadside market in Kabul.



Afghan baker Jamil Ghafari (second right) preparing traditional flatbreads locally known as Naan, at a bakery in Kabul.



An Afghan baker preparing dough for traditional flatbreads locally known as Naan, at a roadside bakery in Kabul.



An Afghan baker preparing traditional flatbreads locally known as Naan, at a bakery in Kabul.



The mayor of Rome, Roberto Gualtieri (fourth right) throws a coin in the Trevi Fountain on the day of its reopening after renovation works in Rome. — AFP

Rome's Trevi Fountain reopens to limited crowds

Rome's famous Trevi Fountain reopened Sunday following a three-month clean-up, but visitors will for now be limited to 400 to avoid the crowds of the past, said the city's mayor. Imposing the limit, which might later be modified, will "allow everyone to better enjoy the fountain, without crowds or confusion", Roberto Gualtieri told journalists in front of the famous landmark. Gualtieri also said the city authorities

were considering charging a modest entry price to finance, among other things, the fountain's upkeep.

The clean-up of the fountain and other key city sites, is aimed at "returning most of the monuments to the city in time for the start of the Jubilee" Claudio Parisi Presicce, Rome's superintendent for cultural heritage sites, told AFP-TV. The jubilee of the Catholic Church begins on December 24. The Trevi fountain, a baroque masterpiece, is one of the most visited sites in Rome.

Featured in many films set in the city, it famously appears in a classic scene in Federico Fellini's "La Dolce Vita", when Anita Ekberg invites Marcello Mastroianni to join her in the fountain's basin. Sunday's reopening took place under light rain in the presence of several hundred tourists, many of whom followed the mayor by throwing a

coin into the fountain. Between 10,000 and 12,000 tourists a day used to visit the Trevi Fountain. Making a wish and tossing a coin into the water is such a tradition that the city authorities used to collect around 10,000 euros (\$10,500) a week. That was turned over to the Caritas charity to provide meals for the poor.

The three-months cleaning project involved removing mould and calcium incrustations. The Trevi fountain is just one of the sites being cleaned up across the Italian capital as it prepares for the arrival of the 33 million people expected in 2025 for the Jubilee. This event, declared by Pope Francis, is a year of pilgrimage and prayer, marked by religious and cultural events held across the Vatican and Rome. It takes place roughly every 25 years. —AFP

Bride, groom, spy: India's wedding detectives



A brass band member holds an embellished umbrella with lights during a wedding procession in New Delhi. — AFP photos



A field detective prepares to wear a spy camera and voice recorder before leaving for an assignment, in New Delhi.



A field detective wears a spy camera before leaving for an assignment, in New Delhi.



Sanjay Singh, who runs the Indian Detective Agency Pvt. Ltd. (IDAPL), holds a camera during an interview with AFP at his office in New Delhi.

From an anonymous office in a New Delhi mall, matrimonial detective Bhavna Paliwal runs the rule over prospective husbands and wives -- a booming industry in India, where younger generations are increasingly choosing love matches over arranged marriage. The tradition of partners being carefully selected by the two families remains hugely popular, but in a country where social customs are changing rapidly, more and more couples are making their own matches. So for some families, the first step when young lovers want to get married is not to call a priest or party planner but a sleuth like Paliwal with high-tech spy tools to investigate the prospective partner.

Sheela, an office worker in New Delhi, said that when her daughter announced she wanted to marry her boyfriend, she immediately hired Paliwal. "I had a bad marriage," said Sheela, whose name has been changed as her daughter remains unaware her fiancée was spied on. "When my daughter said she's in love, I wanted to support her -- but not without proper checks." Paliwal, 48, who founded her Tejas Detective Agency more than two decades ago, says business is better than ever. Her team handles around eight cases monthly. In one recent case -- a client checking her prospective husband -- Paliwal discovered a decimal point salary discrepancy. "The man said he earns around \$70,700 annually," Paliwal said. "We found out he was actually making \$7,070."

'Service to society'

It is discreet work. Paliwal's office is tucked away in a city mall, with an innocuous sign board saying it houses an astrologer -- a service family often use to predict an auspicious wedding date. "Sometimes my clients also don't want people to know they are meeting a detective," she laughed. Hiring a detective can cost from \$100 to \$2,000, depending on the extent of surveillance needed. That is a small investment for families who splash out many times more on the wedding itself.

It is not just worried parents trying to vet their prospective sons or daughters-in-law. Some want background checks on their future spouse -- or, after marriage, to confirm a suspected affair. "It is a service to society," said Sanjay Singh, a 51-year-old sleuth, who says his agency has handled "hundreds" of pre-matrimonial investigations this year alone. Private eye Akriti Khatri said around a quarter of cases at her Venus

records directly online -- leaving nothing on agents' phones, in case they are caught. "This is safer for our team," she said, adding it also helped them "get sharp results in less time and cost". Surveillance tools starting at only a few dollars are readily available. Those include audio and video recording devices hidden in everyday items such as mosquito repellent socket devices, to more sophisticated magnetic GPS car

'Basis of lies'

The job is not without its challenges.



Akriti Khatri, founder of Venus Detective Agency, shows various spy gadgets during an interview with AFP at her office in New Delhi.

Detective Agency were pre-marriage checks. "There are people who want to know if the groom is actually gay," she said, citing one example.

Arranged marriages binding two entire families together require a chain of checks before the couple even talk. That includes financial probes and, crucially, their status in India's millennia-old caste hierarchy. Marriages breaking rigid caste or religious divisions can have deadly repercussions, sometimes resulting in so-called "honor" killings.

In the past, such premarital checks were often done by family members, priests or professional matchmakers.

Layers of security in guarded modern apartment blocks mean it is often far harder for an agent to gain access to a property than older standalone homes. Singh said detectives had to rely on their charm to tell a "cock and bull story" to enter, saying his teams tread the grey zone between "legal and illegal". But he stressed his agents operate on the right side of the law, ordering his teams to do "nothing unethical" while noting investigations often mean "somebody's life is getting ruined". Technology is on the side of the sleuths.

Khatri has used tech developers to create an app for her agents to upload

records directly online -- leaving nothing on agents' phones, in case they are caught. "This is safer for our team," she said, adding it also helped them "get sharp results in less time and cost". Surveillance tools starting at only a few dollars are readily available. Those include audio and video recording devices hidden in everyday items such as mosquito repellent socket devices, to more sophisticated magnetic GPS car



Akriti Khatri, founder of Venus Detective Agency, shows a GPS tracker and an audio bug device during an interview with AFP in New Delhi.

trackers or tiny wearable cameras.

The technology boom, Paliwal said, has put relationships under pressure. "The more hi-tech we become, the more problems we have in our lives," she said. But she insisted that neither the technology nor the detectives should take the blame for exposing a cheat. "Such relationships would not have lasted anyway", she said. "No relationship can work on the basis of lies." —AFP



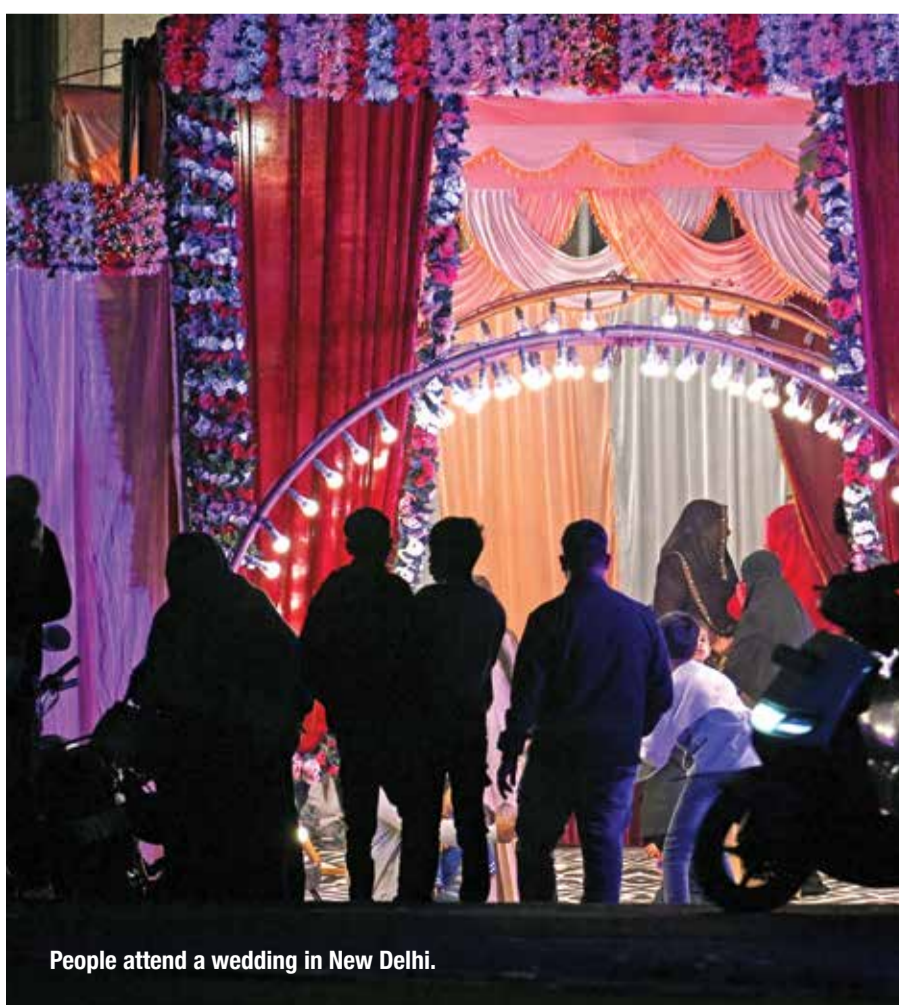
Akriti Khatri, founder of Venus Detective Agency, speaks with a staff member at her office in New Delhi.



A man walks out of a shop selling spy cameras at a market in New Delhi.



A vendor demonstrates a mosquito repellent spy camera at his shop in a market in New Delhi.



People attend a wedding in New Delhi.



Akriti Khatri, founder of Venus Detective Agency, shows spectacles with a hidden spy camera during an interview with AFP in New Delhi.



A vendor selling spy cameras attends a phone call inside his shop at a market in New Delhi.



Women harvest aromatic and medicinal plants in the mountains of Tbaïnia village near the city of Ain Drahem, in the northwest of Tunisia. — AFP photos



A woman harvests aromatic and medicinal plants in the mountains of Tbaïnia village.

TUNISIA WOMEN HERB HARVESTERS STRUGGLE WITH DROUGHT AND HEAT



Women harvest aromatic and medicinal plants in the mountains of Tbaïnia village.



A woman harvests aromatic and medicinal plants in the mountains of Tbaïnia village.



A woman extracts oils from plants at the "Al Baraka" ("Blessing") laboratory in Tbaïnia village.

On a hillside in Tunisia's northwestern highlands, women scour a sun-scorched field for the wild herbs they rely on for their livelihoods, but droughts and rising temperatures are making it ever harder to find the precious plants. Yet the harvesters say they have little choice but to struggle on, as there are few opportunities in a country hit hard by unemployment, inflation and high living costs. "There is a huge difference between the situation in the past and what we are living now," said Mabrouka Athimni, who heads a local collective of women herb harvesters named "Al Baraka" ("Blessing").

"We're earning half, sometimes just a third, of what we used to." Tunisia produces around 10,000 tons of aromatic and medicinal herbs each year, according to official figures. Rosemary accounts for more than 40 percent of essential oil exports, mainly destined for French and American markets. For the past 20 years, Athimni's collective has supported numerous families in Tbaïnia, a village near the city of Ain Drahem in a region with much higher poverty rates than the national average. Women, who make up around 70 percent of the agricultural workforce, are the main breadwinners for their households in Tbaïnia.

'Yield less'

Tunisia is in its sixth year of drought and has seen its water reserves dwindle, as temperatures have soared past 50 degrees Celsius (122 degrees Fahrenheit) in some areas during the summer. The country has 36 dams, mostly in the northwest, but they are currently just 20 percent full -- a record low in recent decades. The Tbaïnia women said they usually harvested plants like eucalyptus, rosemary and mastic year-round, but shrinking water resources and rare rainfall have siphoned oil output. "The mountain springs are drying up, and without snow or rain to replenish them, the herbs yield less oil," said Athimni.



Mabrouka Athimni, who heads a local collective of women herb harvesters named "Al Baraka" ("Blessing") shows oil extracted from plants in a laboratory in Tbaïnia village.



Women extracts oils from plants at the "Al Baraka" ("Blessing") laboratory in Tbaïnia village.

Mongia Soudani, a 58-year-old harvester and mother of three, said her work was her household's only income. She joined the collective five years ago. "We used to gather three or four large sacks of herbs per harvest," she said. "Now, we're lucky to fill just one." Forests in Tunisia cover 1.25 million hectares, about 10 percent of them in the northwestern region. Wildfires fueled by drought and rising temperatures have ravaged these woodlands, further diminishing the natural resources that women like Soudani depend on. In the summer of last year, wildfires destroyed around 1,120 hectares near Tbaïnia.

"Parts of the mountain were consumed by flames, and other women lost everything," Soudani recalled. To adapt to some climate-driven challenges, the women received training from international organizations, such as the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), to preserve forest resources. Still, Athimni struggles to secure a viable income. "I can't fulfil my clients' orders anymore because the harvest has been insufficient," she said. The collective has lost a number of its customers as a result, she said.

'No longer sustainable'

A recent study by the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights (FTDES) highlighted how climate-induced damage to forests had severely impacted local communities. "Women in particular suffer the consequences as their activities become more difficult and arduous," the study said. Tunisia has ratified key international environmental agreements, including the 2015 Paris Climate Accord. But environmental justice researcher Ines Labiadh, who oversaw the FTDES study, said implementation "remains incomplete".

In the face of these woes, the Tbaïnia harvesters, like many women working in the sector, will be forced to seek alternative livelihoods, said Labiadh. "They have no choice but to diversify their activities," she said. "Relying solely on natural resources is no longer sustainable." Back in the field, Bachra Ben Salah strives to collect whatever herbs she can lay her hands on. "There's nothing we can do but wait for God's mercy," she said.—AFP



'Sonic 3' zips to top of North America box office

Paramount's new action comedy "Sonic the Hedgehog 3" sped to the top of the North American box office this weekend, outdoing predictions with an estimated take of \$62 million, one of the best December openings in years, industry watchers said Sunday. The latest sequel about the blue-maned supersonic creature -- based on the popular Sega video game -- rode positive reviews and strong audience scores to what analyst David A Gross called "an excellent opening" for the hybrid animation/live action



Keanu Reeves attends the "Sonic The Hedgehog 3" Los Angeles premiere at the TCL Chinese Theatre.

genre.

He predicted it would "far out-earn Sonic #2," which finished 2022 with \$405 million worldwide. Jim Carrey plays mad scientist Dr. Ivo Robotnik, while Ben Schwartz (Sonic) and Keanu Reeves (Shadow) top the voice cast. Disney's

new animated musical drama "Mufasa: The Lion King," a prequel to "The Lion King," placed second at \$35 million for the Friday-through-Sunday period, industry watcher Exhibitor Relations reported.

That was far below predictions of around \$50 million, especially for a mov-

ie that cost an estimated \$300 million to produce and promote, Variety reported. But Gross predicted a "very good run," with school children now enjoying year-end vacations in North America. The film's voice cast includes Aaron Pierre (Mufasa), Seth Rogen, Beyonce and Donald Glover (AKA Childish Gambino), with songs by Lin-Manuel Miranda.

Universal's "Wicked" raked in another \$13.5 million as it slipped one spot to third place. The musical fantasy is the first leg of a two-part adaptation of the popular Broadway play set in the magical world of Oz. Touted as an Oscar favorite, with Cynthia Erivo and Ariana Grande starring, the weekend haul brings the film's global earnings to over \$570 million.

"Moana 2" set records when it opened over the Thanksgiving weekend, but the Disney film slipped to fourth place this weekend with an estimated \$13.1 million in ticket sales. Hawaiian-born Auli'i Cravalho reprises her voice acting role

as the titular courageous young sea-traveler, while Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson voices the demigod Maui for the sequel, which has worldwide earnings of over \$790 million. And in fifth place was "Homestead," a post-apocalyptic thriller from Utah-based Angel Studios, at \$6.1 million. Neal McDonough and Dawn Olivieri star in the story of a family fleeing the chaos of a nuclear attack for refuge in the fortress-like mansion of an eccentric survivalist.

Rounding out the top 10 were:

- "Gladiator II" (\$4.5 million)
- "Kraven the Hunter" (\$3.1 million)
- "Red One" (\$1.5 million)
- "The Lord of the Rings: The War of the Rohirrim" (\$1.3 million)
- "The Best Christmas Pageant Ever" (\$825,000)—AFP



(From left) Keanu Reeves, Jim Carrey, and Ben Schwartz attend the "Sonic The Hedgehog 3" Los Angeles premiere at the TCL Chinese Theatre in Hollywood, California. --AFP photos



(From left) Keanu Reeves, Krysten Ritter, Ben Schwartz, Adam Pally, Alyla Browne, Jim Carrey, Tika Sumpter, Lee Majdoub, James Marsden, and Jeff Fowler attend the "Sonic The Hedgehog 3" Los Angeles premiere at the TCL Chinese Theatre.

Sports

Jokic, Nuggets rally for overtime win over Pelicans

Rockets erase 16-point first-half deficit to beat Raptors 114-110

LOS ANGELES: Denver's NBA Most Valuable Player Nikola Jokic shook off a slow start to post a 27-point triple-double Sunday as the Nuggets rallied to beat the New Orleans Pelicans 132-129 in overtime. Jokic, who claimed his third MVP in four years last season, added 13 rebounds and 10 assists.

But the Serb star, who was held to six points in the first half, bemoaned another slow start for Denver— who trailed by as many as 17 in the third quarter. They took a 111-109 lead on Julian Strawther's layup with 4:37 left in regulation.

CJ McCollum put New Orleans back in front 119-117 with 53.2 seconds left in the fourth, but Denver guard Jamal Murray drilled a step-back basket with nine seconds to go to tie it at 119-119, and when McCollum missed a three-pointer they went to overtime.

Jokic took over in the extra session, scoring Denver's first six points as they handed the Pelicans a seventh straight defeat. "Seems like we just like it that way," Jokic said of the late heroics needed by the Nuggets, but added: "We should be more hungry."

Murray also scored 27 points for Denver, and Russell Westbrook added 21 off the bench. Jordan Hawkins led New Orleans' scoring with 25 points and McCollum had 24. Elsewhere, the Indiana Pacers posted their fourth straight win in impressive style, powering away in the second half to beat the Kings 122-95 in Sacramento. Pascal Siakam delivered a double-double of 19 points and 10 rebounds and the

Pacers put up 70 points in the second half of a dominant victory in which seven Indiana players scored in double figures.

Myles Turner scored 15 points, star guard Tyrese Haliburton and reserve Ben Sheppard added 14 apiece and T.J. McConnell contributed 12 points and 10 assists off the bench. "We brought it from start to finish," Sheppard said. "The energy we brought, both the bench and the starters, it was a great team win."

Point guard De'Aaron Fox scored 23 points to lead the Kings, and Domantas Sabonis added 17 points and 21 rebounds, but Kings fans were booing as the team fell to a fourth straight defeat. "Tough night for us," Kings coach Mike Brown said. "There are going to be nights when you don't have it offensively, but we can't give up 70 points in a half."

The Houston Rockets erased a 16-point first-half deficit to beat the Raptors 114-110 in Toronto. Dillon Brooks scored 27 points and Jalen Green added 22 for Houston, who held the Raptors to five-of-15 shooting in the fourth quarter to finally seal the game. Alperen Sengun scored 17 points and grabbed 10 rebounds for Houston, who out-scored Toronto 33-26 in the third quarter to take a one-point lead into the fourth.

The Rockets pushed the advantage to as many as 11, but the Raptors cut the deficit to three on Ochai Agbaji's dunk with 22.7 seconds remaining. Toronto would get no closer, however, with Brooks finally sealing it with a free throw. — AFP



NEW ORLEANS: Julian Strawther #3 of the Denver Nuggets shoots the ball over Javonte Green #4 of the New Orleans Pelicans at Smoothie King Center on December 22, 2024 in New Orleans, Louisiana. — AFP

Ayub shines as Pakistan sweep South Africa

JOHANNESBURG: Rising star Saim Ayub hit his second century of the series — and his third in five innings — as Pakistan completed a series clean-sweep over South Africa in the third one-day international at the Wanderers Stadium on Sunday.

Left-handed opening batsman Ayub made a sparkling 101 off 94 balls in a Pakistan total of 308 for nine. Heinrich Klaasen thrashed 81 off 43 balls for South Africa — but the hosts were beaten by 36 runs chasing an adjusted target of 308. The match was reduced to 47 overs a side because of rain. Ayub, 22, hit 113 not out in the second one-day game against Zimbabwe in Bulawayo last month and 109 in the series opener against South Africa in Paarl last week.

In between his one-day appearances he made an unbeaten 98 in the second Twenty20 international against South Africa in Centurion. Ayub was named player of the match and player of the series. "It's important because we won but it is for all the team, not just me," he said. "The senior players helped me a lot." In contrast to Ayub's form, his opening partner Abdullah Shafique was out for his third successive duck after Pakistan were sent in to bat.

But Ayub was seldom troubled as he played shots all around the wicket in partnerships of 114 with Babar Azam (52) and 93 with captain Mohammad Rizwan (53).

Ayub fell to debutant Corbin Bosch, caught behind attempting an audacious flick to leg, after hitting 13 fours and two sixes. Bosch, the son of the late Test and one-day international player Tertius Bosch, received a call-up after injuries hit South Africa's fast bowling resources.

For the third successive match, Klaasen was the only South African to make a half-century. He kept South Africa ahead of the required run rate until he was sixth man out, caught on the square leg boundary off Shaheen Shah Afridi with the total on 194 in the 29th over.

Ayub followed up his century by taking one for 34 in 10 overs with his mixture of off-spin and carrom balls, claiming the key wicket of David Miller and producing the most economical figures by any bowler in the match.

Brief scores:

Pakistan 308-9 in 47 overs (Saim Ayub 101, Mohammad Rizwan 53, Babar Azam 52, Salman Agha 48; K. Rabada 3-56) v South Africa 271 in 42 overs (H. Klaasen 81, C. Bosch 40 not out)

Result: Pakistan won by 36 runs (DLS method)
Series: Pakistan won the three-match series 3-0
Toss: South Africa. — AFP

Langers edge Tiger and son Charlie in PNC Championship

MIAMI: Golf superstar Tiger Woods was thrilled by son Charlie's first hole-in-one, but Team Langer got the better of the Woods duo in a playoff for the PNC Championship family golf event crown on Sunday.

The ace by 15-year-old Charlie Woods at the 176-yard, par-three fourth hole at the Ritz-Carlton Golf Club in Orlando briefly lifted the duo into the solo lead in the 36-hole two-player scramble event. The youngster watched his seven-iron shot as far as he could, but it took the cheers from the crowd to let him know it had landed some six feet from the pin and rolled into the cup.

A beaming Tiger Woods gave his son a hard hug, then a playful shove in celebration. "It was a perfect seven-iron, so just kind of hit it," Charlie Woods told Golf Channel as he walked toward the fourth green. "It was awesome! I didn't think it went in." The elder Woods called it "an unbelievable moment".

"That two-hole stretch, that was his first eagle he

Daniels throws 5 TDs as Commanders down Eagles, Lions win

LOS ANGELES: Washington quarterback Jayden Daniels threw five touchdown passes as the Commanders rallied for a 36-33 victory over Philadelphia that halted the Eagles' 10-game NFL winning streak.

It was an especially painful loss for the Eagles, who saw quarterback Jalen Hurts depart in the first quarter with a concussion. Philadelphia failed to clinch the NFC East division title, and fell out of a tie for the best record in the NFC, still shared by the Detroit Lions and Minnesota Vikings who both won on Sunday to improve to 13-2.

The Commanders shook off five turnovers to win, piling up 22 points in the fourth quarter. Daniels, the second overall pick in this year's draft, found Jamison Crowder on a nine-yard touchdown pass with six seconds left to secure what had seemed an unlikely win. "The game's never over until the clock hits zero," Daniels said after a win that kept the Commanders' playoff hopes alive while eliminating Dallas and San Francisco from contention.

"It feels awesome," Daniels said. "Everybody can enjoy their Christmas now." The Eagles, who hadn't lost since September, were without Hurts for most of the game after his head hit the turf when he was tackled by Frankie Luvu at the end of a 13-yard run. Kenny Pickett replaced him and threw for 143 yards with a touchdown and Saquon Barkley ran for 150 yards and two touchdowns, but the Eagles dropped to 12-3 and saw Pickett suffer a rib injury as well.

Meanwhile NFC North rivals Detroit and Minnesota both improved to 13-2. The Lions cruised past the Bears 34-17 in Chicago to set a franchise record with their 13th win of the season while the Vikings held off the Seattle Seahawks 27-24.

Stung by a loss to Buffalo that snapped their 11-game winning streak, the Lions jumped to a 20-point lead on the way to setting a single-season franchise record for points scored with 493 so far.

Jacobs gets New Zealand call-up for S Lanka series

WELLINGTON: Hard-hitting New Zealand batsman Bevon Jacobs earned a maiden call-up Monday for their T20 series against Sri Lanka, which marks the start of Mitchell Santner's tenure as white-ball captain. Jacobs has turned heads since bursting on the domestic scene last year and was a surprise pick-up by Mumbai Indians in the Indian Premier League auction this month.

The Blackcaps face Sri Lanka in three T20s start-

ever made out there on three, and then his first hole-in-one," the 15-time major champion said. After grabbing a share of the overnight lead with a first-round 59, the Woods duo combined for a 57 on Sunday and a record-setting 36-hole score of 28-under.

But two-time Masters champion Bernhard Langer and his son Jason, who were in the three-way tie for the lead to start the day, posted the same score. At the first playoff hole, Bernhard Langer curled in an eagle putt to seal the duo's second straight victory in the 20-team event.

Langer has now won six PNC titles—four with Jason and two with son Stefan. Despite the tournament's laid-back atmosphere, there were plenty of fireworks on Sunday. Paddy Harrington, son of three-time major winner Paddy Harrington, also had a hole-in-one, saying his ace at the par-three eighth was the first of his life.

"I've never been as excited," Paddy Harrington said. "I've never hit a shot that I've been as excited." The event was a chance for Tiger Woods, who turns 49 on December 30, to get a taste of some friendly competition for the first time since he missed the cut at the British Open at Royal Troon. Woods, whose 82 US PGA Tour titles are tied with Sam Snead for most in history, has said he has a long way to go to be ready to return to elite tournament play after undergoing a sixth back surgery in September. — AFP



SEATTLE: Geno Smith #7 of the Seattle Seahawks is forced out of bounds against the Minnesota Vikings during the fourth quarter at Lumen Field on December 22, 2024 in Seattle, Washington. — AFP

Lions quarterback Jared Goff threw for 336 yards and three touchdowns, including an 82-yarder to Jameson Williams, who had a career-high 143 receiving yards. In Seattle, Minnesota quarterback Sam Darnold hit Justin Jefferson with his third touchdown pass of the game with 3:51 to play and the Vikings escaped with their eighth straight win. Less than two minutes earlier the Seahawks had taken their first lead of the game when quarterback Geno Smith connected with AJ Barner on a four-yard scoring pass.

Bills hold off Pats

The Buffalo Bills remained in the hunt for the top seed and home field advantage in the AFC, rallying from a 14-0 deficit to beat the New England Patriots 24-21. Bills quarterback Josh Allen had a lackluster

ing Saturday in Mount Maunganui followed by a three-match ODI series from January 5 -- their last before the Champions Trophy hosted by Pakistan. Jacobs was only included in the T20 squad.

"It's obviously an exciting time for Bevon and his family," said selector Sam Wells. "He's a promising player with a lot of talent and we're looking forward to exposing him to international cricket. He's clearly got a lot of power with the bat, but he's also shown in the longer formats that he has a decent technique and temperament."

Rachin Ravindra, Daryl Mitchell and Matt Henry all return to the white-ball squads after missing last month's trip to Sri Lanka to prepare for the just-finished England Test series. Henry leads a youthful pace attack which includes Zac Foulkes, Will O'Rourke, Jacob Duffy and all-rounder Nathan Smith.

day, completing 16 of 29 passes for 154 yards and saying later he dealt with numbness in his hand after taking a blow to his elbow.

The Los Angeles Rams remained in control of the NFC West division with a 19-9 victory over the New York Jets. In Atlanta, rookie quarterback Michael Penix Jr. made his first career start in place of struggling Kirk Cousins and threw for 202 yards in a 34-7 victory over the New York Giants.

The win owed plenty to Atlanta's defense, with safety Jessie Bates and outside linebacker Matthew Judon returning interceptions of Giants quarterback Drew Lock for touchdowns. The Falcons ended the day with the upper hand in the NFC South after the Tampa Bay Buccaneers were beaten 26-24 by the Cowboys in Dallas. — AFP

Santner is the frontline spin option, alongside all-rounders Ravindra, Michael Bracewell and Glenn Phillips. Kane Williamson and Devon Conway are playing in South Africa's SA20 competition and were unavailable while Ben Sears (knee) and Kyle Jamieson (back) continue their rehabilitation from injury.

T20 squad: Mitchell Santner (capt), Michael Bracewell, Mark Chapman, Jacob Duffy, Zak Foulkes, Mitch Hay, Matt Henry, Bevon Jacobs, Daryl Mitchell, Glenn Phillips, Rachin Ravindra, Tim Robinson, Nathan Smith.

ODI squad: Mitchell Santner (capt), Michael Bracewell, Mark Chapman, Jacob Duffy, Mitch Hay, Matt Henry, Tom Latham, Daryl Mitchell, Will O'Rourke, Glenn Phillips, Rachin Ravindra, Nathan Smith, Will Young. — AFP



ORLANDO: Tiger Woods of the United States and his son Charlie Woods react on the 16th green with caddie Luke Wise during the second round of the PNC Championship at Ritz-Carlton Golf Club on December 22, 2024 in Orlando, Florida. — AFP

Sports

Salah stars as rampant Liverpool hit Spurs for six

Salah only Premier League player to reach double figures in goals

LONDON: Liverpool swept four points clear at the top of the Premier League as Mohamed Salah's masterclass inspired a memorable 6-3 rout of Tottenham on Sunday. Salah delivered a sublime performance featuring two goals and a pair of assists as Arne Slot's side ran riot in north London. Liverpool took advantage of second-placed Chelsea's 0-0 draw at Everton earlier in the day to cement their status as title favorites heading into the Christmas period. Hapless Tottenham had no answer to Liverpool's intelligent pressing and supreme passing and movement, with Egypt star Salah at the heart of their lethal attack.

Salah is the only Premier League player to reach double figures in goals (15) and assists (11) this season. The 32-year-old is now Liverpool's fourth top scorer ever with 229 goals. His brace took him past Billy Liddell, with only Ian Rush (346), Roger Hunt (285) and Gordon Hodgson (241) ahead of him.

Salah's latest heroics only underlined the urgency to get his future resolved, with the forward's current deal due to expire at the end of the season. He is free to sign a pre-contract agreement with foreign clubs from January and has hinted several times that this could be his last season at Anfield. With Salah scoring 18 times in all competitions, Liverpool have been on fire since Slot arrived from Feyenoord to replace Jurgen Klopp in the close-season. Klopp delivered Liverpool's last Premier League title in 2020 and it looks increasingly likely Slot will emulate that success in his maiden campaign.

The Reds have won 21 of their 25 matches in all competitions under Slot and have a game in hand on Chelsea to strengthen their lead in the title race. This was a remarkable display of Liverpool's firepower as Luis Diaz and Alexis Mac Allister scored to put them in command. Dominik Szoboszlai grabbed Liverpool's third just before the interval and Salah took over after the break before Diaz netted again. Punished for Ange Postecoglou's insistence on sticking to his high defensive line, it was the first time in 10 years that Tottenham had conceded five or more at home in a Premier League game. An eighth league defeat this season leaves Tottenham languishing in 11th place as the pressure mounts on Postecoglou.



LONDON: Liverpool's Egyptian striker #11 Mohamed Salah (2L) shoots to score their fourth goal during the English Premier League football match between Tottenham Hotspur and Liverpool at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium in London, on December 22, 2024. — AFP

Unstoppable Salah

Foreshadowing the demolition to come, Salah slalomed past three Tottenham defenders and blasted against the crossbar in the early stages. Liverpool's pressure reaped its deserved reward in the 23rd minute as Trent Alexander-Arnold's inch-perfect cross arced towards Diaz, who headed past Fraser Forster from six yards. Tottenham fans released black balloons in protest at chairman Daniel Levy's reign midway through the first half. They became even more deflated in the 36th minute as Liverpool struck again. Szoboszlai climbed to meet Andrew Robertson's cross and the ball deflected kindly for Mac Allister to nod beyond Forster from close range.

Liverpool's focus briefly wobbled as Mac Allister was robbed by Dejan Kulusevski and James Maddison rifled home from 18 yards. But Szoboszlai quickly restored the two-goal lead, capping a typically

incisive raid in the final seconds before half-time.

Salah took Szoboszlai's flick in stride and returned a clever reverse pass to the midfielder, who took a touch before planting his shot through Forster's legs. It wasn't long before the unstoppable Salah got on the scoresheet. Cody Gakpo slipped a pass into the six-yard box in the 54th minute and, when Tottenham failed to clear, Salah was on hand to tap in.

Salah bagged his sixth goal in his last five games in all competitions seven minutes later with another close-range finish from Szoboszlai's pass. Dejan Kulusevski's 72nd-minute volley from just inside the area was followed by Dominic Solanke's close-range effort in the 83rd minute as Tottenham hit back.

But Salah provided a fitting coda to his eye-catching display two minutes later with a precise pass that Diaz converted to ensure the scoreline reflected Liverpool's supremacy. — AFP

Atalanta fight back to take top spot in Serie A

MILAN: Atalanta surged back to the top of the Serie A standings with a Charles De Ketelaere-inspired 3-2 win at home to Empoli on Sunday, while inconsistent Roma thrashed Parma 5-0. De Ketelaere was twice on target for Atalanta in the top-sy-turvy encounter—his second goal proving to be the winner with just four minutes left on the clock. Ademola Lookman was also on the scoresheet to ensure Gian Piero Gasperini's side won their 11th consecutive match in the league and leapfrogged Napoli back into top spot for the Christmas period. "It's been a wonderful year, we're sorry it's ending, let's hope that 2025 will be just as good," Gasperini told DAZN.

"It won't be easy, but beyond the results I'm very happy with the spirit that there is in this team." The reigning Europa League champions restored their two-point buffer over Napoli, who had moved a point ahead of them following their 2-1 win at Genoa on Saturday. Lorenzo Colombo gave 11th-placed Empoli the lead at the Gewiss Stadium on 13 minutes. Things got worse for Atalanta when Mateo Retegui, the top scorer in the league, was forced off with a muscular injury in the 21st minute—casting a doubt over his availability for coming matches. But De Ketelaere hit back to level for the Bergamo-based outfit four minutes after the half-hour.

Recently crowned African player of the year, Lookman got his 12th goal of the season in all competitions to put Atalanta in front in first-half added time. Sebastiano Esposito pegged back Atalanta on 57 minutes, converting from the penalty spot. As the game crept towards a disappointing draw that would have still sent Atalanta back top on goal difference, Belgian midfielder De Ketelaere popped up with his fifth league goal this term in the 86th minute.

The 23-year-old showed skill and composure to glide along the edge of the box until a chance presented itself, and he then fired off a disguised left-footed shot which flashed past the goalkeeper. "Today we suffered a bit, but always after goals we reacted and tried to win," said De Ketelaere. "It's December and it's not even over yet, we are happy where we are but every game is difficult and we continue."

'Real Roma'

Roma bounced back from last weekend's surprise 2-0 loss at Como, which had left Claudio Ranieri's side within two points of the drop zone, to thump Parma in the Italian capital. Paulo Dybala hit a brace, with goals also coming from Alexis Saelemaekers, Leandro Paredes and Artem Dovbyk as Roma moved to 10th place. "The most important thing was the points. We had to show that the team seen against Como was not the real Roma, we had to do more," Saelemaekers told DAZN.

Parma remain one point above the drop zone in 16th spot. Dybala converted a penalty and Saelemaekers slammed home a volley to give the home side a 2-0 lead inside the opening quarter of an hour. The Argentinian netted his second six minutes after the break. Paredes then scored from 12 yards in the 74th minute and Ukrainian striker Dovbyk put the cherry on top for the Romans with seven minutes remaining. Venezia climbed off the bottom of the table with a vital 2-1 home win over fellow strugglers Cagliari. The result leaves Cagliari 18th on 14 points, one ahead of Venezia, with Monza propping up the standings with 10 points after defeat at home to Juventus.

Juventus maintained their unbeaten status in Serie A by seeing off the bottom side 2-1 thanks to first-half strikes from Weston McKennie and Nicolas Gonzalez. The Old Lady remain sixth on 31 points as they won for the first time in the league since early November following four consecutive draws.

They are level on points with fifth-placed Fiorentina, but the Tuscans can go clear again when they take on Udinese on Monday. Champions Inter Milan, in third on 34 points, host Como later that day. — AFP

Tunisia's Dugaz retains title of Arab Masters Tennis tournament

MANAMA: The curtain came down yesterday evening (Sunday) on the competitions of the fourth Arab Masters Tennis Championship with the crowning of the Tunisian player Aziz Dugaz with the title of the competition for the second time in a row after beating his Syrian rival Hazem Al-Naw 2-1 by 7-6, 1-6, 1-6 and (10-3) in the final match held at the Public Security Officers Club in the Bahraini capital Manama, under the patronage and presence of the Bahraini Minister of Interior Sheikh Rashid bin Abdullah Al Khalifa, Ambassador of the State of Kuwait to the Kingdom of Bahrain Sheikh Thamer Jaber Al Ahmad Al Sabah and President of the Arab Tennis Federation Sheikh Ahmed Al Jaber Al Abdullah Al Sabah and the President of the Bahrain Tennis Federation Sheikh Abdulaziz bin Mubarak Al Khalifa.

Sheikh Ahmed Al Jaber expressed his pleasure for the great success achieved in the tournament from the technical, organizational and media aspects, thanking the Bahraini Minister of Interior for his presence and sponsorship of the closing ceremony of the tournament.

Sheikh Ahmed Al Jaber said that the fourth edition appeared in a wonderful and professional manner in light of the fruitful cooperation with the Bahraini Sports Federation, which harnessed all its capabilities to make this Arab sports event a success. He extended his sincere thanks to the President of the Bahraini Federation, Sheikh Abdulaziz bin Mubarak Al Khalifa, for all the efforts exerted in this tournament, which is sponsored by the National Bank of Kuwait and KGL, and thanked the Bahraini Ministry of Interior and the Public Security Officers Club for hosting the championship, adding that "this is not strange for our Bahraini brothers who are used to good organization and generous hospitality."

Sheikh Ahmed Al Jaber announced that the fifth



Bahrain's Minister of Interior Sheikh Rashid bin Abdullah, Kuwait's Ambassador to Bahrain Sheikh Thamer Jaber Al Sabah and President of the Arab Tennis Federation Sheikh Ahmed Al Jaber Al Sabah with champion

edition will be held in the Kingdom of Bahrain, adding that the Bahraini brothers succeeded with distinction in organizing one of the best editions of the tournament, which encouraged the Arab Federation to entrust the organization of the next edition to the Bahraini Federation.

Sheikh Ahmed Al Jaber stressed that the Arab Federation is keen to continue this tournament on an annual basis due to the gains and technical benefits it has achieved for Arab players, thanking the management of BeIN Sports for its efforts in broadcasting the final of the strongest Arab tennis tournaments, and praising the efforts made by the officials of the Arab Federation and all the organizers and partners of success.

Sheikh Ahmed Al Jaber also thanked Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait, the main sponsor, and KGL for their support of the tournament, stressing that the support provided by them contributed to the continuation and development of the tournament.

The President of the Arab Federation congratulated the winners of first places in this edition, praising the high level shown by the players in all roles of the tournament, noting that the champion of the competition will receive a Wild Card that entitles him to participate in the Marrakech International Tournament.

The closing ceremony of the tournament was attended by the Vice President of the International Tennis Federation and President of the Tunisian Tennis University, Dr. Salma Al Molhi, President of the Egyptian Tennis Federation, Ismail Al Shafei, President of the Palestinian Tennis Federation, Dr. Maha Rasem Jarrad, Vice President of the African Union, Aziz Larraf, Secretary General of the Arab Federation, Ali Lafi Al Mutairi, Secretary General of the Arab Federation, Walid Sami, President of the Jordan Tennis Pioneers Club and member of the Pioneers Committee in the Arab Federation, Ahmed Qaddumi and a number of Bahraini Federation officials.

Classifieds

Clinics & Hospitals

Clinics

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

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

Hospitals

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

Change of Name

I, **SK Jane Alam** S/o SK Jamaluddin, residing at Vill- Lakshya, P.O-Kumarara, P.S. Mahishadal, Dist- Purba Medinipur, Pin-721632, mistakenly in my passport no-Z3827008 my name is Shaikh Jane Alam S/o Shaikh Jamaluddin. On 6/11/24 by Haldia First Class Judicial Magistrate Shaikh Jane Alam S/o Shaikh Jamaluddin and SK Jane Alam S/o SK Jamal Duddin is same and identical person.
#6615, 24/12/2024

D'Costa. I will henceforth be known in the name of Angelo Saluzinho Da Costa and, I also undertaken to carry out this name change in all my documents.
#6614, 23/12/2024

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.
#6613, 22/12/2024

I, **Agnelo Saluzinho D'Costa** holder of Passport No. P0775908 do hereby change my name to Agnelo Saluzinho

Automated enquiry about the Civil ID card is 1889988

Zain supports 'The Gulf Cup' book

Occasion held in celebration of Khaleeji Zain kick-off, in presence of UAE Ambassador



UAE Ambassador to Kuwait, Dr Matar Al-Neyadi, author Mohammed Al-Jokar and Zain Kuwait's Chief Corporate Affairs and Relations Officer Waleed Al-Khashti with Zain's team.



Al-Jokar signs copies of the book with Ambassador Al-Neyadi in attendance.

KUWAIT: Zain announced its support for the book *The Gulf Cup... A Chronicle of History and Memories*, authored by Emirati sports critic Mohammed Al-Jokar. The book chronicles the rich story of the Arabian Gulf Cup football tournament and highlights the profound and historic ties between Kuwait and the UAE. This initiative coincides with the recent kick-off of Khaleeji Zain 26.

To mark the occasion, Zain's Innovation Center (ZINC) at the company's headquarters in Shuwaikh hosted a special gathering attended by the

UAE Ambassador to Kuwait, Dr Matar Al-Neyadi, the book's author Mohammed Al-Jokar, Zain Kuwait's Chief Corporate Affairs and Relations Officer Waleed Al-Khashti, and the company's team.

The book delves into the rich history of the Arabian Gulf Cup since its inception in 1970, recounting its key milestones and underscoring the deep-rooted relations among Gulf nations, particularly between Kuwait and the UAE.

It also sheds light on the Gulf lead-

ers' commitment to supporting and developing sports. Additionally, the book offers insights into the Gulf Cup Football Federation's pivotal role in organizing the tournament and its notable achievements over the years.

Zain expressed its pride in the resounding success of the recent Khaleeji Zain 26 opening ceremony, held under the esteemed patronage of His Highness the Amir, Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. The company praised the artistic performances that celebrated the Gulf's heritage and emphasized a

unified Gulf vision for a brighter future.

As the tournament's official partner, Zain highlighted the remarkable nature of the opening event, which reflected Kuwait's prestigious standing in the international sports arena. The ceremony showcased the heritage and cultures of Gulf nations, embodying a shared sense of unity, vision, and identity. The performances vividly depicted Gulf life on land and sea, brought to life with advanced technologies, aligning with the tournament's slogan, *The Future is Gulf*.

The Supreme Organizing Committee

of Khaleeji Zain 26 delivered an exceptional opening ceremony that received widespread acclaim from political and sports circles alike. The event's final segment stood out, featuring a display of the flags of the eight participating nations and archival footage from past Gulf Cup tournaments.

This partnership with the Gulf's premier football tournament reflects Zain's steadfast commitment to supporting major sporting events, further solidifying Kuwait's regional prominence in the sports arena.



Luis Garcia



Juan Pizzi



Rasheed Jaber



Paulo Bento



Moaz Al-Asaimea

Group A teams in pivotal matches at Khaleeji Zain 26

KUWAIT: The second round of the Khaleeji Zain 26 competition kicks off this evening with two Group A matches. Omani faces Qatar at 5:25 pm at Jaber Al-Mubarak Stadium, followed by Kuwait meeting the UAE at 8:30 pm at Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium. All four teams in Group A are currently level on points and goals, following a 1-1 draw between Kuwait and Oman and the same result in the Qatar vs UAE match during the first round.

Pizzi: Every match a new opportunity

Kuwait's national team coach Juan Pizzi emphasized that while facing the UAE will be challenging, it is not decisive for qualification to the semifinals, as the final round will be critical.

Speaking at a press conference held yesterday at the tournament's main media center at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Farwaniya, Pizzi stated, "Every match is a new opportunity to achieve the best possible result. We always strive to win, and I trust all the players to give their best to secure three points, taking a significant step toward the second round."

The Argentinian coach expressed optimism about the Blue team's chances against the UAE White, stating that each match requires its own tactical approach. He highlighted the importance of public support, which played a crucial role during the opening match.

Al-Asaimea: Our goal is to make fans happy

Blue player Moaz Al-Asaimea affirmed that the Kuwait national team is always expected to win in Gulf tournaments, given its illustrious history of ten title wins. He acknowledged that Kuwaiti football is not at its peak but emphasized the team's determination to perform well against the UAE despite the difficulty of the match. Al-Asaimea expressed hope that he and his teammates can bring joy to loyal Blue fans.

Injuries to Hamdan and Hani

Dr Abdulmajid Al-Bannai, head of the medical committee in the Kuwait Football Association,



Sheikh Mubarak Al-Sabah during his visit to the media center.

provided updates on injuries sustained by Blue players in their first match against Oman. Hassan Hamdan suffered a severe sprain in his right foot joint, with an MRI revealing ligament ruptures and bleeding. He requires a mobile splint, intensive physical therapy and special exercises over two to three weeks. Meanwhile, Reda Hani experienced a shoulder subluxation but has started rehabilitation and may participate against the UAE. Minor injuries among other players have healed, allowing them to join the next round.

Bento: I don't control expectations

UAE coach Paulo Bento dismissed external expectations favoring his team to win the tournament. Speaking at a press conference, he emphasized his focus on preparing the team mentally and physically for each match. Bento acknowledged the challenge of facing Kuwait and the strain of playing matches every three days, which limits recovery time and adjustments. He noted the Gulf tournaments' significant media attention and described the event as a personal challenge.

Jaber: Technical differences a decisive factor

Oman national team coach Rasheed Jaber underscored the importance of their match against Qatar after a first-round draw. Speaking at a press conference, Jaber stressed the need for focus, mental readiness and efficient utilization of opportunities. While preparing player Salah Al-Yahyaie for the match, Jaber acknowledged ongoing injury concerns for key players like Mohsen Ghassani. He expressed confidence in Oman's ability to advance in Khaleeji Zain 26, highlighting the unique dynamics of Gulf tournaments compared to continental events.

Garcia: Oman relies on counterattacks

Qatar's Spanish coach Luis Garcia described the opening draw with the UAE as a normal result and emphasized his team's readiness for the match against Oman. He highlighted the introduction of young players as part of the team's development strategy. Garcia acknowledged Oman's strength in counterattacks and emphasized the need to adapt to their playing style. Reflecting on the match, Garcia said, "Football is like life — there are happy days and sad days. To compete strongly, we must adapt to the opponent's style."

Bahrain beat Saudi 3-2 in opener match of Khaleeji Zain 26



KUWAIT: Bahrain national football team achieved a tough victory on Sunday against Saudi Arabia, winning 3-2 in the opening match of Group B of Khaleeji Zain 26, currently underway in Kuwait, until January 3rd. The match, held at Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium, as Bahrain took the lead, creating several chances, despite Saudi late comeback. Bahrain now lead group (B) in goal difference, followed by Iraq's earlier win against Yemen 1-0. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Bahrain and Saudi players fight for the ball. — KUNA photos